

# Diversity and Critical Thinking in Political Science

Frances Widdowson  
Department of Policy Studies, Mount Royal University  
[fwiddowson@mtroyal.ca](mailto:fwiddowson@mtroyal.ca)

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A major focus at the 2012 Annual Conference of the Canadian Political Science Association (CPSA) concerns “diversity” in the discipline.<sup>1</sup> Of particular significance is the linkage between diversity, and teaching and learning. References are made to “teaching diversity” in the discipline, and it is taken for granted that this would be a positive development in political science.

But what is meant by “diversity”, and why should the discipline “go beyond lip service to teaching diversity”, as is asserted in the CPSA’s teaching and learning conference workshop? Often faculty members are encouraged to “respect” and “value” diversity, even when the concept is not understood. The reluctance to define diversity, while at the same time promoting its dissemination in research and teaching, should be a concern for all who attach importance to critical thinking in the discipline of political science.

Exhortations to “value diversity”, in fact, have the potential to impede the honest exchange of viewpoints among faculty and students necessary for the pursuit of truth. How will professors encourage critical thinking in the classroom if the value of diversity must be accepted without question? This problem is exacerbated when it is assumed that any investigation of the validity of the concept is indicative of some underlying bigotry or xenophobia. It is therefore necessary to critically investigate the notion of “teaching diversity”, and to promote open and academically rigorous debate about its potential impact upon the discipline of political science.

## *What is Diversity?*

The American academics William O’Donohue and Richard E. Redding maintain that “in today’s academy, diversity... is the central, unifying ethical and pedagogical imperative. The breadth of its application – in faculty hiring, student admissions, scholarship and financial aid distribution, curricula and course design, residence life programs, and extracurricular programs – is remarkable”.<sup>2</sup> As Peter Wood explains, again in the context of American institutions of higher learning, “if we take college viewbooks and promotional literature as a measure, diversity is often emphasized far more emphatically than even the pursuit of knowledge”.<sup>3</sup> This prominence

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<sup>1</sup> <http://www.cpsa-acsp.ca/pdfs/2012Programme.pdf> [accessed May 2012].

<sup>2</sup> William O’Donohue and Richard E. Redding, “The Psychology of Political Correctness in Higher Education”, in Robert Maranto et al., *The Politically Correct University* (Washington: AEI Press, 2009), p. p. 100.

<sup>3</sup> Peter Wood, “College Conformity 101: Where the Diversity of Ideas Meets the Idea of Diversity”, in Robert Maranto et al., *The Politically Correct University* (Washington: AEI Press, 2009), p. 125.

of diversity also is noticeable in Canadian universities, as can be seen in a number of university mission statements in this country.<sup>4</sup>

Although references to the importance of diversity are common, definitions of the concept are not. Mount Royal University, for example, provides the vague assertion in its mission statement that it “welcomes, supports and celebrates all its communities” since “diversity strengthens us all”.<sup>5</sup> References to diversity also are tacked on to Mount Royal’s Human Rights Policy in a “Code of Personal Conduct”, where it is decreed that the “behaviour of all members of the Mount Royal Community will reflect...respect for diversity”.<sup>6</sup> But diversity is not defined anywhere in these documents. A definition also is also avoided by the university’s “Diversity Plan Development Committee”, which is attempting to develop a “framework for incorporation of diversity...into Mount Royal’s institutional and departmental policies, procedures and practices” because diversity is being “championed by members of [the] campus community”.<sup>7</sup>

Similarly, the Faculty of Arts’ Diversity Committee, which was “formed to assist in the task of bringing in, promoting, and maintaining an atmosphere of diversity to the Faculty of Arts at Mount Royal University”, does not define diversity in its Charter.<sup>8</sup> It refers to “issues of diversity”, and how they “may pertain but are not limited to faculty representation, hiring strategies, student, faculty, and staff concerns, and harmony and tolerance within university life”. It also states that “Mount Royal University is committed to respecting and valuing not only the uniqueness of all of its employees and students, but their diverse differences and backgrounds as well”. This statement, however, raises more questions than it answers since it implies that all differences and backgrounds will be valued,<sup>9</sup> which is certainly not the case. The “differences and backgrounds” of white supremacists, holocaust deniers, misogynists and homophobes, for example, would certainly not be valued because of their inconsistency with other university objectives, such as the promotion of critical thinking and “respect and inclusion”.

The Mount Royal Faculty Association’s Diversity Committee also has attempted to elaborate on the concept, again without elucidating its nature. It maintains that

the concept of diversity encompasses acceptance and respect. It means understanding that each individual is unique, and recognizing our individual differences. It is the

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<sup>4</sup> This is the case of mission statements for York University, Concordia University, University of Winnipeg, University of Regina, and Mount Royal University. Although the University of Toronto, McGill University, Dalhousie University and the University of British Columbia do not have diversity in their stated missions, they all have large equity offices that assert that diversity is a fundamental goal.

<sup>5</sup> <http://www.mtroyal.ca/AboutMountRoyal/OfficesGovernance/BoardofGovernors/InstitutionalVisionMissionMandate/index.htm> [accessed May 2012]

<sup>6</sup> “POL 1702: Human Rights Policy”, Appendix 4, p. 17,

<http://www.mtroyal.ca/wcm/groups/public/documents/pdf/hrpolicy.pdf> [accessed May 2012].

<sup>7</sup> [http://www.mtroyal.ca/CampusServices/CampusResources/DiversityHumanRights/div\\_plan\\_deve\\_comm](http://www.mtroyal.ca/CampusServices/CampusResources/DiversityHumanRights/div_plan_deve_comm) [accessed May 2012]

<sup>8</sup> Faculty of Arts Diversity Committee, “Faculty of Arts Diversity Committee Charter”, May 15, 2011 (file in the author’s possession).

<sup>9</sup> Although the Charter maintains that “those differences and backgrounds include but are not limited to age, race, colour, ethnicity, place of origin, ancestry, gender, sexual orientation, gender identity, marital status, family status, socioeconomic background, source of income, physical ability, mental disability, and religious beliefs”, the use of the words “include but are not limited to” makes the statement open-ended.

exploration of these differences in a safe, positive, and nurturing environment. It is about understanding each other and moving beyond simple tolerance to embracing and celebrating the rich dimensions of diversity contained within each individual.<sup>10</sup>

While this only provides a statement on what diversity does, not what it is, the committee still intends to investigate how “identified barriers” to diversity can be addressed through the collective agreement, tenure and promotion criteria, and hiring practices.<sup>11</sup>

In spite of these evasions of providing a definition, a review of the scholarly literature on the subject enables two types of diversity to be identified – identity diversity and the diversity of ideas. The two are thought to be connected, because it is assumed that identity is a major influence on how one views the world. It also is important to point out that all identities and ideas, contrary to university declarations, are not “valued” and “promoted”. Instead, it is those identities held by groups “who are seen as different from dominant groups” that are being affirmed.<sup>12</sup> The doctrine of diversity teaches “that important differences are the ones connected to a history of social oppression”, and that “the greater the history of collective oppression, the greater the current value to be attached to the difference”. And although other differences might have economic, political and cultural significance, recognizing them is avoided as this is perceived as a “morally awkward insensitivity to the differences that actually matter”.<sup>13</sup>

The promotion of the identities and ideas associated with oppressed groups is claimed to occur so as to achieve two objectives: striving for social justice and improved learning and knowledge acquisition. With respect to social justice, the doctrine of diversity has been influenced by what has been called the “personal identity assumption” and the “discrimination assumption”. It is maintained that “people’s race, ethnicity, gender and sexual orientation are central to their personal identity...and view of the world, and it is important to recognize and celebrate these identities in pedagogy and university programs”. Furthermore, there is the notion that “people suffer discrimination due to their race, ethnicity, or gender, and this discrimination requires remedies (such as diversity training)”.<sup>14</sup>

The “educational benefits assumption” of the diversity doctrine, on the other hand, maintains that “with racial, ethnic, and gender diversity comes a diversity of life experiences, values, and ideas”, and that student exposure to a variety of circumstances enhances academic achievement.<sup>15</sup> Classifying students on the basis of oppressed identities, and incorporating them into the university on this basis, is argued to result in a more vibrant learning environment because “their suffering, even if remote from their actual experience, endows them with a distinct point of view that translates into a contribution to the intellectual diversity of the

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<sup>10</sup>Tanya Samman and Cynthia Gallop, Report for the MRFA Annual General Meeting, 2009, [www.mrfa.net/files/DiversityCommittee\\_MRFA\\_AGM2009\\_report.doc](http://www.mrfa.net/files/DiversityCommittee_MRFA_AGM2009_report.doc) [accessed May 2012]

<sup>11</sup> Diversity Committee, Report for the Mount Royal Faculty Association Annual General Meeting 2011 (submitted by Cynthia Gallop), <http://www.mrfa.net> [accessed May 2012].

<sup>12</sup> Rita Dhamoon, “The Politics of Diversity”, in Janine Brody and Sandra Rein (eds), *Critical Concepts*, Fourth Edition (Toronto: Pearson, 2009), p. 215.

<sup>13</sup> Wood, “College Conformity 101”, pp. 122-123.

<sup>14</sup> O’Donohue and Redding, “The Psychology of Political Correctness in Higher Education”, p. 102.

<sup>15</sup> Ibid.

classroom”.<sup>16</sup> The multiple perspectives brought about by sociopolitical diversity, it is asserted, “stimulates critical thinking and creativity, produces more complex reasoning styles and attitudes, improves understanding and decision-making quality, and facilitates values clarification and moral development”. It is also maintained that “people who are part of socio-politically diverse groups tend to be willing to consider ideas different from their own”.<sup>17</sup>

But is it correct to assume that increasing the proportion of students from subordinated groups will result in a diversity of ideas, and that exposure to these ideas will improve educational achievement? First of all, why are we assuming that people with the same gender, sexual orientation, disability, or ethnicity will think in the same way? Isn't this just an exercise in the kind of stereotyping that diversity initiatives claim to deplore? Secondly, is it correct to assume that ideas have value just because they are held by groups who have been historically oppressed? What about those ideas that have been shown to be demonstrably false? Should these ideas be promoted simply because they “are central to [an oppressed person's] identity... and view of the world”?

In political science, however, the desire to achieve social justice and provide educational benefits is not the only reason for focusing on diversity. Diversity also is a major area of interest because of its relationship to one of the main areas of study in political science – the causes of social conflict and its reconciliation. It is a possibility, therefore, that “teaching diversity” could help political science students to understand an increasingly important source of conflict in society.

### ***“Teaching Diversity” in Political Science?***

The concept of diversity is especially important in political science because it is recognized that countries like Canada are becoming increasingly culturally varied, and this can be a source of conflict in society. Therefore, as Rita Dhamoon points out, the concept of diversity “raises normative questions about how members of a society ought to live together, how far the state should accommodate or limit practices of diverse groups, and how to promote and preserve human rights and equity”. More specifically, the concept of diversity helps political scientists to probe empirical considerations such as “why identities are constructed in particular ways and how these shape societal relations”, “the ways in which citizenship is defined and determined”, and how diversity “sculpts various legal and political claims”. Political scientists also ask normative questions about whether or not diversity can reduce conflict by “address[ing] various kinds of historical injustice”.<sup>18</sup>

According to Dhamoon, there are three approaches in political science that have directly investigated these questions – classical liberalism, liberal multiculturalism, and radical perspectives on diversity. Classical liberalism sees diversity as a source of conflict, and is

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<sup>16</sup> Wood, “College Conformity 101”, pp. 123-124. Wood notes that, in the United States, this assumption emerged out of the opinion of Justice Powell in the case *Regents of the University of California v. Bakke*. In his opinion, Powell maintained that the University of California medical school “might have justified its racial preferences had it thought to emphasize the *educational* benefits of having in its classrooms the diverse *ideas* that Powell assumed would automatically flow from black students *admitted* with lower *qualifications* than other students”.

<sup>17</sup> O’Donohue and Redding, “The Psychology of Political Correctness in Higher Education, pp. 102 and 105.

<sup>18</sup> Dhamoon, “The Politics of Diversity”, pp. 213-215.

suspicious of attempts to recognize group difference. This is because, for classical liberalism, individual rights and freedoms are paramount, and it is believed that the group rights advocated by the diversity doctrine mask oppressive practices<sup>19</sup> and cause fragmentation instead of unity.<sup>20</sup> Classical liberalism, however, has been criticized because “it over-determines this clash between individual and group rights” and

falsely assumes that state institutions are neutral when responding to diverse individuals and groups. The ideal of impartiality assumes that there is one conception of justice and a single, homogeneous culture that provides the standard by which to judge other cultures. Moreover, classical liberalism underestimates the significance of cultural contexts for individuals, especially in terms of providing choices about how to live our lives.<sup>21</sup>

Liberal multiculturalism is a response to some of these perceived deficiencies in classical liberalism’s privileging of individual rights. It maintains that “rather than leading to societal fragmentation, the allocation of recognition and differentiated group rights enables and promotes the lives of individuals and therefore the well-being of society more generally”. Therefore, Canadian institutions should promote diversity because individual freedom requires that the culture in which individuals are situated be nourished. Liberal multiculturalism, however, has been criticized for not having a robust enough conception of diversity. It assumes that the ideal of unity is a universal value, and expects that minority groups must change to fit into the mainstream. Liberal multiculturalism’s promotion of “unity through diversity” is perceived as masking racism since the mainstream benefits dominant, racially privileged, groups, while dismissing racialized minorities as “culturally incompatible”.<sup>22</sup> Critics of liberal multiculturalism maintain that this problem stems from its inability to understand identity and state interaction in terms of power differentials.<sup>23</sup>

Power differentials are the focus of the radical perspectives on diversity. These perspectives have emerged in response to the other two approaches because they provide a critique of liberalism, and analyze “the ways in which historical representations of identity and difference continue to shape ideas about diversity today”.<sup>24</sup> This enables radical perspectives to “[address] historical legacies in ways that the previous two approaches dismiss or underestimate” and examine how dominant and oppressed identities are represented. Radical perspectives “[take] seriously the relations between members of society”, and shun “the primary focus of the other two approaches on how the state should respond to diversity”. This enables radical perspectives to have a “broader picture of various social dynamics” and reconceptualize “subordinated groups

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<sup>19</sup> One of the major theorists who examines this problem in the context of women’s rights is Susan Moller Okin in her article “Is Multiculturalism Bad For Women?”, *Boston Review*, <http://www.bostonreview.net/BR22.5/okin.html> [accessed May 2012]

<sup>20</sup> Brian Barry, *Culture and Equality: An Egalitarian Critique of Multiculturalism* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2001).

<sup>21</sup> Dhamoon, “The Politics of Diversity”, p. 217.

<sup>22</sup> Augie Fleras, “Racializing Culture/Culturalizing Race: Multicultural racism in a multicultural Canada”, in Camille A. Nelson and Charmaine A. Nelson (eds), *Racism, eh?* (Concord: Captus Press, 2004), pp. 430-433.

<sup>23</sup> Dhamoon, “The Politics of Diversity”, pp. 218-219.

<sup>24</sup> *Ibid*, p. 219.

as dynamic political agents who are already involved in practices of resistance and action, rather than simply representing them as victims who need to be accommodated by the state”.<sup>25</sup>

Although comparing, contrasting and evaluating the variety of perspectives examining diversity is important for developing critical thinking in political science, this is not the pedagogical approach of “teaching diversity”. The doctrine of diversity demands that liberal assumptions be rejected and radical perspectives affirmed. This is because, while the study of diversity can be empirical, its overriding concern is normative. The normative aspect – that diversity is a good in itself – tends to drive away those approaches that are critical of identity politics.

### ***Diversity and Critical Thinking in Political Science***

The insistence of the diversity doctrine that groups should be viewed as dominant or oppressed, and ideas must be promoted if they are held by the latter, creates a number of problems for critical thinking in the discipline. While intellectual diversity is perceived as important, this goal is subordinated to the dictate that diversity must be valued. As Peter Wood explains, the doctrine of diversity is paradoxical because the “advocacy of diversity has sped the way to intellectual conformity on campus...because ‘diversity’ is actually an aggressive ideology that stigmatizes and attempts to drive out anyone who does not actively support it”.<sup>26</sup> As a result, a number of postulates are put forward that must be accepted as fact, without any evidence being presented in their support.

The most significant postulate put forward is that groups must be classified in terms of whether they are dominant or subordinate, and the views of the latter must be “recognized” and “respected” to achieve social justice. Those who challenge the ideas of identities that have been historically oppressed are accused of racism, sexism, homophobia, ableism, colonialism, and so forth. There are two problems with this postulate, however; the first is that many members of groups that have been oppressed historically are now economically privileged in relation to others in society. The second is that oppression does not give a person a monopoly on truth. In fact, a history of oppression can be used in universities to “assume the victim’s mantle to gain power and advantage in the polity of the ivory tower”. The diversity doctrine creates a rationale for groups ironically classified as subordinate to “coerce others to remain silent, to refrain from criticizing favored beliefs and practices, or steer clear of research on politically incorrect topics”.<sup>27</sup>

The diversity doctrine also demands that “concepts of culture and ethnicity” be theorized as “reflect[ing] positive tendencies of identification and inclusion”, in contrast to identities based on biological characteristics.<sup>28</sup> As Dhamoon argues, race “has to be understood as a social construction that determines power differences, rather than a natural way to classify groups”.<sup>29</sup> But what if a political scientist is investigating the biological basis of certain kinds of human behaviour, or asks questions about whether some cultural features result in social conflict?

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<sup>25</sup>Ibid, p. 220.

<sup>26</sup> Wood, “College Conformity 101”, p. 131.

<sup>27</sup> O’Donohue and Redding, “The Psychology of Political Correctness in Higher Education” , p. 112.

<sup>28</sup> Dhamoon, “The Politics of Diversity”, p. 216.

<sup>29</sup> Ibid.

Would the doctrine of diversity discourage research that involved such investigations, or prevent conversations probing these questions from proceeding in the classroom?

There are two examples of the problems that the doctrine of diversity poses for critical thinking. The first concerns diversity initiatives at Mount Royal University; the second is particular to Canadian political science, and involves attempts to censor controversial views on aboriginal politics.

With respect to Mount Royal University, the two major diversity initiatives are the Multi-Faith Chaplaincy and Positive Space. The Multi-Faith Chaplaincy perceives religion to be a matter of “wellness” and has a team of chaplains “representing a variety [diversity?] of faith traditions” to help students “explore...adventures and challenges as we travel along our life’s path”.<sup>30</sup> These chaplains substitute themselves for legitimate counseling, encouraging irrational beliefs instead of providing sound psychological guidance.<sup>31</sup> The promotion of religion also exists within the Faculty of Arts’ diversity initiatives, where “religious beliefs” are one of the declared “differences and backgrounds...” that must be “respected” and “valued”.<sup>32</sup>

The Positive Space initiative was formed to “[promote] understanding and respect of sexual orientation and gender diversity”. It is attempting to challenge the marginalization of “lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgendered, two-spirited, inter-sex and queer (LGBTTIQ) individuals” and to create a “campus free of discrimination on the basis of sexual orientation and gender identity”. It also “encourages a widespread and visible commitment to welcoming sexual and gender diversity”.<sup>33</sup>

These two initiatives show the problems with “teaching diversity”. It is one thing to try to prevent discrimination against people on the basis of gender identity or religion; it is another to dictate that these identities must be “valued”, “welcomed”, or even “celebrated” by students or faculty. This directive is particularly troubling with respect to “religious beliefs”, as belief in the supernatural conflicts with the university’s mandate to encourage critical thinking.<sup>34</sup> Students and faculty should be free to openly debate the question “Is Religion Harmful?”,<sup>35</sup> without fear

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<sup>30</sup> <http://www.mtroyal.ca/campuservices/WellnessServices/Multi-FaithChaplaincy/index.htm> [accessed May 2012]

<sup>31</sup> The Chaplaincy, for example, holds sessions on “How does spirituality influence your health and wellness?” (March 26, 2012) - a loaded question that assumes the existence of spirituality. In these sessions, material circumstances such as compassion, quantum mechanics and the placebo effect are attributed to supernatural forces.

<sup>32</sup> Faculty of Arts Diversity Committee, “Faculty of Arts Diversity Committee Charter”.

<sup>33</sup> <http://www.mtroyal.ca/positivespace/> [accessed May 2012].

<sup>34</sup> I have discussed this matter elsewhere, as so will not do so again here. See Frances Widdowson, “Critical Thinking, Secularism and Mount Royal University: Is 100 Years of Progress Under Threat?”, Submission to the Mount Royal Centennial Reader, August 19, 2010, <http://blogs.mtroyal.ca/fwiddowson/files/2010/10/Secularism-Critical-Thinking-and-MRU-Frances-Widdowson.pdf> [accessed May 2012].

<sup>35</sup> A debate on this question was held on March 28, 2012 at Mount Royal University. The question was criticized by a number of Religious Studies professors and associates of the Chaplaincy on the grounds that debates on religion were “unhelpful”, that the question chosen was biased, argumentative and inflammatory, and that the framing of the debate in terms of opposing views “narrows the range of issues that will be brought to the table and risks reifying or legitimizing that polarity in students’ or other less trained observers’ minds”. It was argued that nuanced arguments about religion should be solicited, rather than attempting to facilitate a clash of oppositional viewpoints on the subject.

of being censored by diversiphiles.<sup>36</sup> And what is to be done about religions that oppose homosexuality or gender confusion? Should they too be “celebrated”?

An even more disturbing example of the problems with “teaching diversity” concerns my own experiences putting forward controversial views in Canadian political science. At the 2008 CPSA conference, I gave a presentation entitled “Native Studies and Political Science: The Implications of ‘Decolonizing the Discipline’”, which argued that “indigenous theories and methodologies” were inconsistent with the rigour and objectivity demanded in the discipline.<sup>37</sup> This presentation was vehemently opposed by a number of Canadian political scientists, who argued, without presenting any evidence,<sup>38</sup> that it expressed “overt and blatant racism”.<sup>39</sup> One of the main reasons why these views were opposed was that it was believed that they would negatively impact upon diversity in the discipline of political science. This was shown by a letter written by Kathy Brock, Joyce Green, Kiera Ladner, and Malinda Smith, and submitted to the CPSA Board of Directors. Entitled “Racism, Chilly Climate, Our Responsibility & the Discipline” (see Appendix A),<sup>40</sup> the letter maintained that “how we teach our students and each other to think about past and contemporary Aboriginal-settler relations do matter, particularly in a discipline with few Aboriginal faculty and students”. Brock et al. maintained that they were “concerned that the mere perception that we tolerate or are indifferent to racism and the legitimization of racist scholarship impairs our ability to create and support a respectful teaching and learning environment”. Dissemination of arguments such as mine at CPSA conferences, according to Brock et al., constituted a continuation of a “hostile intellectual environment” that

already [had] led to the CPSA losing some members. Without redress it is likely to lead to an exit from CPSA of the handful of Aboriginal scholars within the discipline. It certainly will send the wrong message to our graduate students whom we have a responsibility to mentor in a respectful environment. We cannot make it easier for those whose work aims to “kill the Indian in the child” than for those who resist such symbolic and psychic violence. We need to acknowledge the heterogeneous impact of chilly climate; the strictures of academic freedom or free speech should not be used to ignore racism and other ways of marking and excluding bodies/scholars from political science community [sic].

Here we can see one of the main problems of “teaching diversity” in political science; the doctrine of diversity trumps the free exchange of ideas. Work that is perceived to be

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<sup>36</sup> This term seems to have been coined by Carol Iannone, “The Unhappy Difference Diversity Makes”, *Academic Questions*, Spring 2003.

<sup>37</sup> <http://www.cpsa-acsp.ca/papers-2008/widdowson.pdf> [accessed May 2012]

<sup>38</sup> Although there are no transcripts of the presentation, the paper and the PowerPoint slides that were used show no evidence of this. The testimony of Andreas Krebs, a person who appears to have no stake in the controversy, also indicates otherwise. Krebs posted his comments on Janet Ajzenstat’s blog “The Idea File”. See Responses to “Harvey Mansfield on Canada”, August 28, 2008, <http://janetajzenstat.wordpress.com/2008/08/28/harvey-mansfield-on-canada/> [accessed May 2012].

<sup>39</sup> Although these minutes were originally available on the Women’s Caucus’ website (<http://www.cpsawomen.ca/lucheon/index.htm>), they were removed in 2009. They continue to be available at the following address - <http://blogs.mtroyal.ca/fwiddowson/files/2009/12/The-Canadian-Political-Science-Association-Women’s-Caucus-Meeting-2008-and-2009.pdf> [accessed May 2012].

<sup>40</sup> <http://blogs.mtroyal.ca/fwiddowson/files/2009/12/Racism-chilly-climate-our-responsibility-and-the-discipline-Brock-et-al.pdf> [accessed May 2012].



“disrespectful” to members of historically oppressed identities must be censored so as to prevent individuals belonging to groups classified as “subordinate” from being confronted with ideas that they might dislike.

### ***The Unhappy Difference Diversity Makes***<sup>41</sup>

If “teaching diversity” poses such serious problems for open and honest inquiry in political science, why is it so widely supported? Why is the CPSA devoting so much time and effort to promoting the concept?

Peter Wood maintains that one of the major reasons for diversity’s appeal is that “diversity is really two quite different ideas”;<sup>42</sup> on the one hand, there is the bright and welcoming idea of diverse individuals harmoniously working together for the common good.<sup>43</sup> The other idea of diversity – the one that is closely associated with “teaching diversity” - has an “angry and aggressive” posture “in which an individual’s true identity is rooted in social division”.<sup>44</sup> As Wood explains, this version of diversity demands deference since the “true diversity novel is a novel about how *my* ancestors, *my* group, and *I* as part of *my* group have suffered unjustly at the hands of a society that has insufficiently appreciated diversity”.<sup>45</sup> Interest groups and individuals demand privileges on the basis that they have ties to identities that have been historically oppressed, and this oppression must be compensated with a plethora of diversity initiatives.

While many political scientists will be inclined to support diversity because they accept the bright and welcoming version, this well intentioned impulse is contrary to critical thinking. Diversity is a fact, not a value judgment. Diversity cannot be a good in and of itself, and individual and group differences must be evaluated according to their social effect. Cooperation and knowledge acquisition – two goals to which diversity initiatives claim to aspire – require commonality, and this cannot be achieved by supporting difference unconditionally. The problem that is ignored by “teaching diversity” is that philosophical differences are frequently incompatible and irreconcilable.

Diversity initiatives also have been successful because they conflate anti-discrimination, equity and identity promotion.<sup>46</sup> While anti-discrimination and equity are laudable goals, because they appeal to the fundamental ideals of freedom and equality, the same is not true for identity promotion. Demands that “difference” must be “recognized” and “valued” discourages students

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<sup>41</sup>This title was first used by Carol Iannone in a very insightful article in *Academic Questions* (Spring 2003).

<sup>42</sup> Wood, “College Conformity 101”, p. 122.

<sup>43</sup> Wood contrasts these two ideas as follows: “to feel pleasure in the actual and surprising wealth of human difference around us gets confused with assent to the deadening contemporary doctrine that each of us is the sum of his race-class-gender social coordinates, and that group grievances flow down through the well-engineered compensatory channels to group entitlements”. Wood, “College Conformity 101”, p. 126.

<sup>44</sup>Ibid, p. 128.

<sup>45</sup> Ibid, pp. 122-123.

<sup>46</sup> This is common in works in political science on diversity. See, for example, Miriam Smith, “Diversity and Canadian Political Development: Presidential Address to the Canadian Political Science Association, Ottawa, May 27, 2009, *Canadian Journal of Political Science*, 42(4), December 2009, where diversity is sometimes mentioned on its own, and sometimes in conjunction with human rights.

from coming to the realization that some identities are oppressive and can even be a *cause* of conflict.

Finally, the diversity doctrine is being promoted in disciplines like political science because of its tendency to link the unchangeable attributes of an identity group with their ideas. “Ethnoscience”, “women’s ways of knowing”, “the epistemology of the closet” and “crip theory”, for example, all maintain that historically oppressed identities think in a certain way. Therefore, to oppose the ideas of some of the members of these groups is to risk being labeled racist, sexist, homophobic or ableist.

Separating these subjective and objective factors will enable political scientists to feel comfortable challenging all dubious ideas, regardless of the identity of the individual or group that initiated them. Respecting the idea that aboriginal peoples were placed in North America by “the Creator” to be custodians of the environment, for example, does not provide educational benefits or aid social justice. In fact, it reinforces the continued marginalization of those aboriginal people who, because of their deprivation, suffer educational deficits.<sup>47</sup> It also encourages people with aboriginal ancestry to see themselves as morally superior, resulting in arrogance, entitlement and social conflict.<sup>48</sup>

All people should be respected, but their ideas must be critically examined. It should be assumed that students are autonomous human beings who can contribute to disciplinary knowledge by using their critical faculties. Exhortations to “teach diversity”, however, negatively impact students by privileging sensitivity over honesty. An antidote to this anti-intellectual agenda is a memorable quote from one of the most significant defenders of freedom of expression in the world today – Salman Rushdie. In an article written in 2005, Rushdie argued the following:

you never personalize, but you have absolutely no respect for people's opinions....People must be protected from discrimination by virtue of their race, but you cannot ring-fence their ideas. The moment you say that any idea system is sacred, whether it's a belief system or a secular ideology, the moment you declare a set of ideas to be immune from criticism...freedom of thought becomes impossible.<sup>49</sup>

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<sup>47</sup> Similar comments can be made with respect to “Black English”, where bad grammar used by poorly educated black Americans is justified by a “perspective that demands finding means to celebrate, not merely tolerate, diversity in our classrooms”. Lisa Delpit, “Language Diversity and Learning”, in Antonia Darder et al. (eds), *The Critical Pedagogy Reader*, Second Edition (New York: Routledge, 2009), pp. 333-335.

<sup>48</sup> This can be seen in the movement for “indigenous sovereignty”, where religious arguments are used to justify the isolation of aboriginal groups from “settlers”. At its worst, these arguments seem to imply that attempts to achieve common political aspirations are futile because of perceived biological differences between aboriginal and non-aboriginal peoples. As the historian Keith Windschuttle points out, “anyone who takes [these beliefs about separate origins] seriously is also committed to the position that the Aborigines did not evolve in Africa along with the rest of us and must therefore belong to a different species. Here we can see not only the disastrous intellectual consequences of this position but also political perspectives that are the opposite of what they claim to be. It is the universalism of...science that recognizes all human beings as the same people with the same origins. In opposition to this, cultural relativism supports the view that each native group is different and unique and that those who think they are biologically distinct are entitled to their belief”. Keith Windschuttle, *The Killing of History: How Literary Critics and Social Theorists are Murdering Our Past* (San Francisco: Encounter Books, 1996), pp. 303-4.

<sup>49</sup> Salman Rushdie, “Democracy is no polite tea party”, *LA Times*, February 7, 2005, <http://www.pen.org/viewmedia.php/prmMID/164> [accessed May 2012].

“Teaching diversity” assumes that identities that have been historically oppressed should be condescended to so as to avoid causing subordinate groups discomfort. But the deferential promotion of cultural attributes is not, even according to one of the founders of identity politics, Charles Taylor, “a genuine expression of respect”; it actually amounts to “unsufferable patronizing”. As Taylor explains, “the supposed beneficiaries of the politics of recognition...know that they want respect, not condescension. Any theory that wipes out the distinction seems at least *prima facie* to be distorting crucial facets of the reality it purports to deal with”.<sup>50</sup> Political scientists who value critical thinking, therefore, should realize the problems inherent in “teaching diversity”, and resist its destructive influence on the discipline.

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<sup>50</sup> Charles Taylor, *Multiculturalism and the Politics of Recognition* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1992), pp. 69-70.

## APPENDIX A

Date: Thu, 3 Jul 2008 13:05:39 -0400  
Reply-To: Women's Caucus - CPSA <WC-CPSA@YORKU.CA>  
Sender: Women's Caucus - CPSA <WC-CPSA@YORKU.CA>  
From: Kathy Brock <Kathy.Brock@QUEENSU.CA>  
Subject: Fwd: Racism, Chilly Climate, Our Responsibility & the Discipline

Colleagues,

We produced the below after much thought and discussion following this year's CPSA and have sent it to Board as one way forward. We thought we'd send to Caucus to facilitate broader dialogue.

Malinda Smith, Kiera L. Ladner, Joyce A. Green, Kathy L. Brock

Date: 12 June 2008  
From: Kathy L Brock, Joyce A. Green, Kiera L. Ladner, and Malinda S. Smith

Colleagues,

Re: Racism, Chilly Climate, Our Responsibility & the Discipline

We produced the below after much thought and discussion following this year's CPSA and have sent it to Board as one way forward. We thought we'd send to Caucus to facilitate broader dialogue.

Re: Racism, Chilly Climate, Our Responsibility & the Discipline

In an historical moment when the Canadian Government has offered an apology to Aboriginal peoples for state-sanctioned policies within educational institutions designed to "kill the Indian in the child", we think this provides an important opportunity to reflect upon how our discipline and scholars impact Aboriginal faculty, students, staff and scholarship. Moreover, how we teach our students and each other to think about past and contemporary Aboriginal-settler relations do matter, particularly in a discipline with few Aboriginal faculty and students.

We note that speaking up and speaking out can be risky, especially for junior and untenured scholars. As relatively secure professors we believe we have a responsibility that does not allow us to remain silent. To this effect, a number of us have been in conversation about how to move this process forward in a way that allows it to be a "teachable" moment, and in a way that positions the CPSA as a learning and self-reflexive organization. What we propose are various interventions that would strengthen the CPSA as a diverse and inclusive community of scholars; one that adheres to a code of conduct that recognizes, respects and is accountable to the heterogeneity of its membership; and that takes seriously issues of racism, sexism, homophobia/heterosexism, dis/ablism or other forms of exclusion, consistent with human rights codes.

## I. Responsibility, Accountability of Critical Scholars

a. As critical scholars we need to recognize and confront racism and other forms of discrimination within our body politic and provide personal and professional support to members who face it. We are concerned that the mere perception that we tolerate or are indifferent to racism and the legitimation of racist scholarship impairs our ability to create and support a respectful teaching and learning environment. We support a systematic documentation of what transpired at the session. We need first-hand accounts of what transpired at the 2008 CPSA session, mindful that different participants may have competing perspectives. Such documentation will ensure an informed letter mapping our concerns about climate. We wonder if other disciplines have faced these kinds of issues and whether we can learn from their experiences.

b. Experiences of a hostile intellectual environment already have led to the CPSA losing some members. Without redress it is likely to lead to an exit from CPSA of the handful of Aboriginal scholars within the discipline. It certainly will send the wrong message to our graduate students whom we have a responsibility to mentor in a respectful environment. We cannot make it easier for those whose work aims to "kill the Indian in the child" than for those who resist such symbolic and psychic violence. We need to acknowledge the heterogeneous impact of chilly climate; the strictures of academic freedom or free speech should not be used to ignore racism and other ways of marking and excluding bodies/scholars from political science community.

c. Any institutional (CPSA), rather than personal response (e.g. by us), requires protocols that are fair, transparent and open to all members. CPSA needs to address racism, racial discrimination and xenophobia by developing a racial harassment protocol (similar to what exists for sexual harassment). Ideally, this protocol should address multiple and intersecting forms of discrimination and exclusions. We do not believe such a protocol should focus solely on individual cases, rather it is important to account for systemic issues as well, and how to reconcile competing principles (e.g. academic freedom and anti-racism/protected human rights).

d. We must also have the difficult conversation about the important principles of academic freedom and the equally important principle of anti-racism. This means thinking through how to handle situations where the two principles seem to conflict. At a minimum, we must be able to name these situations. As racism is always a human rights violation it is to be deplored along with the scholarship or scholarly approaches which suggest racism must be protected by academic freedom. We understand the importance of defining concepts such as racism.

e. On the ideas already in circulation: first, we agree with the call for a collective letter; second, we agree with Laura Janara that this moment presents an opportunity for the CPSA to think through its Constitution to create a diverse/heterogeneous community and develop a Professional Code of Conduct or Ethics as has already been done by related professional associations; and, third, we agree with Bruce Baum that caution needs to be exercised vis-à-vis any suggestion

of censuring a colleague if the sole reason is we find their views distasteful or incompatible with our own.

## II. Ambivalences and Complexities

a. As women scholars, as well as those who are Indigenous or have been racialized or whose views have been on the margins of the discipline, itself, we do not want to endorse a protocol that will impinge upon heterogeneous bodies and views within the discipline. Many of us would not survive under these circumstances.

b. Equitable process: Such views have been expressed within the discipline and at the CPSA before, primarily by some very senior men. This does not make the views more palatable. Rather it raises questions about principle and process. We wonder if our perception is correct: It is easier to mobilize against a junior woman scholar although similar views have been expressed by senior male scholars (and in one case have been awarded). In the case under discussion, we note that if you Google the individual, you will find their work on course syllabi across the country; works published in disciplinary journals; and book published by a University Press. The individual was trained at a major University by leading scholars in the discipline.

c. Paradoxes of Power: At some human rights offices on campuses you will find that many cases filed within Universities are against women and racialized minorities. We are ambivalent about reinforcing unequal relations of power. Junior women have filed complaints against more senior women, and racialized minorities against each other, paradoxically and precisely because it is easier to do so; they hold positions of less power and privilege. The margin critiques the margin and the centre remains undisturbed. This worry does not preclude critique. Rather, it is a call for self-reflexivity about why we defer to senior male scholars who engage in this kind of work but are prepared to make "the" example out of a junior woman. What often goes uncontested is the conduct of senior scholars who are in positions of power and privilege who can choose to acknowledge, avert their eyes, and do nothing to remedy the situation or pursue reconciliation.

## III. Way Forward

What is our objective? Chilly climate, political correctness, and so-called hot button debates of the past have been divisive for critical scholars and our respective departments. Any institutional initiative should try to elevate the debate to truly make it a learning experience, one that does not turn a particular individual into a cause célèbre (and turn us into anti-intellectuals). The results should strengthen our academic credibility.

We believe it is important that Aboriginal scholars can go to the CPSA and not have to experience racism. This also means recognizing that resistance to such experiences may take different forms and, thus, it is up to the CPSA to articulate how it understands scholarly comportment (which too may be resisted). Sometimes cultural

conceptions of politeness and manners can lead to silence in the face of problematic conduct.

We would like to view this moment as a "teachable" moment. We propose several kinds of interventions as a way forward. One involves the CPSA itself. The second entails the various CPSA sections, including the one some of us were involved in creating \*Race, Ethnicity, Indigenous Peoples and Politics.\*

a. We support a collective letter that should be sent to the President and Board for a frank discussion about racism in the discipline and our association. We hope such discussions could extend to sexism, heteronormativity and other forms of exclusion.

b. We also support professional interventions, which are not personalized disputes, critiquing the person rather than the arguments or conduct. We need to have our facts in order so the moment is not reduced to personalities and, thereby, ignore the more fundamental concern with the institutional legitimation of scholarship which contributes to chilly climate, disrespect toward identifiable groups, and can result in pushing that group of people out of the discipline. To this effect, the 2008 panel that prompted this moment needs to be separated from the individual's peer-reviewed book with McGill-Queen's. There are existing mechanisms for dealing with the book among a community of critical scholars: scholarly and philosophical critiques; critical book reviews; ignoring the work, and certainly not buying it, recommending it or including it on one's course syllabi. We caution against any collective decision to identify scholars with the aim of having them engage the work with a predetermined outcome. Such an initiative will be turned back on (backlash) the individuals doing it and seen as unprofessional. If so inclined, scholars already can critique the work if they want to read it, write about it and try to get it published.

c. Currently the CPSA does not have Constitutional articles, a Code of Ethics or Conduct by which we can deem certain conduct outside the bounds of professionalism. Without articulating such a code, policy and process the association (rather than us as a collective) will risk being challenged on due process. This will defeat the point of critical intervention. What we propose, then, is that the Constitution be strengthened to support a diverse and inclusive community of scholars; and that a code of conduct is developed to address racism, sexism, homophobia/heterosexism, dis/ablism consistent with human rights codes.

#### IV. Some Recommendations

We recommend that in 2009 the CPSA sponsor a major plenary and various professional development panels (on responsibility of intellectuals, professional ethics, mentoring, accountability for racism, etc) and publish these reflective pieces in a special issue of the journal. This approach also accepts that all scholars can and do change; however, this is less likely if we black-list a scholar and especially without appearance of due process. In addition to the collective letter, we agree with two kinds of intervention, which would be productive for advancing a broader dialogue within the CPSA. It also will allow us to

indirectly and constructively take up the climate issues that impact departments within our association.

We recommend that the CPSA develops a practice in which it identifies and observes the protocol of Aboriginal peoples in the communities in which the association conducts its meetings. This will help establish a relationship of mutual respect.

a. A Major CPSA \*Plenary on Responsibility Difference and the Discipline\* might be productive, which would allow 4 or 5 primarily \*very senior\* scholars to speak to issues. The weight of such discussion should not be carried solely by Aboriginal scholars. Some names that came up in no particular order included: Rauna Kuokkanen (Native Studies and Political Science, U of T), Taiiaki Alfred, Indigenous Governance, UVic , Janine Brodie (CRC, and fmr chair in political science), Charles Taylor (just coming off Bouchard-Taylor Commission), Professor Emeritus Peter Russell, Professor Jennifer Smith (fmr CPSA Pres), among others. There are many scholars outside the discipline who also can offer important interventions: Sakej Henderson (Saskatchewan Law), Val Napoleon, Makere Stewart-Harawira, Sunera Thobani, Sherene Razack, Darlene Johnson and John Borrows. The session may be Co-Chaired by Joseph Wong and/or Miriam Smith who can intellectually intervened in terms of her own work as well as maintains professional decorum. Such a panel would attract a phenomenal attendance and would generate the kind of constructive professional debate we desire within the CPSA, and would be a mentoring opportunity for graduate students and junior faculty.

b. We support the CPSA pursuing professional development initiatives such as Mentoring: Important to cultivating responsible scholars and scholarship is mentoring because such moments impact graduate students and junior faculty and how they experience the discipline.

c. We believe our new CPSA section to be launched in 2009 -- Race, Ethnicity, Indigenous Peoples and Politics also can be a site where panels take up these important issues as relates to the discipline, heterogeneity and mentoring a heterogeneous community of present and future political science scholars.

We believe we have a responsibility to act. We welcome dialogue and support concrete actions.

In alpha order:

Kathy L. Brock, Joyce A. Green, Kiera L.Ladner, Malinda S. Smith  
Dr. Kathy L. Brock

>School of Policy Studies and  
>Department of Political Studies  
>Queen's University  
>Policy Studies Building, 138 Union Street  
>Kingston ON Canada K7L 3N6  
>P: 613-533-6486  
>



>Dr. Joyce A. Green  
>Associate Professor  
>Department of Political Science  
>University of Regina  
>Regina, Saskatchewan S4S 0A2 Canada  
>Phone: 306 585 4444  
>  
>Dr. Kiera L. Ladner  
>Associate Professor and  
>Canada Research Chair in Indigenous Politics and Governance  
>Department of Political Studies  
>University of Manitoba  
>  
>Dr. Malinda S. Smith.  
>Associate Professor, Political Science  
>10-23 H.M. Tory Building, University of Alberta  
>Edmonton, Alberta T6G 2H4 Canada  
>Telephone: 780.492.5380 / Fax: 780.492.2586  
><http://www.uofaweb.ualberta.ca/polisci/index.cfm>  
>  
>The Ardent Anti-Racism and Decolonization Review  
><http://www.arts.ualberta.ca/~aadri/index.htm>