

**Testimony of:**  
**William E. Scheuerman**  
**President, United University Professions**  
**State University of New York**

**Before the:**  
**Pennsylvania House of Representatives Select Committee on Academic**  
**Freedom in Higher Education**

**Temple University**  
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Let me start by thanking Chairman Stevenson, co-chairman Curry and the rest of the members of the committee for this chance to testify today. My name is Bill Scheuerman. I am a professor of political science at the State University of New York. I am also the president of the United University Professions, the largest higher education union in the country representing 31,000 faculty and staff in the SUNY system. I am a vice president of the American Federation of Teachers, the largest higher education union in the country, and I serve as the chair of the AFT higher education program and policy council.

I am testifying today not only as a faculty member of 30 years standing, but also on behalf of 150,000 faculty and professional staff represented by the AFT.

We have studied very closely the efforts of David Horowitz, one of your witnesses today, to enact versions of the so-called Academic Bill of Rights in eighteen states so far. We've joined the debate everywhere we could—Right now, we are glad, and relieved, to say that the record of wins for this legislation is 0 for 18—and we think the reason for that is simple. The more closely that state legislatures have looked at the idea, the more obvious it has become that the facts on the ground just do not support the contentions of Academic Bill of Rights proponents, and the so-called “solution” they recommend would do much more harm than good.

I would like to spend my time today outlining those concerns for you from a national perspective and I know that my colleague Bill Cutler from the Temple Association of University Professors/AFT will be discussing the local impact. I also know that you also heard some excellent testimony at your last hearing on the impact in other parts of the state.

Let's start with a simple fact—our system of higher education is the envy of the world. There is no better evidence of that than the hundreds of thousands of international students who come to enroll in our colleges and universities every year. Our system's greatest strength is its diversity, which derives largely from a

decentralized model that has created an incredibly wide variety of institutions—two-year, four-year, private, public, liberal arts, vocational, etc. That, in turn, has led to tremendous diversity in missions, roles, programming and perspectives and an incredibly wide variety of faculty and staff nationwide. The opportunities for American students to pick the kind of education they want are unparalleled.

This system pays off enormous benefits in terms of economic growth, the national knowledge base and American culture—it is critical to a democratic and open society. We can thank our lucky stars that our governmental leaders have always understood that it is critical to keep institutions vital to the free expression of ideas, like higher education, free from political interference.

Promoters of the Academic Bill of Rights paint a picture that is pretty scary. They paint a portrait of faculty who are all left-wingers who don't care about teaching their students, only in indoctrinating them. Conservatives can't get a decent faculty job, although they apparently managed to get PhD's from these awful left-wingers. Conservative students are derided by their professors and either given bad grades or cowed into submission.

Well, I guess I am forever a professor, because the first thing I want to see when a student or anyone makes a claim like that is the evidence to back that up. So let's look at the evidence.

At your last hearing, Steven Balch reported on two studies which he and others offer up as an indication that faculty in our institutions are biased. The problem is that the use of these two studies is almost a classic case of sloppy fact-finding and faulty logic. For example, Balch cited a study by Daniel Klein who surveyed members of six scholarly societies and found them to be strongly weighted in terms of Democrats—a study I note that was issued by Steven Balch's own group, the National Association of Scholars. Let me read the fields

he looked at because that is important. They were: anthropology, political science, sociology, history, philosophy, and economics. Not accounting, not chemistry, not engineering or finance or physics, or math, but anthropology, political science, sociology, history, philosophy, and economics.

It doesn't take a statistician to know that you can't extrapolate from a sample like that. You wouldn't conduct a survey in Philadelphia and suggest that it represents all of Pennsylvania and we shouldn't poll a group of similar disciplines and suggest they represent all of higher education.

The second study referenced was a study by Rothman, Lipset and Nevittee. While this looks at a broader range of disciplines, the study, funded by the Randolph foundation, is still full of problems. First it does not include any faculty in two-year institutions, even though a very large number of bachelor degree students get their basic survey coursework at community colleges. I am not suggesting that faculty members at community colleges are more or less conservative, but they'd have to be included in order to make generalizations from the data. Second, the survey eliminates all responses of faculty who identified themselves as middle of the road, independent or "other" and then lumps everyone into left or right, black or white categories. Again, it doesn't take a statistician to see that this procedure is going to over-dramatize differences. Then, even with all that, the researchers found that academic achievement was much more important than political orientation in explaining hiring decisions. And most important to me, it is always time to put up a warning sign when the authors of a study will not release the data set so we cannot tell what is true and what is not.

However, even if we were to accept the findings as true, that is, that more faculty are Democrats, liberals or left-leaning, one still has to make a giant—and really unfair—leap to take those findings and translate them into a problem of political bias in the classroom. We are trained to teach, not to preach, and

that important distinction must not be lost. Elected officials like yourselves know how to see shades of gray and understand the motivations of people who disagree with you. But ideologues like Mr. Horowitz simply can not imagine people who disagree with him politically could possibly be responsible professionals—they *have* to be charlatans simply because they disagree with him.

The problem is that the Horowitz picture of higher education is as incorrect as it is insulting. I wasn't hired because of my political views—I was hired because I spent many years studying and I went through an extremely demanding probationary period where my scholarship and teaching were constantly assessed. I remained a professor because I was gifted at presenting material to students and at challenging them to reach reasoned and logical conclusions from the facts. If the advocates of the Academic Bill of Rights were painting an accurate picture of higher education, how is it that so many conservative scholars somehow manage to emerge with degrees and honors after going through the academic mill, all the while maintaining their political perspective?

Which brings me to the third leg of the advocacy for an Academic Bill of Rights—the idea that conservative students are complaining about being treated badly for their political views. This is another area where supporters of the Academic Bill of Rights have made a practice of collecting individual, unsubstantiated allegations and opportunistically taking advantage of them to hurl accusations.

Take my own institution, for example. Our Board of Trustees, or I should say one member of our Board of Trustees, has over the past several years tried to push an academic bill of rights policy for the State University of New York. So, SUNY did something that I believe University of Pittsburgh Provost Maher testified that they did -they went back to see if they had received complaints

about political bias in the classroom. At SUNY, where we have 64 campuses and over 400,000 students . . . zero formal complaints about political bias.

In Florida, the state House subcommittee actually recommended an Academic Bill of Rights, but it eventually died. Why? One main reason was that when David Horowitz went to testify in front of a committee he couldn't give one concrete example of the problem in Florida—I might note that while Florida was considering passing legislation with no basis or evidence of political bias at their institutions, their department of education was projecting that if they did pass the legislation, schools would need over 4 million dollars in additional money to handle litigation—in short, the legislation was going to create a new problem, not solve one. And this is repeatedly the case.

If you haven't done so yet, I would encourage you to visit the Students for Academic Freedom website ([www.studentsforacademicfreedom.org](http://www.studentsforacademicfreedom.org)) set up by Mr. Horowitz and you will see that in state after state it is a single incident or no incident at all that has been used to stir up a hornet's nest. On this web site, students are encouraged to report on alleged instances of abuse by left-wing professors. Look at the kind of postings that appear. From one university—"Professor (X) introduced controversial material and mocked political/religious figures." Another person identified as a student complains of an "election related area" in the cyber library. Even when they make more serious charges, the entries appear as follows: "(Y) University-singled out, forced students, biased grading."

It's really madness but there's nothing funny about it, especially if you are one of the faculty members targeted. I hope we don't get into a situation today where accusations like this are made and the real facts come out weeks later or, for lack of documentation, don't come out at all. The problem is that committed ideologues don't care if the information is verified or not, because

they know in their hearts that higher education is guilty as charged so the details are just an inconvenience.

It is hard for me to imagine that anyone who has ever taught a class believes that their students fail to challenge their professors or put forward different ideas than their professors. That's good. Healthy skepticism and debate are fundamental to the teaching experience. As a professor, I can tell you that any educator prefers smart and engaged students on the opposite side of the ideological spectrum more than a student who just nods agreeably without independent ideas. If the situation is askew in one classroom, the fact is that just about every institution of higher education in America employs student evaluations and has a student complaint system where problems of this nature could be aired.

Representative Surra has said it repeatedly in these hearings—this is a solution looking for a problem that does not exist. I might modify that slightly and say that it is a solution that would *create* a problem, and a big one at that. Imagine government agencies, or, in fact, legislative agencies becoming involved on an ongoing basis in reviewing or oversight of hiring, teaching and research on campus. Under those circumstances, who can believe that colleges and universities will be immune from changes in the political winds as they try to conduct the day-to-day enterprise of education? Merely the threat of intervention by the government is enough, believe me, to frighten college administrators and some faculty so they are less likely to raise tough questions or discussion controversial issues in the classroom—and then what does higher education turn into but an exercise in getting credentialed where your professors don't push you to learn new things, to think differently, to get outside of your own conventional ways and learn to be creative and solve problems by examining issues from multiple perspectives.

So while those promoting this agenda may see faculty as the problem, their solution will not only hurt faculty, it will hurt students and, as was pointed out in the last hearings, will hurt institutions and systems that are subject to this type of governmental intrusion. The biggest losers, of course, will be the public institutions attended by most Pennsylvania students. These attacks interfere with the ability of the faculty at your state institutions to do their job and provide the kind of exemplary service that keeps them competitive while still affordable for those who cannot afford the price of private higher education.

Finally, I would like to suggest that that amount of energy going into these discussions would be far better spent on the real problems we are facing. I do not need to tell you about how difficult of a time we face financing public education, but we need to figure out how to do that because it will only become more important to help people get the education they are going to need—and not just those who can afford to take out huge student loans to pay for college. We need to figure out a way to get more full-time tenured faculty in our institutions rather than attacking them and substituting contingent faculty and graduate employees for them. We need to work on building programs that will help students succeed and persist through school. And we need to work to protect the principles of academic freedom that this country's higher education system was built on, not undermine them.

So let me close by saying that the AFT and our Pennsylvania affiliates stand ready to work with you on all of those things to strengthen your already fine system of higher education in Pennsylvania. Thank you for the opportunity to speak here today.