



## Find the square root of our free speech

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Walter Kehowski may be the most annoying, politically extreme professor in the entire Maricopa County Community College District. Which is exactly why they should *not* fire him.

Kehowski has been on paid administrative leave since early March. He is a mathematics professor at Glendale Community College. In November, he sent out an e-mail that contained George Washington's Thanksgiving Day proclamation from 1789. Kehowski used his GCC computer and sent the e-mail to all district employees on a site designated for "announcements." The e-mail contained a link to conservative commentator Pat Buchanan's Web site, which features his strident views on immigration policy.

In time, five district employees complained about Kehowski's e-mail. The district's chancellor said that Kehowski had violated policies outlining use of district e-mails and should be fired. He's currently awaiting a June 5 hearing before a faculty panel. That group will make a recommendation to the chancellor, who will pass it on to the district's governing board.

If fairness prevails, and there is a thorough review of the facts and a sensible approach to repercussions, everyone involved in the process will be harshly rebuked - except Kehowski.

"It's been terribly boring," Kehowski told me. "I've been reading books, watching TV a little, Web browsing. Occasionally I deal with my lawyer or the people at FIRE (the Foundation for Individual Rights in Education, which had taken up Kehowski's cause). But, it's hard. It's very difficult being taken out of the classroom after eight weeks of class."

Kehowski has gotten into trouble before over his computer use. A few years back, some people were offended by some inflammatory articles about immigration that he posted on his faculty Web page, even though he pointed out that it was "not an official Web site of the Maricopa County Community College District."

Kehowski's problem is that a lot of people don't like his politics. Neither do I.

My support for the irksome professor isn't based on politics, but self-preservation.

The Internet is not an intellectual flower garden. It's a jungle. It's filled with beautiful blooms and exotic creatures, as well as creepy-crawly insects, poisonous plants and wild animals. If we kill the weeds and put all of the toothy beasts in cages, the place will die.

And while Kehowski admits that many of his postings have an edge, he says that he didn't believe that Washington's Thanksgiving message would be seen as offensive.

"It took all of 20 or 30 seconds to link it and copy it," he said. "I thought that it was completely innocuous."

He believes, now, that he might have looked for a different link to the same material, one that wasn't connected to the controversial Buchanan.

Still, none of us is required to read e-mail. We can avoid being offended and delete them, or we can click on an interesting-looking post. What good is life without a little risk?

I asked Kehowski what he would do if he were fired.

"I'm considering the legal alternatives," he said. "Looking at what I can do in the courts. But I'm hoping it doesn't come to that."

Then again, it might be entertaining (at least to us media types) to see all the other MCCD postings that weren't work related and which no doubt would come out in a trial.

I'm not a math whiz like Kehowski, but I learned enough in school to know that the square root of free speech is tolerance, even for the most offensive and annoying. Especially for them. (Or should I say, "Us.")

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