

Higher Education and the National Security State

In reaction to the events of September 11, 2001, the United States is reshaping itself into a nation that sets the priority of national security above all others. For those of us in higher education, this raises questions of professional responsibilities that we must answer in these perilous times. Faculty are often the first to notice, compile evidence on, and analyze official proclamations and actual practices in times of national crisis and war, and educators have a special responsibility to call attention to choices about values and goals during times of perceived threats to the nation.

Since September 11, constitutional rights taken for granted in the past have been redefined, and economic priorities have shifted as resources were moved to support homeland security and wars in Iraq and Afghanistan. In this issue of *Thought & Action*, we discuss what these changes mean to higher education.

On our campuses, there are efforts now underway to ferret out perceived enemy supporters and sympathizers. There is little regard for constitutional rights when the government or private groups think they are hot on the trail of state enemies, and underwhelming evidence creates the rationale for an overwhelming reaction.

But the reaction is not limited to compiling a list of professors who someone thinks are siding with the enemy and finding ways to discipline them. There is a nationally orchestrated campaign, led by David Horowitz, Lynn Cheney, and Daniel Pipes, among others, and bankrolled by a familiar cast of wealthy neo-conservative backers, that has set its sights on restricting academic freedom when it involves criticism of national policy and converting the public role of academicians into intellectual cheerleading for the national security state.

The so-called “Academic Bill of Rights (ABOR),” promoted by Horowitz, places restrictions on how controversial issues can be discussed in the classroom and places a “balance” requirement if a controversial issue is mentioned or discussed—opening faculty to discipline and lawsuits if they fail to toe the line. This year the ABOR was proposed as an amendment to the federal Higher Education Act and introduced in two dozen state legislatures.

At the same time, the economic fallout from 9/11 brings a direct hit on higher education. The “new federalism” of the Reagan era had already cut national higher education funding. Beginning in the 1980s, responsibility for social and educational programs was shifted from the national level to the state level or to the private sphere. After 9/11, this process accelerated. Faculty are now challenged to defend what is essential to their profession, while funds are disappearing. The *reductio ad absurdum* is Colorado, where faculty find new restrictions on discussing anything that might make students “feel uncomfortable,” and universities are told to become totally self-supporting within a few years.

This *Thought & Action* Special Focus surveys the terrain after these dramatic changes. The articles in this section underscore the need for a strong and organized faculty advocate to resist the changes on the political drawing board and to create the conditions for our members to continue to provide higher education at its best.

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