

Thank you for using NewsLibrary

# The Washington Times

## Faculty protests 2 courses at GMU

May 24, 2000

Section: C

METROPOLITAN

VIRGINIA

Edition: 2

Page: C1

Vaishali Honawar THE WASHINGTON TIMES

Faculty members at George Mason University are protesting two history courses they say were forced into the curriculum by the Board of Visitors, which overstepped its limits by prescribing specific courses.

Starting in fall 2001, all freshmen entering the Fairfax City-based university will have to take a semester-long course in U.S. history and a second one in Western civilization.

In an emergency meeting held Thursday last week, the Faculty Senate voted 21-9 to censure the Board of Visitors for including in the general education curriculum the two courses that they described as "academically inferior." Many of the Senate's 61 members did not attend.

The Board of Visitors claims the courses are essential for young persons to develop an understanding of their country and its origins.

"People coming out of college today lack some basic knowledge, and we need to go back to the basics," said Jack Herrity, a member of the board and the driving force behind the inclusion of the two courses.

But requiring specific courses is something only the faculty can do, according to Don Boileau, chairman of the Faculty Senate.

"There has been no precedent to this at our university," Mr. Boileau said about what he called the Board of Visitors' interference with the faculty's domain over the curriculum.

The motion of censure, which Mr. Boileau described as a "statement of the faculty's displeasure," will be mailed this week to the board's 16 members.

The protest is merely symbolic, however, "because we cannot do anything - we just have to go on," Mr. Boileau said.

One course, simply called U.S. History, traces the country's history from Colonial times to the present and focuses on founding documents, values and institutions. The Western civilization course begins with ancient Greek civilizations and ends with the Congress of Vienna in 1815.

A faculty committee had suggested that the students be required to take one of a variety of courses from an approved list on the subject of "U.S. and Western institutions, traditions and economies."

"It is difficult to teach the history of Western civilization in just one semester," said Gary Galuzzo, dean of the Department of Education and a member of the Faculty Senate.

Mr. Boileau said not only would it be difficult to teach the courses to 2,000 freshmen in a single semester, but the new courses also would make it awkward for students who transfer to the university.

The school enrolls 25,000 students and receives about \$80 million in state funding annually.

Mary Burgan, general secretary of the American Association of University Professors, described the GMU incident as "disturbing."

"The faculty are doing the research and studying and should handle the curriculum," Ms. Burgan said.

Both Ms. Burgan and Mr. Boileau pointed out that requiring a course in Western civilization left out the role played by Eastern, African and South American cultures.

Mr. Herrity said he was not against the inclusion of multicultural studies, but added that the board wanted the U.S. history and Western civilization courses because persons either born here or moving here from other countries need to know what America is all about.

"To maintain the greatness of a country like this, they need to have an

understanding of where it all came from," he said.

He pointed to a study conducted in February by the **American Council of Trustees and Alumni** that found four out of five seniors surveyed at the top 55 colleges and universities in the country received a grade of D or F on history questions drawn from a basic high school curriculum.

The faculty, however, does not think this is adequate justification for the board's actions.

In the past, Mr. Boileau said, the Board of Visitors' role was limited to activities like raising funds, hiring the president and setting the general policy for the university. But of late, "what we are seeing in more and more places is a more activist board," he said.

---

All content © 2000-, by News World Communications, Inc.; 3600 New York Avenue, NE; Washington, DC 20002 and may not be republished without permission.

---

*All archives are  
stored on a SAVE (tm)  
newspaper library  
system from  
MediaStream Inc., a  
Knight-Ridder Inc.  
company.*