

How Wisconsin Can Avoid Future Kevin Barrett Controversies

National Organization Advises Regents, Administrators
MADISON, WI, (July 18, 2006)--For over two weeks, the University of Wisconsin has been under fire thanks to UW-Madison instructor Kevin Barrett, who claims 9/11 was an "inside job" orchestrated by the Bush administration. In response, the American Council of Trustees and Alumni has written to UW's leaders to advise them on how to avoid similar embarrassment in the future while still respecting academic freedom.

"UW was right to investigate whether Barrett's extreme views polluted his classroom," ACTA president Anne D. Neal said. "Indeed, one can sincerely wonder how he was hired in the first place. ACTA is happy to recommend proactive changes so that UW never finds itself in such a situation again."

In a July 17 letter to UW's Board of Regents and several administrators, ACTA pointed out that by instituting some simple reforms, UW can prevent problems like the Barrett controversy. As ACTA notes in the letter, "While it is chilling to use political criteria to single out individual instructors for review, reviewing course offerings and content as part of a broader, established mechanism of quality assurance is an excellent practice." UW authorities "owe it to taxpayers, families, and students to guarantee that UW not only receives the public's tax dollars, but also deserves its trust," the letter continues.

The recommendations in ACTA's letter are drawn from its 2005 report *Intellectual Diversity: Time for Action*, which experts lauded for its sensitivity to academic freedom. They are also in line with recent actions by the interim chancellor of the University of Colorado at Boulder, who has called upon CU's deans to review their practices to make sure individuals with questionable scholarly practices are not hired or promoted. ACTA's recommendations include:

- _. Performing an institutional self-study of the classroom environment;
- _. Instituting post-tenure review of faculty;
- _. Assessing hiring and promotion practices to ensure that quality of research and teaching--not ideological litmus tests--are the criteria for job security;
- _. Incorporating intellectual diversity concerns in guidelines on teaching; and
- _. Including intellectual diversity issues on course evaluations.

As the letter points out, the recent occurrences at UW are not an aberration. In another report, *How Many Ward Churchills?*, ACTA has documented an abundance of politicized teaching on our nation's campuses. Examples include a Vassar College course on how "our culture covertly and overtly condones the abuse of women by their intimate partners," a Penn State professor who promises to promote "un-learning" on the part of his students, and a Davidson College

course that requires students to put on a 15- to 20-minute skit on a topic such as "five ways to demonize an ethnic minority" or "more ways than one to be white."

"Surely UW wishes to avoid the type of headlines it has gotten recently," Neal noted. "By adopting ACTA's recommendations, the regents can do just that-- while also protecting academic freedom and, most importantly, enhancing the education their students receive. I trust they will not delay."

The American Council of Trustees and Alumni is a national education nonprofit dedicated to academic freedom, academic quality, and accountability. ACTA boasts a nationwide network of alumni and trustees and has issued numerous reports on higher education including *How Many Ward Churchills?*, *Intellectual Diversity: Time for Action*, *The Hollow Core*, and *Losing America's Memory: Historical Illiteracy in the 21st Century*. For further information, contact ACTA at 202-467-6787