

## Books, Articles, and Items of Academic Interest Compiled, with Commentary, by Carol Iannone

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### No Way to be Accountable?

Traditionalists and conservatives are alarmed over plans by Secretary of Education Margaret Spellings to institute standardized testing and “outcomes assessment” at the college level. Larry P. Arnn, president of Hillsdale College, which accepts no federal money, notes that Spellings uses the language of Lyndon Johnson’s Great Society in her speeches, and sees her recommendations, which might have made their way into law had Republicans retained control of Congress, as leading to increased federal bureaucratic control over the university. “Since Sept. 11, 2001, spending on higher education has grown at rates greater than, say, the Defense Department,” Arnn writes, and he fears the next DOE will be armed with dangerously large resources with which to influence higher education for the worse. (“Hands off Higher Education,” *Wall Street Journal*, 12 May 2007).

According to Peter Wood, outcomes assessment and standardized testing make some sense in the lower grades, but “the problems facing higher education are different. We won’t cure a politicized curriculum, runaway expenses, academic overspecialization, intellectual banality, pandering to interest groups, and infringements on freedom of thought by imposing a Brobdingnagian-sized input–output blanket of tests.” Wood further notes the irony in the fact that Spellings “is killing off one of the important reforms that followed from conservative critiques of higher education. She is putting the ax to the American Academy for Liberal Education (AALE) because this organization is not friendly to her.” The kind of classical and traditional liberal-arts degree programs that AALE has accredited can’t be judged by “simplistic outcomes assessment,” explains Wood. (“Spellings Bee: The Problem with Standardized Testing in Higher Education,” *NRO*, 27 March 2007).

Arnn suggests that we devise free-market solutions for the problems in contemporary academia, such as tax-free savings accounts for prospective college

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students. Clearly, however, this could be only a small part of the remedy. Like proposed conservative solutions to problems in lower education, usually involving “choice,” market-based ideas do not address the big picture.

### **Crime and No Punishment**

Columbia students who stormed the stage last October to interrupt a speech by representatives of the Minutemen, an organization dedicated to border control, have been rewarded with the proverbial slap on the wrist.

According to *Inside Higher Ed*, several students have been found guilty of disrupting the lecture and aiding others in doing so. At least one student was additionally found to have placed others in danger of bodily harm. The students have been issued “disciplinary warnings” that will remain on their transcripts until 31 December 2008. No actual punishments are associated with the warnings (“A Slap on the Wrist at Columbia,” 28 March 2007).

This decision no doubt contributed to John Leo’s satirical yet grimly serious “instructions” on how to enforce censorship on campus today (“Campus Censorship,” *New York Sun*, 2 May 2007). Here are a couple of them:

*Shrink the audience for unwanted speakers.* Columbia University pioneered this tactic in 1998. Citing the possibility of turmoil by leftist protesters, the university ruled that only Columbia students could attend a scheduled on-campus event by the conservative group, Accuracy in Academia, thus banning hundreds of students from other area colleges who had paid to be there. Columbia reprised the tactic last fall after threats to disrupt a talk by anti-jihadist, Walid Shoebat, a former terrorist. Instead of beefing up security, the administration cut the crowd, allowing only 20 off-campus guests to attend. [Editor’s note: And they turned away people who had confirmed reservations and had come from as far away as Pennsylvania.]

*Run out the clock on punishing disrupters.* When angry leftists shut down a scheduled talk by two Minutemen, Columbia president Lee Bollinger issued a resonant defense of free speech and promised an investigation. More than 11 weeks later, Columbia announced the vague result of this epic inquiry, releasing it on Friday, 22 December, just in time for a long Christmas weekend, when few people read newspapers carefully. After another long interval, it turned out that the agitators who shut down the speeches got a wrist slap with the likelihood of no permanent mark on their school records. Students around the country got the message. In the recent dispute at UCLA, an online protester said, “Let’s do what they did at Columbia and shut it down!” Mr. Bollinger could have rescheduled the Minutemen speeches and introduced the speakers himself. He is a First Amendment scholar, after all.

In another article, Leo presents an interesting sketch of the history, background, and growth of campus censorship (“Free Inquiry? Not on Campus,” *City Journal* Winter 2007). He explains how censorship grew out of Herbert Marcuse’s idea of “repressive tolerance,” that is, that traditional tolerance diminishes political

radicalism by allowing all points of view a civil hearing. Instead, “Marcuse favored intolerance of established and conservative views, with tolerance offered only to the opinions of the oppressed, radicals, subversives, and other outsiders.” He called for the indoctrination of students and “deeply pervasive” censorship, “starting on the campuses and fanning out from there.”

The late 1980s saw the fulfillment of Marcuse’s strictures, writes Leo. Designated race and gender groups “knew that they weren’t subject to the standards and rules set for other students.” Marcuse’s ideas were adopted by radical scholars such as Mari Matsuda and Catharine MacKinnon, culminating in the deliberate conflation of speech and action that has called forth a whole new vocabulary: “verbal conduct” and “expressive behavior” for speech, “nontraditional violence” for strong criticism, and “antifeminist intellectual harassment” for rolling one’s eyeballs over feminist dogma, for example. Georgia Tech has banned “denigrating” comments on “beliefs,” which, Leo says, “would make almost any passionate argument over ideas a violation.”

Indeed, Leo notes that a “2002 *New York Times* article reported that today’s college kids seem more guarded in their views than previous generations of students. The writer suggested several possible explanations—disgust with partisan politics and uncivil debates on cable news shows, perhaps, or simple politeness. A more likely reason is that universities have made honest disagreement dangerous, making students fearful of saying what they think.” (This article, “Debate? Dissent? Discussion? Oh, Don’t Go There!” by Michiko Kakutani, 23 March 2002, was mentioned in B & A, Fall 2002).

### **Don’t Indoctrinate Us**

Indoctrinate U is a documentary on political correctness by Evan Coyne Maloney, a documentary filmmaker and Bucknell graduate now in his mid-thirties. It is sound, shocking, even to someone who knows a lot about political coercion on today’s campuses, and it is also, amazingly, highly entertaining—both amusing and sobering at once. Former FIRE executive director, Thor Halversson, was also involved in the production. The film deserves widespread distribution in theatres across America. Go to its website and register your interest in having it come to your area. It’s encouraging to see that young people who have experienced first hand the oppressive and bullying mind control of the contemporary university are working to expose it.

### **Duke University Students Cleared**

As *AQ* readers surely know, the three Duke University lacrosse players indicted for rape last year have been totally cleared of all charges. See our interview in this issue with K.C. Johnson, who took an active role in their defense. Also, in “Rotten in Durham,” Richard Bertrand Spencer, a graduate student at Duke, examines the attitudes of the Duke professors who rushed to judge the young men before any evidence was in, and even after evidence came in that exonerated them! For example,

Professor Tim Tyson: “The spirit of the lynch mob lived in that house on Buchanan Boulevard, regardless of the truth of the most serious charges.” (*American Conservative*, 26 February 2007).

### **Modernism Seen Anew**

The intriguing thesis of Lee Oser’s philosophy-based study, *The Ethics of Modernism: Moral Ideas in Yeats, Eliot, Joyce, Woolf, and Beckett* (Cambridge University Press, 2007), is that modernism in part was a movement toward transcendence and transformation.

### **Cheers for 911 Hijackers from Columbia’s Newest University Professor**

Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, newly named University Professor at Columbia, delivered an address in England in 2002 in which she described the 911 hijackers in such terms as to make them sound heroic and even sympathetic. The whole speech is available online, but access is restricted to subscribing libraries. The key quotation is below. The meaning comes through despite the opacity of the prose.

Suicide bombing—and the planes of nine–eleven were living bombs—is a purposive self-annihilation, a confrontation between oneself and oneself, the extreme end of autoeroticism; killing oneself as other, in the process killing others. It is when one sees oneself as an object capable of destruction in a world of objects, so that the destruction of others is indistinguishable from the destruction of self .... Suicidal resistance is a message inscribed in the body when no other means will get through. It is both execution and mourning, for both self and other. For you die with me for the same cause, no matter which side you are on. Because no matter who you are, there are no designated killees in suicide bombing. No matter which side you are on, because I cannot talk to you, you won’t respond to me, with the implication that there is no dishonor in such shared and innocent death.

President Bollinger’s announcement of her appointment as University Professor:

Professor Spivak’s commitment to interdisciplinary scholarship, at the most creative levels, and a life of civic engagement—including in her native India—embodies Columbia’s mission of teaching, scholarship, and service to the broader world community. Through her new role as University Professor, I hope and expect more students will be able to experience her imaginative mind and spirit.

Yes, perhaps they will imagine themselves as suicide bombers, or learn to sympathize with the spirit of mass murderers.