

OREGON ASSOCIATION OF SCHOLARS



Trail Notes, Fall 2016

Dear Colleagues,

The fall is a wonderful time to be a scholar in Oregon. Our state is blessed with an amazing ability to attract great scholars to visit or work here. In October, Professor Timothy Brook from the University of British Columbia offered a fabulous lecture at PSU on 17th century maritime voyages from Europe and China. Fall is just the thing for rereading an old favorite or finally finishing that draft paper that your co-author was promised long ago. For me, it's been a chance to think about how to communicate with our members. This is my first attempt at a newsletter, which I have entitled "Trail Notes" for good Oregonian reasons.



Let's hike from the south of the state to the north. The University of Oregon really continues to outdo itself in treating students like children who must be protected from debate and ideas with which they disagree. There are two buildings that will be renamed this year on the grounds that the historical pedigrees of the men are insufficiently progressive by today's standards. Apparently, airbrushing difficult and challenging aspects of history is the way for students to "learn from history."

Catching up to Yale, the University of Oregon also had a scandal this year involving a "black-face" Halloween costume worn by a law professor at a private, off campus party. Never waiting for facts or context, the university leapt into condemnation mode, and is pursuing a formal investigation. I usually dress up like a pharaoh at Halloween but wonder if I should desist, even in my own home. Just for fun, I asked our one of our campus diversocrats. The reply indicated that indeed, "wearing a pharaoh costume is culturally insensitive, unless the person is from that culture." That got me thinking about the "difficult conversations" that this is supposed to bring: one of the most difficult in my case would surely be figuring out who are the cultural heirs of the pharaohs given the cultural mixing of the ancient Mediterranean world (the word itself is Greek and Hebrew in origin).



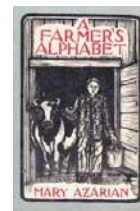
The University of Oregon's art museum often offers a refreshing diversion from the culture of complaint that surrounds the institution. This fall, it has fascinating offerings on Russian and Japanese art,

landscape prints, portrayals of athletics and football in American art, and lithography. There have also been exhibits of contemporary painting from Cuba and propaganda posters from Mao's China that acknowledge the political repression of those places. The museum also offered a selection of black American art responses to the book *Between the World and Me* by Ta-Nehisi Coates, which the university chose as the mandatory common reading book for incoming freshmen. We might say several things about Coates' Manichean tome, which argues that there is no hope and thus no responsibility for the black community to lift itself up and join the American dream as millions of immigrants (including from Africa) do every year. It's an adolescent's voice, hardly the sort of book to inspire a new generation of young adults to take responsibility for positive change in their world. Over at the library in November, meanwhile, diversocrats sponsored a "check out your privilege" event where participants would crawl through the stacks and learn to "deal with" their admixture of any of the five deadly sins (being heterosexual, middle class, white, male, or comfortable with the gender on your birth certificate). My first thought was that now that the American capitalist and pluralist system has made Mr. Coates fabulously rich, he should lead the crawl since he suffers from four of those five deadly sins. My second thought was: God help the books!



If we follow the trail up the valley to Oregon State University, we see what happens when

the politicization of a campus is institutionalized. As I mentioned in the summer, the university's Office of Institutional Diversity was running clips of politically partisan videos created by students, noting how proud it was of their activism. The big question is when and how OSU will implement the planned mandatory course in "social justice" for incoming freshmen. The NAS has been closely watching the invisible shift of the university missions from the creation and communication of truthful knowledge to a new emphasis on "community engagement" and "social justice". The new NAS report on the subject will be published in February.



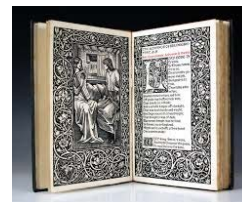
Yet on the other hand, it seems there is something of an awakening in Corvallis. In November, the university will host a panel on "Freedom of Expression and OSU" where the vice provost for student affairs along with the university librarian will speak along with several faculty. Sometimes, the greatest allies of campus freedoms are those who have dealt with attempts to muzzle university discussions first hand. The event is sponsored by OSU's Center for the Humanities which truly lives up to its name as a plural and rich center of human experience.



And at last we step into our fair Rose City. In August, Mark Mitsui began as president of the Portland Community College system, the largest college in the state. Mitsui who worked in Seattle's community college system for several years before 4-year stint at the U.S. Department of Education has the attributes of a good leader: he is effective and he is well-liked. But he also steps into a minefield of what is probably the most politicized institution in the state. A \$40,000 "climate assessment" of 2015 conducted by two University of Pennsylvania professors of "race and equity in higher education" found an institution teeming with "micro-aggressions" where faculty and staff exhibit symptoms of "shallow progressivism" and where the college "maintains neoliberal positions of neutrality amidst college-wide racial conflict." In spring 2016, PCC hosted a Whiteness History Month to shame people of European descent about their alleged history of privileges and oppression of others (including what the *Oregonian* called "wealth earned at the expense of other people" as if wealth is something found in other people's pockets). Mitsui is not a stranger to this racial essentialism and opportunism, having been a member of Asian-American groups promoting the same agenda in higher education and as a senior official in arguably the most intrusive Department of Education in U.S. history. Yet he is no push-over either in getting results. Let's hope that sense prevails at PCC.



I was happy that in October the NAS featured a blog post commending the defense of free speech on campus offered in September by outgoing PSU president Wim Wiewel. In a letter to students, the president said that free speech on campus meant that "you will be exposed to ideas that will challenge you, and you will encounter people you disagree with. Thus, a peaceful protest against armed campus police is allowed. So is a peaceful demonstration advocating for a border wall." It's only a pity that our president did not reveal his very Dutch inner classical liberal sooner. While wishing that Wiewel had expounded the purpose of free speech as a means rather than an end, the NAS post noted: "This is a promising declaration and will hopefully become just as trendy as Portland's coffee shops."



Another promising development in higher education is the formation of the Heterodox Academy (<http://heterodoxacademy.org>) as a national organization composed of tenured or tenure-track professors devoted to encouraging viewpoint diversity in higher education. What is unique and important about the H.A. is that its membership list is public and searchable. So this is a stand-up-and-be-counted initiative of scholars concerned about the implications of our universities and colleges being permanently captured by partisans. I am a member. The H.A. and N.A.S. (in cooperation with our California chapter CalScholars) will be co-hosting a panel entitled "Viewpoint Diversity in Political Science" at the annual

conference of the American Political Science Association in San Francisco in September 2017.



A little chapter history came to light when I took up this role. Apparently, our last chapter head fell out with the national headquarters over climate change. I must admit that there is a fine line to walk here: our association aims to promote the “truth seeking” model of higher education which surely means that the uncertainties and counter-evidence about human-induced and potentially catastrophic climate change, to the extent that they meet the standards of justification and rigor expected by any field, should not be silenced in higher education. Indeed, if ideology rather than evidence explains the absence of those scholars and projects from our campuses then that is to be decried. Yet we also should not allow the weight of evidence to be denied in order to establish “balance”, any more than we should deny the consensus of science on any other topic such as evolution or heliocentrism. Surely that is also part of a truth-seeking environment. My own guess is that the real role of the NAS is to work to ensure robust debate on campus about what is to be done, and how to ensure that climate change policy is not captured by irrelevant, rent-seeking agendas. Here on my own campus, for instance, the university promoted the opening of a new “pan-African student resource center” in November as part of its “green campus” sustainability initiative. Come again?



I'd like to welcome Robert McCullough of McCullough Research in Portland and a long-time instructor and supporter of programs and initiatives at Portland State University to our ranks. Bob is the sort of “think first, speak later” sort of person who makes our organization such a pleasure to be a part of and I encourage you to look at the articles on various economic and policy topics published by his group (www.mresearch.com).

Happy Thanksgiving!

Bruce Gilley