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Reeling From Harsh Attacks, Educators Weigh How to Respond to 'Politically Correct' Label

By SCOTT HELLER

Only a few months ago the expression "politically correct" was an inside joke, a way for student and faculty activists to poke fun at their own progressive beliefs. Today the words blaze from the covers of magazines and newspapers, tarring colleges and universities as left-wing hotbeds where dissenting opinions are squelched.

Even President Bush got in on the act when, in a commencement address last month, he decried "the boring politics of division and derision" that threaten free speech on campuses.

Reeling From Steady Attacks

The steady attacks, also mounted in such recent high-profile books as Dinesh D'Souza's *Illiberal Education* and Roger Kimball's *Tenured Radicals*, have left educators reeling, confounded over whether—and how—to fight back.

Last month the Modern Language Association, whose members have borne the

brunt of much of the criticism, issued a statement defending the way literature is taught on the nation's campuses. The statement accused critics of "misrepresentation and false labeling."

Some humanities professors have suggested the formation of an organization to counter what they see as distorted information presented in articles, books, and by the National Association of Scholars, most of whose members are politically and academically conservative.

"The terms of the debate, as framed by the right, have become apocalyptic and hysterical," said Peter Brooks, director of Yale University's Whitney Center for the Humanities. At a national meeting of campus humanities-center directors in April, he proposed forming a group to counter the N.A.S., an idea that so far hasn't got off the ground.

Stephen H. Balch, president of the N.A.S., laughed when told about the idea. "I suppose I should be flattered," he

Continued on Page A16