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Nonprofit responds to Baruch's freshmen text

By: The American Council of Trustees and Alumni

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As first-year students arrive this week at Baruch College, they are getting their first lesson-in indoctrination, not orientation. Baruch's mandatory freshman reading program leaves them little room to disagree with the views of an author who claims the United States is "addicted to war." Baruch's president has ignored the request of the American Council of Trustees and Alumni to address the problem.

"Freshmen at Baruch are not getting what they deserve," noted ACTA president Anne D. Neal. "In their very first assignment, instead of teaching them how to think, Baruch is telling them what to think."

The book's author, Chris Hedges, claims that the United States is "addicted to war." On an official website, Baruch supplies questions on which it encourages students and faculty to base their reading and discussion. Many include politicized statements and then call on students to explain why they agree-without giving them any chance to differ.

One weighted question, for example, asks students to describe what "distortions in our democracy have already taken place" since 9/11, requiring students to accept as settled truth that such "distortions" have occurred.

Another notes Hedges' discussion of humility and compassion. Students are then directed to list ways America has "moved away from these virtues in the past decade."

"It is standard procedure for professors to present a thought-provoking view in a question and then ask students to agree or disagree," Neal said. "But these questions leave students no room to disagree. The picture they paint of Baruch's freshman reading program is a troubling one indeed."

After receiving an inquiry from a concerned alumnus, ACTA wrote privately to Baruch president Kathleen M. Waldron on August 17, asking her to take immediate action to address these concerns. She has not responded, and the questions are still posted online.

As ACTA's letter points out, Baruch's use of such one-sided questions ignores its students' academic freedom. The American Association of University Professors' 1915 "Declaration of Principles" warns faculty against "taking unfair advantage of the student's immaturity by

indoctrinating him with the teacher's own opinions before the student has had an opportunity fairly to examine other opinions upon the matters in question, and before he has sufficient knowledge and ripeness of judgment to be entitled to form any definitive opinion of his own."

"The AAUP's statement surely was written with college freshmen in mind," Neal concluded. "We hope Baruch will remember that academic freedom is not only a right, but also a responsibility."

The American Council of Trustees and Alumni is a national education nonprofit dedicated to academic freedom, academic quality, and accountability. ACTA has a network of trustees and alumni around the country, including those from the City University of New York. ACTA has issued numerous reports on higher education including *A Failure to Set High Standards: CUNY's General Education Requirements*, *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.

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