

The Chronicle of Higher Education
February 13, 2004
<http://chronicle.com/free/v50/i23/23b01201.htm>

"In Defense of Intellectual Diversity"

by
David Horowitz

I am the author of the Academic Bill of Rights, which many student governments, colleges and universities, education commissions, and legislatures are considering adopting. Already, the U.S. House of Representatives has introduced a version as legislation, and the Senate should soon follow suit.

State governments are also starting to rally around efforts to protect student rights and intellectual diversity on campuses: In Colorado, the State Senate president, John K. Andrews Jr., has been very concerned about the issue, and State Rep. Shawn Mitchell has just introduced legislation requiring public institutions to create and publicize processes for protecting students against political bias. Lawmakers in four other states have also expressed a strong interest in legislation of their own, based on some version of the Academic Bill of Rights. Students for Academic Freedom is working to secure the measure's adoption by student governments and university administrations on 105 member campuses across the country (<http://www.studentsforacademicfreedom.org>).

The Academic Bill of Rights is based squarely on the almost 100-year-old tradition of academic freedom that the American Association of University Professors has established. The bill's purposes are to codify that tradition; to emphasize the value of "intellectual diversity," already implicit in the concept of academic freedom; and, most important, to enumerate the rights of students to not be indoctrinated or otherwise assaulted by political propagandists in the classroom or any educational setting.

Although the AAUP has recognized student rights since its inception, however, most campuses have rarely given them the attention or support they deserve. In fact, it is safe to say that no college or university now adequately defends them. Especially recently, with the growing partisan activities of some faculty members and the consequent politicization of some aspects of the curriculum, that lack of support has become one of the most pressing issues in the academy.

Moreover, because I am a well-known conservative and have published studies of political bias in the hiring of college and university professors, critics have suggested that the Academic Bill of Rights is really a "right-wing plot" to stack faculties with political conservatives by imposing hiring quotas. Indeed, opponents of legislation in Colorado have exploited that fear, writing numerous op-ed pieces about alleged right-wing plans to create affirmative-action programs for conservative professors.

Nothing could be further from the truth. The actual intent of the Academic Bill of Rights is to remove partisan politics from the classroom. The bill that I'm proposing explicitly forbids political hiring or firing: "No faculty shall be hired

Space for Notes



or fired or denied promotion or tenure on the basis of his or her political or religious beliefs." The bill thus protects all faculty members -- left-leaning critics of the war in Iraq as well as right-leaning proponents of it, for example -- from being penalized for their political beliefs. Academic liberals should be as eager to support that principle as conservatives.

Some liberal faculty members have expressed concern about a phrase in the bill of rights that singles out the social sciences and humanities and says hiring in those areas should be based on competence and expertise and with a view toward "fostering a plurality of methodologies and perspectives." In fact, the view that there should be a diversity of methodologies is already accepted practice. Considering that truth is unsettled in these discipline areas, why should there not be an attempt to nurture a diversity of perspectives as well?

Perhaps the concern is that "fostering" would be equivalent to "mandating." The Academic Bill of Rights contains no intention, implicit or otherwise, to mandate or produce an artificial "balance" of intellectual perspectives. That would be impossible to achieve and would create more mischief than it would remedy. On the other hand, a lack of diversity is not all that difficult to detect or correct.

By adopting the Academic Bill of Rights, an institution would recognize scholarship rather than ideology as an appropriate academic enterprise. It would strengthen educational values that have been eroded by the unwarranted intrusion of faculty members' political views into the classroom. That corrosive trend has caused some academics to focus merely on their own partisan agendas and to abandon their responsibilities as professional educators with obligations to students of all political persuasions. Such professors have lost sight of the vital distinction between education and indoctrination, which -- as the AAUP recognized in its first report on academic freedom, in 1915 -- is not a legitimate educational function.

Because the intent of the Academic Bill of Rights is to restore academic values, I deliberately submitted it in draft form to potential critics who did not share my political views. They included Stanley Fish, dean of the College of Liberal Arts and Sciences at the University of Illinois at Chicago; Michael Bérubé, a professor of English at Pennsylvania State University at University Park; Todd Gitlin, a professor of journalism and sociology at Columbia University; and Philip Klinkner, a professor of government at Hamilton College. While their responses differed, I tried to accommodate the criticisms I got, for example deleting a clause in the original that would have required the deliberations of all committees in charge of hiring and promotion to be recorded and made available to a "duly constituted authority."

I even lifted wholesale one of the bill's chief tenets -- that colleges and professional academic associations should remain institutionally neutral on controversial political issues -- from an article that Dean Fish wrote for *The Chronicle* ("Save the World on Your Own Time," January 23, 2003). He has also written an admirable book, *Professional Correctness* (Clarendon Press, 1995), which explores the inherent conflict between ideological thinking and scholarship.

Since the Academic Bill of Rights is designed to clarify and extend existing principles of academic freedom, its opponents have generally been unable to identify specific provisions that they find objectionable. Instead, they have tried to distort the plain meaning of the text. The AAUP itself has been part of

that effort, suggesting in a formal statement that the bill's intent is to introduce political criteria for judging intellectual diversity and, thus, to subvert scholarly standards. It contends that the bill of rights "proclaims that all opinions are equally valid," which "negates an essential function of university education." The AAUP singles out for attack a phrase that refers to "the uncertainty and unsettled character of all human knowledge" as the rationale for respecting diverse viewpoints in curricula and reading lists in the humanities and social sciences. The AAUP claims that "this premise ... is anti-thetical to the basic scholarly enterprise of the university, which is to establish and transmit knowledge."

The association's statements are incomprehensible. After all, major schools of thought in the contemporary academy -- pragmatism, postmodernism, and deconstructionism, to name three -- operate on the premise that knowledge is uncertain and, at times, relative. Even the hard sciences, which do not share such relativistic assumptions, are inspired to continue their research efforts by the incomplete state of received knowledge. The university's mission is not only to transmit knowledge but to pursue it -- and from all vantage points. What could be controversial about acknowledging that? Further, the AAUP's contention that the Academic Bill of Rights threatens true academic standards by suggesting that all opinions are equally valid is a red herring, as the bill's statement on intellectual diversity makes clear: "Exposing students to the *spectrum of significant scholarly viewpoints* on the subjects examined in their courses is a major responsibility of faculty." (Emphasis added.)

As the Academic Bill of Rights states, "Academic disciplines should welcome a diversity of approaches to unsettled questions." That is common sense. Why not make it university policy?

The only serious opposition to the Academic Bill of Rights is raised by those who claim that, although its principles are valid, it duplicates academic-freedom guidelines that already exist. Elizabeth Hoffman, president of the University of Colorado System, for example, has personally told me that she takes that position.

But with all due respect, such critics are also mistaken. Most universities' academic-freedom policies generally fail to make explicit, let alone codify, the institutions' commitment to intellectual diversity or the academic rights of students. The institutions also do not make their policies readily available to students -- who, therefore, are generally not even aware that such policies exist.

For example, when I met with Elizabeth Hoffman, she directed me to the University of Colorado's Web site, where its academic-freedom guidelines are posted. Even if those guidelines were adequate, posting them on an Internet site does not provide sufficient protection for students, who are unlikely to visit it. Contrast the way that institutions aggressively promote other types of diversity guidelines -- often establishing special offices to organize and enforce all sorts of special diversity-related programs -- to such a passive approach to intellectual diversity.

At Colorado's Web site, for example, one can read the following: "Sections of the AAUP's 1940 Statement of Principles on Academic Freedom and Tenure have been adopted as a statement of policy by the Board of Regents." Few people reading that article or visiting the site would suspect that the following protection for students is contained in the AAUP's 1940 statement: "Teachers are entitled to freedom in the classroom in discussing their subject, but they

should be careful not to introduce into their teaching controversial matter which has no relation to their subject."

Is there a college or university in America -- including the University of Colorado -- where at least one professor has not introduced controversial matter on the war in Iraq or the Bush White House in a class whose subject matter is not the war in Iraq, or international relations, or presidential administrations? Yet intrusion of such subject matter, in which the professor has no academic expertise, is a breach of professional responsibility and a violation of a student's academic rights.

We do not go to our doctors' offices and expect to see partisan propaganda posted on the doors, or go to hospital operating rooms and expect to hear political lectures from our surgeons. The same should be true of our classrooms and professors, yet it is not. When I visited the political-science department at the University of Colorado at Denver this year, the office doors and bulletin boards were plastered with cartoons and statements ridiculing Republicans, and only Republicans. When I asked President Hoffman about that, she assured me that she would request that such partisan materials be removed and an appropriate educational environment restored. To the best of my knowledge, that has yet to happen.

Not everyone would agree about the need for such restraint, and it should be said that the Academic Bill of Rights makes no mention of postings and cartoons -- although that does not mean that they are appropriate. I refer to them only to illustrate the problem that exists in the academic culture when it comes to fulfilling professional obligations that professors owe to all students. I would ask liberal professors who are comfortable with such partisan expressions how they would have felt as students seeking guidance from their own professors if they had to walk a gantlet of cartoons portraying Bill Clinton as a lecher, or attacking antiwar protesters as traitors.

The politicized culture of the university is the heart of the problem. At Duke University this year, a history professor welcomed his class with the warning that he had strong "liberal" opinions, and that Republican students should probably drop his course. One student did. Aided by Duke Students for Academic Freedom, the young man then complained. To his credit, the professor apologized. Although some people on the campus said the professor had been joking, the student clearly felt he faced a hostile environment. Why should the professor have thought that partisanship in the classroom was professionally acceptable in the first place?

At the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, a required summer-reading program for entering freshmen stirred a controversy in the state legislature last fall. The required text was Barbara Ehrenreich's socialist tract on poverty in America, *Nickel and Dimed: On (Not) Getting By in America* (Metropolitan Books, 2001). Other universities have required the identical text in similar programs, and several have invited Ehrenreich to campus to present her views under the imprimatur of the institution and without rebuttal.

That reflects an academic culture unhinged. When a university requires a single partisan text of all its students, it is a form of indoctrination, entirely inappropriate for an academic institution. If many universities had required Dinesh D'Souza's *Illiberal Education: The Politics of Race and Sex on Campus* (Vintage Books, 1992) or Ann Coulter's *Treason: Liberal Treachery From the Cold War to the War on Terrorism* (Crown Forum, 2003) as their lone

freshman-reading text, there would have been a collective howl from liberal faculties, who would have immediately recognized the inappropriateness of such institutional endorsement of controversial views. Why not require two texts, or four? (My stepson, who is a high-school senior, was required to read seven texts during his summer vacation.)

The remedy is so simple. Requiring readings on more than one side of a political controversy would be appropriate educational policy and would strengthen, not weaken, the democracy that supports our educational system. Why is that not obvious to the administrators at Chapel Hill and the other universities that have instituted such required-reading programs? It's the academic culture, stupid.

David Horowitz is president of the Center for the Study of Popular Culture and the author of Left Illusions: An Intellectual Odyssey (Spence Publishing, 2003).

<http://chronicle.com>

Section: The Chronicle Review

Volume 50, Issue 23, Page B12

Copyright (c) 2004 by *The Chronicle of Higher Education*