



FOR TRUSTEES ONLY

featuring best articles on higher education

April 2004

INSTITUTE FOR EFFECTIVE GOVERNANCE

1726 M Street, NW • Suite 800

Washington, DC 20036

202.467.0376 • www.iegov.org

IS INTELLECTUAL DIVERSITY AN ENDANGERED SPECIES ON AMERICA'S COLLEGE CAMPUSES?

Hearing before the Senate Health, Education, Labor & Pensions Committee
Wednesday, October 29, 2003

TESTIMONY OF ANNE D. NEAL, PRESIDENT, AMERICAN COUNCIL OF TRUSTEES AND ALUMNI

One pundit on higher education has described our colleges and universities as islands of oppression in a sea of freedom. While the comment is humorous, the observation is quite serious. The lack of intellectual diversity on our college and university campuses is increasingly troublesome and of profound concern to all of us interested in the education of our next generation of leaders.

As early as 1991, Yale President Benno Schmidt warned that, "The most serious problems of freedom of expression in our society today exist on campuses. The assumption seems to be that the purpose of education is to induce correct opinion rather than to search for wisdom and liberate the mind." In his last report to the Board of Overseers, retiring Harvard president Derek Bok similarly warned: "What universities can and must resist are deliberate, overt attempts to impose orthodoxy and suppress dissent. ... In recent years, the threat of orthodoxy has come primarily from within rather than outside the university."

My organization, the American Council of Trustees and Alumni, was founded in 1995 and is a bipartisan network of college and university trustees and alumni across the country dedicated to academic freedom and excellence.

Anne Neal and KC Johnson testify at Senate Hearing. Prior to joining ACTA, Ms. Neal specialized in First Amendment law at the New York City law firm of Rogers & Wells. KC Johnson is a professor of history at Brooklyn College, City University of New York.



Since our founding, we have had occasion to evaluate colleges and universities in terms of academic freedom and academic offerings. And what we have discovered confirms these eminent university presidents' worst fears.

Rather than fostering intellectual diversity—the robust exchange of ideas traditionally viewed as the very essence of a college education—our colleges and universities are increasingly bastions of political correctness, hostile to the free exchange of ideas.

Before I go any further, I want to make one principle perfectly clear. There is no more important value to the life of the mind than academic freedom. This is the value that Thomas Jefferson so vividly articulated in reference to the University of Virginia: "We are not afraid," said

Jefferson, "to follow truth wherever it may lead, nor to tolerate any error so long as reason is left free to combat it." And that means permitting academics of all political stripes—with partisan or ideological commitments counting neither for nor against them—to engage in that exercise.

But what is at issue here today is the other side of the equation, the *student's* right to academic freedom, the student's right to learn and hear both sides of controversial issues of the day. While there is much thoughtful teaching and superb scholarship across the country, there are also many examples—as I will outline in the next few minutes—of teaching and learning being put into the service of politics and ideology. As a consequence, our colleges and univer-

sities are failing at their responsibility to educate the next generation of leaders by rigorous and balanced exposure to significant theories and thoughtful viewpoints.

Threats to the robust exchange of ideas on our college and university campuses come in many forms, but typically manifest themselves in the following ways:

- Disinviting of politically incorrect speakers;
- Mounting of one-sided panels, teach-ins and conferences;
- Sanctions against speakers who fail to follow the politically correct line;
- Instruction that is politicized;
- Virtual elimination of broad-based survey courses in favor of trendy, and often politicized, courses;
- Reprisal against or intimidation of students who seek to speak their mind;
- Political discrimination in college hiring and retention
- Speech codes and campus newspaper theft and destruction.

Here are some examples.

Disinvited Speakers

Former Secretary of State Henry Kissinger was disinvited by the University of Texas-Austin because of threats by a fringe student group. The heckler's veto reigns.

University of California trustee and recognized public figure Ward Connerly was disinvited by Columbia on the grounds that the university could not provide adequate security. Again, the protesting few limited the rights of the majority.

One-Sided Panels or Teach-Ins

Yale sponsored a teach-in examining the events of September 11 but was publicly criticized by Professor of Classics Donald Kagan for its utter failure to include a single spokesman in favor of

military action.

Brooklyn College sponsored a post 9/11 panel without any representatives of the U.S. or Israeli government's point of view. Professor Robert David Johnson condemned the panel as one sided, and—as you will learn—paid dearly for doing so.

At Columbia University, college professors convened a six-hour anti-war “teach-in.” One student, quoted in the campus newspaper, described the teach-in as nothing more than a “fervid pre-sentation of an exclusive viewpoint ... where professors could express their viewpoints unopposed.”

Sanctions Against the Politically Incorrect

In these cases, professors or students are singled out for punishment because of the content of their views. In the wake of September 11, a number of professors were sanctioned for being pro-war, while very few cases arose of professors being taken to task for anti-war views.

- Duke University shut down a faculty member's website after he included an article advocating a vigorous military response to terrorism. The website was later reinstated, but the professor must now include a disclaimer that his views do not reflect the views of the university. Duke has never before required such a disclaimer.

- A University of Massachusetts administrator revoked a permit for a pro-war rally, while allowing an anti-war rally to proceed.

- A Florida Gulf Coast dean instructed employees to remove “Proud to be an American” stickers until negative public reaction prompted her to revoke the decision.

Politicized Instruction

At the University of California, a course description for “The Politics

and Poetics of Palestinian Resistance” stated that “conservative thinkers are encouraged to seek other sections.” The University called the description a failure of oversight and announced it would monitor the class to ensure it did not exclude or discourage points of view. The professor, a leader of the Students for Justice in Palestine, was not reprimanded.

At the flagship campus of the University of Massachusetts (along with at least 30 institutions across the country, including Princeton and the University of California) students enroll in “whiteness studies.” At Massachusetts, the enrollees are required to participate in a “privilege walk.” According to the *Washington Post*, the field is “based on a left-leaning interpretation of history by scholars who say the concept of race was created by a rich white European and American elite, and has been used to deny property, power and status to nonwhite groups for two centuries.” Note: students are not asked to evaluate this thesis but to absorb it.

At the University of South Carolina, a professor provided students with a set of discussion guidelines that asked them to “acknowledge that racism, classism, sexism, heterosexism, and other institutionalized forms of oppression exist” and called upon them to “agree to combat actively the myths and stereotypes about our own groups and other groups so that we can break down the walls that prohibit group cooperation and group gain.”

At Arizona State University, a course on Navajo history restricted enrollment to American Indian students.

Several Spanish courses at Florida International University are closed to non-Hispanic students.

One-Sided Faculty

An Academic Study Survey conducted

by Stanley Rothman, Emeritus Professor of Political Science at Smith College, the results of which are being released today, finds that half of American professors identify with the Democrats, a third call themselves independent, while a tenth of the respondents identify with the Republicans. A much higher percentage of faculty members surveyed—72%—describe their own ideology as “left,” while 15% self-describe their ideology as “right.” Eighty-one percent of professors in the humanities and 75% in the social sciences identify their views as strongly or moderately left, while only 9% of respondents in these two fields hold strongly or moderately conservative views. Even in the science, math, business, and medicine sectors, faculty who identify themselves as Republican are in the minority.

This would not be so bad if professors consistently offered different points of view. However, the concept of balance appears to be out of favor with contemporary academicians. This was starkly underscored this fall when the Faculty Senate at the University of California adopted a new regulation on academic freedom. This new provision removed the long-term prohibition against using the classroom “as a platform for propaganda” on the grounds that in this new age “academic freedom does not distinguish between ‘interested’ and ‘disinterested’ scholarship.” At a time when post-modernism reigns on our college and university campuses, the concept of the disinterested search for the truth has been supplanted by a conception of the world that views every issue in terms of race, class and gender.

Disappearing Core Curricula

Even this ideological imbalance would not be fatal if students were given the knowledge and background that em-

powers them to think for themselves. But survey after survey by ACTA and others also show that *students are no longer even being exposed to broad areas of knowledge.*

Rather than being introduced to foundational subjects such as history, natural science, literature, government, and economics, students are permitted to pick and choose from a smorgasbord of academic offerings that are often trendy and tendentious. In two studies conducted by ACTA, *Losing America’s Memory* and *Restoring America’s Legacy*, we discovered that not one of the top 50 colleges require a course in American history of their graduates. Only five institutions required any history at all. Instead, students are picking from course offerings ranging from “From Hand to Mouth: Writing, Eating and the Construction of Gender” at Dartmouth and “Global Sexualities” at Duke to “Witchcraft, Sorcery and Magic” at Williams College.

In this atmosphere, faced often isolated anecdotes, that political correctness and the lack of intellectual diversity are not really a problem. That courses are handled fairly and that teachers are well aware of the need to let students speak their mind.

But the fact is there are too many alarms from too many quarters to ignore what is happening. Whether it is ACTA or the Foundation for Individual Rights in Education (FIRE), Nadine Strossen of the ACLU, or the late Supreme Court Justice William Brennan (who once said, regarding college speech codes, “They ought to just abolish all of them”), evidence of widespread limitations on intellectual diversity on our college campuses is now overwhelming.

Only last weekend, two recent college graduates bewailed the state of affairs in the *Wall Street Journal*. And I quote:

“One would not dare question certain ‘truths’ in the classroom for fear of being ostracized, vilified—or receiving a ‘grade adjustment.’ An independent-minded renegade chooses instead to bite his tongue rather than face the inevitable wrath of his peers and, worse, his instructor, who ought to be facilitating an honest, open dialogue.”

Given this substantial evidence, this committee is to be commended for raising awareness of this most critical academic freedom issue. “Sunlight,” as Justice Louis Brandeis once observed, “is a great disinfectant.” By contrast, to ignore a problem or to be less than candid about it discourages a remedy.

The next question, of course, is what that remedy ought to be.

The American Council of Trustees and Alumni respectfully submits that the solutions for this problem are *not* legislative mandates—but instead fall within the purview of college and university faculty, administrators, and boards of trustees. Statutory edicts on curricular matters are bound to raise academic freedom problems of their own. The remedy, as Madison wrote in *The Federalist*, would be “worse than the disease.” Therefore, ACTA recommends the following.

Boards have a fiduciary obligation to protect the academic quality and academic freedom of their institutions. They should protect academic freedom—of both faculty and students—from internal as well as external threats. Faculty and administrations likewise have this obligation but, at many universities, they have clearly defaulted on this responsibility.

- Trustees should adopt a statement or resolution that all faculty are expected to present points of view other than their own in a balanced way and respect and

nurture students' ability to make up their own minds on contentious issues.

- Trustees should adopt a policy underscoring that the focus of courses is intellectual development and the acquisition of knowledge and skills, not the manipulation of attitudes or engaging in political activism.

- Trustees should insist that their institutions offer broad-based survey courses designed to expose students to the best that has been done and said.

- Trustees should insist that speaker programs sponsored by the university present a range of points of view.

- Trustees should make clear that they will not tolerate ideological or political discrimination in the hiring, firing, or promoting of faculty. Trustees should monitor tenure decisions—both granting and denying—on a regular basis.

- Trustees should direct administrators and faculty to engage in an “intellectual diversity inventory” to see whether students are exposed to diverse points of view in classroom readings, speakers series, etc., and whether partisan or ideological bias is influencing hiring and retention.

- Congress should hold periodic hearings to raise public awareness of this problem, and should encourage faculty, administrators, and boards of trustees voluntarily to conduct intellectual diversity reviews and to make the results public so that students, parents and taxpayers can see what the facts are.

- Congress should target federal grants to promote the study and teaching of American history, politics and the law. ACTA commends Sen. Greg for sponsoring SR 1515, the Higher



A Service Organization for Responsible Trustees

www.iegov.org

The Institute for Effective Governance (IEG) is a nonpartisan membership and service organization founded by college and university trustees—for trustees. Today, trustees must be stewards of the public interest, helping public and private colleges and universities provide a high-quality education at an affordable price. IEG is devoted to enhancing boards' effectiveness and helping trustees fulfill their fiduciary responsibilities fully and effectively. The Institute offers services tailored to the specific needs of individual boards, and focuses on academic quality, academic freedom, and accountability. The Advisory Board includes current and former trustees from 20 institutions across the country.

INSTITUTE FOR EFFECTIVE GOVERNANCE ADVISORY BOARD

Herman Badillo

City University of New York

Bruce D. Benson

Metropolitan State College

James F. Carlin

Massachusetts Board of Higher Education

Candace U. de Russy

State University of New York

Thomas F. Egan

State University of New York

Timothy E. Foster

Colorado Commission on Higher Education

Jane H. Fraser

Hamilton College

Donald Hamstra

Colorado State University

F. Philip Handy

Florida Board of Education

Dorcas R. Hardy

Mary Washington University

Ronald C. Johnson

Virginia State University

S. Susan Johnson

University of California

Walter D. Kelley, Jr.

Old Dominion University

Phyllis M. Krutsch

University of Wisconsin

Hans M. Mark

Polytechnic University

Edwin Meese, III

George Mason University

Drew Miller

University of Nebraska

Velma Montoya

University of California

Michael Muftic

University of Northern Colorado

Kathleen M. Pesile

City University of New York, Chairman

Norwood L. Robb

University of Colorado

James R. Thomas

Gettysburg College

Steven D. Weinstein

Rowan University