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UC president: Faculty should educate, not proselytize

By LARRY MITCHELL - Staff Writer

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Mark Yudof, president of the University of California

CHICO During his talk at the Chico Chamber of Commerce Tuesday, University of California President Mark Yudof was asked about professors who promote their own political beliefs.

A man in the audience referred to a report called "A Crisis of Competence," saying, "the report says the schools are very, very liberal and it gets passed down."

He said he could believe it, citing the example of his own children whom he said were "shouted down" by their college classmates when they expressed conservative views.

Yudof said it was terrible the students were shouted down. There's no excuse for that ever, he said.

The report, which focused on the UC, claims that "a college education is now much less likely to improve reading, writing and reasoning skills, as well as general knowledge, than it used to." One reason for this, it says, is that many professors spend less time on traditional subject matter and more time promoting their notions of social justice.

Yudof said he'd read the report and found it "a hodge-podge" containing "gross exaggerations."

He called it "nonsense" to say that "this generation is less literate. They're doing fine. They are taking good courses."

However, Yudof said there is some truth in the charge of faculty proselytizing. He said he doesn't want to see classes "politicized."

"Professors are there to educate not to rouse the troops for a cause," he said. They should not put on their websites that everyone should be pro-Israel or pro-Palestinian, for example.

The problem of inappropriate political advocacy by faculty aggravates him, Yudof said. But it's difficult to do much about it, he added.

Retired Chico State University history professor Charles Gesheker, one of the report's authors, was in the audience. Gesheker is a member of the National Association of Scholars, which produced the report. He said it's a national group of about 4,000 professors who believe a university should be a place where all ideas can be freely expressed and met with civility. Part of the association's official description of itself says it promotes "the tradition of reasoned scholarship."

Gesheker told Yudof he was pleased to hear that he recognized the problem. He asked the president if he couldn't send a memo to all the UC campus chancellors condemning inappropriate political advocacy.

"I could do that," Yudof said. "I don't know that it would do much good."

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