

Testimony of Anne D. Neal, President
American Council of Trustees and Alumni
Before the Higher Education Committee, Missouri House of Representatives

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My name is Anne Neal and I am president of the American Council of Trustees and Alumni, a bipartisan, national nonprofit founded in 1995 and dedicated to academic freedom, academic excellence and accountability in higher education.

I want to thank the members of the Committee for asking me to speak today and extend a particular thank you to Representative Cunningham, sponsor of House Bill 213. I have had the good fortune to work with Representative Cunningham in her capacity as chairman of the Education Task Force of the American Legislative Exchange Council and I know she is a real champion of quality public education.

The American Council of Trustees and Alumni is made up of parents, taxpayers, alumni, and trustees from around the country, including Missouri, who believe that a quality education is critical to getting ahead. We believe in the ability of education to transform young lives. We believe in education's public purpose to produce informed citizens, effective workers, and life-long learners. We believe, as did Thomas Jefferson, whose

statue graces the Capitol, that a nation that expects to be ignorant and free expects what never was, and never shall be. Only a few months ago, we were pleased to convene a special trustees conference in Kansas City on teacher education in conjunction with the Kauffman Foundation.

Our organization was formed because of mounting evidence that our institutions of higher education are *not* all they can be. One of the most troubling problems facing higher education—across the country and *here* in Missouri—is the lack of intellectual diversity. You will soon hear some very troubling stories from those who know best what is happening in the classroom—students who were subjected to unprofessional behavior; students who bravely refused to agree with their professors just to get a good grade; students who went to college to be challenged and stimulated—but instead found an atmosphere closer to an indoctrination camp than an institution of higher learning.

The incidents that you will hear are troubling because they suggest that Missouri's public institutions of higher education are failing to provide ensure the free exchange of ideas that is the very essence of a liberal education.

They are troubling because they suggest that Missouri's public institutions are deviating from their own goals and ideals. For example, the MU Board of Curators rules and regulations, as well as existing faculty ethics codes, provide—and I quote:

- “[I]nstitutions of higher education are established and maintained for the common good, which depends upon the free search for truth and its free expression”;
- “[F]aculty members are entitled to freedom in the classroom in discussing their subjects, but have the responsibility not to depart significantly from their respective areas of competence or to divert substantial time to material extraneous to the course”;
- [A]cademic freedom in its teaching aspect is fundamental to the protection of the rights of the faculty member in teaching and of the student in learning; it carries with it duties correlative with rights”; and
- “The professor demonstrates respect for the student as an individual and adheres to his proper role as intellectual guide and counselor, [and] makes every reasonable effort to foster honest academic conduct and to assure that evaluation of students reflects their true merit,”

Yet, as you will hear, there is troubling evidence that institutions are failing to practice what they preach.

Now, ACTA has been in the business for over a decade and, I can tell you, when faced with similar anecdotal evidence of a problem, universities and colleges—and groups that represent them such as the American Federation of Teachers, American Association of University Professor and ACLU—have denied there is a problem. They have said these are isolated incidents; that students who complain consist of a small group of conservative and religious students who do not want their eyes to be opened; that there

are existing mechanisms and policies in place that make any further action unnecessary; that academic freedom means that legislators should stay out of their business. Indeed, in a story on this hearing in the *Maneater*, Central Missouri State University professor Bob Yates, who serves on the Advisory Council of the Missouri Faculty Senate proved quite predictable: “There does not seem to be a problem of students in Missouri’s public universities complaining about what they’re learning in the classroom in terms of diversity,” he said. “Secondly, there are mechanisms that all universities have to solve these problems.” (Feb. 23, 2007)

Many professors like him have rejected incontrovertible evidence showing that faculties are a political monoculture—a fact that University of Missouri-St. Louis Curators Professor of Political Science J. Martin Rochester recently conceded in a guest commentary. And, when presented with a national scientific survey showing serious consequences in the classrooms of the top 50 colleges according to *U.S. News and World Report*, they rejected that as well.

That’s why my organization decided to go one step further—to commission a new scientific survey—to *examine what students think here in Missouri*. We commissioned a national survey firm, Pulsar Research, to do a scientific survey of undergraduates at the University of Missouri-Columbia and Missouri State, institutions that represent more than 37,000 students. And what the firm—whose principal was among the founders of the University of Connecticut’s well-known Center for Survey Research and Analysis—found is shocking:

- 58.7 percent reported that “some professors use the classroom to present their personal political views”;
- 56.8 percent reported courses that “have readings which present only one side of a controversial issue”; and
- 51 percent of the students reported “courses in which students feel they have to agree with the professor’s political or social views in order to get a good grade.”

This survey was conducted in February and has a sampling error of plus or minus four. [Packets are available for the press from Charles Mitchell in the audience.] These numbers should be zero.

And these weren’t observations of so-called conservatives. Notably, the vast majority of respondents described their political views as moderate, liberal, or radical left (75.7 percent). Of the students polled, 63.2 percent reported that they studied professional or science topics—where one would frankly not expect courses with political content.

Based on this poll, the lack of intellectual diversity in Missouri is not just an occasional or isolated phenomenon. The lack of intellectual diversity—as these numbers show—is a systemic problem. Make no mistake: Huge numbers of students in Missouri said that they are receiving preaching rather than teaching.

Despite policies that prohibit such behavior, more than half of the students polled at MU and MSU said that their classrooms are politicized, that course offerings are one-sided and that they feel pressured to agree with their professors in order to get a good grade. There is no way this kind of classroom climate can be conducive to a solid education and every legislator, every parent, every taxpayer in Missouri should be profoundly concerned since our system of government—our democratic republic—relies upon an educated and thoughtful citizenry.

Universities—here and everywhere—are granted extensive, and very special, privileges. They receive substantial appropriations. They receive tax-exempt status. They receive special autonomy to govern themselves. They receive academic freedom. They receive the right to give professors life-time tenure.

But the universities receive these privileges from the people of Missouri subject to an understanding—that they will serve the public good and be accountable. Academic freedom does not mean freedom from accountability.

That is the reason for House Bill 213.

We all know that students are better educated if they are exposed to multiple perspectives. That professors should give a fair presentation to alternative points of view. That teachers should never intimidate or treat unfairly students with a “dissenting” point of view. That campus panels and speakers series should give students more than one side

of the great issues of the day. That political and ideological bias in hiring, promotion, and tenure is unacceptable. We all agree with these principles—and the bill quite properly gives universities a chance to make sure that they are meeting these goals.

In the face of hair-raising stories and shocking data in Missouri, something needs to be done. Representative Cunningham has provided a method for you to ensure accountability—in a way that is sensitive to academic freedom and shared governance.

Requiring a simple annual report like the one in this bill—a little bit of sunlight—does not violate academic freedom, restrict free speech or intrude in the operation of institutions in any way. It does not regulate the curriculum or tell professors what to teach. Indeed, it is left entirely up to the each institution to decide what steps it will take and what it will include in its report.

As legislators responsible for public funding and oversight of Missouri’s institutions of higher learning, you can make certain that those institutions are fostering an atmosphere in the classroom dedicated to valid educational ends. And this bill would do it.

And don’t be fooled. The solution would be simple and inexpensive. After all, Missouri State already has an Equity and Diversity Office, online diversity training, and a diversity report on its website. The University of Missouri-Columbia has a Chancellor’s Diversity Office, and a campus self-study on diversity. Central Missouri State has a “Community Engagement Office” whose mission is all about diversity. Missouri State is already

undertaking a self-study of the Social Work Program as part of its settlement in the Brooker case. Surely they can file a simple annual report on this crucial type of diversity—a variety of perspectives.

And you would not be the only state to take action on this issue, either. A similar reporting requirement is already in place in Pennsylvania. A special bipartisan committee gave the state universities a list of suggestions regarding academic freedom and students' rights and asked them to report on their progress by November 1 of next year.

A reporting requirement will underscore the legislature's urgent interest in finding out what is happening in Missouri. Indeed, by calling upon institutions to provide an accounting to the public they serve, the legislature will endorse the academy's insistence on institutional solutions rather than legislative intervention.

Again, I hope you ensure that your universities address the critical issue of intellectual diversity. I thank Representative Cunningham for providing you with an appropriate way to do that, and I thank you for allowing me to speak.