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## Students react to flag burning controversy

**Meghan Hayward**

**Issue date:** 11/8/07 **Section:** [News](#)

If your professor offered extra-credit if you were to burn the American Flag or the U.S. Constitution or were arrested for defending free speech, would you? Rebekah McDade would not.

McDade, a second-year journalism and political science double-major at the University of Maine was offended when professor Paul Grosswiler made this claim in her history of communications class. McDade chose to drop the class immediately afterward.

"There is a lot of military in my family so the flag and the Constitution, while not illegal to burn either of them, are things that are really important to me," McDade said. "My father was over in the Middle East, and those are things that my family has fought for, and it offends me to think that people would just burn it, especially for something as trivial as extra credit for a class."

Grosswiler said his main point in using this reference was to emphasize the tremendous courage it took early American editors like William Lloyd Garrison to express ideas that threatened or took their lives.

"I try to present the idea that we have the First Amendment right to burn the flag in the context that they know it is not to be taken literally. It's a mixture of seriousness and humor," Grosswiler said.

McDade said when the issue first became public, she was uncomfortable.

"I don't enjoy the position I am in, but I am trying to use it to learn how to be good to people when they are in uncomfortable situations in my future career," McDade said.

McDade did not expect the issue to become so widely publicized. Earlier this week, she was contacted by NBC about a possible interview on the Today Show.

When the extra-credit claim was made, McDade said the class became silent and some questioned whether Grosswiler was serious.

Kathleen Dame, a first-year journalism major who is currently in the class, said while she was shocked at first and caught off guard. She believes that Grosswiler makes this claim to be used as a teaching tool to emphasize power of free speech. Dame said his intent was not to actually burn the flag.

[Continued...](#)

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### **Kathleen March**

posted 11/08/07 @ 7:55 AM EST

Professor Grosswiler should be applauded for having the courage to bring a very controversial topic into the classromm during this polarized time in US history. ([Continued...](#))

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### **improvjeff**

### **Jeff Hake**

posted 11/08/07 @ 8:38 AM EST

I agree with Kathleen and certainly stand on Paul's side. Never in the history of the United States, not even

at the height of McCarthyism, have the basic rights of Americans to free speech, self-expression, and assembly been so threatened by the institution that is intended to uphold them, the US government. ([Continued...](#))

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## Alum

**posted 11/08/07 @ 10:52 AM EST**

Having graduated from UM and taken several classes from Professor Grosswiler, I find this uproar disturbing. Grosswiler and other professors like Lyombe Eko (former UM prof) have always vigorously defended free speech and inspired thoughtful discussion. ([Continued...](#))

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## Christine

**posted 11/08/07 @ 4:03 PM EST**

I think it's humorous that the name of the organization McDade wants on campus is called Academic Freedom. The irony leaves me absolutely speechless. ([Continued...](#))

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## Concerned

**posted 11/09/07 @ 10:53 AM EST**

Regardless of whatever you may or may not feel about flag burning to me this is just a small indicator of a much larger problem on campus. To be honest I'm not paying nearly 20,000 dollars a year to be bombarded by professors preaching from their liberal pulpit. ([Continued...](#))

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## Chris

**posted 11/09/07 @ 7:07 PM EST**

Even more disturbing to me than this incident is the UMaine student senate considering adopting Students for Academic Freedom and David Horowitz's "Student Bill of Rights. ([Continued...](#))

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## Slippery Slope

**posted 11/09/07 @ 9:14 PM EST**

I wonder the type of response that would be generated if Professor Grosswiler had offered extra credit for burning the UN flag, writing articles against homosexuality, and being arrested for protesting abortion

clinics. ([Continued...](#))

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## UMaine parent

## UMaine parent

posted 11/10/07 @ 11:23 AM EST

Should a professor (even in jest) propose to give extra credit to students for burning the flag, burning the constitution, or being arrested in the name of free speech? As Glenn Beck said, regarding our right to burn the flag -- he has a right to do so, but a responsibility NOT TO. ([Continued...](#))

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## Umaine Sibling

posted 11/10/07 @ 11:36 AM EST

I would like to note that this professor Changed his story so many times during this whole occurence. How should a man be respected if he can not keep his integrity when a 19 year old College student can keep her's?

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## distant observer

posted 11/12/07 @ 2:35 AM EST

ok, ive been reading into this since it began.... mcdade regardless of her excuse, is looking for attention. if she wasnt, why would she have gone the press?? she wants nothing more than attention. ([Continued...](#))

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