Climate of fear threatens academic freedom

by Beth Selberger

Academic freedom... applies to both teaching and research. Freedom in research is fundamental to the advancement of truth. Academic freedom in its teaching aspect is fundamental for freedom in its teaching aspect is fundamental for freedom and Tenure. Freedom and Tenure

Controversy is at the heart of free academic inquiry which the entire [1940] statement is designed to foster.

1970 Interpretive Comments

Earlier this semester, I issued an assignment to another Ascend writer asking him to interview a tenured and untenured faculty on the widely debated and controversial issue of tenure itself. The intent of the story assignment was to reveal the range of opinions in existence at Daemen regarding tenure and the process of acquiring it, the necessity of it, its effectiveness in protecting academic freedom, and one's chances of receiving it. We could not have anticipated that the response to our inquiry would reveal such degrees of tension and discomfort surrounding this issue. Not one untenured professor approached the subject would comment or participate in the interview.

The perspective which the acquisition of tenure is based is clearly outlined in the Daemen Faculty Handbook. However, the unwillingness of untenured professors to publicly comment on this issue suggests that those responsible for granting tenure are maintaining a climate in which candidates perceive a threat. This perception may also be exacerbated by the current financial crunch. The criteria used to evaluate the tenure applicant, as they appear in the Handbook, are as follows:

- Evidence of teaching effectiveness and excellence
- Evidence of productive scholarship of high quality
- Evidence of continuing academic growth
- Ordinarily, evidence of possessing the appropriate terminal degree for the area in which one teaches. In certain areas in which the appropriate terminal degree may beaphetical, the candidate should supply a letter from his/her chairperson describing the appropriate terminal degree in that field.

Student and departmental evaluations are examined, as well as any publishing credits, participation in academic conferences and other academic achievements and involvements appearing on the candidates resume.

The definition and limits of tenure, as well as the procedure for application appears to be in accordance with the 1940 Statement of Principles on Academic Freedom and Tenure and the 1970 Interpretive Comments, two imperative documents upon which American universities and college base their policies. One remaining question, then, is whether academic freedom exists before tenure is granted. The unwillingness of untenured faculty to speak publicly on the controversial issue of tenure suggests that it does not. Indeed, apprehensions, perhaps even fear of retribution, indicates that criteria beyond what is expressed in the
Student activism sheds light on authority and academic freedom

by Beth Seilberger

Although student activism is normally reserved for railing against authority to achieve a specific result, it also illuminates the true dangers of the occasionally abusive opposition. In the latter instance, the students learn the difference between adolescent rebellion and the conscious realization of a wrong and the action of correcting it. They also learn the difference between swollowing a dogma for the sake of academic safety, and procuring guaranteed academic freedom for all students after themselves. Recent conflict within the Davis English Department illustrates this very circumstance.

At the beginning of the semester, a proposal for changes in the English major curriculum provoked a number of students majoring in English, including myself, to act in favor of maintaining the current curriculum. Perceiving the changes as having the potential to severely relax the standards mandated by the current curriculum, students challenged the proposal first through informal discussion with Dr. Robert Morace, Chairperson of the English Department, and then by writing letters to Dr. Kathleen Boone, Intrim Vice President of Academic Affairs and Dean of the College.

Within a week, a meeting was arranged by Boone between her involved faculty and students. Students’ letters and, apparently, conduct and remarks expressed during the meeting achieved a partial success, as Boone chose not to act on the proposal. However, students’ frustrations were still exponentially increased because of the opposing professors’ unwillingness to acknowledge the valid concerns expressed, the professors’ inability to do so, and the potential to severely relax the standards mandated by the current curriculum. Within a week, a meeting was arranged by Boone between her involved faculty and students. Students’ letters and, apparently, conduct and remarks expressed during the meeting achieved a partial success, as Boone chose not to act on the proposal. However, students’ frustrations were still exponentially increased because of the opposing professors’ unwillingness to acknowledge the valid concerns expressed, the professors’ inability to do so, and the potential to severely relax the standards mandated by the current curriculum.

Morace, the author of the proposal for curriculum changes, stressed that one of the greatest benefits of the new curriculum was the freedom it offered to students in their course selections and therefore, the direction of their literary study. The accompanying chart illustrates the varying requirements of the current and proposed curriculums, as well as the requirements maintained by Beth.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Current</th>
<th>Proposed</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Lit 112 Approaches to Literature</td>
<td>Lit 201 World Literature I</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lit 203 British Literature I</td>
<td>Lit 202 World Literature II</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lit 204 British Literature II</td>
<td>Lit 211 American Literature I</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lit 409 or 410 Shakespeare</td>
<td>Lit 212 American Literature II</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Eng 307 English Language</td>
<td>Lit 301 Chaucer</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Advanced Writing</td>
<td>Lit 443 Senior Seminar (thesis)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

According to Morace, the elimination of World literature, Chaucer, the thesis, and one American literature as requirements in the curriculum gives students freedom to choose four literature electives and, consequently, to specialize in a particular area of literature at the undergraduate level. However, this freedom is granted without consideration for students who may possess an inadequate literary background, or an inadequate awareness of what they should be exposed to. The system, then, poses many threats to a comprehensive course selection process. The elimination of World and American literature survey courses as requirements particularly de-emphasizes the students’ exposure to the most vital works of Western literary art. At best, under the proposed changes, the enthusiastic student could take a variety of courses in World, British, and American literature, perhaps opt to write the thesis at the completion of his undergraduate career. At worst, this plan caters to the indolent, apathetic, and less able student who may only choose courses that interest him and are reputed to be easy. This student will be empowered to make decisions about that in which he is uninformed as an undergraduate.

cont. on pg. 4 “Activism”

Eating Art

by Dr. Peter Siedlecki

I know even before I put the following words on paper I am going to sound like a Luddite. Most people understand the anti-technological implications of that word. For those who don’t, let me say that it was coined after groups of workers in the 19th century became involved in a movement to destroy newly developed machinery because mechanization was taking jobs away. Their leader was a man named Ned Ludd. Since my intention in composing this piece is to question the Internet, my sitting here putting it together on my computer makes that intention somewhat ironic—sort of like playing with the monster that is threatening to consume me. But, believing that the Internet is consuming anyone—consuming our judgment, and even our relinquishing a portion of our humanness. We have always had a tremendous respect for authors and to watch our authorship jump inexorably. It is not like the old typewriter—not like that passive old machine whose paper just sat there rolled tight against the platen until we manually did something with it, extracted it, folded it, piled it in manuscripts. That passive machine demanded our attention and effort, our ability to communicate. Our attention and effort, our ability to communicate.

Maybe it would be a good idea to remove that last adjective and concede only improved communication to the computer and resist asserting to characterize it as human. I have seen too many people who behave one way on an e-mail list and totally differently in person to give willing recognition to electronic humanism. There is something about the way those little black characters jump onto that white background, displacing the prompt as they move that seems to invite our relinquishing a portion of our humanness. We have always had a tremendous respect for authority. Citizens of previously totalitarian countries have grown accusatory frequently been bemoaning the passing of the old ways because it was better when someone else—authority—told them what was in charge of their destinies. The computer, however, offers a kind of freedom we can live with, one that allows us—at least more within the confines of our society. It allows us the opportunity to become authors and to watch our authorship jump onto that white page pushing that prompt along.

The views expressed in the Ascent are those of the authors and not necessarily those of the staff or sponsors. Please do not use the rest of us as scapegoats to lynch.

The Ascent

re-established by Beth Seilberger and Amanda Poreda (1/1999)

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The Ascent

Page 2
Daemen Demands

Name: Victor  
Age: 21  
Resident  
What would make you spend more time at Daemen when you're not studying?  
Maybe if they had more on-campus activities, a better game room, another gym, a 24 hour computer room. A lot of times people have papers and they don't get them done before midnight.  
Where do you hang out other than Daemen?  
Friends, movies, mall, shopping stuff like that. I don't really hang out.  
What is on your mind RIGHT NOW?  
Um...how will I do in school. I guess. Not that I'm doing bad, but it's always important.

Name: Stacey Rae  
Age: 19  
Commuter  
What would make you spend more time at Daemen when you're not studying?  
If there was cooler things to do around here.  
Where do you hang out other than Daemen?  
Mainly at my apartment and other people's apartments.  
What is on your mind RIGHT NOW?  
Getting through the end of the year.

Name: Jonathan  
Age: 23  
Commuter  
What would make you spend more time at Daemen when you're not studying?  
I would say, probably, events that are more centered around art, like theater, gallery openings, and also more activities with beer. If they served BEER at artistic activities...  
Where do you hang out other than Daemen?  
Home, I'm a hermit.  
What is on your mind RIGHT NOW?  
The fact that I'm not reaching my potential as a student because I'm a member of the oppressed class that must work TOO MUCH. I have to feed my hungry ass. Eat the rich!

Name: Mike  
Age: 30  
Commuter  
What would make you spend more time at Daemen when you're not studying?  
Absolutely nothing. I suppose there could be something, but I can't think of it right now. Women.  
Where do you hang out other than Daemen?  
Work.  
What is on your mind RIGHT NOW?  
My classes and the grades I get in them. Oh and whether or not I get into upper division

Name: Matt  
Age: 22  
Commuter  
What would make you spend more time at Daemen when you're not studying?  
mmm...next question? A center where more student activities are going on. More events, 3-D movies definitely.  
Where do you hang out other than Daemen?  
Classic Q and local filthy bars.  
What is on your mind RIGHT NOW?  
That I have 5 minutes to eat before class

Name: Nicole  
Age: 19  
Resident  
What would make you spend more time at Daemen when you're not studying?  
Friends.  
Where do you hang out other than Daemen?  
I don't hang out off campus. No car.  
What is on your mind RIGHT NOW?  
School work. Finals coming up.

Name: Jen  
Age: 24  
Resident  
What would make you spend more time at Daemen when you're not studying?  
More social activities. More sports, better concerts.  
Where do you hang out other than Daemen?  
UB.  
What is on your mind RIGHT NOW?  
Getting through tests. Getting through finals.

Name: Stacey Rae  
Age: 19  
Commuter  
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Age: 30  
Commuter  
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Getting through tests. Getting through finals.

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Continuations

Little Elian is with His Dad

by Justin Gerstein

Elian Gonzalez is with his rightful guardian: his father. Attorney General Janet Reno had to make the tough but necessary decision in the early hours of April 22. Since then, many images from that frightful morning have come from the Miami relatives’ lives.

The Clinton Administration has come under high degrees of pressure for the method it followed this, and other, internal conflicts. As Ruby Ridge or WACO, the latter instances, Reno made tough but correct choices, for better or worse.

The Miami relatives throw a premature victory party when the Federal Appellate Court said that Elian had to stay in the United States until May 11, when the court decides whether the 6-year-old Cuban boy can apply for political asylum in the United States.

Reno and her top negotiators attempted to peacefully reunite Elian and his father, who was allowed to travel to the United States from Cuba. Until about 4:15 on the morning of the raid, Reno and Elian’s Miami relatives were negotiating for a peaceful reunification between father and son, according to a transcript of their telephone conversation that was released by the Miami relatives’ lawyers. The final hour, however, was not present on the transcript. I speculate that negotiations broke down and Reno had no choice but to go in full force. At 5:30 a.m. Reno sent federal agents from the Immigration and Naturalization Service (I.N.S.) to rescue Elian from the Miami relatives.

The Miami relatives had this coming. From the beginning, they have been negotiating in bad faith. They also used the little boy as hostage by forcing him to make home videos and by coercing him to say things that he doesn’t understand. On top of that, some protesters drew the two fiances buttons in the meeting with faculty with little more than a somewhat conducing statement of appreciation for their concern. This interaction with current students suggest to me that the academic freedom guaranteed by the proposal is for professors to act neglectfully or abuse authority. In the circumstance involving current students, they have done both by ignoring us.

By ignoring our questions, criticism, and to a large extent our concern for the future of the department, they have contributed to the validity of our opposition to the proposal and the freedom it allows in a way that few of us had ever suspected. The proposal, which is clear, is allowed by us voice to concern without adequate acknowledging or responding to it, they have undermined the potential of our academic freedom. But most importantly, the unwillingness to acknowledge our awareness of the inherent flaws in their thinking should not surprise me. By making the severe and logical proposal, the curriculum does not require the English major to demonstrate or engage in any extensive scholarly research, writing, or thinking. Perhaps we should not think critically, reach our own conclusions, or be conscious of anything except what they feed us, in and out of the classroom.

There is a strong possibility that without student awareness, concern, and willingness to act in opposition to the proposal, with whom we must deal for the remainder of our undergraduate careers, that this proposal might have been passed due a minute faculty majority in favor of change. Currently, the proposal is awaiting a review by the EPC, this time including letters of students and hiring position. If the EPC again approves the proposed curriculum, the final decision will be left to Dr. Edward Clau, incoming Vice President of Academic Affairs.

Would have to pay for it. That makes sense, just as it does for the CD store Travelocity.com for my plane tickets and Yankees.com for my baseball-fan paraphernalia. But as I am doing so, I feel values and creativity of Freddy Mercury and Jim Morrison, and I am not in the I.N.S. to rescue Elian and his father. Children like Elian, who have made a promise to their mothers to belong with their Dads, not distant relatives. This is a major victory for all fathers in custody battles.

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“Art” cont. from pg. 2

taste in pop music. He added that he could download their greatest works at no cost via MP3 and Napster.

This is when saving money made me slightly upset, and my reaction relates to something that has been festering deep within me. I recently joined Garden.com and discovered that if I wanted to procure a particular species of dwarf bamboo, I

most likely presidential candidates, Vice President Al Gore and Texas Governor George W. Bush, into the middle of the controversy.

Most notably was Gore’s deflection from the Clinton position that he would return Elian to his father. This was a poor political choice for the Vice President, as most Cuban Americans align themselves with the Republican Party. Florida, we must not forget, only carries 25 electoral votes, which is not the largest or anywhere near the largest state. (California wields the most political power in the country, with 54 electoral votes.) Even New York has more clout than Florida, as it carries 33 electoral votes.

After the rescue, the Republican Party demand­ed to have congressional hearings on the ordeal, and some Republican Congressmen began compar­ing little Elian to Jesus Christ and martyr throughout history. This is pretty pathetic: the Messiah of the Republican Party is a 6-year-old Cuban boy who is illegally in the United States.

Who am I to pass judgment?

Last November, little Elian arrived on the shores of the United States, which is illegal under the Immigration Act. The law simply states that you cannot enter the United States legally for purposes of immigration from the sea.

However, Reno allowed the little boy’s entrance into the United States and put him in the temporary custody of his Miami relatives after his Elian’s mother died when her boat capsized off of the Florida coast. It was Reno’s duty to make sure that the child was reunited with his closest blood relative once he came to the United States. Reno made a decision to send him in sending in the I.N.S. to rescue little Elian and return him to his father. Children like Elian, who have made a promise to their mothers to belong with their Dads, not distant relatives. This is a major victory for all fathers in custody battles.

“Activism” cont. from pg. 2

Of course, this is where supporters of the proposal insist that they will make sure that every student will cover the material that he needs, including sufficient background material for special­ized, upper level literature electives which require background knowledge of various literary movements and major influential works of different historical periods. But who is to make the distinction and how will it be made? For instance, how will instructors have to do these courses? Whether these social areas fulfill student desires is now up to the students themselves. If, of course, they can figure out what it is they want.

Imagining how much faster this all would have gone if a student said, “Hey, why don’t we throw down some comfy chairs and couches?”

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