

Conservatives, Too, Are Politicizing Campuses

By NAOMI SCHAEFER RILEY

Article: "[Between Heaven and Hell, Religious Colleges Thrive](#)," an interview with Naomi Schaefer Riley

This winter, amid the latest revelations that college faculties are overwhelmingly liberal, the Young America's Foundation, an organization that supports conservative ideas and programs on college campuses, put out its first list of "Top 10 Conservative Colleges." Some of those named were not surprising. Thomas Aquinas College in Southern California provides a great-books curriculum within a strict social environment, which includes single-sex dormitories with no visitation hours. Hillsdale College, though not religious in nature, provides a similar environment and bases its education on the "intellectual and spiritual inheritance from the Judeo-Christian faith and Greco-Roman culture."

Others on the list, however, raise the question of just what makes a college "conservative" these days -- and whether conservatives battling the liberal establishment in higher education all have the same goals in mind.

The curriculum at Grove City College in Pennsylvania, for instance, is praised by the foundation because one of its professors wrote a book on Ronald Reagan, the conservative economist Walter E. Williams sits on its board of trustees, and it offers a major in entrepreneurship. Indiana Wesleyan University earns a spot on the list because it has "several prominent scholars in conservative and libertarian thought" and has brought guests like Dinesh D'Souza to the campus (through the foundation's speakers program). Liberty University is praised for its solid Christian vision and for a doctrinal statement that repudiates political correctness and is committed to political conservatism and America's free-enterprise system.

Then there is Patrick Henry College, extolled for teaching students professional skills like "intelligence analysis, investigative techniques, open source data exploitation, counterintelligence, counterterrorism, and information dissemination." The college is also praised for providing distance education.

If such programs are what conservatives are fighting for, this is not your father's culture war. Allan Bloom's 1987 book, *The Closing of the American Mind: How Higher Education Has Failed Democracy and Impoverished the Souls of Today's Students*, did not argue that students should read more of Ronald Reagan's radio addresses. He and other culture warriors of the 1980s hoped to return curricula to the great works of Western civilization and to return campus life to a pre-1960s state that did not revolve around sex, drugs, rock 'n' roll -- or politics.

Some conservatives still at least pay lip service to restoring university life to its former apolitical self. When David Horowitz was asked by a reporter from *The Boston Globe* what he was trying to

accomplish with the "academic bill of rights" -- his proposal that would require faculty hiring to be nonpolitical and teaching to cover a variety of political viewpoints (versions of the measure have already been introduced this legislative session in California, Florida, Indiana, Ohio, and Tennessee) -- he talked about his own education. "I was a Marxist and my parents were communists. I went to Columbia in the McCarthy 50s, and I'm sure I had no idea what my professors' political views were," he said. "I wrote Marxist papers. I'm sure I irritated the hell out of some of my professors, but I was an A student."

Horowitz, another speaker sponsored by the Young America's Foundation, is right when, in promoting his document, he charges that the luxury of not knowing one's professors' political views, and not being graded on one's own, is an increasingly rare one. But he, and many of his allies on the right, have given up fighting for it: They accept campus life as a political war and are trying to boost support for their guys.

Conservatives now regularly claim the mantle of victimhood that once belonged to liberal groups (and was often rightly mocked by conservatives): Horowitz's own document, after all, is based on the assumption that conservatives are victims of today's academic culture. Indeed, the activism adopted by many conservative groups on campus today belies a certain resignation. Even if you're fighting for conservative ideas, you have to use the tactics for which you criticize the left: That means politicizing the campus.

Do we just want to keep adding political viewpoints in the classroom? Should we start subtracting some? x Donald Lazere, a member of the steering committee of Teachers for a Democratic Culture, criticized Horowitz's proposal in these pages last year. In mustering the evidence for his case, he revealed quite a bit of knowledge about his students' political views, and though he didn't say so I suspect they know just as much about his. He criticized his students for reading Rush Limbaugh in their spare time and not reading more of *The Nation*. But the ghost of Allan Bloom might ask, why would students have time for either if college professors were giving them enough serious reading to do?

There are plenty of books and magazines out there that are worth reading. Ronald Reagan's radio addresses are indeed valuable -- but you won't need help understanding them. Plenty of other materials are much harder to grasp without a professor's help.