



Higher Education: Brainwashing 101

“Language is the source of misunderstanding,” said the French writer Antoine de Saint-Exupery. But a confusion of tongues was not the cause of Abigail Beardsley’s consternation over what she was expected to learn in a French language course she took at Penn State University in the spring of 2007. Described in the college catalogue as a course in French language and culture, it inexplicably included a viewing of the Michael Moore film, *Sicko*, an English-language “documentary” about inadequacies of the healthcare system in the United States and a paean to the state-run medical care in other lands. The following semester, Beardsley addressed a formal complaint to the chairman of the university’s French Department about the insertion of a movie about the American practice of medicine in a course that, she wrote, was supposed to be about “real-life language use, the integration of language and culture and the development of the four skills: listening, speaking, reading, writing.” In other words, an academic exercise.



Yet the professor “took valuable class time” for the Moore film, which the student described as “an attack on the free market health care system in the United States and an endorsement of socialized medicine in England, Canada, France and Communist Cuba.” She went on to point out the absence of any “critical evaluation of the film” or contrary views of socialized medicine presented by the professor that might have been useful to students in forming their own opinions on the subject. That, she noted, was contrary to a university policy requiring instructors to provide students with “access to those materials which they need to think intelligently.” The same policy, Beardsley noted, instructed professors “not to introduce controversial materials that are irrelevant to the class subject and outside their area of expertise.”

The department chairman dismissed her appeal and backed the professor’s decision to make the viewing of a film attacking the American healthcare system a component of a French language course. The student’s complaint and its rejection were related in *Indoctrination U* by David Horowitz, who has documented what he describes as “the widespread acceptance of political agitation as a suitable form of classroom instruction.” The problem is not just professors preaching their mostly liberal or “progressive” political views as a substitute for academic instruction, even in courses whose subject matter bears no realistic connection to those political opinions. It is also the fact that little to no room is allowed for different, much less opposing, viewpoints, as Beardsley noted in her letter.



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No Discussion Allowed

“Ideas deemed ‘reactionary’ and ‘politically incorrect’ are shut down by ‘speech codes’ and collective disapproval” by those who regard teaching as “a partisan activity and the university as a platform from which they hope to change the world,” Horowitz wrote. “Ideas that oppose left-wing orthodoxy — opposition to racial preferences, belief in innate differences between men and women, or, more recently, support for America’s war in Iraq — are regarded as morally unacceptable or simply indecent. The proponents of such ideas are regarded as deviants from the academic norm, to be marginalized or shunned.” Professors, meanwhile, increasingly use their classrooms as forums in which to preach their often passionately held views to a virtually captive audience, frequently on matters far outside their areas of expertise. Horowitz, who claimed to have interviewed hundreds of students at dozens of colleges and universities on the subject, wrote: “In the course of the interviews, I rarely encountered a student who had not been subject to such in-class abuse.”

Yet in many schools the indoctrination begins well before the incoming freshmen enter their first college classes. Orientation programs are often another name for indoctrination into a “progressive” worldview that requires the student to drop as mental contraband any allegedly racist, reactionary, chauvinistic, or “homophobic” views he or she may have contracted like a communicable disease in a home, school, or church environment. One freshman orientation program that has been adopted at nearly 100 colleges and universities is called the “tunnel of oppression” that the new students must traverse, as they learn about the evils of “white privilege” and sit through lectures informing them that they are part of a “rape culture.” “Resident advisers” are hired to help the students work their way to such pre-ordained conclusions as the certainty that religious parents hate their “gay” children and university campuses are inhospitable to Muslims. The resident adviser must first himself or herself be immersed in the race-conscious, feminist, class-warfare ideology. A former “RA” at DePauw University in Indiana described the regimentation she experienced to Robert Shibley, senior vice president of the Foundation for Individual Rights in Education (FIRE), a non-profit organization fighting restrictions on the freedom of speech and the efforts at thought control in schools.

The prospective RA’s were instructed never to think of themselves as merely people, but were to regard themselves, first and foremost, according to their respective classifications: “black” or “white” or “Asian” or “heterosexual” or “queer.” They were required to speak in bigoted stereotypes while being told that was what they were really thinking “deep down.”

“For all we hear about faculty ideological or political bias,” wrote Shibley, “campus administrators are often worse when it comes to brainwashing students.” A radical feminist agenda has permeated the culture of colleges and universities, large and small, in the East and West, and in the heartland of America. In the fall of 2010, Hamilton College in New York required all male freshman students to attend a “She Fears You” presentation to make them aware of the “rape culture” of which they were allegedly a part and of the need to change their “rape supportive” beliefs and attitudes.

“Did Hamilton warn incoming female students of the campus ‘rape culture’ before it took their tuition?” wrote Shibley. “I doubt it. But publicity did force administrators to make the seminar optional — just minutes before it started.”

Freshman orientation as practiced at the University of Delaware also came to the attention of the Foundation for Individual Rights in Education. The very fact that the university labeled its orientation a “treatment” program suggested it was an exercise in the type of mental hygiene that might fairly be described as “brainwashing.” The “educational” materials used in the “treatment” of the new arrivals



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on campus included a glossary that defined racism as a term that “applies to all white people (i.e., people of European descent living in the United States, regardless of class, gender, religion, culture or sexuality.)” Non-racist, on the other hand, was officially a “non term. The term was created by whites to deny responsibility for systemic racism.” Through required attendance at lectures and one-on-one meetings with residence assistants, students learned what views were acceptable (or mandatory) on matters of “social justice” and a “sustainable” environment. (One program urged students to commit to reducing their ecological “footprint” by 20 percent.) The code of political correctness even covered door decorations in the dormitories.

Students were evaluated on how they responded to the “treatment,” with the residence assistants providing written reports to school administrators on the “best” and the “worst” students in the one-on-one sessions. Among the “worst” was a student who complained of having “diversity shoved down [her] throat” and who responded to the question “When did you discover your sexual identity?” with a crisp: “That is none of your damn business.” Another who questioned why the university needed to “force all this diversity stuff” on the students was also labeled one of the “worst.”

In a strongly worded letter to the university president, Samantha Harris, FIRE’s director of legal and public advocacy, questioned the University of Delaware’s commitment to education, as opposed to indoctrination:

The fact that the university views its students as patients in need of “treatment” for their incorrect attitudes reveals the university’s utter lack of respect both for its students and for the fundamental right to freedom of conscience. And the university’s definition of learning not as *a process of acquiring knowledge or technical skill*, but rather as the *attainment of specific attitudinal or behavioral changes*, represents a distorted idea of “education” that one would more easily associate with a Soviet prison camp than with an American institution of higher education. [Emphasis in original.]

The university formally dropped its “treatment” program after the FIRE protest brought publicity, but a series of Residential Curriculum Institutes, based on the Delaware program, has spread onto campuses throughout the country.

Composition of College Classes

Beyond orientation programs, curriculum is another area in which higher education has undergone radical change, as an English professor at a large Midwestern university sadly told *The New American*. Even a basic freshman course such as English Composition has long ceased to have anything to do with grammar, punctuation, or sentence structure, he said — the type of things a student might be expected to master in learning to write well. English courses and the social sciences are joined together in a program called Connect, in which each course must address three signature issues: sustainability (environmentalism), civic engagement (political activism), and intercultural engagement (multiculturalism).

“Everything from Theater to Philosophy to History to English has, in effect, become sociology,” the professor said. “Teaching subject matter has become less important than teaching a very political perspective.” Regardless of what subject and in which department students are studying, “they get taught the same thing over and over: a radical critique of the entire American social structure, an indictment of capitalism, anti-Christian propaganda, and collectivism over individuality.... It all comes down to race, class and gender. And sexuality, now that they are pushing, in a radical way,



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homosexuality.”

A strict requirement of “sensitivity” and a heavy emphasis on multiculturalism have combined to create an environment in which “the only culture we’re ever allowed to criticize is our own,” the professor said. He cited as an example the “Jesus Stomp” instructor at Florida Atlantic University, who, as part of an Intercultural Communications course, instructed his students to write the name “Jesus” on a piece of paper and then step on it. In the uproar that followed, the instructor, Deandre Poole, received threats and was placed on paid administrative leave by the university. He has been reinstated to teach classes this summer and fall, but has been limited to online courses for security reasons, said Heather Coltman, the interim dean at the university’s College of Arts and Letters. The school will decide in December if Poole will be welcomed back into the classroom for next year’s spring semester, Coltman said.

“You would never in a million years see anyone do that with the name Mohammed. You couldn’t do that with Hillary Clinton’s name. You couldn’t do that with nearly any other name, or you’d be fired,” said the English professor, who preferred not to be identified because he does not yet have tenure in his present job. Tenure isn’t really a protection of academic freedom, he maintains, but is a means of weeding out professors who are not “ideologically pure enough” to remain on the faculty. “There’s a reason why I’ve taught at seven different universities in 20 years,” he said.

Yet for all the emphasis institutions of higher learning place on gay, lesbian, bisexual, and transgender issues and on race-based courses and Women’s Studies programs, courses *not* being taught at many colleges and universities are conspicuous by their absence. Last fall the California Association of Scholars issued a report to the regents of the University of California sharply critical of the number of traditional course requirements that have been dropped from the curricula at the various campuses of the statewide university. Entitled “A Crisis of Competence,” the report attributes the deletions to what is described in the subtitle as “The Corrupting Effect of Political Activism in the University of California.”

Among the glaring omissions detailed by the scholars is the fact that none of the nine general campuses in the university system requires students to study the history of the United States or of Western civilization. English majors on some campuses may graduate without taking a course in Shakespeare. Students in political science programs get diplomas without a course in American politics. The omissions are not the result of accident or neglect. A study by UCLA’s Higher Education Research Institute found more faculty members believe they should teach students to be agents of social change than believe it is important to teach the classics of Western civilization.

The leftward tilt of college and university faculties is nothing new. Numerous studies in recent decades have shown an overwhelming majority of college professors to be left-liberal in ideology and Democratic in party affiliation. But increasingly they seem to be no longer convinced of the need to make any genuine effort at, or pretense of, refraining from making their personal political and social ideals the content of classroom instruction. The school administrators, the California report concludes, “far from performing their role as the university’s quality control mechanism, now routinely function as the enablers, protectors, and even apologists for the politicized university and its degraded scholarly and educational standards.”

At a time when college education costs upwards of \$45,000 a year at private institutions and tens of thousands at most state-sponsored universities, the emphasis on racial and cultural diversity and advocacy of social change has come at the expense of academic achievement. “Far too many” students, the California report said, have not learned to write effectively or to read “a reasonably complex book.”



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Students and their parents, in other words, are paying more and getting less in genuine education.

Yet despite tuition costs that have risen dramatically higher than inflation for three decades, the spending spree in higher education continues, aided and abetted by federal expenditures for research, Pell Grants, and student loans. Much of the spending goes into hiring more administrators to run more diversity programs. Officials at the University of California's San Diego campus, for example, created a new position called "vice chancellor for equity, diversity and inclusion," despite a large number of "diversitycrats" already on the school's administrative payroll. The money for the new vice chancellorship, wrote columnist Michael Barone, "could have supported two of the three cancer researchers that the campus lost to Rice University in Houston, a private school that apparently takes the strange view that hard science is more important than diversity facilitators." The University of North Carolina at Wilmington, Barone noted, saved some money by consolidating two science departments, while increasing spending on its five diversity-multicultural offices.

Mainly Conservative Controls

While ethnic, cultural, and socio-economic diversity appears to be prized at the nation's schools of higher learning, intellectual diversity is something to be silenced where it can't be eliminated altogether.

Not all too surprisingly, given the controls on free speech that universities now favor, the suppression of free speech on campus is not only aimed at silencing conservative thought. In *Unlearning Liberty: Campus Censorship and the End of American Debate*, author Greg Lukianoff begins by recounting the ordeal of a student, Hayden Barnes, who had been expelled from Valdosta State University in Georgia for protesting, on Facebook and in a letter to the editor of the student newspaper, the university's decision to spend \$30 million on the construction of two parking garages. In the student's environmentalist crusade against the garages and the automobiles it would house, he invoked what Lukianoff describes as "the classic liberal fight song, 'No Blood for Oil.'" After Lukianoff, an attorney and the president of FIRE, launched a publicity campaign and finally a legal action to have the expulsion overturned, the university's Board of Regents reversed the decision and offered readmission to Barnes, who, by that time, was completing his education at another institution.

But Lukianoff, who describes himself as a liberal, pro-choice, pro-gay rights, lifelong Democrat, acknowledges that it is conservative-minded students who are most directly affected by the emphasis on "speech codes" and political correctness on college campuses. "While many attempts at censorship are apolitical," he notes, "you are far more likely to get in trouble on campus for opposing, for example, affirmative action, gay marriage and abortion rights, than you are for supporting them."

Lukianoff acknowledges being once "hissed at" during a libertarian student conference for being a Democrat, but notes "it is far more common that I am vilified as an evil conservative for defending free speech on campus," a reaction he has found to be both commonplace and odd. "Isn't freedom of speech quintessentially a liberal issue?" he asks.

The problem is not new, but it has grown dramatically worse since a young William F. Buckley described the anti-free market, anti-religion intellectual environment at his Ivy League university in *God and Man at Yale*, way back in 1950. Many parents and students opposed to the indoctrination routinely imposed at so many colleges and universities are nonetheless paying the increasingly expensive piper for educational tunes hostile to their own deeply held values and traditions. Those of a conservative or libertarian persuasion can find alternatives in mostly small, conservative and/or religious colleges and



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universities. But the nation should be able to expect more from secular, “mainstream” establishments of higher education than to find them as enclaves of a rigid ideological regimentation.

Speech codes that punish students for comments that may offend or provoke a protected race, ethnic group, gender, or persons of a different “sexual orientation” stifle not only speech but thought, preventing the free exchange of ideas in a climate hospitable to debate. As George Washington University Law School Professor Jonathan Turley has noted, the nation has gone far beyond the famous dictum of Supreme Court Justice Oliver Wendell Holmes that the freedom of speech does not confer upon anyone the right to falsely cry fire in a theater. “Our entire society is being treated as a crowded theater,” wrote Turley, “and talking about whole subjects is now akin to shouting fire.”

The once-proud liberal notion of a “values-free” education has long since given way to an educational regime that imposes values that are hostile to freedom, faith, and morality and intolerant of opposing points of view that have the potential of stimulating serious debate about the reigning tenets of a “progressive” creed and ideology. A 2010 survey of 24,000 students by the Association of American Colleges and Universities found only 30 percent of college seniors strongly agreed with the statement: “It is safe to have unpopular views on campus.” More telling, perhaps, is the fact that only 16.7 percent of faculty members registered a strong agreement with that statement. Higher education in recent decades has become dramatically higher in cost, but remarkably lower in the standards it upholds as a university’s ideal. The late Clark Kerr, former president of the University of California, was no doubt being facetious when he said that the three-fold purpose of the university was to “provide sex for the students, sports for the alumni and parking for the faculty.” Or perhaps he was exaggerating only a bit.

Some economists claim that the rapidly rising costs of college education, propped up by government grants and subsidized loans, have created an economic bubble in the higher education market that will soon burst as the housing bubble did in 2008. Perhaps economic realities will succeed where concern for fairness and decency has failed in focusing minds of professional educators and laymen alike on the meaning and purpose of higher education. Aspiring students in the not-too-distant future may find the doors locked at one or more of our most prestigious universities, with a sign on the lawn in front of the administration building telling the sad story: “Gone out of business. Didn’t know what our business was.”



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