

10th August 2008

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

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

SUBMISSION TO SENATE INQUIRY INTO ACADEMIC FREEDOM

I am a student at Sydney University who has just finished my first semester of study in my Bachelor of Economics degree. University is an awarding and enriching experience for any student. However, I have noticed that often diversity of opinion is lacking in many departments of the university. Often this works to stifle debate, silence opinions and take away the open-mindedness of pupils.

The most notable of these was my experiences in a tutorial based upon industrial relations. At my first tutorial in this unit of study the tutor opened her remarks with "well thank God the Howard government is gone". Whilst this statement by itself may be viewed as mere opinion amongst free-minded adult, it soon became apparent that the tutor had a clear vendetta to indoctrinate political views amongst the students. This manifested itself many times in the classroom. When a pupil made the statement that "WorkChoices was good for many businesses", rather than discussing the point, the tutor made the statement "no, WorkChoices was bad for everybody, no good came out of that policy". As the semester progressed WorkChoices even transformed into "a clear manifestation of John Howard's goal of increasing the pay gap between men and women by deregulating the workforce". Furthermore, the tutor soon learned who among the pupils agreed with her viewpoints and gave them increasing chances to lead the discussion to the detriment of others with alternative points of view.

Unfortunately, such circumstances like the above were not isolated incidents. Indeed other lecturers have said "at your age you should all be republicans", with the implication that the viewpoint of supporting a constitutional monarchy was stupid. Further, many lectures were wasted with lectures going off on tangents to express their political views. One of the most prominent examples of this occurred when a lecturer decided to dedicate forty-five minutes of a two hour lecture to how socioeconomic status related to academic achievement, despite the fact the such an argument was completely irrelevant to the unit of study.

Universities should not be a place of indoctrination, but instead a grand platform for debate. Opinions should allowed to be expressed without fear of retribution either through embarrassment or, perhaps more importantly, fear of losing marks for holding such views. This is necessary for continuing high educational standards in Australia. Diversity and debate stimulate the minds of young people without them universities turn into a place where degrees be obtained simply through agreeing with the views of academia. Unfortunately, this is increasingly happening at Australian universities and is detrimental both to student and the nation as a whole.

Adrian Pryke