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## Scholars of the Year

AIM Column | By Malcolm A. Kline | January 10, 2008

Submitted for your consideration, as Twilight Zone creator Rod Serling used to say, is the honor roll, if you could call it that, of the professors you might call “America’s Least Wanted.”

Because of the nature of our work, we don’t often get to do “best of” lists. By definition, almost, we are chronicling professors of questionable scholarship in our often vain search for accuracy in academia.

What we have assembled, then, is something of a bottom 10 list, sort of a reverse U. S. News & World Report ranking. Indeed, it was hard to narrow down such a selection from the more than 100 professors a year whose antics we cover.

Arguably, and we would argue the point, our own roster is perhaps a truer reflection of life in the ivory Tower than most publications offer. Submitted for your consideration, as Twilight Zone creator Rod Serling used to say, is the honor roll, if you could call it that, of the professors you might call “America’s Least Wanted.”

Because we still work in the old inverted pyramid style of reporting, we will take the pedagogue we consider most notable first:

- That would have to be [Montclair State University's Grover C. Furr](#) who is still intent on proving that Joseph Stalin was framed on charges that he committed genocide, no matter what the Russians themselves may say.
- For his part, [Lowell “Rusty” Pritchard of Emory](#) is trying to warn the globe that “humans have caused most of the warming” “since 1950” despite temperatures that dropped in the intervening years.
- On the home front, [Brigham Young University's Valerie Hegstrom](#) says “I have to teach my female and male students to think like women” when studying Spanish literature. “When people ask me how I can stand it, I say that I believe in striking out in the heart of the patriarchy,” Dr. Hegstrom explained of her decision to stay at BYU.
- [Rachel B. Reinhard of the State University of New York at Cortland](#) vexes over the attitudes of the future teachers she instructs: “My students see themselves as conveyors of knowledge or as coaches or mentors, not activists.”
- [The University of Chicago's Jane Dailey](#) got herself a spot on the honor roll with her thesis on “Sex,

## Segregation and the Sacred After Brown.”

- [The University of California at Riverside's Jennifer Doyle](#) makes our final cut because of the slide show that she presented at the Modern Language Association's annual convention which featured a naked artist sitting on a pyramid the hard way. In the next slide, a pyramid was replaced by a baseball bat.

- [Lafayette College's Michael Benitez](#) finished his presentation at a multicultural conference with a rap song and told his student audience: “You're only an expert on your own experiences.”

- [Julianne Malveaux, president of Bennett College](#), found an interesting link between labor economics and criminology. “The drug offenders are only hurting themselves,” she said at a conference last summer. “Why don't we expunge those records and get those people back in the labor pool?”

- [Johns Hopkins University professor Richard Halpern](#) found sexual references only an academic could unearth in Norman Rockwell's paintings.

Finally, in tenth place, we have a trio of honorable mentions:

- [Lisa Jane Moore of Purchase College in the State University of New York](#) system for writing the book *Sperm Counts: Overcome by Man's Most Precious Fluid*;

- [Northwestern University's Michael S. Sherry](#) for scouring the Watergate tapes in search of Richard Nixon's views on homosexuality; and

- [The University of Washington's Jessica Burstein](#) for looking for love in all the wrong places, namely the MLA, and writing about it in *The Chronicle of Higher Education*.

Incidentally, many of these top-of-the-bottom profs work for state universities so they provide a very human answer to the anguished question: “Where would you cut government spending?”



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## Stalinism at the MLA

*by: Malcolm A. Kline, January 18, 2006*

Attending the Modern Language Association's annual convention gives the uninitiated a chance to see how professors can pass off theories to their students that do not hold up to independent inquiry. For example, Grover C. Furr of Montclair State University in New Jersey is making a cause of proving the innocence of Joseph Stalin, who presided over three

decades of genocide in the former Soviet Union.

"I worked with Russian scholars in the Comintern," Dr. Furr told the audience at the MLA's Washington, D. C. conference. "I call current anti-communist scholarship 'lying, pseudo scholarship'." For one thing, he claims that Nikita Khrushchev's secret speech about Stalin's crimes was itself deceptive. "There was a secret speech behind the secret speech," Dr. Furr said at the MLA conference at the Washington Hilton.

He suggests that Khrushchev may have had more to hide about his own guilt than he did to reveal about Stalin's complicity in mass executions. To a point, Dr. Furr may be onto something: Khrushchev was Stalin's lieutenant on the scene during the forced famine in the Ukraine that starved millions of farmers to death for their refusal to give up their farms.

The English professor also insists that Leon Trotsky, assassinated by Stalin's agents, was guilty of treason during the Second World War. "All of the evidence supports the charge of Trotsky's collaboration with the Germans and Japanese," Dr. Furr says. "Trotsky was in touch with the Germans and Japanese." But so was Stalin. In fact, he signed a non-aggression pact with Adolph Hitler in 1939.

Dr. Furr says that researchers who source the Comintern files as proof of Stalin's reign of terror are wrong. But those writers actually give direct quotes from the files. Dr. Furr offers none.

By the way, at the time that Trotsky was assassinated, he was scheduled to testify before the U. S. House of Representatives Committee on UnAmerican Activities. In those days, HUAC focused nearly exclusively on efforts by the Axis powers—primarily Nazi Germany—to subvert American institutions and engage in espionage in the United States.

Former HUAC staffer Herb Romerstein shared the news of Trotsky's planned testimony at one of Accuracy in Academia's conferences. In a special report for Accuracy in Media, AIA's parent group, Romerstein reported that the Soviets also lied about casualties in the Spanish Civil War. The "war heroes" that Soviet apologists celebrated for decades were actually deserters shot by their own comrades. This vignette did not make it into Dr. Furr's talk either.

For their part, Dr. Furr's colleagues on the MLA's panel on "(Un)Critical Reading" want to restrict the flow of information in ways that would have made Stalin envious. It bears repetition that, in their courses, these professors can put their plans in action. "Reading is, and I exaggerate only a little, the other name of class," says Kimberly DeFazio of the State University of New York at Stony Brook.

Dr. DeFazio offered up a "Labor Theory of Reading." "Does one sell one's labor to survive or does one purchase the labor of others?," Dr. DeFazio says.

"We need a theory of class analysis for critical reading," says Dr. DeFazio. "Spontaneous reading fosters unequal social relationships."

She took a sideswipe at "imperialist wars in Afghanistan and Iraq." She also said that "The religious experience in America is funded by corporate donations."

"Should critical reading focus on the class struggle?," Vincent Barry Leitch of the University of Oklahoma asked rhetorically. "Yes," he answered himself.

"Intellectuals are affected negatively by the capitalist inclination towards innovation." But don't real intellectuals like innovation? It depends on how you define intellectual.

"For some three decades or more, we have seen an antipathy towards Marxism," Dr. Furr laments. Imagine.

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