



## JOHN LEO'S BLOG



**John Leo has covered the social sciences and intellectual trends for *Time* magazine and the *New York Times*. He is also the author of two books: *Two Steps Ahead of the Thought Police* and a book of humor, *How the Russians Invented Baseball and Other Essays of Enlightenment*.**

June 13, 2006

### **A lack of confidence in higher education**

On the theory that attacks on universities for leftist bias are "a tempest in a teapot," the Association of American University Professors sponsored a [phone survey](#) to test public opinion.

The AAUP said the survey suggested that Americans "have a high degree of confidence in higher education institutions." There's a "but," however: "The tempest in a teapot view, though not entirely unsubstantiated, underestimates how upset a sizable minority of Americans are about the perceived politics of professors."

Over 90 percent of those polled said they had either high confidence or some confidence in higher education. But liberal Democrats were twice as likely to report high confidence (53.1 percent) as were conservative Republicans (26.8 percent). Almost half of Republicans (48.5 percent) said bias in the classroom is a very serious problem, compared with 26.9 percent of Democrats. Four fifths of those surveyed thought tenure sometimes protects incompetent professors.

Anne Neale of the conservative American Council on Trustees and Alumni (acta) thought the poll could be viewed as significantly damaging to the academic establishment. Though only 8.2 percent said political bias is the greatest problem in American education, she said that when you add that percentage to the 10.2 percent who named low standards and the 5 percent who picked incompetent professors as the biggest fault, you get almost a quarter of those surveyed, 23.4 percent, who thought the quality of teaching and learning is the most glaring problem—second only to the cost of going to college. Neale said, "This poll is remarkable in its indictment of the academy and proof that acta's studies of curricular disarray and pervasive politics in the classroom are truly making their way into the public consciousness."

Posted at 12:00 PM by John Leo