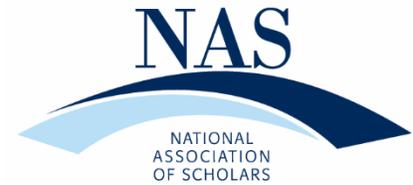


# OREGON ASSOCIATION OF SCHOLARS



## Trail Notes, Spring 2017

Dear Colleagues,

The past six months have been tremendously successful for our association. We have added new members, issued new reports and statements, and attracted media and broader public attention. There is clearly a deep thirst in our state for the sorts of refreshing intellectual pluralism that used to be the norm in Oregon. We are working hard with legislators, university trustees, and student and faculty groups to advance excellence in higher education, viewpoint diversity in the academy, and merit-based approaches to hiring and admissions. More broadly, we are committed to advancing a vibrant scholarly community in Oregon that allows researchers from a variety of perspectives to thrive.



In February, we released data showing that grade inflation continues to plague higher education in Oregon, as elsewhere. We examined undergraduate grades at six universities in the state from 1980 to 2015 and compared them to national averages for private and public institutions. All six have followed the national trends for higher and higher grades. We noted that 40% of all grades awarded at the University of Oregon

in the fall 2016 quarter were A or A- grades. The problem, we noted, is that such grade inflation defeats the use of grades in indicating to students and to employers how they have fared compared to their peers. This was the theme taken up by the *Portland Business Journal*, which ran a story on the data with nice graphics. The institutions, alas, have no incentive to combat grade inflation because high grades make students happy and make life easier for faculty and administrators. Responding to the PBJ, a University of Oregon spokesman said they take the problem seriously and have mechanisms in place to track it. Yet when I requested the relevant data, it had not been gathered by the university since 2005. The campus newspaper also reported that the issue had “died on the hill” a decade ago. Meanwhile, Portland State was more brash: our teaching is getting better so student GPAs are rising, the school’s provost told PBJ. Yet the university does not systematically evaluate teaching outcomes, so this claim is suspect at best. My favorite response came from Lewis & Clark, which our study showed has the worst grade inflation problem in the state – an average undergraduate GPA of 3.36 (B+) in the fall 2016 semester. Officials there stated that they admit only smart and hardworking students. This is the Lake Wobegon approach.



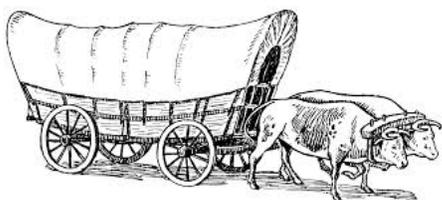
In March, we released another report, this one on the use of “diversity statements” to evaluate faculty for hiring and promotion. The National Association of Scholars has been vigilant about the corrosive effects of the diversity agenda for many years. It is a thinly-disguised form of ideological imposition onto scholars. There is nothing wrong with multiple viewpoints and ideologies having a robust debate on campus. But when one viewpoint is made the official dogma then red lights should flash in the mind of every serious intellectual. Alas, the diversity agenda has continued to spread like a blob in a bad B movie. In part, as many scholars have written to me, this is because it is just boilerplate to most faculty, a kind of joke they can afford to ignore. But the joke is now over. University diversicrats are using mandatory diversity statements to evaluate faculty candidates for hiring and promotion. The more hyperbolic and breathless your commitment to diversity – defined as rushing to the assistance of multiple victimized group identities throughout your life as well as finding a victimized category to which you belong and recounting your suffering – the better a scholar you are, on this theory. In our report, we showed how such tests were being rolled out at Oregon universities, with truly frightening implications for our already grossly unbalanced faculty viewpoints. In a related essay written for *Minding the Campus*, I recalled how I was denied a job at the University of California at Santa Cruz

(according to junior faculty there) because I gave the “wrong” response to a diversity question during the interview process (my scholarly impact metrics from Google Scholar and Scopus are roughly twice as strong as those of the strongest political science faculty member there today so the claim that I did not meet their high standards rings hollow). These publications brought us attention from *The Chronicle of Higher Education*, among other high-profile outlets. A spokesman for Oregon State University responded by saying that the litmus tests are supported by their faculty, so what could possibly be wrong with them? A spokesman for the University of Oregon insisted that in the wonderland of Eugene, imposing ideological views on faculty was a way to expand free speech: “Free speech and diversity essentially go hand-in-hand,” he said. My favorite comment came from an education professor at the University of Minnesota who told the school newspaper that the OAS report was “another example of folks with dominant ideologies saying that ‘our views are neutral and everybody else’s are ideological’.” Well, at least they now understand that this involves ideology. Admitting you have a problem is the first step...



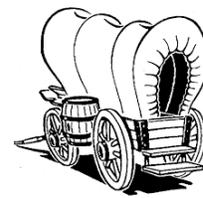
Your association has also been active over the past six months in calling out various threats and challenges to the classical ideal of higher education and non-partisan scholarship. These have ranged from the sublime – the growing number of non-left

wing speakers being intimidated or uninvited from campuses in the nation -- to the ridiculous – Oregon State’s two-day group therapy session in May for white faculty to offer them treatment for the mental illness of “internal domination” over others and an opioid-like addiction to “institutional racism” and “oppressive systems”. As Heather MacDonald of the Manhattan Institute noted in a *Wall Street Journal* article in April, the silencing of speech on campus is a symptom of a much deeper malaise in American society in which group-centered victimization narratives are being used to undermine Enlightenment values of universal reason and civil debate. Effete academic concepts like “micro-aggression”, “inter-sectionality”, “equity lens”, and “de-colonization” are entering mainstream workplaces and organizations. The difference is that whereas most organizations have missions that require them to respect pluralism in order to retain top talent, universities can afford to filter out non-left wing scholars while claiming that doing so makes them better universities.



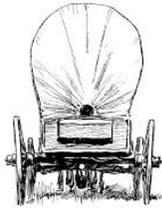
The National Association of Scholars office in New York issued two timely and thorough reports in the first half of 2017. The first, *Making Citizens: How American Universities Teach Civics*, is highly pertinent to Oregon. The report argues that civic education at American universities has been transformed from education about the American way of politics, policy, and governance into applied left-wing social activism for credit. The law,

liberty, and self-government are out; training for protests in favor of massive transformations of American government and society are in. Universities partner with left-wing community organizations to train students how to be social activists. Like diversity statements, faculty are to be evaluated based on their commitment to this activism. This is relevant to Oregon because Oregon universities have long espoused “community engagement” of this sort. Indeed, Oregon State plans to send all incoming undergraduates for mandatory training in “social justice” activism in fall 2017, even if they intend to study medieval history or bio-chemistry.



The second NAS report, *Outsourced to China: Confucius Institutes and Soft Power in American Higher Education*, is no less relevant. The Confucius Institutes “avoid Chinese political history and human rights abuses, portray Taiwan and Tibet as undisputed territories of China, and educate a generation of American students to know nothing more of China than the regime’s official history” the report’s summary reads. I must admit to a soft spot for the Confucius Institute at PSU since it was formerly headed by a native of China who had graduated from the Ph.D. program in public affairs and policy that I direct. She was an outlier perhaps in welcoming all opinions and frequently inviting critics of the Chinese Communist Party like me to speak (I once gave a talk there about Hu Yaobang, the reformist party secretary whose death set off the Tiananmen Square protests of 1989).

The other Confucius Institute in Oregon is at the University of Oregon. So far it has confined itself, besides language training, to the wonders of Tang Dynasty poetry and the challenges of making Chinese dumplings. But structurally, it is indeed a problem to have China's government so deeply enmeshed in our institutions of higher education in Oregon, not to mention our K-12 education. The texts being used to learn Chinese repeat official party histories and exclude out-of-favor authors such as Nobel laureate Gao Xingjian. The PRC's San Francisco consulate oversees the Confucius Institutes in Oregon and its education officers visited Eugene on an "imperial inspection" in January. The OAS will continue to monitor these organizations for threats to academic freedom and scholarly truth.



So, we are off to a good start in relaunching OAS and giving it a significant voice of common sense and prudence in higher education issues as well as broader scholarly and intellectual issues in Oregon. In the coming year we have several new initiatives planned. One is a "great books about Oregon" canon that will contain the enduring and universally relevant works that have been written about our state. Another is a study of the party affiliations of university and college faculty in the state as a measure of the patterns of political bias in the academy. I look forward to your input and thank you for your support.

Bruce Gilley, OAS President