



# HOW THE LIBERAL UNIVERSITY HURTS THE LIBERAL STUDENT

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Is higher education politically liberal? The answer is clearly, “yes.” In virtually every field within academia, the great majority of professors identify strongly with both leftist causes and the Democratic Party.

Renowned Sociologist Seymour Lipset was one of the first to examine this question. Based on a number of surveys taken since World War II, Lipset concluded that academics are more likely than any other occupational group to identify their views as left or liberal. Professors tend to support a wide variety of egalitarian social and economic policies. They are far more likely to vote for Democratic candidates, and in many cases back leftist third parties. While Lipset based his conclusions on faculty surveys from the 1950s through the early 1980s, more recent studies show that the professoriate’s commitment to leftist politics has only strengthened.

In our book, *The Still Divided Academy*, my colleagues April Kelly-Woessner, the late Stanley Rothman, and I take an in depth look at faculty views at the beginning of this century. Consistent with earlier studies we find, that a near twelve percent of professors see themselves as Republicans. But even this statistic is deceiving. Among this small minority of faculty who call themselves Republicans, fifty-one percent are pro-choice; sixty three percent support more environmental regulations, even though it could cost people their jobs. And thirty-nine percent of Republicans believe that the government should work to reduce the income gap between the rich and the poor.

So not only are there relatively few Republicans in the ranks of faculty, but many of the Republican professors hold views that are identical to Democrats outside of academia. Based on the best evidence, fewer than one in 10 professors hold conservative social, political, moral, or economic views.

Although college professors are overwhelmingly on the left, there are big differences in the political values of faculty depending on their field. Dan Klein, Professor of Economics at George Mason University, and his colleagues conducted an in-depth study of six academic disciplines: Anthropology, Economics, History, Philosophy, Political Science and Sociology. Within these fields, faculty backed the Democratic candidate over Republican candidates by a ratio of 15 to 1. The Left’s advantage was most lopsided in Anthropology and Sociology, where Democratic faculty voters outnumbered Republican voters by approximately 30 to 1. In Political Science faculty support for the Democrats over Republicans runs only 7 to 1 and in Economics the ratio is a mere 3 to 1.

On the surface then, it certainly appears that the odds are stacked against college students

receiving anything but a left-wing indoctrination, but the picture is not so grim as it might first appear. In the battle for ideas, conservative professors don't need to be equally represented in a discipline to have an impact on the students they teach. Whereas sociology or philosophy students may never hear a conservative perspective, most economics and political science departments have at least one, and often more than one Republican on the roster. Even in leftist academia, there are islands of non-leftist thought, provided students who do not want to receive only one view of the world, know where to look.

Given academia's overwhelmingly left wing bias, what effect does this have on the students' thinking? The evidence is somewhat surprising.

According to my research, students who enter conservative tend to remain conservative and students who enter liberal tend to remain liberal. Conservative students, if they look for conservative professors, can often find some. And liberal students can easily go through four or more years at the University having never heard a conservative idea.

Ironically, therefore, it is not conservative students who suffer as a result of this overwhelmingly liberal bias, but liberal students. They rarely, if ever, have their views challenged. And if the point of college is to expose students to diverse world views, then the college experience for liberal students is sadly lacking. And what about students who enter college without any formed ideology? They're also shortchanged by higher education's liberal bias. These students are pushed toward a left leaning worldview in large part because that's the only perspective they've ever been offered.

Ideally, higher education should be about expanding students' minds by subjecting them to new ideas, and testing their assumptions. That's exactly what most conservative students experience. And that's exactly what most liberal students don't. And that's a shame.

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