Testimony of:

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My name is William Cutler; I am a professor of both History and Educational Leadership at Temple University. To be more specific, I hold tenure and the rank of full professor in both the Department of History in the College of Liberal Arts and the Department of Educational Leadership and Policy Studies in the College of Education. I have been a faculty member at Temple since 1968. My specialty is the history of American education about which I have written extensively. In the last decade I have also been a scholar at the Carnegie Foundation for the Advancement of Teaching (1999-2000); the director of the teaching improvement center in Temple's College of Liberal Arts (2000-2003); and the president of the Temple Association of University Professionals (TAUP, 2001-present). TAUP is the collective bargaining agent that represents more than 1100 faculty and staff who work in thirteen different schools and colleges at Temple University.

In the testimony presented to date, the committee has heard from both proponents and opponents of HR 177. Those in favor have claimed that there is ideological bias on campus, which may require legislative oversight to be counterbalanced. Those opposed have said that such oversight is not only unwise but also unnecessary because there are already sufficient safeguards to protect all students' rights. Rather than rehash these arguments, it is my intention this morning to give the committee my perspective on what it is that most professors try to do. My remarks are based on my experience both as a scholar who studies American education and as a working professional who has taught in one of the Commonwealth's three state-related universities for nearly forty years.

These days more than sixty percent of all young Americans attend college for least one or two years. But just because many Americans have been college students does not mean that they fully understand academe. Far too many graduate without a real appreciation for what it is that professors do. As Gerald Graff has pointed out in his recent book *Clueless in Academe: How Schooling*

Obscures the Life of the Mind (Yale, 2003) college "takes students who are perfectly street-smart and exposes them to the life of the mind in ways that make them feel dumb." Bewildered by the range of choices that exist on campus, they never learn "that summarizing and making arguments is the name of the game." Why is this the case? According to Graff, it is because academics hide what they do "in plain view, amidst a vast disconnected clutter of subjects, disciplines, and courses." Ironically, it is the wealth of ideas in the academic marketplace for which such ignorance is to blame.

If this is true (and I believe it is), it is a shame because no matter what their field or discipline, professional academics engage in argument. In contrast to those who are mere advocates, academics do not trade in belief or opinion. They make arguments that are characterized by

- a reliance on reason and evidence consistent with the epistemological standards for a field or a discipline
- a knowledge of and a respect for what others have said on the subject in question
- a healthy skepticism for all conventional wisdom
- a commitment to what the historian Richard Hofstadter once called "playfulness" -- that is, the turning of answers into questions
- a sharp eye for unrecognized assumptions and unresolved contradictions
- a willingness to ask the "so what question"

A reliance on sound argument is not confined to academe. It can be found in many other professions. Is there a trial lawyer among you? Which of the following best describes what you do?

- assert throughout a trial that your client should be vindicated but never call any witnesses or introduce any exhibits

- present all kinds of evidence relevant to the case but never explain what the evidence means
- tie the evidence to conclusions, showing how it supports the verdict you want the jury to reach.

Like lawyers, professors do try to convince or persuade. There can be no denying that. However, they do not do so in a "no holds barred" way. Like lawyers, they live or die by the standards for good argument that govern their trade. This is why good scholarship in both research and teaching is like good law -- public and prospective. It is conducted in the open, builds on precedent, is subject to peer review, and never stands in one place. Whenever new evidence is discovered or new insights are made, old conclusions inevitably lose face.

A college course should be an argument. It should bring evidence to bear on the theories or conclusions the teacher wants the students to learn. It should also model what it means to make an argument. That college and university faculty don't always do this successfully doesn't discredit the goal. It means only that they should try harder to achieve it. Who should determine whether faculty have been successful in making their teaching into an argument? Should this be left to the academy or should a panel of laymen decide this? In the marketplace of ideas that is the university, it is faculty who are in the best position to determine whether this goal is being achieved or at least whether a good faith effort is being made. This is because faculty know better than others the standards for argument and the rules of evidence that govern their field or discipline. The same principle applies in the law where the appeals process exists as a check on error or excess.

Students should also play a role in the appraisal of college teaching. And they do. Over the last thirty years course evaluation forms have become standard practice in American higher education. But as novices to the world of academic

argument their judgments must be taken in context. Sometimes they don't understand the difference between advocacy and argument.

In his testimony before the Select Committee on Student Academic Freedom Dr. Stephen Balch cited the freshmen reading program as evidence of "advocacy" at Temple University. As a professor who has participated twice in that program I want to challenge that claim. The purpose of the program is to introduce beginning students to the world of argument. The books assigned are a means not an end.

When I participated in a seminar for students and faculty on the book read in the summer of 2003, *Lies My Teacher Told Me: Everything Your American History Textbook Got Wrong* by James Loewen, here is what I said:

> First, it can teach us that facts alone are not enough to achieve understanding. It's how facts are used that's really important. It's the way in which they contribute to analysis . . . .
>
> Second, the book can teach something about what constitutes a good argument. . . . we must dig deeper if we want to take away from this book something of significant value. In other words, we must read it carefully to understand the fullness of its argument.

This lesson was not lost on the students who read this book. Consider what History major Timothy Lombardo said:

> [This book] informs the reader that history is so much more than the memorization of dates, events, and facts that happened a long time ago.

and

> The most important lesson that I took away from *Lies*, and the one that I hope those incoming students who just read it took away from it, is that history is never as “cut and dry” as I learned it in high school.

Mr. Lombardo went on to say:

> I think that Professor Loewen has done an excellent job of reporting (or is it re-reporting) on historical events, but that does not go to say that his should be the only voice, or that this should be the only book you read. Professional historians and those of us students who have studied history for a few years understand this point, but first time readers need to understand it as well, and need to view this book as a starting point in what they can learn about American history, and certainly not the final point.

Here is a student who learned the most important lesson a college education can convey. Far from "clueless", he graduated knowing the difference between advocacy and argument, between indoctrination and education.

In the 1990s there was a running debate in and out of academe about liberal bias in American history courses and texts. The release of the National Standards for History in October 1994 sparked a controversy that spread across the land. Critics complained that the Standards showed disrespect by passing over lessons that all Americans should learn. But truth be told, there is no canon. Over the past century, the humanities and social science curriculum has often changed. What was once revolutionary or even standard has often come to be seen as incomplete or out of date. By the same token, topics and perspectives that faded from view have sometimes returned to center stage. As historian Lawrence Levine has observed, "The canon changes constantly because historical circumstances and stimuli change and people therefore

approach it in myriad ways, bringing different perspectives and needs to it, reading it in ways distinctive to the times in which they live, and emerging with different satisfactions and revelations" (*The Opening of the American Mind: Canons, Culture and History*, Beacon Press, 1996). This is not just how it is; it is how it should be if we want our system of higher education to continue to be what it has become -- an engine of prosperity and a bedrock of democracy in the United States.

Thank you and good day.