



- WAR ON TERROR
- ABOUT US/HELP
- ARCHIVES
- BOOKS
- BUSINESS
- CLASSIFIEDS
- COLUMNISTS
- COMMUNITY
- CONTACT US
- DISCUSSION
- DPO BY E-MAIL
- DPO WIRELESS
- ENTERTAINMENT
- FOOD/DINING
- LIFESTYLES
- NEWS
- OBITUARIES
- OPINION
- **Columnists**
- **Editorials**
- **Letters**
- **Write for us**
- SEAS. TO SHARE
- SHOPPING
- SPORTS
- TRAVEL
- WEATHER
- DPO HOME

al knight

Tiny mob, a big injustice

By [Al Knight](#)
Denver Post Columnist



Wednesday, December 05, 2001 - It was a tenet of conventional wisdom following the Sept. 11 terrorist attacks that public opinion in the United States might turn against people of Middle Eastern background and result in a wave of discrimination. Officials from the president on down issued urgent pleas to the American public to avoid any acts that could result in unfair treatment based on skin color or background.

What could not have been anticipated was that American citizens, among them a tenured professor, would experience mistreatment at the hands of Middle Eastern students. Yet that is exactly what has happened, and - as is usual in these types of cases involving fundamental free speech issues - the American Civil Liberties Union is nowhere to be found.

Here's what happened and what it may say about the state of academic freedom in this country.

Professor Kenneth Hearlson of Orange Coast College in Costa Mesa, Calif., was placed on administrative leave in late September after complaints were lodged against him by at least two Middle Eastern students who took exception to remarks he made during a political science lecture on Sept. 18.

The students alleged that Hearlson delivered remarks labeling them as terrorists. One of the students, Mooath Saidi, told the Los Angeles Times, "I don't want an apology. He needs to get fired, if not prosecuted, for what he did."

As it turns out, a female student in Hearlson's class made a recording of the lecture and class discussion that followed. The tape wasn't made available to Hearlson or to the school administrators until after the school president, Margaret Gratton, had put Hearlson on administrative leave.

Since the recording surfaced, however, no one who has heard it or read the transcript has been able to locate anything resembling the remarks which the students say were made. Instead, The New York Times and the Washington Times, among others, have reported that the tape makes clear the only allegations of terrorism made were leveled at Arab nations, including those that produced the terrorists that piloted planes in the

Recent Columns

Dec. 2:
[The 2002 campaign begins](#)

Nov. 28:
[Justice and the laws of war](#)

Nov. 18:
[The value of religious faith](#)

Nov. 14:
[Taming radical notions](#)

Nov. 11:
[Statements need to be corrected](#)

Nov. 7:
[PC means political control](#)

SEARCH DPO:

Enter search term,
hit enter key
[Click here for advanced search](#)

Sept. 11 attacks.

Hearlson, who is represented by the Foundation for Individual Rights in Education, has asked to be restored to his teaching duties and is considering a defamation case against the school.

Incredibly, Hearlson has yet to receive a hearing or been provided with any other recourse by the school that might constitute appropriate due process. He is a tenured professor, and it is very nearly unthinkable that he could be removed from the classroom and kept away from his teaching duties for 2 1/2 months without a hearing. The school has hired an investigator to look into the student allegations, but that investigator must be working in slow motion.

Hearlson's class was designed to cover contemporary political issues. During the class in question, he raised a number of issues, including the fact that Muslim nations had not risen with a single voice to repudiate Osama bin Laden. He has said that he makes it clear to every class that there is no "incorrect opinion," and that grades are never assessed based on the content of any student's political opinion.

Indeed, a former student of his, Russ Baker, wrote to the Los Angeles Times and defended Hearlson's teaching methods. "Hearlson is a professor who puts a great deal of passion into what he teaches. Lectures conducted by him were thought-provoking, challenging and sometimes edgy. At no time during class did I ever hear him make any disparaging remarks toward any person or group."

The college has taken much too long to resolve this matter. It owes the public an explanation as to why the normal rules of due process haven't been followed. It also should explain why it takes weeks and weeks to evaluate the conduct of a professor during a single class period. And most important, it needs to inform the complaining students, and perhaps the school's current set of administrators, that in this country we don't prosecute professors for raising perfectly appropriate issues in a political science class simply because someone, of whatever background or religion, claims to be offended.

Al Knight (alknight@mindspring.com) is a member of The Denver Post editorial board.

[Printable View](#)

[Email a Copy of this Article](#)

[Return to top](#)

All contents Copyright 2001 The Denver Post or other copyright holders. All rights reserved. This material may not be published, broadcast, rewritten or redistributed for any commercial purpose.

Terms of use | [Privacy policy](#)

Go to Section

