

College under fire for course tying Israelis to JFK's death

By MICHAEL GRANBERRY
Los Angeles Times

MISSION VIEJO, Calif. — The South Orange County Community College District has approved a course that claims a conspiracy was behind the assassination of President John F. Kennedy and has committed \$5,000 for flying in four guest speakers, one of whom says the Israeli intelligence agency, Mossad, masterminded the killing.

The course, scheduled for Sept. 26-28 and advertised by district literature as a "high-quality community education" offering, has angered some faculty members and others who say the board's decision subjects the college to ridicule and endorses the agendas of political extremists.

"All of this is out-and-out anti-Semitism," said Cheryl Altman, chairwoman of the department of reading at Saddleback Community College in Mission Viejo, which, along with Irvine Valley Community College, is run by the district.

The Anti-Defamation League, which formally opposed the course at a trustees meeting Monday night, accuses one of the speakers, Washington author Michael Collins Piper, of being a proponent of Holocaust denial and labels his claim that Israelis killed Kennedy ridiculous.

Another speaker, Chicago author Sherman Skolnick, is, according to the Anti-Defamation League, a member of the advisory board of The Spotlight, which the organization called "the most anti-Semitic publication in America."

Steven J. Frogue, the president of the community college district's seven-member board of trustees — who cast the tiebreaking vote to approve the course — will also teach the three-day seminar, albeit free of charge. Frogue said the \$5,000 allocated to the speakers will come not from taxpayer money but solely from the \$99 fees being charged the students who take the course.

Frogue also noted at the meeting that no student will receive

academic credit for the course.

'Experts' incite derision

Gerald Posner, the author of "Case Closed: Lee Harvey Oswald and the Assassination of JFK," seemed aghast Wednesday at the panel of speakers heading to Orange County.

"The harm is setting this in an educational environment, where it has an official stamp of approval," Posner said. "This strikes me as being similar to the notion that the Holocaust was a hoax."

Chip Berlet, who has studied the assassination extensively and is a senior analyst at Political Research Associates, a nonprofit think tank in Somerville, Mass., that examines authoritarian thinking, laughed upon hearing the names of the panel of experts.

"Oh, get out of here!" Berlet said. "You couldn't find ... more embarrassing conspiracists in America. Even among conspiracy theorists, these people represent the outer limits."

Some faculty members fear that the course will harm the reputation of the district.

"I am profoundly embarrassed that the president of our board of trustees is a man who takes seriously crackpots such as these," said Roy Bauer, a philosophy instructor at Irvine Valley Community College.

Last November, Frogue received a bigger endorsement than any other candidate in the district, garnering 128,361 votes in a reelection bid for a decisive 61 percent to 39 percent victory over his opponent.

Frogue did not return calls from the Los Angeles Times but said during an interview last fall that he believed the Anti-Defamation League played a key role in killing Kennedy.

Calling the Anti-Defamation League "a group of spies that actively keeps files on people ... people like me," Frogue added, "I believe Lee Harvey Oswald worked

for the ADL. That's right. ... I believe the ADL was behind it."

At the trustees meeting Monday night, Frogue denied making the comment.

All of this has caused an uproar on the district's two campuses. Earlier this week, faculty members lodged a protest with the school's attorney, charging that Frogue would violate state education guidelines by teaching a course while also sitting as the board president, and by voting to approve a course that he will teach.

"At the very least," Bauer said, "it's an egregious conflict of interest."

Robert Lombardi, the district's chancellor, demurred, saying Wednesday he had checked with both the district's counsel and the Orange County counsel, and neither saw a problem.

"I know there's a lot of passion about this," he said, "but I believe

colleges are places where people can have these kinds of special interests. For instance, we also offer a course on California wines."

Piper, reached at The Spotlight's offices on Wednesday, said he was excited about the course and his involvement in it, and he commended Frogue, "a personal friend," for having offered it.

The author of "Final Judgment: The Missing Link in the JFK Assassination Conspiracy," Piper explained his views.

The assassination, he said, "was a joint enterprise conducted on the highest levels of the American CIA, in collaboration with organized crime — and most specifically, with direct and profound involvement by the Mossad."

Piper assessed Israel's motive as having evolved from a dispute between Kennedy and the late David Ben-Gurion, the former Israeli prime minister.

Colleges add JFK conspiracy class

Seminar decision angers faculty

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