

15 August 2008

Committee Secretary
Senate Education, Employment and Workplace Relations Committee
Department of the Senate, Parliament House

By email: eewer.sen@aph.gov.au

Dear Secretary,

Thank you for the opportunity to make a submission to the Senate's inquiry in to academic freedom.

From my experience of Australian Educational institutions there is a significant culture of bias in the system focused on perpetuating the dominant paradigm that exists within these institutions rather than foster debate and opposing views.

In my experience this dominance of ideology and intolerance of opposing views can begin as early as Primary School, in my case I found it to be most prevalent in High School. Some examples of incidents included a teacher advocating "responsible drug use" and not tolerating any opposing views to this issue. Other incidents involved teachers encouraging students to attend May Day protests against globalisation and Resistance protests against Pauline Hanson and offering any students who wished to attend dispensation from class.

The worst case of academic control I encountered was in legal studies where I encountered directives to re-write essays to accord to certain views of the teacher (other students also had similar requests made of them). I subsequently discontinued the subject to avoid being subjected to further cases of bias and impediments to academic success.

In University my first experience of academic bias was encountered in Legal Institutions. The course was heavily political and balanced towards left-wing ideology. There were a series of guest lecturers for the course, all who would be considered to be representatives of the left. At the time (2002) the issue of illegal immigrants was a prominent legal discussion, all representatives on the subject were opposed to the Howard Government's action in this respect. One of my friends in the course had been able to get then Attorney General Daryl Williams to agree to the students and was told by the convenor that she would not allow him to speak to the class.

As a student of economics at Sydney University I found that the prevailing orthodoxy was Keynesian and any opposing views were not welcomed. One of my class mates in arguing neo-liberal economic theories in a tutorial against the Keynesian mantra was told by the tutor that if they wanted to pass the course they shouldn't "rock the boat".

Our Universities and Educational institutions should be places that foster debate and encourage challenges to the prevailing orthodoxy, not institutions that seek to stifle such discourse.

Scott Farlow