



U.S. Senator Judd Gregg, Chairman

Senate Committee on Health, Education, Labor and Pensions

Statement of Chairman Judd Gregg

Is Intellectual Diversity an Endangered Species on America's College Campuses? Wednesday, October 29, 2003

The word “diversity” is quite popular today, and nowhere is that more true than on our nation’s college campuses. There is no doubt that our nation’s colleges and universities have, in recent years, devoted vast resources toward the goal of establishing ethnic and gender diversity on their campuses. And certainly, we all applaud the fact that the doors of higher education today are now open to all, regardless of gender or race.

This hearing, however, will focus on a different, and yet equally important, kind of diversity – intellectual diversity. This is the kind of diversity that comes from having the full marketplace of ideas represented on campus, rather than just a narrow slice; the kind of diversity characterized by the free exchange of ideas and honest debate on the issues of the day, rather than by restrictions on free speech and a one-sided curriculum. I believe that, with rare exceptions, the intellectual diversity of the academy has diminished significantly over the last 30 years. Many others have been pointing to what they see as a lack of intellectual diversity in the academy for years, and we will hear some of those voices today.

Ultimately, this is a quality issue. While college tuitions go up and up, it’s fair to ask just what students and parents are getting for their money. Hopefully, this hearing will shed light on just how this lack of intellectual diversity is hurting the quality of education received by college students. That is what this hearing is about. Now let me say a brief word concerning what this hearing is not about. It is not about restricting anyone’s academic freedom or having the federal government dictate college curricula.

The curriculum

One can see evidence of the lack of intellectual diversity in higher education if one looks at the courses offered in certain fields. Whereas at one time traditional approaches to history and literature, for example, were featured prominently in the curriculum, along with new approaches like social history, today those traditional approaches are being squeezed out in favor of a uniform curriculum based more on interest-group politics than academic merit. A study by the National Association of Scholars showed that only one of the top 50 universities in the country required undergraduates to take an introductory history class in 1993, down from 60% in 1964. And a recently released report by the Independent Women’s Forum looked at the top 10 liberal arts schools as ranked by U.S. News and World Report, and found, for example, that:

- A freshman at Amherst isn’t offered an overview course in American or European history.
- Carleton College’s history department offers only one broad overview course.

What is replacing such traditional, and educationally sound courses? The answer is a proliferation of classes focused on race, class, and gender, with little intellectual substance:

- At Antioch College in Ohio, students can take classes in ethnopsychiatry, queer British fiction, and ecology and feminism.
- The university of Texas offers an English course, which teaches students that there is nothing grammatically wrong with the sentence: “nobody didn’t leave.
- Vanderbilt University offers a course entitled “pornography and prostitution in history.”
- Swarthmore offers courses in “illicit desires in literature” and “fictions in identity.

These are just examples, but increasingly they represent the norm. It has gotten so bad that some professors have actually started new professional associations in fields like history and literature, as alternatives to this new uniformity they see in those fields.

Speech Codes and Speech Zones

Campus speech codes that seek to punish students for exercising their First Amendment rights are rampant on college campuses today. These codes typically define forbidden speech in overly broad terms that cannot help but have a chilling effect on open, rigorous debate.

Some recent examples include:

- Any jokes and stories “experienced by others as harassing” (Bowdon College)
- Any speech that causes a loss of “self-esteem” (Colby College)
- Any “verbal behavior” that produces “feelings of impotence, anger, or disenfranchisement” (Brown University)
- Any “inappropriately directed laughter.” (University of Connecticut)

The Foundation for Individual Rights in Education (FIRE) has catalogued hundreds of these speech codes, and has fought several of them in the courts. FIRE estimates that approximately two-thirds of U.S. colleges have speech codes of some kind.

In addition to speech codes, in the past few years we have seen the rise of another strange new development on campus – the “free speech zone.” These zones are created by college administrators to limit student protests and demonstrations only to certain areas on campus. The implication, of course, is that free speech can, and will, be restricted in places outside the zone. With policies like these in place, one must seriously question whether freedom of expression really exists for today’s college student. They stifle the voices of public criticism, commentary, and satire, and teach students to engage in self-censorship so as to avoid causing even the slightest offense.

Bias and indoctrination

Another serious barrier to intellectual diversity on campus is the political and ideological bias of the faculty, and the outright indoctrination practiced by too many professors and administrators. A soon-to-be published survey of more than 1500 faculty members at 140 American colleges and universities, conducted by the Angus-Reid polling firm and directed by professor Stanley Rothman of Smith College, found that 72% of faculty members describe themselves as politically liberal, while only 15% describe themselves as politically conservative.

It seems clear from this data that the American professorate is unrepresentative of the full range of views in America today. Not only is the faculty biased, but this bias impacts what goes on in the classroom as well. There appears to be an increasing number of incidents in which alternative viewpoints are either silenced or ignored in the classroom – often with hostility or disdain.

It has gotten so bad that a new, nonpartisan website sprang up a year ago to catalogue these sorts of incidents, and has so far registered scores of examples:

- A University of Maryland, college park course on the art of ancient America was derailed by the professor's frequent tirades on U.S. foreign policy and the oppression of Middle Eastern people, in which he pretended to strap a bomb to himself as a terrorist would. Examples like this that disparage the state of Israel are unfortunately, all too common.
- A Notre Dame professor's stated goal in his "introduction to American government" class was to "win students over to the cause of liberalism." A student reported that the professor spent so much time discussing his political bent that few of the required readings were actually covered.
- Another example of this outrageous bias concerns students at Citrus College in California. As part of a speech class at that institution, one professor offered her students extra credit if they wrote letters to President Bush protesting the war in Iraq. Those who wrote letters praising the Iraq campaign or who refused to actually mail their letters were refused credit for the assignment.

What's more, universities are not even trying to hide what they are doing. The University of California – Berkeley recently repealed its long-standing policy against politicizing the classroom, calling it "outdated."

And it's not just in the classroom. Some colleges have instituted mandatory freshman orientation programs and "diversity training workshops." Run by administrative entities with names like the "prejudice reduction committee" these efforts at thought reform often involve paid consultants whose job it is to "re-educate" students and faculty to accept a view of multiculturalism based on a victim mentality and group, rather than individual, rights. In recent years, the classified section of the *Chronicle of Higher Education* has included hundreds of advertisements for these consultants, demonstrating just how pervasive such efforts have become.

Conclusion

Students on many of America's college campuses are being exposed to only a narrow range of viewpoints through politicized course offerings, an ideologically homogenous faculty that fosters an atmosphere where dissenting views are either quashed or ridiculed, and significant restrictions on free speech. Simply put, this lack of intellectual diversity in higher education shortchanges students by depriving them of exposure to a robust debate on the issues of the day.

How can students be liberally educated if they are only receiving part of the story? What do we teach students about freedom when they see that some views are discouraged or even forbidden? What are we teaching them about our American traditions if traditional subjects like political and constitutional history are shoved aside to make room for trendy courses designed to appeal to grievance-based politics? How can students lacking in exposure to the full marketplace of ideas be expected to thrive after college in a world where opinions and perspectives differ greatly?

I look forward to hearing our witnesses testify about these issues.

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