Academic Freedom After 9/11: Is it “Superstition”? 

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What’s Going On Here?

“...a newly reinvigorated war is currently being waged...the universities are where the major skirmishes are taking place.”

“[They are] neo-McCarthyites...assaulting our liberties”

“[They are] Jihadists...determined to transform the American university into a species of the madrassa...”

Historical Perspective

- 1915 – AAUP – *General Declaration of Principles*
- 1940 – AAUP – *Statement of Principles*
  - Coincided with Un-American Activities Committee chaired by Sen. Joseph McCarthy

Challenges to Academic Freedom in the light of September 11, 2001

- Freedom to pursue research
- Freedom to publish
- Freedom to teach
- Freedom to speak

Freedom to Pursue Research

- Example: “Card Memo” – March 2002 – reiterated the need to protect what was called “sensitive but unclassified” information related to homeland security.

Freedom to Publish

- “Cookbook” for smallpox derivative – Univ. of Pennsylvania School of Medicine – May 2002
- “Mail-order supplies” for poliovirus – SUNY – Stony Brook School of Medicine – Summer 2003

Freedom to Teach

- Visa application backlog
- Will the U.S. continue to be the country of choice for international students to come to study?

Freedom to Speak

- **Americans for Victory over Terrorism (AVOT)**
  - Founded by William Bennett

- **American Council of Trustees and Alumni (ACTA)**
  - Founded by Lynne Cheney

We learn from history what happens when a nation’s intellectuals are unwilling to sustain its civilization. In 1933, the Oxford Student Union held a famous debate over whether it was moral for Britons to fight for king and country. After a wide-ranging discussion in which the leading intellectuals could find no distinction between British colonialism and world fascism, the Union resolved that England would “in no circumstances fight for king and country.” As the Wall Street Journal reported: “Von Ribbentrop sent back the good news to Germany’s new chancellor, Hitler: The West will not fight for its own survival.”

Freedom to Speak, continued

- University of South Florida – December 2002
  - AAUP stopped “just short” of censuring the USF administration for their handling of Prof. Sami Al-Arian after his arrest in February 2003.

- And, of course…

Point to Ponder

- ...[A]s suspicion began to fray the social fabric, certain pathological types rose to national prominence: the informer, whose repeated purgations of guilt acquired the public’s sanction; the defamer, whose aggressions against his fellows took socially acceptable forms; the investigator, who was allowed to pry and accuse without the customary judicial restraints. Finally, at both times, the public, called upon to judge difficult problems of individual guilt or innocence, took refuge in the passive and naive assumption that where there is smoke there must be fire, neglecting to inform itself as to whether there might not in fact be a smokescreen.