

Posted on Fri, Jan. 13, 2006

Letters | One Reader's View Resist hyped claims of faculty bias

Re: "Hearing into bias falls short of billing," Jan 10.

We had a legislative hearing about academic freedom in Colorado in December 2003. Encouraged by state Senate Republicans and a local right-wing think tank, student turnout was high, and a document containing numerous student complaints - and naming allegedly miscreant professors - circulated to hearing attendees.

I attended the hearing, and studied the document. Although student complaints were independently unverified and, in most cases, clearly suspect, the process culminated in a "memorandum of agreement" between Students for Academic Freedom and the leaders of Colorado's public institutions that existing student grievance procedures would be better enforced. Both sides could claim victory. Students for Academic Freedom could crow about a win, and Colorado university presidents could claim a triumph for institutional self-governance.

Sadly, this is perhaps the best we can hope for when ignorance confronts fear: ignorance among students and legislators about the nature, history, and position of the university in society, and fear among public university officials about the consequences of opposing those who control state budgets. The real casualty is the intellectual and pedagogical freedom of faculty and, consequently, engaged, critical thought about the human condition.

Such outcomes promise more generations of students and citizens afflicted by entitlement and litigiousness, more university leaders unwilling to take steadfast, principled stands on social issues, and more "consumerization" of higher education. Pennsylvanians recently struck a blow for the Enlightenment cause in Dover's public high schools. Here's hoping their elected leaders will do the same for the state's colleges and universities.

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