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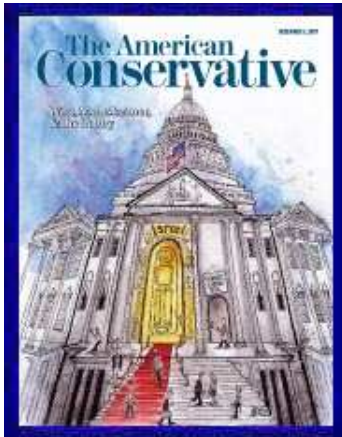
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Current Issue



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Four Year Plan

**Freshman orientation Lesson 1: all whites are racists.**

*by Richard B. Spencer*

NEWARK, DEL.—As almost every aspect of the American university has been drenched in political correctness, a certain outrage fatigue has set in. Who is still shocked by news of Shakespeare being replaced by P. Diddy, lectures on the political implications of masturbation, and photographic retrospectives on the Black Panther Movement? Wouldn't it be best just to roll one's eyes and move on?

Perhaps not. Over the past two weeks, news has come out of Delaware that the state's public institution organized a freshmen orientation that, even for the most hardened of academic observers, would seem sinister and bizarre.

Last August, the Office of Residential Life gave all prospective RA's—the student residential advisers who manage the freshmen dorms—a "Diversity Training Handbook" that averred, "all white people living in the United States" are racists, implicated in an "institutionally perpetuated system of exploitation and oppression." The rest of the manual reads like history of the world as recounted by Al Sharpton. A professional "diversity trainer," Shakti Butler, was on hand to make sure the message got across.

In September, Residence Life scheduled one-on-one "orientation" sessions with these RA's and all 4,000 incoming freshmen. The students had expected to discuss roommate problems. Instead they got, "When were you first made aware of your race?" "When did you discover your sexual identity?" and "When have you felt oppressed?"

In group sessions, the freshmen were made to play act being a poor black family facing racial harassment. In another variant, the RA's situated the students in the center of the dorm's common area and hung two signs on opposite walls, "Agree" and "Disagree." They then made a series of political statements—"gays should be able to marry," "affirmative action is justified," "the poor deserve to be poor"—and the freshmen were told to choose a side. Public shaming was the order of the day: the group was divided and students singled out who dared cross over to the non-progressive side of the room.

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Throughout, grades were given, from “best” to “worst,” based on a student’s willingness to delve into his “identity” and get involved in the PC theater. The evaluations were kept secret from the freshmen and are still on file in the Office of ResLife. Sophomore Bill Rivers told me that one friend replied to the query “When have you felt oppressed?” with “When I checked the box marked ‘white’ on college applications, knowing it was going to hurt my chances of getting in.” One hopes his RA didn’t give him an “Enemy of the Dorm” designation.

Delaware is not exactly known as a hotbed of the radical Left. Indeed, the university’s Jeffersonian architecture, nicely dressed students hurrying off to class, and surrounding belt of Victorian homes make it a postcard image of traditional education. Moreover, with just under 16,000 undergraduates and a Div. I-AA football team, UD doesn’t show up on many radar screens. But within days of news breaking, it became a flashpoint for the national debate on academic culture.

The concerted effort to combat ResLife began in early September after Peter Johnson, a UD parent, got word from his son of the goings-on in the dorms. Johnson contacted ResLife and politely asked to see copies of the program’s reading list. He was stonewalled. On Sept. 24, Assistant Director Michele Kane wrote Johnson that sending the materials “without context would likely not be of any benefit.” At this point, Johnson contacted the Philadelphia-based Foundation for Individual Rights in Education (FIRE), a not-for-profit group dedicated to exposing speech codes and political indoctrination in academia. With FIRE backing Johnson, ResLife Directors Kathleen Kerr and James Tweedy agreed to release some materials. FIRE put them online. Outrage mounted.

As area papers picked up the story, ResLife went into “no comment” lockdown, removing materials from its website and refusing all interview requests (including mine). The administration pursued a kind of defensive minimalization. First, it claimed the program was never mandatory, but FIRE countered immediately with copies of e-mails RA’s had sent to freshmen making it clear that attendance was required. Then on Nov. 1, first-year university President Patrick Harker simply shut the program down. Still, he was careful never to condemn ResLife, claiming that he acted with its consent and only wanted to make sure its programs were fulfilling their intended goals.

At a Faculty Senate meeting at which Provost Dan Rich echoed Harker, Professors Jan Blits and Linda Gottfredson, who have been the most articulate critics of ResLife among the faculty, stressed that Delaware will continue being the “laughing stock of the nation” until the administration unequivocally disavows ResLife. Furthermore, Blits pointed out that many at UD could be in legal jeopardy. Under the so-called “Ku Klux Klan Act” of 1871, if political indoctrination is judged to be taking place at a state institution, the employees themselves can be held liable.

However Harker and Rich want to spin it, freshmen orientation was a disaster. But then the program is hardly unique. Indeed, ResLife—with its “diversity”-speak and winks to the radical Left—is representative of countless organizations at UD. And if such things are occurring at Delaware, then they’re occurring most everywhere. In this way, the ResLife program sheds a great deal of light on the nature of the contemporary

university, and it's worthwhile to examine it more closely.

One could begin with those Roger Kimball has called the “tenured radicals”: the baby-boom professors who were grad students in the '60s and '70s and throughout the '80s and '90s established themselves in Humanities departments. Much has already been written about this phenomenon—how the Canon was replaced with Gender Theory, how activists forwent the barricades and stormed the Association of University Professors, how Gen-X profs offer more of the same—and it's not necessary to dwell on these matters here. Besides, the Delaware case reveals more about the operations of bureaucracy on campus than the inanities of the tenured faculty.

For of equal significance to the rise of the postmodern Left over the past quarter century has been the mushrooming of non-academic departments (still going strong). For every five entering freshman at UD, there's one full- or part-time professional or bureaucrat. Across the country, offices of Institutional Equity, Multicultural Programming, and Residential Life employ thousands; they're long on ideological mission statements and short on real justification.

Any sensible person would think the position of ResLife director could be filled by a just-out-of-college type with a knack for throwing fun pizza parties—but then how to justify 13 fulltime administrators? ResLife has chosen to claim responsibility for “transforming students ... into functional adults” and directing “service learning” in the areas of “youth advocacy,” “women's empowerment,” “ability awareness,” among others. ResLife's whole “curriculum-based approach” even lets its directors vault themselves up to quasi-professor status.

Throughout ResLife's curriculum, the words “intentional” and “structure” appear again and again. Indeed, the office seems to have a Four Year Plan for each student—and a checklist to make sure the “transformation” stays on track. Freshmen will “understand their social identities”; sophomores will “recognize that systematic oppression exists in our society”; by the time they're seniors—New PC Persons—students will fully understand their duties in constructing a “sustainable society.”

Leading the charge, Adam Kissel and Samantha Harris of FIRE have called the ResLife programs “totalitarian” and likened them to Soviet “re-education.” Such rhetoric can certainly get out of hand—no RA has yet attempted mass murder—but the comparison is apt. When Mao sent thousands of university students to “self-criticism camps,” their reformation was not complete until they condemned their own parents as reactionaries. Instructing a student body that is 83 percent white on the evils of “white privilege,” ResLife seems to have similar ambitions. In one of the few “evaluations” of freshmen that has been made available, a student who denounced her “racist and opiated [sic] father” received a “best” rating from her RA.

Nevertheless, there's little reason to believe that anyone on the ResLife staff is an actual leftist radical—or ever read a page of Marx or could even pronounce “Michel Foucault.” The office's concern instead is to recite properly the dogmas of the academic Left as the sure-fire way of seeming relevant—even hip—and securing status and funding.

ResLife's "diversity" obsession plays an important role in this. The office actually treats signs of insufficient tolerance as if they were assaults on a student's safety. On its website, the office lists "Any instance that is perceived by those involved as being racist, sexist, anti-Semitic, homophobic, or otherwise oppressive" alongside fire, suicide, and rape as "emergency/crisis" situations that require immediate action. Who else could the university community rely on to police diversity than those dedicated officers at ResLife?

ResLife's whole m.o. is laid bare in its internal document on "Strategic Change" from 2006. Here, Associate Director Tweedy outlines the office's objectives, which include 1) "allocating resources to areas that are producing the outcomes we value" (read: "let's jump on the 'diversity' bandwagon"); 2) "satisfy the requirements of accrediting agencies and funding agencies" (read: "make connections with gurus like Shakti Butler"); 3) "strengthen arguments for increased funding." (Cha-Ching!)

In the "Diversity Facilitation" handbook, one suggested activity is to ask students to "pick your favorite mainstream institution, and do a little power structure research." Perhaps the RA's should suggest that freshmen turn their critical gaze onto ResLife itself, all of whose top-level bureaucrats are white. (The most anyone of them can boast is to have once lived in the "internationally diverse" city of Washington, D.C.) Seen through cultural Marxist goggles, ResLife's "diversity" fetish seems little more than a game played by whites in which one seeks power by claiming to care about non-whites more than one's colleagues.

Understanding the motives of the RA's is more of a challenge. What could they have been thinking? Grant Newman, a former RA, related that the students who took part were hardly on the Left. Indeed, at least half were conservative Christians. While many of those probably never questioned the program out of fear, many more likely found a way to make "diversity" make sense to them. Sophomore Kelsey Lanan pointed out that her freshman-year RA was a devout Catholic but no less a "diversity" hawk.

At one point, Lanan's RA called an emergency hall meeting after noticing that someone had made an indenture with his fingernail on a cork bulletin board on which a "GLBT Pride" poster hung. The poster wasn't defaced, and most likely the act was done out of boredom, not hate. But Lanan's RA treated it as a "crisis" (according to ResLife guidelines, of course). She seemed quite sincere in denouncing this supposed attack on the most vulnerable in the dorm. In her mind, "diversity training" seems to have been conflated with "shepherding the flock" and "protecting the meek."

In defending ResLife, Newman said that its programs didn't amount to indoctrination because "there was no right answer. ... It is the process not the content." If he means that the goal was for students to internalize a discourse and regurgitate its shibboleths on all occasions, then he is most definitely correct.

After President Harker shut down freshman orientation, FIRE declared victory. But then most everything that gave birth to the program has remained firmly in place—at UD as everywhere else. Professor Blits joked that if anyone at ResLife were fired, they'd be quickly hired and promoted at Brown. ■

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