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ACTIVISM, FREE SPEECH

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## Why I Set Up the Oregon Branch of the National Association of Scholars

written by **Bruce Gilley**



I first turned to the aid of the National Association of Scholars (NAS) in 2016 after a “woke mob” of my students accused me of using the wrong gender pronoun for a student in a class. Peter Wood, the NAS president, stood ready to make the organization’s voice heard on the matter, privately to my university at first but publicly if the nonsense carried on. Fortunately it did not. But the experience left me profoundly aware of the importance of solidarity for scholars who still value pluralism and reason in the face of an increasingly intolerant and arrogant Left in the academy. I wanted to do what Peter had done for scholars and scholarship in my home state of Oregon. As a result, we agreed that I would build an Oregon chapter of the NAS.

In any large country, national organizations work best with local chapters. If for no other reason, members of local chapters are more likely to meet and get to know one another—little platoons firing fusillades against the revolutionary armies attacking their positions. In the case of the U.S., much law and policy in higher education is a state matter and for that reason chapters make even more sense. But the most important role of the chapter is simply to mobilize more people into action on behalf of the organization. Groups like the NAS are effective in direct proportion to the number, breadth, and engagement of their membership. In our Oregon chapter, we have launched initiatives like an annual “campus freedom award” for students in the state that can serve as models for others to follow.

One main lesson I have learned in my three years of heading the chapter—the Oregon Association of Scholars—is that there is a tremendous appetite in the real world for common sense responses to campus lunacy. Well-educated people seek well-educated responses to that lunacy, and a chapter composed of scholars and experts in higher education is well-placed to provide that. The real audience and the real solution to the steady erosion of freedoms and intellectual pluralism in higher education is the educated public. I don’t get involved with campus politics at my home institution and I rarely engage my faculty colleagues on the issues that our Oregon Association of Scholars publishes and advocates on. Our audience is instead taxpayers, alumni, donors, policy-makers, university trustees, elected politicians, and the media, in whose hands the resurrection of higher education will take place. In the meantime, the NAS and its local chapters provide not just effective moral support but

also stimulating intellectual company in which to wait out the dark ages into which we have descended.

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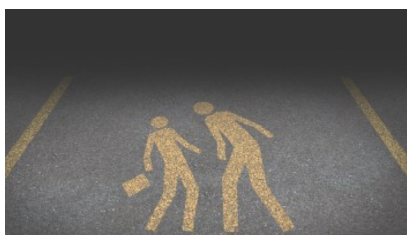
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## Comments



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A little background on your specific interaction with students and the results would be useful.