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Weekend WEATHER

 FRI: 12/14- 46°

 SAT: 12/15- 45°

 SUN: 12/16-45°

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The Defamation of Grover Furr *Attacks against professor prove to be nothing but Red Scare*

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A YouTube video of a Montclair professor at a public debate has sparked the attention of national and local news outlets, resulting in both public outcry and marked sensationalism.

In the video, the professor is addressed a question regarding genocides committed by communist regimes in the past hundred years, which grows into a shouting match between the professor and the questioner. "The United States has the lowest standard of living of all of the industrialized countries," says the professor at the end of the video, "and they all have some form of Socialized healthcare, and you should have it too!"

The professor was Grover Furr, who has been

with Montclair State for 43 years, and teaches classes like History of Journalism, World Literature and History of the English Language.

Outside of his capacities as an English professor, his research specialty has been the communist regimes of the 20th century, where he holds a number of controversial positions.

One popular contention is his claim that Stalin, who is historically recognized as a genocidal mass-murderer, never actually perpetrated any of the alleged atrocities. "I have yet to find one crime," he shouts in the video, "one crime that Stalin committed!"

The video is hosted by 'YALiberty,' with a description that reads "Let's make this video go viral." It has 37,000+

views to date.

Young Americans for Liberty (YAL) is a national organization for politically libertarian students. A relatively new activist organization, it has grown rapidly in the past four years, expanding to 300 chapters representing 26,000 students across the nation, a testament to the burgeoning American libertarian movement.

After the publishing of the video on their official YouTube channel, Jeff Frazee, the executive director and founder of YAL and the former National Youth Coordinator for Ron Paul's 2008 presidential campaign released a statement claiming Furr was teaching Stalinism to students. When Furr responded to YAL on this statement, Frazee, arguably one of the most im-

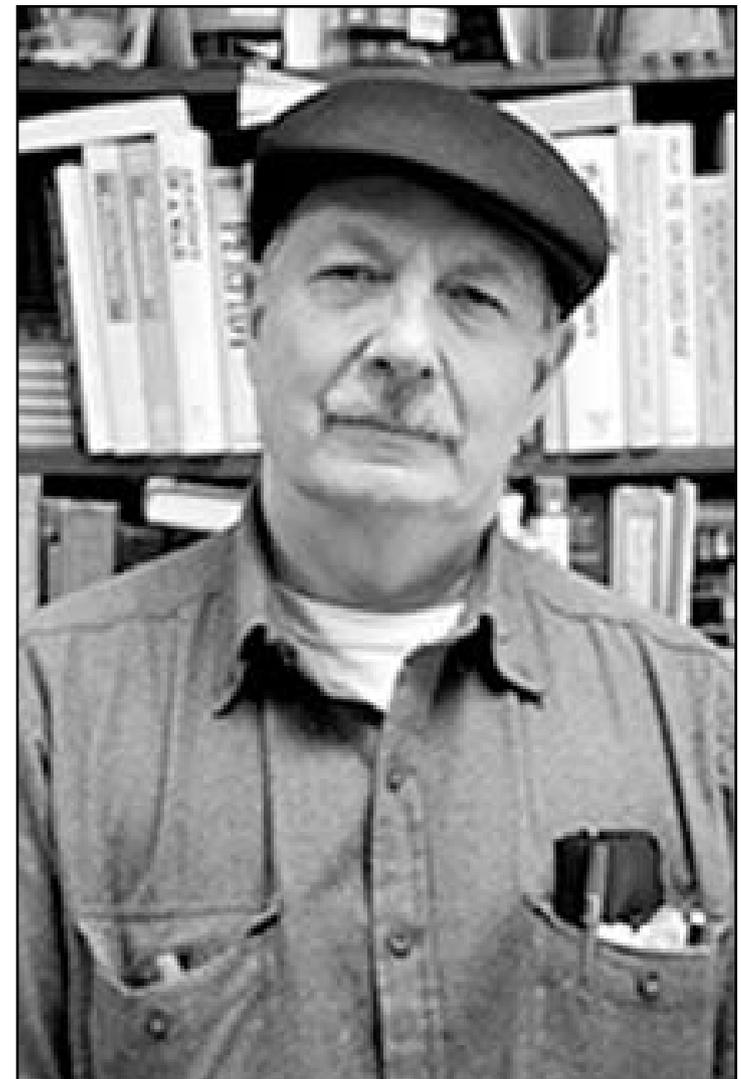


Photo courtesy of flickr.com.

Professor Grover Furr teaches the History of Journalism here at Montclair State.

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portant libertarian youth leaders in the country, personally responded with one sentence, "You are a sick man for denying the deaths of millions of innocent people and should be exposed for such."

During the recent election season, YAL sponsored a series of debates held at seven universities, and it was at this debate that the video of Prof. Furr was taken. "During the first few days, I watched the video rise in popularity, from 7,000 views to 12,000 views to 25,000 views, and so on," said Anthony Celi, Vice President of the local YAL chapter. "It was very exciting to see our event get national coverage. We worked long and hard to put that debate together."

This coverage, however, was mostly due to the circulation it was receiving among a variety of conservative-leaning news sources and independent bloggers. The video had indeed gone viral, and with a very particular audience.

The Washington Examiner, a daily paper with a circulation of a few hundred thousand, ran the headline on its site "Your Tax Dollars At Work: prof says Stalin did not kill millions of people - that's 'the Big Lie.'" The video itself is called "Communist Denier' teaches students." The title's implications, however, are that Grover Furr uses his platform as a professor to teach communism or Stalinism to his students, a possibly spurious allegation.

All of this media attention caught the eye of Arthur V. Belenduik, a lawyer from Washington D.C. Belenduik's field is communications and he has been practicing law for decades. "If the FCC regulates it, it's the kind of work I do." Arthur Belenduik is also a first-generation Ukrainian American.

"When Stalin was rolling his tanks into Eastern Europe, my parents were running for their lives," he said. "My aunt spent five years in a concentration camp under Stalin. I've seen what he can do first hand." It wasn't long after the video went online that Belenduik was receiving emails from Ukrainian friends about Prof. Furr. The prospect that someone making claims that Stalin never commit-

ted "one crime" was teaching at a public university was appalling to Belenduik.

Belenduik felt he needed to reach out, and contacted the office of the president, the College of Humanities and Social Sciences and the English department. The position of the school was that Prof. Furr was entitled to his first amendment rights, both in public forums and on his website hosted through Montclair's servers.

"The first amendment is not an absolute right," said Belenduik, speaking on the phone from his office in Washington. "It's not an issue of teaching the controversial. We demand that students who come to college be taught things that are truthful." Unsatisfied with the official response from the university, he reached out to the Montclarion. "I am asking that you take steps that will lead to the immediate

"None of these bloggers, or anyone saying these things, has ever been in one of my classes. Have they ever sat in on one of my classes? Or spoken to my students? They certainly could have. And those are the only opinions that matter."

-Grover Furr

termination of Grover Furr," he wrote in an email to our editors.

The portrayal of Prof. Furr by these online news sources is endemic of a popular narrative in modern conservative politics: universities are liberal institutions, subsidized by your tax dollars, where young people go to be indoctrinated into left leaning ideologies. The Washington Examiner and other publications paint Prof. Furr as a typical example of just this. The alleged ethical infringement, however, hinges on whether or not Professor Furr brings his personal politics into the classroom, out of context of the coursework at hand.

Though initially excited by the circulation and publicity, the local leadership of YAL was clear that they didn't support the outcry against Prof. Furr which called for his removal from his teaching position. "We invited the man to debate his position, and he did just that," said Celi. "The debate existed independently of his teaching."

Ultimately, it's Professor Furr's behavior in class which informs the legitimacy of his professional performance. The College for Humanities and Social Sciences was reluctant to comment on whether or not there had been a history of formalized complaints against Prof. Furr, or whether administrators had sat in on or observed any classes.

"I can tell you this," said Dr. Emily Isaacs, chair of the English department, "I have not received a complaint from an undergraduate student regarding any English class this semester."

"None of these bloggers, or anyone saying these things, has ever been in one of my classes," said Furr, who's no stranger to the regular criticism he receives, mostly online, and none of whom have reached out to him for comment on the debate clip. "Have they ever sat in on one of my classes? Or spoken to my students? They certainly could have. And those are the only opinions that matter."

"I'd heard that his political views had influenced his classes," said one student who has taken Prof. Furr's class in Middle English Literature. "But in my class, he never really made any references to communism or Stalinism or anything." Most students have the same reaction.

Prof. Furr, though notorious for his political positions, can't recall an incident where Prof. Furr brought those positions into an irrelevant classroom context.

Professor Furr keeps a website where all of his course materials are available for anyone to view, hosted on Montclair's servers, as well as information on his political views, his publications and articles he authors or curates. "I've taken a look at the syllabus for his History of Journalism class, at least," said an associate professor who teaches journalism here at Montclair, "and I couldn't find anything

that wasn't really par-for-the-course."

Though there is debate about his writings on the subject of communist regimes of the 20th century, they've never been a part of his assigned readings or materials for classes he's taught, and Prof. Furr often has to defend himself from outright slander on the subject.

Ratemyprofessors.com, a site owned by MTV-U that hosts millions of ratings and comments, is a site where you can post reviews of your professors much like you would movies or restaurants. The site has pages of comments about Prof. Furr, many of which range from the misleading to the obviously fraudulent. Prof. Furr writes a letter nearly annually requesting the removal of dozens of these posts, going one by one through each review pointing out clear inaccuracies, such as comments on Furr's performance teaching classes that don't even exist.

"As I recall, in every case they removed the posts I identified," said Furr. "[They've] handled this matter well." Soon after they're removed, the comments begin to stack up again, and are often taken as legitimate and used to levy criticism in right-wing blogs.

Public and private universities have historically been a safe haven for the exchange of controversial ideas, the institution itself representing the value of multi-disciplinary practices and views informs the growth of an informed member of society.

"Students attending Montclair State University are aware, intelligent and discerning," said Suzanne Bronski, Montclair's Director of Media Relations. "At the heart of the university experience is the valuable process of helping students to arrive at their own informed and considered opinions. As much as people may vehemently disagree with Professor Furr, we deeply believe that students are capable of separating out historical truth from personal political viewpoints."

As for Furr himself, the defense against the defamation of his character marches onward. He thinks it's time for another letter to Ratemyprofessors.com. "I'll probably write to them again as soon as classes are over."