

September 17, 2008

The Senate  
Standing Committee on Education, Employment and Workplace Relations  
Parliament House  
Canberra ACT 2600

**Senate inquiry into academic freedom – adverse comment**

Attn: John Carter, Secretary

Dear Mr Carter

I write in response to your letter informing me that adverse comment has been made about me in a submission to this inquiry.

I would like to raise a number of concerns about this submission, which are outlined below.

First, your letter says that the committee deems Mr Williams' letter to not be personally derogatory, and so has made it public. While it is true that he does not stoop to remarks about appearances or race or gender (for example), it is surely derogatory to claim that the department and Faculty are: "a hotbed of cranky, leftist old warhorses". Academic departments stand for reasoned argument and the ability to interrogate a number of different perspectives. To make such unsubstantiated claims as Mr Williams does about this Faculty and to then find they have been published on a government website, is a great disservice to academic freedom, which is what this committee purports to be about.

Second, to the best of my knowledge I have never met Mr Williams and he has never attended any of my classes. I am mystified about why he has made such an outrageous attack involving me, and assume that he also knows little about many of my colleagues that he has named.

Third, I have been personally named on the basis of two of my research topics outlined on the website – social connectedness in communities and capacity building in indigenous health policy. Mr Williams has selectively chosen these from amongst my list of interests, presumably since they seemed like the most 'left wing' of them. Let me explain what these topics mean, and why they do not amount to a left wing bias:

1. Social connectedness, more widely known as social capital, is neither a left nor right wing topic. It is treated seriously by economists, sociologists, psychologists and political scientists (and others). If Mr Williams had ever seen me speak on this subject, he would have been exposed to the breadth of views that surround this topic from different disciplines and ideological perspectives.
2. I cannot imagine why the topic of capacity building in indigenous health policy should be seen as left wing. Both sides of the political divide in Australia have long struggled with how to improve indigenous health. The research project attached to this topic has the aim of helping young indigenous and non-indigenous scholars build careers in indigenous health, in order that they will go on to work on improving the situation of indigenous Australians.

I sincerely hope this committee will not publish any other such ill-informed and unfounded opinion.

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