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UNIVERSITY OF PC

As a Republican, I'm on the Fringe

By Robert Maranto

Sunday, December 9, 2007; Page B01

Are university faculties biased toward the left? And is this diminishing universities' role in American public life? Conservatives have been saying so since William F. Buckley Jr. wrote "God and Man at Yale" -- in 1951. But lately criticism is coming from others -- making universities face some hard questions.

At a [Harvard](#) symposium in October, former Harvard president and Clinton Treasury secretary [Larry Summers](#) argued that among liberal arts and social science professors at elite graduate universities, Republicans are "the third group," far behind Democrats and even [Ralph Nader](#) supporters. Summers mused that in Washington he was "the right half of the left," while at Harvard he found himself "on the right half of the right."

I know how he feels. I spent four years in the 1990s working at the centrist [Brookings Institution](#) and for the Clinton administration and felt right at home ideologically. Yet during much of my two decades in academia, I've been on the "far right" as one who thinks that welfare reform helped the poor, that the United States was right to fight and win the Cold War, and that environmental regulations should be balanced against

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All these views -- commonplace in American society and among the political class -- are practically verboten in much of academia. At many of the colleges I've taught at or consulted for, a perusal of the speakers list and the required readings in the campus bookstore convinced me that a student could probably go through four years without ever encountering a right-of-center view portrayed in a positive light.

A sociologist I know recalls that his decision to become a registered Republican caused "a sensation" at his university. "It was as if I had become a child molester," he said. He eventually quit academia to join a think tank because "you don't want to be in a department where everyone hates your guts."

I think my political views hurt my career some years back when I was interviewing for a job at a prestigious research university. Everything seemed to be going well until I mentioned, in a casual conversation with department members over dinner, that I planned to vote Republican in the upcoming presidential election. Conversation came to a halt, and someone quickly changed the subject. The next day, I thought my final interview went fairly well. But the department ended up hiring someone who had published far less, but apparently "fit" better than I did. At least that's what I was told when I called a month later to learn the outcome of the job search, having never received any further communication from the school. (A friend at the same university later told me he didn't believe that particular department would ever hire a Republican.)

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Now there is more data backing up experiences like mine. Recently, my Villanova colleague Richard Redding and my longtime collaborator Frederick Hess commissioned a set of studies to ascertain how rare conservative professors really are, and why. We wanted real scholars to use real data to study whether academia really has a PC problem. While our work was funded by the right-of-center [American Enterprise Institute](#), we (and our funders) have been very clear about our intention to go wherever the data would take us. Among the findings:

Daniel Klein of [George Mason University](#) and Charlotta Stern of Stockholm University looked at all the reliable published studies of professors' political and ideological attachments. They found that conservatives and libertarians are outnumbered by liberals and Marxists by roughly two to one in economics, more than five to one in political science, and by 20 to one or more in anthropology and sociology.

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In a quantitative analysis of a large-scale student survey, Matthew Woessner of Penn State-Harrisburg and April Kelly-Woessner of Elizabethtown College found strong statistical evidence that talented conservative undergraduates in the humanities, social sciences and sciences are less likely to pursue a PhD than their liberal peers, in part for personal reasons, but also in part because they are offered fewer opportunities to do research with their professors. (Interestingly, this does not hold for highly applied areas such as nursing or computer science.)

Further, academic job markets seem to discriminate against socially conservative PhDs. Stanley Rothman of Smith College and S. Robert Lichter of George Mason University find strong statistical evidence that these academics must publish more books and articles to get the same jobs as their liberal peers. Among professors who have published a book, 73 percent of Democrats are in high-prestige colleges and universities, compared with only 56 percent of Republicans.

Despite that bad job-hunting experience I had, I doubt that legions of leftist professors have set out to purge academia of Republican dissenters. I believe that for the most part the biases conservative academics face are subtle, even unintentional. When making hiring decisions and confronted with several good candidates, we college professors, like anyone else, tend to select people like ourselves.

Unfortunately, subtle biases in how conservative students and professors are treated in the classroom and in the job market have very unsubtle effects on the ideological makeup of the professoriate. The resulting lack of intellectual diversity harms academia by limiting the questions academics ask, the phenomena we study, and ultimately the conclusions we reach.

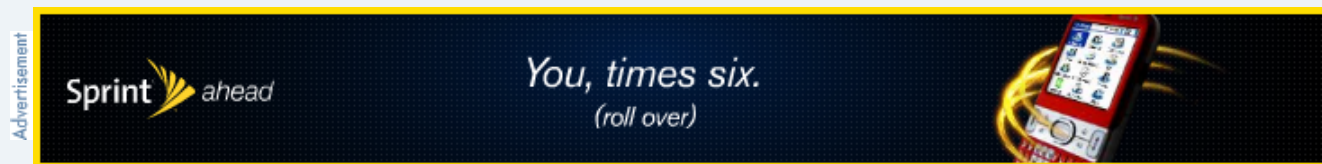
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There are numerous examples of this ideological isolation from society. As political scientist Steven Teles showed in his book "Whose Welfare?," the public had determined by the 1970s that welfare wasn't working -- yet many sociology professors even now deny that '70s-style welfare programs were bad for their recipients. Similarly, despite [New York City's](#) 15-year-long decline in crime, most criminologists still struggle to attribute the increased safety to demographic shifts or even random statistical variations (which apparently skipped other cities) rather than more effective policing.

In my own area, public administration, it took years for bureaucracy-defending professors to realize that then-Vice President Al Gore's National Performance Review (aka Reinventing Government) was not a reactionary attempt to destroy government agencies, but rather a centrist attempt to revitalize them. Most of the critics of the academy are conservatives or libertarians, but even the left-of-center E.D. Hirsch argues in "The Schools We Need and Why We Don't Have Them" that academics in schools of education have harmed young people by promoting progressive dogma rather than examining what works in real classrooms.

All this is bad for society because academics' ideological blinders make it more difficult to solve domestic problems and to understand foreign challenges. Moreover, a leftist ideological monoculture is bad for universities, rendering them intellectually dull places

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imbued with careerism rather than the energy of contending ideas, a point made by academic critics across the ideological spectrum from Russell Jacoby on the left to Josiah Bunting III on the right.

It's odd that my university was one of only a handful in [Pennsylvania](#) to have held a debate on the [Iraq](#) War in 2003. That happened because left-leaning Villanova professors realized that to be fair they needed to expose students to views different from their own, so they invited three relatively conservative faculty members to take part in a discussion of the decision to invade. Though I was then a junior faculty member arguing the unpopular (pro-war) side, I knew that my senior colleagues would not hold it against me.

Yet a conservative friend at another university had an equal and opposite experience. When he told his department chair that he and a liberal colleague planned to publicly debate the decision to invade Iraq, his chair talked him out of it, saying that it could complicate his tenure decision two years down the road. On the one hand, the department chair was doing his job, protecting a junior faculty member from unfair treatment; on the other hand, he shouldn't have had to.

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Unfortunately, critics are too often tone deaf about the solutions to academia's problems. Conservative activist David Horowitz and Students for Academic Freedom, a group he supports, advocate an Academic Bill of Rights guaranteeing equality for ideological minorities (typically conservatives) and ensuring that faculty are hired and promoted and students graded solely on the basis of their competence and knowledge, not their ideology or religion. That sounds great in theory, but it could have the unintended consequence of encouraging any student who gets a C to plead ideological bias.

Ultimately, universities will have to clean their own houses. Professors need to re-embrace a culture of reasoned inquiry and debate. And since debate requires disagreement, higher

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education needs to encourage intellectual diversity in its hiring and promotion decisions with something like the fervor it shows for ethnic and racial diversity. It's the only way universities will earn back society's respect and reclaim their role at the center of public life.

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Robert Maranto is an associate professor of political science at Villanova University and co-editor of "Reforming the Politically Correct University," to be published in 2008.

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Outlook: GOP Black-Listed Out of the Ivory Tower

In Washington I Was Left of Center; on Campus, I'm the Right-Wing Fringe

Robert Maranto

Associate Professor of Political Science, Villanova University ; Author, "Reforming the Politically Correct University"

Monday, December 10, 2007; 12:00 PM

"I spent four years in the 1990s working at the centrist Brookings Institution and for the Clinton administration and felt right at home ideologically. Yet during much of my two decades in academia, I've been on the 'far right' as one who thinks that welfare reform helped the poor, that the United States was right to fight and win the Cold War, and that environmental regulations should be balanced against property rights. ... At many of the colleges I've taught at or consulted for, a perusal of the speakers list and the required readings in the campus bookstore convinced me that a student could probably go through four years without ever encountering a right-of-center view portrayed in a positive light."

Villanova University associate professor of political science **Robert Maranto**, author of "Reforming the Politically Correct University" will be online **Monday**,

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Dec. 10 at noon ET to discuss difficulties he and colleagues have experienced as conservatives struggling to get along in higher education careers.

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