

# NACA's College Politics

By Wheat Williams

On Feb. 16 through 21, at the Opryland Hotel, the National Association for Campus Activities (NACA) will hold its annual convention. While it's not open to the public, the events and circumstances surrounding it provide an intriguing, possibly disturbing picture of the zeitgeist of today's institutions of higher learning.

Entitled "Celebrando el Cambio" ("Celebrating Change"), the event is an opportunity for student and staff leaders from colleges and universities across the country to come together and educate each other about trends and issues facing those in higher education. On a more colorful note, it's also a massive talent-buying opportunity, with dozens of top-notch musical groups, entertainers, and public speakers showcasing for campus activities committees and vying for next year's bookings.

NACA—a non-profit organization which links colleges with talent agencies—coordinates "cooperative buying," by which several colleges in the same area can book artists for consecutive dates. "The college entertainment market is a vast one that aspiring and seasoned artists want to tap into. Multiple bookings within the same area create more attractive pricing, establish more logical routing, increase business volume, and keep the attraction working," says NACA Convention and Member Services Director Lou Ross.

More than 2,500 registrants from 1,100 member colleges and 500 member talent agencies will be in attendance at Opryland. Agencies include William Morris, Sony Music (formerly CBS), MTV and the Dick Clark Agency. More than 70 performing groups will be showcased, spanning pop music, the performing arts and—this year's hottest trend—stand-up comics. Big names include jazz artist Christopher Hollyday, comedienne Paula Poundstone, rock oddity Mojo Nixon, pianist Liz Story and political satirist A. Whitney Brown. Nashville talent is represented with artists like Reunion/Geffen's Kim Hill, folk-rock favorites Say-So, guitarist Robin Crowe and comedian Truett "Killer Beaz" Beasley. And there's a workshop entitled "Presenting Country Music On Campus."

The keynote speaker for the event will be former U.S. Congresswoman and civil rights activist Shirley Chisholm. Li Lu, a student leader of the Tianamen Square demonstrations and one of the 20 people on China's most wanted list, is also a featured speaker. Mohammed Hakki, bureau chief of one of Kuwait's leading newspapers and a frequent guest on network news programs, will no doubt be in extreme demand for his perspective on the Gulf war.

Dean James Sandlin, Director of Vanderbilt University's Sarratt Student Center, has been attending NACA conventions on and off for 20 years. "Though the really big talent agencies don't come anymore, it's a valuable experience for the students," he says. "Its training seminars are one of its strong suits. They provide student activities chairmen with entry level opportunities to learn what contracts mean, how to stage technical productions, and how to promote and do publicity. The second thing is it keeps you up with what's

multiculturalism is seen by many as an attempt to subvert traditional American and Western European academic values and to silence those who espouse them. On Dec. 24, 1990, *Newsweek* cast the issue as a cover story, rife with anecdotes of abusive treatment towards professors and students who were not "politically correct." The title read "Is this the New Enlightenment—or the New McCarthyism?"

The NACA's numerous publications abound with "politically correct" language. Black participants are referred to only as "people of color," and they've avoided references to American culture—there are, they say, many cultures in American college life, none of them dominant and none of them uniquely American. Their new statement of purpose proclaims, in part, "The NACA and the NACA Educational Foundation, in affirmation of their commitment to the principles of multicultural enhancement, are supportive of the concepts of non-discrimination, affirmative action, and equal opportunity as they relate to race, creed, native origin, gender, sexual orientation, age, and physical ability. In holding with these tenets, the Association stresses the importance of eliminating discriminatory and/or culturally insensitive language, behavior and content..."

At the outset, no one who is broad-minded can object to curbing discrimination. On the other hand, one has to wonder just how terms like "culturally insensitive content" are defined. Universities have always been places where radically different and opposing points of view can be presented and debated openly; should any point of view be "eliminated" from the marketplace of ideas? Speaking of the multicultural trend in general, *Newsweek* observed, "What is distressing is that at the university, of all places, tolerance has to be imposed rather than taught, and that 'progress' so often is just the replacement of one repressive orthodoxy by another."

One wonders if NACA-sponsored college lectures and debates will continue to present both sides of any given controversy and what all those stand-up comics will be permitted to make jokes about.

There is a potentially darker side to the NACA's educational agenda, as evinced by topics such as "Utilizing Power To Promote Multicultural Acceptance," whose program description is sprinkled with militant language: "This session presents information concerning aspects of power that students can ethically utilize to promote multicultural acceptance.... Specific tactics including recruitment of diverse student group members, overcoming resistance and conflict to exercise change, and role modeling will be discussed."

A program entitled "A Changed Campus Ethos" promises "This new diversity increases the number of competing power groups. Thus, we will make suggestions and offer a paradigm in which a new order is hypothesized."

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What may be more controversial is the NACA's position as a vigorous proponent of "multiculturalism." A broad agenda aimed at eliminating racism, sexual discrimination and prejudice,

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Whatever the outcome, the only constant seems to be change, and college campus leaders are responding. After all, a college education isn't just about stand-up comics and rock 'n' roll—it's about preparing one's self for participating in the evolution of society. ■

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