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Student participates in Senate hearing

Committee hears testimony on intellectual diversity in education, undergrad discusses University climate

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The U.S. Senate Committee on Health, Education, Labor and Pensions addressed intellectual diversity in higher education yesterday, featuring testimony from a University student.

In a hearing titled, "Is Intellectual Diversity an Endangered Species on America's College Campuses?," third-year College student Anthony Dick was invited to speak on issues surrounding the University speech policies, his opposition to mandatory diversity training and the academic climate on Grounds.

Dick, also president of the Individual Rights Coalition, was joined by three other witnesses: A professor from Brooklyn College and City University of New York, the president of the American Council of Trustees and Alumni and the director of legal and public advocacy for the Foundation for Individual Rights in Education (FIRE).

"The witnesses represent a spectrum of experiences that have been affected by the lack of intellectual diversity," said Josh Shields, spokesperson for the committee's majority staff. Shields added that the purpose of the hearing, which was unrelated to any specific legislation, was to "shed light" on the problematic state of intellectual diversity at colleges.

"Sunshine is the best disinfectant," he said.

Members of the committee, chaired by Sen. Judd Gregg, R-NH, include Majority Leader Bill Frist, R-Tenn., John Warner, R-Va., John Edwards, D-NC, and Hillary Clinton, D-NY.

Gregg identified the lack of intellectual diversity as a salient problem in higher education.

"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 ... and significant restrictions on free speech," Gregg said in a press release.

"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."

Senators Lamar Alexander, R-Tenn., Jeff Sessions, R-Ala., and Gregg were the only members present for the hearing, which lasted roughly an hour and-a-half. Witnesses were



allotted a brief amount of time to speak and were encouraged to submit additional written testimony.

In his remarks, Dick said he summarized a written statement accusing the University of promoting a political agenda by stifling free expression and giving certain viewpoints preference over others.

"When I came to college three years ago, I expected to find an environment firmly devoted to free inquiry and the open competition of ideas," Dick said. "Judging from my experience over the last three years, many in the U.Va. community view a university education not as an end in itself, but merely as a means to achieving some higher political goal."

Throughout his testimony, Dick criticized University officials.

"U.Va. administrators by and large constitute an extremely risk-averse and reactive body," he said. "They are careful to avoid criticism at almost any expense, as they have their own careers to look after."

In response to Dick's testimony, Pat Lampkin, University vice president for student affairs, said she rejected his assessments.

"I disagree with Anthony's characterization of the intellectual atmosphere at the University and his dim view of the motivations of University administrators," Lampkin said in a written statement. "But, he is more than welcome to his own opinions."

FIRE Chief Executive Officer Thor Halvorssen was at the hearing with colleague Greg Lukianoff, who testified.

"It is essentially that universities are held accountable through exposure for putting policies and programs in place that violate the United States Constitution and the principles of freedom," Halvorssen said, describing common practices of universities as infringements upon freedom.

"Universities are increasingly in the business of using freshman orientation and sensitivity training as indoctrination sessions," he added.

Dick's testimony also discussed the definition of diversity.

"Differences in race, ethnicity and gender are praised and sought after with great fervor, but significantly less attention is given to the intellectual diversity of the University community," he said.

Lampkin, however, disputed this claim.

"I support diversity, which means I embrace the full range of viewpoints, including those that are different from my own," she said.

Though present senators expressed disapproval of legislative solutions to the problem, Gregg said the committee intends to conduct more hearings on the issue.

Editor's note: Anthony Dick, an Opinion columnist at The Cavalier Daily, had no editorial influence in the reporting of this article.

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