



The Journal of Higher Education

Academic Matters

La Revue d'enseignement supérieur

April/avril 2007

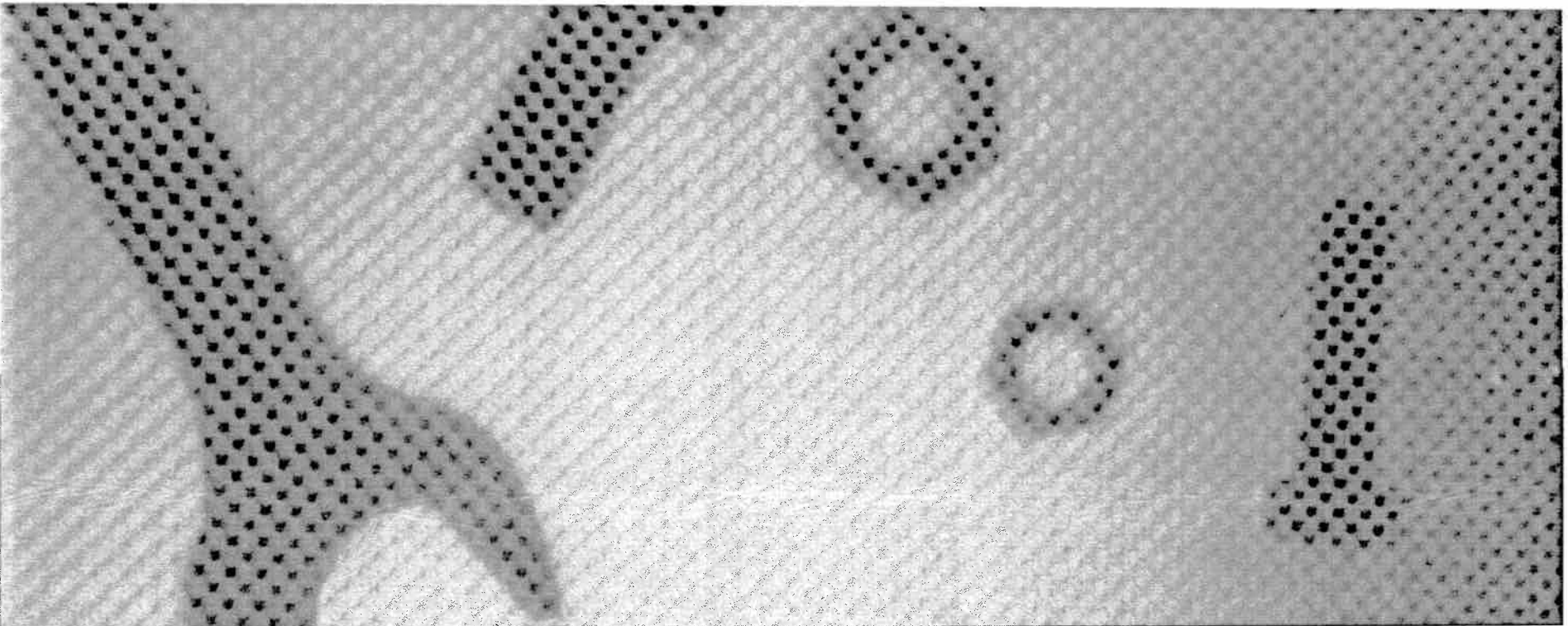
Restructuring the Academy

Tom Flanagan
On today's liberal arts

Janet Atkinson-Grosjean
Is Big Science bad for research?

Glen Jones
The academy as a work in progress

Martin Finkelstein
Negotiating the new academy



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Ontario Confederation of University Faculty Associations
Union des Associations des Professeurs de l'Ontario

Academic Matters is published four times a year by OCCUFA, and is received by 24,000 professors, academic librarians and others interested in higher education issues across Canada. The journal explores issues of relevance to higher education in Ontario, other provinces in Canada, and globally. It is intended to be a forum for thoughtful and thought-provoking, original and engaging discussion of current trends in postsecondary education and consideration of academe's future direction.

Lead articles in the magazine will be informed by research yet written for a broader audience of professors, academic librarians, policy makers, and others who work on, or have an interest in, postsecondary education issues. Supporting articles, columns, book and literature reviews are also intended to provide well-researched, incisive consideration of the leading issues of the day.

Readers are encouraged to contribute their views, ideas and talents. Letters to the editor (maximum 250 words) are welcome and may be edited for length. To provide an article or artwork for *Academic Matters*, please send your query to Editor-in-Chief Mark Rosenfeld at mrosenfeld@ocufa.on.ca.

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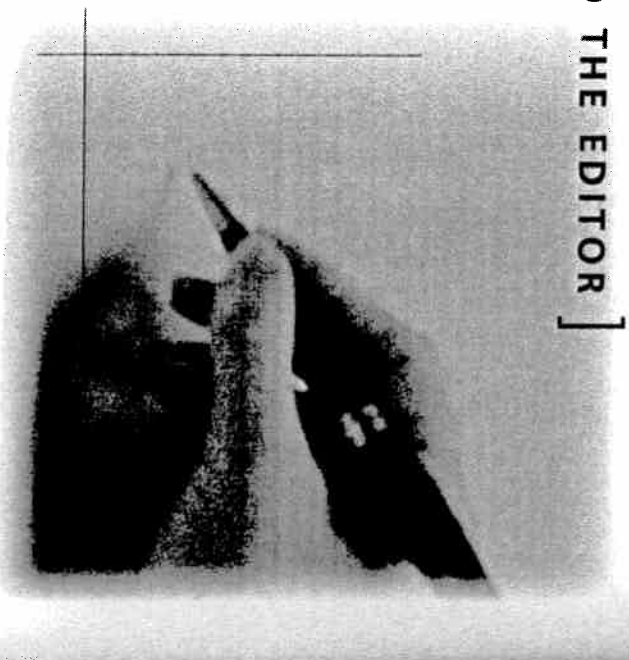


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LETTER TO THE EDITOR]



Dear Editor:

The recent article, "Fory Years Later..." (February 2007) caused a slight rise in temperature. It's amazing how, using the identical data presented there, I could write a story showing the enormous progress that women have made in academe over only a few short decades. It's amazing how subjective interpretation plays such a major role in our objective scholarship!

The authors seem to suggest that "parity" means 50 per cent (or more?), and that 47-49 per cent is only "near parity." The greatest shortcoming of this article is that it fails to consider innocuous reasons why it may take somewhat longer for the average woman to rise through the ranks: in brief, any perceived shortcoming in "parity" seems to be automatically attributed to systemic discrimination against women. I also object to the premise that senior administration positions in the university represent higher rungs on a career ladder, and the fact that even fewer women are found there is yet another sign of discrimination. It's funny how the next article by Sandra Acker refers early to the fact that "desirability of being an academic manager declines." Although the community at large may look to chairs, deans, and others to be prestigious positions, I think many (most?) academics genuinely shun these positions for reasons of which most of us certainly well aware.

I have genuinely enjoyed the few issues of *Academic Matters* that have come my way. I hope you will continue distributing it nationally.

W. Reuben Kaufman
Professor, Biological Sciences
University of Alberta

Lakehead's data were not available at the time of writing. —The Editors

Dear Editor:

I was pleased to see that Janice Drakich and Penni Stewart's article (February 2007) on the progress of women in universities included tables on Ontario universities that omitted any mention of Lakehead University, which is located in Thunder Bay on the western shore of Lake Superior in a region known as Northwestern Ontario. We here in the Northwest have always felt that Northwestern Ontario constitutes a distinct geographic, social, and economic space within Canada and appreciate the implicit recognition that our part of Ontario is, indeed, unique by being excluded from this list of Ontario universities without an explanation.

I thank our southern Ontario colleagues for helping strengthen our sense of self-image and internal value by not including us. While such an omission would once have caused me some concern, I now see it as something to celebrate.

Livio Di Matteo
Professor of Economics
Lakehead University

A conservative look at the liberal arts

As far back as I can remember—about 50 years—American universities have been more visibly involved in the political process than their Canadian counterparts. The 1950s saw struggles over radical professors, Communist sympathizers, and loyalty oaths. In the late 1960s and early 1970s, American campuses became hotbeds of opposition to the war in Vietnam. As time went on, the New Left graduated from the student body to the professoriate, lending an increasingly left-wing complexion to faculties of humanities and social sciences even as the Republicans were establishing themselves as the majority party in the country at large.

Initially, conservatives concentrated on establishing think tanks and advocacy groups to generate the ideas they were not finding in the universities. More recently, however, they have gone on the attack against campus liberalism. Signs of the times are organizations such as *Campus Watch*; the recent book by David Horowitz, *The Professors: The 101 Most Dangerous Academics in America* and campus “bills of rights,” proposed (but not passed) in several state legislatures. Like much of American public life, it’s immensely entertaining but not directly relevant to the less boisterous political culture of Canada, where conservatives have not organized any effort to monitor universities and push them in a direction more to their liking. (Disclosure: I sit on the board of directors of an organization called the Society for Academic Freedom and Scholarship, which criticizes affirmative action on meritocratic grounds; but we have no overt political orientation; and we try to defend the academic freedom of any professor who gets himself in trouble, whether he has offended the right or the left.)

Michel Bérubé, a professor of American literature at Pennsylvania State

University, has for years been trading darts with Horowitz, who named Bérubé as one of the “101 most dangerous academics in America.” This book is the latest installment of their ongoing feud.

Indeed, Bérubé has some strong points to make. Not all the stories cited by Horowitz and other critics of American campus liberalism are accurate in every detail. Prominent American conservatives send their children to the same universities, such as Harvard and Stanford, that they love to criticize. And there certainly is no organized plan to staff faculties of humanities and social sciences with left-wing professors; it is largely a matter of who chooses to go into these fields and thus becomes available for employment. Conservatives,

liberals, unable or unwilling to succeed in such competitive arenas, settle for poorly paid jobs in the universities. Though he offers no systematic data, there may well be some truth in this line of argument.

However, the reason for the statistical disparities is not the only point at issue. A university is not a sports franchise trying to field the best team in order to win championships, entertain fans, and make money. As long as the team wins, it doesn’t really matter if all the players on the basketball team are black and all the players on the hockey team are white. But it does matter if all, or almost all, the professors in departments such as English or political science come from one part of the political spectrum, because the mission of the university is not entertainment but education, which degenerates easily into indoctrination. In spite of best attempts at being open-minded in the classroom (and I take Bérubé at his word in his book’s dedication, “For my students—all of them”), political convictions

Conservatives, who have trenchantly criticized affirmative-action administrators for interpreting statistical disparities as evidence of discrimination, may make the same mistake when they criticize universities for hiring so many lefties.

who have trenchantly criticized affirmative-action administrators for interpreting statistical disparities as evidence of discrimination, may make the same mistake when they criticize universities for hiring so many lefties.

Bérubé is rather comical on this issue. He toys with arguing that universities hire liberals because university professors have to be smart and liberals are smarter than conservatives, but he won’t go so far as to agree with John Stuart Mill that conservatives are the “stupid party.” He thus ends by saying that conservatives tend to follow the money into consulting practices, law firms, and brokerage houses; whereas idealistic

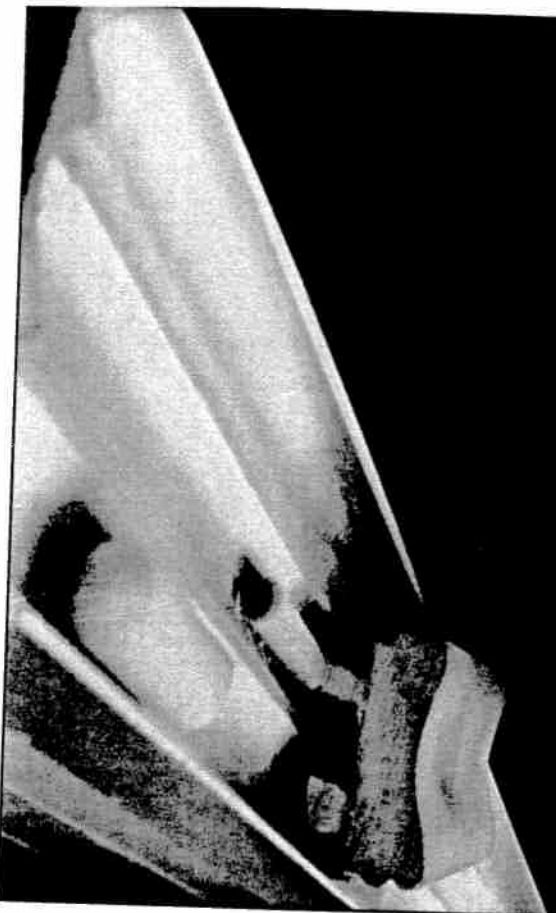
are bound to affect the way one teaches.

Bérubé provides an example of this in the course of discussing an alleged case of liberal indoctrination in the classroom. A political science professor at Foothill College (Los Altos Hills, California, in case you’ve never heard of it) had asked this question on an exam: “Dye and Zeigler... contend that the constitution of the United States was not ‘ordained and established’ by ‘the people’ as we have so often been led to believe.... Analyze the U.S. constitution (original document) and show how its formulation excluded [the] majority of the people living in America at that time, and how it was dominated by

WHAT'S LIBERAL ABOUT the LIBERAL ARTS?

CLASSROOM POLITICS AND "BIAS"
IN HIGHER EDUCATION

MICHAEL BÉRUBÉ



Reviewed by Tom Flanagan

Michael Bérubé, *What's Liberal About the Liberal Arts? Classroom Politics and "Bias" in Higher Education* (W.W. Norton, 2006), 344 pp.

private universities, both religious and secular, to challenge the reigning orthodoxies and practices of public institutions.

Within universities, I think the situation is not bad, at least within the traditional disciplines. If I may invoke my own experience, those of us in the so-called "Calgary School" are known as conservative thinkers, and we naturally attract some conservatively minded graduate students. When they graduate, those students have never found a problem in getting hired in Canadian universities. I think Canadian conservatives can do just fine in the traditional disciplines, in which there are objective standards of accomplishment.

More private universities, both religious and secular, would challenge the reigning orthodoxies and practices of public institutions

I am not so sanguine, however, about faux disciplines such as women's studies, native studies, queer studies, and cultural studies, which have been invented to get around the objective standards of the traditional disciplines. Practitioners in these fields generally practice advocacy scholarship in support of social movements and tend to create a monolithic rather than pluralistic intellectual climate. To the extent that such departments proliferate, they create "no go" zones for conservatives, both students and faculty. I would not, however, ask governments to intervene to restructure the universities, as the cure would be worse than the disease. University administrations will have to deal with the problems they themselves have created. **AM**

bucks to have their beliefs challenged.

I beg to differ. I believe that a system of advanced education should strive for genuine pluralism, in which competing world-views can obtain more than token representation. Pluralism ought to exist at several levels: individual instructors should strive for fairness in the classroom, while acknowledging that no one can be perfect at this. Departments should seek balance in their hiring processes, and the system should make it possible for minorities who feel excluded to create their own institutions.

The biggest problem in Canada is the systemic one. We used to have a healthier balance of public and private institutions, but the private ones were mostly gobbled up in the great public expansion of the 1960s. I think we would benefit from having more

America's elite interest." The question is a transparent exercise in indoctrination; it tells students what the right answer is while directing them to fill in a few blanks, but Bérubé accepts the question as valid, arguing that a student whose cause conservatives had taken up deserved to fail because his answer was poorly written. Indeed, the answer (as printed in Bérubé's book) was poor, and the student probably did deserve to fail, but the professor should also have been chastised for abusing his classroom prerogatives.

Ultimately, Bérubé sees no problem in the fact that 90 per cent of instructors in American faculties of humanities and social sciences are liberal Democrats. Conservative students should just suck it up and be grateful that they can pay big

Tom Flanagan is a professor of political science at the University of Calgary and a Fellow of the Royal Society of Canada. In the years 2001-05, he was also campaign manager for Stephen Harper and the Conservative Party of Canada