

The Hoppe Victory Blog: <http://blog.mises.org/hoppe>

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Academic freedom is under assault, particularly for those whose writing, teaching, and research challenges dominant political ideologies. The special concern of this letter is the case of Hans-Hermann Hoppe, Professor of Economics at the University of Nevada, Las Vegas, and Senior Fellow of the Ludwig von Mises Institute.

As professors, students, and citizens, we support Professor Hoppe in his battle for academic freedom against the assault on his freedom to teach by the administration of his University. The developments surrounding the harassment of Professor Hoppe threaten not only the interests of one intellectual but also the rights and freedoms of everyone in the academic community.



Even the University's decision, made under pressure, to withdraw the complaint against Hoppe leaves a chill and a sense of uncertainty among faculty about whether and to what extent they are permitted to exercise their freedom. Due to national and international coverage, the scholarly world is watching to see how this case is finally resolved.

The initial concern arose from a "letter of instruction" issued by the University, signed by Provost Raymond W. Alden, III, and hand delivered to Professor Hoppe. The new policy announced by this letter would chill free speech and dramatically stifle academic freedom at UNLV, and send a very ominous signal within American academia. Moreover, this letter arrived after nearly a year of investigations and harassment of Hoppe in which he was under a gag order and threatened with financial penalties and severe forms of censure.

That this could happen to Hoppe, a world-renowned economist, author, and speaker, as well as a pioneer in the libertarian tradition of political economy, is striking enough to make one worry about the status of colleagues with lower public profile and less academic protection.

The Mises Institute has a special interest in his case. Hoppe is an adherent of the Austrian school of economics (leading Austrian school economist F.A. Hayek won the Nobel Prize for Economics in 1974), he earned his Ph.D. in Philosophy and his *Habilitation* degree in Sociology and Economics, both from the Goethe-Universität in Germany. He taught at several German universities as well as at the Johns Hopkins University, Bologna Center for Advanced International Studies, Bologna, Italy. In 1986, Hoppe joined UNLV's economics department and has been a tenured full professor since 1992.

Constantly in demand for speaking engagements around the world, Hoppe is author of dozens of scholarly books and articles. His scholarly work covers areas such as money and banking, the methodology of the social sciences, comparative systems, European economic history, political ethics, the market for security, the theory of ownership and property rights, and economic institutions generally.

He is a radical thinker and a system builder of the sort that academia should treasure, for his ideas offer a relentless challenge to students and colleagues. Because Professor Hoppe enjoys an international reputation—his books and essays have been translated and published in Korean, Italian, Spanish, Czech, Chinese, French, Danish, German, and eight other languages—his case has benefited from an outpouring of support, especially from students who have studied under him both in the US and abroad. He serves as senior fellow of the Mises Institute and editor-at-large of the *Journal of Libertarian Studies*.

The controversy surrounds comments made during two money and banking class lectures in March 2004, during which Professor Hoppe discussed the concept of "time preference." Time preference is an important notion in economics, and particularly in the Austrian school of economics, because it draws attention to the importance of time in the market process, identifying individuals' varying degrees of willingness to defer the immediate consumption of goods in favor of saving and investment.

In his lecture, Hoppe explained by way of illustration that certain demographic groups that might tend not to have children, such as homosexuals, generally do not adopt as long an economic time horizon as those that do have children. The same is true, he said, of other groups such as the very young and very old, *ceteris paribus*.

Individuals with higher time preference such as homosexuals, he continued, might engage in riskier behaviors. Agree or disagree with his illustration of an economic principle, an illustration which is certainly subject to empirical investigation, his comments were within bounds of the topic in question. (An audio version of the full lecture is available online.)

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This was the lecture that led to the complaint and the subsequent international uproar against the UNLV administration for failing to defend Hoppe's freedom to teach. Instead of dismissing the student's complaint, the University launched a series of menacing investigations which culminated in the February 9, 2005 letter that declared that Professor Hoppe had created a "hostile learning environment." The letter went on to instruct the professor to "cease mischaracterizing opinion as objective fact."

The decision by the UNLV administration was an unfortunate and significant erosion of the academic freedom guaranteed by the University's own bylaws, which state, in pertinent part:

Academic freedom is essential to these purposes and is applicable to both teaching and research. Freedom in teaching is fundamental for the protection of the rights of the teacher in teaching and of the student in learning. ... A member of the faculty has freedom and an obligation, in the classroom or in research, to discuss and pursue the faculty member's subject with candor and integrity, even when the subject requires consideration of topics which may be politically, socially or scientifically controversial... the faculty member...shall not be subjected to censorship or discipline by the University and Community College System of Nevada on grounds that the faculty member has expressed opinions or views which are controversial, unpopular or contrary to the attitudes of the University and Community College System of Nevada or the community.

The letter sent by the provost directly contradicts this iron-clad promise of protection for the freedom to teach. It also establishes a fact-opinion dichotomy that is untenable in a university setting. An attempt to enforce it universally would lead to a shutdown of classroom life as it has been known in the whole history of academia. Professors themselves would be reduced to mere transmitters of received and accepted facts, thereby robbing the students of a serious education and an opportunity to have ideas presented and judged on their own merits. No serious university can operate under such strictures. Clearly, as the University's own bylaws acknowledge, academic freedom permits and even *obliges* faculty to discuss controversial matters at variance with "common wisdom."

The implications of the University's new policy are made clear by comments by the complaining student, Michael Knight, an economics major who graduated from the University last year and now lives in the Seattle area. In published newspaper accounts, Knight claimed: "When the door closes and the lecture began, he needs to make sure he is remaining as politically correct as possible."

While this student cannot be expected to be familiar with the nuances of academic freedom, the University itself ought to realize its crucial importance. The UNLV student newspaper, disgusted at the course of events, saw fit to remind students and the administration: "It should be understood that college is a place only for those with [temperance], patience, willingness to learn."

President Carol Harter's statement that the university has dropped its case against Hans-Hermann Hoppe is a victory of sorts, and yet it is not a clarion call on behalf of the freedom to teach; indeed, it seems to leave an opening for future violations of its contractual guarantee of academic freedom insofar as lecture content must be tempered by "significant corresponding academic responsibility"; "where there may be ambiguity between the two" freedom must be "foremost."

Academic freedom here seems more like contingent administrative permission, something granted to prisoners on parole. The statement also implies that the Hoppe case was somehow ambiguous. Another reading, it is true, could note that the university bylaws assert that freedom and "academic responsibility" are "equally demanding." In that sense, Dr. Harter's assertion that freedom is actually more important can be seen as a big shift in Hoppe's favor.

However it is parsed, it is hard to see how this resolution is going to inspire faculty who might have felt the chill to rest assured that they can count on the administration to back them up in dispute. Moreover, the statement offered no compensation to Hoppe for an entire year of diversion and difficulty with this case.

At stake is more than the reputation of an individual scholar, or the standing of a university that has failed to live by its by-laws which promise to protect the freedom to teach "even when topics are politically, socially or scientifically controversial." What is at stake is the integrity of the university learning environment itself. The incident politicizes the classroom environment to the point that neither students nor teachers can pursue science and truth without fear of political reprisal.

Especially now that this case has garnered international attention, it is crucial that it be resolved in favor of open debate and the free exchange of ideas. We respectfully urge this University and all universities that guarantee the freedom to teach, and to restore anew a commitment to academic freedom, which Mises himself regarded as critical to the defense of a free society.