

LIBERAL ACADEMIC BIAS EVALUATING A POLITICAL MOVEMENT

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This essay attempts to describe and critically assess the validity of accusations that a liberal bias is undermining higher education. In descriptive terms, the liberal academic bias (LAB) argument has four interrelated components: a) liberals are over-represented among college faculty and academic administrators; b) liberals hire only other liberals; c) liberals consistently teach from a partisan perspective, denying conservative students access to conservative material; and d) liberals punish ideological dissent of both students and faculty. As an analytical matter, whether LAB is the result of conscious bias or is merely an example of "self-segregation" fairly common and unnoticed in other elite and politically sensitive professions is unclear based on the present literature. Academic response has ranged from cautious acceptance to mitigating concessions to outright rebuttals. A reliance on anecdotal evidence weakens many facets of the LAB argument, and much of the empirical evidence needs to be replicated and reconsidered in a more sophisticated manner. The political consequences of this movement for the discipline of political science, the social sciences generally, and for higher education are considerable, and cannot be over-stated. To some extent, this issue can be viewed as the point of spear aimed at academic freedom. Although significant challenges exist in the attitudinal study of elites, the potential of this issue area as a sustained field of research is very nearly limitless, given adequate support.

Allegations of liberal bias among college faculty have a long history. Particularly on topics where political or moral questions might arise,¹ complaints often surface alleging that professors have misused their authority either to indoctrinate gullible students or to intimidate those who dare to question a professor's viewpoints. Campaigns attributing bad faith to college faculty appear to come in relatively discrete waves, often driven by partisan polarization or political uncertainty. The attacks of 9/11/01 have created a wealth of both polarization and uncertainty, provoking the latest in a long line of campaigns criticizing higher education faculty as pedagogically unsound, ideologically biased, elitist, culturally insensitive, or some perfidious cocktail of analogous sins (Buckley 1951; Bloom 1987; Sykes 1988; D'Souza 1992; Bork 1996).²

The current academic bias movement has focused on the state level, with measures being introduced into seventeen legislatures advocating a "student bill of rights" intended to mandate a neutral environment in the classroom. Virtually all of the states where such legislation has been proposed had Republican-controlled legislatures in 2004-2007. Four states proximate to Oklahoma—Colorado, Kansas, Missouri, and Texas—have seen legislation proposed or entertained education policy changes that would bring college professors under closer scrutiny from state political officials.³

Oklahoma students and faculty members have offered anecdotal evidence of academic bias. In 2004, OU geology professor David Demming published an opinion article on the Internet magazine *FrontpageMagazine.com* detailing instances where university officials suppressed his right to free speech because of his conservative views. In 2007, OU journalism major Ray Martin published an editorial on the OU portal arguing that many college professors discriminated upon students on the basis of their embrace of evangelical Christianity. He further noted that an OU psychology professor proposed a course discussing both evolution and intelligent design, which was rejected by his fellow faculty members (Martin 2007).

Both the University of Oklahoma and Oklahoma State University have chapters registered with Students for Academic Freedom, a group sponsored by David Horowitz, who has been an organizing force in lobbying various Republican-controlled state legislatures, and has recently published several books criticizing higher education in general and liberal college professors in particular. Students at three Oklahoma universities

have posted complaints of academic bias at the Students for Academic Freedom website.⁴

Such claims leveled against the roughly one million university professors and instructors require careful scrutiny. To contend, on the one hand, that academics are uniformly liberal is to make an empirically testable claim. To argue, on the other hand, that academics are uniformly liberal *and* that they are systematically biased and unprofessional in their approach to the study and teaching of political subjects is to make a claim with considerable normative consequences. To fairly evaluate charges that may have sweeping policy implications requires careful analysis of the nature of the claims advanced.

THE LAB ARGUMENT

The liberal academic bias (hereafter LAB) argument consists of four interrelated but separate claims. First, college faculties are disproportionately liberal in their ideological sympathies (LAB1). Second, this liberal dominance has its origin in unfair hiring practices (LAB2). Third, liberal professors are presumed to impose a uniformly liberal curriculum on students, even when topics are not explicitly political (LAB3). Fourth, liberal faculties intimidate and punish conservative students and faculty who challenge the liberal dominance over the academy (LAB4).

These claims are, to some extent, logically intertwined. Some LAB claims logically require the feasibility of other claims to be persuasive (e.g. in the absence of persuasive evidence of LAB1, LAB4 claims appear vacuous). Most of these accusations can be submitted to varying degrees of empirical analysis, some more easily than others, but may also produce ambiguous, misleading, or easily misinterpreted results, depending on the nature of the data generated as evidence, the methodology employed, or the quality of interpretation. And some charges, as the discussion will suggest, may be impossible to adjudicate empirically.

Another issue is how to weigh different LAB claims. A few arguments advancing LAB claims have surfaced in trade and discipline journals; however, much of the LAB discourse has taken place on the Internet, and a great deal of the material is overtly ideological and partisan in tone and intent. One solution is to confine the analysis to scholarly

journals and recognized interest groups. Unfortunately, that solution would purge much of the material and lose a great deal of the scope and intensity of the discourse. While a fair cross-section of the material both advocating and criticizing the LAB position has been included for the sake of fairness, care has been taken to indicate where material appears driven more by partisan than scholarly intentions.

LAB1: LIBERAL OVERREPRESENTATION

The easiest dimension of the LAB argument to assess is the claim that liberals are overrepresented among college faculty. Numerous studies of varying quality have been conducted to support the claim that there are more liberals in academia than in the population at large. Faculty voter registration is for the most part a matter of public record and can be assessed relatively easily. Surveys can also be distributed to generate self-reported data on faculty members' political attitudes. The degree of overrepresentation, however, is a matter of considerable controversy: while data can be easily gathered, such evidence can also be misleading in the absence of careful sampling, can admit to multiple interpretations, and can often support much more benign conclusions than the ones preferred by many LAB advocates.

As an intuitive matter, the hypothesis that liberals are more likely to be attracted to the academic profession than conservatives has a long lineage. An early exemplar can be found in Joseph Schumpeter's *Capitalism, Socialism, and Democracy* (1942). Schumpeter contended that liberals and leftists are more likely to be imbued with a spirit of collectivism and/or utopianism, and consequently liberals and leftists are attracted to pedagogy as a means of overcoming intellectual opposition to their reformist plans.⁵ While the cliché of liberals as elitists who are "thinkers rather than doers" and of conservatives as being too greedy and anti-intellectual to seek employment in poorly compensated fields like education appeals to the worst assumptions of liberals and conservatives alike, the possibility that liberals are disproportionately drawn to the academic profession forms a practicable hypothesis.

Studies conducted to test this hypothesis often focus on elite institutions, and tend to concentrate rather narrowly on social science and humanities departments. Beyond financial constraints and ease

of access to such institutions, the rationale for such foci is that elite schools produce a significant fraction of the total number of scholars that populate the American academy. The focus on social sciences and humanities is justified by anecdotal evidence that politically oriented disciplines are the most likely to address politically charged topics in a sustained manner.

Empirical evidence of LAB1 ranges from relatively nonpartisan to overtly partisan. Rothman, Lichter, and Nevitte (RLN) conducted a 2005 study of 1,643 faculty members from 183 four-year colleges and universities, using data from a 1999 North American Academic Study Survey.⁶ The study indicated that 72 percent of respondents self-identified as liberal, while 15 percent self-identified as conservative. Voter registration indicated that 50 percent of faculty were registered Democrats, while 11 percent were registered Republicans. Similar studies by Santa Clara economic Daniel Klein revealed significant Democrat-to-Republican ratios (30:1) and humanities-related academics. A 2001 study by the UCLA Higher Education Research Institute concluded that while 47.7 percent of faculty surveyed self-identified as "far left" or as "liberal," only 18 percent self-identified as "far right" or "conservative." Likewise, a 2001 Pew Research Center for the People and Press survey indicated that 49 percent of faculty surveyed self-identified as Democrats while 15.1 percent self-reported as Republicans.⁷ To date, no empirical study of LAB1 has seriously tested for alternative hypotheses, such as self-selection.

LAB2: LIBERAL HIRING PRACTICES

Mere overrepresentation may have benign causes and effects. However, many LAB advocates advance substantive claims regarding both the causality of LAB and its normative consequences. LAB2 attributes a negative causality. At some point in the past, expansion of college faculties disproportionately favored liberals; from that point on, liberal faculties retained their advantage through the search-and-hiring process.

For a LAB2 critic with a historical bent, several periods stand out as origin causes for LAB2: the Progressive Era, which saw the creation of large numbers of land-grant colleges and universities; the post-World War II era, which witnessed a massive expansion of the

student population; and the 1960's, where large numbers of women and minorities began to enter the American academy.⁸ Specifically within the social sciences, events of the 1960's and 1970's also led to the creation of numerous specific sub-disciplines such as gender studies, African-American studies, and area studies, that significantly expanded job opportunities for radical and liberal candidates to the academy (Wiarda 2000, 89).

An early variant of this argument was advanced by Roger Kimball's argument that "yesterday's student radical is today's tenured professor or academic dean" (Kimball 1990). Many conservatives who advance LAB2 claims, even those who decry the sense of isolation they experience as "lonely voices" on campus, suggest that the phenomenon is not necessarily an overt strategy, but is rather the result of secular trends. Others, however, embrace a conspiratorial interpretation of LAB2. David Horowitz,⁹ for example, cites UCLA historian John P. Diggins, who at an annual meeting of the American Studies Association declared that when

my generation of liberals was in control of university faculties in the Sixties, we opened the doors to the hiring of radicals in the name of diversity. We thought you would do the same. But you didn't. You closed the doors behind you (Horowitz 2002).

Horowitz and other LAB2 advocates contend that the obstacles for prospective conservatives entering academia are much higher than their fellow liberal aspirants because hiring and tenure committees "are stacked with ideological and political adversaries" (2005b). He characterizes the entire process for educating faculty in gloomy terms. The entire process of training graduate students, qualifying Ph.D. recipients, hiring junior faculty and granting tenure is hierarchical, arbitrary, closed to public scrutiny and designed to produce intellectual conformity in the best of circumstances. Therefore special concern would be required to ensure that there are protections for students' academic freedom and intellectual diversity. Unfortunately, in the present institutional framework no such protections exist (Horowitz 2005b).

In short, while some contend that the explanation for LAB1 is only tangential to LAB2, others claim that LAB2 is an essential explanatory variable for LAB1.

LAB3: LIBERALS TEACHING LIBERALISM

Proceeding from LAB2, LAB3 advocates claim that faculty members offer only those topics that reinforce their worldview, and concomitantly elide conservative views and issues. Horowitz is fond of opening his campus addresses with the slogan “You can’t get a good education if you’re only getting half the story” (Horowitz 2002). Horowitz’s CSPC has aggressively organized student campus groups to protest what they perceive as a narrowing of the curriculum.¹⁰

Emory English professor Mark Bauerlein has suggested two principal explanations for LAB3. First, some academic disciplines are predicated on progressive political assumptions:

Some fields’ very constitutions rest on progressive politics and make it clear from the start that conservative outlooks will not do. Schools of education, for instance, take constructivist theories of learning as definitive, excluding realists (in matters of knowledge) on principle, while the quasi-Marxist outlook of cultures studies rules out those who espouse capitalism. If you disapprove of affirmative action, forget pursuing a degree in African-American studies. If you think that the nuclear family proves the best unit of social well-being, stay away from women’s studies (Bauerlein 2004).

Second, some disciplines accept conservative ideas and scholars . . . *in theory*, but then “narrow the avenues of advancement:”

Mentors are disinclined to support your topic, conference announcements rarely appeal to your work, and few job descriptions match your profile. A fledgling literary scholar who studies anti-community writing and concludes that its worth surpasses that of counterculture discourse in terms of the cogency of its ideas and morality of its implications won’t go far in the application process (Bauerlein 2004).

Bauerlein suggests that, while the predominance of liberalism in most academic disciplines initially provides a valuable common framework that facilitates scientific inquiry, it often degenerates into a kind of groupthink, where “academics with too much confidence in their audience utter debatable propositions as received wisdom” (Bauerlein 2004). According to Bauerlein and other LAB3 advocates, such groupthink is dangerous, threatening to convert the academy into an elitist clique

lacking connection to the wider public, who increasingly view college professors and university scholars with suspicion.

Evidence supporting LAB3 predominately come in the form of anecdotal evidence, usually in the form of student complaints regarding faculty curriculum decisions or classroom comments that are perceived as efforts at indoctrination. Public controversies at Duke University, the University of North Carolina, and Ball State University have typically involved conservative student organizations (often organized by David Horowitz) publicizing complaints about assigned reading or films for freshman reading or orientation programs (Bettis 2005; Mock 2005; Roy 2005; Yee 2004). This alleged one-sidedness leads to a privileging of liberal perspectives. Horowitz associate Robert Locke employs a particularly vivid metaphor to illustrate the implications of LAB3:

academia is a petri dish for growing the most virulent strains of ideological anthrax By maintaining an artificial left-wing Disneyland in which leftist ideas are held to be normal and the rituals of leftism are acted out on a daily basis, they accustom even apolitical and right-of-center students to seeing such things as normal, even if not good (Horowitz 2002).

LAB4: LIBERAL RETRIBUTION

The logical culmination of other LAB claims is the notion that liberal dominance leads to systematically unfair and arbitrary treatment of non-liberal students and faculty members. Relatively few efforts have been made to date to establish non-anecdotal evidence of LAB4. The RLN study cited earlier employed a regression analysis to investigate whether conservative faculty “may be discriminated against in terms of hiring and promotion.”¹¹ The authors’ study found statistical evidence that Republicans, religious faculty (excluding Jews), and women found themselves “significantly worse than their colleagues at similar levels of achievement” (2005). While the authors concluded that achievement is a more powerful predictor of success than discrimination, and that other “unmeasurable” factors (e.g. good luck, personality, personal appearance, wealth, status, etc.) may weaken the power of discrimination as a causal factor, discrimination was nonetheless a statistically significant variable.¹²

An attempt to document discrimination against students was undertaken by the American Council of Trustees and Alumni, which posted on its website a variety of instances of faculty discrimination and evidence supporting the claim that liberal faculty have behaved in a punitive manner toward students.¹³ For the ACTA, such seemingly isolated conduct constitutes a pattern of abuse. Many LAB4 advocates contend that faculty members' assertion of autonomy over the grading process, combined with faculty influence over the tenure and promotion processes, prevents the extent of LAB4 from being adequately publicized and documented.

Given the obstacles to establishing statistical evidence of liberal faculty penalizing conservative faculty and students, proponents of LAB4 have attempted to build a case by accretion, publishing individual instances on websites such as *CampusWatch*, *FrontPageMagazine.com*, the *Foundation for Individual Rights in Education*, *Students for Academic Freedom*, and *Accuracy in Academia*. These sites serve as a clearinghouse for LAB4 complaints, and a great deal of "cross-pollination" occurs in which conservative students share stories of liberal faculty actively intimidating or punishing students either because they express such heterodox views as patriotism, support for capitalism, opposition to social welfare or Social Security, or abortion rights, or challenge a faculty member's liberal assumptions. Surveying these sites archives reveals accounts with such revealing titles as "War Stories From Academia," "Defending a Patriotic Arab Student's Rights," "One Party State," "Academic Intimidation," and "Freshman Indoctrination At Ball State."

Quite often the accusation that liberal or leftist faculty members have used their departmental majorities to block the academic aspirations of conservative faculty members is deployed to make broader insinuations regarding academia as a whole, combining LAB2 and LAB4 complaints. For example, Stanley Kurtz, a researcher at Stanford University's Hoover Institute, has written extensively in conservative opinion journals contending that conservative Middle East scholars have been "blacklisted" from academic posts. Middle East studies, according to Kurtz, "is a field literally founded upon the principle of the blacklist," and has "virtually no scholars left" in the sub-discipline to challenge what he perceives as a group of radical scholars fanatically committed to viewpoints that are deeply hostile to U.S. national interests as they

relate to the Middle East. At the same time, Kurtz's columns on the subject – "Opening the Classroom Door," "Balancing the Academy," and "Anti-Americanism in the Classroom," among others – suggest a broader topic than departments of Middle East Studies, political science, or even the social sciences (Kurtz 2003).

THE ACADEMIC REJOINDER

While some members of the academic community have taken at least some of these criticisms seriously, many scholars have responded critically to the entire corpus of LAB allegations, claiming that many of these accusations are driven by partisan motivations that are hostile to the academic profession. Academic responses to LAB allegations range from critical acceptance to angry dismissal. No surveys to date have included faculty reporting on whether they agree with any or all LAB claims, but a reasonable hypothesis is that a significant percentage of the academic community would contest most, if not all, LAB accusations.

Recently, the American Association of University Professors (AAUP) released a statement entitled "Freedom in the Classroom" as a tool to "help professors decide what they can and cannot safely say in the classroom." The reporter Robin Wilson observed that the statement

reads like a defense of the professoriate in the face of heavy criticism from people like David Horowitz, and the American Council of Trustees and Alumni Anne Neal criticized the statement for its 'bald unwillingness to acknowledge academic responsibility as well as academic rights' (Wilson 2007).

One general criticism of the corpus of LAB literature is the paucity of clear definition of some of the central concepts employed. Terms like "radical," "liberal," "moderate," and "conservative" are often deployed without explanation or specification of what the terms mean. Without commenting on whether or not this lacuna is deliberate, one consequence among readers of the literature may be to conflate liberal and radical ideological views, and elide the degree to which many liberals' embrace fairly widely shared and uncontroversial political attitudes (e.g. the belief in individual liberty and autonomy), and

often have much more in common with conservatives than with the radicals with whom they have purportedly allied themselves.¹⁴

EVALUATING LAB1

Most academic evaluations of LAB1 focus either on perceived flaws in the methodologies of studies providing evidence of LAB1, or alternatively attempt to explain that liberal overrepresentation is a by-product of benign factors such as self-selection. These observations suggest that in the larger scheme of things, the fact that there are more liberals than conservatives among college faculty pales in comparison with conservative dominance on corporate boards, among the officer corps of the military and political institutions.

Several benign factors may explain LAB1. One justification may be that the universe of liberals attracted to faculty posts in higher education is larger than the universe of similarly motivated conservatives. While liberals may comprise a relatively small portion of the overall population, they may comprise a much larger proportion of that segment of the population that would be drawn into higher education, namely, those individuals with advanced degrees. A second factor may be that Republican campaign strategies and public statements may have alienated significant portions of the academic community that might otherwise self-identify as conservative. *New York Times* columnist Paul Krugman contends that conservative anti-intellectualism and rejection of science have appalled many in the academic community:

Scientific American may think that evolution is supported by mountains of evidence, but President Bush declares that “the jury is still out.” Senator James Inhofe dismisses the vast body of research supporting the scientific consensus on climate change as a “gigantic hoax.” Think of the message this sends: today’s Republican Party—increasingly dominated by people who believe truth should be determined by revelation, not research—doesn’t respect science or scholarship in general. It shouldn’t be surprising that scholars have returned the favor by losing respect for the Republican Party (Krugman 2005).

From this perspective, two factors might contribute to liberal overrepresentation in academia. First, the conservative universe of people attracted to the academy is smaller because it rejects working for the government or because they reject the community of scholarly consensus on the epistemological status of scientific knowledge on ideological or scientific grounds. Second, formerly conservative faculty members might have previously self-identified as conservative, but become so disaffected by the conservative assault on public education that they defected to an independent, libertarian, or contrarian position that might be mislabeled as "liberal" or "leftist." The very notion of what constitutes "conservative" among the population with advanced degrees is likely to be significantly distinct from the conservative population at large.

The methodologies employed in studies purported to support the LABI hypothesis have been subjected to considerable criticism. The representativeness of the samples of many studies has been challenged. For example, UCLA historian Jacoby has criticized the Klein and Stern study cited for its low response rate (Jacoby 2005). Likewise, the presumption that only a few disciplines or the top universities comprise a representative universe can be fairly questioned. While the faculties of elite colleges and universities might be disproportionately liberal, such a monolithic effect would be unlikely in a more representative sample of American colleges and universities.¹⁵

Likewise, the focus on social science and humanities departments probably exaggerates the ideological landscape of academia as a whole. One working hypothesis might be that while liberals are naturally drawn to the Enlightenment-inspired social sciences, conservative faculty members might be expected to dominate in other business or technologically oriented disciplines. For example, little sustained scholarly attention has been paid to the ideological beliefs of faculty members of medical schools, advertising, accounting, or business programs, and other college disciplines that may intuitively be expected to attract conservative students, and thus, conservative faculty. The faculty in other disciplines might aggressively socialize students into a professional culture hostile to high taxes and government regulation of their professions. Likewise, recent studies have tracked a distinctive conservative drift among members of the officer corps of the armed services (Feavor and Kohn 2001). Comparative

study among a cross-section of elite professions might yield fruitful insights explaining such “self-segregation” among elites.

Employing voter registration as an indicator of ideological preferences also poses numerous problems. First, the existence of liberal Republicans in the Northeast and conservative Democrats in the South creates a more complex ideological milieu than most LAB advocates care to admit or account for in their statistical models. Another possibility is that American professors are as indifferent to partisan orientation as are many Americans. Second, the kinds of universities and colleges targeted for such studies are more likely to be located in large urban areas and “college town” environments that are likely to attract liberal faculty—and liberal students, for that matter—than the myriad of community college and small college campuses strewn throughout rural areas and small towns in the United States. Such small towns and rural communities might present a more comfortable environment for conservative faculty members (who, it could be hypothesized, would be more family-oriented and less likely to pursue the traditional academic ambitions leading them from smaller schools to larger, more cosmopolitan universities in less family-friendly urban areas) and students alike (a factor that is contributory to the response to LAB2).¹⁶

EVALUATING LAB2

The primary obstacle to providing documentary or statistical evidence to support LAB2 is that universities and departments are notoriously guarded in their hiring policies. This reticence is explained partly by the fear of litigation on the part of disgruntled candidates, but is also rooted in claims of university autonomy, and consequently such matters are jealously protected. Aside from the anecdotal nature of LAB2 claims, these instances of closed or arbitrary hiring practices can reasonably be challenged as poorly supported or unrepresentative of the entire academic profession.

For example, Roger Kimball’s claim that college faculties were “taken over by radicals” in the 1960’s, while intuitively appealing for conservatives, appears to have a rather thin empirical basis. That certain sub-fields and disciplines are populated with professors whose political views lie outside what Roger Kimball or some other conservative judges to

be acceptable or "mainstream" opinion is hardly evidence that hundreds of thousands of "radicals" succeeded in occupying the bulk of available faculty positions throughout the country as they came open over the course of ten to fifteen years. One additional problem, as noted above, is the conflation of "liberal" with "radical," but there is little evidence to suggest that liberals as a category of individuals have historically been more likely to support or tolerate radical ends that fundamentally undermine the profession to which they belong. Indeed, a person might intuitively hypothesize that many (if not most) liberal faculty members would be more likely to ally themselves with conservatives against radicals bent on destroying the academy. Moreover, some research into the profession indicates that many leftist faculty members become sufficiently acculturated and socialized into the academic profession to be appreciative and protective of its norms and values (Saha 1976).

The sorts of conflicts innate to LAB2 claims often degenerate into "He said/She said" interchanges that are inherently difficult to adjudicate fairly, but which are suggestive of the larger partisan antipathies that have characterized America's culture wars for the past twenty years. One unfortunate by-product of these conflicts is outside pressure on universities and colleges by politicians and interest groups determined to bend higher education to the service of their ideological ends. To illustrate, many experts in Middle East politics have voiced concerns about Israel's policies toward the West Bank and the Bush administration's occupation of Iraq. Many of these scholars are Muslims and embrace left-of-center ideological perspectives. Interest groups supportive of Israel have naturally responded to these criticisms with criticisms of their own, and in some instances have fomented efforts to have more vocal faculty members removed from their positions. Liberal interest groups have likewise demanded the resignations of controversial conservative faculty members.¹⁷ On both sides of the partisan divide, distressingly numerous instances arise of groups demanding the resignation of faculty members whose principal sin appears to have been offering their expertise in the service of publicly supporting one side or the other on a controversial issue.

Student mobilizations increasingly appear to be aimed at liberal and radical faculty members as well as conservatives and reflect more the unsettled political environment in which we are presently embroiled than

a coherent movement to isolate conservative faculty (Jacobson 2004). Indeed, a working hypothesis might be that student organizations and interest groups are increasingly targeting those extremists on both the left and right that advertise their views through controversial public statements, and that such mobilizations might serve to significantly reduce the overall instances of college faculty's public engagement with controversial issues.

EVALUATING LAB3

Essential to the LAB3 argument is the notion that liberals having been cozened into an unlikely alliance with radicals in the 1960's substituted their commitment to justice and fairness for a radical commitment to an "adversary culture." Again, the evidence to support this claim is not particularly impressive.

For example, Bauerlein's critique of liberal groupthink sounds damning but is logically otiose for the simple reason that *all forms of groupthink are anti-intellectual*. To the extent that liberals are guilty of self-congratulatory assumptions of consensus, they deserve to be called to account, as should conservatives, radicals, and everyone else. Are other ideological partisans within higher education without sin when it comes to uncritically accepting key tenets of their ideology? Do conservatives routinely subject their foundational assumptions regarding the innate equity of capitalism, the correctness of business-friendly environmental policies, or the wisdom of a universal ban on abortions to serious critical scrutiny? Are conservative economists who teach Friedman over Keynes or Schumpeter over Galbraith engaging in indoctrination, or are they attempting to teach what in their mind is most truthful in their discipline? Indoctrination is a complicated charge to substantiate, and Bauerlein's scold could fairly be applied in small doses to virtually every perspective across the ideological spectrum, and not simply to liberals in particular or to the left in general.

LAB3 allegations may often be driven in part by more fundamental conflicts between progressive and conservative models of education. Progressive education calls for challenging unexamined beliefs while a conservative education's purpose is to impart an existing community's wisdom and morality. Conflict between the two models is by no means

inevitable, but when they do occur, as they clearly are at present, they bring into question basic epistemological principles and ideals that normally lie dormant and challenge certain fundamental professional norms of the academy, especially the commitment to objectivity. Much of the LAB literature expresses a commitment to "diversity of opinion," which surely can be valuable, but is not inevitably so. Allowing white supremacists or Stalinists into the academy would surely contribute to "diversity of opinion," but not in a way that would improve the education of America's citizens (Cobb 2005b; Hebel 2004).

Some LAB3 advocates defend the veracity of student survey data, arguing that students "are directly affected" by liberal attempts at indoctrination, and that students "have no reason to misrepresent what is happening" on college campuses (Neal, French, and Siegal 2005). This sort of claim seems to fly in the face of mounting evidence that students are being aggressively mobilized and sensitized to pounce on any hint of classroom discrimination and/or intimidation in an "Astroturf" interest group operation.¹⁸ The possibility that disgruntled students who received lower grades than they deemed fair may chalk up their poor performances to professors' biases would appear to further undermine such a claim. Most studies produced in response to claims of political bias in the classroom have yielded little empirical evidence of systematic discrimination (Murphy 2006).

A troubling but unstated implication of the student complaints compiled by these various websites is the rejection of the proposition that credentialed faculty members should control the curriculum. A corollary assumption appears to be that students are in a better position to decide what issues should be taught and how best to teach subjects with political content. Recent campus protests appear to offer evidence of the growing sense "that students throughout the US are trying to control what they are taught, immunizing themselves against ideas that might challenge or offend them" (Roy 2005). While this sort of challenge might be viewed as benign or even progressive in one light, it also strikes at the heart of the whole enterprise of public education.¹⁹ These kinds of mobilizations also challenge the political autonomy of the faculty and of the university as a whole. As Robert O'Neil, director of the Thomas Jefferson Center for the Protection of Free Expression, suggests this challenge has no historical analogy: "Even the most contentious or disaffected of students of the 1960's or early 1970's never really pressed

this kind of issue" (Pope 2004). Anecdotal evidence is emerging that some faculty members have been intimidated from broaching contentious issue areas (Bahr 2005).

The organization of conservative groups has also stimulated the organization of groups in defense of faculty under the claim of protection of freedom of speech and the protection of the classroom. For example, "Free Exchange on Campus," a coalition of student, faculty, and civil-liberties groups, published a report critical of hearings the Pennsylvania state legislature held on the topic of political bias in the classroom. In addition to pointing out the chilling effect of proposals such as a student bill of rights advocated by David Horowitz's group, the report included statements by students arguing that their classmates are not "vacuous imbeciles" that are being brainwashed by liberal faculty. Rather, they are "intelligent individuals with the capability of thinking critically about even their professors' beliefs" (Lipka 2006). In a similar vein, a faculty member who had been accused of a pro-minority bias questioned, "How often do white students make . . . objections when a professor includes only white male authors on the syllabus?" (Gasman 2006) Whether students should be in a position, be they liberal or conservative, to dictate the course material to credentialed faculty would seem intuitively on pretty shaky ground.

Finally, the argument that conservative graduate students face significantly higher obstacles in earning degrees and employment seems overdrawn. Compartmentalization and overspecialization no doubt exists and is a problem, but the notion that liberal faculty routinely discourages conservative students from selecting topics of their choosing for study represents a serious accusation of unprofessional behavior, and would require much more careful documentation to substantiate. The idea that a liberal economist would actively discourage a student from the study of Hayek or Schumpeter, or that a liberal political scientist would actively steer a student away from the study of the philosophy of Edmund Burke, Leo Strauss, or Michael Oakeshott conflates scholarship with ideology in a way that appears deeply at odds with the professional commitments of credentialed scholars.

EVALUATING LAB4

A syllogism of sorts often arises in LAB discourse: where LAB claims include assumptions of bad faith, conspiracy, or malevolence, the likelihood of passionate repudiation on the part of educators and administrators rises concomitantly. Ball State University President Jo Ann Gora, responding to allegations that a freshman orientation course was indoctrinating students, denounced the attacks as orchestrated by David Horowitz's CSPC, writing, "Ball State is merely one target in an unfair and outrageous smear campaign" (Gora 2004). Similarly, *New York Observer* columnist Daniel Lazare points to the power corporate America wields over universities as a counter-weight to the influence professors wield in the classroom as even more pernicious and coercive. Lazare concludes,

I have little doubt that, beneath the pious avowals by conservatives of Horowitz's ilk that they are concerned to preserve academic freedom for liberals and conservatives alike, lies the cynical intent to unleash the most ignorant forces of the right in hounding liberal academics to death (Lazare 2004).

Additionally, attempts to generate statistical evidence of discrimination have been challenged as theoretically and methodologically unsound. A group of University of Pittsburgh political scientists have criticized the RLN study, arguing that the measures treat placement and advancement as indistinguishable, which creates serious questions about the findings of discrimination. Additionally, the Pittsburgh group also contends that the survey items used to measure ideological beliefs fail to differentiate between moral traditionalism and attitudes toward social welfare policies, which further undermines the claim of discrimination. A final complaint is that the RLN study offers an inadequate measure of academic achievement. As Ames and others (2005) suggest,

In political science, one article in the *American Political Science Review* is normally worth multiple book chapters. But, as the RLN measures achievement, a scholar writing five book chapters and attending two international meetings will have a higher score than one publishing three *APSR* articles over the same five year span.

In short, critics have argued that the most evidence supporting LAB4 is statistically unreliable, and LAB critics often impute either cynical or malevolent manipulation of data to LAB4 advocates.

A LAB4 critic might grant that a certain amount of discrimination in faculty hiring and promotion exists, but nonetheless reject the idea that such discrimination is systematic. Some discrimination might almost certainly be attributed to interpersonal rather than ideological conflicts. Like most professions, higher education has norms and mores. Academic culture is one in which argumentation is ubiquitous, and where skepticism is counted a virtue. While criticism of the academy, within limits, is acceptable, systematic attacks on the profession (e.g. "All college professors are anti-American) are liable to be viewed by members of the profession as acts of betrayal. Many of the instances of alleged punitive behavior documented in the *Chronicle of Higher Education* include references from other faculty members to personal antagonisms and blanket criticisms that could have been perceived as perfidious by other faculty members (Jacobson 2004).

Relying on student reports as evidence of faculty discrimination also raises serious difficulties. Student feedback is notoriously unreliable in situations where the surveyor's motivations can be detected, and some of the statistical evidence supporting discrimination against students contains leading questions like "On my campus, some professors use the classroom to present their personal political views" (Jacoby 2005). Such questions (this one constructed for a survey by the American Council of Trustees and Alumni) present grave methodological problems. First, the question fails to determine whether radical, liberal, or conservative faculty members are seeking to impose their personal political views on students. Second, the question virtually begs for an affirmative response, given the vague and unqualified language ("Some professors . . .") and the leading nature of the question (Jacoby 2005).

Additionally, anecdotal claims of student discrimination must be weighed against equally anecdotal assertions of liberal faculty members that they take exceptional measures to be respectful and inclusive of their conservative students (Lazare 2005; Bèrubè 2003). An objective observer weighing the universe of "Professor said . . . /Student said . . ." confrontations would be unlikely to draw generalizable conclusions, but would rather feel compelled to weigh each case on an *ad hoc* basis. In all likelihood both behaviors occur, but in what proportion to

the wider universe of class hours being taught? Likewise, not every student, conservative or otherwise, receiving a disappointing grade from a professor, liberal or otherwise, is a victim of discrimination. Significant portions of the current generation of college students may be increasingly becoming close-minded, resistant to new ideas, and prone to seek confrontation and litigation as alternatives to studying material they reject. That generational change occurs among students as well as faculty seems a reasonable and defensible hypothesis.

Finally, the trauma of 9/11 has also seen a rise of overt attacks on liberal and radical faculty who have criticized U.S. foreign policy. In numerous instances, Republican lawmakers have called for the dismissal of faculty members who have questioned the wisdom of Bush administration foreign policy decisions (Fogg 2006). Such incidents in the wake of the 9/11 attacks offer considerable anecdotal evidence that ideological partisans, from both the left and right, are increasingly subject to calls for dismissal for no other reason than the utterance of politically objectionable or controversial beliefs.

CONCLUSION

An analysis of the literature claiming liberal academic bias suggests that more support exists for some LAB claims than for others. LAB1 allegations appear to have some supporting evidence, although the degree of overrepresentation is unclear, and a good deal of comparative analysis with other elite professions would be required to conclude that LAB1 presents a problem for higher education.

The other three claims appear to be much more weakly supported. While credible anecdotal evidence of LAB2, LAB3, and LAB4 exists, many claims are balanced by equally credible faculty denials and/or mitigating circumstances. Furthermore, anecdotal evidence exists to raise counter-charges that some conservatives have deliberately politicized their classrooms, intimidated students, and in general sought to impose their views in an arbitrary manner. In any event, without further research, considerable room for skepticism exists concerning the most inflammatory claims.

What does this analysis portend for the state of Oklahoma? One hypothesis is that as the state moves more and more firmly into Republi-

can control at the state level, the likelihood of lobbying activities seeking legislative remedies to perceived academic discrimination will increase. Such lobbying efforts would likely include a greater interest group presence on Oklahoma campuses and intensified attempts to gather evidence supporting claims of ideologically-motivated discrimination.

The potential for research on this issue is extensive. Among the issues that could be included in a LAB research agenda include:

- A clear ideological differentiation of college professors' attitudes based on up-to-date survey data, using a statistically valid sampling model that would capture the complexity of the profession;
- Conducting local, state, regional, and national studies of LAB attitudes among faculty;
- A study of the ideological differences between conservative elites and the broader universe of conservatives;
- A study of the state legislature's efforts to assert political control over tenure and hiring decisions in higher education;
- A comparative study of various professional elite political attitudes (e.g. academics compared against military officers);
- A study of the ideological composition of the current population of students seeking terminal degrees;
- Charting student movements, their origins, and instances of calls for faculty resignations emanating from student organizations;
- Identifying a scholarly approach to LAB2 claims of discrimination on the part of faculty search committees.

These questions could form the basis of a research agenda that could shed considerable light on the issue of liberal academic bias, and facilitate a much clearer understanding of the interplay between ideological and professional culture in the various disciplines of higher education.

NOTES

¹Explicitly political disciplines are by no means the only targets of complaint. Education critics frequently raise the objection that professors of explicitly non-political subjects (e.g. physics, algebra, biology, etc.) introduce political opinions into their classroom discussions (Horowitz 2005).

²Controversial statements by college faculty in the aftermath of the 9/11 attacks have further heightened calls among politicians for tighter controls over the tenure and hiring process. The Ward Churchill controversy is an especially well-publicized illustration of the mounting antagonism between elected officials and educators. For an overview of the controversy, see Churchill (2001). The *Rocky Mountain News* and *Denver Post* have archived articles detailing the controversy generated by Churchill's essay, "The Justice of Roosting Chickens," as well as the attack on Churchill's status as a tenured faculty member. Churchill was fired on July 24, 2007, by the University of Colorado for academic misconduct unrelated to his essay. The University's statement on Churchill's firing is archived at <http://www.colorado.edu/news/reports/churchill/distefano062606.html>.

³In 2004, the Colorado legislature considered legislation that included a student academic bill of rights. In 2006, the Kansas House of Representatives entertained similar proposals, and Missouri's legislature considered legislation that would have effectively ended tenure for college faculty. In Texas, the University Board of Regents circulated a memo cautioning faculty to avoid introducing into their classrooms "controversial matter(s) not related to his or her subject."

⁴The URL for *Students for Academic Freedom's* complaint center is <http://www.studentsforacademicfreedom.org/comp/default.asp>.

⁵I owe this insight to communications with Stanley Rothman of Smith College. See also Glazov (2005).

⁶The study included self-identification data and a six-item survey of political attitudes. The survey tested for attitudes concerning homosexuality, women's employment, government's commitment to reduce the income gap, and government's commitment to protect the environment.

⁷The Pew study suffers from a very small sample size. Russell Cobb cites a *Chronicle of Higher Education* survey of 50,000 college faculty in which 48% self-identified as “liberal to far left,” while the rest self-identified as either conservative or moderate. See Cobb (2005d).

⁸In email correspondence with the author and elsewhere, Prof. Stanley Rothman of Smith College has argued that college faculty of the 19th century were predominately conservative. See Glazov (2005).

⁹Horowitz is former radical leftist who has migrated to conservatism. He runs the David Horowitz Freedom Center, which is dedicated to advancing the rights of conservative students and faculty in education.

¹⁰In one notable instance, the Duke University Conservative Union (DCU) published an open letter to Duke University president Nannerl Keohane in the *Chronicle of Higher Education* alleging that a number of the university’s humanities departments had “become increasingly politicized over the past few decades.”

¹¹ Author’s email communication with Professor Stanley Rothman, May 10, 2005.

¹² Stanley Rothman reinforced that conclusion in a personal communication: “We never said that discrimination, if it exists, is universal. These are statistical findings, which mean that they suggest that discrimination takes place on *some* campuses *some* of the time.”

¹³Included on the website are student reports of feeling intimidated by professors and fellow students if they question politically correct ideas, self-reports that professors frequently inject political comments into their courses, widespread perceptions on the part of students that they must agree with their professors in order to earn a good grade, the adoption of speech codes or sensitivity requirements that threaten freedom of expression, and the removal and/or discipline of professors for violating the norms of political correctness. See http://www.goacta.org/issues/academic_freedom.html.

¹⁴As a purely theoretical matter, most liberals are not committed to “perfectionist” principles, and most are far more devoted to procedural norms designed to produce fair and just outcomes, as opposed to utopian ends. See Rawls (1971, 325-332). For further reading on the relationship between liberalism and perfectionism, see Arneson (2000) and Wall (1998).

¹⁵A counter-sampling of conservative and religious institutions like Bob Jones University, Brigham Young, Baylor, Southern Methodist, Claremont, Oral Roberts, Pepperdine, Patrick Henry, and Liberty Baptist Universities would likely produce a mirror image of monolithic conservative dominance, and in all likelihood would be an inaccurate portrayal of the universe of college faculty as those studies conducted by the CSPC.

¹⁶These concerns have been echoed by Barry Ames, David C. Barker, Chris W. Bonneau, and Christopher J. Carman (2005).

¹⁷For example, University of California at Berkeley law professor John Yoo, who as a member of the Bush administration authored the memo authorizing the use of torture, has faced significant criticism from liberal campus groups, who have demanded his resignation. See Jacobson (2004).

¹⁸*CampusWatch*, *FIRE*, *Camera*, and *Students for Academic Freedom* all have links encouraging students to contact the managers of those websites if they feel that they have a claim of abuse against a professor. Likewise, David Horowitz visits an estimated 30 campuses annually in an effort to organize conservative student organizations.

¹⁹"Inmates running the asylum" is the phrase that might naturally enter an educator's mind. For an interesting discussion of this problem, see Jacoby (2005).

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