

## The Academic Freedom Issue

- 1. Those faculty most vocally concerned with academic freedom showed little distress when it seemed that the revised E306 course might be imposed upon the department by the Dean himself and the chair. One official of the LDEPC explained to me that the our committee's approval was not necessary; the course, I was assured, was a fait accompli. There was no point in opposing it.**
- 2. There was no outside opposition to the course until departmental administrators issued a "press relaease" on it--one which misrepresented the course in failing even to mention that it was composition class. The chair also made an appearance on KLBJ radio to publicize tthe course prior to any organized opposition.**
- 3. The statement of academic concern signed by numerous members of the university faculty urged the English Department to reconsider its action. The statement did not ask the administration to intervene in any way.**
- 4. As a required course that has been routinely discussed and debated by the university council and other university committees and bodies, E 306 would necessarily be scrutinized by officials of other colleges who require it for their students. These people have every right to determine whether the curriculum of a course is consistent with its catalog description.**
- 5. The public's right to know what is going on at a publically-funded state institution is at least as great as a faculty's right to define curriculum.**
- 6. Even the AAUP in the Shockley case has acknowledged that academic freedom does not extend beyond one's area of expertise. Legitimate questions can be raised as to whether teachers of rhetoric and literature can claim expertise in courses about race, gender, economics, law, and so on.**
- 7. In any case, one cannot, as proponents of the new E 306 do, deny the legitimacy of traditional departmental structures and boundaries and then restore such boundaries when you need them to defend one's own interests and preprrogatives. The boundaries between disciplines cannot be both down and up at the same time: in the words of Brian Bremen, et al., "the university is not removed from historical forces, but constituted by them."**
- 8. One cannot, as many proponents of the new E 306 routinely do, excoriate privilege, hierarchy, and elitism and then authorize one's own privilege by recourse to the very same categories. One cannot deny legitimacy to everyone else's structures of authority while clinging to one's own, pretending that one's judgments stand above the political fray and beyond the scruting of all but a narrow, and self-selecting academic elite.**

logically neutral.

But notice how this "neutral" position above excludes the everyday, real concerns of the book's readers (both then and now) in order to contemplate its transcendent ideas — much the same way that Ahab's own monomaniacal contemplation of the whale ignores the everyday, real concerns of his very multicultural crew, leading them to their destruction. Failing to see the consequences of its own ideological preoccupations in "what is actually said" in *Moby Dick*, this "way of seeing" also fails to recognize the privileged, ideological position implicit in its own detached concern over "ideas."

When he was asked whether his grandmother ever made things like doilies or samplers, Woody Allen replied in *Annie Hall*, "No, she was always too busy being raped by Cossacks." In other words, the making of doilies — or of "timeless truths" — may equally be available only to rich white grandmothers, or powerful white sea captains, or future white captains of industry.

Rather than avoiding ideology, our first reading functions as ideology to make this detached position both natural and timeless. Those of us who struggle against and within this "way of seeing" get conveniently overlooked — if not destroyed — by it.

A headline the Sept. 12, 1990, issue of the Sunday "Week in Review" section of *The New York Times* reads "Opening Academia Without Closing It Down." The ugly idea that opening the university to women and people of color will close it down intellectually is spurious and overlooks the history of the U.S. academy as it has been disciplinarily

debated from their broader, historical context is to misconstrue the problem and limit the search for responses.

In a recent essay on the critical emergence of cultural studies in Britain, Stuart Hall remembered that "the truth is that most of us had to leave the humanities in order to do serious work in it." Hall's inquiry here into the strictures and restrictions of the disciplining of the academy argues for a larger examination of the construction of the university around academic disciplines and the role that the maintenance of the territorial prerogatives of these disciplines plays in containing multicultural debate.

Indeed, elements of the contemporary university, its administrative structure and academic departmentalization, might be seen as one of the legacies of the history of colonialism. Anthropology and sociology, as social scientists like Talal Asad and critics like Edward Said have pointed out, were developed in the 19th century in order to facilitate the European project of scientifically and systematically grasping the "other" — i.e., peoples colonized by the West.

Similarly, political science, as Timothy Mitchell argues in *Colonizing Egypt*, was consolidated as a "science" as part of the need to develop administrative practices adequate to the task of governing these "others." Even the now canonized realm of aesthetic disinterest, English literature, served, as

Gauri Viswanathan has demonstrated in *Masks of Conquest*, to elaborate a coherent national-cultural persona that could be presented to the "natives" for emulation and edification.

Academic structures, consolidated in significant part through the exigencies of empire building, have now developed their own territorial imperatives and administrative protocols. They oversee not only curricula and syllabi — through course committees and other academic legislative bodies — but also personnel, by way of admissions policies and the apparatus and criteria for promotion and tenure.

The historical process of decolonization has brought about the present crisis in the academy. The debate about multiculturalism is a debate over the legacy of colonialism inherent in the university's disciplinary and bureaucratic structures. The proponents of multiculturalism address this legacy, in recognition of the fact that the university is not removed from historical forces, but constituted by them. In contrast, the opponents of multiculturalism ignore this legacy, and act as if its history did not exist.

The presence of ideology, of politics, in the academy extends from the organization of knowledge, and the organization of disciplines, to the organization of institutions. Recurrent lamentations over the ascendancy of tenured radicals and a hegemonic ideology of "political correctness" are disingenuous. On the contrary, for students and professors alike, it pays to be conservative.

dation, the Heritage Foundation, the American Enterprise Institute, the Cato Institute and the Hoover Institute.

These foundations work for conservatives in a number of ways. They fund research. A conservative scholar is thereby eligible for more grants than a scholar of equal ability whose work is not conservative. Scholars funded by conservative foundations do less teaching and have more time for research.

Conservative foundations also occasionally underwrite part of the costs of publication for work they consider "politically correct," or (as in the case of the Heritage Foundation and AED) they may publish it themselves. Robert Bork's book *The Tempting of America*, for example, was subsidized in this manner. This gives publishers an incentive to prefer conservative work, and makes publication easier for conservative scholars.

Conservative funding is not confined to academic activities. Several organizations, the Olin Foundation prominent among them, have provided extensive assistance to conservative student newspapers for printing and distribution. Other right-wing groups furnish articles. The notorious *Dartmouth Review*, which employed insults and intimidation against various segments of the Dartmouth community for years, received large grants from conservative foundations (as has UT's *University Review*).

When the *Dartmouth Review*'s behavior finally prompted legal action, their defense was paid for, in main, by the Olin Foundation and the *National Review*.

In universities where conservative foundations have established institutes, professors and students deemed politically correct" (i.e., conservative) are

by

Brian Bremen

Anne Cvetkovich

Ted Gordon