

Committee Secretary

Senate Education, Employment, and Workplace Relations Committee

Department of the Senate and Parliament House

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Dear Committee Secretary

**Re: Inquiry into Academic Freedom**

Thank you for the opportunity to make this submission to the inquiry into academic freedom in Australian universities. I am currently a third year student enrolled studying law and political science. Unfortunately, since the start of my degree I have found academic bias towards the particular views held by lecturers rampant in many subjects, and as a student have been led to believe that should I express views other than those which particular lecturers believe to be correct, I would not receive high marks in the subjects that I was studying. In my experience, while it is undeniable that there are many commendable lecturers who adopt an objective approach towards their students, a highly significant proportion have failed to do so. Moreover, within the content of courses which I have studied I have found that partisan political ideology has been rampant and deliberate attempts have been made to indoctrinate students rather than providing them with objective information and a proper unbiased educational experience in many instances. In particular, the following incidents remain etched in my mind as particular examples of this.

- 1) I have been abused and mocked by a lecture in front of others for refusing to acknowledge the 'genocide occurring in Lebanon' during the Israeli/Lebanese war of 2006. The lecturer in question implied that I was stupid for 'refusing to acknowledge that what my parents had taught me my whole life was a load of crap' and suggested that others who refused to do so were similarly 'stupid'.
- 2) Early in my studies, Mr David McLeoud, council for former Guantanamo Bay detainee David Hicks presented the sole lecture regarding the former government's handling of the Hick's case and its legality, as well as part of that regarding the war on terror. Following the lecture, students were informed by course coordinators that Prime Minister John Howard was a man 'obsessed with terrorism because he had nothing else to offer the Australian people and that anybody who did not agree had no conscience'. While I understand the relevance of hearing Mr McLeoud's views, the fact that he alone presented this lecture and that no other position was provided is certainly problematic.
- 3) I was subsequently forced to complete a presentation on the illegal acts of the Australian government in what was referred to as its 'so called war on terror'.
- 4) I have enrolled in courses in which numerous articles discussing the immorality of the United States have been made mandatory reading with no countervailing position
- 5) I have been in a class in which a lecture told the class that 'nobody in Australia supports John Howard and his crimes'. When I questioned the lecturer about why Mr Howard was, at the

time, polling at around 40% of the electorate, when 'nobody liked him' I was told to leave the class.

When writing essays for political science students, as well as in class discussions, I have also consistently felt intimidated that if I express views other than those which are all but completely dominant among tutors and lecturers, and many students, that my marks will suffer. As a result, I have seldom done so. Given that few students appear, in my opinion, to deviate from the views expressed by lecturers, I can only conclude that others are likewise doing so.

Unfortunately, as a prominent member of the Australian Union of Jewish Students I have also often been made to feel that if I publicly express my views regarding the Arab/Israeli conflict on campus I will risk my marks falling in certain subjects, and have been warned not to express them. From my involvement in the Jewish Students' Union, I also know that Anti-Israel bias is rife across many universities, particularly in the recently exposed Kholdoun blog of Macquarie University. Unfortunately, the sum-total of my experiences, while certainly not being that all lecturers and academics engage in bias, suggests, that at least in my opinion, a problem does exist on Australian campuses.

**Joshua Koonin**