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# From the Inside Looking In: A Student Perspective on the Meddling and Muddling of Education

Alanna Duffy

William Torrey Harris, United States Commissioner of Education from 1889 to 1906 on the standardization of school. Ninety-nine [students] out of a hundred are automata, careful to walk in prescribed paths, careful to follow the prescribed custom. This is not an accident but the result of substantial education, which, scientifically defined, is the subsumption of the individual. *The Philosophy of Education* (1906) (Gatto, 2000: 106).

## Introduction: A Model, Disgruntled Student

The composite of my college experience is not unique to many students. My post-secondary education began in a small, private Catholic college, where I lasted one semester. The decision to leave was based solely on a single occurrence in a freshman English class. Our professor, baffled by the low level of writing, actually found it necessary to ask a group of eighteen and nineteen year-old students, "What is a verb?" As that question left her lips, I said to myself, "This is elementary school curriculum," most definitely not a topic for discussion in college. I left this school, as the education was quite simply sub-par compared to the education I received in high school, and yet I was still paying a hefty tuition check for a poor "service." I believe that college is, in fact, a business, a service in which all students are required to pay an amount of tuition, either out of pocket, through loans, or grants and scholarships. The only catch in this

business model is that I, the student and customer, cannot demand a refund for a “bad” education. There is no customer service department at a university establishment.

For the next year and a half of my life, I attended a local community college in my hometown of Cranford, New Jersey. I encountered some wonderful professors who truly fostered my creativity and encouraged me to pursue a bachelor's degree. Some of these professors were even kind enough to provide me with scholarships from his or her own pockets. One question remained, and that question was, to which school would I transfer in order to complete my undergraduate work? Months of indecision led me to the University of New Hampshire where I spotted the word EcoGastronomy on the new programs page of the university's website. I was sold, and four months later became New Hampshire bound.

I arrived in New Hampshire, from the beginning, at odds with the vast majority of students. My Yankee's baseball hat most certainly did not help me to make friends in Red Sox country and my “accent” almost always spurred the question, “Where are you from?” Quite unfortunately, the only connection to The Garden State, had my many non-natives to New Jersey, is to an embarrassing piece of mass media, “The Jersey Shore”, which should have never found its way onto television. So what would bring a girl from New Jersey, who detests the snow and cold weather, to the University of New Hampshire? I have yet to think of a rational answer to this question.

### **What Are You Going to do Without a Degree?**

What began as a simple question, “why did I decide to go to college?”, has led me to a great deal of consideration. Why did I? Was it worth the money? What have I learned? Originally, the scopes of these questions were limited to the “culture of the classroom”. However, as I began to enter the murky waters of our education system, I contemplated many intriguing questions concerning creativity vs. the structure of the classroom, of institutions as a business, power, and moral domain, and of the “true” value of post-secondary education. In my research I found it essential to challenge the assumptions made about our educational system, and the students participating in this system. Learning institutions sell the students the idea of knowledge, offer classes that are presented as “expanding one's mind”, yet what students receive is education by means of pontification. As much as the university would like to market “diversity”, the goal of education is intellectual conformity.

While researching “education”, such recurring terms as “diversity”, “inclusivity”, and “harassment” have become far too ubiquitous. What do these terms really mean? Are the meanings within the university different from that in the public sphere? And why is this terminology the “Holy Grail” of post-secondary education? All of these questions were formed out of my own realization that diversity of ethnicity, religion, and culture does not necessarily equate diversity of thought. On more than one occasion, my intellectual impulses have been squashed by the dominant discourse in the classroom, as well as around campus. Suppression of student voice is not a listed fee on my tuition bill, yet someone is getting paid at the Diversity Office to create language guidelines and run workshops in “sensitivity training.”

### **First Encounters with the “Thought Police”**

My first year at UNH has been characterized in my own words as “the year from hell.” Transferring as a junior was difficult, and living in a single studio off campus isolated me from the UNH campus community a great deal. I did not meet a single friend until the spring semester, and the loneliness that I felt was only magnified in the classroom, where I had weekly experiences of feeling as though I was being “conditioned”, rather than educated. The year before I transferred marked my first encounter with the “thought police.” I had taken an introductory course in Philosophy, and the professor seemed to think it necessary to begin every class with a political discussion. This course coincided with the 2008 Presidential Elections. After preaching to the students about this professor’s favorite young candidate, came the audacious, “Make sure you vote for the right person!”

When I arrived at UNH, this problem only became more apparent. Never before in my academic career had I been told that I could not use a particular source, not because of questionable origins, but because the argument the article brought forth was not agreed upon by the professor at hand. However, the issue of censorship extends beyond student-teacher relations. Professors are also within the “university system”, and at times must be careful not to mince his or her words, to present ideas that may prove contrary to university initiatives. Classes are required to meet certain criteria before they can be offered by the university to tuition paying students, and teachers must present material that aligns itself to the “bigger picture” of the given institution.

As previously mentioned, professors undergo “sensitivity” and “diversity” training, all in the name of conforming to “Big Brother's” set of ideological standards. The only problem is that the real world does not have Resident Assistants and Hall Directors who can tell students what constitutes as “politically correct”, admissible speech.

### **Founding Fathers: The History of American Education**

Before delving into contemporary post-secondary education, it is of utmost importance to realize that college is intimately tied to early education. Problems within the realm of education are systemic, but where are we going wrong? As a successful teacher in New York City public schools for nearly thirty years, John Taylor Gatto retired in disgust from the career in which he had devoted his life. In his compilation of essays, “The Underground History of American Education”, Gatto outlines some extremely disturbing philosophies laying the foundation of modern education, what he refers to as “forced schooling.” In the late 18<sup>th</sup> Century, the primary contributors to forced, public education are names quite familiar to history books. Do the names Andrew Carnegie, J.P. Morgan, J.D Rockefeller Sr., and Henry Ford ring a bell? I should hope so, but none have been widely credited with designing modern schooling. Gatto writes,

Between 1896 and 1920, a small group of industrialists and financiers together with their private charitable foundations, subsidized university chairs, university researchers, and school administrators, and spent more money on forced schooling than the government itself did. Carnegie and Rockefeller, as late as 1915, were spending more themselves. In this laissez-faire fashion a system of modern schooling was constructed without public participation. The motives for this are undoubtedly mixed, but it will be useful for you to hear a few excerpts from the first mission statement of Rockefeller's General Education Board as they occur in a document called *Occasional Letter Number One* (1906):

In our dreams...people yield themselves with perfect docility to our molding hands. The present educational conventions [intellectual and character education] fade from our minds, and unhampered by tradition we work our own good will upon a grateful and responsive folk. We shall not try to make these people or any of their children into philosophers or men of learning or men of science. We have not to raise up from among them authors, educators, poets or men of letters. We shall not search for embryo of great artists, painters, musicians, nor lawyers, doctors, preachers, and politicians, statesmen, of whom we have an ample supply. The task we set before ourselves is very simple...*we will organize children...*and teach them to do in a perfect way the things their fathers and mothers are doing in an imperfect way...(Gatto, 2000: 45).

Education is not striving to foster the creativity of children, but to “organize” the lives and minds of students. Creativity is stifled in the classroom, for there is no room for learning outside of the structured curriculum. No Child Left Behind<sup>1</sup> was the final nail in the “creativity coffin” as it requires every child within the public education system, across the country, to follow the same learning curriculum. The fact of the matter is that people of all ages learn in very different forms and manners. If institutions of “education” are promoting the values of becoming a productive “worker”, rather than an effective “questioner”, what is the value of such systems? What are the services sold by learning institutions? I decided to go to college based on a desire to learn how to question, and to hopefully accrue a body of knowledge by exercising such skills. I did not apply for college based on a desire to learn how to think, for teaching one how to think is intimately tied to teaching one what to think. I had no

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<sup>1</sup> No Child Left Behind is a policy enacted by President George Bush in 2001. The Act seeks to standardize public schools, which accept federal funding by requiring nationwide standardized tests. If students perform well, teachers are assumed to be sufficient. Low scores reflect a need for reform, possibly new staff and curriculum.

desire to be told what to think, although I have encountered such “instruction” for much of my high school and college career.

Education is a highly profitable business, and such establishments would have nothing to sell if they advocated learning on the basis of personal creativity. This, however, is not the case. Structure in the classroom is not an unnecessary evil, it is a basic concept that is carried throughout all aspects of American life, but one size does not fit all. Furthermore, do we really “need” college? Post-secondary education is presumed to be the sole outlet of learning, but school is not for everyone. There are students who excel in class, and those who do not, yet classes are taught to the lowest common denominator. Standardization, quite simply, does not work, for all students have different capabilities inside and outside of the classroom. Real world accomplishments are measured separately from academic accomplishments. Therefore, a student who does not fare well in the classroom, but excels in a trade or craft, is pushed through a system that provides little enrichment to his or her set of interests and skills. In other words, education has been “industrialized” and students become the manufactured products of this system. Gatto (2000) explored the notion of standardization of education and notes:

David learns to read at age four; Rachel, at age nine: In normal development, when both are 13, you can't tell which one learned first – the five-year spread means nothing at all. But in school I label Rachel “learning disabled” and slow David down a bit, too. For a paycheck, I adjust David to depend on me to tell him when to go and stop. He won't outgrow that dependency. I identify Rachel as discounted merchandise, “special education” fodder. She'll be locked in her place forever. In 30 years of teaching kids rich and poor I almost never met a learning disabled child; hardly ever met a gifted or talented one either. Like all



school categories, these are sacred myths, created by human imagination. They derive from questionable values we never examine because they preserve the temple of schooling. That's the secret behind short-answer tests, bells, uniform time blocks, age grading, standardization, and all the rest of the school religion pushing our nation. There isn't a right way to become educated; there are as many ways as fingerprints. We don't need state-certified teachers to make education happen – that probably guarantees it won't (p. xxvi).

The problem with primary and secondary education has often been attributed to “teaching towards a test”. Instead of presenting a solid foundation of knowledge in which students can later build upon, classes have been modified to suit the requirements of a test. Advanced Placement (AP) classes, offered in high schools across the U.S., offer students the potential to earn college credits before even beginning post-secondary education. Such courses offer high school students a money saving option, for the exam, offered by The College Board, is much less expensive than credits at a University. However, the glaring problem with AP classes is that it is premised on passing an exam. The goal is to “condition” students, to “familiarize” him or her with the content and format of the test, not to broaden a body of knowledge, but to learn test-taking skills. So what is college “teaching to”, if anything? A better question might be of what colleges are teaching us, the students, to do while we are here on campus and after we leave.

### **Education; The New Religion**

In a strong sense, the “institution of learning” has become a religious body. Instead of believing in God, or what have you, institutions believe in social change, to alter the world by means of imparting partial knowledge. “The religious purpose of modern schooling was announced clearly by the legendary University of Wisconsin

sociologist Edward A. Ross in 1906 in his famous book, *Social Control*...In it Ed Ross wrote these words for his prominent following:

Plans are underway to replace community, family, the church with propaganda, education, and mass media...the State shakes loose from Church, reaches out to School....People are only little plastic lumps of human dough. There you have it in a nutshell. The whole problem with modern schooling. It rests on a nest of false premises. People are *not* little plastic lumps of dough" (Gatto, 2000: 58).<sup>2</sup>

Gatto could not be more correct when he argues that students, even children, come to the desk with knowledge of the world, already imparted by their parents, religion, experiences, geography, and culture. Students, no matter the age, are not pieces of play-dough who are paying to be molded into a cookie-cutter shape.

An example of college as a "moral and religion" doctrine, one need not look further than Colombia University (Teachers College). As an alumnus, Gatto received an issue of the magazine publication from his alma mater, Colombia. In this publication, he recalls reading an article concerning as to how, 'Teachers College felt *obligated* to take a commanding role "maintaining the planet."<sup>3</sup> The next extension of this strange idea was even more pointed. Teachers College now interpreted its mandate, I was told, as one compelling it "to distribute itself all over the world and to teach every day, 24 hours a day"' (Gatto, 2000: 96). He continues,

Columbia...is the last agency I would want maintaining *my* planet. For decades it was a major New York slumlord indifferent to maintaining its own neighborhood, a terrain much smaller than the globe. Columbia has been a legendary bad neighbor to the community for the 40 years...So much for its qualifications as Planetary Guardian. Its second boast is even more ominous...the goal of

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<sup>2</sup> Italicized text has been maintained from the original document.

<sup>3</sup> See footnote 2

intervening in mental life “all over the world,” teaching “every day, 24 hours a day. Teaching what? Shouldn't we ask? The trouble with recognizing true belief is that it wears a reasonable face in modern times” (Gatto, 2000: 96).

Truth be told, I would not want UNH to police the world, to make the attempt to educate the planet, 24 hours a day! Academia should not be policing the universe, nor should they have the power to “maintain” anything beyond the physical campus. The switch to online classes and blackboard components within courses essentially prevents students from ever leaving the classroom. We can access our email at any time, have a professor assign a new reading without even going onto campus, and in this sense, UNH (among most, if not all universities) are teaching 24 hours a day.

### **Instilling Fear: From “the People” to “the Sheeple”**

How do we then break free from our failing education system? In exploring the agency of the individual, Foucault (1975) offers some interesting insights into the power dynamics at work within the four cement walls of a classroom. However, before addressing his theory, it is quite telling to note the physical setting of the classroom. Students sit in desks, restricted from interacting with others by a bar and table top surrounding his or her trunk. In some buildings, the windows to the classrooms do not open; in others they are quite small, like that of a detention cell. A sense of structure and organization permeates the room, to have disorder is the antithesis of “learning” or “education”. Students are confined, waiting to break free from his or her desk, to escape the suffocation of the classroom. As melodramatic as the description may seem, the order in the classroom is stifling to free thought and creativity. Through these means, students have become disciplined, institutionalized, and dependent upon a

system which tells the individual what to do, when to carry out tasks, and what ideas are acceptable or “dangerous”. Ask a college student to write a paper or project without a rubric and he or she will be lost. We have been “organized” to a great degree, as structure prevails far beyond individual creativity.

Foucault specifically discussed the transformation of schools in the early 19<sup>th</sup> Century, coinciding with Gatto's discussion of the founders of modern education. The classroom diverged from the “little red schoolhouse” to a system of moral order.

...The new approach introduced complex and covert strategies of surveillance, assessment, analysis, normalization, and punishment. Foucault (1969; 1975) used the term “*disciplines*” as an umbrella term for these strategies. The authority based on these strategies is productive; it enables the attainment of scientific knowledge, which...led to an overarching and systematic kind of power recognized by Foucault, targeted to form the socially desirable behavior of the majority and at the same time granting privileges and legitimacy to particular economic and political interests. Consequently, a perspective that was only one among many other perspectives became the only acceptable perspective and the only legitimate way of talking about reality (Stojnov, 2008: 44-5).

The word “discipline” no longer refers to a mere subject of learning, but to the overall assessment of the student, and the right to “discipline” the student within a “corrective” system. But what are institutions choosing to correct within post-secondary education, and what happens to those students who resist such coercion? An interesting point discussed by Foucault is the student who willingly underachieves. This “underachievement” is measured in terms of I.Q. versus grades, and scores of standardized tests compared to low levels of achievement in the classroom. In either case, these “intelligent” students who do not want to achieve are viewed as a threat to

the moral order of the learning environment. For this reason, they are “classified” in psychological terms as “bad”, a “failure”.

The purpose of a disciplinary system—from Foucault’s standpoint—is to produce ordered, obedient, and highly trained individuals who fit the standards of maximum productivity and exploitation of labor, in the least time and with the least energy loss (Foucault, 1975). In other words, the imposition of a particular worldview and the discipline of children and youth in accordance with its obligatory ontological and epistemological categories sustain the economic interests of a privileged group. The community of pupils reflects the principles of a highly efficient and profitable organization. School underachievers are not efficient enough and deviate from school norms regarding productivity. They become useless and endanger the discipline mechanism and economy of the community (Stojnov, 2008: 49).

This interpretation of power thus introduces the idea that “underachieving” students have the power to upset the delicate balance of the system. These students refuse the “prescribed paths” that Harris spoke of (see introductory quote), and while “underachieving” may empower individuals, it is doomed to failure. If and when a student chooses to deviate from the education system, these actions will result in “removal” (either through suspension or academic probation). However, the power structure of learning institutions will remain intact and unaffected. Once the “threat” has been eliminated, the educational forces continue to march along, unaffected by rebellious students. Just think of how kindergarteners are taught to “line up”, to follow the colored tape in the hallways and gymnasiums to ensure that one does not step out of line. To deviate from the disciplinary system has consequences for students; therefore, the docile, manageable student is rewarded for his or her conformity while the non-conforming student is criminalized.

For children, fear culminates in the prospect of being sent to the principal's office. The Principal represents the "supreme authority" within the walls of the school. Surveillance, as Foucault (1975) noted, is a necessary component to the monopoly of power. On college campuses students are bombarded with multiple types of such surveillance. At UNH, cameras line the buildings, as well as various other public spaces on campus. Standing in front of the Wildcat statue will put you on "Wildcat camera", a new program set up by the university so that alumni can see the campus any time he or she so desires. It seems hard to believe that this would be the only use for such cameras. Additionally, campus security, R.A.'s, and various other university programs police the public. It is not that any of these services are not necessary, for they most certainly are. It simply points to the fact that we are always being watched, whether by other civilians or by the "Big Brother" university (1984).

### **I "Feel" Therefore I "Know"**

There is a great deal of fear associated with failure, despite the fact that failing can be as instrumental to the learning process as success. Much of education is now an emotional appeal to students, rather than the exposure of knowledge. Our entire language has morphed into a "feel-good" vernacular, one that stifles open discussion. A primary example of this is the phrase "I think" vs. "I feel". As a student, professor, or any other participant in the classroom, I cannot argue against someone's "feelings", but I can argue against what someone "thinks". While observing many classes, I have become hyper-alert to the fact that students increasingly frame his or her responses

(often the most controversial statements) in terms of “I feel” rather than “I think”.

These ideas are characterized by emotional sentiments, rather than stemming from fact, and for this reason, such discussions are a “dead end”. As a fellow student, I (nor anyone else) can attempt to prove that another person's feelings are invalid. Thomas Sowell (1993) wrote of such occurrences in his publication *Inside American Education: The Decline, the Deception, the Dogmas*.

The phrase “I feel” is often used by American students to introduce a conclusion, rather than say, “I think,” or “I know,” much less “I conclude.” Unfortunately, “I feel” is often the most accurate term – and is regarded as sufficient by many teachers, as well as students. The net result, as in mathematics, is that many *students are confident incompetents*, whether discussing social issues, world events, or other subjects. The emphasis is on having students express opinions on issues, and on having those opinions taken seriously (enhancing self-esteem), regardless of whether there is anything behind them” (Sowell, 1993: 5).

In short, emotions have surpassed the rational capacity of students, and appealing to the emotions is encouraged within the classroom. The emphasis on emotion is transforming school into psychological treatment, where administrators are diagnosing students by selling a confidence booster called “education”. It is acceptable that incoming freshman in college are not capable of defining what constitutes a “verb” because these students have been self-assured time and time again that personal initiative is unnecessary. The teacher will simply tell him or her the meaning. Perhaps this is why universities are so blatantly lacking a diversity of thought, for one can simply memorize course material and still pass the class! At the end of the day, learning the meaning of a “verb” is more important than a pat on the back. Learning basic grammar is a far more useful tool than growing emotionally dependent upon constant,

regimented, positive reinforcement. Hearing the words, “you are wrong” should not result in the hypersensitivity that one can now witness in elementary and college level classrooms.

### **When Education Becomes Indoctrination**

Entering a college campus is reminiscent to stepping into the “twilight zone”. It is a microcosm universe within a larger community. Here at the university, not only are you encouraged to engage in certain “initiatives” and value particular ideas, but you are also subjected to the phenomena of “word choicing.” A student cannot say what he or she honestly thinks or knows for a fact if it is interpreted as an “offensive” statement to another student. I wasn't aware the people have the right to not be offended, for if we all spoke nicely to one another, we would have no need to protect free speech. Pleasant speech is something everyone can agree upon; but this is not free speech. Political correctness on college campuses around the country has grown to epic proportions, and is simply out of control.

One does not need to look further than residence halls on college campuses to witness a model example of “word choicing”. This document discusses the term “ableism”, and how in our society we view “healthy” people as a standard or norm. The document also suggests that while in residence dorms and beyond, students should not use the phrase “healthy person”, but “temporarily without disabilities.” One again, the terms “inclusivity” are thrown around, but the campus “Newspeak” truly shines through with the division of “inclusionist” vs. “abelist” societies. What do these terms really



mean? What is the message that UNH is trying to send students? At times it is difficult to extract a very simple truth from a convoluted idea. The policing of speech (which is what all of these rosy terms lead to) is a frightening thought, especially when the word “healthy” has transformed into a vulgarity.

The fact of the matter is that UNH only seeks to promote its own message, not that of the students. In researching speech codes here on campus, UNH's “Office of Diversity” approved a set of “Non-Sexist Speech Guidelines.” If that title is not Orwellian enough, I was shocked to read that the word “freshman” was listed as a “sexist term”. Did you know that here at UNH, you are instead supposed to call this group, “First-year student?” Under these speech codes, it is also suggested to not use the terms “Mothering” and “Fathering”, but instead “Parenting” because, “Unless gender is specifically implied, avoid gendering a non-gendered activity.” The list goes on: “police officer” rather than “policeman”, “mail carrier” instead of “mailman”. However, the final statement of the formal codes is truly the cherry on top.

When using this handbook, keep in mind that attempting to introduce nonsexist language at the cost of awkwardness, obscurity, or euphemism does not improve communication. The use of nonsexist language is not simply a matter of avoiding specific words or phrases, and these guidelines are not prescriptions for all possible uses of nonsexist language...

Any endeavor to change our language is a formidable task at best. Some aspects of our language considered sexist are firmly embedded in our culture and will only change with education and self-reflection. On the other hand, with some rephrasing and careful attention to meaning, even the generic “he” can be avoided most of the time. Again, the purpose of these guidelines is to generate discussion and to facilitate and promote accurate use of language.

Since when does a learning institution have the power promote non-sexist language as “accurate language”? College is supposed to expand your mind, not enclose it. Isn't the phrase “non-sexist language” itself a euphemism that does not prove to increase clarity in speech and language? This is political correctness-gone-off-the-deep-end.

### **The P.C. Mob**

The hypersensitivity towards free speech has appeared hand in hand with the invasion of political correctness in every aspect of university life. New college policies have reached comical levels, but the sad reality is that these regulations are enforced. To provide some examples of such ridiculous policies, one needs to look no further than UNH's own policies on diversity and harassment. UNH defines harassment as “ words or behaviors such as: unwelcome sexual advances, graffiti, jokes, pranks, slurs, insults, threats, remarks, interference with work or academic life, vandalism, or physical assault.” However, this policy continues with the statement,

Discriminatory harassment does not include comments that are made in the classroom that are germane to the curriculum and a part of the exchange of competing ideas. *A single incident that creates a distracting and uncomfortable atmosphere on a given day does not constitute discriminatory harassment. However, isolated or sporadic acts that are severe may. **It is possible for a series of individual incidents, each minor in itself, to have the cumulative effect of becoming pervasively harassing behavior*** (Policy 5.4).<sup>4</sup>

Under this definition, I could have reported entire courses for causing me personal discomfort on a daily basis, but this is not the case. Disagreeing with students and professors in class has never prevented me from attending class, from achieving my

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<sup>4</sup> I have chosen to italicize and bold this text in order to stress the areas of the policy that I found to be most pertinent to the given research.

grades, and has only pushed me further to continue my degree. Being “offended” does not constitute harassment, disagreeing with another student should not cause anything more than a healthy debate, but “agreeing to disagree” is quickly fading from the classroom.

In comparison to other universities, UNH has vague criteria for what does and does not constitute as harassment. Other institutions have clear guidelines, although accusing someone as a guilty party for some of these “criminal” acts seems more than absurd.

At leading colleges across the country, the word “harassment” is used in a... way to include the expression of any adverse opinion about any behavior, group or organization that the college views favorably, whether or not that expression occurs within sight or earshot of those criticized, and even when it involves no personal contact whatever...M.I.T.'s report urging an anti-harassment policy defined harassment to include, among other things, anything which creates an “offensive environment.” This includes things said or done, “on or off campus” and penalties range “up to and include termination of employment or student status.” At the University of Connecticut “harassment” includes “misdirected laughter” or even “conspicuous exclusion from conversation.” When not talking to someone becomes “harassment”, Newspeak clearly reigns (Sowell, 1993: 265-66).

Perhaps we should be thankful that UNH has yet to adopt “misdirected laughter” as a form of harassment, but other aspects of university life should draw equal concern from students.

### **“Diversity Perversity”**

Walter E. Williams, a noted economist currently teaching at George Mason University recently published a syndicated column titled “Diversity Perversity”. In it, he

captured every ironic double standard that so many university students promote and defend without proper examination. Mind you, Walter E. Williams is one of many Black academics who have tackled such policies as affirmative action, diversity on college campuses, and more generally speaking, the pervasiveness of politics in education.

Williams (2011) writes,

The terms affirmative action, equal representation...and quotas just don't sell well. The intellectual elite and their media...have come up with *diversity*, a seemingly benign term that's a cover for racially discriminatory policy. They call for college campuses, corporate offices and government agencies to "look like America." Part of looking like America means if blacks are 13 percent of the population, they should be 13 percent of college students and professors...Behind this vision of justice is the silly notion that but for the fact of discrimination, we'd be distributed equally by race across incomes, education, occupations and other outcomes. There is absolutely no evidence that statistical proportionality is the norm anywhere on Earth; however, much of our thinking, laws and public policy is based upon proportionality being the norm. Let's look at some racial differences whilst thinking about their causes and possible remedies. While 13 percent of our population, blacks are 80 percent of professional basketball players and 65 percent of professional football players and are the highest paid players in both sports. By contrast, blacks are only 2 percent of the NHL's professional ice hockey players. There is no racial diversity in basketball, football and ice hockey. They come nowhere close to "looking like America." ...The bottom line is there no evidence anywhere that but for discrimination, people would be divided according to their percentages in the population in any activity. Diversity is an elitist term used to give respectability to acts and policy that would otherwise be deemed as racism.

Why should a white majority population at UNH be seen as a negative attribute amongst university students? Howard University promotes themselves as a Black University, and therefore a disproportionately high number of Black students encompass the population. The same applies to The Catholic University of America. Non-Catholic students are welcome to apply and attend the school, but the overwhelming majority of students are Catholic. New Hampshire is not a particularly diverse state, and it should

not be very surprising that UNH is not an exceptionally diverse school. Yet, UNH has an Office of Diversity, whose mission statement is quite interesting in light of Walter E.

Williams' statements on racial policies:

In the same way in which UNH seeks to provide students with exposure to a diversity of subjects...UNH has an obligation to offer its students exposure to that multicultural diversity that comprises our nation. Were UNH situated in a state with a diverse population, the normal processes of recruitment might naturally provide an educational experience, which reflected the desired diversity. Alas, this is far from our situation. UNH faces special challenges....UNH serves a state in which minorities are not present in large numbers: in 2000, New Hampshire had a non-white population that is one-eighth the national average. As a result, the vast majority of native New Hampshire students at UNH have had very little exposure to a *plurality of voices* which comprises approximately 25% of our nation's population (in 2000).<sup>2</sup> **Thus it is essential that UNH take significant affirmative action to recruit and retain students, faculty, and employees from such underrepresented groups.**<sup>5</sup> Absent this effort, we have left a serious gap in the educational program, which we offer our students. With it, we may yet fully achieve our ideal of the sort of diverse educational community that is optimal for inquiry and that facilitates the emergence of cosmopolitan graduates.

Notice how “diversity” is immediately utilized as a term to connote “race” or ethnicity, rather than “diversity” of ideas. I was never aware that ethnicity has any relation to intellectual disposition. Would it not be rash to assume that non-white students have a “voice” that is any different from a body of white students? Is it not possible for students of any color, any religion, or from any communities to have differing ideas about the world? UNH's statement on diversity makes it explicitly clear that native New Hampshire students need to be “educated”, or “exposed” to diversity. I have yet to understand what purpose racial diversity is meant to serve, and how bringing in underrepresented groups into UNH will result in “cosmopolitan graduates.” I can

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<sup>5</sup> I chose to bold this text in order to emphasize this sentence. Please see the previous note for further explanation.

guarantee that the student sitting next to me in most of my anthropology classes does not have even remotely similar ideas to myself. This has nothing to do with where we were born, the color of our skin, and the God(s) (if any) to which we pray. In anthropology, there is a great effort to debunk the notion of “race”, for it is a man-made division of humanity that has long promoted inequalities, yet here at the university, racial policies are embraced by the administration, as well as students (including liberal arts) alike.

In my opinion, promoting diversity within the educational establishment is a “racist” policy (to use the same terms that are so often used by the defenders of diversity), for it assumes that something is inherently wrong with having a localized population that is not reflective of national statistics. This concept of diversity is a numbers game, for where on earth (other than universities) is any local population an exact replica of the national averages? The answer is...nowhere. While a pro-diversity argument may entail something to the extent of “people from the different walks of life can provide students with a new perspective”, once again, one should not assume that such perspectives are dependent upon any pre-measurable characteristic. Universities have a desire to “influence”, or all together “change” student opinions. It is almost as if we enter as defective merchandise, and this so called “liberal” attitude justifies the means in which freshman transition from an imperfect to a perfected prototype, reflective of university values.

I did not experience such cultural hypersensitivity until I attended UNH, and I do not see how highlighting cultural differences helps to promote inclusivity within a

community. Diversity on college campuses is as artificial to the real world as the comprehensive university environment. Perhaps this is why students are so fearful to enter the “real world” that lies beyond graduation.

**Conclusion: Who Wins in the End?**

There are so many other topics that could have been tackled in this paper; how student loans are modernized forms of indentured servitude, how all types of students are unhappy with the education system, the devaluation of the college degree, unnecessary politics in the classroom, and the list goes on. My research reflects a personal list of concerns felt by an anthropology student here at UNH, but these sentiments are not original, nor are they limited to this college. Disgruntled students can be found throughout the United States, and for a good reason. Our education system is failing, quite miserably, and school administration seems to focus on budget on its biggest worry, rather than on perceived quality from students. In conclusion, I have paid far too much money for a less than stellar education. The most valuable lessons that I have learned have always been outside of the classroom. Life experience cannot be neatly packaged and tied with a pretty ribbon. Students cannot stroll down an aisle and purchase his or her desired school experience. With education, price does not always dictate quality, and students are not always aware of what is truly being purchased. Just look at the various fees on any tuition bill; you will be left to wonder where all of that money is being funneled.

In the end, I don't know who wins; the university, or me? By questioning everything that the educational system has presented to me, I have learned to become a skeptic, yet I would not refuse my earned diploma. Similarly, by refuting the prescribed identity that was assumed by UNH, I will be graduating in the Fall as a part of a system whom would prefer to remain apart. My education has shaped me, for better or worse, even in ways that worked contrary to the intended results. For this, I would like to thank UNH, for had it not been a rocky road from start to finish, I might have slipped into being just another cog in the wheel, a “confident incompetent.”

***The views expressed in this article are the author's own and do not necessarily reflect the views of the Department of Anthropology and University of New Hampshire.***



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