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## **A question of decency**

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Chicago's DePaul University, which has taken a couple of hits for its grotesque squashing of a professor's free-speech rights, is hitting back, adding defamatory insult to career-ending injury - and a question comes to mind.

It's a question that was asked by the counsel for the Army in 1954 when Sen. Joseph McCarthy was seeking out communists in the government. He threw his charges around with little or no evidence, others in Congress did the same and sometimes reputations were recklessly ruined.

In the hearing, McCarthy got tangled with the counsel, Joseph Welch, in suggesting that a young associate of Welch's had communist ties because of an affiliation in his university years. Welch posed the question to get McCarthy to back up from yet another hurtful foray and caused many to look at the senator with newborn concern.

The question matters today because what's going on at DePaul and elsewhere is a New McCarthyism, directed this time around not at suspected communists, but at those who voice views contrary to the politically correct, intellect-stops-here glop that passes for idealism.

The facts of the DePaul case are that Thomas Klocek, a non-tenured professor, got involved in an argument with students from Muslim and pro-Palestinian groups at an activities fair in September 2004 about their insistence that Israel was murderous in fighting back against Palestinian suicide bombers. He was booted from a class he was teaching without a hearing that DePaul's rules demand, and it appears he will get no future assignments after 14 years of highly praised teaching at DePaul.

PR staffers and the president of DePaul, the Rev. Dennis Holtschneider, have responded to news accounts and comments on all of this with e-mails to readers and letters to newspapers, managing in their self-exculpatory balderdash to worsen the original offense. Here are some of the ways:

- They contend Klocek was fired for his conduct, not for what he said. The president has written that Klocek confronted the students "in a belligerent and menacing manner," raising his voice and throwing pamphlets, for instance.

Unfortunately for his argument, the person who did the suspending had written a letter to the student newspaper saying, "No one should ever use the role of teacher to demean the ideas of others or insist on the absoluteness of an opinion, much less press erroneous assertions ..."

Susanne Dumbleton, dean of the School of New Learning, made no reference to conduct in the letter, only to what Klocek said, adding later, "The students' perspective was dishonored and their freedom demeaned. Individuals were deeply insulted."

David French, president of FIRE (Foundation for Individual Rights in Education), says the students were upset because Klocek "said something insensitive to (their) politically correct point of view. " He "got tossed because he hurt feelings," French said, adding: "What really infuriates me is that the students were handing out literature that is provocative" and, when someone reacted to their provocation, they "became the victims."

- The DePaul president says there was a "mutual decision" that Klocek would step down after he refused to "acknowledge the inappropriateness of his behavior." The university has encouraged him "to file a grievance and receive the hearing he claims he was denied, " he wrote, also saying: "Instead, his lawyer threatened DePaul with litigation and demanded a large sum of money. Then, he (the lawyer) hired a publicist in an attempt to exert pressure to secure the financial settlement."

Unbelievable.

Here is a 23,000-student rich institution with its own lawyers and PR types stomping all over someone, and the president gets his dander up because the poor soul is fighting back. He treats the absence of a hearing as if that's nothing much to worry about and pretends a grievance proceeding would have meaning, which it probably would not.

John Mauk, the attorney for Klocek, points out that his client was called to a meeting where he was not advised of possible consequences, was supplied with no written charges, was given no chance to confront witnesses against him and was given no chance to keep teaching, as Dumbleton's letter also makes clear. That's far from what the university's rules require, and far from any notion of fair play.

A grievance procedure? A faculty grievance committee would have no power to give him a new classroom assignment. Could Klocek subpoena documents through it? Probably not, his attorney said.

- On top of everything else, the DePaul president, in an e-mail, talks of Klocek staying away from a teaching assignment "while he attended to personal health issues that we discovered were impacting his effectiveness in the classroom."

The president, says French, was "darkly hinting at mental instability." There is no evidence of that. French says, and I agree, that the medical issue "is a smear."

All of which brings me to that question Welch asked McCarthy.

"Have you no decency, sir, at long last?"

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