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There's a code of correctness at colleges

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Alan Charles Kors believes the adage that power corrupts.

He holds that if the political right ran the universities, students and faculty would have to take loyalty oaths and be forced to pay homage to Western Civilization's heroes.

But the right isn't in charge, he says. The left is. And today's colleges and universities freely crush dissent and squash any scholar or student who doesn't go along with the left's program of anti-Western crusades. Censorship abounds, he says. And the campus censors are slowly killing freedom.

Kors says he knows this firsthand. He's a professor of history at the University of Pennsylvania. And because he's a conservative, he jokes that his faculty colleagues wouldn't know what to call him if they couldn't call him fascist. He also says, more seriously, that because he's a conservative, he wouldn't be hired today.

Kors also is the founder of the Foundation for Individual Rights in Education (www.thefire.org), an anti-political correctness organization that fights for free speech on campuses.

Kors came to the University of Delaware this week to debate whether modern universities are a threat to liberty in America. The Intercollegiate Studies Institute and several campus and state conservative groups sponsored the event.

It wasn't much of a debate, however.

This isn't a jab at Kors, or his opponent, William Galston, a political science professor at the University of Maryland. They staged as gentlemanly a debate as I have ever seen.

Little disagreement

The problem -- from the debate point of view -- was that Kors and Galston weren't that far apart. Galston is a political liberal. He was an official in the Clinton administration. But he also is the co-author of two reports about what troubles the Democratic Party and his analysis is anything but PC. The reports are worth searching for on the Internet: "The Politics of Evasion" (1989) and "The Politics of Exclusion" (2005).

Galston readily admitted the examples Kors provided were outrageous. But he said they weren't typical of modern life on campus.

However, he did say that colleges do have a right to limit some forms of speech. For example, you shouldn't be allowed to unfurl a banner that used the words the radio personality Don Imus used to describe the Rutgers women's basketball team.

But as soon as the words got out of Galston's mouth, Kors shot back: But can you play them on a CD in the dorm or teach them in a class about rap music?

Kors said the problem on campuses is selective enforcement.

It's hypocrisy, he said. Kors doesn't care what the professors and administrators believe as long as they are honest about.

In a sense, he said, many faculty members truly believe that their students are the progeny of a homophobic, sexist, racist, ultra-patriotic society, and for \$40,000 a year they will cure them of it.

Kors said on a college campus the protected groups are gays and lesbians, racial minorities and feminists. Then he added that there was a hierarchy of preference:

Race trumps sexuality. Gender trumps race. But careerism trumps everything.

Galston agreed.

Much of what goes on campuses that is deplorable, he said, is less political correctness than self-protection. Caution and timidity rule. "Junior faculty are encouraged to publish," he said, "but to publish safely."

Professors don't want to be challenged, Kors said. And all the rules about speech codes and student re-education classes are part of every university's risk management.

Now that is a disturbing corruption of power.

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