

Dear Mr Chairman and Committee Members

I congratulate Senator Fifield on his very farsighted motion that led to the Committee's inquiry into the matters outlined in the terms of reference. All too rarely does the general public get an opportunity to comment on educational matters of such great importance. It is my sincere hope that the Committee's work will lay bare the skewed ideological skirmishes that run unchecked within secondary and tertiary education in this country. The force-feeding of one-sided ideological content to the growing minds of young people must stop and I commend the Senate for its initiative. Students should be taught how to think, not what to think.

I wish to briefly contrast my personal experiences in relation to the conduct of teaching professionals at Trinity Grammar School, Kew, Victoria, with my experiences in the Department of Political Science, Faculty of Arts, University of Melbourne.

I completed my Victorian Certificate of Education ("VCE") at Trinity Grammar School, Kew in 1993. I hold a Bachelor of Commerce and Diploma in Arts (Political Science) from the University of Melbourne, and a Bachelor of Laws from the University of London.

As a Year 12 student in 1993, one of my VCE subjects was Economics, the content of which was a mix of economic history and macroeconomic theory. The teacher of this subject was a Mr David Mansour. It goes without saying that the field of Economics is implicitly ideological. This fact notwithstanding, my classmates and I regularly speculated on the political leanings of Mr Mansour because they were entirely indecipherable. As a class we regularly asked Mr Mansour to set out his beliefs and he always adroitly side-stepped the question. The point of me raising this is that Mr Mansour's personal beliefs, whatever they were and are, had no discernable bearing on the manner in which he taught his subject (a subject, I might add, which he taught with considerable skill). In being coy about his own beliefs, of which I have not the faintest idea, he equipped his students to think for themselves. While I did not reflect on it much at the time, in retrospect Mr Mansour should be applauded for the objectivity and professionalism with which he taught an inherently ideological subject. He is, I suspect, a teacher who serves as a worthy model for his peers. Fortunately for me and many of the other students who have passed through Trinity Grammar, Mr Mansour's teaching colleagues were of similar calibre.

I contrast this experience with those of mine as a student in the Political Science Department at the University of Melbourne in 2002. My overall impression of the Department, and the Faculty of Arts in general, was as one overrun by post-modernist fundamentalism in which staff members blatantly pushed their own ideological barrows. While academic freedom, at tertiary level, to some extent involves the pursuit of personal fancy, it is no excuse for a skewed presentation of intellectual material. Particularly glaring was the demonstrative skew of perspectives amongst academic staff and the overall lack of ideological breadth. Let me plainly state that the Department, and the Faculty in general, is, in my opinion, a hotbed of cranky, leftist old warhorses. Years of

stacking academic appointments, combined with life tenure, means that the Department is immune from a clean sweep of the broom. The only cure, in my view, is massive funding cuts to lance the intellectual boil from the body of the Faculty so that a fresh start may be made.

By way of illustration, here is a list of current academic staff members of the Department and a paraphrased description of their areas of research interest:

Prof. Verity Burgmann (Chair, School Human Research Ethics Advisory Group) – Labour movement politics and history, new social movements and protest movements, anti-globalisation radicalism and environmentalism.

Dr Jo Barraket (Coordinator, Research Higher Degrees) – social inclusion and community development.

Prof. Ann Capling – Australian Trade Policy [*Prof. Capling unapologetically advocates multilateral trade negotiations, such as the recently failed DOHA round, at the expense of bilateral free trade agreements*]

Dr John Chesterman – Australian Indigenous political and legal affairs, access to the law, third sector (community) organisations.

Prof Mark Considine (Dean of the Faculty of Arts) - the emergence of networks as an alternative to markets.

Dr Michael Crozier (Honours/PG Dip Coordinator - Politics) - Social economy.

Dr Thomas Davis (Internship Coordinator)(Coordinator, Transition Program) – Human rights.

Professor Robyn Eckersley (Chair of Political Science, Deputy Head of School) - environmental philosophy, politics and policy, global environmental politics.

Prof. Brian Galligan (Director, Master of Public Policy and Management) - citizenship and rights protection.

Prof. Leslie Holmes (Deputy Head of Political Science) – post-communism, corporate crime.

Assoc. Prof. Sheila Jeffreys - sexual politics, international gender politics and lesbian and gay politics.

Assoc Prof Jenny Lewis - social connectedness in communities, capacity building in indigenous health policy.

Assoc Prof Adrian Little (Head of the School of Political Science, Criminology & Sociology) – feminism, radical politics, multiculturalism and contemporary political and social theory.

Assoc Prof Ralph Pettman (Coordinator, Master of International Politics) – human rights and anti-globalisation

Assoc. Prof. Philomena Murray (Director, Contemporary Europe Research Centre) - immigration, racism, minority nationalism

Dr Lauren Rosewarne (Centre Manager / Lecturer in Policy Studies) – gender and sexual politics

Prof. Paul Smyth (Coordinator, Master of Social Policy) – social inclusion

Dr Pradeep Taneja – not stated

Such a profile does not exactly inspire one to believe that there is a breadth of ideological views on offer here. The intellectual development of the University's students are the victims of such bias, particularly in the context of the University's move to a US style academic system in which an undergraduate liberal arts degree takes on such prominence. It should not be surprising then that those intellectuals who do not fit within the narrow mould represented above choose to locate themselves within privately funded think tanks. Such academics are clearly shunned by a hostile, publicly funded, left-wing clique.

One glaring example of bias springs to mind as a student in the Politics Department. I took the subject "Modern Political Thought" in second semester 2002, taught by Prof. Verity Burgmann. The political theories of liberalism, Marxism, feminism, anarchism, syndicalism, communism, nationalism, fascism, socialism, social democracy, conservatism, neo-liberalism and environmentalism were covered. Pointedly, I recall that the lecture in relation to conservatism was not delivered. Prof. Burgmann told students that it would not be covered in class and that it would not be subject to assessment, but if they wished they could dig it out of archives at the Educational Resource Centre and listen to an old lecture on tape in their own time. She made absolutely clear to the full lecture hall of over 500 students her clear disinterest and distaste for the political theory of conservatism. It was a shameless display of intellectual arrogance. I begrudgingly went to the Educational Resource Centre and listened to the tape and despaired at what most of the other students had missed out on. It is bias such as this, insidious in nature, which must not be tolerated.

Prof. Burgmann could learn a great deal from Mr David Mansour, if she ever condescended to do so.

How the above state of affairs within the Department of Political Science ever came into being, I do not know. It is the intellectual rigour of the Faculty that suffers, as do its students. What is without question is that if public funds are to be spent, in the aggregate,

on such blatantly partisan proselytising by a University Department, the tap must be turned off. I call for closer attention to be paid to academic appointments to facilitate breadth, and ongoing external scrutiny of wholesale academic bias.

No-one enjoys dumping on their alma mater. In this case, the situation being so grave, I felt it my duty to do so.

Yours sincerely

A handwritten signature in cursive script, appearing to read 'Lachlan Williams', with a small mark above the second 'l'.

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