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<http://www.insidehighered.com/news/2006/03/23/academic>

Murderers, Video and Academic Freedom

Video of Pat Robertson and a new report out of Florida have set off the latest skirmishes over the Academic Bill of Rights.

The video of Robertson on his CBN television station has raised questions about a claim on the book jacket of David Horowitz's new book, *The Professors: The 101 Most Dangerous Academics in America*, which lists "murderers" among those allegedly teaching America's youth. Robertson — whose television shows are viewed by millions — used the words "murderers" and "killers" in reference to professors.

The report out of Florida, meanwhile, says that — contrary to the claims of backers of the Academic Bill of Rights — colleges have policies in place about academic freedom, students have grievance procedures they can use, and few students find reason to use them.

David Horowitz, in e-mail interviews Wednesday, acknowledged that he could not show that any of the professors he criticizes in his book actually killed anyone, although he said some may meet the legal test for having helped others to kill. He slammed the Florida legislative report as irrelevant.

For starters, let's go to the [videotape](#). On the *700 Club* this week, Pat Robertson said that the 101 professors in Horowitz's new book are only a "short list" of the 30 to 40 thousand" professors whom he called "termites that have worked into the woodwork of our academic society."

Robertson referred to professors as "murderers" (as well as sexual deviants and terrorist supporters) and later said that some of them are "killers." Robertson's comments were cited by [People for the American Way](#), which made the video available, as a "right wing outrage."

So who are the murderers Robertson was talking about? Horowitz in his book does not attribute any individual deaths to any of the professors who make his list, but the book jacket does mention "murderers."

In an e-mail interview, Horowitz said that he "didn't write the flap jacket on my book and was not even shown a copy of it until the covers were printed." But he also said that he didn't have anything to retract. He said that two of the professors in his book, Bill Ayers and Bernadine Dohrn, were members of the Weather Underground — while a third, Sami al-Arian, was a member of a terrorist group — and that all three thus have ties to groups that tried to kill people.

While Ayers and Dohrn have acknowledged that they were part of the Weather Underground, they have never been convicted of murder or of aiding a murder, and al-Arian has never acknowledged being part of a terrorist group and his recent trial on related charges ended in a hung jury on some accusations and not guilty verdicts on others.

Horowitz, asked if the term "murderer" didn't normally mean someone who had killed someone else, said that "no one to my knowledge in my book actually pulled the trigger so to speak." But he added that he had never made such a claim. He also said, however, that it was appropriate to judge the three professors he named by the groups that he says they were a part of. "According to the law, if you are the member of a conspiracy or gang that commits murder, you are guilty of murder," he wrote.

Criticism over accusations about "murderers" is also largely irrelevant, Horowitz said, because "what's damaging to academics in my book is not the sensational stuff," but rather the "normal and massive corruption" that he said exists throughout higher education.

To that end, the study out of Florida did not please him.

Florida is among the many states where conservative legislators have introduced a version of the Academic Bill of Rights, which would bar faculty members from punishing students for their political views and would require professors to share alternative viewpoints in classes. Proponents say that the legislation is needed to protect student rights, but most academic groups say that the measure could encourage lawsuits and discourage professors from covering controversial subjects, and might force them to allow intelligent design or Holocaust denial into their classrooms.

An important part of the debate has been the question of whether there is in fact a problem with students feeling that their views are squelched and that they don't have policies to turn to at their colleges. In Florida, legislators asked the state's Office of Program Policy Analysis and Government Accountability to examine those issues.

In its [report](#), the office found that all Florida colleges have policies in place that protect academic freedom and include procedures for students to follow if they feel that their rights are being denied by anyone. In terms of student complaints, the report found that very few complaints deal with the issues raised by the Academic Bill of Rights. Less than 1 percent of student grievances concern academic freedom issues, the report said.

A statement issued by Tom Auxter, president of the United Faculty of Florida — a faculty union affiliated with both the American Federation of Teachers and the National Education Association — said that the report found “absolutely no basis for the contention that faculty members violate the right of students to academic freedom in the classroom.”

Given that proponents of the Academic Bill of Rights spoke about “rampant abuse,” Auxter said that the relative rarity of complaints, along with the availability of grievance procedures, “calls into question the motives of those legislators who looked for evidence to justify limiting the rights of faculty in the classroom and limiting the rights of students to hear what faculty had to say.” Horowitz called the report “meaningless” and a “whitewash.” He said that most students and faculty members don't understand what academic freedom means, so they wouldn't know to file grievances. Rather than looking at grievances that have been filed, Horowitz said, Florida officials should have asked students this question: “Have you ever been in a class where your professor made remarks about the war in Iraq or President Bush that was not a course about the war in Iraq or President Bush?” Horowitz said that “if you think the response would be only 1 percent positive, you haven't talked to students in a long time.”

He added of the report — produced by the research arm of the Florida Legislature: “The academic left can go on maintaining that there is no problem as long as they like. The longer they do, the less credible they will appear to a public that will be more and more outraged at what's going on.”

FROM THE FREE EXCHANGE ON CAMPUS WEBSITE

http://www.freeexchangeoncampus.org/index.php?option=com_content&task=view&id=45&Itemid=27

Free Exchange! Fighting for the free exchange of ideas on campus.

March 26, 2006

No smoking gun in Florida

A report of the Florida Legislature's government accountability office has found no evidence that students' rights to academic freedom in Florida are in jeopardy. In fact, the report finds, not only are current policies and mechanisms for complaint in place, there is every indication that they are doing their job to ensure students' freedom.

The report was sought by the legislature last summer, while a piece of legislation was in play that would have restricted faculty's academic freedom. The bill failed, but its conservative sponsor, Rep. Dennis Baxley, vowed to reintroduce it, possibly in this session.

This report (<http://www.oppaga.state.fl.us/reports/educ/r06-22s.html>) from the Office of Program Policy Analysis and Government Accountability should cool Baxley's jets. It says that every one of Florida's 11 universities and 28 community colleges has well-established academic freedom policies and well-publicized mechanisms for students and faculty to file complaints. The office looked at all recent complaints. Between the academic years, 2002-03 and 2004-05, the total number of formal student grievances on academic freedom-related matters was 7, less than 1 percent of all grievances filed.

"Not only is there no smoking gun, the gun never went off," says Tom Auxter, president of the United Faculty of Florida, the joint AFT-NEA union that represents all faculty in the 11-university system. "Meanwhile, the same legislators who launched this investigation of faculty, attempting to distract the public's attention from the real crisis in higher education and poison the public attitude toward higher education, draft budgets that are woefully inadequate in every category. The Legislature is punishing all of higher education for crimes that were never committed."

INDEPENDENT FLORIDA ALLIGATOR NEWS

<http://www.alligator.org/pt2/060327freedom.php>
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**Study addresses 'leftist totalitarianism' in schools
NOT MANY STUDENTS COMPLAIN OF CURTAILED RIGHTS, STUDY SAYS**

By [JUSTIN RICHARDS](#)
Alligator Writer

Casting skepticism on a cause championed by conservative activists, a recent study states that 1 percent of grievances filed at Florida universities accuse faculty of encroaching on students' First Amendment rights.

The Office of Program Policy Analysis and Government Accountability, an agency of the Florida Legislature, published the study this month at the request of legislators investigating the issue of academic freedom.

Academic freedom, broadly, denotes the right of students and faculty to pursue knowledge without obstruction. In recent years, activist groups and Republican legislators have waved the rhetoric of academic freedom behind a march on excessive and oppressive liberalism in higher education.

Tom Auxter, president of statewide faculty union United Faculty of Florida, said the Accountability Office study collapses that cause.

"This is a made-up problem," he said. "Actually, it has much more to do with trying to discredit faculty and discredit higher education so that the public is not so outraged when they cut money." Last year, State Rep. Dennis Baxley, R-Ocala, filed a bill that would have enabled students to sue professors if they felt their political or religious beliefs were not respected. In discussion of the bill, Baxley decried the "leftist totalitarianism" of "dictator professors."

In an interview Friday, Baxley said the study's findings understate what remains a problem. He said students whose academic freedom has been violated often do not file formal complaints - lacking confidence in their universities' grievance procedures.

"I think they look at it and say, 'I'm not going to get an objective review here,'" he said. "I think it's pretty heavily weighted to protect faculty."

At UF, students may file grievances if they feel a classroom condition "is illegal, unjust or creates unnecessary hardship," according to the process described on the Dean of Students Office Web site.

Students are encouraged to broach their complaint with the faculty member involved. If dissatisfied, the student may file a complaint with the instructor's supervisor, who will create a fact-finding committee to evaluate the student's grievance. A student may appeal that decision to one of four UF vice presidents. That official's ruling is final.

TPMCafe, NY [One Flew East](#)

(online Blog)

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TPMCafe, NY - Mar 23, 2006

ONE FLEW EAST

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