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Culture & Ideas 9/23/02
BY JOHN LEO

The absent professors

It's not news that college professors are lopsidedly drawn from the political left. But *American Enterprise* magazine offers some numbers on how heavy the tilt has become. In eight academic departments surveyed at Cornell University, 166 professors were registered in the Democratic Party or another party of the left, with just six registered with Republicans or another party of the right. Similar imbalance showed up in departments at the 19 other universities surveyed. At the University of Colorado-Boulder, the numbers were 116 to 5. It was 151-17 at Stanford, 54-3 at Brown, 99-6 at the University of California-San Diego, and 59-7 at Berkeley, the flagship of the

University of California system. At Williams College, a poll turned up only four registered Republicans among the more than 200 professors on campus.

Why are the numbers so skewed? Some professors say the imbalance is natural because progressives tend to gather in do-good professions while conservatives gravitate toward traditional careers in business and finance. Besides, they say, voting patterns of teachers are irrelevant if classes are taught fairly. There's some truth in both arguments, but neither can account for what is happening on campus now. In the 1950s and early 1960s, faculties generally had a broad diversity of worldviews and philosophies and plenty of open debate. Professors were routinely hired by department chairmen who opposed their principles—because the candidates were sound scholars and students needed divergent views.

Now debate has virtually disappeared, and there isn't much diversity of opinion. Campuses have become "ideological monopolies," as *American Enterprise* says. Graduate students who want to become academics know they can't rise within the system unless they display liberal views. Professors know they are unlikely to get hired or promoted unless they embrace the expected package of campus isms—radical feminism, multiculturalism, postmodernism, identity politics, gender politics, and deconstruction. Remaining conservatives and moderates can survive if they keep their heads down and their mouths shut. Dissent from campus orthodoxy is risky. A single expressed doubt about affirmative action or a kind word about school vouchers may be enough to derail a career.

Campus indoctrination. Upwardly mobile professors also must endorse levels of indoctrination and coercion that were unheard of two generations ago. Freshman orientation and freshman writing classes are often straightforward exercises in political conditioning. So are the sensitivity training sessions and mandatory "prejudice reduction workshops" that lay down the party line and set limits on dissent. On some campuses, professors are expected to sign "loyalty oaths" promising to promote multiculturalism in their courses, even in math and science. Huge bureaucracies have arisen around affirmative action and other campus causes, making reform seem impossible. As a result, the modern campus has come to look like an ideological system learning to reproduce itself.

What can be done about our wayward campuses? More monitoring by outside groups would be a start. The model is FIRE (Foundation for Individual Rights

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in Education), which has been remarkably effective in rolling back constraints on free speech and other repressive measures on many campuses. We also need a broader effort from the organizations that evaluate and rank universities, including *U.S. News & World Report*. These organizations avert their gaze from the ideological storm. It's easy to see why—ranking colleges by course content, academic freedom, and diversity of faculty would be costly and controversial. But the current system seems badly outdated—like a plan to rank used cars without looking under the hood.

Writing in *American Enterprise*, New York lawyer Kenneth Lee suggests civil rights litigation to open up college faculties. The suits would argue that universities violate equal opportunity laws by engaging in employment discrimination against Republicans and Christian conservative professors. Not a good idea. After arguing for years that colleges should not establish race and gender quotas, how can the right suddenly endorse court-imposed quotas for conservative academics? Besides, the goal is not a set number of teachers for each viewpoint but a genuinely open policy of hiring by talent, not ideology.

Litigation is likely to play some role in reforming the campuses, particularly at state schools, where taxpayers are expected to foot the bill for ideological excesses. One suit successfully challenged the funding of leftist campus causes with fees collected from all students. But social pressure will be the main tool. Journalists should begin noticing the one-sided hiring policies on campus. And politicians, civic leaders, and alumni have to start browbeating universities into making faculties more open and diverse. This won't be easy or quick, but it has to be done.

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