

Professor heats up debate on sex, academia

Colleges should not restrict romances of faculty and students, UCLA teacher writes.

By Larry Gordon
Los Angeles Times

LOS ANGELES — In the volatile mix of academia and sex, University of California, Los Angeles psychology professor Paul R. Abramson says he is trying to light a torch for liberty.

Abramson is sharply criticizing his own employer and colleges nationwide that have adopted restrictions — and, in a few cases, outright bans — on romances between faculty and students.

Of course, sexual harassment should not be allowed and no one should supervise or give grades to a romantic partner, says Abramson, who has taught at UCLA for 31 years. But those concerns should not restrict the right of consenting adults to have a non-exploitative relationship, he argues in a new book.

The rights to romance and to choose whom to love are as basic as the freedoms of speech and reli-

gion, Abramson writes in "Romance in the Ivory Tower: The Rights and Liberty of Conscience" (MIT Press). A university that suppresses such a choice "tramples the very nature of freedom itself," he declares.

Readers looking for sexy material will be disappointed by his 172-page volume, unless they get turned on by constitutional law and copious references to Jefferson, Madison and the 9th Amendment. There are no steamy scenes of stolen kisses in library cubicles.

But the book has steamed some critics.

University leaders say anti-dating rules protect students, usually graduate students, who may feel their education is at risk when a relationship ends. As expected, the book has triggered a few smirky comments about its author, who teaches courses on human sexuality and whose previous writings tackled such topics as abuse and incest, the spread of AIDS and the history of sexual freedom.

Conservative critic Dinesh D'Souza called Abramson's constitutional arguments a "legal absurdity" and wrote in his online

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Paul R. Abramson
UCLA psychology professor

column that the UCLA professor "is certainly entitled to cruise the bars of Los Angeles if he wants to. I just think he should leave his copy of the Constitution behind."

Salon.com, in a blurb that set off a blistering online debate about the classroom and the bedroom, suggested that Abramson might be "a campus Casanova in his own right."

To that, Abramson reacted wryly during an interview at his campus office. "I'm 57 and have three kids and two grandkids. If I'm the campus Casanova, then the campus has a lot of problems," said the professor, who has long, graying hair, a goatee and an earring.

Abramson concedes that his personal life was complicated in his 20s but says he has been a staid suburban soccer dad for the last two decades. Thrice divorced, he is married to a 51-year-old neonatal nurse who has never been affiliated with UCLA.

He points out that he has not had a romance with anyone at UCLA for 20 years, although he said he had serious relationships with two former undergraduate students nearly 30 years ago. One was 13 years his senior, and the other, whom he eventually married, was five years his junior. He met them in his classes but did not date them until later, he said.

Too many people have an unrealistic stereotype of campus love, he said. "The picture of it is the older professor and Suzie Coed. I'm sure such things happen, but the greater likelihood are people of similar ages, with similar interests, going for the same music and movies," like a 27-year-old assistant professor and a 24-year-old graduate student who later got married, he said.

Abramson's book began as a reaction to regulations adopted by the University of California re-

gents in 2003; they didn't ban such hookups but declared that professors should avoid romantic or sexual relationships with students for whom they have "or should reasonably expect" to have teaching or supervisory responsibility. That includes students interested in a subject within the professor's expertise — a definition that Abramson finds overly broad. Sanctions range from written censure to dismissal.

The rules were adopted, amid some debate, partly in reaction to a sexual harassment allegation at UC Berkeley. Its law school dean, John P. Dwyer, resigned in 2002 after a student charged that he fondled her when she passed out from heavy drinking. The dean said the encounter was consensual.

The fact that the Dwyer case was cited to support the rules shows that campus leaders were more concerned about lawsuits than anything else, Abramson alleges.

"Eliminating civil liberties to punish a small number of transgressors is hardly the answer," he writes.

To allay legal fears, he suggests

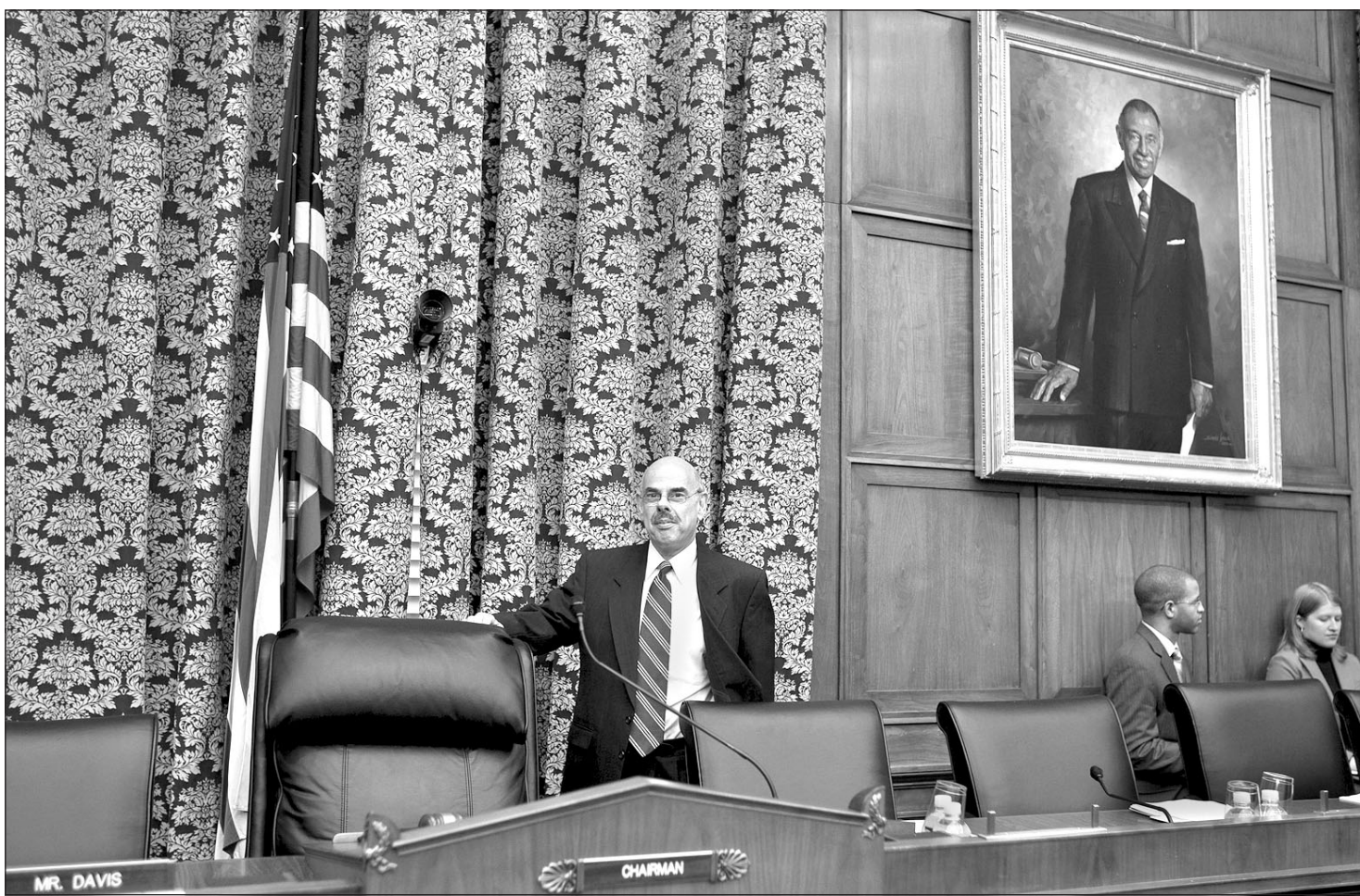
an alternative: All faculty and students would read and sign a release (a "love contract") that would warn about the power differences and favoritism that can arise from faculty-student dating. They then would promise, as in a medical release, not to hold the school responsible if the romance goes sour.

UC Santa Barbara political science professor Gayle Binion, who helped draft the 2003 UC policy when she headed the system-wide Academic Senate, said it was partly intended to shield UC from liability.

But more important, she said, most of the faculty thought it was "good policy" since students may consent to an affair but not grasp the potential consequences even if they sign a release.

"If the relationship goes awry, it is the student who is going to suffer," Binion said, citing instances of graduate students who then drop out.

Such relationships are "not terribly uncommon at the graduate student level," but probably less frequent and more "under the radar" now than during the free-wheeling '70s and early '80s, she said.



Rep. Henry Waxman, D-Los Angeles, chairman of the House Committee on Oversight and Government Reform, quizzed Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice on Thursday about allegations that Iraqi Prime Minister Nouri al-Maliki blocked corruption probes of top officials.

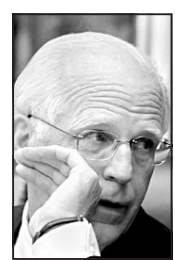
Waxman: One analyst praises him for reviving oversight role

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countable for getting us into this war and the way this war is conducted."

"When Bush became president, the Republicans in charge of oversight decided there was no scandal too big for them to ignore," Waxman said. "They didn't want to hold hearings. They didn't want to look at anything that might embarrass the president, which is contrary to the constitutional separation of powers that provides checks and balances."

Waxman grew up talking politics at home in Los Angeles. His father and mother were "fervent New Dealers" and the children of Russian immigrants. His father had a grocery store and later worked for other grocers. Waxman was the first in the family to graduate from college. Now 68, he's been an elected official since he won a seat in the California Legislature at 28.

"Waxman has been a spectacular success in his first year as chairman of the full committee," said Thomas Mann, a Congress expert at the Brookings Institution, a centrist policy research



REP. CHRISTOPHER SHAYS

The Republican, a panel member for 20 years, says the emphasis on Iraq has been unfairly negative.

group. "On all important counts — the range, volume and quality of his oversight initiatives — he almost single-handedly revived the critical role of Congress in overseeing the executive."

The ranking Republican on the committee, Rep. Tom Davis of Virginia, said that when one party controls both the presidency and Congress, "oversight tends to disappear."

"You tend to under-investigate," Davis said. "When you have two-party rule, you tend to over-investigate. Henry's overstepped it a couple of times, but he's doing some needed things as well. ... Some of the things he's doing are useful."

But for committee member Rep. Christopher Shays, R-

Conn., there's been too much negativity.

"I have served on this committee for 20 years, and everything this committee has done since we've gone into Iraq in this last year, in particular, has been to try to point out everything bad that is going on," Shays said Thursday, as Waxman and others listened during a hearing held to question Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice on Iraq.

Rep. John Mica, R-Fla., agreed, complaining that the hearing was intended to "make the State Department look bad, the Iraqis look bad, the contractors look bad."

Waxman's committee has issued 22 subpoenas so far, 11 of them to the State Department. He wrote in a recent letter to Rice that the department had instructed its personnel not to speak publicly about how the Iraqi government is doing or whether it has the will or ability to fight corruption. He also noted that the department classified some reports on Iraq that had been public.

Waxman's style is to question persistently, repeating his ques-

tion several times in slightly different ways if he's not satisfied with the answers. He often smiles as he ends a question. He's direct, but polite.

On Thursday, for example, he asked Rice several times about allegations that Iraqi Prime Minister Nouri al-Maliki has blocked corruption investigations of top officials.

Rice said she'd have to get more information and get back to him. She said corruption certainly was pervasive and that the State Department was investigating. She said she didn't want to expose sources, so officials would tell the committee about Iraq corruption only in a closed meeting.

"The problem with that offer is that you will give this information that we then cannot make public because it's then confidential," Waxman replied. "And I think there are a lot of things that ought to be made public."

Call Renee Schoof, McClatchy Washington Bureau, (202) 383-6004.

STATE DIGEST

Two kids drown in Antioch pool

ANTIOCH — Two toddlers drowned Friday in a family's backyard swimming pool in Antioch while their mother left them unattended to use the restroom, authorities said.

The victims were a 3-year-old boy and his 1-year-old sister, police said. There was a fence around the pool, but the children managed to get past it, authorities said.

Neighbors told authorities they heard screaming at the home and arrived to find the children at the bottom of the pool. Cardiopulmonary resuscitation was attempted on the children before medics arrived on the scene, to no avail.

The children, whose identities were not immediately released, were taken to Sutter Delta Medical Center, where they were pronounced dead.

Ads barred at Golden Gate

SAN FRANCISCO — Golden Gate Bridge officials have rejected a number of proposals that would have allowed limited corporate advertising to help bolster sagging revenues at the famed span.

The bridge district's board of directors shelved the plans after listening to overwhelmingly negative comments from members of the public. The plans included an option that would have allowed for corporate logos in visitor areas of the bridge, on trash cans and bridge-related publications.

Supporters of the ad program said the revenue would have staved off future toll increases.

'Burglar' was a deputy

BRADBURY — Deputies responding to a burglary-in-progress call found a bear ransacking a Bradbury home.

A resident discovered a break-in when he returned home Thursday evening and he immediately called the Los Angeles County Sheriff's Department. Sgt. Roberta Granek said deputies responding to the Woodland Lane address at 6:30 p.m. spotted the "really hairy" intruder.

Department of Fish and Game officials were sent to the home and scared the bear off within a few minutes.

No one was hurt, but the house was a mess.

Medflies in L.A. County

RANCHO PALOS VERDES — Crop-destroying Mediterranean fruit flies have turned up in the Rolling Hills Estates and Rancho Palos Verdes areas, which are now the target of a massive eradication effort.

Four female flies were discovered this week. It's the first Medfly infestation in Los Angeles County since 2001.

Ground crews are spraying an organic pesticide on trees and residents are being notified that sterile male Medflies will be released this weekend.

The peninsula area is now quarantined.

— From the Associated Press

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Recycling for the Future

More than 75 percent of the newspaper used to print The Sacramento Bee contains recycled fiber. At least 50 percent of fiber content is from recycled waste.

Armenia: Turks are key to U.S. effort in Iraq

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message on past inhumanities to prevent future ones.

"We certainly thought it would be a very tough fight, but it was a much more lopsided one than we expected," said Rep. Adam Schiff, D-Burbank, a main sponsor of the bill.

Pelosi as well as Rep. Steny Hoyer of Maryland, the majority leader, were both dedicated proponents of the resolution that would put the House on record as defining the deaths of an estimated 1.5 million Armenians in 1915 as genocide. And the crisis in Darfur had raised public consciousness about genocide as well.

It did not hurt that Armenians are an influ-

ential bloc in California, the speaker's home, and that the resolution was a top priority of California House members of both parties, including Schiff and two other Democratic members of Congress, Brad Sherman and Anna G. Eshoo, a lawmaker of Armenian heritage who is a close friend of Pelosi's.

California is home to fully half the nation's 1 million people of Armenian extraction, mainly in Fresno, Los Angeles, Glendale and San Francisco.

Sherman said the speaker's decision to pledge a vote by the full House was not about personal relationships but about principle.

"You don't have to have a special relationship with this speaker to get her to be in favor

of recognizing genocide," he said.

While the backers of the resolution pressed ahead, the Turkish government also went to work, hiring a lobbying team to raise concerns about the potential backlash in Turkey if the resolution was approved, particularly when Turkey is a staging ground for the Iraq war.

The Turkish government has resisted the characterization of genocide, seeing the deaths as among the many tragic losses in a time of brutal conflict. But most of the lobbying against the resolution centered on the need not to antagonize Turkey at time when it was of crucial strategic value.