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A left-wing monopoly on campuses

By Jeff Jacoby, Globe Columnist | December 2, 2004

THE LEFT-WING takeover of American universities is an old story. In 1951, William F. Buckley Jr. created a sensation with "God and Man at Yale," which documented the socialist and atheist worldview that even then prevailed in the classrooms of the Ivy League institution he had just graduated from.

Today campus leftism is not merely prevalent. It is radical, aggressive, and deeply intolerant, as another newly minted graduate of another prominent university -- Ben Shapiro of UCLA -- shows in "Brainwashed," a recent bestseller. "Under higher education's facade of objectivity," Shapiro writes, "lies a grave and overpowering bias" -- a charge he backs up with example after freakish example of academics going to ideological extremes.

No surprise, then, that when researchers checked the voter registration of humanities and social science instructors at 19 universities, they discovered a whopping political imbalance. The results, published in *The American Enterprise* in 2002, made it clear that for all the talk of diversity in higher education, ideological diversity in the modern college faculty is mostly nonexistent.

So, for example, at Cornell, of the 172 faculty members whose party affiliation was recorded, 166 were liberal (Democrats or Greens) and six were conservative (Republicans or Libertarians). At Stanford the liberal-conservative ratio was 151-17. At San Diego State it was 80-11. At SUNY Binghamton, 35-1. At UCLA, 141-9. At the University of Colorado-Boulder, 116-5. Reflecting on these gross disparities, *The American Enterprise's* editor, Karl Zinsmeister, remarked: "Today's colleges and universities . . . do not, when it comes to political and cultural ideas, look like America."

At about the same time, a poll of Ivy League professors commissioned by the Center for the Study of Popular Culture found that more than 80 percent of those who voted in 2000 had cast their ballots for Democrat Al Gore while just 9 percent backed Republican George W. Bush. While 64 percent said they were "liberal" or "somewhat liberal," only 6 percent described themselves as "somewhat conservative" -- and none at all as "conservative."

And the evidence continues to mount.

The New York Times reports that a new national survey of more than 1,000 academics shows

Democratic professors outnumbering Republicans by at least 7 to 1 in the humanities and social sciences. At Berkeley and Stanford, according to a separate study that included professors of engineering and the hard sciences, the ratio of Democrats to Republicans is even more lopsided: 9 to 1.

Such one-party domination of any major institution is problematic in a nation where Republicans and Democrats can be found in roughly equal numbers. In academia it is scandalous. It strangles dissent, suppresses debate, and causes minorities to be discriminated against. It is certainly antithetical to good scholarship. "Any political position that dominates an institution without dissent," writes Mark Bauerlein, an English professor at Emory and director of research at the National Endowment for the Arts, "deteriorates into smugness, complacency, and blindness. ... Groupthink is an anti-intellectual condition."

Worse yet, it leads faculty members to abuse their authority. The American Council of Trustees and Alumni has just released the results of the first survey to measure student perceptions of faculty partisanship. The ACTA findings are striking. Of 658 students polled at the top 50 US colleges, 49 percent said professors "frequently comment on politics in class even though it has nothing to do with the course," 48 percent said some "presentations on political issues seem totally one-sided," and 46 percent said that "professors use the classroom to present their personal political views."

Academic freedom is not only meant to protect professors; it is also supposed to ensure students' right to learn without being molested. When instructors use their classrooms to indoctrinate and propagandize, they cheat those students and betray the academic mission they are entrusted with. That should be intolerable to honest men and women of every stripe -- liberals and conservatives alike.

"If this were a survey of students reporting widespread sexual harassment," says ACTA's president, Anne Neal, "there would be an uproar." That is because universities take sexual harassment seriously. Intellectual harassment, on the other hand -- like the one-party conformity it flows from -- they ignore. Until that changes, the scandal of the campuses will only grow worse.

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