

Survey of Academic Freedom Issues in New York, 2006-2007

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Below are a summary of the responses we received to the survey (May 2007) on academic freedom issues. The survey was drawn up by me, and it was done quickly to reach chapter chairs before the summer 2007 break. I regard it as a simple beginning that can be improved. Tom Policano sent the survey questions to 50 chapter chairs. There were 20 responses plus one additional situation that came via Tom, but was not part of the survey. Thus the total is 21. I include my own reactions in brackets.

1. Have there been academic freedom issues at your campus during the 2006-07 academic year, and, if so, what did they involve?

Of these, 9 indicated that there had been academic freedom issues on the campus; 9 said no, and 3 discussed a situation that was unclear as to its academic freedom content. [IY: Of the 9 instances of academic freedom problems, one had been referred to NY Committee A. This case was referred ultimately to national Committee A. Two other cases were referred directly to national Committee A from the campus with notice to NY Committee A. The others remained at the campus level... However, more important is the fact that 6 of the 9 instances of problems with academic freedom had not been carried beyond the campus, and probably would not have surfaced at all except for this survey. Unfortunately, this does not mean the academic freedom issues have been resolved successfully at the campus level. In fact, only 4 of the 9 were even considered by a campus chapter, in most cases because campus chapters considered themselves too weak to take on the issue. Only 2 of the 9 were reported to be resolved successfully. Clearly, we have to make NY Committee A better known, not because we can necessarily resolve problems that elude those on campus, but because our status as a non-campus source allows for an important perspective, and in some cases our intervention can be helpful. The survey also produced a good response rate of about 40%, with reported academic freedom issues at about half of the campuses that responded. We do not know from this simple survey whether this percentage is high because those chapters with problems may have responded more heavily than those without problems. However, the frequency of problems reported is more in line with what is found in Ohio, and less consonant with the silence that has characterized reporting of academic freedom issues in New York over the years.]

2. Was your chapter involved, and, if so, how?

In 4 of the 9 instances of problems with academic freedom issues, the situation was reported to the chapter. In the other cases, the chapter was not viable or was weak at the time of the problem. [IY: Faculty members always should consult with their local chapter before making an approach to national or NY committee A since the chapter may be able to resolve the issue most quickly. This is absolutely necessary in collective bargaining chapters. If NY Committee A receives an inquiry from a faculty member at a campus with an AAUP chapter, CB or non CB, we involve the chapter immediately. If

the chapter believes it is too weak to handle the issue, NY Committee A's intervention often can be salutary.]

3. How were the issues resolved?

Of the 9 campuses with academic freedom issues, 2 cases had a favorable result. In 3 the results were unfavorable, and the other results were still unclear. **[IY:** Even where our assistance is not requested we would like to know about the situation for informational purposes. Since we do not currently have a reporting system, we should establish one. This survey can be a starting point for such a reporting system. To encourage reporting, we always keep the name of an institution and of persons involved confidential. Our commentary on academic freedom issues in New York at the Spring and Fall meetings, or in NY Academe, is controlled by this confidentiality, and we will not report on a situation if doing so, even in the most guarded way, would identify the institution and the persons involved. In the 3 unfavorable situations, in one case there is no longer an AAUP chapter and no action has been taken beyond the campus; in one the AAUP chapter did call on NY Committee A, and in fact appealed to the NY Conference; and in the third case there was a request to national Committee A for support, but the chapter chair did inform NY Committee A of what was happening. This last type of action should be standard for chapters in NY: if the chapter asks national Committee A for help, it should keep NY Committee A informed. This is not done routinely in my judgment because most chapter leaders and faculty involved believe there is coordination between the national and NY committee, or they have not heard about NY Committee A. To correct the latter, we should try to raise our visibility. The coordination issue is more difficult. Historically, our coordination with national Committee A is erratic. In some cases, national Committee A will ask for our assistance; in many others, it acts independently. Unless we take steps to improve coordination, it will remain spotty.]

4. Did any faculty member contact national Committee A in Washington, D.C. about these issues, and, if so, with what results?

Of the 9 campuses, 3 consulted national Committee A. 1 of the 3 did not regard the response from national Committee A to be supportive while the other two inquiries are open. **[IY:** All 3 campuses that consulted national Committee A also informed NY Committee A of what was happening. Again this should be standard practice.]