



FRONTPAGEMAG.COM

[HOME](#) [BLOG](#) [HOROWITZ](#) [ARCHIVES](#) [COLUMNISTS](#) [SEARCH](#) [GOPOSTAL](#) [STORE](#) [LINKS](#) [CSPC](#) [CONTACT](#)

FRONTPAGE ARTICLES



Make Comment



View Comments



Printable Article



Email Article

Font **F** **E**

Academic Freedom on the Front Lines



By Robert David Johnson

FrontPageMagazine.com | January 11, 2005

By any measure, Brooklyn College's current leadership sports a dreary record regarding the protection of academic freedom on campus. In 2002, the college **unsuccessfully attempted** to deny me promotion and the resulting tenure for "uncollegial" behavior—which the administration defined, *in writing*, as disagreeing with the political, curricular, and personnel opinions of some senior colleagues. Last fall, the administration **proposed** making "collegiality" a basis of evaluation for the scholarship, teaching, service, *and* overall performance of all untenured faculty. (No doubt many faculty leftists would deem "uncollegial" the scholarship of **Richard Pipes** or the teaching of **John Lewis Gaddis**.) A few weeks later, an administration-invited speaker, **Cathy Trower**, urged members of college personnel committees to require all white male—and only white male—applicants to demonstrate a commitment to "diversity" before they could join the faculty. This past summer, exercising his responsibility under the CUNY Bylaws to enhance "the educational standards and general academic excellence of the college under his jurisdiction," President C.M. Kimmich appointed to the History personnel committee a **women's studies professor** whose website affirms her belief in combining her scholarship with activism for "assorted radical causes" but who in one job search had **thought nothing** of asking an applicant who had written for a conservative, Christian webzine about whether his kind of political beliefs belonged in the classroom. And on curricular matters, the college has zealously followed the written mantra of **Provost Roberta Matthews**: "Teaching is a political act."

Even in this hostile environment, an academic freedom movement has flourished. The campus branch of Students for Academic Freedom, headed by **Eldad Yaron**, has proven remarkably effective in gaining student support for its efforts. One sign came this fall, when Representative Daniel Tauber of the Student Government Assembly introduced the Defense of Academic Freedom Act, which seeks to protect students from being penalized for their political viewpoints and to discourage professors from replacing academic content in their classes with material that solely reflects their political opinions.

In an ideal world, legislation such as Tauber's wouldn't be necessary, but



Email Address

**KEEP FRONTPAGE RUNNING
HELP FPM NOW!**

**STUDENTS FOR
ACADEMIC FREEDOM**

**Open Letter To Indiana
Legislators**

By Sara Dogan, National Director of
Students for Academic Freedom
[Read More](#)

SYMPOSIUMS

Four More Years

Islam and Israel

**The Terror War: How
We Can Win**

Iraq: Fight or Flight?

INTERVIEWS

Christopher Hitchens

Natan Sharansky

Stephen Vincent

David Horowitz

BLOGS

PowerLine Blog

PolySigh

over the years, public colleges and universities have been particularly vulnerable to attempts to use the classroom for indoctrination. The most spectacular example, McCarthyism, led to the dismissal of hundreds of faculty members nationwide for their Communist or allegedly pro-Communist leanings.

In the last decade or so, a new type of challenge has emerged, based on a different conception of what an education at a public college should accomplish. Public institutions traditionally have sought to provide students with knowledge in the disciplines of the liberal arts, as well as important intellectual skills such as writing and critical reasoning. The new goal, however, centers on a belief that public colleges should teach students not *how* but *what* to think.

Adherents of this viewpoint are mostly senior administrators and the senior professors whose lifetime appointments and salaries safely ensconce them in the upper middle class, and they base their position on an unseemly class prejudice—namely, a contention that middle- and working-class college students need to be taught how to behave in a “diverse” society. In another era, this would have been described as a “civilizing” mission, but such wording, quite properly, is now discredited. In the framework of organizations such as [the Association of American Colleges and Universities](#), appropriate student behavior in a “diverse democracy” is most often achieved by professors using the classroom to influence students’ political positions. It is no coincidence that the AAC&U has guided the Brooklyn College agenda since Matthews’ installation as provost in September 2001.

The *Brooklyn College Bulletin*, like that of most colleges and universities, explicitly guarantees to all students the right to academic freedom, and so the Student Government had every right to take up a measure like Tauber’s. Indeed, the bill could not have been more timely: the college administration has, in a variety of recent venues, demanded an increased emphasis on “Global Studies.” To my knowledge, not one university grants a Ph.D. in “Global Studies”; instead, this [new curricular fad](#) provides a cover for professors to offer courses organized around one-sided presentations about contemporary domestic and international issues. In a “Global Studies” class, students need the protection provided by measures such as Tauber’s Defense of Academic Freedom Act, since teaching truly *is* a political act.

The Tauber measure drew strong opposition from administration supporters on campus. One faculty member (whose in-class approach this [noindoctrination.org](#) posting profiles) informed Assembly representatives that the bill, which urged the college to adopt as official policy that professors could not be fired for their curricular or political opinions, would produce a new “McCarthyism.” Moreover, the representatives were told, passing the bill would require Brooklyn’s “far-right” History professors to assign [Howard Zinn](#) and [Noam Chomsky](#) in their classes—even though no conceivable reading of the measure could suggest that professors would be forced to assign any specific works, much less books from outside of their discipline. (Zinn is a political scientist, [Chomsky a linguist](#).) Then,

The Anti-Chomsky Blog

[CAMERA.org](#)

[Andrew Sullivan](#)

[Milt Rosenberg](#)

[FPM WATCH DOG](#)

[Borders Watch](#)

[Mexico hopes amnest passes](#)

[Jihad Watch](#)

[News Updates](#)

[Campus Watch](#)

[About Campus Watch](#)

[Current News](#)

[Survey of Institutions](#)

[Media Watch](#)

[Honest Reporting.com](#)

[David Limbaugh.com](#)



astonished Assembly members were advised that if they wanted an appropriate model for academic freedom, they should turn to the example of late 1960s Tanzania, where this faculty member was invited to speak alongside a professor from the Soviet Union. For those unfamiliar with African history, Tanzania, under the leadership of Julius Nyerere, abolished opposition political parties, embraced Marxism, and aligned itself internationally with Communist China.

As the meeting drew to a close, members of the Assembly received a first-hand lesson in what academic freedom might have been like in a one-party socialist state of the late 1960s. Brooklyn College Dean of Student Life Milga Morales issued a letter deeming “null and void” all actions taken by the Assembly in the previous seven weeks and removing the duly elected Assembly speaker and committee chairs. When **queried on the matter** by the *New York Sun*, Morales refused to specify the rationale for her actions.

The college’s action drew an almost immediate rebuke from the Foundation for Individual Rights in Education (FIRE), whose director of legal and public advocacy, **Greg Lukianoff**, noted, “That any college would take such extraordinary actions to prevent the passage of an academic freedom bill is both outrageous and shameful, and is unworthy of an institution dedicated to a liberal arts education.” President Kimmich quickly looked into the matter, concluded that Morales had acted before obtaining all of the facts, and reversed her ruling on technical grounds.

To FIRE president **David French**, “The message from this case is clear: friends of liberty will not allow administrators to hide censorship behind procedural or administrative pretexts. If an administration believes an academic bill of rights is improper, it should engage in debate, not repression.”

The college disagreed: in a letter to FIRE, Brooklyn’s attorney claimed that the college respects “the right to full expression and the academic integrity of students as well as faculty and embraces all points of view.” If its handling of the Student Government issue demonstrated how the institution defines academic freedom, perhaps it’s easy to understand why Dean Morales so feared the effects of Representative Tauber’s bill.


[Make Comment](#)

[View Comments](#)

[Printable Article](#)

[Email Article](#)