



“Morally and Intellectually Corrupt”: UCLA Professor Resigns in Protest over Viewpoint Intolerance

Description



Anthropology professor Joseph Manson announced his retirement this month with a broadside blog post that detailed the loss of academic freedom and integrity at UCLA. Manson describes many of the things that I have previously addressed as standard measures used to force out dissenting or conservative voices, including the isolation and investigation of colleagues to get them to resign. He is now among that lengthening list of such faculty who have decided to cut their academic careers short rather than work under such intolerable conditions.

Manson was a tenured professor in the UCLA Anthropology Department, who described in detail how the school made life insufferable for those who raise dissenting voices in research on subjects like racial justice or crime patterns. He wrote “I’m a professor, retiring at 62 because the Woke takeover of higher education has ruined academic life. ‘Another one?’ you ask. “What does this guy have to say that hasn’t already been said by Jordan Peterson, Peter Boghossian, Joshua Katz, or Bo Winegard?”

Manson described how the anthropology department was a healthy and diverse intellectual environmental until the 2000s when things began to change dramatically. It is the same time period identified by others when a critical mass seemed to form on many faculties of professors who began to almost exclusively hire liberal colleagues and shun those with opposing views.

Among the examples of the intolerance on campus, Manson gave a detailed account of the “defenestration of a colleague,” P. Jeffrey Brantingham. His colleague created software to predict

urban crime through simulation models. The research was immediately denounced as being racist and anti-Black.

“In Spring 2018, the department’s Anthropology Graduate Students Association passed a resolution accusing Jeff’s research of (among other counter-revolutionary sins) ‘entrench[ing] and naturaliz[ing] the criminalization of Blackness in the United States’ and calling for ‘referring’ his research to UCLA’s Vice Chancellor for Research, presumably for some sort of investigation. This document contains no trace of scholarly argument, but instead resembles a religious proclamation of anathema.”

What caught my eye was Manson’s description of the shunning by his colleagues:

“Not only was Jeff ostracized, he was unpersoned. None of the faculty talked about him, if they could possibly avoid it. Meanwhile, our department chair opened most faculty meetings by solemnly intoning that our department was a community, a family, and that ‘we’re here for each other.’ In private conversations, I was able to elicit from some of my colleagues an embarrassed acknowledgment that the Woke faction had treated Jeff abominably, and that we strongly resembled a dysfunctional family in denial.”

It is an all-too-familiar account.

I recently wrote how universities can use course assignments and other collateral means to isolate dissenting professors in an effort to get them to resign. This is particularly the case with tenured faculty.

For many of us in teaching, these cancel campaigns have become a constant, looming threat. There have been drives to fire or discipline faculty who hold dissenting views on issues ranging from racial justice to police abuse to transgender identification to gender statements to pronoun usage to native-land acknowledgment. This includes a recent campaign at Georgetown that successfully secured a law professor’s resignation over a tweet.

Today, a palpable level of fear and intimidation exists among many faculty members that they could be the next target of one of these campaigns. Most professors are not protected by tenure, and universities can cite other reasons for not renewing their contracts.

The percentage of tenured professors has been declining for half a century. Roughly [three of four](#) faculty today are what are called “contingent faculty,” or faculty who work contract to contract.

The problem is that this contingency often seems to depend upon an adherence to a new orthodoxy on racial justice, police abuse, gender identification and other issues. It is the subject of my recent publication in the *Harvard Journal of Law and Public Policy*. The article entitled “*Harm and Hegemony: The Decline of Free Speech in the United States*.”

Most faculty do not want to face the legal or social costs of directly seeking to strip colleagues of tenure. They recite values of academic freedom while working to make life as hard as possible for dissenting colleagues by shifting classes, keeping professors off academic panels and committees and subjecting them to public ridicule, including citing them as examples of intolerance. Few faculty stand up for colleagues who have been tagged by the mob in fear that they could be the next subject of such

a campaign.

University of North Carolina criminology professor Mike Adams spent years in university proceedings and litigation successfully fighting for his right to express conservative views. The investigations and attacks never stopped. Indeed, they resumed with new fervor after he condemned Gov. Roy Cooper (D-NC) for his pandemic rules with a tweet that compared eating in cramped quarters with a slave ship. It was a stupid and offensive tweet. But we've seen extreme comments on the left — including calls to gas or kill or torture conservatives — tolerated and even celebrated at universities. Adams was hammered incessantly over the tweet until he finally relented and took a settlement to resign. He killed himself a few days before his final day as a professor.

For Manson, he had enough despite a distinguished career that could have continued for many years. He wrote of his reluctance "But I strongly suspect that mainstream U.S. higher education is morally and intellectually corrupt, beyond the possibility of self-repair, and therefore no longer a worthwhile setting in which to spend my time and effort."

That is a loss for UCLA but it is also a loss for the entire teaching academy. Manson is the latest example of the not-so-noble lie that pervades our institutions of higher education. We mouth principles of academic freedom and free speech while allowing colleagues to be hounded and harassed. Most faculty members remain silent as their colleagues are isolated and ostracized. Their departure is silently welcomed because there is less of a reminder of what we have lost in higher education.

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Category

1. Freedom-Free speech-Resistance & H-rights
2. Main
3. Society-Family-Education

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