

THE MADNESS OF OUR EDUCATION SYSTEMS: AN EXAMINATION OF NON-DIVERSITY, NON-FREEDOM, AND NON-ACADEMICS IN AMERICAN SCHOOLING

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The Office of Sexuality and Gender Diversity is located on the fourth floor of Lucas Hall. This Office is home to Prizm [the Queer-Straight Student Alliance] and Gender Studies. Adjacent to the Office are two gender inclusive bathrooms. These gender inclusive bathrooms are becoming more common on campus. In some cases, these bathrooms were previously gender specific and we are having a small problem with folks forgetting to lock the doors when they are using the bathrooms. Please remember to lock the door once you enter the bathroom since the gender inclusive bathrooms generally are designed to be used by one person at a time. UMSL is really an inclusive campus and these types of changes are good parts of 21st Century America.

The above was an email sent to the faculty by the dean of the College of Arts and Sciences at the University of Missouri-St. Louis on March 23, 2017. The need for educational institutions to instruct their students in potty habits typically in the past has occurred at the level of nursery schools and kindergarten. It is a sign of the times that this is now occurring in higher education, carried out no less by a dean of arts and sciences. As a microbiologist, he may have been concerned about germs and public health issues. However, the matter in question here was social justice, something that we are now all experts in these days, or at least are expected to develop expertise in.

UM-St. Louis is just one campus in the four-campus University of Missouri system. This same scene could have been played out on any of the UM campuses. As the flagship campus (i.e., the one with the Division I football and basketball team), the University of Missouri-Columbia (“Mizzou”) tends to dominate system-wide rules and regulations issued by the system administrators and board of curators. Since the much-publicized racial turmoil that occurred at UM-Columbia in the fall of 2015, discussed below, the regimes governing UM have doubled down in mandating “inclusiveness.” The Mizzou incident sparked similar protests at universities across the country, with similar calls for increased inclusiveness, albeit within certain parameters. Bathroom wars and other such conflicts have only escalated since the 2016 presidential election.

Leon Botstein, the president of Bard College, spoke for many academics when, in a recent *New York Times* op-ed, “American Universities Must Take A Stand,” he warned that “not since the era of witch-hunts and ‘red-baiting’ has the American university faced so great a threat from government.”¹ What he and fellow faculty fail to recognize is that the threat to the university has been building for decades and comes less from government than from within, less from Donald Trump and the alt-right than from the alt-left that rules American campuses.² In Orwellian fashion, the typical campus ad nauseam trumpets diversity but lacks its most important

form, intellectual diversity; proclaims its commitment to free inquiry and expression but undermines those through a proliferation of speech code restrictions including micro-aggressions, trigger warnings, and safe spaces; and claims its main mission to be the cultivation and dissemination of knowledge but in many disciplines has drifted away from scholarly rigor and serious curricula altogether.

In this paper, the author explores these developments on college campuses, using a case study of the 2015 crisis at the University of Missouri-Columbia as a window into how “institutional liberalism” has subverted the modern university. One must add that the problems discussed here are not confined to higher education but can be seen pervading our education systems generally, including K-12, calling for wide-scale reform across the education spectrum. If the madness is to be addressed, it needs to be treated in a holistic fashion, roots and all.

The 2015 Campus Crisis at Mizzou

According to “Concerned Student 1950,” the group that launched the campus protest in the fall of 2015 at the University of Missouri-Columbia (named after the first year the university admitted black students), racial problems had persisted at Mizzou for decades, with relatively little progress made in combating racism. The campus was already racially charged – due to the recent police killing of unarmed black teenager Michael Brown in Ferguson, Missouri 120 miles from Columbia, giving rise to the Black Lives Matter movement – when a “Racism Lives Here” rally was held on September 24. There had been several anecdotal accounts of local incidents involving bigotry, including a September 12th Facebook posting by the African-American student government president, Payton Head, reporting racial and anti-gay slurs hurled at him by unidentified people riding in a pick-up truck off-campus. UM-Columbia Chancellor R. Bowen Loftin, on October 8, announced that all incoming freshmen would receive mandatory online diversity training. Two days later, protestors blocked University of Missouri President Tim Wolfe’s car during a homecoming parade, with Wolfe accused of being unresponsive to student concerns and even “smiling and laughing.” On October 20, Concerned Student 1950, which numbered no more than a couple dozen persons, issued a list of demands that included an apology from Wolfe and his resignation, along with a more extensive racial awareness and inclusion curriculum for all staff, faculty and students, as well as hiring of more black faculty. On November 2, a graduate student named Jonathan Butler, who claimed Wolfe’s car had hit him during the parade, started a hunger strike which he intended to continue until the university president resigned. Despite an apology from Wolfe acknowledging racism at the university, some 200 students camped out in support of Butler, who was further supported by the school’s football team which threatened to boycott the rest of the season, potentially costing the university a \$1 million fine if they had to forfeit an upcoming game against Brigham Young University. Under growing pressure from faculty and state legislators concerned about damage to the school’s reputation, President Wolfe announced his resignation on November 9, followed hours later by Chancellor Loftin, who likewise had been accused of insensitivity to racial and social justice issues.

That was not the end of the story. The day after the Mizzou chancellor’s resignation, all students, staff, and faculty received an email from the campus police department “asking

individuals who witness incidents of hateful and/or hurtful speech or actions to call the police immediately” and “provide a detailed description of the individual(s) involved.” Such Bias Response Teams were not viewed as constituting “witch-hunts” but as necessary to insuring a “safe” environment. On November 9, student protestors who had gathered in a tent city in the university’s main quadrangle were approached by two student journalists interested in capturing the event on video. An assistant professor of mass communications, Melissa Click, tried to block the journalists from interviewing and filming students, even though the reporters were seeking access to a public space. She was caught on tape yelling at them to “get out” and, after grabbing the camera, calling for “some muscle” to remove them from the quad. With a courtesy appointment in the School of Journalism, she apparently was unaware of the First Amendment rights of the student journalists. Her understanding of mass media was limited to popular culture; the university website reported that “her research interests center on . . . theories of gender and sexuality and media literacy. Current research projects involve 50 Shades of Grey readers, the impact of social media in fans’ relationships with Lady Gaga, messages about class and food in reality television programming, and messages about work in children’s television programs.” Her research agenda had included not just Lady Gaga but also Martha Stewart, the Twilight vampire series, the Thomas the Tank Engine series, and other such gravitas-lite academic subjects. Although she claimed to be an expert on “visual literacy,” she did not realize how quickly her scowling image and call for mob rule could go viral nationally. While she was under review for tenure at the time, many state lawmakers urged she be terminated immediately. On February 24, 2016, after release of an earlier video showing her screaming profanities at police during the October homecoming parade, the UM Board of Curators fired her. Over 100 of her colleagues signed a letter defending her in the name of academic freedom and due process, backed by the American Association of University Professors. She subsequently was hired as a lecturer in communication studies at Gonzaga University, which announced that “Dr. Click was hired through an extensive national search process that revealed her to be the most qualified candidate for the position.”³

President Wolfe was replaced by Michael Middleton, a Mizzou law professor and deputy chancellor emeritus, as interim head of the UM system. On the same day that Professor Click was terminated, Middleton, an African-American, received a revised set of demands from Concerned Student 1950 which included compulsory cultural competency training for all staff, faculty and students, overseen by persons of color; an increase in the percentage of black faculty and staff to 10 percent; and other demands aimed at “advancement of Blacks on campus.” The next month, the University of Missouri hired a Chief Diversity Officer with a starting salary of \$235,000 and instituted a new three-credit hour “diversity intensive” course required for graduation, focusing on “understanding differing social groups.” It was not clear how any of this would address the fact that Mizzou was ranked in 2016 as “the worst school in the country for ideological diversity.”⁴ It was also not clear if the university would learn any lessons from this debacle, as freshman enrollment at Mizzou suffered a 35 percent drop due to negative publicity, while alumni donations, especially to the athletic department, plummeted precipitously, and substantial budget cuts were ordered by state officials unimpressed with faculty teaching, research, and oversight.⁵

Reflections on the Misery in Missouri

As a University of Missouri faculty member, I watched with a mixture of amazement and horror at the events that unfolded during the 2015-16 academic year. Amazement, because perhaps never before had so few students been able to get so many college administrators to display so much cowardice over so little provocation. A relatively small group of protestors not only succeeded in ousting the two highest officials in the UM system but also emboldened the radical left to hold campuses hostage to threats of disruption all across the country, in a chain reaction that ranged from elite private universities to large public institutions.⁶ Horror, because perhaps never before had we seen quite this combination of totalitarianism and sophomorphism at work in higher education.

The 1960s also saw campus demonstrations of a significant magnitude, but they at least could be understood as reactions to the vilest forms of racism, along with anger over the Vietnam War. Although there remain legitimate concerns about racial and social justice today, we clearly live in a much more inclusive society and there is no major war taking the lives of 50,000 Americans. Chanting about white supremacy and white oppression seems somewhat misplaced at a time when Asians are the single most educationally and economically successful racial group in America, a black man occupied the highest office in the land for the past eight years having been elected twice by comfortable majorities, two of the last five secretaries of state entrusted with the security of the country were black (having been appointed by the president of a party often labeled racist), and on most measures of racial progress improvement has been unmistakable.

Closer to home, beyond some bits of anecdotal evidence, it is hard to validate the complaints of Mizzou students regarding the existence of a climate of racism on campus. Nobody has taken a reliable survey of the 35,000 students in Columbia. Never mind that Tim Wolfe was preceded by a black UM President (Elson Floyd), that the president of the UM-Columbia student body at the time of the crisis was black as was the homecoming queen, that the black graduate student whose hunger strike led to the climatic events of November 9 hardly seemed the victim of “white privilege” he was protesting against given the fact his father earned more than \$8 million the year before as a railroad executive, that representation of African-Americans in the undergraduate student body (8.1 percent) and among tenure-track faculty (3.5 percent) roughly approximated the level of representation in American universities generally, or that two months before the crisis the university had held a diversity workshop educating faculty and staff in the use of racially acceptable language.⁷

My own campus, UM-St. Louis, has not escaped the fallout from its sister campus, as diversity sensitivity training has been stepped up here as well. It does not matter that UMSL has among the most diverse minority student populations in the state, with blacks comprising 18 percent of the student body, that in my department alone one-third of the tenure-track faculty are black, that there has been a “cultural diversity” curriculum requirement for all majors for decades, that we have had a black chancellor (at a time we were called a “racist” institution), that we have long had a “chief diversity officer” and a “chancellor’s diversity council,” and that as recently as 2013 we received a national “Higher Education Excellence in Diversity” award.

Universities have come a long way since Kent State and other symbols of Vietnam-era activism, but one would never know it from the shrillness of voices being heard today in the halls of academe. Many have attributed the growing shrillness to Trump-era hyper-political polarization, although the Mizzou protest preceded Trump's election as have so many other such episodes. Whether in Columbia or St. Louis or any other community, the local campus is probably the single most diverse place in town, yet the site of the largest grievance industry (over racism, sexism, classism, and other categories of victimhood and discrimination). We are in the midst of a revolution of rising expectations.⁸ Students may have less reason to be enraged today than in the 1960s; but the growth of political correctness, social media, and other cultural trends over the past fifty years has only increased the sense of entitlement and the level of revolutionary fervor, stoking student demands that go far beyond anything conceivable in the past. There is a take-no-prisoners quality to the current uprising. One could see this not only in the Mizzou affair but in its immediate aftermath, in the campus follies the latter helped trigger nationwide, including at Ivy League institutions.

For example, almost no one in the 1960s at Princeton would have dared suggest the removal of Woodrow Wilson's name from the School of International and Public Affairs and other corners of the campus, lest they reveal ignorance of the fact they were calling for expunging an iconic figure long considered the father of American progressivism and the liberal welfare state as well as the exemplar of liberal internationalism through his creation of the League of Nations after World War I. Yet, when students staged a sit-in at President Elsgruber's office in November 2015, they demanded Wilson's banishment from campus due to his "racist legacy"; they had to settle for a removal of his mural, along with a ban on the title "masters" of residential colleges. A month earlier, Yale experienced a brouhaha over a memo circulated by its Intercultural Affairs Council instructing students in proper Halloween attire, urging them not to wear costumes (say, Mexican garb) that might border on "cultural appropriation." Erika Christakis, a lecturer in early childhood education and the wife of the head of a residential college, elicited the f-word from irate students who called for her dismissal when she emailed that Yalies were capable of making their own Halloween selections. Yale President Salovey said he heard the student protestors' "cries for help" and accepted Christakis's resignation, suggesting just how scary the ivory tower had become. Around that same time, not to be outdone, Columbia University saw several hundred students gather on the quadrangle to chant "We love black criminals," extending to rapists and murderers the same warm welcome the school had given Iranian president and Holocaust denier Mahmoud Ahmadinejad a few years earlier. One was left wondering what kind of reception someone like Dr. Ben Carson, on the opposite end of the ideological spectrum, would likely get, were he ever invited to speak there. One final illustration of the depths to which higher education had descended: the students at Lebanon Valley College matched the silliness of their Ivy League counterparts when they demanded the renaming of Lynch Hall due to its racial overtones, dishonoring a former college president and perhaps raising the possibility that former U.S. Attorney-General Loretta Lynch might not be considered as a commencement speaker anytime in the future.

If the Mizzou case seems a caricature of contemporary American academia, it is by less than six degrees of separation.

Courageous Conversations?

What happened at Mizzou has been replicated elsewhere and is symptomatic of the larger problems found across the higher education landscape. In the aforementioned op-ed, President Botstein offered the usual pieties invoked to define the essence of a university: a commitment to the scholarly “pursuit of knowledge” and “truth” based on “reasoned argument, evidence, and rigorous verification”; a commitment to “academic freedom” and free exchange of ideas “no matter how uncomfortable”; and a commitment to “nonpartisanship” and avoiding pressures to “create a consensus of belief that can marginalize disagreement and dissent.” These are the very core values now at risk, under attack not so much from outside the walls of the ivory tower as Botstein argues but rather from within, and not so much from the right as from the left, the erstwhile bastion of free thought.⁹

The Declining Commitment to Scholarship

Aside from Professor Click exhibiting questionable values for someone housed in a communications department with an appointment in a journalism school, and a questionable temperament to be a professor responsible for cultivating young minds, one might also question her academic credentials as a scholar, given her research agenda that includes vampires and Lady Gaga. Then again, these are cutting-edge, relatively hi-brow subjects to teach and study these days. Witness the fluff that has passed for “gen ed” at American universities in recent years: “students from Dartmouth to Stanford are getting academic credit for studying Star Trek and Looney Toons”; at Stanford, students can enroll in “How Tasty Were My French Sisters,” while at Michigan, coursework is offered on “diva-worship, drag, and muscle culture.”¹⁰ Harvard has offered a class called “Anal Sex 101.”¹¹ Zombie studies are particularly in vogue, pioneered by Arthur Blumberg of the University of Baltimore, co-author of *Zombieman: 80 Movies to Die For* and the instructor in the “Media Genres: Zombies” course, where students read “Walking Dead” comic books and watch 16 classic zombie movies, which are intended to provide “a back door into a lot of subjects.”¹² One of those subjects is my own field of international relations, where one can read Daniel Drezner’s *Theories of International Politics and Zombies* (published by a prestigious university press no less) to explore how “different approaches to world politics would explain policy responses to the living dead” and can attend panels at scholarly conventions on “How Global Governance Would Deal with Zombies.”¹³ All this is done in support of student “engagement,” the latest buzzword in campus centers of teaching and learning, designed to maintain student interest in disciplines that no longer provide serious, useful bodies of knowledge and marketable skills.

How one can submit phenomena such as vampires and zombies to “rigorous verification” and why one would want to expand our body of knowledge in this area remains a mystery. Not to worry – under the influence of postmodernism, which holds that there is no objective reality, knowledge, or truth, other than what we “construct” based on our personal experiences, the entire scholarly enterprise is whatever one wishes to make of it. Thus, Donald Trump is no more anti-science or anti-facts than the average professor, at least in the social sciences and humanities. If rigor no longer matters, then it becomes more acceptable for students to dictate

changes in faculty hiring, tenure, and promotion guidelines that render merit a peripheral concern. It also is more acceptable for research and curricula to be driven by ideology rather than by the discovery and dissemination of knowledge. Hence, it is legitimate for a professor of education and program chair for a 2016 National Council of Social Studies professional conference to elicit proposals challenging presenters to “look at systemic racism, white supremacy, Islamophobia, homophobia, transphobia, voter suppression, socioeconomic disparities, sexism, and environmental destruction (to name a few)” and consider “intersectionality, decolonization, LGBTQ+ Studies, Critical Race Studies, and Environmental Justice.”¹⁴ Increasingly, in schools of education as well as social work, law, communications, history, political science, English and other liberal arts, professors are hired who not only can add entertainment value to a department’s offerings but can teach political values in a wide range of victimization studies courses.

There has been general academic slippage as a well-intentioned but misplaced obsession with equity and diversity along with a “therapeutic” culture aimed at softening life’s hard edges has undermined standards from beginning to end, from college admissions to granting of diplomas. One would think that “social justice” would entail rewarding people for hard work and superior work. However, affirmative action has morphed into race-based admissions, often discriminating against Asian students and others with stronger academic records.¹⁵ Universities are considering allowing incoming, unprepared students (weaned on K-12 classes that award trophies to students for registering a pulse) to count “remedial” courses as college credit toward graduation.¹⁶ “Retention centers” are proliferating along with “early alert” warning systems designed to support students by sending regular reminders to come to class and perform basic obligations. The growth in online classes may eliminate the need to come to class at all. The hand-holding, “coddling” paradigm has been imported from K-12, complete with enhanced mental health counseling, rec centers that offer yoga and other stress reduction exercises, and wellness areas such as the new “Whole U” at UMSL which offers “comfy cots” for napping during the day. Mental health is a serious problem among young people, but it is not clear why this generation experiences so much stress and sleep deprivation when the bar for success, at least in school, is being lowered. There has been well-documented grade inflation in undergraduate education occurring over decades.¹⁷ Arum and Roksa, in *Academically Adrift*, have shown how grades have gone up as expectations and work demands (in terms of the number of books read and the length of papers written) have gone down.¹⁸ Partying has gone up, with one study estimating the flow of beer at fifteen cases consumed per student per year.¹⁹ Meanwhile, learning objectives are being skewed toward college sports as “pigskin and sheepskin collide”²⁰ -- recall the pivotal moment in the Mizzou crisis came when the Tiger football team, backed by its head coach, threatened to boycott the rest of the season, depriving the campus of a major *raison d’être*.

In short, the core academic mission of the university, inside and outside the classroom, among students and faculty alike, is being chipped away at.

The Declining Commitment to Academic Freedom and Free Exchange of Ideas

One might argue that the very concept of “academic freedom” entails allowing faculty to study and teach virtually whatever they want and how they want, at the same time giving students an ever-wider menu of choices in the curriculum, never mind that in an era of scarce budgetary resources there seems a need to assign priorities. However, freedom only goes so far. It has never meant total license. In fact, in many respects personal liberty is increasingly being infringed upon in academia, as seen in the imposition of mandatory cultural competency training for all stakeholders at Mizzou, similar to programs elsewhere that resemble the political reeducation camps of Mao Zedong and Pol Pot. Botstein may be raising well-founded concerns about “authoritarianism” in the Trump era, but he does not fully understand the roots of the problem.

In the 1960s, students challenged authority structures. But today the authority structures are so mired in political correctness that they themselves are enablers of protest. As political correctness took hold in the 1970s and became ensconced on and off campus, young people became more convinced than ever of the rightness of their cause, indoctrinated or validated by their professors. Mario Salvo’s Berkeley Free Speech Movement degenerated into restrictive campus speech codes in the 1980s and 1990s, morphing by the new millennium into the university as police state. Bias Response Teams report the most tangential affronts to PC, including Title IX sexual harassment cases that proceed against defendants with minimal due process.²¹ Censoring has replaced censuring, and “hurtful” comments have replaced hateful comments as the mark of unacceptable behavior. The same collegians uttering obscenities at university officials and their peers claim a right not to be “offended” by even the slightest counter to their worldviews and the tiniest “micro-aggressions,” their psyches so fragile they require “trigger warnings” for any idea that might deny them a “safe space.”²² These phrases have now become the ubiquitous, everyday vocabulary of thin-skinned collegians, who have variously been called “snowflakes,” “Little Robespierres,” and “crybullies.”²³ They are being coddled in more ways than one.²⁴

As at Mizzou, administrators tend to cave in to protestor demands. There are now limits to free speech so outrageous they leave one almost speechless, as epitomized by the note on University of California president Janet Napolitano’s website instructing faculty to avoid uttering such “microaggressions” as “I believe the most qualified person should get the job.” At the University of Tennessee and many other institutions, diversity offices, worried about student discomfort with gender-specific pronouns (“he,” “she,” etc.), are urging gender-neutral substitutes (“ze,” “hir,” “xyr,” etc.). The president of Emory went so far as to sympathize with students who felt “endangered” by “Vote Trump in 2016” chalk markings on sidewalks, leading to investigations of those responsible for such epithets. Following Trump’s victory in November, the Hampshire College administration lowered the American flag to half-staff in the main quad and offered grief counseling services, anticipating an unusually heavy load of post-traumatic stress disorder cases in the college community unable to handle the bombshell result of constitutional democracy. Also in the fall of 2016, a student at Pierce College was barred from handing out copies of the U.S. Constitution on campus, since he was held to be outside the school’s designated “free speech zone.” The University of Northern Colorado’s “Language Matters” campaign warned against saying “all lives matter.”²⁵ So much for “courageous conversations.”

Speech is supposed to be protected at public universities by the First Amendment, and at private universities by the traditions of academic freedom. Neither is being defended vigorously at present. This perhaps is seen most clearly in the number of campus speakers being disinvited or disrupted from speaking. The Foundation for Individual Rights in Education (FIRE) has tracked such trends in recent years, as “the number of disinvitation attempts from 2000 to 2016 has grown fairly steadily.” FIRE found that 2016 “featured a record number of disinvitations to speakers from colleges and universities, 46 in total.”²⁶ While 14 of these were targeted at Milo Yiannopoulos, the anti-PC provocateur, most involved less provocative figures. It is one thing to try to ban an incendiary provocateur like Yiannopoulos, whose visit to the University of California-Berkeley campus on February 1, 2017 sparked violent rioting. That may be understandable, if inexcusable. However, among those experiencing disinvitations recently have been the following: former U.S. Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice (at Rutgers), former New York City Police Commissioner Raymond Kelley (at Brown), International Monetary Fund head Christine Lagarde (at Smith), human rights activist Ayaan Hirsi Ali (at Brandeis), columnist George Will (at Scripps), columnist Jason Riley (at Virginia Tech), and former UC-Berkeley chancellor Robert Birgeneau (at Haverford).²⁷ Virtually all of these and other speaker disinvitations monitored by FIRE came “from the left of the speaker and occurred most often for controversies over racial issues, views on sexual orientation, and views on Islam.”²⁸ Even when conservative speakers appear on campus, they are not assured of being able to deliver their remarks, as seen most recently in the cases of Charles Murray (whose visit to Middlebury College on March 2 was cut short by loud disruptions and physical assaults) and Heather MacDonald (whose lecture at Claremont McKenna College on April 7 was cancelled when protestors blocked the auditorium).

The Middlebury College home page website advertises in cliché-like fashion a “commitment to a diverse and respectful community.” And that is the rub; the modern university respects all manner of diversity (racial, ethnic, gender, and otherwise) except the most critical type of diversity that defines the academy – diversity of ideas. As former New York City Mayor Michael Bloomberg said in his 2014 commencement address at Harvard, “Today, on many college campuses, it is liberals trying to repress conservative ideas, even as conservative faculty members are at risk of becoming an endangered species.”²⁹ One of the best statements of the problem was the 2005 report “Intellectual Diversity: Time for Action,” which started with the observation that “the most serious challenge for higher education today is the lack of intellectual diversity.”³⁰ Now, more than a decade later, action is long overdue.

The Declining Commitment to Diversity and Inclusiveness

In David Hume’s words, “Truth emerges from debate among friends,” from the competition of ideas conducted in a civil way. There is relatively little debate and competition of ideas on most campuses, and less and less civility. There is a liberal hegemony that has become so ingrained among administrators, faculty, and students as to constitute systemic or institutional liberalism. Conservative faculty and students are marginalized, often compelled toward self-censorship. One can talk about “toxic masculinity” and “whiteness” but not dare to stereotype women or blacks.³¹ Liberal ideology is privileged especially in those departments and units that

preach the most about the need for diversity – the humanities and social sciences, education and social work schools, and others. Of course, there are exceptions (for example, economics departments and business schools, along with many of the hard sciences); but liberal orthodoxy dominates the university as a whole, as could be seen in the broad groundswell of faculty support for Melissa Click at Mizzou, including from the AAUP. Data provided by the UCLA Higher Education Research Institute and other sources confirm a trend over time toward a higher percentage of self-identifying “liberals” in the professoriate and a decreasing percentage of “moderates” and “conservatives.”³²

Whereas Leon Botstein insists that a hallmark of the university is “nonpartisanship,” the empirical evidence overwhelming contradicts him. One study by Daniel Klein and colleagues, which examined faculty voter registration at forty leading universities, found Democrats outnumbering Republicans by a ratio of 12 to 1.³³ Another report found “Democrats and Marxists outnumber Republicans and libertarians by 3 to 1 in economics, more than 5 to 1 in political science, 10 to 1 or more in history and English, and well over 20 to 1 in anthropology and sociology.”³⁴ Jonathan Zimmerman of NYU, a self-described “devout Democrat,” in an article entitled “US Colleges Need Affirmative Action for Conservative Professors,” adds that at the 8 Ivy League colleges, 96 percent of the faculty who made campaign donations in the 2012 presidential election gave to President Obama. At Brown, for example, 129 faculty gave to Obama and just one donated to Mitt Romney.³⁵ It is not just an Ivy League thing – at my own university, based on Federal Election Commission filings, it was determined that from 1997 to 2015 more than 75 percent of faculty and staff political donations went to Democrats.³⁶ Like Zimmerman, some other liberal observers have found the evidence impossible to ignore. For example, Nicholas Kristof, who has written about “liberal intolerance” and “the dangers of echo chambers on campus,” has noted that “four studies found that the proportion of professors in the humanities who are Republicans ranges between 6 and 11 percent, and in the social sciences between 7 and 9 percent. One study found that only 2 percent of English professors are Republicans.”³⁷

The way institutional liberalism works is not so much that conservative job candidates fail at departmental interviews but rather they never make it to the interview stage if their dossier lacks a progressive-minded dissertation or research agenda in the works; nobody questions why queer history is in and military history is out. It is not so much that conservative guest speakers are disinvited but rather they are rarely if ever invited in the first place, since they are only marginally represented on the faculty, on university student programming boards, and on other bodies that make up the bubble that is the university. Students wanting to start up a College Republicans organization on campus may be prevented from doing so, not because of any outright ban but owing to the unavailability of conservative faculty to serve as an advisor. “Discovery learning” is the pedagogical rage, aimed at getting students to reach the conclusions dictated by what is assumed to be a settled liberal consensus on everything from climate change temperature increases to minimum wage increases. There is a smug sense of inclusiveness, with everyone welcome as long as there is no dissent and challenge to prevailing liberal dogma. When liberals are accused of fostering institutional liberalism, their fallback position is that, by definition, such fascism is not liberalism.

Toward Education Reform

It is possible that a conservative counter-revolution may be on the horizon. Campus progressives may have overplayed their hand lately, as even many liberals have winced over the excesses of trigger warnings, micro-aggressions, and safe spaces that are fundamentally incompatible with the idea of a liberal education.³⁸ Especially hopeful is the recent letter by the University of Chicago dean of students, Jay Ellison (supported by President Robert Zimmer), informing incoming freshmen that academic freedom and vigorous debate override concerns about discomfort and other speech constraints. As President Zimmer remarked, “A university should not be a sanctuary for comfort but rather a crucible for confronting ideas.”³⁹ A few other universities, such as Purdue and Princeton, have followed suit, with faculty committees following the lead of Chicago’s Committee on Freedom of Expression in drafting policy statements.⁴⁰ A large number of faculty opposing the recent illiberal trends have formed the Heterodox Academy in order to articulate their concerns. Washington University in St. Louis and other schools have developed policies to limit disruptions and distractions that can prevent invited speakers from being heard.⁴¹ John Etchemendy, the former provost of Stanford University, delivered a speech to the Stanford Board of Trustees on February 21, 2017, warning of “the threat from within . . . as I have watched a growing intolerance at universities in this country – not intolerance along racial or ethnic or gender lines. . . . Rather, a kind of intellectual intolerance, a political one-sidedness that is the antithesis of what universities should stand for.”⁴² Still, there remains much pushback against reform.

The solution to all this is not affirmative action for conservative professors to achieve a certain “balance” of viewpoints, since the development and dissemination of knowledge should not be reduced to ideological and partisan bean-counting.⁴³ Rather, if universities want to properly respond to this critique, they need to become more sensitized to these issues and include them in the “diversity” project. If universities do not act more responsibly in policing themselves, they will invite outside intrusion from politicians and alumni.⁴⁴ That would be unfortunate, but universities would have only themselves to blame for a failure of governance.

The Link Between K-12 Education and Higher Education: The Chicken and the Egg

In a sense, I have put the cart before the horse. The students at Mizzou and their peers elsewhere learned bad habits long before they arrived on campus. Ultimately, universities can be only as good as the raw material we have to work with. We are dependent not only on our own good governance but the governance of the K-12 establishment that provides most of our students. Unfortunately, in many ways, K-12 is a mirror image of higher education in terms of the problems cited above. Perhaps we should not be surprised, given the fact that nowhere are these problems more evident than in our schools of education that link higher and lower education, playing the lead role in furnishing precollegiate teachers and pedagogy.⁴⁵

One must be careful to distinguish between private and public schools and, among public schools, urban, suburban, and rural schools, since school culture can vary considerably depending on the character and locale of the institution. Nonetheless, owing partly to the

“institutional liberalism” uniformity of schools of education that train the administrators, the professional development experts, and the faculty, one can see “pack pedagogy” at work across much of the K-12 universe. The problems, though, go well beyond the harmful effects of schools of education and are eventually felt at the university level, not only in the training of future teachers but the future workforce and citizenry generally.

What does “institutional liberalism” translate into at the K-12 level?

The declining commitment to scholarship at the college level is manifested in K-12 by the ongoing decline in academic standards and expectations found in most schools. It is not just a matter of grade inflation even exceeding that in higher education. And it is not just a matter of hostility to content, a longstanding criticism of K-12 leveled by Diane Ravitch and others.⁴⁶ There has been a growing emphasis on “engagement” that goes beyond the buzzword used in university centers of teaching and learning. Where the old slogan was “no pain, no gain,” the new mantra is “if it ain’t fun, it can’t be done.” There is an ongoing reduction in the amount of homework assigned, lest kids become too stressed. Increasingly, schools see their mission as catering to the “whole child,” where the social-emotional needs of students are as important as their academic needs. In place of the adult – the scholar – at the front of a classroom of rows of desks, the classroom is reorganized to facilitate a “student-centered” pedagogy which assumes children suddenly are expected to teach themselves along with their peers as coequal members (with the teacher) of a “learning community,” never mind if many have not gotten around to doing the assigned reading the night before or have not opened a book up in weeks. Direct instruction or lecturing (aka teaching) is out, and discovery learning is in, however inefficient and ineffective it might be. The teacher’s job increasingly is to administer uniform assessments that claim to tap critical thinking but can be mindless. Honors and Advanced Placement courses are increasingly open to all students, the dubious assumption being that what was conceived to be the penultimate academic challenge any school district could offer is now doable by every last child in the building and that opening up the floodgates to these courses will not dumb-down the classes.⁴⁷

Although all of this is being driven by the relentless, often well-intentioned push to promote “diversity” – to better serve the disabled, minorities, and other populations traditionally underserved in schools – it is resulting in declining diversity, as heterogeneous, “full inclusion” classrooms are producing one-size-fits-all education environments notwithstanding the efforts to overcome such through “differentiated” pedagogy aimed at accommodating individual learning styles. Classroom management has become a nightmare, as a teacher must now attempt in the same space to teach the highest level achievers while contending with the distractions of some students requiring constant movement, fidget-spinners, bouncy balls, or other diversions from focused academics.

As for academic freedom and the free exchange of ideas, K-12 schools outdo universities when it comes to controlling speech. This is partly due to the understandable need to limit children’s exposure to lewd language, violent material, and other problematical content. However, it also owes to schools taking political correctness still further than most college campuses, as younger students tend to be even more sensitive to “offense” than their older counterparts, even more wary of “micro-aggressions” and needy of “safe spaces.” School administrators are quicker to protect students from hurtful, “bullying” behavior from elementary

to high school. A recent survey of colleges by the Foundation for Individual Rights in Education found that “a majority of students on college campuses self-censor in class, support disinviting some guest speakers with whom they disagree, and don’t know that hate speech is protected by the First Amendment.”⁴⁸ It is hard to find comparable data for K-12 students, but there is reason to believe these views are all the more pronounced in that cohort group.

The problem is broader than “institutional liberalism.” The combination of declining academic rigor, academic freedom, and diversity can be seen in the textbook adoption process in many states, where committees follow guidelines that result in dumbed-down, sanitized books being utilized in classrooms across America. In her book *The Language Police*, Diane Ravitch found that “the textbook adoption process in California, Texas, Florida, and other states had warped the quality of textbooks. . . . Editors were instructed to avoid or delete anything that might offend feminists, conservative religious groups, disability groups, ethnic activists, or any other imaginable self-designated spokesmen for any other conceivable organization of aggrieved victims.”⁴⁹ It is not just a case of “pressure groups hijacking the textbook adoption process,” but noncompetitive bidding routines and larger political forces at work standardizing k-12 education in ways that promote mediocrity.⁵⁰

Ninety percent of America’s school children are educated in the public schools. Despite a tripling of real per pupil spending in the past half century, there is little evidence of increased academic performance over that time. The crux of the problem is the failure to meet the challenge of promoting a creative, dynamic educational environment for students and teachers alike while also insuring accountability. Too many stakeholders have had a stake in preventing positive change. In *Saving Schools: From Horace Mann to Virtual Learning*, Paul Peterson notes how efforts to decentralize, personalize, and customize schooling to meet the individual needs of students have alternated with growing centralization, with parental and local community control ultimately losing out to state and federal government bureaucratic regimens.⁵¹ The current resistance to vouchers, choice, and competition – to diversity – is the latest manifestation of this historical pattern. There is hope that ever-powerful technologies will unleash the potential of each child, by fostering enriched curricula and pedagogical strategies. However, that assumes that the elites who shape education policy inside and outside schools are committed to sound values and high standards.⁵²

If higher education needs to get its house in order, K-12 needs reform as well. Although the challenges may differ, they share some of the same problems having to do with recommitting to academic rigor and the fostering of a vibrant intellectual climate.

NOTES

1. Leon Botstein, “American Universities Must Take A Stand,” *New York Times*, February 8, 2017.
2. Among the few universities that have spoken out publicly against liberal speech code restrictions and other threats to free speech is the University of Chicago. See “University of Chicago Rebels Against Moves to Stifle Speech,” *New York Times*, August 27, 2016;

- and Robert Zimmer, “Free Speech Is the Basis of A True Education,” *Wall Street Journal*, August 26, 2016, written by the president of the University of Chicago.
3. “Fired Mizzou Professor Melissa Click Hired at Gonzaga University,” September 4, 2016, <http://www.foxnews.com/us/2016/09/04/fired-mizzou-professor-melissa-click-hired>. The sequence of events during the crisis can be seen in Michael Pearson, “A Timeline of the University of Missouri Protests,” CNN, November 10, 2015, <http://www.cnn.com/2015/11/09/us/missouri-protest-timeline/>.
 4. “Mizzou Ranked As Worst School in the Country for Ideological Diversity,” *The Daily Caller*, October 27, 2016, <http://dailycaller.com/2016/10/27/mizzou-ranked-as-worst-school>. According to the Heterodox Academy, a group of academics concerned about respect for diverse viewpoints, the University of Missouri-Columbia was tied with the University of Oregon for the most ideological homogeneity among American universities.
 5. UM-Columbia expected an overall drop in enrollment of 7.4 percent in Fall 2017, including the smallest freshman class in two decades, as well as loss of \$14.7 million in state funds, resulting in trimming of 400 positions. “Mizzou Likely to Cut Hundreds of Positions Amid Expected 7 Percent Enrollment Dip,” *St. Louis Post-Dispatch*, May 16, 2017. Also, see “Long After Protests, Students Shun the University of Missouri,” *New York Times*, July 9, 2017.
 6. It is estimated that some sixty colleges and universities were the subject of “demands” made by student protestors during 2015-2016. Although some of these protest events preceded the Mizzou crisis, for many others the crisis was a catalyst. See Alia Wong and Adrienne Green, “Campus Politics: A Cheat Sheet,” *Atlantic*, March 4, 2016.
 7. Statistics on the racial composition of the Mizzou campus and the degree to which discrimination exists can be found in Michael Podgursky, “Racial Discord and Response at the University of Missouri-Columbia,” talk given at the Discussion Club, St. Louis, May 6, 2016.
 8. On revolutions of rising expectations, see W.C. Runciman, *Relative Deprivation and Social Justice* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1966); and Russell K. Nieli, “Snowflake Jacobins: Black Rage on Campus,” *Academic Questions*, 29 (Summer 2016): 163-176.
 9. Early on, Allan Bloom observed these problems developing in academia, in *The Closing of the American Mind* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1987). For a similar treatment, more recently, see Kim Holmes, *The Closing of the Liberal Mind* (New York: Encounter Books, 2016). Holmes (p. 99) states, “The paranoid style still exists on the far right in America. What is new is not only how pervasive it is on the far left, but also how acceptable it has become in the mainstream mentality and practice of progressive liberalism.”
 10. Sources are Tony Mecia, “Is It Weird? You May Get College Credit,” *Campus* (Spring 1997); William Simon, “The Dumbing Down of Higher Education,” *Wall Street Journal*, March 19, 1996; “How To Be Gay,” National Association of Scholars, August 13, 2001.

11. "Harvard University Offers Students 'Anal Sex 101' Class," Reuters, November 3, 2014, at <http://www.rt.com/usa/201979-harvard-anal-sex-week>. The class was offered during the annual Sex Week.
12. "Zombie Studies Offered at University of Baltimore," *Rising Dead*, September 10, 2010; also, see "Zombie Studies Gain Ground on College Campuses," *Wall Street Journal*, March 3, 2014.
13. Daniel W. Drezner, *Theories of International Politics and Zombies* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2011). The "Zombies" theme panel was held at the annual meeting of the International Studies Association in 2014.
14. Rick Hess, "A Rorschach Test for Bias in Education Scholarship," *Education Week*, February 13, 2017.
15. Hans von Spakovsky and Elizabeth Slattery, "Discriminatory Racial Preferences in College Admissions Return to the Supreme Court: Fisher v. University of Texas at Austin," Heritage Foundation, December 3, 2015; Jason Riley, "Is the Ivy League's Admission Bias A Trade Secret?," *Wall Street Journal*, March 29, 2017.
16. Chester Finn, in "The Collapse of Academic Standards," *Flypaper*, March 23, 2017, reports on such a policy in the California State system.
17. See *Chronicle of Higher Education*, February 14, 1997 and July 25, 1997; Valen Johnson, *Grade Inflation: A Crisis in College Education* (New York: Springer, 2003).
18. Richard Arum and Josipa Roksa, *Academically Adrift* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2010).
19. Chester E. Finn, Jr. "The High Price of College Sports," *Commentary* (October 2001).
20. Jere Longman, "At Oregon, Pigskin and Sheepskin Collide," *New York Times*, October 20, 2001.
21. On Title IX abuses, see Laura Kipnis, *Unwanted Advances: Sexual Paranoia Comes to Campus* (New York: Harper, 2017).
22. There is a huge, growing literature on micro-aggressions, trigger warnings, and safe spaces. See, for example, Holmes, *op.cit.*, chapter 6; and Jonathan Zimmerman, *Campus Politics: What Everyone Needs to Know* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2016).
23. Roger Kimball, "The Rise of The College Crybullies," *Wall Street Journal*, November 13, 2015; "Yale's Little Robespierres," *Wall Street Journal*, November 9, 2015; and Ben Yagoda, "Who You Calling 'Snowflake'?" *Chronicle of Higher Education*, December 4, 2016.
24. Greg Lukianoff and Jonathan Haidt, "The Coddling of the American Mind," *The Atlantic* (September 2015).
25. See "UC System Going the Wrong Way on Free Speech," editorial, *Los Angeles Times*, June 24, 2015; and Katherine Timpf, "UC Faculty Training: Saying 'America Is the Land of Opportunity' Is a Microaggression," *National Review*, June 10, 2015. On the University of Tennessee and other examples, see George Will, "America's Higher Education Brought Low," *Washington Post*, November 25, 2015. On the Emory incident, see Jonathan Turley, "Free Speech Should Not Be Big News," *USA Today*, August 30, 2016. Also, see "Hampshire College Draws Protests Over Removal of U.S. Flag," *New York Times*, November 28, 2016; "Student Sues Pierce College Over Tiny 'Free Speech

- Zone’,” *Los Angeles Daily News*, March 29, 2017; and Jillian Kay Melchoir, “Censorship Is Free Speech? It Must Be the Class of 1984,” *Wall Street Journal*, January 27, 2017.
- Other incidents are reported in “Studies in Free Speech,” *New York Times*, June 23, 2016.
26. Sean Stevens, “Campus Speaker Disinvitations: Recent Trends (Part 1 of 2),” Heterodox Academy blog, January 24, 2017, <http://heterodoxacademy.org/2017/01/24/campus-speaker-disinvitations>.
 27. See Jason Riley, “I Was Disinvited on Campus,” *Wall Street Journal*, May 3, 2016; Timothy Egan, “The Commencement Bigots,” *New York Times*, May 16, 2014.
 28. Sean Stevens, “Campus Speaker Disinvitations: Recent Trends (Part 2 of 2),” Heterodox Academy blog, February 7, 2017, <http://heterodoxacademy.org/2017/02/07/campus-speaker-disinvitations>.
 29. Quoted in Ray Sanchez, “Bloomberg: Universities Becoming Bastions of Intolerance,” CNN, May 29, 2014.
 30. “Intellectual Diversity: Time for Action” (Washington, DC: American Council of Trustees and Alumni, 2005).
 31. At Gettysburg College and other schools, classes can teach about “toxic masculinity.” See “Students Told Term ‘To Be A Man’ Represents Toxic Masculinity,” *The College Fix*, October 18, 2016, <http://www.thecollegefix.com/post/29527/>. Courses on “white privilege” and “whiteness” are commonplace. See “A Course Originally Called ‘The Problem of Whiteness’ Returns to Arizona State,” *Washington Post*, November 12, 2015.
 32. Samuel Abrams, “There Are Conservative Professors. Just Not in These States,” *New York Times*, July 1, 2016. On the marginalization of conservatives in academia, see Jon Shields and Joshua Dunn, *Passing on the Right: Conservative Professors in the Progressive University* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2016).
 33. Reported in “Liberal Professors Outnumber Conservatives Nearly 12 to 1, Study Finds,” *Washington Times*, October 6, 2016.
 34. Cited in Robert Maranto and Matthew Woessner, “Diversifying the Academy: How Conservative Academics Can Thrive in Liberal Academia,” *PS: Political Science and Politics*, 45 (July 2012): 469-470.
 35. Jonathan Zimmerman, “US Colleges Need Affirmative Action for Conservative Professors,” *Christian Science Monitor*, December 13, 2012.
 36. Reported to me by a colleague at UMSL, on November 19, 2015.
 37. Nichols Kristof, “A Confession of Liberal Intolerance,” *New York Times*, May 7, 2016. Also, see his “The Dangers of Echo Chambers on Campus,” *New York Times*, December 1, 2016. Other liberal commentators who have acknowledged concerns about lack of respect for diversity of ideas on campus are Frank Bruni, “The Dangerous Safety of College,” *New York Times*, March 11, 2017; and Kirsten Powers, *The Silencing* (New York: Regnery, 2015). Even Bill Maher, a vocal critic of conservatism, felt compelled on March 17, 2017, after the Charles Murray incident at Middlebury College, to say on his Real Time television show that “liberalism is at a perilous point” due to its repressive, exclusivist nature on college campuses.
 38. President Obama, in his 2016 commencement speech at Howard University, said, “Don’t try to shut folks out, don’t try to shut them down, no matter how much you might

disagree with them. There's been a trend around the country of trying to get colleges to disinvite speakers with a different point of view. . . . Don't do that." "University of Chicago Rebels Against Moves to Stifle Speech," *op.cit.*

39. See Note 2.
40. More universities are grudgingly conceding there is a problem that needs attention. See "Colleges Pledge Support for Discourse," *Wall Street Journal*, June 26, 2017.
41. At major assemblies featuring guest speakers, Washington University enforces a policy stating that "posters, banners, and other forms of expression should not be brought into the presentation area during the talk so that an environment free of interference, distraction, and intimidation shall be maintained," although "groups are free to gather outside, to leaflet, to display posters, and to distribute literature."
42. John Etchemendy, "The Threat from Within," speech to the Stanford University Board of Trustees on February 21, 2017.
43. See "Iowa Senator Wants Political Balance Among University Professors," *Des Moines Register*, February 20, 2017.
44. "Fight Over Free Speech Goes to States," *Wall Street Journal*, May 25, 2017.
45. See Rita Kramer, *Ed School Follies: The Miseducation of America's Teachers* (New York: The Free Press, 1991).
46. See Diane Ravitch, *Left Back: A Century of Failed School Reforms* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 2000).
47. These and related issues are discussed in my *Class Warfare: Besieged Schools, Bewildered Parents, Betrayed Kids, and the Attack on Excellence* (New York: Encounter Books, 2002).
48. Foundation for Individual Rights in Education, press release, October 11, 2017.
49. See Diane Ravitch, *The Language Police* (New York: Knopf, 2003). The quote is from Diane Ravitch, "Introduction, in Ravitch and Chester E. Finn, Jr., *The Mad, Mad World of Textbook Adoption* (Washington, DC: Thomas Fordham Institute, 2004).
50. See Ravitch and Finn, *op.cit.*
51. Paul Peterson, *Saving Schools: From Horace Mann to Virtual Learning* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2010).
52. For dissenting views on the potential for enhanced "personalized learning" through use of technology, see Benjamin Herold, "The Case(s) Against Personalized Learning," *Education Week*, November 7, 2017.