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Professor Takes Heat Over Wetbacks Stance

Thursday, January 24, 2008 10:50 AM

By: Newsmax Staff

Brandeis University declared a professor guilty of racial harassment and placed a monitor in his classes after he criticized the use of the word “wetbacks” in his Latin American politics course.

Professor Donald Hindley, a nearly 50-year veteran of teaching, was threatened with termination without being granted a formal hearing by Brandeis.

“Brandeis’ actions demonstrate a fundamental disregard for academic freedom and for fair, rational fact-finding procedures,” said Greg Lukianoff, president of the Foundation for Individual Rights in Education (FIRE), which is seeking justice on Hindley’s behalf.

“Professor Hindley is a respected scholar who until now has not faced a single student complaint in nearly five decades of teaching. Punishing him for actually criticizing the use of what is often considered an ethnic slur shows a mindless application of ‘sensitivity at all costs’ at the expense of freedom of expression.”

In his fall 2007 course on Latin American politics, Hindley allegedly used a term that at least one student found objectionable. Despite his repeated demands to Brandeis administrators to disclose in writing precisely what was offensive, they have refused to tell him.

According to Hindley, he explained to his class that Mexican migrants in the United States are sometimes referred to pejoratively as “wetbacks.”

FIRE said in a release: “If this statement against racism was at the center of Brandeis’s investigation, this is an extreme example of suppressing academic speech by taking it out of context.”

A student’s complaint about Hindley’s speech was passed on to Provost Marty Krauss and Director of Employment Jesse Simone.

Simone interrogated Hindley on October 22, 2007, and submitted her report to Krauss the next day without giving Hindley a chance to make final comments and clarifications — a right promised in Brandeis’s policies, according to FIRE.

On October 30, Simone informed Hindley that he was guilty of making “statements in class that were inappropriate, racial, and discriminatory.” Krauss threatened Hindley with termination and ordered a monitor to observe Hindley’s classroom activities until Krauss determined he was “able to conduct [himself] appropriately in the classroom.”

Brandeis’s Faculty Senate met in emergency session about Hindley’s case on November 8 and strongly faulted the administration in a unanimous decision.

FIRE wrote to Brandeis University President Jehuda Reinharz on December 12, reminding him that “if

Brandeis is to legitimately claim to provide a liberal education, it cannot prioritize individual sensitivities over the freedom of speech and academic freedom of its professors.”

Brandeis has not yet responded to FIRE, and Krauss sent Hindley a letter on January 7, 2008, stating that “the University now considers this matter closed.”

Adam Kissel, Director of FIRE’s Individual Rights Defense Program, said: “Brandeis has yet to explain how administrators could have so grossly misinterpreted normal classroom speech as ‘harassment.’ FIRE will pursue this matter until Brandeis finally applies basic standards of academic freedom and fair procedures to Donald Hindley’s case.”

FIRE is a nonprofit educational foundation that works on behalf of individual rights, due process, freedom of expression, academic freedom, and rights of conscience at U.S. colleges and universities.

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