

# Bias charges based on misleading information

*'Academic Freedom' sponsor misled General Assembly about number and source of complaints by conservative student complaints*

by Nathan Tobey

Lancaster Republican Rep. Gibson Armstrong in the Pennsylvania House misrepresented facts when he introduced a resolution based on an "Academic Bill of Rights" from Students for Academic Freedom (SAF), according to Montgomery Democrat Rep. Lawrence Curry. SAF was founded by conservative activist David Horowitz as an offshoot of his Center for the Study of Popular Culture (CSPC), an umbrella organization of right-wing media and legal advocacy groups. CSPC, which paid Horowitz \$330,000 in 2003, is funded by some of the country's most influential conservative foundations.

Saying he was prompted by the receipt of approximately 50 complaints from Pennsylvania college students claiming biased instruction or unfair treatment by professors, Rep. Armstrong sponsored House Resolution 177 to establish a select committee tasked with determining whether improper bias influences faculty hiring, student evaluation, course instruction and stu-

dent conduct policies at state-supported universities. HR177 passed in July, establishing a select committee that has since held hearings at universities across the Commonwealth.

In an interview for this article, Rep. Lawrence Curry, Democratic chair of the committee, said Armstrong exaggerated the number of complaints and possibly misrepresented their origins. Curry and his staff reviewed the complaints after receiving redacted copies from Armstrong. According to Curry, there were a total of 30 complaints, not 50. Of those, Curry said, Armstrong has failed to disclose that most were from private universities, which the legislature has limited authority and mandate to oversee. Moreover, Curry noted, while Armstrong has claimed the aggrieved students contacted him directly in 2005, nearly all the complaints are photocopies of allegations posted on the Internet as early as February 2004. Armstrong did not respond to interview requests for this article.

Curry's staff determined the students' schools of origin by referencing their complaints as originally posted on either the Students for Academic Freedom site (<http://www.studentsforacademicfreedom.org>) or on NoIndoctrination.org, a small organization founded by a California mother who felt her son's college writing course was

overly "race-related."

Curry also noted that the complaints do not "contain a single mention of using the procedures in place at both private and public schools for addressing grievances." Additionally, he said, almost all the complaints lack any documentary evidence other than the students' accounts.

The authors of HR177, however, anticipated that student accounts would play a role in the hearings. The resolution specifies that individuals may use the hearings to air allegations of faculty bias. An accused instructor must be provided 48 hours' notice and the opportunity to testify at the same hearing as the accuser.

A student testified for the first time at the most recent hearing, held at Temple University in January. Logan Fisher, vice-chair of the Temple College Republicans, complained that Temple has helped fund liberal speakers on campus. He also, without naming professors, described incidents of instructors making derogatory comments about President Bush and penalizing conservative students for their views.

Fisher said he knew many students who were too "afraid to testify, for fear of repercussions to their academic careers."

"I have not lodged any formal complaints [within Temple] for the fact that I didn't think they would be handled at all,"



Lancaster Republican Rep. Gibson Armstrong, above, has not accurately named the number or source of student complaints of faculty bias.

Fisher said.

At the November committee hearings in Pittsburgh, Dr. Stephen H. Balch, president of the National Association of Scholars, a network of conservative professors partially funded by prominent right-wing foundations, supported Fisher's contention. Balch testified that Pennsylvania's public universities, in general, do not enforce their academic freedom policies.

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# Black Studies program invites a variety of students

by Carisa Cortez

The African and African American Studies program at Penn State began as a series of courses during the 1970s, designed with the goal of providing an integrated and critical understanding of the experiences and contributions of peoples of African descent.

"There was a growing recognition by the university, by the students and throughout the nation that [such a program] was becoming a necessary addition," said Grace Hampton, interim head of Penn State's program for the past two years. She said motivation for the program's creation grew out of concerns reaching back to the 1960s about inclusion and a lack of awareness of the contributions African Americans have made to the United States. It was amidst the turbulent political climate of the 1960s that many of the country's top universities began offering special classes created to emphasize and educate students about ethnic minority communities, their histories and the unique challenges confronting many

groups.

In response to those concerns, Penn State's College of Liberal Arts began offering such classes, expanding the program with the establishment of a minor concentration in the 1980s, and later offering the option to major and earn a Bachelor of Arts or Bachelor of Science degree in African and African American Studies. Students choose an emphasis on African American Studies, African Studies, or Law and Social Justice and are encouraged to do research and evaluate the relationship between the political, social and economic developments in Africa and the African diaspora. Within this spectrum is a wide range of topics – art, music, history, politics, economics and literature-of African countries, as well as other countries where large groups of people of African descent live, such as the United States and Brazil.

The quality and diversity of the current faculty contribute to the wide applicability of the program. "One of the strengths of our program is our faculty: We have a very

strong and diverse faculty, not only versed in politics, history and culture but well-versed in their own particular specialization – linguistics, economics and land use, for instance," Hampton said. "We have one of the strongest core faculties in African American Studies, with members specializing in politics, economics, globalization, urban politics, public law and a strong emphasis on Caribbean history and politics as it relates to the Third World diaspora. Then we have people who are very interested in the 1960s as they relate to our [African and African American] history and development and our future. We have faculty trained in both African and African American studies, which adds to the richness of what we teach."

Students with a degree in African American Studies have gone on to become noted journalists, professors, writers and anthropologists. Together, they have helped bring the complex and diverse cultures of African peoples and countries to the world's attention by investigating important con-

temporary issues such as ethnic strife, the environment and health care.

"We are looking to our alumni to bridge the gap between what one studies and what happens in the world," Hampton said. "We have many successful alumni participating in the corporate world, in industry, the media, medicine, public policy and other areas."

As an interdisciplinary studies degree, the African and African American Studies program overlaps with other fields. Hampton said the department continually looks at how these fields relate to the African American culture and brings in affiliate faculty from throughout the university to strengthen the program.

Despite the success of the program, there is still one overriding misconception, Hampton said.

"One of the common misunderstandings about African American Studies...one does

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