



FIRE is a nonprofit educational foundation devoted to free speech, individual liberty, religious freedom, the rights of conscience, legal equality, due process, and academic freedom on our nation's campuses.

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Foundation for Individual Rights in Education

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Fox News' *The O'Reilly Factor*:

Back of the Book Interview With CEO Thor Halvorssen

Transcript, originally aired March 14, 2003

O'REILLY: In the "Back of the Book" Segment tonight, at Citrus Community College just outside of L.A., speech professor Rosalyn Kahn awarded Extra credit to students for writing anti-war letters to President Bush. But Ms. Kahn denied extra credit if the letter supported the war in Iraq.

Joining us now from New York is Thor Halvorssen, the CEO of the Foundation for Individual Rights and Education, and, here in L.A., Gina Cantagallo, a junior at Citrus College who was in the class.

All right, Gina. Just tell us what happened.

GINA CANTAGALLO, CITRUS COLLEGE STUDENT: Well, I was in class, and she provided an extra credit assignment for us. She said we could receive extra credit if we wrote a letter to President Bush in regards to the war.

So I went home, did the assignment, and I came back, and I had a letter that said I supported Bush, I supported our country, I supported our troops. She looked at the letter and said this is unacceptable.

O'REILLY: Really?

CANTAGALLO: Yes. I said, "What's wrong? You said write a letter on the potential war," and she said absolutely not, I wanted you to write a letter stating you were against war and against us overriding the U.N.



Read excerpts from *The Shadow University* by Alan Charles Kors & Harvey A. Silverglate.



Read *Thought Reform 101* by Alan Charles Kors.



Read *Memo to Free Speech Advocates University of Wisconsin-Madison* by Harvey A. Silverglate.

Foundation for Individual Rights in Education, Inc.
210 West Washington Square
Suite 303
Philadelphia, PA 19106
Phone: (215) 717-3473 (717-FIRE)
Fax: (215) 717-3440
Email: fire@thefire.org

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O'REILLY: Now how many kids in the class took her point of view, do you know?

CANTAGALLO: I don't know that, but I know there's at least nine that didn't do the assignment because they didn't want to write an anti-war letter.

O'REILLY: All right, but you did the assignment. You completed the assignment.

CANTAGALLO: Yes.

O'REILLY: And you didn't get the extra credit.

CANTAGALLO: I got no extra credit.

O'REILLY: But the ones who did it the way she wanted it done, as far as editorial point of view, got the extra credit.

CANTAGALLO: Yes.

O'REILLY: Now what steps did you take after that because that's patently unfair.

CANTAGALLO: Well, I was scared. I was really scared because she's an authority figure of mine, and I didn't know what aspects or what steps I could take as being a student. But I went to the dean, and nothing seemed to happen right away, and...

O'REILLY: You told the dean.

CANTAGALLO: I...

O'REILLY: You said -- just like you told us. And what did he say? What did the dean say?

CANTAGALLO: They said they would handle it appropriately and speak with her. Nothing got done that week.

A colleague of mine, who was in the same situation, Chris Stevens, wrote -- we wrote e-mails, tons of e-mails to Republicans, to

conservative parties, got tons of feedback, and that's when FIRE stepped in.

O'REILLY: OK. So then -- and what did he do?

CANTAGALLO: Within a week, the problem was solved, and...

O'REILLY: You got your extra credit?

CANTAGALLO: I didn't get my extra credit. The teacher is now dismissed from the course.

O'REILLY: OK. So the teacher got fired from the course.

CANTAGALLO: Yes.

O'REILLY: From the school?

CANTAGALLO: She's put on paid leave.

O'REILLY: Paid leave. All right.

Now, Thor, you did this. You got the teacher bounced. Did you get any resistance from the college?

THOR HALVORSSSEN, FIRE CEO: Well, once we nudged them, the school reacted, and they reacted magnificently.

What is rare is not that this occurred in a college course. This happens all the time. What is rare is that a college president is willing to realize a situation and remedy it so quickly, and we commend them for having done that.

They must, of course, protect the professor's due-process rights, but this was a flagrant violation of the First Amendment, and it also sends a message to college presidents everywhere that, if you do the right thing, you're not going to pay a price for it.

O'REILLY: Now -- but Gina should get the extra credit. That's what I'm worried about. I mean, I don't like this administrative paid leave thing either. I think she should be suspended for the rest of the semester without pay and then, you know, taught a lesson.

But I want Gina to get her extra credit. She did the work, and -- is that going to happen?

HALVORSSSEN: Well, the credits have been expunged. The school has apologized formally to the students. The school is sending a letter of apology to President Bush.

This -- Bill, this is a first in American high education history. So we're thrilled with the way the university has acted. And they are, in fact, going to give the students a chance to do the assignment again and to provide any point of view they want the way it should have been from the first place.

O'REILLY: All right. Now did you get any cooperation from the "L.A. Times"?

HALVORSSSEN: No. The story immediately moved on UPI. They were magnificent in exposing the story.

O'REILLY: All right. So UPI is a wire service. They took it as it is.

HALVORSSSEN: Yes.

O'REILLY: Because the media here in Southern California is kind of left wing, you know.

HALVORSSSEN: Well, this is -- it's interesting. It's not a question of left and right because I think...

O'REILLY: No, absolutely. Absolutely it's not. It's a question of freedom.

HALVORSSSEN: Correct.

O'REILLY: If it were the other way around and the people who got pro-war letters got extra credit and the anti-war didn't, you'd be on the air, too.

HALVORSSSEN: Absolutely. Absolutely. It's about liberty.

O'REILLY: All right. So we want to make that clear. But it's about

getting your word out, too, you know, Thor.

HALVORSSSEN: Well, students -- just like Gina -- have to understand that they can stand up, they have to have the courage to know that they're not abandoned. If they know their rights, that's the most important thing.

O'REILLY: All right. All right. Well, Gina, we're glad you did stand up. And you're a communications major.

CANTAGALLO: I am.

O'REILLY: You're going to have a great career. You did the right thing.

Thor, thanks very much as always. Nice to see you.

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