

# How to Deal With Those **BLEEP**ing Ideas: Free Speech in the Classroom



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# Courage and Expression

Phil Venditti, Clover Park Technical College

## AN INCIDENT

Twenty-eight years ago, at a large university in the Northwest, a male colleague of mine told a joke while he and some other employees and I waited for a staff meeting to start. In the joke, a man who thought he was going to avoid execution was outsmarted and found that he was going to be raped instead. People laughed, work-related topics came up, and our meeting commenced. Afterward, as four or five of us lingered in the room, one of the female staffers spoke. "It's really hard for me to say this," the woman said, "but I'd appreciate it if you wouldn't tell jokes about rape."

## KINDS OF COURAGE

I believe that one of our responsibilities as educators in two-year colleges is to show two kinds of courage with respect to freedom of expression. The first is the courage to speak freely ourselves. The second is the courage to encourage others to speak.

## THE COURAGE TO SPEAK

Let's start with a truism. Part of life is having to deal with unpleasantness and things we don't like. As Paddy Chayevsky wrote, "Life is problems."

There are irritants from beyond our campuses, of course. No matter what our political persuasion, all of us can identify actions and viewpoints at the local, national, and international level which we consider to be repugnant.

Closer to home, we may face institutional and personal factors that raise our ire. We may deplore how some of the individuals or departments on our campuses work or fail to work. We may

encounter people whom we dislike, some of whose perspectives differ from our own and some of whose behavior may even strike us as being at odds with the mission of a two-year college.

Many of the forces which we find disagreeable, whether from society at large or our immediate institutional neighborhood, probably warrant no overt response. Calvin Coolidge wisely commented, “I have noticed that nothing I never said ever did me any harm.”

After all, we live in an age when we can all too quickly compose and deliver a message in electronic form that we later regret. Thus, it’s a better idea than ever before to think before expressing strong negative or positive reactions to our surroundings. As someone I met long ago advised, “Nothing is ever as good or as bad as you first think it is.” And we should remember that our choice of what to express, and whether we express anything at all, will affect others around us, including our students.

My own view, however, is that faculty members, myself included, usually display more timidity than we should. When we’re faced

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with something we regard as disagreeable, whether it’s national or next door or at the next desk, we often simply grin and bear it. Or we scowl and bear it. Or we immerse ourselves in our work, ignore it, and hope it goes away. Too rarely, I believe, do we speak out. Too rarely do we even submit probing questions which can help us more fully understand a problematic action’s nature and rationale.

It is hard to speak publicly about broad social issues, or about elements of our own colleges which we find to be objectionable.

If our colleges aren’t open to candid exchanges of opinions in a search for truth, however—if they aren’t places where differences of opinion need not be construed as differences in principle—what then are they? As the populist Texas leader Jim Hightower pointed out, “It’s the agitator in your washing machine that gets things clean.”

I believe that all two-year college instructors should be courageous enough to continually seek ways to improve the world as a whole and their institutions in particular. They should agitate, not because they think everything around them is bad, but rather because good conditions are generally the enemy of better ones.

## THE COURAGE TO ENCOURAGE OTHERS TO SPEAK

Of course, we faculty members are busy people. We know that taking on tasks outside our direct daily requirements means sacrificing time we could use to concentrate on our central mission of helping students achieve their potential. Even pleasant undertakings such as writing articles for the FACTC Focus call for us to devote intense mental energy on concepts, relationships, and realities we might sometimes wish to avoid.

Faculty members, without any exceptions I know of, believe that their colleges should welcome a diversity of opinions. But what does their endorsement mean in practical terms? As I wrote earlier, it takes courage enough for us as individuals to take part in a diverse exchange of opinions. Partly because our jobs are so time-consuming, we usually find it easier to react to other people's views than to formally communicate our own.

It's been my experience that getting students to question authority responsibly—whether it's national authority or the authority of an educational institution of which they are a part—constitutes an even larger challenge than generating thoughtful statements of our own opinions. Furthermore, it's harder to solicit diverse student views than to tolerate or welcome such views when they happen to arise on their own.

Before they arrive in a two-year college, many students have found it best to accept things as they are, both globally and personally. Political trends which frame faraway national realities may bother them, and so may various educational policies and expectations which impinge more obviously on their lives. They remain silent, however, and apply themselves to seeking grades, credentials, and the vocational security they hope the grades and credentials will eventually lead to.

Faculty members who urge students to break their silence should prepare themselves for uncertain results. Some students may not respond at all when we ask them to speak out about topics we hope they feel to be important. Others, if they do express themselves at our behest, may write or say something that other students or we ourselves despise. What if they condemn our attempts at promoting free expression? What if they express disdain for some of our treasured teaching methods? Are we ready to confront such unintended consequences of our broad-mindedness?

## IMPLICATIONS

I'm a Facebook "friend" of several dozen current and past students, all of whom requested that we enter that relationship. Whatever its broader pros and cons, electronic social networking

clearly offers the potential for more extensive written interaction between teachers and students than was possible before it came on the scene.

One male student invited me recently to be his Facebook “friend.” I accepted. A week later, he posted an original poem which I felt demeaned women. When the poem appeared on my computer screen, I found myself reflecting on the incident at the university in 1983 with which I began this piece. My colleague’s words then, though long past, rang in my mind: “It’s hard for me to say this, but...”

I wrote to the student and explained that I was “de-friending” him because of the nature of his poem. I also offered to discuss the matter with him face-to-face. We did later talk about the matter, at which point he said he understood my decision.

Countless figures throughout history have claimed that the social, educational, and political systems under which they lived were dysfunctional and needed to change. Countless more have railed against the specific working conditions and organizations within whose parameters they’ve lived.

These courageous people showed by their words and deeds that opposition to faulty systems and inappropriate treatment constitutes responsible behavior, even if it’s ignored, ridiculed, or branded illegal. I aspire to show the courage to express myself as they did. More than that, I want to take every opportunity to encourage my students to do so.

# Don't Stifle: Teach

By Sarah Zale, Shoreline Community College

Should we limit freedom of expression on our campuses? Absolutely not. The question frightens me more than the reason it is being asked.

Last year this question was passionately discussed in the faculty listserv at Shoreline Community College when the Lyndon La Rouche Political Action Movement manned a booth with a poster of President Barack Obama donning a Hitler moustache and a sign with the words, “The Hitler program has been revived by the Obama Administration.” Anger and calls for action flew across cyberspace in minutes, then for hours. Some faculty wanted the group kicked off campus. I disagreed.

Members of the La Rouche Movement spout disturbing rhetoric. When I asked one supporter on the campus of Edmonds Community College if he would consider engaging in a dialogue with a student about the issues he deems important, he said, “Why would I do that? I’m right—why discuss issues with people who

are wrong?” As a humanities / English instructor, committed to teaching critical thinking around social justice issues and the value of dialogue and compassionate listening, I felt sad and frustrated. When I attempted to engage further in a dialogue, he told me to “get out of here!” I found his behavior

dehumanizing and oppressive. I felt angry because I did not know how to get my needs met.

A college campus must serve as a venue and practice field for dialogue. When individuals



attempt to close down the opportunity for listening to other points of view, I see my task as faculty to open it again. A lack of dialogue is not an effective means to ending conflict. It simply precludes any opportunity for two conflicting sides to understand the other.

My English 101 composition course is thematically titled “Social Injustice: The Problem; Compassionate Listening: The Solution.” My connection with the Compassionate Listening Project (TCLP) began in 2006 on a peace delegation to Israel and Palestine, where we listened to the stories on both sides of the conflict. Listening and dialogue with the other is the foundation of peacebuilding. “By knowing the other,” a colleague of mine says, “we advance peace.”

The course begins with the concept of *free listening*, a practice of listening deeply to others and offering *no advice, no judgment, no interruption*. Students learn to be truly present with another, to truly *listen* for perhaps the first time in their lives. Next, they participate in a day-long training session with facilitators from TCLP as an introduction to five core practices:

*suspending judgment*

*maintaining balance in the heat of conflict*

*listening with the heart: non-defensive receptivity to another's point of view*

*speaking from the heart: using inquiry, reflection, and the wisdom of the heart to truly connect with the speaker*

*holding compassion for oneself and others—including forgiveness*

While the students enjoy the practice of both free and compassionate listening, the argument that compassionate listening has little credibility for addressing serious conflicts imbues the class discussions throughout the quarter. It is participation in a local Theatre of the Oppressed that changes their minds. This interactive theatre of community members as actors, created by Brazilian Augusto Boal in the mid-20<sup>th</sup> century, is based on the theories of the progressive educator Paulo Freire. Its goal is to promote social justice and critical thinking by challenging oppressive systems. Like compassionate listening, it inserts individuals into the heat of experience to discover who they are and what they think, and to practice options for addressing conflict.

Last quarter, Marc Weinblatt, based in Port Townsend and an internationally recognized leader in the use of *Theatre of the Oppressed*, came to the Edmonds campus at the invitation of Erik Ray’s history class. One of Erik’s students, Jennifer, played the role of a La Rouché supporter, calling out the three-phrase mantra of “Obama is ruining the country; Obama is the anti-Christ; Obama is a Hitler!”

For two plus hours, students interacted with Jennifer. She never ceased her vitriolic language and demeaning behavior; she would repeat her mantra with increasing force and loudness, regardless of the myriad of approaches made to reach her. Finally, I heard my students whispering: “You know what someone should try? *Listening*.” “Hmm,” I said, “sounds like a good idea.” Marc

Weinblatt asked the audience, “Is there anyone who has an approach that has not yet been tried?”

Everyone looked around. Then a petite, soft-spoken Kafui emerged from the back rows of the auditorium. She approached Jennifer slowly, looked up at her and said, “Go ahead, I’m listening.” Jennifer shouted her message again. “Anything else you’d like to say?” Kafui asked. Jennifer repeated her triad of messages.

Kafui intuitively invited Jennifer to join her on a bench away from the table of pamphlets, away from where Jennifer had confidently, for hours, wielded her power. The two sat in close proximity on a short bench. “Please tell me more,” Kafui said softly. Jennifer complied, ad-libbing a bit from her repeated speech, although still loud and defiant. Then she began to stumble over her words, and her voice softened in volume and temerity.

Jennifer tried to stay true to her original role, but her face and body language suggested a yielding. Marshall Rosenberg, founder of Nonviolent Communication (NVC) says, “We know a speaker has received adequate empathy when we sense of release of tension, and the flow of words comes to a halt.”

During the debriefing process, Jennifer confessed that leaving the table threw her off balance. With Kafui’s sustained stance of listener, Jennifer could not get the old feelings back: “I didn’t know what to say.” Rachel Naomi Remen says: “Listening creates a holy silence. When you listen generously to people, they can hear truth in themselves, often for the first time.”

The look on Jennifer’s face at the end of her encounter with Kafui, said Marc, was, for him, the most meaningful moment of the night. Smiling, and full of good-natured incredulity, he asked Kafui, “What were you doing out there?” She told Marc she was practicing free listening and being truly present in the dialogue.

Should we limit freedom of expression on our campuses? If the reason is to avoid conflict, my answer is no. *Whose* expression should be censored? A message I don’t have the skills to handle in a peaceful manner but you might? A message that triggers you or triggers me?

Rather than limit our freedoms of expression, I’d like to see more dialogue on our campuses about how to deal with the conflict that arises when we are triggered. Conflict, after all, is not inherently bad. Unresolved conflict is what frightens us.

# Academic Freedom: An Elegant Idea

Bill Autry, Big Bend Community College

Academic freedom is as fundamental to humanity as is the first amendment. Academic freedom insures that no institution or judicial branch may encroach upon access to knowledge, whether such knowledge is socially or institutionally acceptable or not. 'Freedom of Speech' and 'Academic Freedom' can't be separated, nor should we allow them to be.

Constitutional law is based on rights and governmental balance. The rights of the majority cannot outweigh the rights of the minority or the individual. As in all logical equations, balance and the direction of operation are inconsequential, thusly; the rights of the minority or the one do not supersede the rights of the majority either. It seems in today's world we seem to overlook the latter.

Academic freedom and tenure insure free thinking educational environments without bounds. Devoid of said freedoms we could easily revert to McCarthyism. Academic freedom came to the forefront during the McCarthy era. Several cases were brought before the courts up to and including the Supreme Court.

One such case was *Keyishian v. Board of Regents*, 385 U.S. 589 (1967). Part of the New York education law was tested. The general text of this law follows...

A person employed as superintendent of schools, teacher or employee in the public schools, in any city or school district of the state, shall be removed from such position for the utterance of any treasonable or seditious word or words or the doing of any treasonable or seditious act or acts while holding such position.

The State University of New York required its employees to certify that they were not communist, a group suspected at that time to advocate the overthrow of the government.

Justice Brennan handed down the ruling of the court. He cited many cases brought before the courts. The following are some of those excerpts...

Our Nation is deeply committed to safeguarding academic freedom, which is of transcendent value to all of us and not merely to the teachers concerned. That freedom

is therefore a special concern of the First Amendment, which does not tolerate laws that cast a pall of orthodoxy over the classroom. "The vigilant protection of constitutional freedoms is nowhere more vital than in the community of American schools." Shelton v. Tucker, supra, at 487. The classroom is peculiarly the "marketplace of ideas." The Nation's future depends upon leaders trained through wide exposure to that robust exchange of ideas which discovers truth "out of a multitude of tongues, [rather] than through any kind of authoritative selection." United States v. Associated Press, 52 F. Supp. 362, 372. In Sweezy v. New Hampshire, 354 U.S. 234, 250, we said: "The essentiality of freedom in the community of American universities is almost self-evident. No one should underestimate the vital role in a democracy that is played by those who guide and train our youth. To impose any strait jacket upon the intellectual leaders in our colleges and universities would imperil the future of our Nation. No field of education is so thoroughly comprehended by man that new discoveries cannot yet be made. Particularly is that true in the social sciences, where few, if any, principles are accepted as absolutes. Scholarship cannot flourish in an atmosphere of suspicion and distrust. Teachers and students must always remain free to inquire, to study and to evaluate, to gain new maturity and understanding; otherwise our civilization will stagnate and die."

Changes, if desired, may be obtained by peaceful means. Therein lies the security of the Republic, the very foundation of constitutional government." [385 U.S. 589, 603]

As one might perceive from these grand words written by wise men, academic freedom is not just a concept, but a self evident fundamental right, one that we, as teachers and students should not accept with indifference. Freedom of speech/Academic freedom does not imply that teachers or students may spout their mouths or pens off with impunity. Freedom carries a burden of responsibility that does not exempt one from the laws of the land. Slander and libelous statements are not protected, the search for wisdom and intellectualism are.

As the overwhelming spirit of academic freedom is the search for truth, thusly we as educators owe it to the honor of our profession to seek truth, only the truth, to be wise and disciplined enough to know the difference... Simple, yet elegant!

# Teaching Tolerance

By Margot Boyer, North Seattle Community College

The impulse to limit freedom of expression often comes from good intentions: the desire to protect community members from the painful impact of oppression. Yet controlling speech can prevent the growth of skills we need to address the problems of oppression and privilege.

In the coordinated studies program at North Seattle called “Beginnings,” we talk directly about these issues, contextualized by written texts, films and students’ experiences. Regularly, students who reveal bigoted attitudes will later express relief at having shifted their perspective. Students who maintain that they never experience oppression will come to freely discuss their experiences of and responses to oppression. These changes happen all the time – in a setting where students can both talk openly and develop their skills.

To make sense of the experiences each of us has of social advantage and disadvantage, we need a framework. In the “Beginnings” program, we use the Nieto model described in *Beyond Inclusion, Beyond Empowerment: A Developmental Model to Liberate Everyone* (of which I’m a co-author). We begin by differentiating three layers of social interaction: Status, Rank, and Power. In the Rank layer, nine different channels of social membership give each of us a complex pattern of benefits associated with Agent membership, and marginalization associated with Target membership. Most of us experience both.

In the book, we identify specific anti-oppression skills that individuals can use in each Agent or Target membership, and consider what conditions allow a person to access more flexible skills. While access to skills is somewhat situational – under stress, we tend to use more limited skills – each of us can increase our use of more flexible skills. The interdisciplinary learning community serves as a container that enhances growth, and fosters access to wider skills through instruction, readings, small and large group work with diverse colleagues, text-based writing, film analysis, musical interludes, personal reflection, shared meals, and the joys of friendship.

Using, and discovering the limitations of, earlier skill sets like Indifference and Survival is

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necessary for developing later, more complex skills. As an agent member, I can't jump from using Indifference skills – with which I might deny the existence of target group members – to Allyship, when I actively engage in social justice work. I have to discover, explore, and find the limitations of all the skills in between. Likewise, as a target member, I cannot shift instantly from using Survival skills to get through the day – even denying the existence of oppression aimed at me – to the nuanced array of anti-oppression strategies that come with Recentering.

The difficulty we face as teachers is that the earlier, less complex skill sets include attitudes that can seem profoundly wrong. For example, a student who belongs to an agent social group, using distancing skills, might verbalize bigoted and prejudiced attitudes toward the target group, often unconsciously. This can be upsetting and offensive to other class members and to us. We might want to ban such language or behavior.

Yet banning “bigoted” language can easily prevent students from working through a particular skill set to the next one. When we drive bigoted attitudes and ignorant beliefs underground, they can harden into personality traits. When we ban the exploration of a particular skill, we stop learning cold.

How can we foster the growth of all our students, including those who use the simplest skill sets, while creating an anti-oppressive atmosphere where everyone can express themselves? If not by hammering every ignorant remark with the full force of our disapproval, then what?

The first step is self-awareness. We all use more basic skills some of the time, in both our agent and target memberships. The attitudes embodied in those skills, which might be offensive or ignorant, reflect deep social conditioning. We're all subject to that conditioning, and we can use class discussion to uncover it. As teachers, we can provide informational resources – books or films or speakers – to give deeper context about a marginalized social group. We can notice the skills we use, especially in the more challenging moments of our lives, and realize that we too often struggle to access more adequate skills.

At the same time, it's critical to support students who belong to target groups and feel the hurtful impact of such attitudes. They might want to express their own views, share feelings, or spend time in more supportive environments, including settings with other members of the target group who can fully share their experience. Depending on our own social memberships, we might also participate in those settings.

Questioning deep social conditioning is tough, and working with the skills we have is the only way to move towards more adequate ones. We can't ban ignorance. Our job is to support and encourage the growth of our students through painful and challenging moments. Accepting our students where they are is key to helping them move forward.

*For more information:* <http://beyondinclusionbeyondempowerment.com/>

# Do Not Block These Ideas

Dennis Knepp, Big Bend Community College

I am in favor of academic freedom. I applaud the free discussion of ideas in the classroom. I agree with the American Pragmatist Philosopher Charles Sanders Peirce who wrote: “The first rule of logic is DO NOT BLOCK THE WAY OF INQUIRY.”

There are many reasons why I agree with Peirce, but today I want to consider the alternative. If we were to limit academic freedom, then who would determine the limit? To set aside topics as not-discussable-in-the-classroom requires someone determining that these ideas are taboo. Who would do the deciding? Let’s consider some candidates.

Perhaps it should be a majority decision. This means voting. We vote for representatives so that we don’t have to vote on every single issue. So, our majority elected representatives should decide what is taboo in the classroom. I live in Grant County, which is very conservative voting district east of the Cascades. Think of us as the anti-Seattle. Republicans typically win representative seats in Grant County. In our last election there were several races in which Republicans ran unopposed because there were no available Democrats to put on the ballot. And yet I also live in Washington State. We have a Democratic Governor and both of our U.S. Senators are Democrats. I doubt that our local Republican representatives and our state-wide Democratic representatives will be able to find a stable agreement on taboo ideas in the classroom. As with most things political, first one side would win a little more power and pull the debate their way, and then the other side would win a little more power and pull the debate back the other way. The result would be a revision of taboo topics at least every two years and it would be a mess. We need something more stable than

the political process.

I am from Kansas where the State Government once decreed that alternatives to the theory of evolution should be taught in the classrooms. As a response, Bobby Henderson proposed that the Universe was created by The Flying Spaghetti Monster. I shudder at the thought of a group of politicians deciding what will be taught in biology courses. A poster in our Math Lab gives a history of mathematics – both great discoveries and great stupidities. One of the great stupidities occurred in 1896. The Indiana House of Representatives voted that  $\pi = 3.2$ . We cannot leave the pursuit of truth in the hands of politicians.

Perhaps God should decide what is taboo. God is more stable than the government and presumably God knows the truth. For our convenience, God left many of His own representatives here on Earth. These God representatives are eager to explain to the rest of us what God thinks is taboo. We could just ask Pope Benedict XVI. The Pope has a lot of opinions on what is taboo. Imagine Biology courses that would have to include discussions about when the soul enters a fertilized egg and how the soul animates the body. Physics courses would have to be more sympathetic to Aristotelian physics so that the faithful could better understand how St. Aquinas used Aristotle's physics to create Catholic dogma. Math courses could be devoted to understanding how three could be one. History courses would be rewritten, Psychology could be replaced with Confession, and Philosophy courses could be simplified with reading just the complete works of C.S. Lewis. Literature courses, too – just C.S. Lewis.

Most of you probably don't think that the Pope is the best choice for this task. You probably think that something Christian is OK, but preferably a form of Christianity that is more modern -- something since Luther. You might think that it should be a Protestant Church or even a group of Protestant Churches -- somebody who will give their list of taboos in English rather than in Latin. So, which churches should be included? Baptists? Which ones? There are several dozen different kinds of Baptists and they all have disagreements with each other over significant issues. There is the Southern Baptist Convention, the Independent Baptists in the Evangelical Tradition, the Baptist Missionary Association, the Free Will Baptists, the General Association of Regular Baptists, and so on. This is not an exhaustive list – it is only a start. I could easily multiply this list of Baptist Churches. Of course, there are other Protestant Denominations, and each one has further sub-categories as well. There are dozens of versions of Methodists and dozens of different Pentecostals. There are Lutherans and Presbyterians and Episcopalians and Congregationalists and Adventists and Pietists and Jehovah Witnesses. There is a rainbow of non-denominational churches who refuse to be labeled. The best part is that each church insists that their version is different from the others and the correct version. Who will determine what is taboo in the classroom?

With all of this variation, we could not possibly get an agreement upon taboo subjects in the

classroom. What we need is a single American prophet who will straighten this out. We need someone with power and authority.

Perhaps we need Thomas Spencer Monsoon who is the President of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints and the current prophet, seer, and revelator of God's will on Earth. President Monsoon would have specific ideas about how U.S. History courses should include Jesus' post-crucifix visit to America and the following battle between the Nephites and the Lamanites. This would have consequences on Anthropology courses so that our understanding of Native Americans would be brought into alignment with *The Book of Mormon*. English courses could encourage King Jamesian English with lots of uses of the phrase "and it came to pass."

A Mormon curriculum is a real possibility where I teach, but perhaps not where you are. You probably would not accept President Monsoon's decrees. We need to find an authority figure who could convince the academics themselves. And maybe that's the key. Maybe the academics themselves should come up with criteria for taboo ideas. Each Academic discipline has a national association dedicated to it. In philosophy we have the American Philosophical Association (and we fight with the psychologists for the acronym APA). We could encourage each professional association to determine what ideas are taboo in the classroom.

I don't know what your associations are like, but it is impossible to get a group of philosophers to agree on important ideas. I remember going to a conference called "The Big Ideas" at Tacoma Community College in 2005. The idea was to come to some consensus about the content of PHIL 101 "Introduction to Philosophy." If PHIL101 is the only philosophy course that the students take, what are the big ideas that we want them to learn? We came up with a list of ideas that would be way too much for an introductory course. We really could not come to a solid agreement – everything was pretty vague. This is because we were philosophers. We are encouraged to disagree. We receive praise from other philosophers when we publicly ridicule someone's ideas. We are trained to disagree and we make sport out of disagreeing with our students every day. So, I don't think we can hope for the American Philosophical Association to agree upon a list of taboo ideas in the classroom.

I think that we need academic freedom for many reasons including the fact that we would be unable to determine what ideas are to be considered taboo. But I also believe that the classroom instructor should be self-censoring. I believe that the instructor should determine what ideas should not be discussed in the classroom. Once again, I don't have lofty reasons for this. Instead, I have very mundane and irrational reasons for it.

Basically I think that you shouldn't be stupid. By this I mean that you should try to avoid saying or writing really offensive things that really make no sense and are not easily justifiable. Don't be stupid. If you are, then you will bring about the wrath of one of the systems we rejected:

the political system, the religious system, or the national association system. Political anger will not listen to even the most well reasoned defense of academic freedom. You will be busily justifying your moral high ground as they kick you out the door. The Politicians will simply cut the funding for your college and you will have all the academic freedom that unemployment provides.

Consider the case of Ward Churchill. Churchill was a professor of ethnic studies at the University of Colorado at Boulder from 1990 to his dismissal in 2007. His case is a complicated one. There were many accusations and counter-accusations in the legal swirl around Churchill's dismissal. I am not qualified to get into these legal issues and so I won't. However, it is clear that what put Churchill into the political spotlight was his 2001 essay "On the Roosting of Chickens" in which he basically said that the victims of the 9/11 terrorists attacks deserved it. Churchill saw New York and Washington D.C. as the center of an evil capitalist empire. He compared it to the Nazi desire for global domination, which means that the people working at the World Trade Centers and the Pentagon are like Nazis, too. In the most notorious line, Churchill calls them "little Eichmanns." Eichmann was the Nazi officer who pleaded innocence because he was just in charge of keeping the Nazi trains running – it wasn't his fault that the trains were full of Jews headed to the gas chambers. Churchill claims that the 9/11 victims seem innocent because they were just working in offices – but their jobs help keep the evil global capitalist empire running.

It's a terrible analogy for lots of reasons. Here's one. Churchill praises the 9/11 hijackers because they are victims of global capitalism who are fighting back against the evil empire. It would be like Jewish victims of Nazi oppression rising up and becoming Jewish terrorists killing Nazis in World War II. And that's a problem. If in order for your metaphor to work you must make Islamic terrorists out to be Jewish victims of Nazi oppression, then there's something terribly wrong with your metaphor. I don't agree, Professor Churchill. And, apparently, neither did the representatives of the State of Colorado. Churchill wrote something really stupid that is not defendable and brought about the wrath of the political system. Professor Churchill can present lots of the well-reasoned arguments in favor of Academic Freedom, but they will have no effect. They found many skeletons in his closet, but Churchill brought his problems to everyone's attention.

We must have academic freedom for the first rule of logic is "Do not block the way of inquiry." We must be able to discuss anything in the classroom. But don't be stupid with it. Academic freedom is a rare and precious thing. It can easily be destroyed. Don't give them easy reasons for doing so.

<http://religions.pewforum.org/affiliations>

<http://lds.org>

[http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Ward\\_Churchill](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Ward_Churchill)

# A Little Respect, Please.

Patrick Murphy, Everett Community College

Teaching in technical trades presents many challenges both in terms of providing the correct and current material for the students and at the same time dealing with students who have not been exposed to what we call harassment. This can be a challenge because many of the students do not realize that what they feel is “freedom of expression” is really creating a hostile environment, making it uncomfortable for others to learn.

If you look at the tool boxes of mechanics in just about any trade you will see pictures of women with little or no clothing. While there is an ongoing debate as to what pornography is and what is art, I will not attempt to make that distinction here, noting that women with little or no clothing can be offensive to some. Before the influx of women students in the trades, little was said about such pictures. It was just “part of the trade.” But with the increase in women in the classroom and shop, instructors have been forced to consider the issue. Some women are not offended by the pictures of nudes in or on toolboxes. But others, including men, find this degrading and offensive. They feel it is degrading to women and to those who indulge in viewing the pictures.

This then creates a hostile teaching and learning environment. The students offended by the display of nude or almost nude pictures of women have to deal with, first, the feelings generated by the pictures and then learning new skills, which are challenging at best, thus the sense of being harassed and threatened. So the challenge is to get all sides to see that freedom of expression, the “right to display any pictures I want,” in the teaching environment hinders others’ learning and then becomes harassment to the person not wishing to see such pictures.

When confronted with the request to remove these types of pictures from tool boxes, the instructor is often met with comments like, “they don’t have to look”, or, “this is my space and I can do with my space as I want.” The freedom of expression is often expressed as the reason they

**They have not been taught that while they may have freedom of expression, that freedom ends where the space of other students begins.**

should be allowed to continue to display the pictures. “This is a free country and I should be allowed to do whatever I want as long as it does not hurt anyone.” But what the students posting the pictures do not realize is their actions are very hurtful. They have not been taught that while they may have freedom of expression, that freedom ends where the space of other students begins. They do not see their actions as being hurtful. And because of this they do not see that they should have to remove the offending pictures.

What has to be shown is that they are all part of a learning and working community. We all live in and work in this community. And for learning to take place, we must all feel comfortable in this space. Many of the students posting these types of pictures have seen this in industry. They see it as the norm, and removing these types of pictures offends them. They see their rights being violated. The point has to be made that what they do affects those around them. They are not alone in the work school lab environment. Sometimes they claim the actions of the instructor asking them to remove the pictures is harassment. So now we have students who feel that this is not a good learning environment and others who feel that their freedoms are being compromised by having to remove the pictures.

What has to be developed is a feeling of acceptance and understanding of others. Sometimes this can be started by sharing with others where their family name came from. Where did their parents come from? Students are encouraged to be proud of their background. By engaging in this type of conversation, students and instructors are likely to develop a feeling of community and family. While I do not want to take the idea of family too far, there is this dynamic in each class. Individuals participating in class are part of something bigger, a family, more than just one student and instructor. This will help the students see that by working together and learning together they will go farther than just on their own. They will also find that much of the industry work world no longer allows nude pictures to be displayed in or on tool boxes. In this way we are better preparing our students for work outside the classroom and the shop/lab.

# The Corporate Think Machine Invades The American Classroom

By Paul K. Haeder, Spokane Falls Community College

The events unfolding just in the past few months tell us why we need more free speech, critical analyses, more students and more teachers rubbing at the veneer of a corporate controlled society:

We just hit the one-year anniversary of British Petroleum-Transocean-Halliburton-US government oil disaster and the misinformation and inaction abound.

Fukushima is unfurling a gigantic radioactive disaster for not only Japan but the rest of the world while Barak Obama and the nuclear industry say all systems full sail for more toxic plants to be built.

Citizens United versus the Federal Elections Commission was a Supreme Court decision that has given a green light for corporations to buy off elections.

Wiki-Leaks supposed information hacker Bradley Manning is being tortured and all his rights are stripped in a New Orwellian gambit of prison is freedom.

Asking the great questions of our time, and facing down injustice at our own peril, those are the values of a free thinking human. How we invoke this critical thinking and deep regard for learning and social and environmental justice is by reinventing the classroom as a safe and unfettered place of inquiry and debate.

More academic freedom and more open regard for new paradigm thinking is the way to emancipation. The 20<sup>th</sup> Century has to make way for the 21<sup>st</sup>.

As educators, we have to be part of the change, this shift in thinking, and that can only be done

by embracing diversity of thought and action.

This movement afoot to attack alternative thinking and abort radicalism is closely aligned to the idea of *agnotology*, the deliberate denuding of knowledge from a culture, culturally constructed ignorance, purposefully created by special interest groups like corporations and oligarchies working hard to create confusion and suppress the truth.

How can we even ask the question, “Is too much freedom-(transparency-thinking-knowing) bad for the classroom?”

Chris Hedges quoted a New York public school teacher in his piece, “Why the United States Is Destroying Its Education System.” The teacher laid out the groundwork of his state’s decimation of public education:

Imagine going to work each day knowing a great deal of what you are doing is fraudulent, knowing in no way are you preparing your students for life in an ever more brutal world, knowing that if you don’t continue along your scripted test prep course and indeed get better at it you will be out of a job. Up until very recently, the principal of a school was something like the conductor of an orchestra: a person who had deep experience and knowledge of the part and place of every member and every instrument. In the past 10 years we’ve had the emergence of both [Mayor] Mike Bloomberg’s Leadership Academy and Eli Broad’s Superintendents Academy, both created exclusively to produce instant principals and superintendents who model themselves after CEOs. . . . What kind of society would allow such people to run their children’s schools? The high-stakes tests may be worthless as pedagogy but they are a brilliant mechanism for undermining the school systems, instilling fear and creating a rationale for corporate takeover. There is something grotesque about the fact the education reform is being led not by educators but by financiers and speculators and billionaires.

Community has been replaced with self-empowerment and individualism.

Asking the questions and having a classroom safe haven for those questions or inquiries to germinate and blossom are the only ways a country will understand the deep entrenchment of wrongheaded thinking and policies driving education to extinction. Corporations want nothing of students asking questions about Monsanto’s genetically modified crop experiment. Why would Wall Street and the financial industry want students in economics looking at ethics and the value of a competitive concept of “free enterprise” over one driven by monopoly? Why would Oil Inc. want students looking into community rights and the environmental impact of hydrological fracturing on millions of people’s water supply?

How much freedom in the classroom was given to Japanese students where an entire generation has failed to ask the simple questions about nuclear power in a country subject to seismic activity and tsunamis?

Academic freedom is about asking those questions, and about revving up critical thinking skills. In essence, our role in the classroom is to protect, profess and promote liberal arts.

Freedom in the classroom is about dissent, and about questioning mores and standard operating procedures for almost every aspect of society, every discipline and profession.

Howard Zinn's *Voices of a People's History of the United States* tells how the ruling white class has been domineered into thinking there is too much multiculturalism, too much diversity engendering tinkering, and leftist teaching in our institutions of higher learning.

Zinn's *People's History of the United States* is grounded by a Frederick Douglass epigraph, so apropos to this FACTC Focus article submission:

If there is no struggle there is no progress. . . . This struggle may be a moral one, or it may be a physical one, and it may be both moral and physical, but it must be a struggle. Power concedes nothing without a demand. It never did and it never will. Find out just what any people will quietly submit to and you have found out the exact measure of injustice and wrong which will be imposed upon them, and these will continue till they are resisted with either words or blows, or with both.

That was said in 1857, one hundred years before I was born, and it seems as if the struggle Douglass spoke of is our call to duty to give voice to those questioning empire, something I take as my marching orders to elevate rebelliousness in our classrooms as our *raison d'être* as both K-12 and higher education teachers.

Education is being assaulted on all fronts. Where's the outrage from administrators, executive staff, operations workers, faculty? Where's the outrage? Where're the teach-ins? The true lessons in participatory democracy?

The great American writer Chris Hedges, an American journalist, who spent more than two decades covering wars for the *New York Times* (his most recent book, *Death of the Liberal Class*) speaks of education rot and its evisceration by the Neanderthals spewing hate, anti-science and anti-immigrant rhetoric.

One line from his book *War is a Force that Gives Us Meaning* is the opening title in the 2009 Oscar-winning film, *The Hurt Locker*: "The rush of battle is often a potent and lethal addiction, for war is a drug."

Hedges was shouted down in May 2003 as he gave the Rockford (Illinois) College commencement speech. He questioned the illegal invasion of Iraq.

Right before he had to pause because of a huge disturbance in the audience, Hedges warned

the graduating class of what some of us in education have seen as worthless panacea for years, cited by theologian Reinhold Niebuhr: "Modern western civilization may perish because it falsely worshiped technology as a final good."

Then all hell broke loose, and Rockford College President Paul Pribbenow had to grab the microphone:

My friends, one of the wonders of a liberal arts college is its ability and its deeply held commitment to academic freedom and the decision to listen to each other's opinions. If you wish to protest the speaker's remarks, I ask that you do it in silence, as some of you are doing in the back. That is perfectly appropriate but he has the right to offer his opinion here and we would like him to continue his remarks.

This FACTC Focus theme is based on how we as faculty navigate these tortuous and contentious times, or how we embrace the full range of ideas in the classroom, but in a sense there is this underlying fear that just five years ago was promulgated by ultraconservative ideologue David Horowitz and his Student Bill of rights that would ban "liberal indoctrination."

It's the politics of fear infusing itself in the classroom. The root of what we face today as educators is not the death of ideas or the seepage of consumerism into lesson plans.

It's a failure of today's so-called liberal class to protect our right to freedom of speech in and outside the classrooms.

The experiences of a 24-year-old former student is an example of utter failure of our society to give young men and women a choice of two worlds – one that allows for opportunity, and a future, and one with no choices but war. This young man is a product of the Spokane K-12 system. A wrestler and good student, he ventured to go into the military instead of continuing his education. A question at the Air Force recruiting office derailed that branch of service: Have you smoked marijuana in the past two years? My student told the truth.

At 17, he ended up in the US Marine Corps and found himself fighting in the Battle for Fal-lujah. "Why weren't the administrators and teachers encouraging truth and real Iraq War ex-vets to come to school and give us their stories . . . another side to the pro-war story?" he now asks.

With PTSD, a desire to get a PhD in English, and the tools of self-medication – copious amounts of booze and pot -- his battles are in the context of two societies: the community, that wants to erase veterans of wars in our midst. The second one is an increasingly hostile community college system where class sizes are swelling, offerings are dwindling, social workers are grossly undervalued, and more and more courses are being retrofitted into Skype or on-line Facebooking sessions.

His struggle is one of working and studying with a faculty fearful of speaking truth to power. He said I was his first instructor who allowed for his anti-military voice to sound loudly.

Some of us face this attack on our intellectual freedom with intimations of “...if there’s smoke then there’s got to be a fire” upswelling from insidious and inaccurate student evaluations of us. Administrators are less willing to call a spade a spade, as parents call college presidents demanding faculty be dismissed, demanding the intellectual space be constrained. As more and more students find their own realities challenged by a more diverse and robust intellectual environment, complaints rain down on some of us.

Any talk about freedom of expression in the classroom, or how to trudge through the mine (mind) fields placed in front of us and our students are irrelevant until we as faculty face down this sort of preemption the overpaid CEOs and administrators demand -- as if faculty can’t think for themselves, or that the Trustees are part of a demigod group unwilling to hear from the rank and file ideas on how to save and advance education.

Mathematician Chandler Davis, who has spent more time in Canada than the US after being ousted from the University of Michigan executives like the ones manning the helm today, had this to say in regard to the notions of politics and rebellion.

Political discourse has been impoverished (since the 1990s)n the 1930s it was understood by anyone who thought about it that sales taxes were regressive. They collected more proportionately from the poor than from the rich. Regressive taxation was bad for the economy. If only the rich had money, that decreased economic activity. The poor had to spend what they had and the rich could sit on it. Justice demands that we take more from the rich so as to reduce inequality. This philosophy was not refuted in the 1950s and it was not the target of the purge of the 1950s. But this idea, along with most ideas concerning economic justice and people’s control over the economy, was cleansed from the debate. Certain ideas have since become unthinkable, which is in the interest of corporations such as Goldman Sachs. The power to exclude certain ideas serves the power of corporations. It is unfortunate that there is no political party in the United States to run against Goldman Sachs. I am in favor of elections, but there is no way I can vote against Goldman Sachs.

These ideas we must grapple with are not so complex to handle, and while they may be considered political hot potatoes by our administrators, we have to allow for the academy to be our places of intellectual and spiritual rebellion.

That means almost anything goes while in the classroom.



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