

What Has Become of Academic Critical Thinking?
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When I was in college, I could not tell you how my professors might vote. They were, as were my elementary and high school teachers, resolutely apolitical. We were taught to think, debate, and even act out in mock political conventions and model United Nations conferences.

This is no longer so in many American and European universities. Despite the avowed liberal values of support for the underdog, rights of women and minorities, and distaste for violence, there is an almost universal faculty support for boycotting Israel (including essential academic exchanges) and full-throated support for Palestine. They find excuses for militant Islam and protect the activist Muslim Student Association, but are mum about Militant Islam's position on women and minorities, and certainly not a word on Islamist domestic violence and wannabe terrorists in our own country. What are they thinking?

Surprising, then, to read \223A Crisis of Competence: The Corrupting Effect of Political Activism in the University of California\224 (April 2012) submitted to the UC Regents by the California Association of Scholars, A Division of the National Association of Scholars. (See http://www.nas.org/images/documents/A_Crisis_of_Competence.pdf.)

At last, real criticism of the rampant political activism on California campuses is emerging after years of silence. It is incomprehensible that in a world rife with human rights violations, that the Israeli/Palestinian issue should take such pride of place. Something is terribly skewed here.

The report notes that it is morally and legally wrong to use the university for political purposes. Although university rules prohibit use of facilities to advance any particular political position, these rules have long been violated. Faculties are no longer reluctant to wear their politics on their sleeves, and in many classrooms, students who object are scorned and silenced. Bias is clear in many required programs, core courses, and general reading lists. Campus events are routinely harassed by political activists (the Muslim Student Association and their friends). Lectures are disrupted by organized clagues and there is overt hostility toward the free expression of ideas.

One notorious case was at UC Irvine, where a guest speaker, the Israeli Ambassador, was violently heckled and interrupted, driving the Ambassador from the auditorium. An organized and very threatening mob intimidated the attendees. Ultimately, some of the Muslim students involved were put on trial and convicted of harassment, which bore only mild punishment. Nonetheless, this was the first show of university backbone in a long time.

The Report worries about the damage that this political activism is doing to the quality of education (in High School as well), decline of respect for academic research, and decreasing respect for academia in America society. Indoctrination is not education.

Meanwhile, in Ireland, an indoctrinated liberal encountered fact over fancy. Nicky Larkin, an artist-filmmaker, was so angry over Israel's incursion into Gaza in December 2008 that he posed in the striped scarf of the Palestinian Liberation Organization for an art show catalogue. Rewarded with a grant from the Irish Arts Council, he planned to shoot a film in Israel and Palestine, establishing Israeli culpability.

Because Larkin had never been to the region before, he talked to both sides and had a surprising enlightenment. He found that Palestinian \223non-violent\224 activists refused to condemn suicide bombing and he recognized that the same anti-Semitic graffiti that appeared on Palestinian walls had been seen on Irish walls as well. What could the Irish and the Palestinians possibly have in common? Is this a case of \223the enemy of my enemy is my friend?\224 Is the enemy their own civilization?

Larkin talked to a former Israeli soldier who had served in Gaza. The soldier recalled with horror 20 Arab teenagers drugged with ecstasy tablets and sent running towards the base where he was patrolling. Each boy was strapped with a bomb and carried a detonator. Only a headshot could take them down, a nightmare that Israeli soldiers could not forget. The Palestinian puppet masters had no such trouble.

The University of California report and Larkin's turnabout may mean that perhaps some critical thinking is kicking in. Sometimes, the enemy of your enemy is your enemy

too.

682 words

Dr. Laina Farhat-Holzman is a historian, lecturer, and author of *How Do You Know That?* You may contact her at Lfarhat102@aol.com or www.globalthink.net.