



What Version of Western Civilization are Universities Offering Students?

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The study of Western civilization in Australia is in crisis. This has come to light in the last few weeks following the Australian National University's [decision](#) to pull out from the partnership with the [Ramsay Centre for Western Civilisation](#).

University of Sydney historian Dirk Moses raises [an interesting point](#) when he declares that the problem is declining enrolments in the Bachelor of Arts in Australian universities, and that the reason Western civilization is being undermined in this country is because not enough students are choosing to study it.

Professor Moses is absolutely right in this respect. Numbers of students enrolled in the Bachelor of Arts are dwindling as young people are increasingly opting to do commerce or accounting degrees rather than those related to the humanities.

But Western civilization is not being undermined due to a lack of students, but rather because of the particular version of Western civilization that they are being offered in the humanities by such



academics as Professor Moses.

Since the 1960s, there has been a gradual homogenisation of academic life, where humanities subjects have become increasingly monochrome, repetitive and boring. This has come about because academics in this field have, with few exceptions, adopted a cultural theory which has now dominates research and teaching.

The cultural theory in question is Karl Marx's analysis of class. Academic positions have been filled by individuals who have based their entire careers on propagating the theory which sees society as a zero-sum contest for power between the privileged and the oppressed. As a result, the subjects they teach, and the extremely limited range of fields in which they specialise, are almost entirely confined to themes which fit Marx's model.

As such, every subject is approached through the lens of identity politics, where class, race and gender. These left-wing leitmotifs have replaced the essential core subjects which explain the political, intellectual, social and material basis of the history of Western civilization. The concepts that should be transmitted to university students, such as respect for the individual, equality of men and women under the law, the abolition of slavery, freedom of speech and religious toleration which are simply not part of the narrative and are not being taught.

In his [7:30 interview](#) with ANU's Vice Chancellor Brian Schmidt, Stan Grant rightly pointed out both the complete lack of diversity insofar as humanities subjects at ANU are concerned, as well as the fact that Western civilization at the university is being taught from a hostile and adversarial point of view. There might well be 150 courses and 18 years-worth of content about the West, as the Professor Schmidt mentioned in the interview, but these subjects will invariably be approached through the same prism of identity politics.

Like the majority of their counterparts around Australia, undergraduates enrolled in the Bachelor of Arts at ANU are being taught to hold Western civilization responsible for all evils in the world, past, present and future.

Those who are majoring in History are getting a particularly skewed, simplistic version of the world based on Marx's judgment that, "The history of all hitherto existing society is the history of class struggles." You only need to look at [ANU's own description](#) of the type of history course it is offering to undergraduates in 2018. The course, it boasts, is replete with subjects which "trace themes such as empire, terrorism, revolution, war, gender, race, technology and environment." The titles are self-explanatory. Students can take "[Sexuality in Australian History](#)" or "[Human Variations and Racism in Western Culture, c. 1450-1950.](#)" Undergraduates can also spend much of the year studying "[Real Men: Masculinities in Western History.](#)" The stunning complexity of the past is reduced to an analysis of class, race and gender.

It is a similar story at the University of Sydney where Dirk Moses lectures in modern European history, German history, the Holocaust and comparative genocide. A survey of his colleagues' research interests reveals that 20 of the 32 staff have variously identified gender and sexuality, racial thought, women's history and power as their current historical fixations.

It is no wonder that the subject offered to undergraduates at the University of Sydney reflect their preoccupation with identity politics. For example, the themes covered in [“Imperialism, 1815-2000”](#) are the “ideologies of empire and culture, gender, race, the environment, and imperialism and nationalism.” In a subject entitled [“What Do We Want? Protest in Australia,”](#) students will:

“examine struggles over labour rights and working conditions in the 1900s, women’s suffrage, Aboriginal land rights, race relations and the White Australia Policy, homelessness during the Great Depression, freedom of speech during the Cold War, the Vietnam Moratorium and sexual liberation in the 1970s, the environmental movement, refugees and asylum seekers, and LGBT rights today.”

Meanwhile, in [“Civility and Squalor: 18 C. British Isles,”](#) students will not study the Age of Enlightenment but rather how “conspicuous consumption jostled with abject poverty, humanitarian campaigns co-existed with capital punishment, and major treatises on political liberty were published alongside drinking manuals.”

The question, then, is why would you want to enrol in a Bachelor of Arts if all you were going to hear was class, gender and race? This problem was raised in an [interview with Mark Bauerlein](#), Professor of English at Emory University, who remarked:

“the number of kids taking humanities courses and majoring in the humanities is going down. And one reason is identity politics. Because identity politics is a downer. ‘Wait, wait. You’re going to sit and talk about Emerson and how racist he is? I don’t want to take this class! I don’t want to hear so much negativity’. And identity politics is a negative. It’s not a positive formation.”

Students in Australia are not being given a “positive formation.” Instead, they are being taught a narrow, one-dimensional view of the world seen through the prism of class, gender and race, over a curious and inquiring three-dimensional view of the world which opens the mind. They are being led down the path of un-enlightenment and un-education. They are not being offered new approaches or new ways of looking at the world. There is no diversity in what is being offered to them. It is unadventurous and is failing to inspire future generations of Australians.

It is monotony and the sameness which is undermining Western civilization in Australian universities, not the dearth of students.

Rather than offering undergraduates a narrow range of subjects which have become a pastiche of identity politics and which appear time and again, across all disciplines of the humanities, it is time to offer them a different perspective. We need to give young people the credit for wanting to know more than just a Marxian cultural theory of identity politics. Tony Abbott is right. What is wrong with offering them something that is *for* Western civilization rather than *against* it?

At the moment, the only place that young Australians can go to be truly challenged with different



ideas is [Campion College](#). If the programs on offer in Australia were more dynamic, diverse, interesting and challenging, students would return in droves to the humanities departments of the other 34 universities in this country which offer a Bachelor of Arts.

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