



For Immediate Release
November 21, 2006

Contact
Megan Fitzgerald / (404) 354-4586
Craig Smith / (240) 461-6912

Pennsylvania Joins More than 20 States in Rejecting Legislation to Restrict a Free Exchange of Ideas on Campus

(Harrisburg, PA)—Today the Pennsylvania House Select Committee on Academic Freedom in Higher Education voted to reject legislation to institute either the so-called “Academic Bill of Rights” or similar restrictions on a free exchange of ideas in higher education. With today’s vote, Pennsylvania joins more than 20 other states in rejecting government intervention in what faculty can teach and students can learn inside the classroom.

“We commend the committee for rejecting attempts to restrict what students can learn in the classroom. There is no evidence of a problem in Pennsylvania higher education and overwhelming evidence that a free exchange of ideas is necessary for students to learn,” said Megan Fitzgerald, Field Director for the Free Exchange on Campus Coalition. “Now that this process is over, we hope that the legislature will turn to the real problems students face in Pennsylvania, such as paying for their education,” continued Fitzgerald.

The Pennsylvania House Committee on Academic Freedom in Higher Education was formed last year after passage of HR 177. The committee was charged with investigating state colleges and universities to ensure that there’s an “environment conducive to the pursuit of knowledge and truth and the expression of independent thought,” and to ensure institutions have procedures in place to handle student complaints. The committee received evidence from all Pennsylvania public higher education institutions and heard from nine days worth of witnesses.

“Though the committee officially rejected legislation today, we anticipated this conclusion since the committees hearings ended,” said Craig Smith, Free Exchange on Campus Coordinator, “our analysis of the hearings showed that when you looked at what the students, faculty members and administrators of Pennsylvania’s higher education institutions said at these hearings, the overwhelming majority of them (86%) testified that there was no problem to be found in Pennsylvania schools.”

At the hearings, each and every institution submitted evidence of existing academic freedom policies and student grievance and similar procedures that could address any future problems.

For a full accounting of evidence before the committee and additional information, please see our attached analysis and background on www.freeexchangeoncampus.org.

Free Exchange on Campus Coalition Members

American Association of University Professors

American Civil Liberties Union

American Federation of Teachers

American Library Association / Association of College & Research Libraries

Campus Progress / Center for American Progress

Center for Campus Free Speech

Free Press

National Association of State PIRGs

National Education Association / NEA Student Program

People for the American Way Foundation / Young People For

United States Student Association