

My name is Jim Duban; I am from the Department of English

Because of questions that may arise about the motives of faculty who object to mandatory forms of teacher evaluation, I feel compelled--though slightly embarrassed--to state that in some circles my teaching is regarded favorably. I have received a Presidents' Associates Teaching Excellence Award for the Teaching of Composition; I was the 1986 recipient of the College of Liberal Arts Student Council Award for Teaching Excellence; I was awarded the 1988-89 William David Blunk Memorial Professorship for teaching excellence and student-teacher rapport; and I have regularly scored in the top 10 percent of my college's senior exit surveys.

Yet, in these respects, I regard myself as representing any number of professors at UT whose teaching has been judged meritorious, but who would still have reason to question legislation that mandates peer evaluation. The following comments, I should add, do not seek to impugn the motives of those who authored the legislation in question; rather, I wish to call your attention to the possible negative tendencies of that legislation.

This is especially the case when so-called "politically correct" thinking has reshaped the nature of even the most basic service courses at UT, as well as the outlooks of a good number of persons on the faculty. The harm done by this nation-wide phenomenon to the integrity of college-level instruction in the arts and sciences, and to the careers of several university teachers has been amply documented by the New York Times, in a piece titled "The Rising Hegemony of the Politically Correct"; by the Wall Street Journal, in one piece titled "Vive the Academic Resistance," and in another titled "PC at Hampshire College"; by the Dallas Times Herald, in a column titled "Thought Police are Controlling America's College Campuses"; and by a U.S. News and World Report piece titled "The Academy's New Ayatollahs."

Most recently, the January 21, 1991 issue of New York magazine, in an article titled "Are You Politically Correct?" describes the stifling effect that so-called "PC" outlooks have had at Harvard: even a Pulitzer-Prize-winning historian, Bernard Bailyn, and Stephan Thernstrom, a professor at Harvard for twenty-five years and the editor of the Harvard Encyclopedia of American Ethnic Groups, have reportedly come under such vicious attack that they have stopped teaching some classes in their areas of specialty. Says Thernstrom, "This is a new McCarthyism. It's more frightening than the old McCarthyism, which had no support in the academy. Now the enemy is within. There are students and faculty who have no belief in freedom of speech." John Taylor, the author of the New York magazine article on PC concludes, among other things, that the New Fundamentalism on American college campuses strikes at the heart of an American educational tradition grounded in a respect for individualism because advocates of PC thinking believe that "the doctrine of individual liberties itself is inherently oppressive."

The legislation that I am protesting seems, for reasons that you already have in print, compatible with the mechanisms by which traditional, individualistic, approaches to instruction stand further to be compromised on our campus. At stake is the autonomy of professors and the quality of education that we may offer our students. I must, therefore, protest the current legislation and urge that the matter be submitted to the General Faculty by mail ballot.

Thank you for allowing me to speak.