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## *ACE Newsletter* Table of Contents

From the Chair	page 1
Newsletter Staff	page 2
ACE NCTE Workshops	page 3
In the Trenches	page 4
Promise or Peril	page 6
Blue Language, Blue Pictures, Blue Ribbons	page 8
ACE NCTE Poster Sessions	page 9
Technocratic Despotism	page 10
Encryption Inventor Wins CPSR Award	page 16

  

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# Technocratic Despotism: Incognito and Safe from the Vexation of Thinking

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## Technocracy, a Modern form of Despotism

The provisions of the US Bill of Rights contain the obligations of the state and define individual rights to protection from interference by the state. They neither give the state power over the individual nor define individual obligations. The First Amendment to the US Constitution guarantees freedom of expression that applies to all communication. These same guarantees now apply in cyberspace (Reynolds 1991), therefore, new law must evolve from policies created with public awareness and responsible institutional behavior. Justice William O. Douglas argued that the protection of fundamental values does not self-execute:

As nightfall does not come at once, neither does oppression. In both instances, there is a twilight when everything remains seemingly unchanged. And it is in such twilight that we all must be most aware of change in the air, however slight, lest we become unwitting victims of the darkness.

The cyberspace twilight has arrived. The new laws that will protect individual freedom of expression can only emanate from equitable practice, not from despotic decrees and censorship (Marx and Reynolds 1991). Communication in cyberspace should profit all people, not just the technocrats who administer it. Increasingly, technocratic peons interfere with university computer resources that scholars need for their officially sanctioned research. These individuals often do not possess the modicum of intellect and literacy needed to indulge in any form of censorship. However, they continue to use their own values to decide who should have access to information in both computer databases and libraries. They believe that pragmatism and efficiency should automatically overrule equitable values. They think that ethics do not apply to them, hold themselves above the law, and follow low moral standards. The time has come for a reversal of policies that allow technocrats to control information flow absolutely. The tail must stop wagging the dog. Oversight and supervision through traditional, ethical, information science procedures need to replace the extant anarchy.

## Technocratic Ethics and Morals

Cyberspace has had a profound impact upon many aspects of human endeavor. The electronic age has generally altered the way that humans think, write, gather, store, and distribute information. It has also changed the ethical and moral standards that associate with communication. Intellectually challenged scholars, like their technocratic counterparts, now push ethical and moral standards to the limit. Orwell's "so is the jungle" response to an assertion on the neutrality of technology succinctly addresses this moral turpitude. Techno-Valkyries confuse adversaries in a cyberspace Valhalla where they preside over real and imagined complaints. They arbitrarily choose those computer users who must die and appease their technocratic gods with the careers of censored heroes Richard Wagner, *Die Walküre*. They completely ignore the synthesis of communication and ethics. However, they correctly acknowledge that technological advances change the underlying laws and rights of individuals and then promptly usurp the right to dictate what laws and rights will apply. They assume the powers of supreme court judges then block any dissent through totalitarian absolutism and denial of due process (Conable and Reynolds 1991). Moreover, they ignore communication protocols that have become broad and flexible enough to

adapt to any type of medium.

Scholars must address the negative impact of denying a new generation the right to know, and the counter-productiveness of setting electronic media apart from other means of communication. It has again become necessary to repeat the values of the First Amendment concerning information distribution. It has again become imperative to remind communities and schools that free access and critical inquiry represent traditional values as the foundation of innovation and progress (Matthews and Reynolds 1991).

### **Political Correctness means Technocratic Censorship**

Making totalitarianism systems expend ever more resources in their abrogation of fundamental human rights has always provided a deterrent to absolutism and made the injustices manifest. Totalitarian systems depend upon petty bureaucrats to administer their ideologies. Therefore, activists may practically focus their energies upon these sycophants by preventing them from using the Nazi death camp defense that they "only followed orders." Recently, judges have begun to mete both individual and institutional punishment for illegal activities and denial of due process at universities. Perhaps these decisions will deter some technocrats from continuing to deny fundamental human rights and freedom of speech. However, the public and the press must remain vigilant and vociferously expose these practices otherwise they will remain incognito and defy prosecution. Ironically, the next generation will not have to deal with officials who advocate censorship. If technocrats continue the present censorship, and their academic apologists continue to maintain political silence, then nobody will know that any form of censorship ever existed.

These questions need answering when it comes to any kind of censorship:

Who accredits censors and vouches for their ethics?

By what criteria do censors determine systems use?

Who decides what material needs censoring?

How do censors decide upon the exclusion of political views? Who knows

What do censors exclude?

These questions remain rhetorical, however, they show good reason for the existence of the First Amendment to the Constitution.

Technocrats probably have neither the education nor the aptitude to understand the content of scholarly communication. Very few have a liberal arts education and understand communication theory, yet they hold unlimited power over those who do. Conversely, the widespread technological ignorance inherent in academic departments, has allowed systems administrators to gain control of educational technology and library databases besides computers and media equipment. They presume that technology must rule preeminently and that content and freedom of expression represent secondary concerns. They sanctify and establish their own ideas of political correctness and expediency. Furthermore, they make frivolous claims of rules infraction to deny Internet access and curb freedom of speech. They then arrogantly use their administrative powers to deny due process. Fortunately, these despots can neither gain absolute control of the Internet nor empower themselves as absolute censors. However, they prove that democracy becomes a sham when controlled by any form of technocratic elite, especially when that elite works for a state university. This reminds one of the way that an elite force acted in the name of the proletariat in the former Soviet Union: totalitarian control without accountability. A democratic society can practice a social tyranny more formidable than many kinds of political oppression. It leaves fewer means of escape and penetrates much more deeply into academic life. Protection against despotism results from challenging political correctness, a form of censorship that allows technocrats to impose their own ideology upon dissenters by means other than civil law.

The inexhaustible capacity of technocrats to find ways to censor information ironically contrasts with efforts to advance global communication and prevents the development of a universal intellectual freedom. Moreover, technocratic political correctness (cyberspace censorship) has resulted in a new form of apolitical totalitarianism (or technological cultism). It has become a religion without a theology. Consequently, pseudo-theocratic dogmas now complement the pernicious academic totalitarianism that already exists in both public and private universities. Unfortunately, attempts to control information will probably increase as the new technologies

advance just as censorship laws proliferated in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. If this absolutism continues, then censorship will curtail information transfer and suppress truth to the detriment of intellectual advancement. Auspiciously, three federal judges recently found for the American Civil Liberties Union (ACLU) in a civil action against the Attorney General of the US, and for the American Libraries Association (ALA) in a civil action against the US Department of Justice. The decision set aside the Internet censorship provisions of the Communications Decency Act (CDA) that made it illegal to transmit certain types of information on the Internet or other computer networks. Judge Stewart R. Dalzell wrote in his opinion:

The Internet may fairly be regarded as a never-ending conversation . . . the Government may not, through the CDA, interrupt that conversation.

The publicity emanating from this finding has already made the public realize that trying to control Internet information has become anachronistic because of the universality of the medium. The legal counsel for the Electronic Frontier Foundation has said that:

Cyberspace may give freedom of speech more muscle than the First Amendment does. . . . It may have become literally impossible for a government to shut people up.

However, despite the eventual futility, many systems administrators continue to censor information. Generally, technocrats argue that they must answer complaints from recipients of messages and have a responsibility to take action against the originators. They then take unilateral action without due process and impose their own values upon others. Moreover, they exercise prior restraint without any legal right to do so. Technocrats typically have a wide range of latitude in interpreting policies because they have for many years created and maintained a technocratic mystique. They give the appearance of technologic correctness (a component of political correctness) and then pass the buck to their subordinates when legally challenged. This can only construe as evasion of responsibility. The danger lies in the insidious technocratic encroachment upon civil rights that very few people notice. For example, the latest revision of the Listserv Owner's Manual provides information on new technology and openly describes how to censor Listserv communications. Although the universities who employ these people proclaim "Seek ye knowledge and the truth" they eliminate controversy by condoning censorship. The irony of electronic advances in information transfer shows that broadened access offers new and more efficient ways to violate First Amendment rights.

### **Academic Despotism and Cultism**

Censorship and prior restraint place exclusive conditions on freedom of expression and, consequently, academic freedom. Any type of censorship restricts, to narrowly defined criteria decided by an oligarchy, what both students and faculty members may say. Politically correct ideologies force everyone to learn the same way, to teach the same way, to research the same way, to discourse the same way, and to write the same way. Subsequently, the conformity destroys any vestige of individuality still left in the academe. The exclusivity forces everyone to become a clone of someone else. It enables those in power to deny academic freedom to dissenters. It also allows them to destroy the careers of nonconformists. These despots arbitrarily outlaw any behavior that they, either collectively or individually, find inappropriate. The war cries "inappropriate" and "politically correct" then define synonymously in these totalitarian environments. Moreover, academicians can only blame themselves for their loss of academic freedom and compliant academic lifestyle that compares with the apathy and compliance rampant among apologists in Nazi Germany. A parody on Martin Niemüller's statement during that era applies today.

### **The Modus Vivendi of Academic Apologists**

University officials first deprived undergraduates of their freedom of expression. That did not concern me because I strictly conformed to a politically correct ideology. Then they deprived graduate students. That did not concern me because I held a faculty position. Then they deprived untenured professors. That did not concern me because I held tenure. Then they deprived tenured professors. That did not concern me because I held a department chair.

Then they deprived me and that concerned me. I soon discovered that the politically correct ideology to which I had given my academic life had paid only lip service to the absolutism of academic totalitarianism. I cried out to my colleagues for help but they had all adopted politically silent attitudes. I desperately turned toward my former students but none of them could help me. They had all lost their freedom of expression and, consequently, could not speak out for me.

### **In the Academe Nothing Succeeds like Excess**

Academic freedom, an absolute right and not an abstract philosophy, should not subserve economic considerations. Information technology exists as a right and not a privilege, despite technocratic claims to the contrary (Reynolds 1991). Legislative and judicial decisions have determined the right of individuals to distribute information freely and the Bill of Rights documents the protection individuals may expect from the state. However, constitutional laws do not now provide much protection against denial of academic freedom and due process of law by despotic university officials. These officials constantly frustrate both faculty members and their students by arbitrarily withholding access to information and computer resources because they disagree with the content of messages: a disagreement probably based upon disclosure of their own malfeasance.

University administrators fear dissent. This fear motivates an aversion to controversy and an addiction to political correctness that frequently allows censorship of Internet activities. Consequently, they empower technocrats who refuse to address properly the email complaints and telephone calls that demand the removal of computer access. Instead, they use their delegated administrative power to “persuade” the alleged offender (politically incorrect deviant) to cease and desist posting controversial material. When the dissenter claims First Amendment rights, they succumb to the demands of conformity, political correctness, and an Emily Post type of “netiquette.” They assume the role of absolute censors. Others, unable to take any personal initiative, shrug their shoulders and pass all requests to equally indecisive policy makers who take the easy way out and either condone or approve censorship. They disengage themselves by insisting that politicians must decide these “political problems.” Then their totalitarian masters adopt political silence because otherwise they must defend extrajudicial activity. The public needs to become aware and to address both the administrative excesses and the double-dipping remuneration of technocrats that exists in both public and private universities. University officials frequently create close financial ties with commercial concerns and now use them to evade their moral, ethical, and legal responsibilities to their constituents. For example, a close examination of payroll records at the University of Washington shows evidence of quid pro quo. The Vice President and Vice Provost for Computing and Communications, an economist turned nerd, has received emoluments as a clinical professor (a category reserved for visiting medical specialists). Apparently, this individual has no medical qualifications and a former university official reportedly describes him as “the most evil man I have ever met.” He and his Valkyrie arbitrarily remove computer access and expropriate research and journalistic databases. This ranks as censorship and prior restraint. For their taxpayer funded “services” they receive the following grossly inflated salaries and increases.

Academic Year 1994/95 1995/96 increase

Ronald A. Johnson Vice Provost, Computing and Communications \$125,004 \$144,996 15.99%

Sandra S. Moy Director, University Computing Services \$103,044 \$115,056 11.66%

Full Professor (average for State of Washington) \$64,415 \$65,675 1.96%

These statistics do not include consulting fees and other perquisites.

The American Civil Liberties Union cooperating attorney has spent nine months investigating the actions of these individuals. This investigation relates to denial of due process. It predicates upon arbitrary removal of computer access and expropriation of both editorial and research databases. Consequently, one may ask whether these extraordinary salary increases bought political silence and immunity from investigation for other involved, high-ranking university officials: officials who also received extraordinarily high salary increases during the same period.

## Conclusion

Economic considerations do not apply to freedom of expression in cyberspace, consequently, exclusionist actions can only derive from political expediency. Free expression, the traditional lifeblood of universities, has now become an economic and political pawn. For all the hyperbole about freedom of expression university presidents and their administrators generally do not contribute to the tenets of true academic freedom. When one examines their overall record, one comprehends the magnitude of their hypocrisy. They concern themselves more with liaison between their institutions, government, and industry than the accumulation of knowledge. They have become institutional pickpockets. If one wishes to expose their corruption, then one quite simply follows the money trail. The time has come for a reversal of policies that allow technocrats to control information flow absolutely. The tail must stop wagging the dog. Oversight and supervision, through traditional, ethical, information science procedures, need to replace the extant anarchy.

## Apologia

Paul Trummel, University of Washington, formerly an associate professor, administrator, and non-traditional PhD student, also an accredited journalist, well knows the practices described in this essay. He compositely describes the aberrant behavior that exists at five different universities. He reveals the details of his personal experiences during the past sixteen years as a professor, administrator, or PhD student, at the University of Massachusetts/Boston, Fitchburg State College, Rensselaer Polytechnic Institute, San Jose State University, and the University of Washington. Officials at all five universities have denied him due process in one way or another.

His essays appear in a WebBook and an Internet column entitled *Contra Cabal*, now censored and under prior restraint, by officials at the University of Washington. Officials have made frivolous claims of rules infraction to deny the author computer access, apparently to prevent publication of this and other exposé. They have also expropriated all of his research and editorial databases and have covered up their censorship and prior restraint by misusing their powers to deny due process. His claims against the University of Washington, still pregnant after a nine-month investigation by the American Civil Liberties Union (ACLU), portend protracted labor. However, the ACLU of Washington Legal Committee has now authorized the filing of a lawsuit in his behalf against the University of Washington. His case against Rensselaer Polytechnic Institute for academic racketeering and discrimination now receives the active attention of the Civil Rights Bureau, Department of Law, State of New York. The attorney handling the case against the University of Massachusetts/Boston absconded with the retainer and the Massachusetts Bar Association whitewashed his malfeasance.

## Glossary

**Ralph Waldo Emerson.** A sect or a party is an elegant incognito, devised to save a man from the vexation of thinking. *Journals* (1909 14) entry for 20 June 1831.

**Mary McCarthy.** Bureaucracy, the rule of no one, has become the modern form of despotism. *The Vita Activa*, *New Yorker* (18 October, 1958).

**Valkyries.** In Germanic myth, Odin's warrior maidens presided over battles, chose those who were to die, and bore heroes' souls to Valhalla. Richard Wagner prominently portrayed them in his music drama, *Die Walküre*.

**CDA.** The Communications Decency Act struck down by three federal judges who found that the legislature had gone too far in restricting the First Amendment rights of all computer users in its effort to protect children from gaining access to pornography.

**Prior restraint** applies particularly to the denial of a journalist's constitutional right to gather and publish information or opinions without institutional control or fear of reprisal.

**clones.** Oligarchic clones indulge in similar practices to those that preceded the Holocaust. The perpetrators of those atrocities used the new radio technology of their time to clone a whole nation into acts of psychological and physical atrocity. Similarly, the universities now use cyberspace censorship and prior restraint to perpetrate intellectual atrocities. Instead of the brutalized corpses so vividly reported to viewers on television, they brutalize minds. They use propaganda, censorship, and psychological indoctrination in efforts to control and conform.

**Martin Niemüller.** Dissent and Freedom of Expression. In Germany, they first came for the Communists and I didn't speak up because I wasn't a Communist. Then they came for the Jews, and I didn't speak up because I wasn't a Jew. Then they came for the trade unionists, and I didn't speak up because I wasn't a trade unionist. Then they came for the Catholics, and I didn't speak up because I was a Protestant. Then they came for me and by that time no one was left to speak up.

**double-dipping.** Drawing a high, publicly funded salary from a university that results from holding conflicting academic and administrative positions, then receiving bonuses and salary increases funded by outside organizations in the form of awards, grants, and consulting fees.

**nerd.** Single-minded and possibly accomplished in computer technology but socially inept.

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