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Today's News

Monday, September 18, 2000

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College Drops Rule Calling for Multicultural Component in All New Courses

By [COURTNEY LEATHERMAN](#)

Monterey Peninsula College has dropped a policy requiring professors who propose new courses to include a multicultural component. Opponents of political correctness heralded the college's reversal as "a resounding victory for freedom of conscience and academic freedom." But faculty leaders dismissed the whole controversy as a "misunderstanding."

The issue arose in March when David Clemens, an English professor at the two-year college, proposed a new course, English 38, to focus on film and literature. In preparing the course description for review by the Curriculum Advisory Committee, he refused to answer Requirement 14 -- a question about "how course topics are treated to develop a knowledge and understanding of race, class, and gender issues." Instead, Mr. Clemens wrote a rebuttal, likening the question to "an ideological loyalty oath." He said the policy had been in effect for about eight years and that, because of it, he had avoided proposing new courses.

In May, the curriculum committee rejected his proposal, citing a state statute that the committee said required the race, class, and gender information.

At about that time, Mr. Clemens sought advice from the

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Foundation for Individual Rights in Education, which promotes free speech on college campuses. Officials of the foundation said they mounted a letter-writing campaign against the requirement, telling administrators, trustees, and alumni that the "politically correct loyalty oath" was immoral and unconstitutional.

Mr. Clemens believes the group's involvement was "instrumental in helping clarify the issue and bring it to a resolution."

What helped bring it to a resolution, says Mark Clements a physical-education professor and president of the college's Academic Senate, was that faculty leaders were notified about Mr. Clemens's concerns. Mr. Clements says he first learned about the issue when Mr. Clemens wrote a letter of complaint to the college's president and then sent a copy to the academic senate. He says that the senate investigated, learned that the college's rule about race, class, and gender was not, in fact, based on a state requirement, and then turned the requirement into an option. This month, the Academic Senate notified Mr. Clemens of the change.

"It was a misunderstanding," says Mr. Clements, noting that before Mr. Clemens, no one had ever complained about the policy. The new policy, he says, is that "we'd like to encourage faculty to incorporate a global look at their curriculum. However, it's not required."

Mr. Clemens resubmitted his course proposal, leaving a blank space on the line about race, class, and gender. On Friday he was notified that his course had been approved by the curriculum committee. He plans to teach English 38 in the spring.

Background article from *The Chronicle*:

- [Proposed Course at California College Said to Run Into PC Buzz Saw](#) (8/11/2000)



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