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Time: 11:44 AM, Friday, July 23, 104

## Culture

### University Mandates Ideological 'Loyalty Oath,' Rights Group Alleges

By Lawrence Morahan  
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May 15, 2002

(CNSNews.com) - A requirement for participation in a women's studies program at the University of South Carolina (USC) includes an acknowledgment by students that they are on the same ideological wavelength as their teacher, an educational watchdog group alleged.

People who sign up for "Women's Studies 797: Seminar in Women's Studies" - a required course for a certificate of graduate study - must "acknowledge that racism, classism, sexism, heterosexism, and other institutional forms of oppression exist," officials from the Foundation for Individual Rights in Education (FIRE) said.

These "guidelines for classroom discussion," as distributed by USC professor Lynn Weber, "create a loyalty oath that is injurious to intellectual freedom," FIRE officials said.

Weber, director of the Women's Studies Program, also distributed a syllabus specifying that classroom participation counts for 20 percent of a student's overall grade.

The guidelines, which were forwarded to FIRE by a student objector, stipulate "we are all systematically taught misinformation about our own group and about members of other groups."

It adds, "this is true for members of privileged and oppressed groups," and that students must "agree to combat actively the myths and stereotypes about our own groups and other groups."

FIRE President Alan Charles Kors said in a letter to the USC leadership the guidelines were unconstitutional.

"Through these official 'guidelines,' USC demands that students embrace and remain loyal to professor Weber's own viewpoints and beliefs," Kors wrote to USC President John M. Palms.

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"In a USC classroom, in a required course, no less, students must hold a preordained set of opinions, regardless of whether or not they agree, under the stated, explicit, and coercive threat of being graded poorly for honest intellectual dissent," he said.

"Students and professors should be at liberty to hold and espouse any viewpoint they wish," Kors said.

The guidelines not only violate the U.S. Constitution and the Constitution of South Carolina, they also are at odds with the principles of the American Association of University Professors' (AAUP) statements on free speech and freedom of conscience, said Thor L. Halvorssen, executive director of FIRE.

In its "Joint Statement on Rights and Freedoms of Students," publishing in 1967, the AAUP said students "should be free to take reasoned exception to the data or views offered in any course of study and to reserve judgment about matters of opinion," Halvorssen pointed out.

The Supreme Court also recognized this principle in its opinion in a 1943 case involving the West Virginia Board of Education v. Barnette.

"This is a slam-dunk First Amendment case," Halvorssen said. "We could walk into federal court and have that course stricken."

FIRE is not seeking conflict or confrontation, he said. "A good 90 percent of the cases FIRE involves itself with are resolved discreetly and amicably. We always give the university the benefit of the doubt."

But he added: "You can be assured that if the University of South Carolina administration, in light of their negligence in upholding the Bill of Rights, do not listen to reason and immediately instruct President Palms to take action, we will absolutely see this to a just conclusion, even if that means using every legal means at our disposal.

The USC has not responded to correspondence from FIRE, Halvorssen said. Calls to the USC by **CNSNews.com** also were not returned.

According to the USC website, the Women's Studies Program "reconceptualizes knowledge, creates new knowledge, and reinterprets existing knowledge through the lens of gender and the prism of diversity.

"Its teaching mission is to share this knowledge with students so that they learn to think critically, to communicate effectively, to solve problems, and to interpret human experience," the website says.

"Emerging from an activist tradition, the program serves University, local, state, and national communities by acting as a resource and guide for issues related to women and gender. Our research, teaching, and service missions interweave as we create, share, and apply the knowledge, skills, and values that promote the full participation of women in society."

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