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## Intellectual diversity hoax

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**Herbert London**, SPECIAL TO THE WASHINGTON TIMES

Without exception, every official in higher education cites the need for diversity. Most usually mean racial, ethnic and geographic diversity, but occasionally intellectual diversity enters the picture too. However, there is a disparity between racial diversity and intellectual diversity now reaching public consciousness.

In June 2005, the American Council on Education and 29 institutions of higher education issued a "Statement on Academic Rights and Responsibilities" affirming support for "intellectual pluralism and academic freedom." It seems this statement was designed to offset growing concern about the ideological homogeneity on campuses.

In an effort to capitalize on the ACE statement, the American Council of Trustees and Alumni (ACTA) sent a letter to the signatories as well as the presidents and chancellors of major universities and colleges seeking information about steps taken to carry out the principles enunciated in the statement.

Remarkably "not one of the more than 100 institutions that received ACTA's letter reported specific concrete steps to implement the principles." "It's all talk and no action," said ACTA President Anne Neal. "Higher education simply can't have it both ways. Colleges and universities presidents say they, alone, are able to correct the situation in the classroom, but then they refuse to do anything but offer lip service to the idea of intellectual diversity. If the academy were faced with just one study showing racism or sexism in the classroom they would take immediate actions to address the problem. Here we see study after study pointing out a breathtaking lack of intellectual diversity on campus and nothing is done about it. The double standard is outrageous."

From a purely pedagogical viewpoint, students at many institutions are shortchanged. Instead of being presented with a variety of perspectives and

encouraged to think for themselves, they are often fed an orthodoxy which they must regurgitate for their professorial masters.

Not everyone, of course, is complacent about this, notwithstanding the conspicuous silence to the ACTA letter.

Benno Schmidt, chairman of the City University of New York's Board of Trustees, said, "ACTA deserves great credit for highlighting the critical issues of intellectual diversity and pluralism in American colleges and universities, and for doing so in a way that scrupulously safeguards academic freedom."

Todd Zywicki, Dartmouth College trustee, noted, "I applaud ACTA for tackling this tremendously important issue that goes to the very heart of a modern liberal arts education."

Says Judith Richards Hope, former Harvard Corp. member: "Universities have been aware of the growing lack of intellectual diversity and, for the most part, looked the other way."

It is indeed remarkable that in this land of the free, universities have become islands of soft oppression where students either adhere to the prevailing orthodoxy or face withering chastisement. A faculty political tilt along with political correctness has resulted in campuses resembling indoctrination centers more than open forums for free exchange of ideas.

Overlooked in most colleges is that academic freedom is a right granted to professors in exchange for a sacred trust, to wit: They will not use the classroom as a soap box for pet causes and personal politics. Moreover, this freedom comes with a duty to employ competence in an area of study and to rely on reason for discovery of knowledge.

Curiously, many in the academy have lost sight of this fundamental academic principle. In this era, academic freedom is often interpreted as freedom to say and do what a faculty member pleases. But that interpretation flies in the face of its actual intent and purpose. Professors are obliged to teach, not preach. A classroom is not a church and doctrinal recitation is not the purpose of higher education.

It is remarkable these rudimentary points must be restated. Alas, these lessons from the past must be relearned.

ACTA should be commended for its role in bringing to the fore the tragic

dimensions of an emerging orthodoxy in the academy. I hope someone is listening, for what is at stake is the very future of our children.

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