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## Republicans Rediscover an Old Foe: Political Correctness in the Academy

By [JEFFREY SELINGO](#)

Philadelphia

Republicans have used their national convention here this week to soften their conservative reputation. So higher-education officials said Wednesday that they were surprised to find that the party's platform had reignited an old debate about political correctness on college campuses.

The document that delegates to the convention approved on Monday says "the ideal of academic freedom is threatened by intolerance." It cites, as examples, the use of student fees to support liberal causes, the penalizing of faculty members for holding unpopular views, and the advocacy of liberal ideologies by accrediting agencies.

"I haven't heard some of these issues raised in almost a decade," said Sheldon E. Steinbach, vice president and general counsel of the American Council on Education, who has advised Republican politicians on education issues in past elections. Debates over student fees and conservative publications, he said, have largely been put to rest by recent court decisions. "I'm not quite sure where this language leads."

But Republicans at the convention said on Wednesday that debates over political correctness are alive and well on many college campuses. Indeed, it was George H.W. Bush, the father of the party's nominee, George W. Bush, who attacked political correctness nine years ago in a

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famous speech at the University of Michigan. (See [an article from \*The Chronicle\*](#), May 15, 1991.)

"Too many faculty think they know what is right, and they expect you to agree with them on what is right," said Eugene W. Hickok, Pennsylvania's secretary of education and a former professor at Dickinson College. "I think we need to be vigilant about it, and the platform is calling attention to the issue."

Nina Rees, who helped write the education planks of the platform, said there was very little debate on the paragraph on academic freedom. It was added, in part, she said, to show support for conservative groups, some of which objected to the G.O.P. platform committee's decision not to call for abolishing the U.S. Department of Education.

"The way it's phrased, it can go both ways -- it can help both liberal and conservative groups," said Ms. Rees, a senior policy analyst at the Heritage Foundation. "It was inserted because family groups have concerns that today's campuses are havens for political correctness."

Groups such as the Heritage Foundation and the **American Council of Trustees** and **Alumni** have pushed an agenda against political correctness -- similar to that of the Republican platform -- for years, said Thomas C. Longin, vice president for programs and research at the Association of Governing Boards of Universities and Colleges. The platform's language is that "of several groups who see ideological threats in contemporary universities," Mr. Longin said.

The **American Council of Trustees** and **Alumni** was founded by Lynne V. Cheney, the wife of the Republican vice-presidential nominee, Richard B. Cheney, after she left her post as

chairwoman of the National Endowment for the Humanities. The president of the council, Jerry Martin, said on Monday that he had not spoken to Ms. Cheney recently and was unaware of the platform's plank on academic freedom.

"The problem of political intolerance on campus is still ongoing," Mr. Martin said. "So it's good that the Republicans decided to address it."

But several higher-education lobbyists said that while they were concerned with the platform's language, it was unlikely to have any influence beyond the convention floor.

"The Bush campaign is moderating a fairly hard-core agenda," said Travis Reindl, director of state-policy analysis at the American Association of State Colleges and Universities. "What you see here is a case where the campaign felt they could throw a bone to the conservatives."

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Background articles from *The Chronicle*:

- [Economics Trumps Social Issues as Students Rally Behind Republican Speakers](#)  
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- [Republican Platform Calls for Limiting Use of Student Fees for Political Causes](#)  
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