

ACADEMIC FREEDOM: A CALL TO THE HUNTER COLLEGE COMMUNITY

In recent months, the American tradition of academic freedom has again come under attack. Speakers with unpopular viewpoints have been banned from speaking at campuses and—emboldened by the excesses of the Patriot Act—state legislatures are considering laws to curtail free expression on campuses. Here at Hunter College, some members of the community have expressed concern that a culture of fear has swept the college, that a chilly climate is discouraging the open dialog and free exchange of ideas that are essential to a healthy academic environment, and that retaliation and intimidation have been directed at individuals, departments and programs that disagree with, or question, the Hunter College leadership.

To ensure that Hunter College maintains its traditions of academic freedom and to examine the scope of these perceived threats, the Hunter College Senate voted to create a Select Committee on Academic Freedom at its meeting of December 8, 2004. The Select Committee on Academic Freedom's charge is to investigate the substance and validity of both external and internal threats to academic freedom at Hunter and eventually to issue a report of its findings. The role of this Committee is not to replace existing channels for dealing with specific procedural issues or grievances. Existing Senate committees as well as the office of the Ombudsperson, departmental appeals, and recourse to the administration remain the appropriate channels for dealing with specific issues and grievances.

In order to develop an overview of the more general situation, and to gather research that will contribute to the development of a formal report, the Senate Select Committee on Academic Freedom is interested in hearing from faculty members who believe that their academic freedom has been affected in the teaching of their classes, in their research, writing and/or creative work, in serving on committees, or in any other way as they carry out their functions as members of Hunter College's faculty. We will also look at external threats to academic freedom and assess whether the faculty or administration needs to take action to ensure that our college is adequately protected against inappropriate interference.

To help us assess the current situation, we are interested in hearing from faculty, staff, students and alumni who can present substantive examples of what has been called a "chilly climate" or a "culture of fear." Members of the administration are also welcome to visit and speak with the committee. We invite people to schedule meetings with the committee, or to submit well-substantiated concerns in writing.

ALL INFORMATION SHARED WITH THE COMMITTEE WILL BE HELD IN THE STRICTEST CONFIDENCE. Given the issues at hand, we are deeply aware of our responsibility to protect all respondents as we pursue our inquiry.

(See reverse side for contact information and committee membership)

HOW TO CONTACT THE COMMITTEE:

EMAIL: acadfreedom@yahoo.com
FAX: 212-721-8485

Appointments may also be scheduled at the Hunter College Senate Office, 1018 East Building

SENATE SELECT COMMITTEE ON ACADEMIC FREEDOM:

Thomas Angotti, Professor, Urban Affairs & Planning

Stuart Ewen, Distinguished Professor, Film & Media Studies; Ph.D. Programs in History and Sociology, CUNY Graduate Center

Nicholas Freudenberg, Distinguished Professor, Urban Public Health; Ph.D. Program in Psychology, CUNY Graduate Center

Dixie Goss, Gertrude B. Elion Endowed Scholar and Professor, Chemistry and Biochemistry; Ph.D. Programs in Chemistry and Biochemistry, CUNY Graduate Center

Barbara Hampton, Professor, Music Ph.D. Programs in Music, CUNY Graduate Center

Elizabeth Maglieri, Student, Thomas Hunter Honors Program

Migdalia Romero, Professor, Curriculum & Teaching.

Louise Sherby, Associate Dean and Chief Librarian, Library

Kenneth Sherrill, Chair, Professor, Political Science

Marina Stasenکو, Student, CUNY Honors College

Barbara Welter, Professor and Chair, History; Ph.D. Program in History, CUNY Graduate Center