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# Campus hawks and doves find speech is not so free

By Andrea Billups  
THE WASHINGTON TIMES

Disputes over free speech are occurring at college and university campuses nationwide as professors and students speak out about issues related to the terrorist attacks.

Officials at one prominent campus liberty group say they have received numerous complaints from professors — both from hawks who support war and doves who oppose it — who have come under attack by campus administrators and others for their analysis of the current crisis.

From a New Mexico history professor who has been accused of "treason" for making snide, off-the-cuff remarks about the Pentagon bombing, to a California community college professor who has been placed on indefinite leave after four Muslim students complained about his provocative lecture, schools are reacting with increasing passion to squelch opinion as patriotic fervor swells.

"If ever there was a time to notice the inconceivable double standard when it comes to protection of free speech and association, it is now," said Thor L. Halvorssen, executive director of the Foundation for Individual Rights in Education (FIRE).

"We are under the tyranny of the touchy-feely," he said. "These administrators are terrified of being insensitive to certain views or certain minorities. Ironically, we are all a minority of one at the end of the day."

Exactly who gets stifled depends on a school's internal political configuration, said Mr. Halvorssen. He decries administrators who selectively determine what views are politically correct and whose opinions need to be squelched — depending on which way the wind of public opinion is blowing.

Administrators, he says, have become "obsessed with group

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identity," with many sending out statements demanding the softening of speech that may come across as inflammatory.

Many are the same administrators, Mr. Halvorssen adds, that fail to speak out when Christian and conservative groups say their views have been silenced.

Winfield Myers of the Intercollegiate Studies Institute in Wilmington, Del., says he understands the importance of protections on speech, but because of the prevailing national climate, today's academics must use sounder judgment.

"While the First Amendment rights of professors must be protected, professors themselves are discovering that words have consequences," Mr. Myers said.

Many academic disputes are often so insignificant that they gain little attention either on or off campus. Some academics, he said, "treat life as a parlor game."

"Our current crisis is not just another dry debate. It involves life and death, national security and war," Mr. Myers said. "Uttering irresponsible phrases may not raise an eyebrow in the perpetually adolescent land inhabited by too many academics, but in the world where most people live, such language is unwise at best, traitorous at worst."

At the University of New Mexico, tenured history professor Richard Berthold has been disciplined for making a remark that he admits now was "insensitive." Mr. Berthold told his class: "Anyone who can blow up the Pentagon has my vote."

Now three Republican state representatives and one UNM official have demanded his resignation, with one, William Fuller of Albuquerque, calling the remark a form of treason. Albuquerque resident John Trainor also filed a lawsuit in state District Court, demanding that Mr. Berthold be dismissed.

"Treason is giving aid and comfort to the enemy," Mr. Fuller told the Albuquerque Tribune. "Any terrorist who heard Berthold's comment was comforted."

He has found support from faculty Senate colleagues who said they disagreed with his statement, but cite his rights to academic freedom.

Mr. Berthold, who has no plans to step down, recognized his folly and apologized in a letter printed in the school newspaper, the Daily Lobo.

"It is the inclination of my personality to deal with shocking events by making light of them," the professor wrote. "I was simply being at the moment an incredibly insensitive and unthinking jerk." He is among several professors who are now being represented by FIRE.

Others include:

- An ethics professor at Duke University who was instructed by administrators to write a disclaimer on his Web site stating that his opinions on the issues have nothing to do with the university. He supported the fight against terrorism, and said his colleagues with opposing views were not asked to similarly disclaim their opinions.
- A criminal justice professor at the University of North Carolina at Wilmington who is under investigation for harassment. The professor told FIRE he had been contacted by university police and the provost over remarks he made behind closed doors to a female graduate student in support of U.S. intervention in Afghanistan. She had argued, Mr. Halvorssen said, that the United States was to blame for the attacks. She complained that his position made her "uncomfortable."



• A conservative Christian professor of political science at Orange Coast College in Costa Mesa, Calif., who has been put on indefinite leave after four Muslim students complained about remarks made in a Sept. 18 lecture. The 20-year teaching veteran led a heated discussion which, according to Mr. Halvorssen, started with a provocative question: "Why do Muslims condemn the terrorist attacks in New York, but never denounce the terrorist attacks in Israel?" The students complained that the professor singled them out as Muslims and blamed them for the attacks. The professor, who has apologized to students, denies those claims.

Mr. Halvorssen said his foundation also has received complaints from students who have been silenced in their support of America, including a group from Lehigh University who were instructed not to display the American flag on campus because Middle Eastern students there complained it made them uncomfortable.

"This just shows the unconscionable hypocrisy of a university who would never ask anyone to take down a flag, be it a gay pride flag, a United Nations flag, or a flag of any sort," Mr. Halvorssen said.

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