



Written by [Steve Byas](#) on January 6, 2016

Legislators Move to Protect First Amendment at University of Missouri

One hundred members of the Missouri House of Representatives and 18 state senators have signed letters to the board of curators of the University of Missouri demanding the termination of Melissa Click, a communications professor on campus.

The legislators, all Republicans, were responding to a November incident in which Click attempted to intimidate student photographer Tim Tai, who was on freelance assignment for ESPN covering a student protest at the Carnahan Quad (shown) on the campus. After she demanded that he leave the area and he refused, saying he had a job to do, Click threatened him with physical force, shouting to the crowd of protesters, “Who wants to help me get this reporter out of here? I need some muscle over here!” The crowd of protesters then pushed him in an attempt to block him from taking photos.



The protests were part of the effort to force the removal of Tim Wolfe, president of the University of Missouri. Wolfe eventually did resign, after at least 30 black football players at the Southeastern Conference school declared that they would not practice or play in the next game, unless he stepped down. They alleged on Twitter that he had been negligent in not adequately addressing concerns of black students about multiple racial incidents on the campus over the past few months.

The tweet read, “The athletes of color on the University of Missouri football team truly believe ‘Injustice Anywhere is a threat to Justice Everywhere.’” The action of the athletes was precipitated when graduate student Jonathan Butler went on a hunger strike, demanding Wolfe’s removal.

The president of the student government, who is black, said in September that people in a pickup truck yelled racial slurs at him as they passed by. This was followed by allegations of other racial episodes. It is not clear what the protesters wanted Wolfe to do about the incidents, unless the perpetrators were identified, but one demand was that Wolfe “acknowledge his white male privilege.”

What is particularly ironic about the entire incident is that the University of Missouri once had the reputation of having the top-rated journalism school in the United States. In their letters calling for Click’s dismissal, the Missouri legislators noted the troubling irony of a journalism professor not upholding the critical right of freedom of the press:

The fact that, as a professor teaching in the communication department and school of journalism, she displayed such a complete disregard for the First Amendment rights of reporters should be



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enough to question her competency and aptitude for her job. It should be evident that these actions are inappropriate, illegal, and unacceptable for a faculty member at the University of Missouri.

State Representative Caleb Jones, a Republican, insisted, “It’s imperative that the university act swiftly to remove her from her position.”

The legislators also made note of the questionable value of her research projects, one of which was a study of the relationship Lady Gaga has with her fans on social media. Click was on leave from the college, not actually teaching any classes last semester, in order to do “research.”

Also targeted by the legislators was Janna Basler, the university’s assistant director for Greek Life. During the protests which student photographer Tai was covering, after Click had turned away from him to call for his removal, Basler pushed into him, also demanding that he leave.

Universities — once seen as bastions of free speech — have in countless cases become institutions of authoritarianism. A recent poll by McLaughlin & Associates, sponsored by Yale University’s William F. Buckley, Jr. Program, revealed that the free exchange of ideas is not a highly valued commodity on the modern U.S. college campus. The poll queried 800 undergraduates across the country, with the startling revelation that 72 percent of respondents agreed with the statement, “Any student or faculty member on campus who uses language that is considered racist, sexist, homophobic or otherwise offensive should be subject to disciplinary action.”

One must ask: Who will make these judgments as to what is racist, sexist, homophobic, or otherwise offensive? After all, some regard any criticism of President Obama as “racist.” Others castigate the Roman Catholic Church as “sexist” for its doctrinal position of not ordaining women to the priesthood. A Christian student or faculty member who expressed that the entire Bible is the Word of God will be labeled “homophobic” by many. The very existence of conservative political, economic, or social views is taken as offensive by the American Left.

But all that aside, the most important point to remember is that the First Amendment has enshrined to all Americans the protection of the precious right to freedom of speech.

A recent article in *The Austrian*, published by the Mises Institute, charged that academia “is the greatest offender” in the push for the criminalization of certain types of speech. “Universities exist to pursue truth, not advance a political agenda,” the article pointed out. “But the modern college student is forced to navigate a system designed to make him duller, poorer, and filled with bad ideas.”

The actions of Basler and Click illustrate that the modern college campus has far too often been a bastion of leftist indoctrination, and has now become the site of actual physical violence against those who do not accept the worldview of the Left.

But instead of condemning the actions of college employees who attempted to suppress the First Amendment rights of a student reporter, some liberal professors on the Missouri campus were instead outraged about what they called the “meddling” of the legislators.

UPDATE: David Kurpius, dean of the Missouri School of Journalism, contacted the *The New American* January 7 to clarify the professor’s role at the college: “Dr. Melissa Click is an assistant professor in the MU Department of Communication in the College of Arts and Science. Until Nov. 10 she held a courtesy appointment with the School of Journalism, which allowed her to work with a small number of graduate students on their master’s or doctoral committees. She never taught a course in the journalism school.”



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Steve Byas is a professor of history at Hillsdale Free Will Baptist College in Moore, Oklahoma. His book, History's Greatest Libels, challenges some of the greatest lies of history, which have attempted to tarnish the reputations of such great figures of history as George Washington, Thomas Jefferson, Warren Harding, Clarence Thomas, and Joe McCarthy.



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