



Do Conservative Professors Need Affirmative Action?

Jon A. Shields, an associate professor of government at Claremont McKenna College in Claremont, California, and Joshua M. Dunn, Sr., an associate professor of political science at the University of Colorado, have a new book, *Passing on the Right: Conservative Professors in the Progressive University*, in which they make the case that conservative-leaning professors face intense discrimination in hiring and promotion in America's liberal-dominated colleges and universities.



The two authors quote former Supreme Court Justice Lewis Powell, who declared in the famous affirmative action case *University of California v. Bakke* that truth is discovered “out of a multitude of tongues.” They then observe, “If Justice Powell is right — and if the primary purpose of affirmative action is to increase the variety of tongues — then we should increase conservative ones too.”

The call by Shields and Dunn for “affirmative action” for conservative professors is mostly tongue-in-cheek. “We don’t endorse preferences in graduate admissions and hiring,” they explain. But they do believe that universities should stop barring conservative speakers from their campuses.

There is no question that academia (and not just in social sciences) has become a stronghold of the progressive Left. A 2008 survey by Colorado University professor Edward Rozek found that only 2.7 percent of the entire faculty were even registered Republicans. Surveys of faculty at other universities have produced similar results.

According to one recent study, a mere 6.6 percent of professors in the social sciences identify themselves as Republicans. But, lest one think the situation reverses itself in areas such as business, engineering, and health sciences, the facts speak otherwise. While not as dominated by the Democratic Party affiliation as the social sciences, less than one-fourth of the professors in these three areas call themselves Republicans. While affirmative action programs are designed to increase the number of women and minorities in higher education, the fact is that conservative professors are in much lower numbers.

Students who tend toward more conservative positions can detect rather quickly that pursuing a career as a college professor would be a daunting task. Almost all the professors are political liberals. I remember that when I was an undergraduate in the 1970s, I started a conservative student organization, calling it Students for Constitutional Action (intended as a contrast to the New Left Students for a Democratic Society). I was told by a fellow student that his history professor said our group must be a “fascist” organization, since groups that used the term “constitutional” in their name usually were. Comments such as that certainly do not encourage anyone with a conservative bent that he or she will be welcomed into the professorial world.

Then, when these conservative students persist and actually pursue graduate degrees, with the intention of teaching at the college level, they must tread gently through a minefield of liberal gate-



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keeping. One must typically get the approval of a committee of left-leaning professors in order to obtain master's and doctoral degrees. A fellow history major at another college told me that his professor dismissed his use of a quotation in his paper from the great Frédéric Bastiat, claiming that Bastiat (the French economist, politician, and writer of the seminal work *The Law* — who championed free markets, private property, and limited government) was just an “obscure” 19th-century philosopher.

If one is able to actually obtain a doctorate, he or she must then attempt to get hired at these institutions of higher learning. As Shields and Dunn note, “Diversity is now the religion of the university,” but that does not typically extend to including conservatives or Christians in the faculty.

“In hiring committees, liberal faculty might also question their natural preference for like-minded colleagues,” Shields and Dunn wrote, explaining that they have often heard progressive professors say that they prefer to hire liberals. When a liberal claims to believe in “diversity,” that ordinarily does not extend to political viewpoints. For most liberals on the campus, diversity means a liberal white man, a liberal black man, a liberal woman, a liberal Hispanic, and the like. It certainly does not mean diversity that includes hiring a history professor who favors conservative politics.

Some conservatives do make it past the hurdles and obstacles thrown up by the liberal worldview found on most college campuses and actually win appointments to the faculty. But that doesn't mean their problems resulting from being a conservative are over. While many on the Left will give lip-service to the idea of “academic freedom,” that is far too often not meant to include a professor taking an openly conservative viewpoint.

One could no doubt cite scores of examples of the suppression of the opinions of conservative professors. Here are a few:

At DePaul University in Chicago, administrators suspended Professor Thomas Klocek without a hearing. His offense was that he had argued with some pro-Palestinian students at a student activities fair. The students reported him, saying they were offended by Klocek's views. He was suspended with pay, and was told that he would be able to teach only one class the next semester, which would be monitored.

John McAdams found himself in hot water at Marquette University in Milwaukee, a Catholic institution, after defending a student who opposed same-sex marriage. McAdams' problems began when he wrote on a blog that a student had been told in an ethics class that the professor would not allow any opposition to same-sex marriage in her class. Dean Richard Holtz wrote McAdams, “Your conduct clearly and substantially fails to meet the standards of personal and professional excellence that generally characterizes university faculties. As a result, your value to this academic institution is substantially impaired.” The dean then informed McAdams that the university had begun the process of revoking his tenure so they could fire him.

At Roosevelt University in Chicago, Robert Klein Engler lost his job as a professor for telling a joke in response to a poll by a group of sociologists in Arizona about the state's new immigration law. “Sixty percent said they were in favor,” Engler said, “and 40 percent said, ‘No hablo Ingles.’”

Mike Adams was hired as an assistant professor in 1993 at the University of North Carolina-Wilmington, and was later promoted to associate professor in 1998. In 2000, Adams, a former atheist, became a Christian. As an instructor in criminology, he noted that his conversion caused a modification of some of his political and social views, which, he claimed, led to his denial of promotion to a full professorship in 2006.

Adams contended that his troubles began because his nationally syndicated column, which expressed



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religious and politically conservative views, was found to be too conservative for university officials. In 2014, he won a lawsuit in which it was determined that the university had indeed denied him promotion because of his political positions.

Jerry Hough, a political science professor at Duke University in Durham, North Carolina, found himself in trouble for a comment he left in response to an editorial in the *New York Times*. A self-described admirer of Martin Luther King, Jr., Hough nevertheless was reprimanded for using the term “blacks” instead of “African Americans.” The vice president for Public Affairs and Government Affairs at Duke, Michael Schoenfield, said the comments “were noxious, offensive, and have no place in civil discourse.”

Another way in which progressive academics narrow the range of acceptable thought is through their control of academic publications. “Publish or perish” is the criteria by which many professors are judged. Yet, whatever is published must conform to a narrow range of thought within the liberal worldview. The so-called peer review process, by which fellow academics determine whether an article can even be published, is often used to stop publication of articles in academic journals which express doubt about man-made global warming, or other such issues for which liberals have decided “the debate is over.”

Would it not be better and more open-minded for a liberal academic to simply write an article disputing a conservative viewpoint, rather than censoring such a view from even being published?

Certainly, private institutions should be free to censor, if that is what they want to do. But they should not then proclaim themselves champions of academic freedom. If the university is supposed to be a place where there is a search for truth, then that search should not be confined to the world of progressive liberalism. Public institutions, supported by the taxpayers, should definitely strive to represent a wider variety of views than what one might expect in a debate between Hillary Clinton and Bernie Sanders.



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