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Today's News

Wednesday, February 21, 2001

Diversity Question on College's Job Application Amounts to 'Loyalty Oath,' Group Contends

By [ROBIN WILSON](#)

A group that opposes political correctness is challenging what it calls a "loyalty oath" in the employment application at Bucks County Community College. The Pennsylvania institution requires applicants to describe their "commitment to diversity."

The Foundation for Individual Rights in Education, or FIRE, wrote a letter in December to the college's president saying that the question on the application is "as inimical to academic and intellectual freedom as any that arose during the sad days of McCarthyism."

In his letter to the college, Thor L. Halvorssen, the group's executive director, said the 1915 guidelines of the American Association of University Professors state that scholars should not be "subject to any motive other than their own scientific conscience." He added: "Your current inquisition into commitment to diversity imposes one fashionable intellectual agenda, among many, reflecting a new orthodoxy regnant on many campuses." Mr. Halvorssen called on the president to get rid of the question.

But James J. Links, the college's president, said he would do no such thing. He said the college was only following orders from the Middle States Commission on Higher Education, which accredits it. The

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commission's accreditation standards tell colleges that "consideration should be given to achieving diversity in areas such as race, ethnicity, gender, and age in faculty ranks."

The president also noted that a dozen years ago, professors at Bucks passed a policy stating that the curriculum should demonstrate that diversity is valued. In asking applicants about their own ideas, said Mr. Links, the college is simply making sure they are thinking about the issue. "We've haven't said, State your commitment to encouraging Asian students to succeed," said the president. "We haven't tried to be orthodox at all." The question has been on the application for three or four years, he said, and no applicants have complained.

But Mr. Halvorssen said that if it doesn't matter how people answer the question, why ask it at all? "This is very clearly aimed to weed out people who do not buy into the school's perspective of what diversity means," he said.

Myles J. Kelleher, a longtime professor of sociology at Bucks, said he discovered the question about six months ago and took his concerns to Mr. Halvorssen's group.

"It is clear to me that they are not looking for a response about intellectual diversity, which I think is being restricted," he said of college officials. "They are looking for diversity in terms of ethnicity and skin color."

Mr. Halvorssen said his group would take its complaints to trustees and alumni of the college.



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