

# The New Campus Orthodoxy

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**EDUCATION**

Three weeks ago, at a meeting of the Western Humanities Conference in Berkeley, faculty and graduate students from 20 western colleges and universities gathered to discuss "Political Correctness' and Cultural Studies" — an examination of the pressure to conform to currently fashionable ideas and its effect

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on scholarship.

Next fall, for example, at the University of Texas, freshman won't write about literary classics and other topics, as they have in the past. Instead, they'll base their compositions on a packet of essays on discrimination, affirmative-action and civil-rights cases.

The new program, called "Writing on Difference," was voted in by the faculty last month and has been praised by many professors for giving the curriculum more relevance to real-life concerns. But some see it as a stifling example of academic or-

thodoxy.

"You cannot tell me that students will not be inevitably graded on politically correct thinking in these classes," Alan Gribben, a professor of English, said at the time the change was being discussed.

The term "politically correct," with its suggestion of Stalinist orthodoxy, is spoken more with irony and disapproval than with reverence. But across the country the term PC, as it is commonly abbreviated, is being heard more and more in debates over what should be taught at universities.

There are even initials — PCP — to designate a politically correct person.

And though the terms are not used in utter seriousness, even by the PCPs themselves, there is a large body of belief in academia and elsewhere that a cluster of opinions about race, ecology, feminism, culture and foreign policy defines a kind of "correct" attitude toward the problems of the world, a sort of unofficial ideology of the university.

Central to PC-ness, which has its roots in 1960s radicalism, is the view that Western society has for centuries been dominated by what is often called "the white male power structure" or "patriarchal hegemony." A related belief is that everybody but white heterosexual males has suffered some form of repression and been denied a cultural voice or been prevented from celebrating what is commonly called "otherness."

The view that Western civilization is inherently unfair to minorities, women and homosexuals has been at the center of politically correct thinking on campuses ever since the recent debate over university curriculums began.

Affirmative action is politically correct. So too are women's studies, gay and lesbian studies, and African American studies, all of which are strongly represented in the scholarly panels at such professional meetings as those of the American Historical Association and the Modern Language

Association.

Politically correct papers include "Jane Austen and the Masturbating Girl," "Brotherly Love: Nabokov's Homosexual Double" and "A Womb of His Own: Male Renaissance Poets in the Female Body," which were on the program for the MLA conference last year in Washington.

The cluster of politically correct ideas includes a powerful environmentalism and, in foreign policy, support for Palestinian self-determination and sympathy for third world revolutionaries, particularly those in Central America. Biodegradable garbage bags get the PC seal of approval. Exxon does not.

But more than an earnest expression of belief, "politically correct" has become a sarcastic jibe used by those, conservatives and classical liberals alike, to describe what they see as a growing intolerance, a closing of debate, a pressure to conform to a radical program or risk being accused of a commonly reiterated trio of thought crimes: sexism, racism and homophobia.

"It's a manifestation of what some are calling liberal fascism," said Roger Kimball, the author of "Tenured Radicals," a critique of what he calls the politicization of the humanities. "Under the name of pluralism and freedom of speech, it is an attempt to enforce a narrow and ideologically motivated view of both the curriculum and what it means to be an educated person, a responsible citizen."