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CIVIL RIGHTS GROUP BACKS CIVIL LIBERTIES GROUP'S OBJECTIONS TO "THOUGHT REFORM" AT COLUMBIA UNIVERSITY'S TEACHERS COLLEGE

New York, New York, October 11, 2006...The New York Civil Rights Coalition's executive director, Michael Meyers, issued a statement today backing the objections of a Philadelphia-based civil liberties organization, the Foundation for Individual Rights in Education (FIRE), to Columbia University's Teachers College's "Professional Commitments and Dispositions" which both groups view as an effort at indoctrination.

Michael Meyers' statement goes one step further than merely objecting to what he calls Columbia's "statement of political correctness and expectations of philosophical conformity." He also calls upon Columbia's trustees to appoint a "Committee on Inquiry" for the purpose of discerning "the root causes" of a history at Columbia of "manifestations of contempt...for free inquiry and free expression." His statement says that Columbia University "is overdue for a shakeup at the highest levels of its administration" inasmuch as the university's officials do not appear to be "sufficiently conversant with and committed to core academic freedom and free speech principles that are required...at a 21st century world-class university."

Taking exception to the Teachers College's requirement that its students "respect diversity" and be committed to "social justice," Meyers wrote, "The man I knew to be amongst the best of social justice advocates, Martin L. King, Jr., ... would have found this kind of code indefensibly crude, intellectually suffocating, and manifestly unjust."

The entire statement of Michael Meyers follows:

"Columbia University is overdue for a shakeup at the highest levels of its administration. The trustees should now investigate whether its top officials, including its president, are sufficiently conversant with and committed to core academic freedom and free speech principles, principles that are required and essential at a 21st century world-class university.

"The self-described "Professional Commitments and Dispositions" at Columbia's Teachers College sound to us like a *Code of Conformity and Disingenuousness*. They are especially troublesome, and fraught with intellectual gobbledygook in the guise of a mission of inculcating its students and pre-service teachers with the 'right values'. The College obviously wants to inculcate its students with 'respect for diversity' and with a 'commitment to social justice.' And a private university, of course, has its prerogative of

establishing its unique mission, and making its preferences for the admission of its students. However, students at Columbia's Teachers College also have their own rights, including the right not to be indoctrinated, not to be expected to toe some line of political-correctness; these rights of the students are embedded in the very standards of academic freedom.

"Columbia's "Professional Commitments and Dispositions" are not standards at all, but a wanton statement of political correctness and expectations of philosophical conformity. They are not only vague but also intellectually deficient, and wholly bankrupt. The man I knew to be amongst the best of social justice advocates, Martin L. King, Jr., I am confident, would have found this kind of code indefensibly crude, intellectually suffocating, and manifestly unjust.

"Teachers College's 'Commitments and Dispositions,' on their face, violate core academic freedom values of every institution of higher education. Teaching and learning can only be effectively and honestly pursued in an atmosphere that is not conformist, in an atmosphere that guards against students being required to think a certain way or to think in tandem about controversial and disputed matters. Students must be protected from having to parrot conventional thinking as to subjects of academic inquiry. *Objective inquiry* and assuring it is the fundamental responsibility of a first-class university. Ideas cannot be freely explored, challenged, tested, questioned if the students' grades or evaluations are premised on the instructor's political or 'social justice' viewpoint. Ideas are subject to interpretation and to varying viewpoints and discussion in the pursuit of truth in a classroom setting; that is the essence of academic freedom.

"Any limitations or restrictions whatsoever on such fundamental students' rights to think independently and to exercise informed and critical inquiry and judgment must be opposed and ultimately rejected. We therefore call upon the trustees of Columbia University to appoint a Committee on Inquiry to discern the root causes of this and the many manifestations of contempt and disrespect for free inquiry and free expression at Columbia University that have come to the public's attention. We stand with the Foundation for Individual Rights in Education (FIRE) in objecting to this program of indoctrination. And we would gladly join in any complaint to Columbia's accrediting authorities in order to seek a quick and satisfactory clarification and restatement of what's expected and required of Columbia University by way of promoting and fostering an atmosphere of free inquiry. Columbia University must be retaught its responsibility to resist the fashions of the times and to cease, once and for all, its penchant for knee-jerk endorsements of politically-correct rhetoric and 'social justice' pabulum."

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