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From the Los Angeles Times

DUST-UP

Marxist professors or sensitive students?

Students complain about indoctrination by professors. Professors complain about vendettas, surreptitious taping and smear campaigns from students and ideologues. Who is right? All week, Michael Shermer and Greg Lukianoff debate academic freedom.

April 14, 2008

Today, Shermer and Lukianoff weigh allegations of widespread political bias at American colleges. Later in the week, they'll debate ideological diversity in curricula, lifetime tenure for professors and more.

Faculty bias, by the numbers

By Michael Shermer

Students *should* complain about professorial indoctrination, because it is real and it is loaded heavily on the left, most notably in the social sciences and the humanities.

A 2005 study by George Mason University economist Daniel Klein found that Democrats outnumbered Republicans among the faculty by a staggering ratio of nearly 10 to 1 at UC Berkeley and 7.6 to 1 at Stanford. Measuring political attitudes through voter registration among faculty in 20 different departments, in the humanities and social sciences the ratio was 16 to 1 at both campuses (30 to 1 among assistant and associate professors), and in some departments, such as anthropology and journalism, there wasn't a single Republican to be found.

Another 2005 study by Stanley Rothman, S. Robert Lichter and Neil Nevitte discovered that only 15% of those teaching at American colleges and universities describe themselves as conservative, while 72% said they were liberal. That figure climbed to 80% in departments such as English literature, philosophy, political science and religious studies, with only 5% labeling themselves as conservative.

The bias exists even in law schools. In a 2005 article in the Georgetown Law Journal, Northwestern University law Professor John McGinnis reviewed the faculties of the top 21 law schools rated by the 2002 U.S. News & World Report graduate school rankings. He found that politically active professors at these top law schools overwhelmingly tend to be Democrats -- 81% contributed "wholly or predominantly" to Democratic campaigns while just 15% did the same for Republicans.

Given this reality, is it any wonder the academy has the reputation of being a bastion for bleeding-heart liberals? Unless they are openly teaching a course entitled, in effect, "Why Liberals Should Rule the World," professors have no business introducing their political bias to students. Their job is to teach the curriculum of their subject, not churn out a bunch of Marx-worshipping, Bush-hating, Che Guevara-loving, pinko graduates who will go out into the world woefully ignorant that most Americans think entirely differently from the way they do.

As for those mamby-pamby professors who whine about students who have the audacity to tell people on the outside what is actually going on in American classrooms, now you know what it's like to be in the real world where consumers are bosses and producers take orders. You've got the cushiest job on the planet, so buck up and take a little criticism like the rest of us have to on Planet Reality. Professors are like cloistered monks who spend their entire lives protected from the buffeting of the marketplace of ideas, where the rest of us work. Think about it: K-12, four years of undergraduate schooling, four to six years of graduate education, maybe a post-doctoral appointment or two, then assistant professor, associate professor, and finally full professor with tenure. It's womb-to-tomb socialized security. No wonder professors are paranoid about public disclosure of their work.

But thanks to the Internet, the gig is up!

Michael Shermer is the publisher of Skeptic magazine (skeptic.com), a monthly columnist for Scientific American, an adjunct professor in the School of Economics and Politics at Claremont Graduate University and the author of 10 books.

Being offended vs. being indoctrinated

By Greg Lukianoff

Hello Michael,

I think you make a lot of important points in your post, but you tend to conflate the evidence of bias in academia with indoctrination. A better statistic can be found in a recent Chronicle of Higher Education-Gallup Poll. According to [this poll](#), 29% of 25- to 34-year-olds, 41% of 45- and 54-year-olds, and 60% of those over age 65 responded that professors "often" use their classrooms to espouse their own political views. Whether the real number is closer to 29% or 60%, these are powerful statistics when you are dealing with millions of students.

But is having an opinionated professor really the same as indoctrination? I have seen claims -- often from conservative students -- that students have a right not to be "harassed" by the left-leaning opinions of their professors. This drives me nuts because if there is one thing conservatives should not be doing, it is legitimizing the idea that merely being exposed to different points of view is the same thing as harassment. Harassment rationales are used

to shut down people with dissenting opinions (often the socially conservative, the un-PC, or the [merely unlucky](#)) far too often.

Certainly, there are gross abuses committed by university professors against the [right of private conscience](#) of their students. California had one spectacular example back in 2003, when an adjunct professor at Citrus College gave an extra-credit assignment in which students had to write and mail letters to President Bush ([pdf](#))opposing the Iraq war. Students were not allowed to take any other stance. This was wrong on multiple levels: It was an abuse of power, it was coerced speech, and it was arguably indoctrination.

I must emphasize, however, that the worst abuses are not coming from the professoriate; they are coming from the ever-expanding army of college administrators. One recent ghastly example that received woefully inadequate press attention was a true thought reform program at the University of Delaware. In this program, all 7,000 residents of the university's dormitories were required to attend coercive and unabashedly ideological "treatments" (the actual term administrators used) with the explicit goal of getting students to adopt specific points of view with regard to issues such as morality, environmentalism and sexuality. Resident assistants were required to give students questionnaires on what races and genders they would date with the goal of getting students to be more open to dating other races or genders. One student, who in one of these exceedingly creepy "one on one" sessions answered "none of your damn business" to the question "When did you discover your sexual identity?" was written up by an RA and reported to the administration ([pdf](#)). That's only the tip of the iceberg and, shockingly, the Residence Life program at the University of Delaware still seems to [believe](#) this was a good program. It is chilling that we are raising a generation of citizens who believe it is their right to mandate the appropriate views that other citizens should have. It's a formula for totalitarianism.

You really must check out some of these other programs, too, Michael. The Michigan State University "[Student Accountability in Community](#)" punishment system is equally terrifying, as it required students who demonstrated aggressiveness (one example given was a girl who slammed a door in a fight with her boyfriend) to sit down for four mandatory sessions with a pseudo-psychologist in order to make them speak "correctly" about what they had supposedly done wrong. No wonder students over the last two decades have come to believe that they have the right to destroy -- and in some cases even burn -- [student newspapers](#) that have opinions they dislike. I shudder for the republic if the next generation of leaders brings such fundamentally anti-democratic thinking to America's institutions of power.

Greg Lukianoff is a constitutional lawyer and the president of the Foundation for Individual Rights in Education ([thefire.org](#)). He is a frequent guest on national TV news programs and a blogger at the Huffington Post.

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