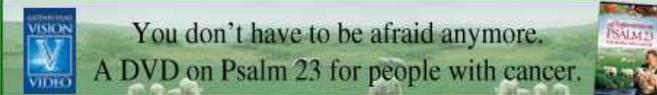


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Tenured bigots

BACK-TO-SCHOOL: It is a statistical reality that most faculty members don't like evangelicals, and they aren't ashamed to admit it | *Mark Bergin*

David French has known for years that college campuses are bastions of anti-evangelical bias. He knew it when he served on the admissions committee at Cornell Law School and watched his colleagues ridicule evangelical applicants as "Bible thumpers" or members of the "God squad." He knew it during his tenure with an education watchdog organization that routinely challenged university speech codes bent on silencing evangelical viewpoints. He knew it when he shifted into his current role as director of the Alliance Defense Fund's Center for Academic Freedom, a position from which he's filed numerous lawsuits on behalf of victimized evangelical students.



But only now can French declare with certainty that his anecdotal observations accurately represent a widespread statistical reality. In a recently released scientific survey of 1,269 faculty members across 712 different colleges and universities, 53 percent of respondents admitted to harboring unfavorable feelings toward evangelicals.

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"The results were incredibly unsurprising but at the same time vitally important," French told WORLD. "For a long time, the academic freedom movement in this country has presented the academy with story after story of outrageous abuse, and the academy has steadfastly refused to admit that the sky is blue—that it has an overwhelming ideological bias that manifests itself in concrete ways. This is another brick in the wall of proving that there's a real problem."

Unlike much of the previous foundation for that proof, this brick hails from a non-evangelical source. Gary A. Tobin, president of the Institute for Jewish and Community Research, set out to gauge levels of academic anti-Semitism compared to hostility toward other religious groups. He found that only 3 percent of college faculty holds unfavorable views toward Jews. In fact, no religious group draws anywhere near the scorn of evangelicals, Mormons placing a distant second with a 33 percent unfavorable outcome.

Tobin was shocked. And his amazement only escalated upon hearing reaction to his results from the academy's top brass. Rather than deny the accuracy of Tobin's findings or question his methodology, academy leaders attempted to rationalize their bias. "The prejudice is so deep that faculty do not have any problem justifying it. They tried to dismiss it and said they had a good reason for it," Tobin told WORLD. "I don't think that if I'd uncovered bigotry or social dissonance about Latinos, women, blacks, or Jews, they would have had that same response."

Cary Nelson, president of the American Association of University Professors (AAUP), told The Washington Post that the poll merely reflects "a political and cultural resistance, not a form of religious bias." In other words, the college faculty members dislike evangelicals not for their faith but the practical outworking of that faith, which makes it OK.

Other prominent voices from the academy have suggested that the anti-evangelical bias does not likely translate into acts of classroom discrimination. Tobin intends to test that claim with a subsequent survey of 3,500 students in the coming academic year. "My guess: You can't have this much smoke without some fire," he said.

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French can readily testify to that. Before the Alliance Defense Fund filed a federal lawsuit last year, Georgia Tech University maintained speech codes forbidding any student or campus group from making comments on homosexuality that someone might subjectively deem offensive. What's more, students serving as resident advisors were required to undergo diversity training in which moral positions against homosexual behavior were vilified and compared to justifying slavery with the Bible.

In another landmark case at Missouri State University, junior Emily Brooker objected to an assignment in which students were asked to write their state legislators and urge support for adoptions by same-sex couples. The evangelical social-work major was promptly hauled before a faculty panel and charged with maintaining an insufficient commitment to diversity. The panel grilled Brooker on her religious views without her parents present, convicted her of discrimination against gays, and informed her that to graduate she needed to lessen the gap between her own values and the values of the social-work profession.

The Alliance Defense Fund sued Missouri State on Brooker's behalf, pressuring the university into dropping the discrimination charges and paying for Brooker to attend graduate school. An independent investigation into the incident found such widespread intellectual bullying throughout the university's school of social work that investigators recommended shutting the program down and replacing the entire faculty.

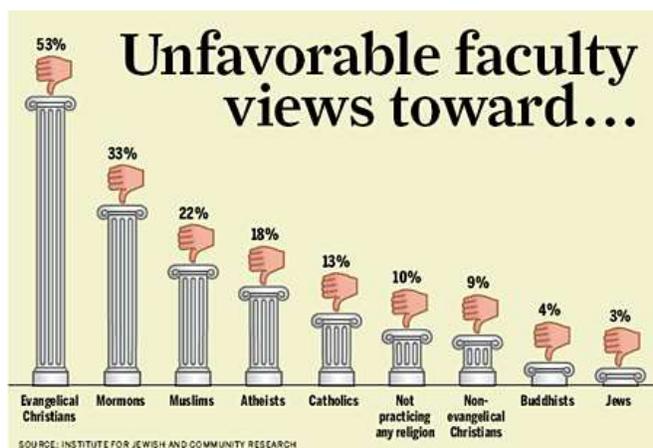
Earlier this year, the Missouri House of Representatives passed the Emily Brooker Intellectual Diversity Act, a bill now pending Senate approval that would mandate efforts from the state's public colleges to prevent "viewpoint discrimination." The AAUP has written the state Senate urging that it not pass "such dangerous and unnecessary legislation" because "there is no evidence that a widespread problem exists."

But Robert Shibley, vice president of the Foundation for Individual Rights in Education (FIRE), told WORLD his organization can hardly keep up with intellectual intolerance and free-speech infringements against evangelical and conservative groups. "College campuses overall are not living up to the ideal of having a marketplace of ideas, of having true intellectual diversity to go along with racial and religious diversity," he said. "In too many cases we see groups—evangelical Christians and conservatives, primarily—face sanctions or punishments that are more severe than those of groups with other viewpoints. Or they're punished for things that other groups wouldn't be punished for at all."

French says the continued advancement of evangelicals to high places within academia is critical to effecting change. During his stint on the Cornell Law School admissions board, the longtime lawyer and evangelical stuck up for at least one highly qualified applicant whose previous work as a part-time pastor nearly generated a rejection letter.

"I said, 'Wait a minute. My own religious background makes this poor guy look like a heathen, and I'm on this committee. I think we should give him another look,'" French recalls. "I actually had people, to their credit, come up and apologize to me afterwards for adopting an unthinking stance towards this student. Having a living, breathing, in-the-flesh Christian with ideas and thoughts and whom people could occasionally respect made a difference."

That's multiculturalism at its best.



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