

Critical Education and Academic Freedom: A reply to David Horowitz

David Horowitz is apparently about to come out with a rehash of his book on radical professors, this new one called "Indoctrination U." In it he will likely publish the excerpt by him about me that I have here on the blog. People interested in what faculty have done and are doing to oppose his attempts to police critical intellectuals and activists should go to teachersfordemocracy.org and criticalthinking.org for more information.

The irony for my own part in this latest round is that my teaching evaluations have never been higher and I just won one of our College's teaching awards on the basis, in part, of my openness to controversy in the classroom. Yes, I teach political subjects because that is the subject matter of my discipline—communication, political discourse, social movements, critical theory, and political rhetoric.

One strategy that some groups are undertaking is to try to refute the claims Horowitz makes. However, I am not sure what is to be gained by disputing Horowitz's "facts." I am a member of the organizations he lists; he has faithfully reproduced my syllabi. I indeed do include the books and topics he cites (as if they were patently ridiculous, which they are not). The level of controversy is not about his facts but about his assumptions and his goal: to police intellectuals in what is fast becoming one of the only spaces for any dissent at all in the United States. He and I agree on the content of my courses in large part. Where I disagree is in his assumption that teaching critical material is wrong. Another problematic assumption: Students can't think for themselves. Try telling my students here at the University of Texas that! They'll tell him where to get off. Critical thinking is not indoctrination; when the entire political landscape is dominated by one point of view, it is ridiculous to locate indoctrination in the University and among the small number of radical intellectuals. We are doing counter-indoctrination, if anything—but I tend to let students set the tone and raise the controversies in my class anyway.

There is only one small factual thing that could be mentioned—I of course do teach conservative documents in my classes, but mostly they are excerpts in my course packet rather than books. From Ronald Reagan to Pat Buchanan to Ann Coulter, students are

exposed to conservative discourse in every single one of my classes. In addition, I ask students to bring materials of interest to them to debate—in my class gender and communication we had an excellent discussion about the flap around the former president of Harvard's disparaging remarks about women's intellectual abilities, with students arguing from diverse perspectives.

I've had a lot of conservative students and some of them are fans of mine.

Here is one letter from such a student:

"To the Editor:

"Let's get two things straight before we begin. I am a fervent capitalist and extremely conservative, so no one can say I'm writing this for any reason except out of my absolute admiration for Dr. Cloud. And before anyone dismisses me as a young, easily impressionable college kid, I'm 43 years old and the mother of children older than many of you reading this. With that said, I would like to go on record in saying that Dana Cloud is one of the finest teachers I have had the joy to encounter during my college experience.

"It is painfully and pathetically obvious that Mr. Horowitz did not have the intellectual honesty nor the journalistic integrity to interview any of Dr. Cloud's students before writing his hit piece. I rather strongly disagree with some of Dr. Cloud's positions, but while I was her student, I felt completely comfortable stating my opinions in class, regardless of whether I agreed with her or not.

"Dr. Cloud did what a good educator is supposed to do: she provided a forum for an open and lively debate of ideas. She encouraged everyone to give their opinions. She provided materials that were thought-provoking, which, as far as I understand it, is the very point of going to college. As a person, I find Dr. Cloud delightful. As an educator, I find Dr. Cloud exemplary. One of the 101 most dangerous professors? Only if you think a professor who is unfailingly open and honest is dangerous.

"I may not agree or even like some of Dr. Cloud's political positions. But she is my fellow American and has the right to express her beliefs. And I point out again, that as an educator, she never forced

her beliefs on anyone, never tried to "indoctrinate" in the classroom. She is an intelligent, vibrant, and wonderfully effective educator, and I pray that this situation serves as a springboard for people to discuss the vital issues of civil rights and freedom of speech.

"I will be horrified if Dr. Cloud is damaged by the obviously slanted piece done by Mr. Horowitz. With all honesty, there are only 4 professors I have had who truly stand out in my mind as wonderful teachers after 122 hours of college. Dr. Cloud, without one second's hesitation, is the top of those four and I consider it an honor to speak for her publicly.

Paula Hudson
Senior, Corporate Communication"

I'm posting this not to crow about my accomplishments or popularity but to make the content available to anyone who wants to use it in defense of academic freedom.

Horowitz is an attack dog for the right--he just keeps coming.