

National Conference on Academic Freedom at UCSD April 13 to Discuss Current Threats

'Blacklisted' faculty members will speak

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Students and Scholars Mobilized Against Repressive Times (SMART) at the University of California, San Diego will host a national conference, "Defending Academic Freedom, Promoting Equitable Universities," on April 13 to address current threats to academic freedom, diversity, student organizations and free speech on college campuses across the country.

The conference will take place from 9 a.m.-12 p.m. at the Price Center, Santa Cruz room; 1 p.m.-7 p.m. at the Price Center, Gallery B; and 7 p.m.-11 p.m. at Warren Lecture Hall 2005.

Speakers and panelists will range from faculty who have been personally targeted such as blacklisted UCLA "Dirty 30" professor Saree Makdisi and Christine Littleton, to representatives from organizations fighting for academic freedom such as American Association of University Professors' Marcus Harvey and College Freedom founder John K. Wilson. Representatives from the Arab Anti-Discrimination Committee, American Federation of Teachers, as well as faculty and student leaders from across the state will also speak.

"We are currently witnessing the largest threat to academic freedom since the McCarthy years of the 1950's," said Michelle Stuckey, a graduate student in the Literature department at UCSD. "We are seeing government intrusion in course content, grant language, and funding of certain programs, as well as increased government surveillance on student organizations."

Currently, two states have passed and 14 state legislatures are considering David Horowitz's "Student Bill of Rights," which would give the government broad power to control what professors and student organizations say. In addition, anti-war student organizations, and Middle East Studies professors and programs are currently finding themselves under strict government surveillance and harassment.

"The War on Terror has reached college campuses," said Adam Lewis, SMART member. "Professors and students are under suspicion for being disloyal, a subversive fifth column." The House of Representatives recently passed H.R. 609 that would submit Middle East and all area studies to strict conditions on the presumption that terrorists may fund scholarly research. In California, the FBI has targeted an anti-war student group at UC Santa Cruz, and a professor at Pomona College. Conservative organizations such as David Horowitz's Students for Academic Freedom and Campus Watch are also behind attacks on academic freedom, and encourage students to report professors who they consider "biased."

This will be the first national response to these attacks," said Scott Boehm, SMART co-founder. "David Horowitz met last week in Washington to consolidate his power, and now we're fighting back."

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