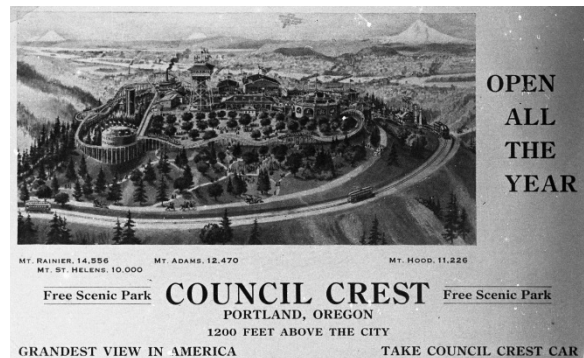


Trail Notes, Fall 2021

Dear Colleagues,

The rumblings in our republic to take back power in the academy and in wider cultural institutions seemed very loud over the summer and fall of this year. One of Oregon's top public intellectuals, my colleague at Portland State University, Dr. Peter Boghossian, resigned his position in philosophy in September citing the lack of intellectual diversity and academic freedom at my fair institution. His tart [formulation](#) of the problem – “[B]rick by brick, the university has made...intellectual exploration impossible. It has transformed a bastion of free inquiry into a Social Justice factory whose only inputs [are] race, gender, and victimhood and whose only outputs [are] grievance and division.” – was widely quoted in the national and international press. Helping to brighten the light of scrutiny prompted by the Boghossian resignation, your Oregon Association of Scholars [called](#) on the PSU Board of Trustees to investigate the resignation and hold accountable all faculty and staff at PSU who had contributed to the assaults on Boghossian's academic freedom that he detailed in his letter. After a seemingly pause, the board chair Greg Hinckley responded thus: “Both the Board of Trustees and PSU administration vigorously support academic freedom and freedom of speech on campus. We found no indication that the

university violated Dr. Boghossian's academic freedom or stifled the free exchange of ideas among faculty and students.” One need only imagine if Boghossian had been a “black studies” faculty member or a “queer theorist” and had faced the same harassment and scrutiny. No doubt, the stewards of academic freedom at this taxpayer-funded institution would have sung a different tune in response to such a resignation.



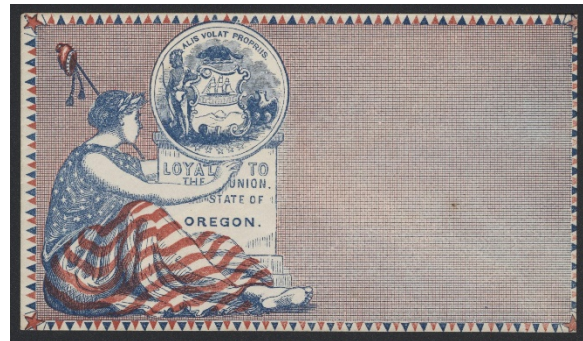
Our busy statistics bureau was hard at work over the summer compiling some interesting data on campaign donations by faculty and staff at the three main public universities in Oregon. Donations may be a better measure of political diversity on campus than party registration because they reflect active commitments rather than passive affiliations. The [results](#), even for those used to political imbalance, were astounding: during the 2020 election cycle, 98% of unique donors (a total

of 806) and 97% of monies donated (a total of \$578,026) went to Democratic Party candidates. The figures were broadly similar across all three universities. As Senator Dennis Linthicum commented on the report: “I fear that these statistics highlight decades of unhealthy polarization, intolerance, and little or no true dialogue which is the death-knell to Oregon’s higher education program.” We wish we could report that the findings attracted wide attention and new efforts to address the imbalance. But the response I got from liberal colleagues was a great shoulder shrug: “Universities are *supposed* to be bastions of progressive thought,” they replied. “What’s the problem?” To me this is a greater threat, when the problem is no longer seen as a problem. My reply – “What if our military had no air force or marines?” – was not well received.



During the summer, we also managed to crash our OAS website. Well, to be more specific, the tens of thousands of Americans who are tired of the jargon and word salad of the progressive movement did so in downloading a new [Cheat Sheet for Responding to Social Justice Rhetoric](#) that we published with the cooperation of Dr.’s Peter Boghossian and James Lindsay. The cheat sheet allows parents, policy-makers, and

citizens facing rhetorical assault in their everyday lives some means of pushing back. For those of us familiar with totalitarian movements grounded in utopian ideology, the use of rhetoric as a key weapon to silence and neutralize opposition is a familiar strategy. The cheat sheet has been widely used by groups that find themselves constantly accused of thought crimes like micro-aggressions, cultural incompetence, or implicit bias. Our little [video](#) on the cheat sheet has been viewed over 2,300 times at this writing.



Speaking of videos, our little tussle over the finer points of free speech with the censors at Portland State University reached a triumphant conclusion in May when we re-issued a [video](#) of a PSU faculty senate meeting that the university had sought to deep-six. The video accompanied our [report](#) entitled *The New Censorship in Higher Education: Insights from Portland State University* that was also the subject of an NAS [webinar](#) that you can view on our YouTube site. The faculty lounge was outraged that their attempts to silence critics of Critical Race Theory had been exposed. We are grateful to the Foundation for Individual Rights in Education for stepping up with a lengthy legal brief to educate the PSU legal counsel on the nature of a free society. The attempt to censor the video was [reported](#) in *The College Fix*.



We wish there was an easy fix for the problem of Common Reading at the University of Oregon, the subject of an [issue brief](#) we released in September. Incoming freshmen at the University of Oregon have since 2014 (2009 in the honors college) been required to complete a common reading as part of their first year studies. In recent years, the university has veered sharply in the direction of assigning partisan, ideological works that reflect the political extremism and rising identity politics of the university. Rather than providing students with access to classic works that have proven their value to developing intellectual rigor and a variety of viewpoints over the years, the university has increasingly used the common reading program as a thinly-veiled mechanism of political indoctrination. We called out this abusive indoctrination and suggested the program be terminated, as happened at Purdue University in 2014. Others are slowly dying because of the lack of student engagement in didactic works (who would have known?). Common reading in Eugene has become uncommon brainwashing.



The National Association of Scholars is thriving. Our membership will top 4,000 this year and staff and budget resources are expanding by leaps and bounds. As I attended the annual board meeting in Austin, TX in October, I realized this is because what was once dismissed as “campus follies” has now moved into mainstream American society. The NAS finds itself at the center of our national debate and well-placed to make a contribution. Speaking of contributions, a generous anonymous donor opened his purse strings to the Oregon Association of Scholars this fall, which I deeply appreciate. Any similar behavior by our members and supporters in the state will be used to good effect. There was, for instance, the \$500 matter of having to upgrade our web-hosting service in the summer due to the demand for the cheat sheet. These are good problems to have. Within Oregon, our active membership stands at a healthy 45, as well as a further 30 in various stages of renewing or being reminded to renew their lapsed memberships. A lifetime NAS membership will of course keep you informed for the duration.

Thanks for all you do!

Bruce Gilley

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