



[Close this window](#) | [Email this page](#)



To submit a case to FIRE, click [here](#).

To contact FIRE, click [here](#).

[phillyBurbs.com](#)

BUCKS COUNTY Courier Times

[Home](#) | [Local News](#) | [Local Sports](#) | [News Archive](#) | [Editorial](#) | [Obituaries](#) | [Circulation](#) | [Advertise](#)

LOCAL NEWS

NEWTOWN TOWNSHIP

Professor challenges diversity hiring question

A teacher says a hiring questionnaire violates job candidates' freedom of speech at Bucks County Community College. Officials say it's just the opposite.

By GWEN SHRIFT

Courier Times

[E-mail](#)

A sociology professor is challenging what he calls Bucks County Community College's "loyalty oath" requiring job candidates to state their commitment to diversity.

Under revised hiring guidelines issued within the past six months, applicants for administrative, management and faculty positions have been asked to provide "a brief statement of your commitment to diversity and how this commitment is demonstrated in your work."

College President James Links said the request is aimed at finding new teachers who are "sensitive to the changes in our society [and who are] ... able to speak to issues in a diverse fashion."

BCCC professor Myles J. Kelleher, who said he is a longtime supporter of civil rights for individuals, called the requirement "a diversity loyalty oath." He said it was "a litmus test to see what your political and social attitudes are. ... As a public institution, they are not permitted to restrict hiring on the political and social views of their applicants.

"A college campus should be a marketplace of ideas - diversity of thinking, a robust discussion, civil argumentation, testing of ideas, for people with all kinds of wonderfully diverse political, cultural, social viewpoints," he added. "Is it diversity of ideas? Does that include any civil criticism of diversity programs? In a system with diversity of ideas, that would be the case."

Kelleher said he wants the college to eliminate the request, but Links said that's not going to happen.

[Home](#)
[Business](#)
[Sports](#) ▶
[Weather](#) ▶

[Marketplace](#)
[AutoSearch](#)
[Classifieds](#) ▶
[Coupon Clipper](#)
[Dining Guide](#)
[Job Search](#)
[Online Shopping](#)
[Physician Finder](#)

[Neighborhoods](#) ▶

[Features](#)
[Access](#)
[Communities](#) ▶
[E-The People](#)
[Food](#)
[Forum](#)
[Free E-mail](#)
[Giving Directory](#)
[Kids Stuff](#) ▶
[Lotteries](#) ▶
[Movie Listings](#)
[NIE](#)
[Real Estate](#)
[TV Listings](#)
[Web Singles](#)
[WebHead's Tips](#)

[The AP WIRE](#)

[Feedback](#)

[Guestbook](#)
[Our History](#)
[Staff Directory](#)

[Click to turn off
pull-down menus](#)
[Menu Help](#)

[phillyBurbs.com](#)

[Tips](#)

He said the college is trying to diversify its education and teaching staff with reference to global issues as well as those of race, gender and culture. "For us, it's not code for hiring a person of some particular persuasion," Links said.

"For me, it is very clearly not a First Amendment issue. People are not being restrained in their speech. We ask questions of new candidates about how they teach. Candidates often volunteer this information."

Asked what would happen if a candidate who held views akin to Kelleher's declined to answer the question, Links said, "I don't know that anything would happen. It's certainly not the reason people have not been hired."

Blaine Greenfield, president of the teachers union at the college, said no faculty member has approached him expressing discomfort with the diversity request. "That's not to say other people haven't felt [the opposite]," he said.

Norma Kent, a spokeswoman for the American Association of Community Colleges, said she doesn't know how widespread such requests are in the hiring process nationally. "Community colleges are committed to diversity, which is a component of access, which is the cornerstone of our mission," she said.

The American Association of University Professors also espouses diversity, spokeswoman Iris Molotsky said.

"We don't believe, done properly, it infringes on academic freedom in any way," she said. "Individually, faculty members across the country have made a large commitment to diversity."

Kelleher said last week he and the Foundation for Individual Rights in Education, a Philadelphia-based group, plan to draw national attention to the practice.

In a letter to Links, FIRE executive director Thor Halvorssen said his group advocates "liberty, legal equality, due process, the rights of conscience, and - in the case of Bucks County Community College - academic freedom on America's college campuses."

"Your current inquisition into 'commitment to diversity' ... imposes one fashionable intellectual agenda among many," Halvorssen wrote. He added that the diversity request reflected "scandalous coercion of both conscience and mind."

"Hopefully, [the issue is] not going to go to court," said Kelleher, adding that he's willing to sue BCCC to remove the question from the application. "Hopefully, the court of common opinion would be able to sway the college."

Around campus, reaction to Kelleher's stance was diverse.

"I understand the principle; I just don't agree with it," said Judy Switzer, a professor of communications and longtime colleague of Kelleher. "I don't think he wants to appear heartless. He's not a heartless person. ... There are practices that are worth more than some principles."



Language and literature professor Chris Bursk said he disagrees with Kelleher on the issue but respects the sociology teacher's passion.

"I feel Myles Kelleher is deeply committed to people being respected. It's a mistake to see his efforts as racist or right-wing. They are concerns for individual rights," Bursk said. He recalled that he and Kelleher walked a picket line years ago in support of the United Farm Workers and that the sociology professor sends his classes to college presentations on diversity.

"It sounds like political correctness run amok," part-time student Paul Polaneczky said of the question on the job application. "Some people might not have time for [activities related to diversity] if you're so engrossed in your field of study. I don't think there's any requirement that you belong to any political party to be in any organization in America."

Full-time student Max Kissel said he's undecided. "I'd need to see more information [on hiring practices] before I said I agree or disagree," he said.

"Something like this, I might feel it's too much. ... I do think diversity is a good thing. I just don't know what they have to go through to get hired. It's good that [new hires] have a commitment to diversity. Everybody should."

Monday, February 12, 2001

[back to Headlines](#)

Tell a friend about this story!
Your Friend's Name
Your Friends E-mail
Your Name
Your E-mail

© Copyright 2001
Calkins Newspapers, Inc.
[Privacy Policy](#)

BACK TO TOP