



Written by [James Murphy](#) on March 12, 2018

## Free-speech Lawsuit Against Marquette University Moves Forward

The Thomas More Society filed an [amicus curiae brief](#) on March 7, 2018, on behalf of Marquette University professor John C. McAdams. In December of 2014, McAdams, who had been a professor of political science at Marquette for more than 30 years, was stripped of his tenure, suspended without pay, and ordered to apologize for making a comment that strayed from liberal orthodoxy. In May of 2016, McAdams filed a lawsuit against Marquette, which is now before Wisconsin's Supreme Court.



According to the court document, McAdams is the first professor to lose tenure in the 135-year history of Marquette. The brief argues that “Marquette breached its contract with McAdams, in which it promised to protect his ‘rights guaranteed by the United States Constitution.’”

McAdams is “guilty” of defending a student who was dressed down by a graduate assistant in a Philosophy of Ethics class. According to McAdams’ blog, the instructor, Cheryl Abbate, “was attempting to apply a philosophical text to modern political controversies.” When Abbate came to the subject of gay rights, she glossed over that particular topic claiming, “everybody agrees on this and there is no need to discuss it.” After the class, a student challenged her on this and Abbate ridiculed and intimidated the student, finally saying, “you don’t have a right in this class to make homophobic comments.”

In his blog, Marquette Warrior, McAdams wrote, “Like the rest of Academia, Marquette is less and less a real university. And when gay marriage cannot be discussed, certainly not a Catholic university.”

After McAdams took her to task for her bullying behavior, Abbate filed a complaint against the professor, claiming harassment. Within a month of the complaint being filed, a faculty panel at Marquette was convened and McAdams was suspended and stripped of his tenure. A university spokesperson told the *Milwaukee Journal-Sentinel* that the university “would not tolerate harassment and will not stand for faculty members subjecting students to any form of abuse, putting them in harm’s way.”

After the incident, Abbate reportedly received disgusting e-mails and threats. Marquette provided no evidence that McAdams had done anything to encourage those threats against Abbate. Nevertheless, the university held McAdams responsible for the threats and ordered him to apologize. McAdams refused, believing he’d done nothing wrong and that the university was ordering him to engage in “compelled speech.” After refusing to apologize, Marquette effectively fired him.

McAdams sued the university for breach of contract, claiming that the university was “using a tactic typical among liberals” of shutting down discussion on an issue by claiming to be offended. On May 4 of last year, Milwaukee County Circuit Court Judge David Hansher dismissed McAdams’ suit and rebuked him for his behavior, saying in the ruling that academic freedom “does not mean a faculty member can harass, threaten, intimidate, ridicule.” Hansher ruled that because McAdams named Abbate in his



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personal blog post, his actions constituted “harassment.”

The Thomas More Society’s *amicus curiae* brief referenced the current state of politically correct authoritarianism that currently exists on America’s college campuses: “Ideological conflicts are being waged with particular ferocity on college campuses, where dissent from opinions deemed ‘politically correct’ have been countered with speech codes, and unpopular speakers are silenced through actual or threatened mob action.”

The Thomas More Society definitely has a point. Numerous speakers, not all of them conservative, have been harassed and shouted down in recent years. In March of 2017, Charles Murray, the author of the controversial book *The Bell Curve*, was physically assaulted at Middlebury College in Vermont. Numerous other speakers, including Ben Shapiro, Christina Hoff-Sommers, Ann Coulter, Steven Crowder, and Milo Yiannopoulos, have had events disrupted or cancelled over the past two years.

Marquette, a university founded by the Catholic Jesuits, has definitely lost its way in terms of the Catholic faith. The university has a well-earned reputation for quashing free speech, as it has [enacted several speech codes](#) that deny students and staff their right to debate certain subjects on campus.

With the “micro-aggression” and “safe space” culture now prevalent in America’s universities, it’s important that cases such as Professor McAdams’ not go unnoticed. “Politically correct” authoritarians must not be allowed to rule over our higher education unchecked and unchallenged. With all of the emphasis given to diversity these days, it’s vital that free speech and diversity of thought — something guaranteed us by the First Amendment to the U.S. Constitution — are protected.

*Image: screenshot from Marquette University website homepage*



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