

University

Penn State's culture of fear strikes close to home

Dear Readers,

We depart from our usual reporting here to alert you to a disappointing turn of events at Penn State that occurred the week before we went to press with this issue.

We had hoped to report on Penn State's new computer security system. Many faculty and staff had expressed concerns about the system that scans any computer that logs onto the Penn State system. We wanted to report not only on the software, but on the systems in place, if any, to protect employees and students from abuse of that software.

Because our young reporter, a Penn State journalism student, kept running into obstacles, he began to believe there was more to the story than there was. By the time he sent an interview by e-mail—as required—to the Office of Public Information, it contained certain assumptions. (His supervisors at *Voices* didn't see it before he sent it.) When OPI refused to respond, the reporter and the official there "had words." The official said OPI would never respond to *Voices* again,

and referring to past stories, said *Voices* is biased. The reporter said Penn State had the opportunity to request corrections and write opinion pieces. Penn State has never done so.

That exchange set in motion a series of conversations with faculty that led the student to believe that working with *Voices* would permanently ruin his reputation. So he quit.

The harm done by this intermingling of administration and the academy is immeasurable. It is caused by a culture of fear, but in light of that fear, we are respecting the student's request not to publish his name, nor the names of the faculty and staff involved. We wish to do no further harm.

This event led to another more hopeful result. Immediately upon hearing of the call with OPI, *Voices* initiated conversations with that office about how best to train students who volunteer for *Voices* and we invited feedback about earlier stories.

After a number of phone calls over many days, we received an email from OPI

Director Lisa Powers that concluded:

"I look forward to continuing a positive rapport with *Voices* and maintaining a professional relationship with you and your reporters."

So do we. To that end, we propose specific measures to avoid such egregious behavior in the future:

1. We call on Penn State President Graham Spanier to use his office to properly investigate this incident and to train his directors to investigate such complaints in a way that ensures due process and transparency.

2. Penn State must strengthen its firewall between administration and the academy. When it is breached, those who pressure students in the pursuit of their free speech rights must be held accountable.

3. Penn State should proactively promote the opportunities all students have to work with various local media outlets and do so without bias.

4. Professors should shield students from any bias colleagues may show and remind colleagues of the university's duties to its students.

5. Faculty, staff and administrators should work more closely with media outlets, pro-

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viding feedback when student reporters appear to be working outside standard journalistic practice.

Thank you for your time and your ongoing support of *Voices of Central Pennsylvania*. Please send comments and questions to voices@voicesweb.org.

We are pleased to announce that the reporter has returned to *Voices*. We look forward to seeing good work from him in the future.

'Most Dangerous' book not so damaging after all

by Jennifer Floyd

In February 2006, David Horowitz published a book called *The Professors: The 101 Most Dangerous Academics in America*. Horowitz claims in his book that there are far too many liberal professors in academia, and that these professors are polluting young minds with their leftist ideologies.

Horowitz, a right wing activist, named two Penn State professors in his book: Michael Bérubé, a professor in the English department who teaches American literature and cultural studies, and Sam Richards, who teaches for the sociology department, and is head of the Race Relations Project at Penn State.

It's been almost three years since the book published, so *Voices* wanted to know: Did anything significant happen as a direct result of the professors being named in this book?

Both Penn State professors agreed that not much of anything happened to them as a result of being labeled.

Bérubé has been in the middle of discussions regarding politics in the classroom for many years, and responded to Horowitz through his blog, michaelberube.com.

Bérubé thinks this blog mockery of Horowitz on his Web site is the real reason he was put in the book in the first place.

While others named in the book lost their jobs and worse, Bérubé said he felt support from the academic community at Penn



Michael Berube



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see *Dangerous*, pg. 17

Women boxers make the grade on Penn State team

by Tamara Conrad

Women on the Penn State Boxing Team prove the ability to take a punch and play a sport dominated by men does not make you any less of a female.

For the past year, Christine Brown, 20, Alexia Miller, 20 and Hillary Santiago, 21, have been boxing at Penn State.

The women practice their technique in the boxing ring in the White Building basement on the Penn State campus. Monday through Thursday, from 6 to 8 p.m. the women practice in a hot, stuffy room that smells like a locker room, alongside the guys on the team.

Dave Vacco, assistant coach for the Penn State Boxing Team, and a Penn State graduate student, said that it's hard to tell the women are boxers based on appearances.

four years, said that boxing is an intimidating sport for both males and females, but it is a challenge that can be met.

"Boxing is not a gender thing. Boxing is not intimidating. Boxing is a test of yourself," Vacco said.

To get on the team, athletes must tryout through the Penn State Boxing Club. The tryout process is the same for both the women and the men. Tryouts involve 10 weeks of workouts ending with a physical exam which includes timed runs. Then after passing the exam, potential boxers must spar against one another, which, in this case, is treated like a boxing match.

"Tryout is a long strenuous process," Vacco said.

The tryout process is primarily used to weed out the boys who want to join the team because there are so many who want



Photo by David Reinbold

Penn State boxer Alexia Miller connects with Christine Brown during practice in the White Building on the Penn State campus recently. The two are among three women boxers who are members of the Penn State Boxing Team.

"Boxing is not a gender thing. Boxing is not intimidating. Boxing is a test of yourself."

--Assistant Coach Dave Vacco

"If you were to see them in a crowd, you wouldn't spot them physically as a boxer," he said.

The women are lean, yet toned. While practicing in cheerleading shorts and wearing hot pink handwraps around their fists, some of the women don't look intimidating at all. That is until they start practicing jabs and uppercuts.

"Some people are shocked that I'm a boxer," Santiago said. "They find it hard to believe."

Jack Rohrabough, another coach for the boxing team, said that simply because a female can box doesn't mean she acts more like a guy or tomboy.

"They didn't change their genders because they decided to be fighters," Rohrabough said.

The women, with the exception of Miller, just began boxing last year. Miller has been boxing for six years.

Santiago, who used to cheer and run track, said that she began boxing because it was a more challenging sport.

"It was something different. Something more intense," Santiago said.

"It's a challenge physically and mentally," Brown said.

Vacco, who has been boxing for the past

to join, Vacco said.

"So many guys try out, so we can only keep a third of them," Vacco said.

There aren't that many women who try out, and Vacco said if a woman endures the process to try out, then she is automatically put on the team.

"If the women spar and show these kinds of guts, they get on the team. If they have the courage to get into that nerve racking situation, they're in," he said.

Last year was the first time the team had women join, and there were five of them.

Brown and Santiago said that, although they get along with the guys on the team, the guys had to get used to the new situation of having gals on the team.

"They had to warm up to us," Santiago said.

"In the beginning they weren't sure," Brown said. "It was like 'What are these girls about?'"

The two said that the team and coaching staff quickly welcomed the women to the team.

Rohrabough, who has been helping out on the coaching staff for the past three years

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State.

"I never had any moment of worrying they would throw me to the wolves," he said of the university.

Bérubé mentioned one negative instance resulting from being in the book that occurred due to press coverage of the hoopla.

"In fall 2006, our class was attended by not one but two reporters from Pittsburgh, as well as a photographer who, I thought (and numerous students agreed, to gauge by the SRTes), was needlessly disruptive. (I'd asked him not to come to the class, but he said he needed a "while teaching" photo—and then the paper ran one that he took in my office anyway.) I really can do without that—though I was pleased that they were really smart and had done the reading," he said.

Bérubé sees Horowitz as a "provocateur" in the politically charged academic world.

Horowitz is well known for proposing his "Academic Bill of Rights" which suggests that a system be put in place within universities to ensure that liberals do not make up a larger percentage within the faculty. His idea is to promote affirmative action for

political instead of racial reasons, yet there appears to be a single slant to the politics he wishes would enjoy that affirmative action.

This contrasts with Horowitz's touted conservative ideals. He also proposes increasing regulation to ensure conservative opinion on campus, a decidedly anti-conservative idea.

Richards said that other than wasting some of his time, nothing significant came of being named in the book. He isn't even sure why he's in the book.

"I should have been in the book in the past, because in the past I very much put all of my, I would say, leftist ideology into the classroom," Richards said. "In some ways it's like the karma hit man coming and getting me, but it's 10 years too late."

Richards agrees with Horowitz that many universities are leftist. He said many of the activities going on at Penn State and other universities are overwhelmingly liberal, and that it can be hard to find an activity that portrays a conservative agenda.



Sam Richards

In his Race and Ethic Relations class, he prompts students to talk about racial issues and finds that political correctness is the speak of the day. He observes that students with more conservative opinions may be less likely to speak up.

"So in that case, Horowitz has got his finger on the pulse of something that's going on," he said.

But, he does not agree that writing this type of book is going to help the situation.

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said he is happy to have women fight on the team.

"I'm more than honored, I'm impressed to have girls on the team," Rohrabough said.

One of the women from last year's team, Jamie Sanfilippo, was the only woman who has competed in a collegiate boxing match. Although none of the women from this year's team have competed yet, Vacco said, they have potential to be very competitive.

Rohrabough and Vacco both said the women are very dedicated to the sport.

"They work hard," Vacco said. "They get hit in the face. They fight."

Even with this fighting spirit and hard

"He's just slamming people on the basis of very thin information," Richards said.

So, did the two Penn State professors named in Horowitz's book find the title to do anything to hurt or help their careers?

Not necessarily.

"One thing negative happened," Richards said. "I would say I probably made some enemies out of jealousy because there were so many people that wanted to be in the book."

work the women have newly put into the sport of boxing, it is difficult to find matches that the women can compete in.

Vacco said there are a limited amount of women who compete at the collegiate boxing level, and finding competition is made more difficult when trying to find a competitor with the same weight and level of experience as the Penn State boxers.

Now that the team is attempting to get the women into a real bout, they are discovering that more schools have female fighters. Unfortunately, those schools don't bring them to the boxing shows because they don't realize there are female opponents available, such as the ones at Penn State.

"We will definitely get our girls some action," Vacco said.

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