

Student Rights Survey (Instructors) – Preliminary Report

SUMMARY

A Student Rights Survey was conducted at Los Angeles Valley College to assess students' and instructors' experiences, perceptions, and opinions related to issues surrounding the current attempt to pass legislation known as the Academic Bill of Rights. This legislation, also referred to as the "The Student Rights Movement" makes specific claims about student perceptions of faculty and takes the stance that "faculty members will not use their courses or their position for the purpose of political, ideological, religious or anti-religious indoctrination." This survey was designed to test several of the claims made by those who wrote and support this bill.

Surveys were sent to all full-time and part-time instructors (about 500 total) at Los Angeles Valley College. Over 120 surveys were completed and returned for analysis.

Instructors in this sample were mostly moderate in their political views (65% rated themselves as a 2 or 3 on a 1-4 scale) and generally felt that their colleagues and students were moderate as well. More instructors reported being registered to vote as Democrats (63%) than as Republicans (21%) or other (11%), and about 3% were not registered to vote.

Instructors overwhelmingly (97-99%) reported that they do not single out students based on either political or religious beliefs and most do not believe that their colleagues or other students do this either. Instructors also reported that they do not let a student's political or religious views impact his/her grade in a class. Instructors also overwhelmingly reported that they do not use classroom time to present personal political views that are not necessarily related to course material and do not present material in a manner that emphasizes a single viewpoint.

Instructors generally disagreed with the following statements:

- "A course on human biological evolution should include information on the view that God is the primary architect of human affairs." (76% disagree)
- "It would be inappropriate for a professor to have a political cartoon that a student may find offensive displayed in his/her office." (70% disagree)
- "It would be inappropriate for a professor to make a political joke during class (e.g., against the President or the war in Iraq)." (62% disagree)

There was less agreement among instructors about the meaning of academic freedom and what instructors should be required to present in class. In response to the statement, "Academic freedom means that a professor can discuss whatever he or she wants to in class" 57% disagreed and 43% agreed, while in response to the statement, "Professors should be required to present all possible viewpoints on a topic" 45% disagreed and 55% agreed.

BACKGROUND

The Academic or Student Bill of Rights

The Student Bill of Rights is largely the work of David Horowitz and a group called Students for Academic Freedom (www.studentsforacademicfreedom.org).

Materials on the Student for Academic Freedom website state that there are widespread problems in higher education that can be solved by the Student Bill of Rights.

The “problem” is defined as including:

- a lack of accountability on the part of colleges and universities
- “elitist and self-selecting” hiring committees
- a largely liberal professoriate that does not reflect the political diversity found in the U.S.
- instructors using the classroom to introduce and advocate controversial material not related to the course subject
- instructors attempting to “indoctrinate” students
- instructors presenting only a single viewpoint
- instructors singling out students based on their political or religious beliefs

The student complaint form on the website includes the following categories:

- Requiring readings or texts covering only one side of the issue.
- Gratuitously singled out political or religious beliefs for ridicule.
- Introduced controversial material that has no relation to the subject.
- Forced students to express a certain point of view in assignments.
- Mocked national political or religious figures.
- Conducted political activities in class (e.g., recruiting for demonstration)
- Allowed students political or religious beliefs to influence grading
- Used university funds to hold one-sided partisan teach-ins or conferences.
- Other

David Horowitz and The Students for Academic Freedom composed model legislation that has been called the Student Bill of Rights or the Academic Bill of Rights. Legislation with similar language has been introduced in every state. In California, it was introduced as SB5. It was blocked in committee but will be reconsidered later. At the national level, language on academic freedom has been introduced into the Higher Education Amendments of 2005, the House version of which was passed earlier this year.

The Survey

In reading the Academic/Student Bill of Rights material, we noticed a lack of research to support the claims that were made about faculty conduct and student experiences. The research conducted by this group concluded that the problem was widespread. The basis of the research focused on the responses to questions that asked students to agree to statements about “some of my teachers” without asking how many or what impact this had. We were also interested in the worldview and perceptions that underlie this movement. As such, the survey had two main objectives:

- 1) To ask students and faculty about these issues and the frequency, perception, and impact (if any) of any of the experiences such as those described by those in this movement.
- 2) To ask students and faculty for opinions about appropriate behavior for professors relative to these issues.

Demographic information, including party affiliation and a liberal to conservative self-identification scale, were included in the survey to aid in analysis and to compare the survey sample to the overall LAVC instructor population.

Surveys were sent to all full-time and part-time instructors (about 500 total). 123 surveys were completed and returned. The demographic data collected on the instructor survey was used to compare the survey sample with that of the overall LAVC instructor population. Overall, the survey population was found to be representative.

INSTRUCTOR SURVEY RESULTS

Voter Registration and Liberal-Conservative

More instructors reported being registered as Democrats (63%) than as Republicans (21%). An additional 11% reported having another party registration and 3% were not registered to vote.

However, on the liberal to conservative scale (with 1 being liberal and 4 being conservative), most instructors rated themselves in the center of the scale (40% chose 2 and 25% chose 3), not on the extreme endpoints (22% chose 1 and 13% chose 4). The mean value for this question was 2.29.

Instructors generally felt that their colleagues were moderate (42%) or liberal (36%), with only about 3% saying they felt their colleagues were conservative and 18% saying they did not know or could not tell their colleague political affiliation. In regards to their students, instructors again were most likely to feel that students were moderate (45%) although many instructors also felt they did not know or could not tell (35%) their

students political affiliation. An additional 13% felt their students were liberal and 7% felt their students were conservative.

Report of Professorial Conduct in the Classroom

Instructors reported that they do not single out students in class based on their religious or political beliefs (99% of instructors). Instructors also did not feel that their colleagues or other students (93% for religious beliefs, 92% for political beliefs for both) singled out students either.

Similarly, 98% of instructors said that they do not let a student's political or religious views impact his/her grade in the class.

The overwhelming majority of instructors also reported that they do not present material in class in a manner that emphasizes a single viewpoint (91%) and that they do not use classroom time to present personal political views that are not necessarily related to course material (95%).

Instructor Opinions

There was less agreement among instructors when they were asked about their opinions as opposed to their actions.

Instructors tended to disagree with the statements that "it would be inappropriate for a professor to make a political joke during class (e.g., against the President or the war in Iraq)" (62% disagreed) and that "it would be inappropriate for a professor to have a political cartoon that a student may find offensive displayed in his or her office" (70% disagreed).

By a slightly larger margin instructors disagreed with the statement that "A course on human biological evolution should include information on the view that God is the primary architect of human affairs" (76% disagreed).

There was much less agreement among instructors when asked about academic freedom and what instructors should be required to teach. In response to the statement, "Academic freedom means that a professor can discuss whatever he or she wants to in class", 57% of instructors disagreed while 43% agreed.

When asked if instructors should be required to present all possible viewpoints on a topic, 55% agreed while 45% disagreed.

Responses by Liberal-Conservative Scale

There appears to be statistically significant differences in responses to some questions based on whether the instructor self-identified as liberal or conservative. However, the small sample size involved means that these results should be interpreted with caution. In the following discussion, the scale being referenced was a 1-4 scale with 1 being the most liberal and 4 being the most conservative.

These differences seem to indicate that more conservative instructors were more likely than more liberal instructors to agree with the following statements:

- “A course on human biological evolution should include information on the view that God is the primary architect of human affairs.” [Percent of agreement by 1 (liberal) to 4 (conservative) level: 1-7%, 2-18%, 3-37%, 4-50%; $p < 0.01$.]
- “It would be inappropriate for a professor to have a political cartoon that a student may find offensive displayed in his/her office.” [Percent of agreement by 1 (liberal) to 4 (conservative) level: 1-11%, 2-25%, 3-43%, 4-50%; $p < 0.01$.]
- “It would be inappropriate for a professor to make a political joke during class (e.g., against the President or the war in Iraq).” [Percent of agreement by 1 (liberal) to 4 (conservative) level: 1-22%, 2-31%, 3-53%, 4-63%; $p < 0.01$.]
- “Professors should be required to present all possible viewpoints on a topic.” [Percent of agreement by 1 (liberal) to 4 (conservative) level: 1-33%, 2-60%, 3-60%, 4-75%; $p < 0.05$.]

Instructors who rated themselves as more conservative were also more likely to report feeling that their colleagues and other students singled out students based on political and religious beliefs.

- “I feel that my colleagues single out students in class because of their religious beliefs.” (Percent agreeing: 1-0%, 2-4%, 3-8%, 4-25%; $p < .04$)
- “I feel that my colleagues single out students in class because of their political beliefs.” (Percent agreeing: 1-4%, 2-2%, 3-11%, 4-27%; $p < 0.01$.)
- “I feel that my students in class are singled out because of their religious beliefs by other students.” (Percent agreeing: 1-0%, 2-4%, 3-7%, 4-29%; $p < 0.01$.)
- “I feel that my students in class are singled out because of their political beliefs by other students.” (Percent agreeing: 1-4%, 2-0%, 3-14%, 4-29%; $p < 0.01$.)

Student Rights Survey Results (Instructor Version)

Fall 2005

I am registered to vote as a:

	Count	%
Democrat	78	63.4
Republican	27	21.2
Other	14	11.4
Not registered	4	3.3
Total	123	100%

On a scale of one to four, with one being very liberal and four being very conservative, I would rate myself as:

	Count	%
1	27	22.1
2	49	40.2
3	30	24.6
4	16	13.1
Total	122	100%

I feel that most of my colleagues are:

	Count	%
Liberal	44	36.4
Conservative	4	3.3
Moderate	51	42.1
I do not know/I can't tell	22	18.2
Total	121	100%

I feel that most of my students are:

	Count	%
Liberal	16	13.3
Conservative	8	6.7
Moderate	54	45
I do not know/I can't tell	42	35
Total	120	100%

Professors should be required to present all possible viewpoints on a topic.

	Count	%
Strongly Agree	31	25.2
Agree	37	30.1
Disagree	36	29.3
Strongly Disagree	19	15.4
Total	123	100%

Student Rights Survey Results (Instructor Version)

Fall 2005

A course on human biological evolution should include information on the view that God is the primary architect of human affairs.

	Count	%
Strongly Agree	9	7.3
Agree	21	16.9
Disagree	32	25.8
Strongly Disagree	62	50
Total	124	100%

It would be inappropriate for a professor to have a political cartoon that a student may find offensive displayed in his/her office.

	Count	%
Strongly Agree	20	16.1
Agree	17	13.7
Disagree	40	32.3
Strongly Disagree	47	37.9
Total	124	100%

It would be inappropriate for a professor to make a political joke during class (e.g., against the President or the war in Iraq).

	Count	%
Strongly Agree	18	14.5
Agree	29	23.4
Disagree	46	37.1
Strongly Disagree	31	25
Total	124	100%

Academic freedom means that a professor can discuss whatever he or she wants to in class.

	Count	%
Strongly Agree	18	14.8
Agree	35	28.7
Disagree	45	36.9
Strongly Disagree	24	19.7
Total	122	100%

In my classes I present material in a manner that emphasizes a single viewpoint.

	Count	%
Strongly Agree	1	0.8
Agree	10	8.3
Disagree	63	52.1
Strongly Disagree	47	38.8
Total	121	100%

Student Rights Survey Results (Instructor Version)

Fall 2005

I use classroom time to present personal political views that are not necessarily related to course material.

	Count	%
Agree	6	4.9
Disagree	36	29.5
Strongly Disagree	80	65.6
Total	122	100%

I feel that my colleagues single out students in class because of their *religious* beliefs.

	Count	%
Strongly Agree	4	3.4
Agree	4	3.4
Disagree	32	27.1
Strongly Disagree	78	66.1
Total	118	100%

I feel that my colleagues single out students in class because of their *political* beliefs.

	Count	%
Strongly Agree	5	4.3
Agree	4	3.4
Disagree	33	28.2
Strongly Disagree	75	64.1
Total	117	100%

I feel that students in class are singled out because of their *religious* beliefs by *other students* .

	Count	%
Strongly Agree	2	1.7
Agree	6	5.1
Disagree	44	37.3
Strongly Disagree	66	55.9
Total	118	100%

I feel that students in class are singled out because of their *political* beliefs by *other students* .

	Count	%
Strongly Agree	3	2.5
Agree	6	5.1
Disagree	48	40.7
Strongly Disagree	61	51.7
Total	118	100%

Student Rights Survey Results (Instructor Version)

Fall 2005

I single out students in class because of their religious beliefs.

	Count	%
Strongly Agree	1	0.8
Disagree	14	11.7
Strongly Disagree	105	87.5
Total	120	100%

I single out students in class because of their political beliefs.

	Count	%
Strongly Agree	1	0.8
Disagree	17	14.2
Strongly Disagree	102	85
Total	120	100%

I let a student's political or religious views impact his/her grade in the class.

	Count	%
Strongly Agree	1	0.8
Agree	1	0.8
Disagree	9	7.4
Strongly Disagree	110	90.9
Total	121	100%

Gender:

	Count	%
Female	53	44.5
Male	66	55.5
Total	119	100%

Age:

	Count	%
25-34	4	3.3
35-54	44	36.7
55 and over	72	60
Total	120	100%

Ethnicity:

	Count	%
African American	5	4.2
Asian	7	5.9
Hispanic	5	4.2
Other	10	8.5
White	91	77.1
Total	118	100%

Student Rights Survey Results (Instructor Version)

Fall 2005

Number of years teaching:

	Count	%
0-4	7	5.9
5-10	19	16.0
11-15	11	9.2
16-20	18	15.1
20 or more	64	53.8
Total	119	100%