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UNIVERSITY PROFESSORS FOR ACADEMIC ORDER: BACKGROUND

Steven Alan Samson

University Professors for Academic Order (UPAO) was founded in 1970 at the height of the turmoil on campuses sparked by opposition to the War in Vietnam. Classes were being disrupted by protestors on campuses throughout the country that Spring. The protests reached a crescendo during the month following the violence at Kent State University which resulted in the deaths of four students. Across the country, school buildings were barricaded or occupied, classes disrupted, lecturers shouted down, and exams boycotted. A professor at George Washington University, Charles Moser, who was disturbed by the unwillingness of college administrations to maintain order on campus, called a meeting of interested faculty members from schools around the country. Out of this meeting of several hundred professors, UPAO was organized.

The purpose of UPAO is at least twofold: to oppose any actions that would interfere with the teaching mission of colleges and to conserve cherished academic values against ideological or political bias. It has actively defended a number of faculty members against arbitrary dismissal for holding unpopular political or religious views. For instance, it took Virginia State College at Petersburg to court in order to have Prof. Kowtoniuk reinstated after his dismissal because of his outspoken anti-Communist views. In this regard UPAO has been a defender of academic freedom, like the much larger American Association of University Professors (AAUP), although it has never numbered more than a few hundred members.

UPAO holds annual meetings, sponsors conferences, publishes a monthly newsletter, and an annual journal called UPAO VOX. Like the National Association of Scholars, which was just recently founded, UPAO is disturbed by the steady injection of ideology into campus the curriculum, often in the guise of diversity education, multiculturalism, deconstructionism, ethnic studies, and women's studies. Many colleges fail to invite conservative professors or clergymen to balance the general leftist bias of their guest lecture series and conferences. A recurring problem on many campuses is the substitution of ideological teach-ins for the campus forums that in the past provided a rich selection of competing viewpoints.

These trends have become such a problem that in recent months, several major national news magazines -- ranging from National Review to Newsweek to Chronicle of Higher Education to the New Republic -- have devoted considerable attention to the issue of "political correctness" on campus.