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Opinion/Editorial
Metropolitan
Sports
Business
Technology
Entertainment
Culture
Weather

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Auto Weekend
Wash. Weekend
Books
Home Guide
Arts
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MARKETPLACE

Classifieds
Gift Guide
TWT Gift Shop
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Anti-war professor violated students' rights

By Audrey Hudson
THE WASHINGTON TIMES

A college professor violated her student's free-speech rights when she ordered them to write anti-war letters to President Bush and penalized students who refused the assignment, the California school determined.

An apology letter for the incident has been sent to Mr. Bush "explaining the illegitimate nature of the assignment and requesting that all letters associated with the assignment be retracted," said Louis E. Zellers, president of Citrus College.

The letters were part of a required speech class taught by Rosalyn Kahn, who was put on a leave of absence last week. Her classes at Pasadena and Los Angeles City College are also being examined to determine if additional letters were sent from those students.

The university investigated after students complained to the Foundation for Individual Rights in Education (FIRE). After visiting the class and interviewing students, Mr. Zellers confirmed the accusations in a letter to Thor Halvorssen, FIRE's chief executive officer.

"Students were told that those who wrote letters expressing alternative views (including support for the war) would not receive credit," Mr. Zellers said.

"At Citrus College, we strongly believe that all students should have freedom of expression and equal opportunity to benefit, regardless of their political beliefs. We believe that this assignment denied students this opportunity and further, could have encouraged

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some to violate their conscience in order to benefit."

Mr. Halvorssen said the Miss Kahn abused her power and demonstrated she is "not fit to be in higher education."

Citrus student Chris Stevens said he was shocked by the assignment and first complained to the school before asking for outside help.

"To their credit, they finally did correct everything, and the students are very happy with the outcome," Mr. Stevens said.

In addition to the anti-war letter, the part-time teacher forced students to write a letter to California state Sen. Jack Scott to protest teacher cuts, and pushed them to lend their names and addresses to postcards of protest to other unnamed state lawmakers.

"All of the letters were to somehow benefit her personally or her political viewpoints," Mr. Stevens said.

Mr. Halvorssen said this type of problem is widespread and directed mostly at conservative and Christian students.

"This is not new to us. It is a national scandal, especially in a nation that has enshrined the values of freedom of thought and speech," Mr. Halvorssen said.

"There is no question professors have political views and have the right to espouse and teach views, but it is a categorically different thing when a professor requires students to hold certain views as well."

When the professor learned students were complaining, graded homeworks and assignments became lost and the homework load increased, Mr. Stevens said.

"It was really disappointing. It's OK for her to hold beliefs and argue for them, but you have to allow people to disagree," Mr. Stevens said.

The college has provided students with a list of all their assignment grades. One student was able to provide homework not counted, but graded with notes from the teacher.

The students were given an alternative assignment — extra credit for writing letters expressing their own views.

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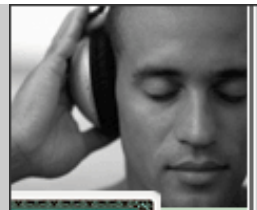
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