

Bacon's Rebellion

The Return of Compulsory Chapel: George Mason Will Require Students to Take 'Social Justice' Courses

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It's the "return of compulsory chapel: George Mason University, a Virginia public institution, will require students to take two social justice courses," notes Walter Olson of the Cato Institute. A student taking such courses will have "to demonstrate" "competencies" in "diversity," "equity," and "inclusion." George Mason University is Virginia's largest university.

Last month, George Mason University announced:

Students entering Mason in Fall 2024 or later will be required to take two Mason Core courses that have the Just Societies flag....

Courses with a Just Societies flag must meet both of these outcomes, in addition to other required course outcomes related to the primary Mason Core Exploration category. Upon completing a Just Societies course, students will be able to demonstrate the following two competencies:

1. *a) Define key terms related to justice, equity, diversity, and inclusion as related to this course's field/discipline and
b) Use those terms to engage meaningfully with peers about course issues ...*
2. *Articulate obstacles to justice and equity, and strategies for addressing them, in response to local, national, and/or global issues in the field/discipline*

The National Review says that "the classes no doubt will be grievance-dominated and utopian."

There is a course approval process for faculty wishing to teach these required courses. But as a practical matter, only courses with a left-leaning ideological slant are likely to be approved. "What do you suppose would happen if a GMU professor proposed a course on the theme that the most just society would be one with a minimal government?," asks George Leef of the James G. Martin Center for Academic Renewal.

Why GMU needs these additional social justice courses is unclear. Its course catalog is already full of social justice courses. As Jay Greene of The Heritage Foundation observes, "The term 'social justice' appears 72 times in the course catalog of James Madison University, 59 times for George Mason University, and 53 times for Virginia Commonwealth University — 2.6 to 4.5 times as often as the word 'Constitution.'"

There is lots of grumbling about GMU's new social-justice-course requirement on social media. But can anything be done about it?

Virginia has a Republican governor, but he doesn't run state universities. He does appoint members to their boards of visitors, subject to approval by the state's Democratic legislature. But university governing boards are staggered, so he can't fill them with conservatives all at once. Indeed, given Virginia's Democratic legislature, he might not be able to appoint a truly conservative board. It looks like George Mason University's Board of Visitors is almost evenly split between appointments by the current governor and his Democratic predecessor.

When Governor Youngkin appointed the staunch conservative Bert Ellis to the Board of Visitors of the University of Virginia in 2023, all but two Democrats in the state Senate voted to defeat his nomination, and Ellis was only confirmed because two moderate Democrats who are no longer in the Senate broke ranks with their more progressive colleagues to approve this nomination.

Today, an outspoken conservative like Bert Ellis might not be confirmable, due to progressive gains in the 2023 election, in which Democrats won control of both houses of Virginia's legislature, and moderate Democrats were defeated by progressive Democrats in primary elections.

In Virginia, both houses of the legislature have to approve an appointment to a state university's board of visitors. In 2023, Democrats only controlled the state Senate. Today, they control both houses of the legislature, and either can veto Governor Youngkin's appointments. This means his nominees may have to be less conservative to be approved.

Some other colleges are also requiring ideologically-driven classes. Northern Arizona University now requires students to take four diversity courses to graduate, all rooted in left-wing "critical theory."

At Bates College, students have to take an ideologically-slanted class on "Race, Power, Privilege, and Colonialism." It is designed to peddle the false notion that countries are underdeveloped due to colonialism. In reality, Third World countries that were not colonized are less economically advanced than those that were colonized, as the father of modern Liberia, William Tubman, noted. Tubman, who served as Liberia's president from 1944 to 1971, observed that Liberia was economically poorer than its neighbors because it had not had "the benefits of colonization." Colonization of Third World countries usually made them more agriculturally and economically productive, eventually curbed the practice of slavery, and led to the abolition of barbaric practices like suttee (the burning of widows on their husband's funeral pyre). On the other hand, many people were killed by colonizers in places like the Congo, Namibia, and Tanzania.

Most people in many pre-colonization African societies were slaves. For example, the slave population accounted for two-thirds to three-quarters of the total population of Songhay-Zarma people, who created the Songhai Empire. That empire was the successor of the similarly heavily-enslaved Mali Empire celebrated in progressive high-school textbooks, whose most famous leader, Mansa Musa, went on a pilgrimage to Mecca with an entourage of 12,000 slaves to cater to his every desire.