

SAFS Newsletter

Society for Academic Freedom and Scholarship

Maintaining freedom in teaching, research and scholarship
Maintaining standards of excellence in academic decisions about students and faculty

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MAKING SAINT MARY'S SAFE FOR EXPRESSION AND DISCUSSION

Mark Mercer

That the current students' association at Saint Mary's is hostile to freedom of expression on campus took no one by surprise. After all, previous Saint Mary's students' associations have joyfully been on the side of restricting and suppressing expression. A few years ago, the association supported orders to remove cartoons from a professor's office door. Once it banned a campaign poster by a student hoping to be its president.

As well, students' associations across Canada have been tripping over themselves to outlaw whatever falls beyond a very small pale. Indeed, not long ago the students' union at Dalhousie debated whether student societies should be able to express opposition to this or that. The campus atheist society may advocate atheism, but should it be allowed to speak against religion?

What really gets student politicians into high gear, of course, is the pro-life stance toward abortion. And so it was bound to happen sooner or later that the Saint Mary's pro-life student society would find itself on the receiving end of a students' association gag order.

On 30 November last year, pro-life students manning an authorized display on campus were ordered by Saint Mary's University Students' Association (SMUSA) president Matt Anderson to remove one of their signs. Reports on what the sign said differ. Perhaps it read "Women do regret abortions," perhaps "Women regret abortions," maybe something else similar. Whatever it said exactly, some students were offended and hurt by it, and they complained to SMUSA.

SAFS 2011

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Mr. Anderson had the sign removed, he explains in a letter to the campus newspaper, in order to maximize the positive university experience and to help students overcome challenges they face.

Mr. Anderson interpreted the sign to say or imply that all women who have chosen to have an abortion eventually regret their decision. Because, according to Mr. Anderson, that claim is false as well as offensive and hurtful, he did the right thing in ordering the sign removed. But it doesn't matter what the sign said. It might as well have read "All women who have abortions are child murderers (and let's restore capital punishment)." By ordering the sign removed, Mr. Anderson wilfully interfered with the peaceful and orderly expression of claims and opinions.

Why was it wrong for him to do this? First, a university campus should be a place that encourages people to exchange claims and opinions, for university people want to live in intellectual community and central to intellectual community is being able to examine issues from all sides and make up one's mind for oneself. We want to live in such a way that our beliefs and values respond only to the pressure of evidence and argument. That is the type of people we are.

By his actions, Mr. Anderson not only expressed disdain for our way of life. He actively interfered with our living it.

Second, Mr. Anderson treated the students at the table badly, as one always does when one prevents another from speaking her mind.

Third, Mr. Anderson molycoddled the students who

complained about the sign. Rather than instruct them how to deal properly with views that upset them, Mr. Anderson treated them as emotionally and intellectually incompetent and fragile, in need of protection from mere words. They should feel insulted. As well, since a central task of a university is to create emotionally and intellectually mature people, Mr. Anderson came between the students who sought to have the sign removed and their education.

Again, that SMUSA is hostile to ideals of university life is not surprising. What is a bit surprising, though, and very much more dispiriting, is that the administration at Saint Mary's, and maybe a good section of the professoriate, as well, doesn't much care.

To date, neither the president of Saint Mary's nor any other official has condemned Mr. Anderson's actions. No official has publicly said anything at all about them. And professors don't seem to be pressing Saint Mary's to condemn this act of censorship, to explain why it was wrong, or to act so that nothing like this happens again.

Mr. Anderson claims that as president, he is authorized by SMUSA's constitution to vet and censor messages student societies wish to communicate. Maybe he is. If he is, Saint Mary's must encourage student politicians to change their constitution so that SMUSA officials may no longer harm campus culture.

Mr. Anderson also claims that Saint Mary's has no authority over the independently incorporated SMUSA to force it to behave itself. That might be true; it might even be how it should be. But then the Saint Mary's administration needs to create a system whereby students can organize themselves into societies outside the reach of SMUSA, where they will be free to say what they want. It also makes imperative that the university have in place mechanisms for denying SMUSA what it needs to live should it again prove itself a threat to campus culture. Student Services can easily take over its functions.

Matt Anderson is a student, and students are students. They are going to make all sorts of mistakes. They are here at university to be educated. By failing to correct their mistakes and to clean up after them, though, university administrators, and the professors who fail to hold administrators' feet to the fire when things like this happen, deny students the education that is their due.

Disdain for freedom of expression and university culture is a serious problem in education in this province and, indeed, throughout this country. The good news is that it is a problem that won't require a cent of taxpayer or student money to fix. The bad news is the sloth, cowardice or connivance of those who should be fixing it.

Mark Mercer is a member of SAFS Board of Directors. □

SAFS LETTER TO PRESIDENT ANDERSON

January 18, 2011

Mr. Matt Anderson, President
Saint Mary's University
Students' Association
Halifax, Nova Scotia

Dear Mr. Anderson and Members of the Students' Association:

I am writing to you as president of the Society for Academic Freedom and Scholarship. We are a national organization of university faculty members and interested others who are dedicated to the defense of academic freedom and reasoned debate. For further information, please visit our website at www.safs.ca.

According to reports we have received from students and faculty members at Saint Mary's, and according to articles in *The Journal*, the campus newspaper, on 30 November 2010 you ordered a student society to remove a sign from their display. You wrote in justification of your order that because the "absolutist" message conveyed by the sign offended some students you needed to interfere with the peaceful expression of opinion in order to serve your organization's mission to "maximize the positive university experience" of Saint Mary's students.

We think it unfortunate that officers of the Saint Mary's University Students' Association have the power to vet and censor students' communications. That aside, it is hard to see how ordering signs down is consistent with your organization's goal of maximizing positive university experiences. Ordering signs down contributes to a climate of intolerance to contrary ideas that is incompatible with the integrity and success of the Academy. The Academy is the one institution in

society that is dedicated to the discovery and transmission of truth. Experience teaches us that the truth cannot be found without unfettered debate over conflicting ideas. In order to accomplish this goal, advocates of opposing positions must be encouraged to challenge each other in vigorous and reasoned debate that will sharpen the issues and allow free individuals to choose among competing views.

What your action has accomplished is not the promotion of debate critical to a healthy university but instead the shortchanging of Saint Mary's students by restricting their exposure to a point of view. That some Saint Mary's students claim to be offended by a statement is not any reason to deny people a platform to voice their views. Further, you have laid a basis for some future council to deny support to other groups, including groups whose aims you personally agree with. Much better that all have their say and the winners of the argument be the ones with the best evidence, logic, and ideas rather than the ones with the biggest sticks.

We call on you to state publicly that you erred in ordering the sign removed, and that you show that you have confidence in the student body at Saint Mary's University to respond appropriately to expressions of claims and policies with which they disagree, without the heavy hand of the Student Association interfering with their ability to deal with disagreements themselves.

Sincerely,
Clive Seligman, President. □

SAFS LETTER TO PRESIDENT DODDS

February 10, 2011

Dr. J. Colin Dodds, President
Saint Mary's University
Halifax, Nova Scotia

Dear Dr. Dodds:

Re: Freedom of Student Expression

I am writing to you as president of the Society for Academic Freedom and Scholarship. We are a national organization of university faculty members and

interested others who are dedicated to the defense of academic freedom and reasoned debate. For further information, please visit our website at www.safs.ca.

As you know, on November 30, 2010, Matt Anderson, the president of the Saint Mary's University Students' Association, ordered members of a student society to remove a sign from their display. In doing so, Mr. Anderson interfered with the peaceful and orderly expression of opinion on your campus.

Universities are institutions dedicated to the advancement of knowledge. Experience teaches us that the discovery and transmission of knowledge are best pursued through unfettered debate. At a university, advocates of opposing positions must be allowed to say what they want and be encouraged to challenge each other in vigorous and reasoned debate. By his action, Mr. Anderson has contributed to a climate of intolerance toward expression. Such intolerance is incompatible with Saint Mary's dedication to the discovery and transmission of truth.

We have written to Mr. Anderson about this issue.

We write to you to urge you to state publicly that Saint Mary's University does not approve of Mr. Anderson's actions and to assure the Saint Mary's University community that the administration is doing what it can to see that in the future students and others may say what they want at Saint Mary's without interference.

By remaining silent, many will interpret you as signaling to the Saint Mary's community that you approve of Mr. Anderson's action. This cannot but have a chilling effect on expression and communication on campus. If the harm Mr. Anderson's action has done to the integrity and mission of Saint Mary's University is to be undone, the administration at Saint Mary's must speak up and begin to lead.

We look forward to your response, and we will post it on our website along with this letter to you.

Sincerely,

Clive Seligman, President

CC: David Gauthier, VP Academic. □

OPINION: ANTI-ABORTION EXHIBIT TO TEST UBC'S COMMITMENT TO FREE SPEECH ON CAMPUS

John V. Carpay

Police arrest a Carleton University student who was staging an anti-abortion protest.

This Thursday March 10, a controversial pro-life exhibit will test UBC's commitment to free speech and to the rule of law. Students with the campus club Lifeline will set up the "Genocide Awareness Project" display, using large colour photos to compare abortion to various historical genocides. In the past decade, UBC has imposed restrictions on Lifeline's speech, such as limits on the number and size of signs, and limits on the number of times per year that Lifeline can exercise its free speech rights. Other campus protests about George W. Bush, the 2010 Olympics, Michael Ignatieff, homelessness, and animal rights have not faced restrictions like these.

Unfair as this discrimination has been, being singled out for censorship is not Lifeline's biggest concern. Far worse has been UBC's choice to condone mob obstruction of Lifeline's display.

For example, when Lifeline set up its display on campus in 2010, opponents covered the display with large cloths and banners, impeded pedestrian traffic, and made it impossible for Lifeline to engage other students in discussion. A shocking video shows police cheerfully informing Lifeline's opponents that they could continue to engage in this physical obstruction and suppress Lifeline's speech.

Lifeline is entirely supportive of the rights of counter-demonstrators to share their competing views in the public square. In this regard, there is a huge difference between expressing your own view and preventing someone else from expressing hers. If a large crowd of people opposed to Islam gathered right next to a UBC Muslim Students Association display, loudly chanted anti-Islamic slogans, covered the display with large cloths, and made it impossible for Muslims to engage passersby in dialogue, would UBC condone the behaviour of the loud mob? I suspect that UBC would force the mob to choose a different time, or a different location, or a less noisy method, or all three. At the very least, UBC would create and enforce a "buffer zone" between the Muslims and their opponents, such

that the Muslims could continue to engage students in dialogue.

In a 2008 *Globe and Mail* interview, UBC President Dr. Stephen Toope lamented that “in Canada we have seen many examples of students trying to shut down speakers with whom they disagree.” Dr. Toope asserted that “the role of the university is to encourage tough questioning, and clear expressions of disagreement, but not the “silencing” of alternative views. Universities are sites for the contestation of values, not places where everyone has to agree. That means that speakers we don’t like, or even respect, should be allowed to put forward their views ... [which can] then be challenged and argued over.”

Dr. Toope understands that free speech – and the benefits which free expression confers on society, democracy and the pursuit of truth – can only exist when law and order prevail. Free speech cannot benefit taxpayer-funded universities when authorities allow the mob to use physical obstruction to silence unpopular views.

Every noble principle is rendered worthless when mob rule replaces the rule of law. For example, in 1957 the first nine Black students tried to enter Central High School in Little Rock, Arkansas, which had recently been desegregated by court order. The court order proved to be worthless when Arkansas National Guardsmen, along with police, stood by while a white mob pelted the black students with stones, assaulted them, and threatened their lives. It was not until the federal government stepped in with appropriate security measures – and upheld the rule of law – that the principle of racial equality became meaningful.

UBC’s past decisions to condone mob rule on campus contradict its own statement on academic freedom, which declares that students and members of the public have the freedom “to teach and to learn unhindered by external or non-academic constraints, and to engage in full and unrestricted consideration of any opinion.” UBC claims that this freedom of expression extends not only to “ideas that are safe and accepted,” but also to “ideas which may be unpopular or even abhorrent.” Any suppression of academic freedom, says UBC, “would prevent the University from carrying out its primary functions: instruction and the pursuit of knowledge.”

UBC claims that it will not tolerate “behaviour that obstructs free and full discussion of ideas.” This

commitment to free speech isn’t worth anything when UBC allows people to use obstruction to silence unpopular minority opinion on campus. Dr. Toope and UBC’s statement on academic freedom have it right. All that needs to happen on March 10 is for UBC to render these noble principles meaningful by taking action in accordance with its own principles.

Lawyer John Carpay acts for the UBC Lifeline club, and for students at other universities, in defence of campus free speech rights.

Vancouver Sun, March 9, 2011. □

STUDENT INVESTIGATED FOR HATEFUL TWEETS

Theo Meyer

The McGill administration is currently investigating Haaris Khan, a McGill student who, using Twitter, threatened to shoot a roomful of other students last week at a campus film screening.

Khan made the threats at a screening of “Indoctrinate U,” a documentary, on March 8 hosted by Conservative McGill and Libertarian McGill. “I want to shoot everyone in this room,” he tweeted at one point during the film, adding, “I should have brought an M16.”

None of the 20 or so students at the screening knew about the threats at the time, the event’s organizers said. Khan sat in the back of the room and tweeted quietly using his BlackBerry.

The event’s organizers found out about the tweets on Thursday, said Kevin Pidgeon, a Conservative McGill member who attended the event. A friend of Brendan Steven, another Conservative McGill member, contacted Steven about the posts, Pidgeon said. After reviewing them, Steven and the event’s other organizers decided to call McGill Security.

Though Khan has since deactivated his Twitter account, Conservative McGill members, at the suggestion of the Montreal Police Department, took screenshots of his tweets for evidence. Over the span of about an hour and half, during the screening Khan railed against Jews and Zionists in 10 separate tweets.

"I've infiltrated a Zionist meeting," Khan wrote in his first tweet, at 6:04 p.m., shortly after the event began. "I feel like I'm at a Satanist ritual."

"Oh man, a Muslim girl just appeared," he wrote in his next post. "I thought, like me, she's a freedom fighter. Unfortunately, she's a co-conspirator. Traitor."

About half an hour into the screening, Khan's tweets turned violent.

"My blood is boiling," he wrote at 6:38 p.m. "I want to shoot everyone in this room. I'm frightened, alarmed, and downright pissed. Never been this angry."

"This experience has hardened me into a soldier for freedom and truth," Khan wrote about an hour later. He posted his last tweet, about bringing an M16, minutes later.

Khan continued tweeting angrily for much of the next day, though not always about Zionism or Conservative McGill. (He called the Boston Bruins defenceman Zdeno Chára a "giant penis" after Chára delivered a brutal hit to Montreal Canadiens forward Max Pacioretty that night.)

But at 1:14 p.m. the next day, Khan tweeted, "The jihad begins today."

McGill Security contacted the Montreal Police Department after Alexandre Meterissian, another Conservative McGill member, reported Khan's threats on Thursday. The police, Meterissian said, called him later that night and told him they were opening an investigation. Khan did not have any registered weapons, the police told him, and promised to call him if they made an arrest.

According to Khan, however, he has not been contacted by the police at all. He met with the McGill administration on Friday, he said, but refused to give any details about the meeting.

McGill's administration has not informed the student body about the threats and, citing the province's privacy legislation, has refused to provide much information to the students who reported Khan's tweets, either. Dean of Students Jane Everett met with Pidgeon and Meterissian on Monday, but Pidgeon described the meeting as "completely unhelpful."

The university, Meterissian added shortly before the meeting, was using privacy laws "to not tell us anything, at least not by email or phone."

In a brief written statement to the Tribune, Everett said the administration had investigated the matter and was taking appropriate disciplinary action.

"It was determined that there was no need to advise the community of the matter because there was no danger posed to the community," she said.

According to Pidgeon, Conservative McGill's leadership knew little about Khan before reading his tweets. Khan had published an op-ed piece attacking The Prince Arthur Herald—a student news website founded several months earlier by Steven and Pidgeon and staffed by a number of Conservative McGill members—in The McGill Daily in January, but none of them had paid it much mind.

After reading the tweets, Pidgeon said he had trouble understanding exactly what it was about the event that set Khan off. "Indoctrinate U," the documentary screened at the event, deals with a perceived liberal bias in American universities and does not touch on religion.

"It had nothing to do with Zionism or Israel or Judaism in general," Pidgeon said.

In an interview with the Tribune on Monday, Khan, a soft-spoken U2 international development studies and software engineering student from Laval, apologized and said that Conservative McGill's members had taken his tweets out of context. He uses Twitter, he said, simply to vent his emotions.

"Whatever comes into my mind, I say it on Twitter," he said. "It's kind of my outlet."

Khan doesn't own any weapons, he said, and doesn't know anyone who does. He has never fired a gun.

Despite his threats of jihad, Khan said he is not particularly religious and doesn't have much attachment to Islam. His sister-in-law is Jewish, he added, and he doesn't consider himself anti-Semitic. "I don't have a problem with Jews," he said.

Though Khan sent an email to Zach Paikin, a Prince Arthur Herald columnist who attended the screening,

on Sunday night, Khan said he has not had any contact with Conservative McGill members. But he would like them to realize, he said, "that I'm not a demon."

Pidgeon and Meterissian, however, said they were concerned for their safety.

"I'm 100 per cent for free speech," Pidgeon said, "But when it encroaches on my and about 15 other people's right to life . . . I think right to life wins out over right to free speech."

McGill Tribune, March 14, 2011. □

CAUTIOUS OPTIMISM ON CANADA'S TCPS2

Ted Palys and John Lowman of the School of Criminology, Simon Fraser University, find that the second edition of Canada's Tri-Council Policy Statement (TCPS2), released in December 2010, offers significant improvements over the first edition of 1998.

[Ted Palys and John Lowman, "What's Been Did and What's Been Hid: Reflections on TCPS2," 18 January 2011].

On the positive side, they find that "The section that has been one of our primary foci over the years – the policy's provisions regarding privacy and confidentiality – has improved to the point where it is respectful of different epistemological and moral perspectives, offers protections for research participants, and reminds both researchers and the institutions in which they work of their duties and obligations. To that extent, TCPS2 represents an exemplary policy that other nations can emulate."

While they would have liked the document to offer better legal advice, they appreciate the ethical advice it gives to researchers and institutions about their duty to honor pledges of confidentiality.

They also applaud TCPS2's new Chapter 10 on qualitative research, provided it is correctly employed: To the extent that Chapter 10 elaborates principles that differentiate qualitative from quantitative and/or experimental research designs – for example, it allows an emergent research design, and authorizes researchers to avoid the legalistic relationship implied

by a signed consent form – it will force REBs to be more sensitive to the protocols of qualitative methods. To the extent that it adequately captures qualitative approaches, it may serve as an example of the sort of experience and expertise that is required on REBs that review qualitative research. However, if REB members use the chapter on qualitative methods as a "Coles Notes" course enabling them to claim that they have developed that expertise, we will all be in trouble.

Palys and Lowman are less sanguine about TCPS2's efforts to combat "the inappropriate imposition of biomedical practices and solutions that may make sense in relation to biomedical/experimental research, but would be epistemologically inappropriate and sometimes unethical in a more qualitative field-based context."

For example:

Though senior university officials, such as vice presidents for research, are prohibited from attending REB meetings, their appointees can and do. How does this prevent conflict of interest?

REB "community members" are supposed to represent the perspective of research participants, but they are never recruited from the ranks of homeless persons, intravenous drug users, drug dealers, sex workers, and prisoners studied by criminologists.

TCPS fails to give adequate "guidance about when establishing multiple REBs would be desirable," so that qualitative researchers may still find themselves at the mercy of quantitative, medical researchers who do not understand the work they are reviewing.

Still, they end on a hopeful note. While TCPS2 is flawed, it is an improvement over TCPS1. And the three councils that created the policy statement can continue to collect feedback, eventually leading to an even better TCPS3.

I share their cautious optimism. The final version does include some troubling language. In their comments on an earlier draft, Palys and Lowman noted that it could promote "ethics creep" by "broadening the concept of 'welfare' to include not only the individual research participant but also everything of concern in that person's life world." The final TCPS 2 does just that, stating that the welfare of groups can also be affected by research. Groups may benefit from the knowledge

gained from the research, but they may also suffer from stigmatization, discrimination or damage to reputation. Engagement during the design process with groups whose welfare may be affected by the research can help to clarify the potential impact of the research and indicate where any negative impact on welfare can be minimized. Researchers must also consider the risks and potential benefits of their research and the knowledge it might generate for the welfare of society as a whole.

On the other hand, chapter 10 does take pains to explain to REBs how qualitative researchers work, and the differences between their ethics and methods and those of biomedical researchers. REBs, it cautions, should accept projects that focus on just a few people, or people more powerful than the researchers. They can expect some researchers to produce "research that is critical of settings and systems, or the power of those being studied." Consent may be "dynamic, negotiated, and ongoing," rather than spelled out in advance. While some qualitative researchers may offer confidentiality, others (including oral historians) show "respect for the participant's contribution . . . by identifying the individual in research publications, or other means of dissemination of the results from the research." REBs should not expect fixed protocols, since "Specific questions or other elements of data collection may be difficult to anticipate, identify and articulate fully in the research proposal in advance of the project's implementation."

In short, TCPS2 calls on REBs to evaluate qualitative research in ways wholly unlike the ways they evaluate quantitative, biomedical research.

Whether that will happen is another question. Canadian researchers have told me that in practice, university REBs ignore the TCPS in favor of American-style ethical imperialism.

Nor has the Panel on Research Ethics explained why we need REB review of qualitative research in the first place. Forcing every project to go through the REB is a massive burden, even if the REB finds the right clause in TCPS2 that will allow the project to proceed as designed. If qualitative researchers had an established record of abusing research participants, and if REBs had an established record of preventing such abuses, that would be one thing. But in the absence of such evidence, I don't see why all of this is necessary.

Still, so far as recognition of ethical and methodological pluralism goes, I am inclined to regard TCPS2 as the state of the art. More sophisticated than the Belmont Report or equivalent documents in the United Kingdom or Australia, it suggests what can happen when social scientists are allowed to participate in discussions of research ethics, and when government bodies revise their guidance in light of experience.

Institutional Review Blog, February 4, 2011. □

IRB OVERREACH?

Dan Berret

An associate professor of education has sued Brown University for barring her from using her own data because she paid her human research subjects different amounts of money based on their economic status.

Jin Li, an associate professor of education and human development at Brown, alleges that the university's Institutional Review Board overstepped its jurisdictional bounds, failed to have minority members on its panel and denied her due process. "Should the IRB ruling stand," reads Li's complaint, which was filed last month in the U.S. District Court for the District of Rhode Island, "plaintiff would be deprived of the fruits of years of research, and the education community would be deprived of the fruits of the same."

Li is seeking \$200,000 in losses due to the quashing of her four-year-old research project.

The suit raises questions about the role of IRBs in regulating privately funded research, the fairness of their process and the tensions that arise when such boards govern the work of social scientists. IRBs initially were meant to protect human subjects from being exploited when they submitted to biomedical research. But the authority of these boards in universities has widened to monitor research in the social and behavioral sciences as well as the humanities. Critics say the spread of IRBs to other disciplines, coupled with a lack of accountability and safeguards for due process, have led them to become unduly empowered, overly cautious and poor

facsimiles of the peer-review process – all of which has stifled research.

The suit is also not the first time that faculty members at Brown have found fault with the way IRBs are run there. Past disputes have centered on whether social sciences were adequately treated by the IRB, and whether such panels should oversee research done by undergraduates <http://www.insidehighered.com/news>. According to Li's complaint, she raised more than \$830,000 from two private foundations -- \$670,186 from the Spencer Foundation and \$163,570 from the Foundation for Child Development -- for her research project, "European American and Chinese Immigrant Children's Learning Beliefs and Related Socialization" at <http://www.brown.edu/Departments/Education/>.

Over the course of three years, Li interviewed the parents of Chinese-American children and made use of educational testing. It's not clear from the complaint whether she tested the children herself or drew upon existing assessments (one of Li's lawyers, Kathleen M. Hagerty, said that no one from the plaintiff's side would comment publicly on the case as long as it's active; Brown has also declined to comment). Her longitudinal analysis was meant to document the learning beliefs and socialization of a total of 300 white and Chinese American children of low, middle and upper-middle class backgrounds -- and to explore how these factors influence their learning and achievement.

Brown's IRB approved payments of \$600 to each family participating in the research, the complaint says. But, during the course of the investigation, Li says that she found that the lower-income families were spending far more time completing surveys and interviews than the middle or upper-middle income families. She decided that it would be fairer to pay the lower-income families \$600 for three years and the upper - and middle-income ones \$300 because this differential more accurately reflected the time they put into the investigation. All families signed consent forms reflecting the amount they would be paid, she says in the complaint.

Li later submitted to Brown a budget for her project, which reflected the different payment levels. It was approved, she says in the suit, though it's not clear from the complaint whether the IRB did so or whether it was some other body within the institution.

In February, she presented a request to the IRB to approve her efforts to modify parts of her investigation, including the pay differential. "The IRB denied that request and advised plaintiff that she may not use any of the data collected from the families that were paid \$300 unless arrangements were made to make additional payments to those families to bring their total to \$600," Li alleges in her complaint. There was not enough money for her to do so, she says. "Plaintiff made numerous efforts to resolve this matter within the IRB, but to no avail."

Li charges that the IRB overstepped its bounds by making her submit to its rule even though the money for her project came from private sources, not the federal government. She also notes in her complaint that her research involves educational testing, surveys and interviews and "poses no threat to any human subject." While one clause of the federal guidelines that govern research involving human subjects says that IRBs must rule on any such research that is conducted or supported by a federal department or agency, it also seems to extend the reach of IRBs to any private entity, as long as it is doing research that is "designed to develop or contribute to generalizable knowledge." Brown's standards explain that all research conducted on human subjects must be cleared through its IRB, regardless of funding source.

Li also alleges that Brown's IRB has no minority members and therefore fails to meet diversity guidelines set out under federal regulations. Those regulations call for an IRB that has members who are sufficiently qualified in experience and expertise, and to include consideration of race, gender, cultural backgrounds and sensitivity to community attitudes. Brown has one IRB composed of 11 regular voting members who have expertise in life, social and medical sciences. It can also bring in people who are equipped to consult on the cultural context of research. It wasn't immediately clear which racial and ethnic groups the members of Brown's IRB represent.

But it is Li's claim that she lacked an avenue through which she could appeal the IRB's decision that is most troubling -- and indicative of wider problems with IRBs, said Zachary M. Schrag, an associate professor of history at George Mason University, who has written a book, (where he brought Li's case to light) and spoken out on the problems, as he sees them, with IRBs.

“If you want people to think the process is fair you have to give them a chance to appeal a decision,” said Schrag.

Even though an IRB does have a role to play in determining whether human subjects are paid appropriately, Schrag said, it's not clear that the punishment -- scuttling Li's research -- suited the alleged breach. “In this particular case, was the violation so great that it justifies what I take to be a pretty draconian action by the IRB?” he asked. “One can imagine sending a warning letter.”

Inside Higher Ed, March 18, 2011. □

SOCIAL SCIENTIST SEES BIAS WITHIN

John Tierney

SAN ANTONIO — Some of the world's pre-eminent experts on bias discovered an unexpected form of it at their annual meeting.

Discrimination is always high on the agenda at the Society for Personality and Social Psychology's conference, where psychologists discuss their research on racial prejudice, homophobia, sexism, stereotype threat and unconscious bias against minorities. But the most talked-about speech at this year's meeting, which ended Jan. 30, involved a new “outgroup.”

It was identified by Jonathan Haidt, a social psychologist at the University of Virginia who studies the intuitive foundations of morality and ideology. He polled his audience at the San Antonio Convention Center, starting by asking how many considered themselves politically liberal. A sea of hands appeared, and Dr. Haidt estimated that liberals made up 80 percent of the 1,000 psychologists in the ballroom. When he asked for centrists and libertarians, he spotted fewer than three dozen hands. And then, when he asked for conservatives, he counted a grand total of three.

“This is a statistically impossible lack of diversity,” Dr. Haidt concluded, noting polls showing that 40 percent of Americans are conservative and 20 percent are liberal. In his speech and in an interview, Dr. Haidt argued that social psychologists are a “tribal-moral

community” united by “sacred values” that hinder research and damage their credibility — and blind them to the hostile climate they've created for non-liberals.

“Anywhere in the world that social psychologists see women or minorities underrepresented by a factor of two or three, our minds jump to discrimination as the explanation,” said Dr. Haidt, who called himself a longtime liberal turned centrist. “But when we find out that conservatives are underrepresented among us by a factor of more than 100, suddenly everyone finds it quite easy to generate alternate explanations.”

Dr. Haidt (pronounced *height*) told the audience that he had been corresponding with a couple of non-liberal graduate students in social psychology whose experiences reminded him of closeted gay students in the 1980s. He quoted — anonymously — from their e-mails describing how they hid their feelings when colleagues made political small talk and jokes predicated on the assumption that everyone was a liberal.

“I consider myself very middle-of-the-road politically: a social liberal but fiscal conservative. Nonetheless, I avoid the topic of politics around work,” one student wrote. “Given what I've read of the literature, I am certain any research I conducted in political psychology would provide contrary findings and, therefore, go unpublished. Although I think I could make a substantial contribution to the knowledge base, and would be excited to do so, I will not.”

The politics of the professoriate has been studied by the economists Christopher Cardiff and Daniel Klein and the sociologists Neil Gross and Solon Simmons. They've independently found that Democrats typically outnumber Republicans at elite universities by at least six to one among the general faculty, and by higher ratios in the humanities and social sciences. In a 2007 study of both elite and non-elite universities, Dr. Gross and Dr. Simmons reported that nearly 80 percent of psychology professors are Democrats, outnumbering Republicans by nearly 12 to 1.

The fields of psychology, sociology and anthropology have long attracted liberals, but they became more exclusive after the 1960s, according to Dr. Haidt.

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Please give notification of attendance by APRIL 29th, so that we can arrange appropriate catering.

Contact Information given below.

Thank you!

SAFS ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING

Saturday, May 7th, 2011, 9:00 am – 3:15 pm

University of Western Ontario, 3M Centre, Room 3250

9:00 am – 9:45 am	Registration and refreshments, meet other members
9:45 am – 10:00 am	President's welcome (Clive Seligman)
10:00 am – 12:00 pm	Symposium on Research Integrity in Canada
	<i>Chair:</i> Paul Paré (University of Western Ontario (Sociology))
	<i>Speakers:</i> Clive Seligman , University of Western Ontario (Psychology) Paul Maxim , Wilfred Laurier University (Sociology) Graham Smith , University of Western Ontario (Geography)
12:00 pm – 1:00 pm	Buffet lunch [in Somerville House -Michael's Dinning Room, Rm. 3340]
1:00 pm – 2:15 pm	Keynote Address: <i>Chair:</i> Clive Seligman, University of Western Ontario Keynote Speaker: JOHN CARPAY <i>Founder and President of the Justice Centre for Constitutional Freedoms</i>
	FREEDOM OF SPEECH ON CANADIAN CAMPUSES
2:30 pm – 3:15 pm	Annual Business Meeting (<i>members only</i>) (3M Centre, Room 3250)

Registration Fee: \$30.00 per person, may pay at the door. Members must have paid their dues. (Registration includes coffee and lunch, but not parking).

To confirm attendance (please reply by APRIL 29) and for further information: E-mail: safs@safs.ca, or write to SAFS, 1673 Richmond Street, #344, London, ON, N6G 2N3. For further info contact: Daniella Chirila, e-mail: dchirila@uwo.ca

Getting there: From the 401, take Wellington Road North to its end, then jog one block west to Richmond Street, go North to University gates (on your left), just North of Huron Street. On campus, follow this road over the bridge, turn left at the light and continue to traffic circle. **Visitor parking** is on your right next to Alumni Hall once you are almost around the circle. Rate: \$5.00 flat rate. From Highway 7, take Highway 4 South (it becomes Richmond Street) At the fork after Fanshawe Road you can either stay left on Richmond to University gates (now on Richmond Street) as above, or stay right and go down Western Road, turn left at 3rd light (Lambton Drive). Visitor parking is on your right as you enter traffic circle. Somerville House is across the traffic circle, 2nd building on Oxford Drive On Saturday there is usually no one at the Information booths.

Accommodation: On-campus rooms at Elgin Hall are \$56.00 per night including breakfast. A modern, air-conditioned residence, situated at University Drive, off Richmond St. North. (1-519-661-3476). The Station Park Inn on Pall Mall (1-800-561-4574), and Windermere Manor (1-519-858-1414), have UWO rates at approx \$110.00 per night.

... continued from page 10

“The fight for civil rights and against racism became the sacred cause unifying the left throughout American society, and within the academy,” he said, arguing that this shared morality both “binds and blinds.”

“If a group circles around sacred values, they will evolve into a tribal-moral community,” he said. “They’ll embrace science whenever it supports their sacred values, but they’ll ditch it or distort it as soon as it threatens a sacred value.” It’s easy for social scientists to observe this process in other communities, like the fundamentalist Christians who embrace “intelligent design” while rejecting Darwinism. But academics can be selective, too, as Daniel Patrick Moynihan found in 1965 when he warned about the rise of unmarried parenthood and welfare dependency among blacks — violating the taboo against criticizing victims of racism.

“Moynihan was shunned by many of his colleagues at Harvard as racist,” Dr. Haidt said. “Open-minded inquiry into the problems of the black family was shut down for decades, precisely the decades in which it was most urgently needed. Only in the last few years have liberal sociologists begun to acknowledge that Moynihan was right all along.”

Similarly, Larry Summers, then president of Harvard, was ostracized in 2005 for wondering publicly whether the preponderance of male professors in some top math and science departments might be due partly to the larger variance in I.Q. scores among men (meaning there are more men at the very high and very low ends). “This was not a permissible hypothesis,” Dr. Haidt said. “It blamed the victims rather than the powerful. The outrage ultimately led to his resignation. We psychologists should have been outraged by the outrage. We should have defended his right to think freely.”

Instead, the taboo against discussing sex differences was reinforced, so universities and the National Science Foundation went on spending tens of millions of dollars on research and programs based on the assumption that female scientists faced discrimination and various forms of unconscious bias. But that assumption has been repeatedly contradicted, most recently in a study published Monday in the Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences by two Cornell psychologists, Stephen J. Ceci and Wendy

M. Williams. After reviewing two decades of research, they report that a woman in academic science typically fares as well as, if not better than, a comparable man when it comes to being interviewed, hired, promoted, financed and published.

“Thus,” they conclude, “the ongoing focus on sex discrimination in reviewing, interviewing and hiring represents costly, misplaced effort. Society is engaged in the present in solving problems of the past.” Instead of presuming discrimination in science or expecting the sexes to show equal interest in every discipline, the Cornell researchers say, universities should make it easier for women in any field to combine scholarship with family responsibilities.

Can social scientists open up to outsiders’ ideas? Dr. Haidt was optimistic enough to title his speech “The Bright Future of Post-Partisan Social Psychology,” urging his colleagues to focus on shared science rather than shared moral values. To overcome taboos, he advised them to subscribe to *National Review* and to read Thomas Sowell’s “A Conflict of Visions.”

For a tribal-moral community, the social psychologists in Dr. Haidt’s audience seemed refreshingly receptive to his argument. Some said he overstated how liberal the field is, but many agreed it should welcome more ideological diversity. A few even endorsed his call for a new affirmative-action goal: a membership that’s 10 percent conservative by 2020. The society’s executive committee didn’t endorse Dr. Haidt’s numerical goal, but it did vote to put a statement on the group’s home page welcoming psychologists with “diverse perspectives.” It also made a change on the “Diversity Initiatives” page — a two-letter correction of what it called a grammatical glitch, although others might see it as more of a Freudian slip.

In the old version, the society announced that special funds to pay for travel to the annual meeting were available to students belonging to “underrepresented groups (i.e., ethnic or racial minorities, first-generation college students, individuals with a physical disability, and/or lesbian, gay, bisexual, or transgendered students).”

As Dr. Haidt noted in his speech, the “i.e.” implied that this was the exclusive, sacred list of “underrepresented groups.” The society took his suggestion to substitute “e.g.” — a change that leaves it open to other groups, too. Maybe, someday, even to conservatives.

This article has been revised to reflect the following correction:

Correction: February 7, 2011

An earlier version of this article omitted the name of a scientist who conducted a study published Monday in the Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences. She is Wendy M. Williams.

New York Times, February 7, 2011. □

(LIBERAL) ACADEMIC SELF-SELECTION

Scott Jaschik

Few aspects of faculty demographics generate more attention than their politics. Why is it, many want to know, that professors are far more likely than the general public to be liberal? Many theories have been put forward, including the view (much discussed in conservative circles) that academe is hostile to conservatives and tries to either weed them out or convert them.

Two studies being released today provide more evidence that bias is not the cause -- and the studies provide some additional evidence to back the theory (put forward last year by one of the authors of the new work) that "self-selection" is the primary reason so many academics are liberal. In brief, the self-selection idea holds that some professions have become "typed" in American society in various ways that may relate to gender or class but could also relate to politics. Academe is seen as more liberal, so liberals are more likely to identify being an academic as something to which they aspire. The argument is significant because it does not contest the lopsided political nature of many faculties, but also suggests that higher education is open to those conservative scholars who want careers there.

One of the new studies was an "audit" of the reactions of graduate program directors to initial inquiries from potential graduate students who said something to indicate their political leanings. The research found no evidence of bias.

The second study used a longitudinal database that had information on how thousands of individuals thought

about politics and the launch of their careers. This study found that those who pursue academic careers are far more likely to be liberal than conservative -- again countering the idea that conservatives are being turned away from doctoral programs, or that a leftward shift is a price of success in Ph.D. programs.

"These studies together make a very strong case that most of the liberalism among professors is the result of self-selection," said Neil Gross, associate professor of sociology at the University of British Columbia, who is among the authors of last year's self-selection work and both of the new studies. (Gross works in Canada, his work on these topics is focused on the United States.)

While Gross sees the new studies providing important backing for the earlier research, not everyone (as he is the first to admit) is likely to be convinced. The studies are only being released now and have yet to be widely reviewed. But Peter Wood, president of the National Association of Scholars, said that they don't rule out bias. He said one of the studies suggests that self-selection is part of the reason that faculties lean to the left, but that there is no way of knowing from available evidence that liberal academics are not discouraging conservatives from joining them.

The Audit

The study of how graduate directors respond to inquiries was conducted by Gross; Ethan Fosse, a graduate student at Harvard University; and Joseph Ma, an undergraduate at the University of British Columbia.

Posing as undergraduates getting ready to apply to doctoral programs, they sent e-mail messages to graduate program directors in top departments of sociology, political science, economics, history and English. The inquiries were similar in describing their academic preparation, their undergraduate institutions, and their interest in applying. Some of the e-mails made no mention of politics, but some mentioned having previously worked on either the Obama or the McCain presidential campaigns.

The political references were brief, and followed by a phrase about the campaign work having been "a learning experience," so as not to suggest that the candidates were ambivalent about academic careers. (The authors acknowledge that working on the Obama

and McCain campaigns might not be perfect proxies for liberal and conservative. "We worried that a stronger conservative prompt, such as being a George W. Bush supporter, might -- if claims about the extent of hostility to conservatism in academe are true -- lead some respondents to question the legitimacy of the e-mail," they write.)

The researchers then had independent (and politically mixed) observers rate the responses from the graduate directors on frequency, timing of replies, information provided, emotional warmth and enthusiasm. In a few cases, the researchers found "traces" of a political impact, but "no statistically or substantively significant evidence of bias."

The paper notes a number of limitations to their study. Most significantly, the test looked at an initial stage of contact between candidates and departments, not the crucial admissions decision, when bias might also surface. Further, they note that all of the publicity over alleged political bias might make graduate directors censor themselves and not reveal their biases.

At the same time, however, the authors cite "research on stereotypes and social biases in general, as well as on political bias and the associated affect specifically [that] suggests that, when present, biases operate primarily in the domain of automatic cognition. Since responding quickly to prospective student e-mails is, in the language of 'dual process' models in psychology, more a matter of heuristic than systematic processing, one would expect political biases likely to affect a range of judgments to show up in our results." In sum, the authors write that "if political bias toward graduate students were robust in the fields we studied, our methodology would very likely have detected it."

The paper notes the ethical issues involved in deceiving the graduate program directors, but argues that they are justified. "[P]eople on both the right and left consider the issue of political bias and discrimination in higher education to be an important topic — conservatives think it exists and is unfair, liberals tend to deny it but worry about the effects on academic freedom of conservative allegations." Further, the paper says that "an audit study (requiring deception) is one of the best ways of gaining empirical traction on the matter" and "that it is not asking much of subjects to respond to two e-mails (though we realize it is asking something); and that there are few

risks to subjects from participating in the study."

The Longitudinal Study

The second study is by Fosse, Gross and Jeremy Freese, chair of sociology at Northwestern University. This study makes use of the Add Health database, which was created to track the long-term health behaviors of 90,000 adolescents, but which also includes questions about political orientation and educational/career plans. The authors realized that although this database was not created to examine the question of why professors tend to be liberal, it had the potential to provide some answers. At various points (well after adolescence) the participants were asked questions about political views and about whether they were headed to graduate school.

One "wave" of questions took place when the respondents were aged 18-26 and another when they were 24-32. The idea was to determine whether political orientation during the period when future professors are likely finishing their undergraduate educations might be a factor in whether they subsequently were enrolled in graduate school. (Those who did not complete a bachelor's degree were excluded since they could not go to graduate school.)

What the study found was that those seeking a doctoral degree in the 24-32 age group were clearly more liberal than the population as a whole. In the entire pool, 35 percent identified as liberal or very liberal, while 49 percent of those seeking doctorates did so. In the entire pool, 23 percent identified as conservative, while only 18 percent of doctoral seekers did so.

These figures match (generally) data on the political leanings of young professors. "These numbers strongly suggest that much of professorial liberalism is indeed a function of who goes to graduate school: filling job openings in academe with a random draw from the pool of graduate students would still produce a distinctly left-leaning occupation," the study says.

Further, other data show that while a significant minority of those studied became more liberal in their doctoral programs, so did a significant number of those who didn't go to graduate school. In addition, doctoral students were slightly more likely than those who stopped their education after their bachelor's degrees to become more conservative than they had been earlier in their lives. These findings generally cast doubt on

the idea that professors are liberal because they are socialized that way in graduate school.

There are some inconclusive results in the analysis about whether some personality traits (not linked to politics) may make some people more likely to go to graduate school. But notably, the study found no relationship between either materialism or early marriage and a disinclination to go for a doctorate. (These findings rebut theories put forward by some observers that conservatives' desire for more money than young professors tend to earn, motivated either by greed or family obligations, explains the scarcity of right-wing academics.)

Self-Selection or Bias?

Whatever the results of these studies, many people remain bothered by the lopsided nature of professorial politics. The annual meeting of the Society for Personality and Social Psychology this year was dominated by a talk charging that the disciplines represented in the organization may have a bias against conservatives, *The New York Times* reported.

Jonathan Haidt of the University of Virginia polled the audience of 1,000 scholars and asked by shows of hands how many of them identified themselves in various political ways. He found that about 80 percent called themselves liberals, a few dozen said that they were centrists or libertarians, and only three said they were conservatives. "This is a statistically impossible lack of diversity," Haidt said, given that 40 percent of Americans identify as conservatives.

Wood, of the National Association of Scholars (a group that has criticized what it considers liberal bias in academic life), found particular fault with the study of graduate admissions directors. He questioned whether McCain was a good proxy for conservative leanings, saying that the senator "is virtually nobody's idea of a standard bearer of conservatism."

But more broadly, he said that "they were looking for actionable bias in entirely the wrong place." He argued that most graduate program directors would only discourage someone who was "manifestly inappropriate" by virtue of a poor academic record, no prospect for a bachelor's degree or similarly clear lack of qualifications. Bias in admissions, he said, would more likely come later, when admissions committees vote on candidates.

Wood called the longitudinal study "the far more substantial paper," and he said it does establish a role for self-selection in the political make-up of the professoriate. But he said that there is still "a gap" in the thinking that this rules out bias. Even if self-selection is "a primary driver for the liberalism" of faculty members, that does not mean bias does not exist, he said. "They have set up a false opposition."

It also may be the case, Wood said, that faculty members have a responsibility for the self-selection going on. "There's a kind of chicken and egg problem that they have done their best to avoid," Wood said. "Given today's university, you'd have to be pretty obtuse not to understand that going into the field is going to mean a lifelong association with professions that are dominated by liberal individuals and liberal ideologies."

Gross noted that the studies acknowledge their limits, but said that it was significant that at the same time that more evidence is emerging for the role of self-selection, efforts to find systematic bias (such as the inquiries to graduate directors) were coming up empty. He also acknowledged that nothing in the research he and others have done denies that some conservatives may feel that academe is "unwelcoming" to them as a profession.

But "unwelcoming," he noted, "is still a self-selection story, as opposed to an exclusion story."

One response by those who want to see more political balance in the make-up of faculties, Gross said, would be to take these studies and make the point to talented, right-leaning students that the door is open to them. More efforts could be made to create and sustain conservative intellectual efforts, he said.

But even if that happens, Gross predicted that claims about liberal bias in academe would not go away. "That line of argumentation serves a pretty important function for the conservative movement," he said. Modern conservatism has cast itself as a populist movement, Gross noted, and populism "requires a bashing of elites." Conservatives have a tough time bashing economic elites, Gross said, "so there's been a strong need to find alternative elites to bash."

From William F. Buckley Jr. on, the solution has been "to focus on cultural elites," such as faculty members. Gross stressed that he was not suggesting "a

conspiracy" by conservatives, but just stating the reality that this line of argument is one that has been made for decades, with considerable success. "It provides a sort of collective identity for educated conservatives, that sense of feeling excluded," he said. The challenge posed by his research, he said, is that it suggests that choice is the primary reason liberals are more common in academe than are conservatives.

Inside Higher Ed, March 21, 2011. □

THE REAL BARRIERS TO WOMEN IN SCIENCE

Margaret Wentz

If women are so equal, why aren't there more of us in science and, for that matter, in politics? On the 100th anniversary of International Women's Day, I got an earful about this stuff. The gender lopsidedness in certain fields obviously proves that, despite women's impressive gains, we still have a long way to go before we can declare victory in the battle for women's rights.

The trouble is, it's not at all obvious why these gaps persist, or what should be done about them. The hackneyed old complaints about systemic bias against women no longer seem convincing. Yet, other hypotheses can be downright dangerous. Just ask Larry Summers, the former Harvard president who was ultimately ousted after he speculated that the preponderance of men atop certain math-heavy fields might partly be explained by the higher variance of male IQ scores at the extreme top and bottom of the Bell curve. Kapow! Instead of defending his right to think freely, academics demanded his head.

But now, Stephen Ceci and Wendy Williams argue that it's time to change the conversation. As academics at Cornell University – they're married to each other – they've been studying the science gender gap for years. And they've concluded that the last thing we need is more gender sensitivity training. In a new paper published in the Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences, they say the bias alleged against women in science simply doesn't exist. The scientific gender gap is largely due to different job choices.

"We often hear that men have a better chance of

getting their work accepted or funded, or of getting jobs, because they're men," Prof. Williams says. But they found no evidence of systemic bias in interviewing, hiring, reviewing or funding. If anything, female PhDs had a modest hiring edge. "Universities expend money and time trying to combat this rampant alleged discrimination," she says. But, in her view, they're wasting their time and money.

Yet, certain barriers remain, and they're real. The principal barrier is the same one that other professional women face. A scientist's prime reproductive years coincide with her prime research years. Female scientists often take more junior positions not because their manuscripts were rejected but because they choose to give priority to their families. About 80 per cent of both male and female graduate students believe that working full-time is "important" or "extremely important." But nearly a third of women (against just 9 per cent of men) also believe that working part-time is "important" or "somewhat important."

Family considerations aren't the only reason women make different career choices than men do. Women tend to prefer jobs that involve interacting with people rather than with data. Many would rather teach than do pure research. And far more women gravitate to the "human" side of sciences (medicine and the biological sciences) than to the math-intensive side (computer sciences, engineering, physics). These preferences may be a result of cultural stereotyping, but they also seem hard-wired. Should we be equally alarmed that women now outnumber men by 3 to 1 in veterinary school? Maybe not.

Prof. Williams, who has three daughters, advocates doing more. She wants to ensure that girls are encouraged to go into science and are exposed to plenty of positive role models. She wants the tenure system tweaked to make it more family friendly. But she also says we should stop trying to figure out the "right" career path for women in science, and start asking how happy female scientists are with their choices.

In other words, it's a lot more complicated than blaming men, or stereotypes, or culture, or tradition. Why don't more women go into politics? I can think of lots of reasons, not including sexism or systemic bias. How about the excruciating difficulty of combining family life with a political career, especially if your

family is a thousand miles away? What can we do about that? I don't have a clue. All I know is, the answers aren't as easy as we like to think.

Globe and Mail, March 10, 2011. □

MIT AGAIN REVIEWS STATUS OF WOMEN

Scott Jaschik

When the Massachusetts Institute of Technology issued a report in 1999 documenting obstacles faced by female professors (and their small numbers), the university quickly captured worldwide attention. Not only was MIT frank about the issues, but senior officials endorsed the report, and pledged reforms. The MIT study was the model for numerous other examinations of similar issues at colleges and universities.

Today MIT is releasing a new report on the status of women, finding "remarkable progress." The number of women on the faculty in the divisions of science (the subject of the original report) and engineering (the subject of a follow-up report) has nearly doubled in the years since the studies were first issued. There are also far more women in senior positions at MIT, which is today led by Susan Hockfield.

But the report also found significant problems, some of which are variations of issues raised frequently by studies of the status of women in academe. For instance, surveys of female faculty members at MIT (which had an unusually high participation rate of about 90 percent) found many women believe that they face significant "service" burdens that hold back their careers.

Other issues, however, reflect some of the advances made at MIT, which the report notes now pays much more attention to trying to attract female scientific talent. "One concern centers on faculty search procedures, which necessarily attempt to identify and eliminate biases in the search process," the report says. "This procedure can lead to the perception that women faculty are unfairly hired, and later, to the incorrect perception that standards of hiring and promotion are lower for women faculty. These misperceptions can erode the confidence of women faculty."

The report is a mix of demographic statistics about women at MIT and the views obtained in the surveys of and discussions with women at the institute. The report makes clear that gender parity is far from a reality at MIT, where men continue to hold solid majorities in most areas. At the same time, the significant roles for women at the institute (president, two of five academic deans, two of six department heads in the School of Science) led several women to tell the report's authors, "who would have thought it possible in our lifetime?"

The percentage of women in the School of Science grew from 8 percent to 19 percent since the first study was released, and many of those surveyed cited specific shifts in both policies and attitudes that contributed to these gains. In the School of Engineering, the gains brought the share of women on the faculty from 10 to 17 percent.

The report cites "[c]hange in attitudes among some male faculty including, (a) awareness that search committees must consciously look for women and minority applicants since diversity is important and since potentially qualified female and minority applicants can be overlooked; and (b) the fact that younger male faculty find it natural to have women in powerful leadership roles."

On a key work/family issue, the report finds that MIT has seen the "removal of the stigma for women bearing children," and that using family leave policies has become "standard practice for female (and male) faculty throughout MIT, a change that was visibly reinforced by locating a new day-care center on Stata's first floor," referring to a major computer science facility. One woman told the authors of the report, "Today junior women faculty can have a child while taking family leave/extension of the tenure clock and get tenure, which had never happened in [the School of] Science at the time our committee was formed in 1995."

Backlash Issues

Several of the issues identified as problems for women today reflect a sense that MIT is officially in favor of advancing women at the university -- and a perception from some that such a commitment must mean that standards are being compromised at some level.

In one discussion held with women on the faculty as

part of the preparation of the report, one faculty member reported that "undergraduate women ask me how they should deal with their male classmates who tell them that they only got into MIT because of affirmative action." That comment, the report says, "prompted some women to note that when they win an award or other recognition it is not uncommon for a colleague on the selection committee to say, 'it was long overdue that the award be given to a woman,' indicating that gender was a significant factor in the selection. These kinds of statements deprive the awardee of the satisfaction of knowing that it was purely because of respect for her accomplishments that she got the award."

With regard to hiring and promotion, the report notes that MIT has made significant efforts to educate search committees about the way bias can affect the way women are evaluated, and that the sources of bias affecting women at MIT can be scholars elsewhere. For instance, MIT has focused on the issue of letters of recommendation -- which can be extremely influential for highly coveted positions at an institution like MIT - - and the way women may be evaluated more on "temperament" than on their science.

But these various education efforts are having an unintended consequence, the report finds: "the perception that standards for hiring and promotion of women faculty are lower than for male faculty." One woman is quoted in a typical comment as saying: "In discussions I hear others saying 'oh, she'll get tenure ... because we need to have women.' Makes it sound like the standards of excellence are not the same for men and women."

The report finds that these attitudes are "disquieting to women faculty," quoting women as saying, "I am very worried about making too much effort to recruit women, and the perception that women are not as good." And: "I felt I was invited to interview because I was dazzling, but now I wonder...."

All Women Aren't 'Soft and Sweet'

The report notes that one of the continuing problems faced by women is a perception that they are all "soft and sweet" and possess certain stereotypical characteristics, and that they are somehow disappointing when they don't fit into those expectations.

"There is an expectation of niceness, sweetness. It's everywhere. Students, collaborators all make this mistake," one woman told the authors of the report.

The flip side of these expectations is also problematic, the report says. It notes that "assertive behavior may be judged as inappropriately aggressive in a woman, but applauded in a man." One faculty member commented that the "acceptable personality range is narrower for women than men" and that "at a retreat, a male colleague commented on a top woman giving a talk 'she's awfully aggressive, isn't she?'"

Related to these stereotypes, women reported that it is assumed that they -- more than their male colleagues -- will make time to be a mentor, and will be willing to talk about such issues as work/family balance before any audience. In fact, some women reported that they don't have time to be mentors or a desire for public discussion of their work/family issues.

Work and Family and Bias

On the issue of work/family balance, the report notes that there is a specific set of "biological challenges" faced by women that are not the same as those for men. And the report applauds policies on family leave, child care and other related issues that have helped many women (and men).

But the report notes that even though "family friendly" policies are open to and used by men as well as women, many female faculty members feel that these issues are considered theirs alone. One woman was quoted as saying: "Why does 100 percent of the conversation about balancing work and family only involve women? At a departmental visiting committee, I was asked in hushed tones, 'How's daycare?' I wanted to say, 'Why did you ask me, I don't have any kids?'"

And some women interviewed cited stereotyping, "especially among older male faculty, that being a parent and a successful MIT scientist is not possible." One woman told the authors of the report: "An older colleague told me I would not get tenure if I was bouncing a kid on my knee at night."

Generally though, the report notes that women feel much more included at MIT than did those interviewed for the original studies on the status of women at the university. In several instances, women reported that they are treated better at MIT than when they interact as part of the international scientific world.

One woman was quoted as saying: "My field is bad [for women] in Europe. I won't even go there any more. Germany and Switzerland are terrible for women in my field."

Another said: "I am tired of sending notes to organizers of scientific meetings telling them to put women on scientific programs as speakers. It is embarrassing to have to do this. I know many women scientists who do it. There need to be mechanisms that make it unnecessary for professional women scientists to have to do this, such as requiring there be women on the program in order to receive federal funding for a meeting. NIH used to require this. But what can one do about meetings not funded by NIH? Meetings in Europe are often the worst."

Inside Higher Ed, March 21, 2011. □

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IMPERVIOUS TO EVIDENCE

Supporting failed programs is moral vanity.

Mona Charen

My friend E. J. Dionne Jr., a liberal columnist for the *Washington Post*, is a fine man with, I feel safe in asserting, a warm heart. But he betrays in a recent column a persistent failing of the Left — imperviousness to evidence.

Describing Speaker Boehner's tactics in the budget fights with Democrats, Dionne wrote:

Begin with the outrageous \$1.1 billion, 15 percent cut from Head Start, a program that offers preschool education to roughly 965,000 poor children. According to the Center for Law and Public Policy, this would knock 218,000 kids out of Head Start and force 16,000 classrooms to close. That is an excellent way to lose the future, as Obama ought to be saying. What could be a better use of public money than helping our poorest children early in life so they might achieve more in school, and later?

Like most liberals, Dionne is enchanted with the idea of Head Start — the romance of a government program that would provide care, nutrition, education, and skills to impoverished preschoolers in order to erase, to the degree possible, the handicaps poverty imposes. That was the idea in 1965, when Head Start was founded. Lyndon Johnson, upon signing the enabling bill, declared, "Today we reach out to five and half million children held behind their more fortunate schoolmates by the dragging anchor of poverty." Head Start, he promised, would be their "passport" out.

It would have been worth the \$166 billion taxpayers have spent on the program since 1965 if a significant portion of Head Start alumni did improve their educational outcomes and escape poverty. But that did not happen.

As any number of studies have demonstrated over the years, the effects of Head Start are modest to nugatory. Stephen and Abigail Thernstrom chronicled the failure in *No Excuses*. One study found that Head Start students were slightly more likely to be immunized than others — a good thing of course, but a) not primarily what the program was sold as, and b) achievable far more cheaply through other programs like Medicaid. A 1969 study found that any gains

participants displayed faded away in the early grades. By third grade, Head Start graduates were indistinguishable from their non-participating classmates. Rather than scrap the program, President Nixon (a sheep in wolf's clothing where domestic policy was concerned) concluded that "Head Start must begin earlier in life, and last longer, to achieve lasting benefits."

Later surveys showed similarly dismal results. By 1987, even the program's founder, Yale psychologist Edward F. Zigler, declined to claim educational benefits for the program. But as the Thernstroms concluded, "Everyone could agree that poverty was hard on blameless children, so any federal effort purporting to help them was difficult to attack without seeming mean-spirited."

That remains true, as witness Mr. Dionne.

A just-released study by the Department of Health and Human Services delivers incredibly harsh news about Head Start. A large, nationwide survey of 4,600 preschoolers who were randomly assigned to either Head Start (experimental group) or no program (control group) were studied on 114 different measures ranging from academic skills to social/emotional development to health status. The study found no statistically relevant effects from the Head Start program by the end of first grade.

If a study falls in the forest and the major news organizations fail to report it, does it make a sound? Hardly a whimper. A few conservative websites like Heritage, Cato, and the Independent Women's Forum noted the results, but elsewhere all was silence. Or, not silence actually; complete denial. President Obama had boosted funding for Head Start from \$6.8 billion in 2008 to \$9.2 billion in 2009. Secretary of Health and Human Services Kathleen Sibelius and Education Secretary Arne Duncan support even greater "investments" in the failed program in the future. Study? What study?

According to Douglas Besharov of the University of Maryland, it costs \$22,600 annually to keep a child in a year-round Head Start program. Typical preschools run about \$9,500. But the price simply doesn't matter. The lack of results doesn't matter. The only thing that seems to matter is that liberals be able to preen about their compassion — oh yes, and condemn anyone not impervious to evidence as heartless.

Mona Charen is a nationally syndicated columnist. © 2011 Creators Syndicate.

First Comment:

If we put the billions we've poured into Head Start into state voucher programs for low-income kids, how many more kids do you think would have been able to break the cycle of poverty? Who is really compassionate here?

National Review on Line, March 8, 2011. □

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