Trigger Warnings? – or, Trigger Guarantees?

By David Linton

(In the previous issue of NY Academe I intended to comment on a new practice that seems to be taking hold on campuses, however, due to a transmission error on my part the entire piece did not make it into print. Therefore, I would like to explore the topic here in full.)

Here’s a joke that only the older cohort of readers is likely to get: Didn’t a Trigger warning once consist of Roy Rogers saying, “Be careful, the horse bites?”

Well, it seems that there’s a new kind of trigger warning in higher education today and it certainly has its own bite. But this time it might be taking a bite out of free expression and willingness to deal with controversial topics. In its most extreme form it requires professors to post content warnings about readings, films, and discussions in class they might “trigger” memories of traumatic or painful experiences from students’ past and to exempt them from engaging with the material.

A reaction against such a practice, described as a blight of caution and fear of offending due to an unwillingness to deal with “touchy” subjects, was expressed in an Atlantic Magazine article in September titled, “That’s Not Funny.” The author, Caitlin Flanagan, focused on the filters and restrictions language and political expression has the potential to distract connections among the issues, nor how the current focus on dramatize how severe the education loan problem is.

Unfortunately, none of the three articles makes the connections among the issues, nor how the current focus on language and political expression has the potential to distract us from addressing the deeply embedded social and economic inequities at the heart of the student debt debacle.

Two days following these three publications, Catharine Hill, the President of Vassar College, joined the conversation with a New York Times op-ed essay titled “Free Tuition? Not the Answer” (11/30/15) in which she addressed calls by President Obama, Senator Sanders, and others for free tuition. She offered a nuanced discussion of the issues, claiming that, “Rather than free tuition, we need targeted policies that result in more money for need-based aid, from both public and private institutions, and from both state and federal governments.”

As far as it goes, this sounds like a good idea. Yet, there’s another remedy that has a proven history of success that I’d like to see brought back and expanded.

In 1958 during the Cold War, in response to Soviet achievements in technology and science as demonstrated by advances in space exploration, the US government passed the National Defense Education Act (NDEA), a system of supports for a wide variety of education initiatives, including loans for higher education expenses. One of its intentions was to perform on campus. Rather than select comics who will rattle the chains of obedience and conformity, selection is based on how well the performer will avoid controversy. In the words of the guidelines published by the National Association for Campus Activities, the objective is to avoid anything that is “discriminatory or culturally insensitive.” Now, no one wants to advocate insults, bigotry, homophobia, sexism, and other forms of hate or nastiness. But the flip side of the story is that, according to Flanagan, there has emerged a new form of “political correctness” that leads to blandness, fear and, at the very least, over-caution. There seems to be no room under these guidelines for the next Amy Schumer, Chris Rock, Eddie Murphy, Bill Maher or Sarah Silverman. In fact, it has been reported that Chris Rock has given up performing on campuses due to demands for limits on the topics he will cover and the way he will express himself.

It seems likely that this trend will have a dampening effect on faculty selection of materials and assignments in their classes, particularly for junior faculty who are already concerned about student evaluations of courses and postings on sites such as RateMyProfessor.com. It is yet another reason why faculty need to be actively engaged in crafting governance policies that protect academic freedom at all levels.

From the President’s Desk: CRISIS ABOUNDING

By David Linton

We know there’s an education crisis going on when within two days of each other The Wall Street Journal (“Closed Minds on Campus” 11/28-29/15), The New York Times (“Lend With a Smile, Collect With a Fine” 11/29/15), and The Chronicle of Higher Education (“Weaponized Words” 11/27/15) all publish prominently placed stories about problems in academe. Two of the pieces, Chronicle and WSJ, focus on the issue of language, self-censorship, and race relations while the Times article, opening on the front page of the Sunday Business section, uses a “worst case” story of a woman who owes $410,000.00 in student loans and interest to dramatize how severe the education loan problem is.

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Crisis at the College of Saint Rose

In December 2015, 23 faculty members at The College of Saint Rose received termination letters, the result of the Administration’s unilateral decision to eliminate more than two dozen academic programs without engaging in appropriate shared governance discussions and decision making.

Both the New York State AAUP and the national organization have rallied to support the besieged faculty. The letter below is AAUP State Conference President David Linton’s most recent letter of support to the Saint Rose community.

The President of Saint Rose

We write to you today to express the concern of AAUP members at the decision by the College of Saint Rose to terminate more than two dozen academic programs and to eliminate the tenure-track position of the AAUP President. This decision was made unilaterally, without faculty input, and in the face of protests from the local AAUP chapter and from the national AAUP. The College’s decision to eliminate programs and faculty positions is a violation of our constitution and bylaws, and a threat to the values of shared governance and academic freedom.

We urge you to reconsider this decision and to engage in a dialogue with faculty and other stakeholders to find a solution that is fair and just. We stand in solidarity with the faculty at Saint Rose and support their efforts to preserve academic freedom and to protect the rights of all members of the academic community.

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An Open Letter to The College of Saint Rose Community:

I am writing as President of the New York State Conference of the American Association of University Professors (NYSCAAUP) to express our collective dismay at both the process and the result of the recent announcement by Carolyn Stefanco, President of the College, of the elimination of more than two dozen academic programs and the termination of 23 faculty positions.

President Stefanco’s letter makes it amply clear that the decision was reached without significant involvement of appropriate faculty bodies. Such a process is a violation of well-established principles of shared governance as outlined in numerous AAUP documents. It is also contrary to the sensible ways that many other similar institutions have dealt with the kinds of financial and enrollment pressures that the Saint Rose administration claims to be addressing. But worst of all, it flies continued on page 3

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to give students an incentive to enter the field, for every year that one taught up to five years, the interest on the loan was waived and the principle was reduced by 10%. In the case of one of my classmates, for instance, she taught for the five years (and another 30 beyond that) thereby reducing her loan by half with no interest accumulation, and at the end of the waiver period she was able to pay off the remainder of the principle. It was a great deal all around.

We need to explore such a plan today and include a spin on another successful education support act, The GI Bill. In this case we could simply reverse the previous flow of funds. Instead of providing monetary support for individuals only after they have served in the military (which we should continue to do), we should also provide incentives to serve following college graduation by waiving interest on student loans during years of service as well as reducing the principle in significant increments.

The result would be an increased willingness to serve and an increase in the level of educational preparedness among new recruits, a significant gain in times of greater needs for skilled, educated military personnel.
The president of the nation’s largest higher education union is urging the State University of New York (SUNY) to drop its Investment and Performance Fund, saying it would be harmful to SUNY and its state-operated campuses.

“As currently implemented, this program reallocates funds meant for SUNY campuses to a SUNY new, creating winners and losers and pitting departments, programs and campuses against each other,” said United University Professions (UUP) President Frederick E. Kurowski, Ph.D.

In its 2016-17 budget request, SUNY is asking the state for $32 million more for the performance-based funding plan, which may tie state funding to specific performance metrics for three or more state conferences shall be included among the nominees. The nominations and election of candidates is governed by the ASC Constitution and bylaws available at http://www.aaup.org/about/asc/constitution.

The ASC elections for all three positions will take place at the June 17, 2016, ASC meeting in Washington, DC, by conference delegates to that meeting.

Completed nominations must be received by 5:00 p.m. on Thursday, January 28, 2016.

Nominations may be e-mailed to the committee at ascnominations@aaup.org or sent via US mail to ASC Nominating Committee, c/o A. Rush Bean, 1133 Nineteenth Street NW, Suite 200, Washington, DC 20036.

The ASC Nominating Committee members, appointed in accordance with the ASC Constitution and Bylaws, are Tina Kelleher (Towson University), Chair; Greg Comer (St. Louis University); and Jonathan Rees (Colorado State University-Pueblo).

www.nysaaup.org

Give the new site a try and send any suggestions or content corrections that you find.

UUP: Performance-based Funding Would Harm SUNY Students, Campuses

The final proposal would establish a Teaching Health Care Fellow program at the University at Buffalo’s medical school. It would fund new positions for as many as 75 health care teaching fellows—medical and osteopathic doctors—who would be SUNY employees. They would teach, mentor and work with 750 resident physicians at nearly a dozen Buffalo area hospitals.

The program would help stabilize the relationship between the medical school and Buffalo area hospitals where it would place resident physicians. The university is the only SUNY medical school without an attached hospital.

The union’s proposal asks for $15 million in state funds to pay for the supervising physicians—who make up half of the medical school faculty, but who are not now paid by the state. This proposal supports the transformation of health care advocated by the Delivery System Reform Incentive Payment (DSRIP) program in New York State and the Federal Patient Protection and Affordable Care Act.

Our four programs are indicative of the leadership and foresight we bring to public higher education. We look forward to working with state lawmakers to gain approval of our proposals,” Kurowski concluded.

Performance-based Funding continued from page 2

racialized gaps in opportunity and income that divide our city. New Yorkers who count on CUNY need to know that the governor has made the political calculation not to invest in their children’s college education and in the future of their communities.

Five years of tuition hikes, which the governor argued would “[make] it possible for public university systems to add faculty, reduce class size, expand program offerings, and improve academic performance” have instead gone to fill holes left in CUNY’s operating budgets. The hole this year: $51 million. Another tuition hike is proposed for CUNY’s four-year colleges this year.

The MOE bill would have protected students’ tuition dollars and the quality of their education by requiring the state to fund predictable increases to CUNY/SUNY operating costs, such as inflation, student aid in utilities, rent and salaries. Without adequate state funding, CUNY

UUP Innovative Action Plan continued from page 3

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PSC Slams Governor Cuomo for Vetoing Bill to Support CUNY, Launches Ads

Governor Cuomo’s veto of legislation to protect educational quality for a handful of mostly low-income SUNY students undermines CUNY’s ability to offer an excellent education and betrays the hundreds of thousands of New Yorkers who rely on CUNY as a route to a better life, according to CUNY’s faculty and staff union.

Both houses of the Legislature overwhelmingly supported the bi-partisan “Maintenance of Effort” (MOE) bill, which would have ensured that tuition hikes go to improve CUNY and SUNY, rather than to offset underfunding from the state. Governor Cuomo has failed to restore CUNY to pre-Recession funding levels, despite the resurgence in the state’s economy. Under his administration, per-student investment in CUNY has remained essentially flat. Since 2008, it is down 14%.

After the veto of the MOE bill, the PSC announced a social media ad campaign modeled after the state’s successful Educational Opportunity Program and starve standing CUNY of resources. The campaign will feature ads on Facebook and Twitter, an online petition and other tactics aimed at mobilizing the communities who depend on CUNY.

“With this veto, Governor Cuomo signals his refusal to invest in the education CUNY students need. Cuomo’s decision to veto the bill will damage the quality of education CUNY can offer and reduce students’ access to the top-quality faculty and staff they deserve. If the aim of the veto was to hurt New York’s ow- and middle-income communities, that aim has been achieved,” said Barbara Bowen, president of the Professional Staff Congress, the union of CUNY faculty and staff.

“CUNY is many New Yorkers’ best opportunity to overcome the deep
The New York State AAUP 2016 Elections

active members of the AAUP in New York State were invited to stand for election to a position on the Executive Council.
The open positions are listed below.
- NYS President 2016-2020: Sally Dear-Healey, SUNY Cortland
- NYS Vice-President 2016-2020: Jeffrey Baker, Monroe Community College
- NYS At Large Member 2016-2020 and AAUP ASC Delegate 2016 & 2017: Steven Goldberg, Adelphi University
- NYS At Large Member 2016-2020 and AAUP ASC Delegate 2016 & 2017: open

The NYS Election Committee is:
- Pat Chilton  [pchilton@syr.edu]  - Chair
- Mary Rose Kubal  [MKUBAL@sbu.edu]
- Anne Friedman  [afriedman@bmcc.cuny.edu ]

Our Election Process is as follows:
- By January 15th, 2016, biographies and election statements for those that have been nominated will be posted on our nyassup.org website.
- Nominations for the open position and for all positions will include a write-in option. The nominees receiving the most votes will win the election.
- The Election will be piggybacked onto the AAUP National elections that are conducted in the spring and all NYS AAUP Conference will get the NYS Election slate in their AAUP election package.

NYS AAUP Executive Director's Report

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The NYS AAUP Executive Director's Report

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David Linton  who is NYS President, Professor Emeritus Marymount Manhattan College. His topic, Upcoming changes in Middle States Standards, was based on a report prepared by our NY Academic Editor, Jeff Kraus of Wagner College.
The speaker presentations were followed by a very lively panel discussion moderated by our Vice President, Sally Dear-Healey. Excellent networking connections and actionable recommendations were made during the two-hour discussion.

NYSAAUP.org update

At our NYS Conference Spring 2015 at Columbia University we asked for a modest budget to perform a complete rebuild and updating of our conference website. Most of the work is completed at the time of this writing except for the migration of some of our archive information. Some of the features of the new site are:
- Complete new design including our conference logo to reflect the newest color scheme of the National AAUP.
- A more intuitive menu bar that includes buttons for Home, About Us, FAQ, News & Events, Forum, Library, Contact. The Library and Contacts buttons have drop down sub-menu options.

The Library button sub-menu includes:
- NYS AAUP Constitution
- AAUP - Censured and Sanctioned Institutions in New York
- NY Academic Issues
- NY Academic Issues
- NYS AAUP Chapter Service Program
- NYS AAUP Government Relations Program

The Contact sub-menu includes:
- NYS AAUP Conference about your question
- AAUP leaders of the NYS AAUP Conference

The NYSAAUP.org website will also be allowing members to register for the conference to the Albany area to help. We had four keynote speakers:
- Fred Floss  who is Professor and Co-Director, Center for Higher Education Law and Policy at Fordham University.
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- College” was the President.  It seems that the President is following the lead of another royal personage and believes “L’Ecole C’est Moi.”
- The AAUP urges the Board of The College of Saint Rose to reconsidered its hasty decision, to rescind the termination letters, to suspend the program cancellations, and to enter into a full and open dialogue with the faculty and all other interested parties in order to arrive at plans that will advance the College’s reputation and stability without threatening its existence and its future.

The AAUP, at both the state and national level, stands ready to assist in repairing the damage that has been done in any way we possibly can.

The Crisis at the College of Saint Rose

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in the face of good sense and intelligent management.
The success of any institution like The College of Saint Rose depends in large part upon the level of confidence and commitment it is locally and staff. College campuses are not factories where the morale of the employees is irrelevant to the production of gadgets. Sadly, the ill-considered and arrogant behavior of the President, Board and administrative team is sure to have the opposite effect of that which it claims to intend. Further destabilization of enrollment, low staff commitment by faculty to recruitment and retention, insecurity and a steady drain on the talent bank of every department. It is hard to imagine a better way of undermining the quality of the college than the steps that the administration has taken.

If it weren’t so devastating in its impact, one could find some irony in the wording of President Stefancic’s letter and those that the terminated faculty members have received. Her letter begins with the salutation “Dear Colleagues.” But there is nothing “collegial” about the way the faculty are being treated nor the ways the decisions were made. Furthermore, in her letter and in the termination letters one finds variations on the phrase “the College has decided” as though “The College” was the President. It seems that the President is following the lead of another royal personage and believes “L’Ecole C’est Moi.”
- The AAUP Unveils Action Plan for 2016

Filling a promise that the union would be a catalyst for positive change, United University Professions President Frederick E. Kowal, Ph.D., introduced the union’s 2016 legislative action plan on December 15.
The agenda includes proposals to create and expand green technology and renewable energy programs at the State University of New York, and to increase diversity in teaching in New York by creating an opportunity program to recruit underrepresented and economically disadvantaged students to become teachers.

“When I became president of UUP, I pledged that we’d continued on page 7

The UUP Unveils Action Plan for 2016

By Tom Pollock

I was present on the NYS AAUP Conference Fall 2015 that was held at the Albany Law College on October 24-25th, 2015, a new NYAAUP.org website and its features, and our upcoming NYS AAUP Conference Spring 2016 to be held at Marymount Manhattan College in NYC April 22-23rd, 2016.

NYS AAUP Conference Fall 2015

Thirty-four faculty members attended our NYS AAUP Fall 2015 Conference–Organizing Faculty that was held at The Albany Law School October 23-24th, 2015. On the day before the conference I met with the Saint Rose College faculty regarding issues that are reported upon in more detail elsewhere in this issue of NY Academic. Later that night I also participated at a similar meeting of The Sage Colleges’ faculty who had invited Risa Lieberwitz to address them.

These two schools and several others in New York state are in economic and academic crisis. Administrations are bypassing AAUP principles of shared governance and academic freedom in making changes in curriculum and the renewal of faculty, some tenured, in order to address financial and enrollment issues.

Faculty want to be involved, but the administrations are dictating the outcomes they desire without any significant involvement or leadership by the faculty who are best able to evaluate and revise programs of study. We brought our state conference to the Albany area to help. We had four keynote speakers.

Risa Lieberwitz who is Professor of Labor and Employment Law in the Cornell University School of Industrial and Labor Relations (ILR) and an Associate of the Worker Institute at Cornell. She is General Counsel of the national AAUP, and is a member of AAUP Committee A on Academic Freedom and Tenure. Risa’s topic was Expanding Unionization in Private Universities: Labor Board Sets New Tests for Whether Private-College Faculty Members Can Unionize.

Fred Floss who is Professor and Co-Director, Center for Economic Education at SUNY Buffalo State. State Conference Committee on Government Relations Chairperson. His topic was Organizing Higher Education - AAUP & UUP Working Together.

Tom Policano (myself) who is NYSS Executive Director, Past President of the Rochester Institute of Technology AAUP Chapters VP of RIT Academic Senate, seven year member of the RIT Academic Affairs Committee. My topic was Your Faculty Handbook the Pearl of Shared Governance.
The changes in the situation and function of universities have been driven by the changing academic role and working environment, not withstanding managerial factors such as institutions towards the creation of a collegial atmosphere. At both the institutional and university level, the AAUP maintains that the “move towards a renewal of the ethos and purpose of academic freedom is something that needs to be given due consideration.” The AAUP recommends the formation of an “Academic Council on Academic Freedom and Tenure” to help universities create a collegial environment. University administrators and faculty can work together to establish a collegial atmosphere, ensuring that the academic freedom and freedom of association are protected and respected. The AAUP has the ability to censure a university if it does not comply, as it did with Northeastern Illinois University. Moreover, AAUP has the power to advise and assist in the resolution of disputes between the university and the faculty, and to provide assistance to help make the academic work environment more collegial.

Directly related to the topic of collegiality, some of the other issues that AAUP regularly addresses include: academic freedom, shared governance, collective bargaining, hiring and promotion, diversity, and the rights of faculty members. The AAUP has developed a set of guidelines on how to handle these issues, and provides resources and support to faculty members who face challenges. The AAUP website (http://www.aaup.org/) and the national website is http://nysaaup.org/ and the national AAUP (level) groups have a ready and available to talk with you, to help you with your university, visit your department, and to meet with administration to help you make your academic work environment more collegial.

In addition, AAUP has numerous resources available to make the process easier. One example is the statement “On Collegiality as a Criterion for Faculty Evaluation,” approved by the Association’s Committee on Academic Freedom and Tenure and adopted by the Association’s Council in November 1999. An additional resource is “Grappling with Collegiality and Academic Freedom” (Timothy Shill, November-December 2015 issue of Academe).

Moreover, AAUP has the ability to censure a university if it does not comply, as it did with Northeastern Illinois University. The AAUP and the case of Dr. John Boyle. Here AAUP Committee A concluded that “NEIU’s president arbitrarily and capriciously used collegiality as an unacceptable criterion to deny Dr. Boyle tenure.”

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