

Submission
to the
Inquiry
into
Academic Freedom

From
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Introduction

Salt Shakers is concerned at the increasing lack of academic freedom in Australia.

There is an increasing occurrence of schools, universities and other institutions teaching a particular, often politically-correct, viewpoint and not encouraging (or even allowing) rigorous examination of the facts and the acceptance of divergent views.

This submission will cover these aspects:

1. Worldviews and Religion in Education
2. Students in schools being taught particular views on social issues such as global warming, abortion, refugees and the stolen generation. Bias in some teachers in presenting their own viewpoint is a concern.
3. University lectures being skewed to a particular viewpoint rather than giving both sides of the argument or presenting neutral facts.
4. Pressure on academics to conform to particular viewpoints in order to obtain or keep academic posts.
5. University Chairs funded by business or overseas countries affects academic independence.

1. Worldviews and Religion in Education

There is a commonly promoted view that the education system is neutral and not based on a particular worldview or religion.

In particular there is an unwritten belief (sometimes explicitly stated) that says that education is ‘secular’ and that religion does not have a place in education..

Over time this has come to mean that education should not include religion – read “Christianity”.

When the Victorian government enacted the Education Act in 1872 to provide state education for children, they inserted the phrase “free, compulsory and secular”. In that context they meant it was not to be sectarian or promote denominations. Today the word secular has changed and is taken to mean ‘not religious’.

However, the prevailing worldview of ‘secular humanism’ is actually a religion. It has particular answers to the questions of “Where did we come from?”, “Why are we here?” and “What happens to us when we die?”.

The signers of the first Humanist Manifesto (1933) endorsed the notion that secular humanism is a religion.

Their statement said:

“Today man's larger understanding of the universe, his scientific achievements, and deeper appreciation of brotherhood, have created a situation which requires **a new statement of the means and purposes of religion.**

Such a vital, fearless, and frank religion capable of furnishing adequate social goals and personal satisfactions may appear to many people as a complete break with the past.

While this age does owe a vast debt to the traditional religions, it is none the less obvious

that **any religion that can hope to be a synthesizing and dynamic force for today must be shaped for the needs of this age.**

To establish such a religion is a major necessity of the present. It is a responsibility which rests upon this generation.

We therefore affirm the following:

The Eighth point is

“Religious Humanism” considers the complete realization of human personality to be the end of man's life and seeks its development and fulfilment in the here and now. This is the explanation of the humanist's social passion.”

At <http://www.americanhumanist.org/about/manifesto1.html>

Postmodernism, too, attempts to undermine the religious beliefs of students by insisting that ‘all truth is relative’ and that everyone can have their own beliefs and think what they want.

This belies the fact that there are truths – a chair (in most cases!) will hold your weight if you sit on it; breathing oxygen is vital for life; you will die if you jump out of a 20-storey building and so on.

Richard Rorty, one of the proponents of postmodernism,

“It seems to me that the regulative idea that we heirs of the Enlightenment, we Socratics, most frequently use to criticize the conduct of various conversational partners is that of ‘needing education in order to outgrow their primitive fear, hatreds, and superstitions’ ...

It is a concept which I, like most Americans who teach humanities or social science in colleges and universities, **invoke when we try to arrange things so that students who enter as bigoted, homophobic, religious fundamentalists will leave college with views more like our own ...**

The fundamentalist parents of our fundamentalist students think that the entire ‘American liberal establishment’ is engaged in a conspiracy. The parents have a point. Their point is that we liberal teachers no more feel in a symmetrical communication situation when we talk with bigots than do kindergarten teachers talking with their students ...

When we American college teachers encounter religious fundamentalists, we do not consider the possibility of reformulating our own practices of justification so as to give more weight to the authority of the Christian scriptures. **Instead, we do our best to convince these students of the benefits of secularization.**

We assign first-person accounts of growing up homosexual to our homophobic students for the same reasons that German schoolteachers in the postwar period assigned *The Diary of Anne Frank*... You have to be educated in order to be ... a participant in our conversation ... So we are going to go right on trying to discredit you in the eyes of your children, trying to strip your fundamentalist religious community of dignity, trying to make your views seem silly rather than discussable. We are not so inclusivist as to tolerate intolerance such as yours ... I don't see anything *herrschaftsfrei* [domination free] about my handling of my fundamentalist students.

Rather, I think those students are lucky to find themselves under the benevolent

Herrschaft [domination] of people like me, and to have escaped the grip of their frightening, vicious, dangerous parents ... I am just as provincial and contextualist as the Nazi teachers who made their students read *Der Stürmer*; the only difference is that I serve a better cause.”

– ‘Universality and Truth,’ in Robert B. Brandom (ed.), *Rorty and his Critics* (Oxford: Blackwell, 2000), pp. 21-2.

2. School education

As a teacher for more than 20 years, I have seen some teachers and institutions provide information to students that fits with their own particular bias. When I was teaching politics during my training I made it my priority to teach about the Australian political system in such a way that students would not be able to tell my political views or party loyalties.

Unfortunately this is not the case with many teachers on many topics today.

On global warming, for instance, all schools in Australia were sent a Guide to help them study global warming in November 2007. Based on Tim Flannery’s work, and funded by an environmental trust, many teachers in a range of subject areas would have taken the lesson plans and presented them to their students.

However Tim Flannery has openly promoted the view of James Hansen that sea levels would rise to the height of an 8 storey building, whereas the latest IPCC report says less than 50 cm.

When subject associations, such as the Geography Teachers Association of Queensland, promote the Guide, is it any wonder that students adopt a particular view on that topic.

Are students presented with an alternative view?

Guide posted at <http://www.theweathermakers.org/tacc/>

Promoted by GTAQ -

http://www.gtaq.com.au/cms/index.php?option=com_content&task=view&id=55&Itemid=73

Many students were taken to see Al Gore’s film ‘An Inconvenient Truth’. Some have told us that they are NOT given any alternative information.

However, there are many documented errors in the film.

Christopher Monckton, of the **International Climate Science Coalition**, has documented 35 errors in the film, as well as 50 errors in Gore’s Bali speech.

See

An Inconvenient Truth: <http://scienceandpublicpolicy.org/monckton/goreerrors.html>

Bali: http://nzclimatescience.net/index.php?option=com_content&task=view&id=178&Itemid=1

The British government sent a copy of the film to every secondary school in the UK. Stewart Dimmock, a school governor in Kent took the government to court, accusing the government of brainwashing students.

The British High Court found against the government, and documented at least 9 errors in the film. The Court said that if children were shown the film they should also be given information about the

errors.

The BBC reported:

“In his final verdict, the judge said the film could be shown as long as updated guidelines were followed.

These say teachers should point out controversial or disputed sections.

Without the guidance, updated after the case was launched, the government would have been breaking the law, the judge said. ...

Mr Justice Burton told London's High Court that distributing the film without the guidance to counter its "one-sided" views would breach education laws.

The Department for Children, Schools and Families was not under a duty to forbid the film, provided it was accompanied by the guidance, he said.

"I conclude that the claimant substantially won this case by virtue of my finding that, but for the new guidance note, the film would have been distributed in breach of sections 406 and 407 of the 1996 Education Act", he said. ..."

See http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/uk_news/education/7037671.stm

The Times said:

“In what is a rare judicial ruling on what children can see in the class-room, Mr Justice Barton was at pains to point out that the “apocalyptic vision” presented in the film was politically partisan and not an impartial analysis of the science of climate change.

The analysis by the judge will have a bearing on whether the Government can continue with its plan to have the film shown in every secondary school. He agreed it could be shown but on the condition that it was accompanied by new guidance notes for teachers to balance Mr Gore’s “one-sided” views. . . “

The Times:

http://business.timesonline.co.uk/tol/business/law/corporate_law/article2633838.ece

A Student’s story

As a conservative Christian ethics group we often have secondary school and university students tell us about bias they see in their teachers and lecturers.

A few years ago, the daughter of one of our readers approached us about an assignment she was writing in her senior secondary English class.

She had chosen the topic of abortion. In one piece of work she was required to present the arguments on both sides of the issue. So far, so good. Students should be taught to analyse and assess both sides of a debate.

She was then required to write an opinion piece, presenting her view backed up by evidence and argument. Also a commendable approach!

However, when she presented her piece to the teacher, she was told that she could not present a piece that opposed abortion. It wasn’t a question of the quality of the argument – it was the view expressed.

We encouraged her (and her parents) to approach the Head of the English Department at the school and the Principal of the school to object to the statements and position of the class teacher.

We even suggested that she should request that another teacher mark the assignment since her

teacher had expressed an ideological viewpoint on the issue.

Eventually the girl was allowed to present her personal view on the topic. However, she was marked down on the essay (she obtained a 'C' grade which was significantly lower than her other marks).

3. University lectures

As an organisation we conduct 'Worldview' schools where we explain the basic tenets of various worldviews, including Secular Humanism, Postmodernism, Marxism as well as Christianity.

Although people of all ages attend, the primary focus is to have university students attend so that they are aware of other worldviews and are more able to detect and counter bias from their lecturers.

The problem is that students are often indoctrinated by 'left' bias – if they are not aware there is a bias then they are likely to absorb the views of the lecturer as their own.

Many of the students who attend the worldview schools express their appreciation for the information they have been given. They are particularly grateful that they can recognise bias and political views once they are back in their university classrooms.

One student who attended in January 2008 wrote:

“Before I went to uni, I'd been warned that my faith would come under attack but I wasn't prepared for the onslaught of feminism, post-modernism, and secular humanism that hit me during my first year at UTAS.

As a new student still adjusting to university, learning the language and unfamiliar with my subject material, it was hard to know when I was learning fact and when I was being influenced by an anti-Christian, political or religious agenda.

Going to a Summit conference was great because it gave me a Biblical framework through which to approach my studies and negotiate the value systems behind the lectures...

Often what we're being taught sounds quite reasonable but we are being groomed to see life through a non-Christian perspective.”

Our research assistant is currently completing an Arts/Law degree. During her Arts studies she actually confronted the lecturers about their bias:

She writes:

“Studying film as my major in my Arts degree, I didn't realise that the lecturers would try to pass off borderline porn as 'art'. This greatly disturbed me and I set off to lead a revolution by presenting a case to the lecturers that we didn't need to see such material and that it really distracted the class from learning. I think they were a little shocked that a uni student was telling them to show less explicit material, however they eventually took my comments on board and modified the course slightly.

The thing that surprised me the most out of this experience was the way my fellow students reacted positively to my activism in class and voiced their own opposition in front of the lecturers.

Film subjects also tended to present issues from a certain perspective. Often we would watch films that explored homosexuality and cross-dressing from a sympathetic viewpoint. At other times the political bent was unmistakably to the left with films on Vietnam, the 'Stolen Generation' and immigration. For an institution that prides itself on being 'pluralist' there

appeared to be only room enough for one type of opinion. One semester the lecturer insisted on spending most lectures attacking the Howard government rather than sticking to the topic that we were being assessed on that week. It became clear to me quite quickly that there was no such thing as neutrality or the possibility of an unbiased education.

Another example was when a lecturer spent the entire 'revision' lesson on exploring the evils of John Howard and his 'right-wing' government. My friend and I became so fed up that at the end of the lecture we marched up the front to ask him to 1) stay on topic and 2) present issues with much less bias. He looked very surprised that uni students were voicing opposition to what is undoubtedly the mainstream view on campus. . . “

4. Pressure on academics to conform to particular viewpoints

We have also had academics tell us that they are increasingly being forced to conform to particular views if they wish to keep their jobs.

In science, Christians who dispute the theory of evolution find it difficult. Even though the proponents of the theory cannot substantiate their claims, it is held as doctrine by many.

Those who dispute the prevailing politically correct approach, whether in history, global warming, refugees etc are often sidelined.

One law professor at a NSW university told us he was continually marginalised and ending up losing his job.

5. University chairs and academic independence

The funding of University Chairs by business and especially overseas nations is occurring more frequently and is of concern as it hinders the academic independence and freedom of the lecturers and the university.

In particular we have documented, and are concerned about, the funding of **Chairs in Islamic Studies by Islamic nations**.

Let me give some examples by reproducing the referenced article we published in July 2008.

Islam: Funding of University Chairs

By Jenny Stokes.

Funding for universities come from a range of sources - student fees, the government, private companies and philanthropists.

In recent years there has been an increasing number of universities accepting funding for Chairs in Islamic Studies from Muslim countries and sources.

In 2005, Harvard University and Georgetown University in the USA each accepted donations of \$20 million from a Saudi businessman and member of the royal family to finance Islamic studies. In the UK, Prof. Anthony Glees, director of Brunel University's Centre for Intelligence and Security Studies, claims that eight universities, including Oxford and Cambridge, have accepted more than £233.5 million from Saudi and Muslim sources since 1995, with much of the money going to Islamic study centres.¹

Funding from Muslim sources is also occurring in Australia. Saudi Arabia alone has

contributed more than \$120 million to Australia's Islamic community since the 1970s for mosques, schools, scholarships and clerical salaries.² In addition to being concerned about the actual funding, it is important to analyse any conditions that might be placed on the holders of such Chairs. Is there academic freedom or does the giver expect something in return?

Griffith University

In September 2007, media reports highlighted a gift of \$100,000 from the Saudi Embassy to Griffith University's Islamic Research Unit. It was revealed that the University originally sought a grant of \$1 million. During April and May 2007, repeated articles highlighted the controversy. The Vice Chancellor defended accepting the gift. Eventually Griffith said they would refuse any further funding from Saudi Arabia. One judge warned that Saudi Arabia promotes an extreme form of Islam (Wahabbism) that could be promoted at the university if finances were accepted.²

University of Melbourne

The Sultan of Oman Chair of Arab and Islamic Studies was established in 2003 by a gift of \$2,495,840 from the Sultanate of Oman. The money pays for the salary of the holder of the Chair. Professor Abdullah Saeed, a Muslim, has been appointed to the Chair.³

The Professor is required to "teach and conduct research in Arab and Islamic Studies in the contemporary world with some emphasis on the Sultanate of Oman." He is also to promote scholarship in fields relevant to Oman and encourage the exchange of ideas with scholars from Oman.

Monash University

In February 2008, the *Ancora Imparo* column in 'Monash Memo', the Monash University weekly newsletter, reported "Negotiations with the Ruler are proceeding in relation to establishing a Sharjah Chair of Islamic Studies at Monash University."⁴

Where is Sharjah, I hear you ask? I had to look it up - it is one of the United Arab Emirates. So it seems Monash Uni is looking for funding from a Muslim nation to establish a Chair in Islamic Studies.

Australian Catholic University

Last year we reported that the Australian Catholic University established the 'Fethullah Gulen Chair in the Study of Islam and Muslim-Catholic Relations'. In October 2007, the ACU appointed Turkish Muslim academic Dr Ismail Albayrak to the position.⁵ The Chair is funded by the *Australian Intercultural Society*, a Turkish Muslim group, at a cost of \$580,000 a year for five years.

Paul Stenhouse, a Catholic academic in Sydney, has written opposing this move, highlighting the Islamist connections of Fethullah Gulen and his group in Turkey.⁶

He also notes that "the book *Moslems in Europe and America* by Ali al-Montasser al-Kattani, published in Iraq in 1976 by Dar Idris, called for the establishment of chairs of Islamic Studies in universities in Europe, America, the West Indies and other countries, and the setting up of committees of Muslims to select other Muslims to occupy these chairs. At the same time it called for an end to any aid, moral or financial, that might already be being given to established chairs of Islamic Studies held by Christians or Jews."

That helps to explain the proliferation of these Chairs funded by Muslim nations.

Endnotes:

1. *Concerns over funding of Islamic studies, Guardian, 17/4/2008.*

2. *Muslims attack \$1m Saudi gift to uni, The Australian, 17/9/2007.*

At <http://www.theaustralian.news.com.au/story/0,25197,22429399-2702,00.html>

3. <http://www.asiainstitute.unimelb.edu.au/programs/islamic/chair.html>
4. *Monash Memo*, <http://www.monash.edu.au/news/monashmemo/stories/20080220/ancora-imparo.html>
5. *Interfaith chair at Catholic Uni a world first*, *The Age*, 7/11/2007.
<http://www.theage.com.au/news/national/interfaith-chair-at-catholic-uni-a-world-first/2007/11/06/1194329223184.html>
6. *Islam's Trojan Horse? Turkish Nationalism and the Nakshibendi Sufi Order*, Paul Stenhouse, *Quadrant Magazine Religion*. December 2007 - Volume LI Number 12 -
http://quadrant.org.au/php/article_view.php?article_id=3715

One of the concerns is the requirement by the holders of such positions to give particular emphasis to the donor or the donor's country. This is undermining our academic independence and freedom.

In the above article this is documented as being part of the actual job description for the Chair at the University of Melbourne.

Conclusion:

There are many aspects of education where academic freedom is under threat. I could expand on areas such as the media (in particular the ABC).

However by mentioning these areas of school and university classes – along with two areas relating to academics themselves, we have highlighted the issue of academic freedom being under threat in Australia.