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## College to apologize to Bush for professor

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From the [Life & Mind Desk](#)

Published 3/7/2003 10:11 PM

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WASHINGTON, March 7 (UPI) -- The president of a California college is sending a letter to President Bush apologizing for an instructor who gave students extra credit for writing anti-war missives to the White House.

Citrus College President Louis E. Zellers wrote that Professor Rosalyn Kahn "did abuse her authority" in assigning students in her Speech 106 class to write letters to Bush protesting the possible war with Iraq.

"Students were clear in their understanding that they would only receive credit if they wrote 'protest' letters," Zellers said in a letter of thanks to FIRE -- the Foundation for Individual Rights in Education -- a Philadelphia-based campus watchdog group.

FIRE's Chief Executive Officer, Thor L. Halvorssen, praised the school. "When fully informed of a frightening violation of freedom of conscience, the college administration responded swiftly and boldly to restore liberty and to undo the harm already done," he said.

Citrus is a two-year community college in Glendora, Calif., in the foothills of the San Gabriel Mountains in eastern Los Angeles County. Kahn's Speech 106 class is a required course.

Kahn made a similar assignment with state Sen. Jack Scott, D-Pasadena, as the intended recipient. "Again, all students understood that they would only receive extra credit if they wrote letters expressing a specific political agenda," Zellers wrote.

Halvorssen said that Kahn collected the letters from the class and personally delivered them to Scott. "The senator's office told FIRE that the letters were not solicited," he said.

Zellers called Kahn's assignment "an injustice" that ought not to have happened. "I am sending a letter of apology to Senator Jack Scott, explaining the illegitimate nature of the assignment and requesting that all letters associated with the assignment be retracted," the college president wrote to FIRE.

Efforts to reach Kahn Friday afternoon were unsuccessful.

Samuel Lee, associate dean for Language Arts and Foreign Languages, told United Press International that he already had taken action before being contacted by FIRE but that the details and perspectives FIRE provided helped him to form his thoughts more clearly. "I'm thankful to them, actually, for that," he said.

Lee said on Feb. 27 he spent an hour with two students -- including Chris Stevens, who contacted FIRE and requested its assistance -- "listening to their complaints about this instructor." The next day Lee asked Kahn if there was any truth to the allegation that she gave students extra credit assignments to serve her personal agenda. "I was

able to confirm with her that that did take place," Lee said.

The dean said on Tuesday he sent Kahn a detailed e-mail, with copies to the students, saying the practice had to stop and must be set right. All students in the class were given the chance to resubmit letters expressing any political opinion they might have and receive credit for them. Lee said Kahn was instructed to apologize to students "and a number of other actions we wanted her to take."

Lee said FIRE's fax on Tuesday provided him with details, and other complaints, of which he had been unaware. "They also sort of lit a fire under my butt, saying: 'Hey! This is very serious. We're not satisfied with what we've seen of your response yet.'"

On Thursday Lee gave Kahn the day off and met with the class for more than an hour. He asked the students "a list of very specific questions" about the allegations. "I was able to verify that these two assignments were given, and it was essentially the way the student (Stevens) and FIRE were portraying it."

Lee said after hearing what the class had to say, he publicly apologized to the students on behalf of the college for what he views as an abuse of power.

Lee told UPI that he promised students a written account of their grades to date so they can make any disputes known before marks are assigned.

Stevens was heartened by the outcome. "In three days, FIRE undid four awful weeks of abusive power," he told the foundation. "I'm so grateful to FIRE for coming to our rescue."

The nonprofit describes itself as "devoted to free speech, individual liberty, religious freedom, the rights of conscience, legal equality, due process, and academic freedom on our nation's campuses." It was founded in 1999 by University of Pennsylvania historian Alan Charles Kors and Boston civil rights attorney Harvey A. Silverglate.

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