

Critical Education

Volume 16 Number 3

August 15, 2025

ISSN 1920-4175

Make the Academy Great Again Right-Wing Think Tanks and the ‘Crisis’ in Universities

Valerie L Scatamburlo-D'Annibale
University of Windsor

Scatamburlo-D'Annibale, V. L. (2025). Make the academy great again: Right-wing think tanks and the ‘crisis’ in universities. *Critical Education*, 16(3), 20-40.
<https://doi.org/10.14288/ce.v16i3.187079>

Abstract

In recent years, there has been an increase in reports declaring Canadian universities are suffering from a ‘viewpoint diversity crisis’ that purportedly compromises their ability to serve as bastions of open inquiry. This article contextualizes this narrative, tracing its historical roots and examining its production within a right-wing infrastructure that has long targeted the academy and sought to undermine public faith in higher education to further an ideological agenda reflective of Friedrich Hayek’s reverence for free market fundamentalism and concomitant contempt for social justice. To the degree that universities are imperilled as proponents of viewpoint diversity claim, the tangible threat stems from externally coordinated assaults on academe and not the contrived crisis projected onto it.



Readers are free to copy, display, and distribute this article, as long as the work is attributed to the author(s) and **Critical Education**. More details of this Creative Commons license are available from <https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/>. **Critical Education** is published by the Institute for Critical Educational Studies and housed at the University of British Columbia.

Introduction

On April 10, 2024, Alberta Premier Danielle Smith’s United Conservative Party (UCP) introduced Bill 18—the Provincial Priorities Act (PPA) to push back against ‘overreach’ by the federal government. If passed, the bill would require designated entities including universities to obtain prior provincial approval before entering into, amending, extending, or renewing an agreement with the federal government. The announcement of the PPA was swiftly condemned by the scholarly community which rightly saw the legislation as a threat to academic freedom as well as a potential roadblock to researchers at Alberta’s universities seeking funding through the Tri-Council agencies (Canadian Institutes of Health Research, Natural Sciences and Engineering Research Council, Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council). The PPA would give Smith’s regime the power to review federal grants received by university-based scholars to ensure alignment with the “government’s political priorities”—a kind of “political litmus test” the Canadian Association of University Teachers (CAUT) referred to as an “unprecedented attack on scientific independence, research integrity and academic freedom” (2024, para. 2-3).

When questioned in a CBC interview about the appearance of blatant interference in academic affairs, Smith expressed concern about ‘balance’ in post-secondary institutions asserting, without any evidence, that the “federal government uses its power through researchers to only fund certain types of opinions, certain types of researchers” (Power & Politics, 2024). After interviewer David Cochrane noted that granting agencies are independent and applications adjudicated by academic experts, Smith claimed universities were not fostering an environment in which “*all* people from all political perspectives are able to engage in a robust debate” and then added, again without citing any data, that journalism schools graduate many more progressive students than those with a conservative bent (Power & Politics, 2024). Amidst the brouhaha, several commentators speculated about the sources shaping Smith’s perceptions of academia. Penner (2024) points to her 30-year relationship with former political science professor Tom Flanagan, long a critic of ‘left-wing’ universities, who mentored Smith at the University of Calgary. Others (Climenhaga, 2024; Mason, 2024) mentioned Jordan Peterson, the omnipresent provocateur, whom Smith has championed on numerous occasions. The pair recently shared a stage with propagandist and conspiracy theory peddler Tucker Carlson, the former Fox News commentator fired by the network for being too extreme (which speaks volumes) and *National Post* founder Conrad Black who, from his current perch as a *Postmedia* columnist, consistently castigates political correctness (PC) while lavishing effusive praise on ‘free speech’ stalwarts such as Peterson (Black, 2016). Readers may recall that in 2017 Peterson publicly complained his rejected application for a SSHRC grant was linked to his controversial stance on gender pronouns. After he was denied funding, far-right *Rebel Media* took up his cause raising almost \$200,000 (Rinaldi, 2021) and he has since made a lucrative career pontificating about the dragoons of groupthink who populate the ivied towers of academe.

Of course, neither Flanagan nor Peterson’s views are particularly original. Flanagan’s body of work strikes a familiar chord, invoking well-worn tropes to justify indictments of various equity initiatives which is hardly surprising since he is perhaps the “best-known acolyte of Friedrich Hayek in Canada” (Penner, 2023, p. 344). A founder of the ‘Calgary School’ and a political advisor to former Prime Minister Stephen Harper, Flanagan was instrumental in promulgating two prominent themes of Hayekian thought—the exaltation of neoliberalism and the devaluing of social justice (Gutstein, 2014)—a topic which is subsequently addressed herein. Similarly, Peterson has proven adept at regurgitating shibboleths from the 1980s playbook of American

‘cultural conservatism’—a strategy hatched by the late Paul Weyrich, another staunch Hayekian, at the Free Congress Foundation (FCF), a think tank funded by some of that country’s most notorious corporate billionaires which was dedicated to fighting ‘culture wars’ (Lapham, 2004; Mayer, 2017). Cultural conservatism was ostensibly a response to activist movements (feminism, civil and minority rights) that were ‘disrupting’ the social order and a liberal-left professoriate which threatened the Western, Judeo-Christian principles upon which America was built. In practice, it represented a tactical manoeuvre to harness (white) anger in the service of ‘backlash’ politics since Weyrich believed neoliberalism could be advanced more effectually (some might say stealthily) by using contentious ‘cultural’ issues as ideological camouflage (Scatamburlo-D’Annibale, 2021). Accordingly, the FCF’s mission was to educate citizens about the evils of PC (aka cultural Marxism) which it contended was actually Marxism translated from economic to cultural terms (Lind, 2004). Peterson has taken up this torch in his rants against PC which essentially provide a contemporary patina for hackneyed right-wing cant which he has monetized to great effect (Mirrlees, 2018; van de Ven & van Gemert, 2020).

Regardless of who specifically *may* or *may not* have influenced Smith, she is clearly drawing on the culture wars toolkit with references to balance (or lack thereof) in universities. Although she did not summon what has been variously labelled intellectual or viewpoint diversity in the CBC interview, her statements align with narratives used by the American right and imported into Canada by neoliberal think tanks such as the MacDonald-Laurier Institute (MDLI) which is helmed by Brian Lee Crowley, another “public-facing Canadian Hayekian” who has penned many policy texts and philosophical pamphlets inspired by the Austrian political economist (Penner, 2023, p. 346). In 2022, the MDLI published a report on viewpoint diversity (discussed below) which Usher (2022) declared was not only “truly bad” but “Icelandic rotting shark bad” for its shoddy methodology and obvious ideological agenda (para.1).

Whether or not viewpoint diversity catches on as a rallying cry for right-wing groups and politicians in Canada to the degree it has in the U.S. remains to be seen. However, if history is any guide, it is likely. We have already witnessed the ways in which Trumpism galvanized the right in Canada (Perry, Mirrlees and Scrivens, 2019) and how Canadian conservatives have followed the lead of their American brethren with moral panics focused on ‘gender ideology’ (Ganshorn, 2024) and campus free speech (D’Orazio, 2021; Scatamburlo-D’Annibale, 2021). As well, think tanks such as the MDLI are part of the U.S.-based Atlas Network (AN) launched by Hayekian aficionado Antony Fisher and known for exporting American-style ‘culture wars,’ including accounts of universities in ‘crisis,’ to several countries (Wilson & Kamola, 2021).

Higher education has long been targeted by conservatives but efforts to demonize campuses as gulags of PC and wayward warehouses of wokeness have escalated in recent years as rightists aspire to dismantle decades of progressive gains, reinstate ‘traditional’ values, and label those contesting sedimented forms of racial, gender and economic injustice as misguided malcontents plotting the demise of Western civilization (McClennen, 2024; Johnson, Ruth & Schrecker, 2024; Riley, 2021). The battle about what constitutes knowledge, how it is produced and by whom is, at both the symbolic and practical levels, a struggle for hegemony in society at large. The right has long understood this which explains its incessant attempts, through various means, to diminish the role of the university as a potential democratizing force. The call for intellectual/viewpoint diversity is yet another variation of the war on PC—the right’s favourite bugaboo—which has been leveraged against progressivism for decades. The current iteration reflects a coordinated communication effort to attack universities as citadels of left-wing orthodoxy which are hostile to

conservative views and focussed on indoctrinating students with woke and/or social justice doctrines that include commitments to equity, diversity, and inclusion (EDI) (AAUP, 2024). As marginalized groups and perspectives have claimed greater visibility and acceptance, (mainly white) conservatives cast themselves as persecuted victims. Indeed, *The National Post* gleefully embraced Smith's PPA as an antidote to discriminatory EDI policies which disenfranchise white males (Sarkonak, 2024). The 'crisis' spawned by the perceived lack of balance, similar to the perceived lack of campus free expression, must therefore be viewed in the context of a series of contrived outrages—political and cultural offensives engineered by a well-financed right-wing apparatus to undermine public faith in higher education, maintain white, patriarchal, heteronormative capitalism and advance an 'epistemology of ignorance' (Johnson, 2024).

The Right-Wing Roots of Intellectual/Viewpoint Diversity

David Horowitz, arguably one of the most deleterious pugilists of the American culture wars, is widely credited with spearheading the drive for intellectual diversity (Fish, 2007; McClennen, 2024; Orzeck, 2012) which was part of a broader assault on academic freedom launched in the aftermath of the September 11, 2001 attacks on the United States (Schrecker, 2006). The notion that 9/11 'changed everything' became an oft repeated cliché invoked by members of the George W. Bush administration seeking to pursue an even more aggressive global foreign policy (Juhasz, 2006). Similarly, the 'opportunities' afforded by 9/11 were not lost on veteran culture war scaremongers who gratuitously exploited the tragedy and began sounding alarms about the serious domestic threat posed by an 'anti-American' professoriate (McClennen, 2006). The same trite themes bandied about a decade earlier were simply repackaged as 'patriotically correct' conservatives ratcheted up the hyperbole, identifying academe as a subversive 'enemy within.' Predictably, many of the same personalities and organizations that helped finance and popularize the early 1990s backlash against PC were at the forefront of post-9/11 efforts to liken legitimate criticism of Bush's war escapades to treason (Wilson, 2008).

Among them was Horowitz who, long before 9/11, had amassed a financial fortune lambasting 'leftist' professors for inculcating impressionable students with diabolical doctrines. Horowitz still helms a sizeable empire that has been bountifully bankrolled for decades by archconservative philanthropic foundations (i.e., Bradley, Scaife, Smith-Richardson, Coors, Koch and the defunct Olin among them) which were crucial to establishing and sustaining an immense and influential network comprised of think tanks, 'research' institutes, campus groups and media outlets dedicated to spreading the 'free market' gospel and purging any vestiges of progressivism from universities and society at large (Johnson, Ruth & Schrecker, 2024; Orzeck, 2012). An in-depth examination of Horowitz's many crusades is beyond the purview of this paper;¹ suffice it to say that despite his claims about leftists, it is "Horowitz himself who advocates a brutal orthodoxy, one which includes a misrepresentation of academic freedom on campus . . . a chilling alt-right culture of censorship and repression, and not even thinly veiled racism" (McClennen, 2024, p. 30). Horowitz's preferred tactics are spelled out in his manifesto on 'political warfare' which necessitates "purposely misleading the public into believing something other than the truth in order to gain political advancement" and making "false statements" to win support unethically if need be (Horowitz, cited in Meranto, 2005, p. 229). (His mentees include far-right figures Steven Bannon and Stephen Miller who occupied key positions in the first Trump administration. Miller,

¹ For a comprehensive analysis of Horowitz's various activities dating back to the 1980s, see Scatamburlo-D'Annibale, 2011.

a breathless voice of extremism, serves as the White House Deputy Chief of Staff in the current Trump regime).

One element of Horowitz's multifaceted campaign was the Academic Bill of Rights (ABOR) designed to 'protect' students and conservative professors from tyrannical left-wing monoculture. Prior to introducing the ABOR which was intended to be used by politicians at the state level, Horowitz had prodded right-wing students to push for the implementation of a Student Bill of Rights (SBOR) and to strategically use the language of the left in doing so. He counselled them to claim radical professors had created a 'hostile' learning environment, that conservative viewpoints were under-represented and to demand an 'inclusive' university community (Horowitz, 2003[a]). However, explicit references to *conservative* views were intentionally omitted from of the text of the ABOR. Horowitz instead used 'intellectual diversity' to sound more innocuous, drawing on tactics delineated in *The Art of Political War*—"choose the terrain that makes the fight as easy for you as possible" and "define the issues as well as your adversary" (Horowitz, 2003[b], pp. 350-351).

For years, Horowitz tried to contest definitions of diversity historically associated with affirmative action and multiculturalism but then recognized the broader popular appeal and political capital of portraying conservatives as the 'true' champions of diversity. In this regard, he was quite savvy in appropriating progressive touchstones for a radical right agenda as was vividly on display in his post-9/11 nationwide blitzkrieg. In fashioning the matter as one of diversity, Horowitz made it difficult for critics to mount a successful rebuttal as objections could be interpreted as endorsements for intellectual homogeneity. Rightists have unscrupulously adopted this strategy which places opponents in the tenuous position of not only attempting to respond to arguments but to dispute the very vocabulary in which the issue is couched (Fish, 1994; 2007). This formula has similarly been used by conservative 'free speech' soldiers.

Horowitz also deliberately avoided using the word 'balance' in the ABOR even though that is precisely what he was advocating to address the problem of 'bias' when classes cover only 'one side' of controversial issues. Academic critics astutely documented the dangers of 'imposed' balance as it would mean, for example, that theories beloved by Christian fundamentalists such as 'intelligent design' (aka creationism) would have to be covered in courses on evolutionary biology (Orzeck, 2012). Regardless of Horowitz's calculated obfuscation, intellectual diversity was and is a euphemism for political balance that denigrates both the integrity of disciplinary knowledge and academic freedom.

Viewpoint Diversity, FIRE and Heterodox Academy

For decades, Horowitz was a fringe figure and despite his efforts not a single legislature in the U.S. adopted the ABOR in the mid-2000s. However, as Berube (2023) demonstrates, his ideas have recently been mainstreamed in choreographed attacks on higher education that essentially build on the ABOR while refashioning it as 'viewpoint diversity' (VPD). That VPD is now incongruously being espoused in numerous legislative bills, especially in states led by Republicans, alongside attempts to ban teaching about race, gender identity and sexual orientation exposes the hypocrisy of conservative discourses about diversity. And, similar to the ABOR, the current offensive is being funded by right-wing foundations and wealthy conservative ideologues (AAUP, 2024). But unlike the ABOR, VPD has been promoted by less caustic although no less politically driven, frontmen such as Greg Lukianoff and Jonathan Haidt, co-authors of a widely

circulated essay “The Coddling of the American Mind” (2015), one of many published that year which resurrected the bogeyman of PC in high profile American magazines (see also Chait, 2015).

Rather than the typical ploy of characterizing professorial leftism as the source of malaise, Lukianoff and Haidt focus on infantilized, oversensitive students endeavouring to rid campuses of words, ideas, and topics that might cause discomfort. By demanding ‘trigger warnings’ and ‘safe spaces’ they foster a culture of victimhood that prioritizes emotional safety and silences dissent (Lukianoff & Haidt, 2015). Akin to previous anti-PC narratives, the authors cherry-pick anecdotes and caricature the subjects of their criticism (Weigel, 2016; Wilson & Kamola, 2021) while positioning themselves as ‘objective’ observers troubled by the potential long-term effects of such coddling (i.e., workplace unpreparedness). However, their seemingly non-partisan façade crumbles when they associate easily offended students with “left-leaning campus sensibilities” (p. 51) and further suggest the ‘problems’ they identify could be resolved by a greater commitment “to the assembly of a more politically diverse faculty” (Lukianoff & Haidt, 2015, p. 52), parroting earlier campaigns promoting intellectual diversity as the pill academia must ingest to cure itself of ideological imbalance. I am not concerned here with Lukianoff and Haidt’s patronizing psychobabble which has been the subject of excellent critiques (Vivian, 2022; Weigel, 2018); rather, my primary focus are the ideological and financial underpinnings of a think-tank echo chamber that has cultivated chronicles about a VPD crisis in higher education.

Lukianoff is President and CEO of the Foundation for Individual Rights and Expression (formerly the Foundation for Individual Rights in Education) established in 1999 by Alan Kors and Harvey Silvergate with funds procured from an array of foundations including Bradley, Coors, Koch and Scaife (Scatamburlo-D’Annibale, 2019). In 1998, they co-authored *The Shadow University* which “traffics in standard 1990 culture war anecdotes” about rampant PC (Wilson & Kamola, 2021, p. 86). Notably, the book laid out a blueprint for using legal mechanisms to browbeat administrators into changing university policies to align with radical libertarian free speech ideals. The plan shaped FIRE’s founding mission to challenge a “culture of censorship” that demands a single viewpoint on matters such as the “meaning and significance of diversity, the definition of social justice, and the impermissibility of ‘hate speech’” (thefire.org). Regardless of its rebranding in 2022, ostensibly to expand its advocacy beyond the domain of higher education, the FIRE is still heavily focused on campus politics and has remained faithful to Kors and Silvergate’s partisan culture war agenda. To that end, it uses poorly conceived research methodologies that lack evidentiary merit and are instead designed to reinforce and sensationalize preconceived notions about the dearth of VPD and endangered free speech. Vivian (2022) extensively details the FIRE’s culpability in propagating misinformation and disingenuous pseudoscience by cavalierly adopting the language of scientific research while adhering to dubious methods.

The link between FIRE and a right-leaning agenda is apparent. The majority of its interventions involve individuals and groups that deploy hateful rhetoric and rest on its absolutist assumption that any limits on speech are violations of First Amendment principles—a position which “precludes an institution’s legitimate authority to regulate speech that threatens its mission, which includes—according to Title IX—the legal requirement to ensure people of all backgrounds feel welcome and safe within the campus community” (Wilson & Kamola, 2021, p. 91). This absolutism is in keeping with the ideological predilections of its far-right financiers including the Koch family whose multimillion-dollar contributions to the FIRE have surged as the manufactured free speech crisis intensified in recent years. Yet, its ‘unwavering’ defense of free speech is

questionable. Along with two other members of the Koch-sponsored AN, the American Legislative Exchange Council and the Goldwater Institute, the FIRE has crafted bills for American lawmakers that would punish student protestors who ‘interfere’ with the free expression of others. Realistically, the most likely offenders would be leftist students who interrupt or deplatform a ‘controversial’ speaker; essentially their constitutionally protected speech would be redefined as unlawful. The “core irony of this legislation is that a manufactured outrage over the left’s supposed repressive censorship is being used to advance reactionary policy changes that do actually, and demonstrably, chill campus free speech and punish dissent” (Wilson & Kamola, 2021, p. 99). Arguably, the FIRE’s devotion to protecting free speech is selective and politically motivated rather than principled. A similar hypocrisy plagues Heterodox Academy (HxA).

Haidt has contributed extensively to the storyline that academe is afflicted by a left-wing uniformity which sacrifices its traditional purpose of pursuing truth at the altar of social justice, and which is at odds with free speech (Goldstein, 2017). And, along with fellow Intellectual Dark Web (IDW) denizens such as Jordan Peterson, he has propagated the ‘university in crisis’ mantra across a number of online platforms (Haidt & Peterson, 2018). Haidt co-founded HxA in 2015 to support “viewpoint diversity—particularly political and ideological diversity—on university and college campuses.” The current language on its website is less forthright—there are only vague references to “open inquiry, viewpoint diversity and constructive disagreement” and no explicit mention of *political* diversity (heterodoxacademy.org). Such modifications may be due, in part, to the torrent of criticism unleashed on VPD for undermining standards of disciplinary competence and professorial authority with calls for balance that wish to make universities more friendly to certain ideological positions regardless of their intellectual merit and for confusing academic freedom with free speech (Kammer, 2021).

Notwithstanding the discursive shifts in its mission statement and claims of non-partisanship HxA, like FIRE, is firmly ensconced within a web of organizations that have manufactured a backlash against higher education and shaped a master narrative that faculty are (take your pick) liberal, left, Marxist, woke, etc., and disdainful of free speech and conservative perspectives. Collectively this network has produced “an ‘echo chamber’ of reports, op-eds, conference and public events, media appearances . . . and talking points that helped coalesce the backlash” (Kamola, 2024, p. 25). Similar to other think-tank generated research, HxA has produced and been linked to studies—powered by the lucre flowing from right-wing foundations—rife with questionable methodologies and flawed statistical evidence in its attempts to demonstrate the overrepresentation of liberals and leftists in universities (Beauchamp, 2018; Setnicar, 2020). As well, Vivian (2022) demonstrates the ways in which HxA surveys about campus issues utilize ‘priming’ techniques to ensure specific responses to “faulty question wording and sequencing” which he characterizes as a “hallmark of pseudo-scientific discourse” (p. 88).

It is also difficult to take seriously HxA’s avowed commitment to VPD given the practices of its own personnel. Haidt selected John Tomasi, Charles Koch’s ‘pet’ libertarian professor (Mayer, 2017) and founder of Brown University’s Political Theory Project (PTP), as HxA’s inaugural president. The PTP’s mission to investigate and advance ideas that make societies free, prosperous and fair (Warner, 2021) was funded by Koch money and the Thomas W. Smith Foundation (a major financier of the anti-critical race theory crusade) which supports free markets, the teaching of Western culture and the triumphal interpretation of American history and works against the thrust of programs and courses in gender, race and class studies (Cohen, 2008). Tomasi’s PTP freshman seminar focussed exclusively on the works of Hayek whose penchant for

free market fundamentalism and disdain for social justice are legendary. Tomasi once “slyly” disclosed to a conservative publication the efficacy of his class: “After a whole semester of Hayek, it’s hard to shake them off that perspective over the next four years” (Mayer, 2017, p. 189). Evidently, VPD was not one of Tomasi’s priorities then nor was it in materials for a course entitled ‘The University’ (described on the HxA website) which relies chiefly on one-sided condemnations of higher education. These include William F. Buckley’s *God and America at Yale* (1951) which expressed contempt for academic freedom (at least for liberals and leftists) and recommended universities adopt and impart to students *one* value system extolling the virtues of capitalism and Judeo-Christianity. Allan Bloom’s *The Closing of the American Mind* which many agree was the opening salvo in a think-tank engineered campaign to sabotage public trust in higher education is also required. In his book (supported by a \$3 million Olin Foundation grant) Bloom conjures up images of decay and chaos in moral and intellectual life which he attributes to the democratic reforms and critical scholarship that emerged in the 1960s. For him, the imperatives of promoting diversity and redressing racism, sexism, and elitism in academe had become the overriding concerns of those who could “define no other interest worthy of defending” (1987, p. 314). Rounding out the curriculum are a number of HxA’s ‘studies’ on the paucity of conservatives in universities. Arguably, Tomasi’s pedagogical approach seems inconsistent with HxA’s professed values.

Along with Koch contributions, HxA has received substantial support from Paul Singer, a hedge-fund billionaire and megadonor to the Republican Party. Singer has also poured almost \$200 million into the Manhattan Institute for Policy Research (MI) which, with additional funding from the Koch, Bradley and Scaife foundations, has become an intellectual staging ground for the American right (Foxman, Birnbaum & Green, 2024). Created in 1977 by Antony Fisher, the MI currently houses Christopher Rufo who is widely credited for weaponizing critical race theory (CRT) and mainstreaming the notion that university board of governors should assert their authority to *abolish* race, ethnic and gender studies programs that purportedly engage in ideological activism rather than the production of scholarly knowledge (McGruder, 2024).

The FIRE, HxA and similar organizations that constitute a right-wing infrastructure or what Vivian (2022) calls a ‘campus misinformation’ network operate in a milieu devoid of scholastic rigor, mechanisms of peer review and basic rules of ethical conduct. The reports and studies they generate are not intended to contribute to knowledge in a scholarly sense, nor to educate or inform. They are designed explicitly to further a political agenda and “conservative research fellows” housed in think tanks are “more likely . . . to arrive at conclusions that have not been subject to genuinely critical scrutiny” (Chapnick, 2021, para. 15). Yet, by virtue of its funding this apparatus has played an outsized role in popularizing specious and exaggerated claims about what is happening in universities. Using common tropes and argumentative conceits that reappear across a number of platforms it promotes a narrative contending that criticism of spurious views unsupported by evidence amounts to censorship, that EDI initiatives are discriminatory and that students are at once coddled snowflakes and censorious rabble-rousers (Vivian, 2022).

And it *repeatedly* claims that universities are overpopulated by leftists. However, data derived from *credible scholarly* sources do not support such assertions or at the very least demonstrate how they are vastly overblown (Burmila, 2021; Kammer, 2021; Tyson & Oreskes, 2022). They also point to how the use of a boilerplate ‘research’ design lends itself to the commission and repetition of numerous methodological errors. These include discounting or eliding the preponderance of faculty who describe themselves as moderates by relying on binary

metrics of political party affiliation or voting behaviour and conflating party membership with VPD for as Kammer (2021) points out to ask whether a particular institution is intellectually diverse should not mean asking whether it is balanced in terms of political affiliations but rather “whether it represents different approaches to scholarly work appropriate for its particular disciplines” (p. 181). Reports on faculty bias also focus disproportionately on humanities and social sciences which are generally liberal while ignoring disciplines like economics and business that often align with Hayekian principles conservatives cherish. Most significantly, the

literature on faculty politics is weak and highly partisan. Study of this topic has been dominated by right-wing think tanks and conservative academic centres. Many of these studies flatten out causal and correlative complexity (why are highly educated people more liberal? And exactly how liberal are they?) in favour of a simple and satisfying narrative about left-wing professors gone amok . . . Methodologically robust studies do not reveal the excessive leftism that less robust studies claim to. The fact that these methodological errors are so widespread raises serious doubt as to whether these studies have been undertaken in good faith. (Tyson & Oreskes, 2022, p. 87)

With these concerns in mind, I turn now to the Canadian context.

All Hail Hayek

Hayek is widely regarded as one of the most influential architects of neoliberalism, a project that arguably began to crystallize with the creation of the Mont Pelerin Society (MPS) in 1947. That year, Hayek invited thirty-six scholars to a lakeside retreat in Switzerland to contemplate the fate of ‘classical liberalism’—rooted in the ideals of market self-regulation (aka *laissez-faire* capitalism), a minimalist state, and personal freedom. The purpose was to facilitate an exchange of ideas among kindred spirits who believed market-oriented economic systems were under siege. Of special concern was the prominent rise of Keynesian thought (based on the work of British economist John Maynard Keynes) in response to the Great Depression which the attendees agreed had become entrenched in academic circles and dominant in shaping governments in several Western nations. Among other things, Keynesianism emphasized the role of the state in reigning in the excesses of capitalism, many of which had contributed to the 1929 stock market crash, and “generating some measure of equality of opportunity” (Gutstein, 2014, p. 19). Three years prior, Hayek (1944) had complained that Keynesianism was paving the way for collectivist/socialist orthodoxy and the diminution of ‘individual liberty’ in *The Road to Serfdom*, at once a paean to the free market and a polemic against state intervention in economic affairs. He asked the Mont Pelerin congregation to consider what he believed to be the insidious rise of “post-war demands for social and economic rights and the creation of a welfare state” and tasked them with developing strategies to counter Keynesianism and advance a “market state—an individualistic, non-egalitarian society, governed by market transactions” (Gutstein, 2014, p. 19). Two consequences of the establishment of the MPS are germane in this context. First, its founding statement evinced a nascent critique of ‘minority’ rights and social justice that Hayek would later expand and second, the MPS presciently predicted the centrality of think tanks in waging a ‘war of ideas.’

Brown reminds us that Hayekian neoliberalism involved more than privileging the market above all else; it was also a “moral-political project” intended to “protect traditional hierarchies by

negating the very ideas of the social and radically restricting the reach of democratic political power in nation-states” (2019, p. 13). The very concept of the social and specifically “its appropriateness as a site of justice and the commonweal—is precisely what neoliberalism set out to destroy, conceptually, normatively and practically” (Brown, 2019, p. 28). Hayek’s vision—steeped in radical individualism—internalized and valorized market rationality, characterized society as non-existent and denounced social justice as a frivolous fancy incompatible with a socio-political order organized around free markets and personal freedoms. Hayek’s critique of social justice was peppered throughout his publications but was given its most extensive treatment in *Law, Legislation and Liberty, Vol. 2: The Mirage of Social Justice* where he claimed social justice was an empty and meaningless signifier; it means “nothing at all, and to employ it is either thoughtless or fraudulent” (1973, p. 66). In a free society the position of different individuals and groups is “not the result of anybody’s design,” consequently “the differences in reward simply cannot meaningfully be described as just or unjust” (p. 7). He also admonished social justice advocates for drawing on the ‘fatal conceit’ of society (a concept he mocked) and the ill-conceived principle of equality to attack the twin pillars of civilization: traditional morality, by which he meant that of the Christian West (Slobodian, 2021), and competitive markets (Brown, 2019). Conveniently, Hayek’s worldview leaves little space to address systemic injustice and inequality.

Phelan (2019) traces the contemporary disparagement of the social justice warrior (SJW), a favourite target of right-wing culture war combatants, to Hayekian thought and argues that there are “ideological and communicative affinities” between pejorative representations of SJWs and “neoliberal discourses hostile to the concept of social justice” (p. 469). Within the neoliberal imaginary, the SJW blends into a “longer history of moralizing Others, exemplified by terms like political correctness” while denunciations of SJWs become a proxy for dismissing the idea of social justice entirely and further often “morph into critiques of universities” as breeding grounds for SJWs and other bogeymen including gender ideology, critical race theorists and cultural Marxists (Phelan, 2019, p. 467). These rightist narratives dismiss structural analyses (after all, there is no such thing as society) that employ concepts such as patriarchy and systemic racism and fuel attacks against the ‘leftist’ academy. There is a paradox in the “making of neoliberalism”—it was by any measure an intellectual endeavour in its own right, yet it is infused with a profound “anti-intellectual sensibility” for as Phelan states, Hayek portrayed intellectuals as key proponents of “simple-minded moralizing discourses about social justice” (2019, p. 468). Phelan also identifies historical parallels between the extant political context and the ‘crisis’ atmosphere which prompted Hayek’s most vehement critique of social justice penned in the early 1970s in the aftermath of 1960s social movements for civil and women’s rights, gay liberation and environmentalism. Recent movements (i.e., Occupy, Black Lives Matter, #MeToo) as well as equity initiatives shaped by renewed appeals to social justice (Berube, 2003; Kamola, 2024) have triggered the ire of neoliberal traditionalists who reinscribe the Hayekian bond between free market principles and radical social conservatism (Slobodian, 2021). This context is crucial to understanding why many neoliberal think tanks in Canada and elsewhere have been central protagonists in the ‘culture wars.’

The MDLI and the ‘Crisis’ in Canadian Universities

One of the major outcomes of the MPS’ inaugural confab was the realization that neoliberals would have to coordinate a campaign to disassemble the Keynesian consensus which had taken hold in post-war Europe and North America. To recapture and reorganize political power in their desired direction, they would first have to alter public discourse by influencing what Hayek

referred to as ‘second-hand dealers’ in ideas—journalists, educators, media personalities, etc.—who decide what views are circulated, in what form and from which angle they are presented. To execute this plan Hayek recruited Antony Fisher, a far-right Briton commonly heralded as the godfather of the think-tank model (Gutstein, 2014). Fisher had wanted to ‘fight the socialists’ by pursuing a political career but Hayek cautioned him against it: “Politicians just follow prevailing opinions. If you want to change events, you must change ideas” (Hayek, cited in Fischer, 2018, para. 1). Hence, to wage a ‘war of ideas,’ Fisher started the U.K.-based Institute for Economic Affairs (IEA) in 1955 which became a prototype for countless other neoliberal think tanks that followed, including the MDLI.

Established in 2010, the MDLI’s managing director is Brian Lee Crowley, well known for publishing an obsequious ode to Hayek on the twentieth anniversary of his death in the *National Post* entitled ‘We’re all Hayekians now’ (Gutstein, 2014, p. 48-49). The MDLI claims to be “rigorously independent and non-partisan” (macdonaldlaurier.ca/about/who-we-are/). In fact, it is part of a Canadian ‘ideas industry’ that took root in the early 1970s when Fisher co-founded the Fraser Institute. Subsequently, Canada’s think tank infrastructure grew exponentially throughout the 1980s, 1990s and 2000s with fulsome financing from conservative philanthropic foundations (i.e., Donner Canada, Lotte and John Hecht, Peter and Melanie Munk and its offshoot Aurea) seeking to replicate the robust apparatus put in the place in the U.K. and U.S. to align public sentiment with neoliberal principles (Brownlee, 2005; Gutstein, 2014). As previously noted, the MDLI is affiliated with the AN founded by Fisher in 1981 to preach the Hayekian economic bible across the globe. However, over the years think tanks in this right-wing labyrinth moved beyond mere advocacy for ‘free markets’ and strategically leaned heavily into culture war bombast, recognizing that appeals to ‘traditional morality’ and attacks on demonized ‘others’ (PC leftists, feminists, racial and sexual minorities) could further their political agenda (Cornelissen, 2019). A visit to the websites of some of Canada’s major think tanks (Fraser, Frontier Centre for Public Policy, the MDLI, Canada Strong and Free Network)—all of which are part of the AN, confirms this as references to PC and its progeny including wokeism, cancel culture and SJWs abound as do rebukes of gender ideology, critical race theory, and EDI. Indeed, Kelpin and Johnson (2021) observe that this Canadian communications infrastructure works pedagogically to expand the reach of Hayekianism inspired by both neoliberal rationality and the protection of entrenched hierarchies of power and privilege.

In 2022, the MDLI published “The Viewpoint Diversity Crisis at Canadian Universities” which the authors acknowledge was supported by a HxA grant (Dummit & Patterson, 2022). It rehearses many of the same accusations as previous ideologically driven studies—conservatives are an embattled lot on ‘hostile’ campuses which suppress their voices or compel them to self-censor and universities suffer from a leftist monoculture which threatens their ability to serve as bastions of open inquiry. It also duplicates many of the methodological errors of previous VPD surveys. Indeed, there is good reason for Usher’s description of it as a “methodologically omnishambles of a report” (2022, para. 10). The sample grossly overrepresented professors from the humanities and social sciences (77%) even though humanities and social science faculty constitute only 36% of the overall professoriate (Usher, 2022). Equally problematical was the question design. When asked to politically self-identify, respondents had to locate themselves on a four-point Likert scale: very right, somewhat right, somewhat left and very left. This left no space to identify as a moderate or centrist nor any room to self-describe outside a simplistic, binary left-right metric they also apply to voting behaviour categorizing those who voted for the Green, Bloc, NDP or Liberal parties as left-wing while those who preferred the Conservative or People’s Party

were deemed right-wing (Dummitt & Patterson, 2022). Usher also pointed to several other issues with the survey attributing them to “incompetence or deliberate feigning of ignorance,” adding that the “methodology and question design are so obviously terrible that it seems hard to avoid the conclusion that its main purpose was to confirm the authors’ biases” (2022, para. 4, 7).

Usher’s conclusion is difficult to deny given the authors’ affiliations with entities known for their *right-wing wing bias*. Dummitt is a frequent contributor to *The National Post*, *The Hub* (see below) as well as *Quillette*, the unofficial online magazine of the IDW founded in 2015 by Claire Lehmann as a venue to confront the ‘left-leaning’ politics of academia and the media (Lester, 2018). Lehmann, a former on-air personality at *Rebel Media* is well-known for fulminations against feminism, gender ideology, and SJWs and her embrace of white nationalism. *Quillette* routinely showcases discredited pseudoscience purporting to demonstrate the intellectual inferiority of people of colour and does so under the guise of defending open inquiry (Vivian, 2022), operating much like the IDW to lend an academicized aura to far right ideas (Finlayson, 2021). In *Quillette*, Dummitt (2019; 2021) rehashes a hodgepodge of right-wing talking points about academe’s deficiencies and champions VPD as a panacea for beleaguered conservatives including those that share his opposition to depicting Canada’s treatment of Indigenous people as genocide. Patterson writes about the current state of Canadian academia for *The Hub*, a think tank ‘news outlet’ co-founded in 2021 by Rudyard Griffiths and Sean Speer who are both Senior Fellows at the University of Toronto’s Munk School of Global Affairs and Public Policy (MS) created with a \$35 million donation from the Peter and Melanie Munk Foundation. Unsurprisingly, *The Hub* is unfalteringly pro-free market and its politics emphatically conservative (Edge, 2024). In recent articles, Patterson (2024[a]; 2024[b]) derides EDI mandates that contradict the ‘merit’ principle (a common rightist ploy to portray minorities as unqualified and ‘undeserving’), teases the idea of defunding higher education or introducing punitive pecuniary sanctions for universities that fail to capitulate to the prescriptions he and his ilk demand, and champions ‘reform’ modelled on initiatives proposed by right-wing American organizations such as the National Association of Scholars (NAS), the MI’s Christopher Rufo and even alt-right figures like Richard Hanania (see below) to ‘reclaim’ Canada’s wayward universities.

The report’s authors are certainly entitled to espouse their opinions in whatever venues they choose but they can hardly be considered neutral observers of academic affairs. Rather, they are situated within a conservative labyrinth that manufactures a crisis by vilifying higher education and then recommends ‘solutions’ in accordance with its political agenda. The study is a product of a think tank echo chamber that has adopted and weaponized a particularly sanctimonious script about academic practices and campus life which has been replicated in several countries including the U.S. and UK. It follows the formulaic tripartite structure of the right’s decades-long critique of academe: (i) the charge of left-wing bias; (ii) the appropriation of terminology generally associated with progressivism (i.e., diversity, fairness, etc.) and (iii) the conflation of VPD with academic freedom (Orzeck, 2012). This is precisely why the authors can declare their report “backs up the position that Canadian universities are homogenous monocultures where academic freedom is under threat” and reinforces the findings of other international and comparative studies on VPD (Dummitt & Patterson, 2022, p. 43). Of course it does.

Ironically, the report suffers from a lack of VPD as evidenced by the studies and sources cited which are mainly derived from organizations such as the HxA funded by right-wing foundations. Others include the NAS and its journal *Academic Questions (AQ)*. The origins of the NAS lie in the Campus Coalition for Democracy (CCD) founded in 1982 by a consortium of

conservatives known for producing hysterical commentaries about American campuses. One of them by CCD's first president Stephen Balch and Herbert London (an Olin-funded professor at New York University) entitled 'The Tenured Left' (1986), a 'foundational' screed in the right's war against PC, declared universities were being taken over by Marxists, feminists, deconstructionists and other degenerates who had come of age in the 1960s to the detriment of Western civilization and the virtuous American free market system. By 1987, the CCD was rechristened as the NAS with financing from the 'four sisters' (Bradley, Olin, Scaife and Smith-Richardson) as well as the Coors and Koch foundations (Scatamburlo-D'Annibale, 2011). The first issue of its flagship publication *AQ* established that same year was a call to arms to rescue the academy from the death grip of left-wing despotism (London, 1987/88). If this sounds familiar, it should. It is the same chorus conservatives have sung for years. Predictably, the NAS has recently advocated for VPD, conducted 'studies' about campus 'cancel culture' and virtually every issue of *AQ* maligns gender, race and ethnic studies and social justice.

Another source is the Legatum Institute, a Koch-funded British think tank that promotes free markets and right-wing populism and which was influential in the disinformation campaign that led to Brexit. Its former leader Phillipa Stroud was recently involved in establishing the Alliance for Responsible Citizenship (ARC)—promoted by Jordan Peterson—to safeguard the West's Judeo-Christian roots and 'traditional' norms from the plague of PC wokeism and its accompanying 'resentment industry' which imperils capitalism (Dawson & Boscia, 2023). Yet another is a report by Eric Kaufmann (also an adjunct fellow at the MI) from the Center for Study of Partisanship and Ideology (CSPI) whose *raison d'être* is to investigate incidents or trends of bias against conservatives. Its areas of interest are "The Great Awakening" around issues of "race, gender and sexuality" and the politicization of institutions that "let political ideology undermine their functioning" (cspicenter.com/about). *HuffPost* recently revealed that CSPI's president Richard Hanania used a pseudonym to publish racist and misogynist screeds "barely distinguishable from Nazism" and was a formative voice in the rise of the alt-right (Mathias, 2023). His book *The Origins of Woke* has been described as a Trojan Horse for white supremacy—a "racist, sexist fever dream, the product of an author whose not-inconsiderable intellect has been warped and distorted—like many young conservatives—by a noxious mixture of racist pseudoscience and the casual misogyny of the extremely online right" (Harper, 2023, para. 2).

The report concludes with several recommendations that reiterate those made in previous VPD studies. Among them is a call for greater governmental (provincial) control to enshrine academic freedom in the management of universities and in "the research funding agencies at the national level" by creating an 'Academic Freedom Act' that "could build on the UK model of the 'Academic Freedom Champion'" (Dummitt & Patterson, 2022, p. 44). Conveniently, the authors fail to divulge the impetus for the British policy stemmed from "uber-culture warriors" (including Eric Kaufmann) at the "decidedly right-wing think tank Policy Exchange," a former member of the AN (Steel & Petley, 2024, p.1). Typically, conservatives eschew government oversight, yet VPD advocates invite policing of academic affairs in ways that benefit their politically charged agenda, but which carry within them the potential to undermine the autonomy of universities and the principle of academic freedom they purportedly esteem. The danger of VPD is that it lays the foundation for a redistribution of power away from a community of scholars which Stanley (2018) identifies as a signal of encroaching authoritarianism.

Another recommendation stipulates that universities remain "politically neutral" in "their public statements, hiring practices, and organizational structure and rules" so that "political

minority faculty” feel “safe from censorship and negative repercussions” (Dummitt & Patterson, 2022, p. 44) which sounds a lot like creating ‘safe spaces’ for conservative academics regardless of the scholarly merits of their arguments. The operative word here is ‘political.’ VPD obscures the fact that there is nothing *intrinsically* valuable about a diversity of *political* perspectives and often conflates freedom of expression with academic freedom. The two are undoubtedly entwined but nonetheless distinct. All individuals have the general right to express their views (with some limits—libel, threats) however factual or fallacious they may be. Free expression requires nothing but a platform from which to spew forth one’s opinions and makes no distinction about quality. Academic freedom *does*. As a special right extended to a small subset of society it entails the responsibility to engage in quality control based on rigorous standards for enquiry, thoughtful contemplation of ideas, careful examination of evidence and the exercise of reasoned judgement; it facilitates the university’s mission to advance knowledge in the service of society (Dea, 2024). The

academic community premises the entire university system on the idea of experts within their respective disciplines considering a range of ideas and, through the process of peer review, identifying those ideas which are worthy of further study and refinement and those ideas which are unworthy of further attention . . . academic disciplines make progress by systematically screening out ideas and arguments that cannot survive careful scrutiny. In this way they insist not on homogeneity but on expertise . . . It is the intellectual value of an idea that is important, not the political ideology. (Kammer, 2021, pp. 196-197)

In short, intrinsic to the university is the valuing of certain perspectives over others; it is not meant to serve as an unfettered ‘marketplace of ideas.’

Attacking EDI has become a standard conservative strategy to generate outrage and is common in many VPD studies. The MDLI report is no exception; it suggests eliminating EDI/diversity statements in hiring and research funding applications since they “insist on a narrow and ideologically specific way of understanding discrimination and currently act to weed out candidates with different perspectives” (Dummitt & Patterson, 2022, p. 45). This recommendation stems from the authors’ disapproval of “radical EDI viewpoints” influenced by CRT that focus on “systemic discrimination” (p. 30) which aligns with the Hayekian aversion to critical structural analyses. Yet, “systemic political discrimination” (from which conservatives presumably suffer) is summoned to buttress demands that job advertisements for faculty positions exclude reference to “‘critical’ approaches to various topics” which is purportedly code for a “left-leaning interpretation” of subject areas (p. 45). Based on these and other statements throughout the report, it is hard not to locate the antipathy to EDI within a much broader wave of white grievance which precipitated the rise of the alt-right and has since been mainstreamed in Canada and elsewhere (Elmer et al., 2022).²

Conclusion

VPD is not a virtuous effort to safeguard academic freedom or to ‘save’ the university from ‘dangerous’ forms of conformity that undermine the precepts of democratic society. Rather, it is a “politically *reactionary*” response to formal measures that have created more socially and

² Dummitt and Patterson provided a rebuttal to Usher’s criticisms but in doing so fell back on studies linked to right-wing think tanks and organizations.

academically diverse institutions of higher learning” (Vivian, 2022, p. 23). MAGA (make the academy great again) bromides about the lack of VPD on campuses also reflect a discursive power grab by the right, which has appropriated ‘progressive’ language and deployed it to delegitimize perspectives challenging entrenched power relations and historical legacies of exclusion.

The authors of the MDLI report cast the ‘debate’ as one between those who believe universities are “in crisis” and those who dismiss such concerns as an “overblown conspiracy” scaffolded by “right-wing talking points in the ‘culture wars’” and then assert only one side (theirs) is “backed up best by evidence” of the sort they provide (Dummitt & Patterson, 2022, pp. 8-9). On the contrary, the VPD ‘crisis’ is one *demonstrably* concocted by think tanks which enjoy an outsized impact because they are incorporated into a well-oiled message machine established to preserve the political, economic and ideological interests of the plutocratic class that funds it. Proselytizing from the same hymnal and aided and abetted by a right-wing media ecosystem, the purveyors of this crisis narrative specialize in fuelling the rhetorical flames of the culture war and exploiting simmering resentments in their attempts to disassemble the political, social and cultural gains made by historically marginalized constituencies, demonize social justice and impose their antediluvian agenda on campuses and beyond. To the extent that universities are in ‘peril’ as advocates of VPD declare, the threat to them stems from coordinated assaults on academe and not the “fabricated crisis they have projected onto it” (Kammer, 2021, p. 156).

Finally, the unscrupulous lengths to which the right will strategically scapegoat universities, academic discourses and concepts to broaden the appeal of its disingenuous messaging for *political* gain cannot be underestimated. EDI, as just one example, has been transformed into a three-letter dog whistle by the likes of anti-PC brigadier Jordan Peterson who marked his departure from the University of Toronto with a harangue declaring it an appalling ideology that disadvantages qualified white, cisgendered men while bolstering incompetent minorities (2022)—an egregious distortion of EDI practices which recalls Horowitz’s ‘political war’ tactics. Recently Peterson lauded Danielle Smith (among other populists) for standing up to licentious leftists while jubilantly celebrating the “worldwide phenomena” of *even* more young men drifting rightward (Jerema, 2024). What he failed to mention, of course, is that many of them are increasingly being radicalized, often with deadly consequences, by the venomous stew of misogyny, racism, homophobia and transphobia he and his comrades serve up daily. We have witnessed a spate of violent attacks perpetrated by young men *indoctrinated* not by the left but by *the right* (as their manifestos often reveal) as well as the dangerous rise of authoritarian populism fed, in part, by white grievance. Authoritarian populists are not opposed to neoliberalism as is sometimes claimed—they are, arguably, “Hayek’s bastards” (Slobodian, 2021, p.1) on a mission to restore a mythological past and purge, once and for all, any remaining vestiges of progressivism from the body politic. History teaches us that the best defence against authoritarianism is a vibrant and independent university (Stanley, 2018). At this critical juncture, we would do well to remember this lesson and vigorously defend higher education against the forces seeking to undermine its credibility and democracy itself.

References

- AAUP. (2024). The right-wing attacks on higher education: an analysis of the state legislative landscape. American Association of University Professors.
<https://www.aaup.org/sites/default/files/Higher-Ed-Legislative-Landscape.pdf>

- Balch, S. & London, H. (1986). The tenured left. *Commentary*, 82(4), 41-51.
- Beauchamp, Z. (2018, August 31). The myth of a campus free speech crisis
<https://www.vox.com/policy-and-politics/2018/8/31/17718296/campus-free-speech-political-correctness-musa-al-gharbi>
- Berube, M. (2023). Academic freedom and the ‘whitelash’ of the 2020s. *Change: The magazine of higher learning*, 55(3), 12-19.
- Black, C. (2016, December 3). In defense of Jordan Peterson. *National Post*, p. A14.
- Bloom, A. (1987). *The closing of the American mind*. Simon & Schuster, Inc.
- Brown, W. *In the ruins of neoliberalism: the rise of antidemocratic politics in the west*. Columbia University Press.
- Brownlee, J. (2005). *Ruling Canada: corporate cohesion and democracy*. Fernwood Publishing.
- Buckley, W. (1986). *God and man at Yale: the superstition of ‘academic freedom.’* Regnery Gateway. (Original work published 1951).
- Burmila, E. (2021). Liberal bias in the college classroom: a review of the evidence (or lack thereof). *Political Science and Politics*, 54(3), 598-602.
- CAUT (2024, April 17). CAUT calls on the Alberta government to scrap Bill 18.
<https://www.caut.ca/latest/2024/04/caut-calls-alberta-government-scrap-bill-18>
- Chait, J. (2015, January 27). Not a very p.c. thing to say. *New York*.
<http://nymag.com/daily/intelligencer/2015/01/not-a-very-pc-thing-to-say.html>
- Chapnick, A. (2021, March 15). A left-wing bias in academe? *Adam Chapnick’s Blog*
<https://www.adamchapnick.ca/adam-chapnicks-blog/a-left-wing-bias-in-academe>
- Climenhaga, D. (2024, April 15). Danielle Smith sets out to ensure the ideological purity of federally funded university research in Alberta. *Alberta Politics*.
<https://albertapolitics.ca/2024/04/danielle-smith-sets-out-to-ensure-the-ideological-purity-of-federally-funded-university-research-in-alberta/>
- Cohen, P. (2008, September 21). Conservatives try new tack on campuses. *The New York Times*.
<https://www.nytimes.com/2008/09/22/education/22conservative.html>
- Cornelissen, L. (2019, July 16). The ‘new right’ is not a reaction to neoliberalism, but its offspring. *Open Democracy*. <https://www.opendemocracy.net/en/can-europe-make-it/the-new-right-is-not-a-reaction-to-neoliberalism-but-its-offspring/>
- Dawson, B. & Boscia, S. (2023, November 2). This global right-wing movement wants to save the world. It just needs a plan. *Politico*. <https://www.politico.eu/article/this-global-right-wing-movement-wants-to-save-the-world-it-just-needs-a-plan/>
- Dea, S. (2024). Academic freedom and the duty of care. In C. Fox & J. Saunders (Eds.), *Routledge handbook of philosophy and media ethics* (pp. 56-68). Routledge.
- Dobbin, M. (2015). Canada’s progressive politics need renewal. In E. Finn (Ed.), *Canada after Harper: His ideology-fuelled attack on Canadian society and values, and how we can resist and create the country we want* (pp. 288-310). James Lorimer & Company.

- D’Orazio, D. (2021). How and why the Chicago Principles came to Canada: free expression on campuses and the closing of the ‘campus crisis feedback loop.’ *American Review of Canadian Studies*, 51(4), 533-553.
- Dummitt, C. (2019, September 17). Confessions of a social constructionist. *Quillette Magazine*. <https://quillette.com/2019/09/17/i-basically-just-made-it-up-confessions-of-a-social-constructionist/>
- Dummitt, C. (2021, August 10). The Canadian Historical Association’s fake ‘consensus’ on Canadian genocide. *Quillette Magazine*. <https://quillette.com/2021/08/10/the-canadian-historical-associations-fake-consensus-on-canadian-genocide/>
- Dummitt, C., & Patterson, Z. (2022). *The viewpoint diversity crisis at Canadian universities*. Macdonald-Laurier Institute.
- Edge, M. (2024, May 12). Is *The Hub* the future of journalism in Canada? *Canadian Dimension*. <https://canadiandimension.com/articles/view/is-the-hub-the-future-of-journalism-in-canada>
- Elmer, G. et al. (2022). Introduction: the mainstreaming of the Canadian alt-right. *Canadian Journal of Communication*, 47(4), 645-648.
- Finlayson, A. (2021). Neoliberalism, the alt-right and the Intellectual Dark Web. *Theory, Culture & Society*, 38(6), 167-190.
- Fischer, K. (2018, July 9). The Atlas Network: littering the world with free-market think tanks. *Global Dialogue*. <https://globaldialogue.isa-sociology.org/articles/the-atlas-network-littering-the-world-with-free-market-think-tanks>
- Fish, S. (1994). *There’s no such thing as free speech . . . and it’s a good thing too*. Oxford University Press.
- Fish, S. (2007). Intellectual diversity: what is it and do we need it? *The Montana Professor*, 17(2), <https://mtprof.msun.edu/Spr2007/fish.html>
- Foxman, S., Birnbaum, E. & Green, J. (2024, June 25). Paul Singer is pitching Wall Street’s own brand of MAGA. *Bloomberg News*. <https://www.bloomberg.com/news/articles/2024-06-25/how-elliott-s-paul-singer-is-driving-wall-street-s-war-on-woke>
- Ganshorn, H. (2024). Connecting the dots between extreme ideologies, ‘parent choice,’ and education privatization in Alberta and Canada. *Critical Education*, 15(2), 75-83.
- Goldstein, E. (2017, July 7). The gadfly: can Jonathan Haidt calm the culture wars? *The Chronicle of Higher Education*, 63(40), p. B6.
- Gutstein, D. (2014). *Harperism: how Stephen Harper and his think tank colleagues have transformed Canada*. James Lorimer & Company.
- Haidt, J. & Peterson, J. (2018). The perilous state of the university. https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=4IBegL_V6AA
- Harper, T. (2023, September 18). An intellectual and moral failure: Richard Hanania’s new book is a Trojan horse for white supremacy. *The Atlantic*. <https://www.theatlantic.com/ideas/archive/2023/09/richard-hanania-origins-of-woke-book/675348/>

- Hayek, F. (1944). *The road to serfdom*. Routledge.
- Hayek, F. (1973). *Law, legislation and liberty, volume 2: the mirage of social justice*. Routledge.
- Horowitz, D. (2003[a]). The campus blacklist. *Front Page Magazine*.
<http://www.frontpagemag.com/Articles/ID=7357>
- Horowitz, D. (2003[b]). *The art of political war*. Spence.
- Jerema, C. (2024, February 29). Jordan Peterson: the awe-inspiring conservative counter-offensive against woke nonsense. *Postmedia Network Inc*.
- Johnson, V. (2024). The epistemology of ignorance and its impact on democracy and higher education. In V. Johnson, J. Ruth & E. Schrecker (Eds.), *The right to learn: resisting the right-wing attack on academic freedom* (pp. 59-76). Beacon Press.
- Johnson, V. et al. (2024). A time for faculty to act. In V. Johnson, J. Ruth & E. Schrecker (Eds.), *The right to learn: resisting the right-wing attack on academic freedom* (pp. 1-13). Beacon Press.
- Juhasz, A. (2006). *The Bu\$h agenda: Invading the world, one economy at a time*. Regan Books.
- Kammer, S. (2021). The ‘intellectual diversity’ crisis that isn’t: liberal faculties, conservative victims, and the cynical effort to undermine higher education for political gain. *Quinnipiac Law Review*, 39(2), 149-224.
- Kamola, I. (2024). *Manufacturing backlash: right-wing think tanks and legislative attacks on higher education, 2021-2023*. American Association of University Professors.
https://www.aaup.org/file/Manufacturing_Backlash_final.pdf
- Kelpin, R., & Johnson, B. (2021, April 8). Munk, Hayek and the Fraser Institute: tracing the insurgent pedagogy of the Canadian right. *Canadian Dimension*.
<https://canadiandimension.com/articles/view/munk-hayek-and-the-fraser-institute-insurgent-pedagogies-of-the-canadian-right>
- Lapham, L. (2004, September 4). Tentacles of rage: the Republican propaganda mill, a brief history. *Harper’s Magazine*, 309(1852), p. 31-41.
- Lester, A. (2018, November/December, n.d.). The voice of the ‘Intellectual Dark Web.’ *Politico Magazine*. <https://www.politico.com/magazine/story/2018/11/11/intellectual-dark-web-quillette-claire-lehmann-221917/>
- Lind, W. (2004). *Political correctness: a short history of an ideology*. Free Congress Foundation.
http://www.lifesitenews.com/1dn/2005_docs/PC1.pdf
- London, H. (1987/1988). A call to the academy. *Academic Questions*, 1(1), 189-190.
- Lukianoff, G., Haidt, J. (2015). The coddling of the American mind. *The Atlantic*, 316 (2), 42-52.
- Mason, G. (2024, April 19). Danielle Smith’s Bill 18 is as cynical and nefarious as it gets. *The Globe and Mail*, A11.
- Mathias, C. (2023, August 4). Richard Hanania, rising right-wing star, wrote for white supremacist sites under pseudonym. *HuffPost*. https://www.huffpost.com/entry/richard-hanania-white-supremacist-pseudonym-richard-hoste_n_64c93928e4b021e2f295e817

- Mayer, J. (2017). *Dark money: The hidden history of the billionaires behind the rise of the radical right*. Anchor Books.
- McClennen, S. (2006). Countering the assault on higher education. *Radical Teacher*, 77, 15-19.
- McClennen, S. (2024). The Three Stooges: how David Horowitz, Stanley Fish and Cary Nelson turned academic freedom into right-wing slapstick. In J. DiLeo & S. McClennen (Eds.), *Left theory and the alt-right* (pp. 27-39). Routledge.
- McGruder, K. (2024). Knowledge and good community organizing can counter the ‘divisive concepts’ campaign. In V. Johnson, J. Ruth & E. Schrecker (Eds.), *The right to learn: resisting the right-wing attack on academic freedom* (pp. 79-89). Beacon Press.
- Meagher, R. (2012). The ‘vast right-wing conspiracy’: media and conservative networks. *New Political Science*, 14(4), 469-484.
- Meranto, O. (2005). The third wave of McCarthyism: co-opting the language of inclusivity. *New Political Science*, 27(2), 215-232.
- Mirrlees, T. (2018). The alt-right’s discourse of ‘cultural Marxism’: A political instrument of intersectional hate. *Atlantis Journal*, 39(1), 49-69.
- Orzeck, R. (2012). Academic freedom, intellectual diversity, and the place of politics in geography. *Antipode*, 44(4), 1449-1469.
- Patterson, Z. (2024[a], July 3). Universities are not going to reform themselves-so now what? *The Hub*. <https://thehub.ca/2024/07/03/zachary-patterson-universities-are-not-going-to-reform-themselves-so-now-what/>
- Patterson, Z. (2024[b], July 10). Canada must reclaim its wayward universities. Here’s how. *The Hub*. <https://thehub.ca/2024/07/10/zachary-patterson-canada-must-reclaim-its-wayward-universities-heres-how/>
- Penner, M. (2024, May 3). On Bill 18: Danielle Smith, the Calgary School and the politics of academic freedom. *Active History*. <https://activehistory.ca/blog/2024/05/03/on-bill-18-danielle-smith-the-calgary-school-and-the-politics-of-academic-freedom>
- Penner, M. (2023). Settler-Neoliberalism: Tom Flanagan and Friedrich Hayek on the Prairies. *The Canadian Historical Review*, 104(3), 343-366.
- Perry, B., Mirrlees, T., & Scrivens, R. (2019). The dangers of porous borders: The ‘Trump effect’ in Canada. *Journal of Hate Studies*, 14(1), 53-75.
- Peterson, J. (2022, January 19). Why I am no longer a tenured professor at the University of Windsor. *National Post*. <https://nationalpost.com/opinion>
- Phelan, S. (2019). Neoliberalism, the far right, and the disparaging of ‘social justice warriors.’ *Communication, Culture & Critique*, 12, 455-475.
- Power & Politics (2024). https://albertapolitics.ca/wp-content/uploads/Power-Politics-Segment_Transcript.pdf
- Riley, C. L. (2021). Introduction. In C. L. Riley (Ed.), *The free speech wars: how did we get here and why does it matter?* (pp. 1-19). Manchester University Press.

- Rinaldi, L. (2021, March 16). The salesman. *Toronto Life*. <https://torontolife.com/city/Jordan-petersons-weird-family-empire>
- Sarkonak, J. (2024, April 24). Pushing back on DEI; Danielle Smith is the antidote to Trudeau's university agenda. *National Post*, A8.
- Scatamburlo-D'Annibale, V. (2011) *Cold breezes and idiot winds: Patriotic correctness and the post-9/11 assault on academe*. Sense Publishers.
- Scatamburlo-D'Annibale, V. (2019). The 'culture wars' reloaded: Trump, anti-political correctness and the right's 'free speech' hypocrisy. *Journal for Critical Education Policy Studies*, 17(1), 69-119.
- Scatamburlo-D'Annibale, V. (2021). The manufactured free speech 'crisis.' *Critical Education*, 12(8), 1-25.
- Schrecker, E. (2006, February 10). Worse than McCarthy. *The Chronicle of Higher Education*. <https://chronicle.com/weekly/v52/i23/23/23b02001.htm>
- Setnicar, C. (2020, January 31). How Heterodox Academy creates a safe space for bad ideas. *Demos Journal*. <https://demosjournal.com/article/how-heterodox-academy-creates-a-safe-space-for-bad-ideas/>
- Slobodian, Q. (2021, June 15). Hayek's bastards: the populist right's neoliberal roots. *Tribune*. <http://www.tribunemag.co.uk/2021/06/hayeks-bastards-the-populist-rights-neoliberal-roots>
- Stanley, J. (2018). Fascism and the university: higher education has historically been a bulwark against authoritarianism. Or its pawn. What'll it be this time. *Chronicle of Higher Education*, 65(1).
- Steel, J. & Petley, J. (2024). Introduction: censorship and freedom of expression in turbulent times. In J. Steel & J. Petley (Eds.), *The Routledge companion to freedom of expression and censorship* (pp. 1-10). Routledge.
- Tyson, C. & Oreskes, N. (2022) The American university, the politics of professors, and the narrative of 'liberal bias.' In J. Cruikshank & R. Abbinnett (Eds.), *The social production of knowledge in a neoliberal age: debating the challenges facing higher education* (pp. 79-102). Rowman & Littlefield.
- Usher, A. (2022, September 22). Viewpoint Diversity. *Higher Education Strategy*. <https://higheredstrategy.com/viewpoint-diversity>
- Van de Ven, I. & van Gemert, T. (2020). Filter bubbles and guru effects: Jordan B. Peterson as a public intellectual in the attention economy. *Celebrity Studies*, 13(3), 289-307.
- Vivian, B. (2022). *Campus misinformation: the real threat to free speech in American higher education*. Oxford University Press.
- Warner, J. (2021, September 6). A new leader for Heterodox Academy. *Inside Higher Ed*. <https://www.insidehighered.com/blogs/just-visiting/new-leader-heterodox-academy>
- Weigel, M. (2016, November 30). Political correctness: How the right invented a phantom enemy. *The Guardian*. <https://www.theguardian.com/us-news-2016/nov/30/political-correctn...w-the-right-invented-phantom-enemy-donald-trump>

- Weigel, M. (2018, September 20). The coddling of the American mind review-how elite US liberals have turned rightwards. *The Guardian*.
<https://www.theguardian.com/books/2018/sep/20/the-coddling-of-the-american-mind-review>
- Wilson, J. (2008). *Patriotic correctness: academic freedom and its enemies*. Paradigm Publishers.
- Wilson, R., & Kamola, I. (2021). *Free speech-Koch money: manufacturing a campus culture war*. Pluto Press.

Author

Dr. Valerie Scatamburlo-D'Annibale is an Associate Professor in the Department of Communication, Media and Film at the University of Windsor. She is the author of two books—*Soldiers of Misfortune: The New Right's Culture War and the Politics of Political Correctness* (1998) which received the 2000 American Educational Studies Association Critics' Choice Award and *Cold Breezes and Idiot Winds: Patriotic Correctness and the Post 9-11 Assault on Academe* (2011), as well as 40 book chapters and journal articles on topics including critical pedagogy, social theory, and North American 'culture wars.'

Critical Education

criticaleducation.org

ISSN 1920-4175

Editors

Sandra Mathison, *University of British Columbia*

E. Wayne Ross, *University of British Columbia*

Associate Editors

Abraham P. DeLeon, *University of Texas at San Antonio*

Adam Renner, 1970-2010

Co-Founding and Past Editor

Stephen Petrina, *University of British Columbia*

Editorial Collective

Wayne Au, *University of Washington Bothell*

Jessica Bacon, *Montclair State University*

Jeff Bale, *University of Toronto*

Grant Banfield, *Flinders University*

Dennis Beach, *University of Gothenburg*

Kristen Buras, *Georgia State University*

Paul R Carr, *Université du Québec en Outaouais*

Lisa Cary, *Murdoch University*

Antonio J. Castro, *University of Missouri*

Erin L. Castro, *University of Utah*

Alexander Cuenca, *Indiana University*

Noah De Lissovoy, *University of Texas at Austin*

Ardavan Eizadirad, *Wilfred Laurier University*

Gustavo Fischman, *Arizona State University*

Derek R. Ford, *DePauw University*

Four Arrows, *Fielding Graduate University*

David Gabbard, *Boise State University*

Rich Gibson, *San Diego State University*

Panayota Gounari, *UMass, Boston*

Keith Heggart, *University of Technology Sydney*

Dave Hill, *Anglia Ruskin University*

Nathalia E. Jaramillo, *Kennesaw State University*

Richard Kahn, *Antioch University Los Angeles*

Gianna Katsiampoura, *University of Athens*

Harper Keenan, *University of British Columbia*

Kathleen Kesson, *Long Island University*

Ashwani Kumar, *Mount Saint Vincent University*

Ravi Kumar, *South Asian University*

Saville Kushner, *Drew University*

Yulong Li, *The Chinese University of Hong Kong*

John Lupinacci, *Washington State University*

Kevin R. Magill, *Baylor University*

Alpesh Maisuria, *University of East London*

Curry Stephenson Malott, *West Chester University*

Gregory Martin, *University of Technology Sydney*

Cris Mayo, *University of Vermont*

Peter Mayo, *University of Malta*

Peter McLaren, *Chapman University*

Shahrazad Mojab, *University of Toronto*

João Paraskeva, *University of Strathclyde*

Lana Parker, *University of Windsor*

Brad Porfilio, *California State University, Stanislaus*

Marc Pruyn, *University of the Sunshine Coast*

Lotar Rasinski, *University of Lower Silesia*

Leena Robertson, *Middlesex University*

Sam Rocha, *University of British Columbia*

Edda Sant, *University of Manchester*

Doug Selwyn, *SUNY Plattsburgh*

Özlem Sensoy, *Simon Fraser University*

Patrick Shannon, *Penn State University*

Steven Singer, *The College of New Jersey*

Kostas Skordoulis, *University of Athens*

John Smyth, *Federation Univ. Australia*

Hannah Spector, *Boston Psychoanalytic Society & Institute*

Marc Spooner, *University of Regina*

Inna Stepaniuk, *Simon Fraser University*

Paolo Vittoria, *University of Naples Federico II*