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ACADEME

Missouri Conference of the American Association of University Professors

“Academic Freedom Isn’t Free”

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Chris Kelly Speaks on Conceal and Carry Legislation at MOAAUP Annual Meeting

By Barrie Talbott

At the MOAAUP Annual Meeting last February, guest speaker Representative Chris Kelly (D-24th District) discussed Carry and Conceal Weapon (CCW) legislation, specifically the application of these laws to college campuses in Missouri. Kelly spoke at the Annual Meeting as a result of the Firearms and Defensive Use of Force Act that passed the House

(106-41) in April of 2009. This bill would have reduced the minimum age to acquire a permit for carrying concealed weapons from 23 to 21 and eliminated the ban on weapons in public colleges and universities in Missouri. The Senate did not adopt the bill at that time.



Several other states have been voting on similar legislation. Currently, Utah has legislation that supersedes the wills of individual colleges, allowing CCW on all state campuses. Although the Missouri bill didn’t pass the Senate, it is obvious that these issues will continue to be a part of the political landscape.

Kelly voted against this bill, and in his talk, he stated that he would vote against future legislation that would allow weapons on college campuses. As a former Boone County Associate Circuit Judge, Kelly shared a few of his experiences working on cases with college students. These experiences convinced him that conceal and carry on a college campus, where alcohol and partying are already common, isn’t a good idea.

During his entertaining presentation, Kelly discussed the current climate in Missouri’s House and Senate and mentioned that many legislators are responding to the political pressure of the one-issue voters who have become highly organized and vocal. He cited upcoming legislation a tax holiday on firearms and ammunition as an example of this response.

Kelly suggested that college faculty should be more aware how this legislature really works, not just have an “intellectual understanding” of state government.

He said that if faculty want their issues to be a part of

these legislative discussions, then they ought to behave more like these one-issue voters rather than as “thinking nuanced scientists.” Nuance doesn’t work in the capital. Faculty need to become more organized, issue-focused, and louder if they want to advocate for legislation that benefits higher education, including funding issues as well as CCW legislation. For example, faculty ought to be saying to their representatives, “we’re going to get 12 million dollars on that bond issue [for capital improvements on college campuses] and don’t come around here trying to get elected if you don’t.”

2010 Gruber Award

By David Robinson, MOAAUP VP

Betty McLane-Iles, professor of French at Truman State University, was awarded the 2010 David F. Gruber Leadership Development Award by the Missouri Conference of the American Association of University Professors (AAUP) during the organization’s annual meeting at the University of Missouri-Kansas City on Feb. 13.



Betty McLane-Iles accepts the 2010 Gruber Award from David Robinson, VP of the Missouri Conference of AAUP.

The Gruber Award is a special honor that gives monetary support to AAUP members in Missouri who attend training seminars and regional or national meetings of AAUP. McLane-Iles attended the AAUP Summer Institute, July 23-26, at Macalester College in St. Paul, Minn. Among other activities there, she concentrated on seminars devoted to negotiations and arbitration of disputes. She has served as president of the Truman Chapter of AAUP since 2006.

Continued – page 2

The Gruber Award was established in 2005, the same year David Gruber, former president of the Missouri Conference and member of the National Council of AAUP, passed away. Gruber taught philosophy at Truman starting in 1989.

Since its founding in 1915, AAUP has followed its original purpose: to advance academic freedom and shared governance; to define fundamental professional values and standards for higher education; and to ensure higher education's contribution to the common good.

Professors Still have a Public Image Issue: A Word From the President

By Keith T. Hardeman, MOAAUP President

As my MOAAUP presidency winds down during its final few months, I've spent a little time looking back at some of the higher education issues we've all dealt with in the last four years. Issues such as spending cuts, tuition increases, salary woes, the reduction of tenure-line positions, poor faculty-administration relations, among many others, have all been on our faculty radar.

But the one that still bothers me most deals with the alleged "liberal indoctrination" in college classes. Even politicians got involved as they actually tried to pass a law to stop us from "poisoning" the minds of our students. Such a law would have dealt a major blow to academic freedom and could have mandated classroom inclusion of viewpoints that were factually discredited. Fortunately, these legislative attempts across the nation appear to have stopped for the time being. The reality is that there are no credible studies to even suggest liberal bias is a pervasive problem.

Though I'm glad to say Missouri twice stopped political curriculum legislation since 2007, we're still not past the suspicion. College professors continue to incur the wrath of a large public segment that still sees us as distant intellectual elitists stuck in our ivory towers. It's an unfair generalization based more in stereotype than empiricism. To those with such perceptions, simple suspicion seems equal to evidence, which is symptomatic of the same shortage of logic we often face in our classrooms. The cure is the ailment in their eyes, so it's nearly an impossible situation to overcome, especially as they continue to "see" liberal indoctrination where it doesn't exist. A conversation I had with my older brother last summer showed this negative sentiment is alive and well.

My brother is a pulmonary physician, very well read, ferociously intelligent, and he enjoys debating anything. He normally articulates well-reasoned

arguments, but every now and then he makes, in my judgment, ludicrous sweeping generalizations, which he seems to have done with this issue. I think the fact that his younger brother is a college professor softens his views on alleged liberal bias somewhat, but he does seem to think the charge is true.

As the subject came up for discussion, I asked him if he really believes liberal bias is a persistent problem. He said he certainly didn't disbelieve it. He contended that reasonable suspicion exists since one political philosophy is "clearly" more pervasive than the other among higher education professionals, and that impressionable students could easily be swayed. Therefore, he said, indoctrination could be a very real problem. When I asked him if he thought it's a problem with conservative professors, he said, without elaboration, "No, not really." I admit, I get rather annoyed when anyone presumes that liberals – but not conservatives – would do their jobs unethically based solely on their personal politics.

A recent University of Georgia study indicated that liberal and conservative students perceived their professors to be far more tolerant of varying political views than the students themselves were.

Sometimes my brother likes to argue a position he does not support to learn of what others have to say, so I wasn't completely sure of how seriously to take him in this discussion. The conversation was on the contentious side, but it was very cordial, predictable, and even humorous at times. I joked that we should be suspicious of college boards of trustees' decisions since most members are Republicans. I also explained that quite a few of those "impressionable" students enter college with resolute opinions and beliefs on numerous issues, with many of them, unfortunately, based in fallacy. And the majority of them don't seem to be the least bit interested in hearing contradicting views that contain more viable evidence.

I told him there's nothing wrong with expecting a fundamentalist Christian to accurately explain Darwinian theory of evolution in a biology class, nor is there a problem with evaluating an atheist on his biblical knowledge in a Bible course.

If a student disagrees with her teacher's information, I think, at the very least, she should fully understand what she disagrees with and why. I'd hardly call it political indoctrination just because one is enlightened as a result of taking a college class. And, of course, the converse could happen in that additional knowledge of another side could actually strengthen an original point of view.

Continued – page 3

As a scientist, my brother is aware that professors sometimes deal with student views that fly in the face of overwhelmingly contradicting evidence. He knows that religion doesn't belong in science classes, not even if creationism is cloaked within the code term, "intelligent design." But he dismisses opinionated students from the issue. He says the problem deals far more with students who come in ready to believe anything a professor says (as though we would simply lie to them).

On this, he's wrong.

The issue of students with factually-challenged views and their accusations of liberal bias *is* the problem. The one thing my brother needs to understand is that we have students who believe that evolution, climate change, a 4.5- to 6-billion-year-old Earth, separation of church and state, and President Obama's U.S. citizenship are nothing but liberal propaganda. And they often demand that their fraudulent challenges be considered legitimate perspectives in the classroom. Of course, it would be highly irresponsible to juxtapose fiction with reality only for the sake of "balance." Forcing academically invalidated views into college classes is exactly what biased politicians like Missouri's Jane Cunningham were imagining as she pushed legislation to control what experts would teach. College professors are not the ones who have politicized their course material. Factual information is Cunningham's "liberal bias."

As the axiom goes, we can choose our opinions, but we can't choose our facts. Professors want students learning to draw sound conclusions by observing all available evidence instead of cherry-picking bits and pieces of information to "support" views that ignore the vast majority of refuting data. A college education doesn't end at graduation. Our goal is for graduates to be lifelong learners, to be better decision-makers.

The discussion with my brother came to an abrupt end when something else came up. But there was so much more I wanted to tell him to quell his irrational suspicions. Hopefully, we'll one day broach the subject again.

He needs to know of a recent University of Georgia study indicating that liberal and conservative students perceived their professors to be far more tolerant of varying political views than the students themselves were. I want to show him the results of annual National Survey of Student Engagement statistics that reveal high student satisfaction with their professors but showed no indication of a liberal bias problem. And I'd like to remind him of what he already knows. After spending four or more years with these "evil

liberals," college graduates are better prepared to deal with their professional and personal futures with better jobs, higher income, better retirement plans, fewer divorces, and the commission of fewer crimes.

I wish I knew how to change these errant perceptions en masse. It may be a losing battle, but somehow, we must develop and maintain positive connections with the public. We must always remember each one of us is a public relations agent for the profession. While we should be humble, we must never fail to communicate that professors help improve society as we train each student to make a positive impact in the world. It's a good sign that most adults still want their children to attend college in spite of disdain they may have for us.

Awaiting Progress at MSSU

By Stephen Schiavo, MSSU AAUP Chapter President

Last year the faculty of Missouri Southern State University in Joplin voted substantially *No Confidence* in President Bruce Speck. A written statement of the concerns leading to the vote cited failure of leadership, failure of management, failure of judgment, and failure of shared governance.

The vote certainly made little difference at the time. The Board, who was and is extremely protective of Dr. Speck, did nothing, other than *suggest* that he attempt to find some grounds for reconciliation with faculty. His response was to hold "Listening Meetings" periodically in which a diminishing number of faculty voiced their concerns, expressed dismay, and suggested compromises; but there was little or no direct evidence that the administration *was* listening. Since then, the faculty continue to react with concern

- to public statements that tenure is bad for the university,
- to budget and staffing moves to weaken the *International Mission*,
- to the elimination of funds for faculty development and travel, and canceled sabbaticals,
- to frozen tenure-track positions (in times of rising enrollment),
- and to repeated proposals that vastly more of our courses be taught online, mainly by adjuncts.

The local AAUP chapter is largely supported by the faculty's discontent with administration initiatives, but the members remain eager to find grounds for compromise, cooperation, and reconciliation.

It is easy to join AAUP! Just go to www.aaup.org

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Chapter Service Program: The Missouri Conference stands ready to aid AAUP chapters and members in any way that it can. If you do not have a local chapter, feel free to contact any conference officer directly, especially Vice-President David Robinson drobinso@truman.edu (tel. 660-785-4321).