



Wed, Feb. 22, 2006

Senate panel approves university diversity plan

CHET BROKAW

PIERRE, S.D. - South Dakota's public universities should be required to file annual reports showing how they are ensuring academic freedom and promoting differing points of view, a state Senate committee recommended Wednesday.

The reports would assure students that they will be exposed to a wide range of ideas and that state universities will respect those students' ideas, said Rep. Phyllis Heineman, R-Sioux Falls, the measure's main sponsor.

"We believe intellectual diversity is the heart and soul of universities," Heineman said.

But opponents said the bill is backed by an out-of-state group that seeks to promote conservative ideas on college campuses. South Dakota universities already have policies that ensure intellectual diversity, they said.

Tad Perry, executive director of the Board of Regents, said the measure could send a message that would harm the national reputation of South Dakota's universities.

"It's a message that there is a problem in South Dakota's public universities. I don't think anything could be further from the truth," Perry said.

The State Affairs Committee voted 6-3 to send the bill to the full Senate for further debate. The panel also removed a part of the bill that had suggested what points should be covered in annual reports filed by universities.

The version of HB1222 approved by the committee leaves details of those annual reports up to the Board of Regents and the state's six universities, which would tell what steps they are taking to ensure intellectual diversity and the free exchange of ideas.

The bill defines intellectual diversity as the "foundation of a learning environment that exposes students to a variety of political, ideological, and other perspectives."

Heineman said the Legislature has the right to ask the Board of Regents for a report on intellectual diversity.

"Oversight is what we do. We should never apologize for it. We owe our students and taxpayers nothing less," Heineman said.

Perry said the Board of Regents has a policy aimed at protecting intellectual diversity on campuses, and the universities have a grievance system that allows students to complain if they believe views are being suppressed.

"This bill before you was designed by out-of-staters with a specific political agenda," Perry said.

Other measures dealing with intellectual diversity have been discussed in a number of states. Those measures are generally promoted by conservatives.

The South Dakota bill is supported by the American Council of Trustees and Alumni, which had a survey conducted of students at 50 top universities nationwide. The survey found about half the students thought faculty members injected politics into the classroom, and about half said campus presentations outside the classroom were one-sided.

However, Perry said South Dakota's universities do not resemble those included in the survey. "I believe South Dakota is not that problem."

Students and others said if South Dakota's universities are promoting a liberal point of view, they are failing because the state remains conservative.

[email this](#)

[print this](#)

[reprint or license this](#)



[News](#) | [Business](#) | [Sports](#) | [Entertainment](#) | [Living](#) | [Shop Local](#) | [Classifieds](#) | [Jobs](#) | [Cars](#) | [Homes](#)

[About AberdeenNews.com](#) | [About the Real Cities Network](#) | [Terms of Use & Privacy Statement](#) | [About Knight Ridder](#) | [Copyright](#)

