



Social Justice Education in America

Executive Summary

NATIONAL
ASSOCIATION
of SCHOLARS

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American universities have drifted from the political center for fifty years and more. By now scarcely any conservatives or moderates remain, and most of them are approaching retirement. The radical establishment triumphed on campus a generation ago. What they have created since is an even more disturbing successor to the progressive academy of the 1990s. In the last twenty years, a generation of academics and administrators has emerged that is no longer satisfied with using the forms of traditional scholarship to teach progressive thought. This new generation seeks to transform higher education itself into an engine of progressive political advocacy, subjecting students to courses that are nothing more than practical training in progressive activism. This new generation bases its teaching and research on the ideology of *social justice*.

The concept of *social justice* originated in nineteenth-century Catholic thought, but it has become secular and progressive in twenty-first-century America. Justice traditionally judges freely chosen individual acts, but social justice judges how far the distribution of economic and social benefits among social groups departs from how they “ought” to be distributed. Practically, social justice also justifies the exercise of the state’s coercive power to distribute “fairly” goods that include education, employment, housing, income, health care, leisure, a pleasant environment, political power, property, social recognition, and wealth.

What we may call *radical social justice theory*, which dominates higher education, adds to broader social justice theory the belief that society is divided into social identity groups defined by categories such as class, race, and gender; that any “unfair distribution” of goods among these groups is *oppression*; and that oppression can only—and *must*—be removed by a coalition of “marginalized” identity groups working to radically transform politics, society, and culture to eliminate *privilege*.

A rough, incomplete catalogue of the social justice movement’s political goals includes increased federal and state taxation; increased minimum wage; increased environmental regulation; increased government health care spending and regulation; restrictions on free speech; restrictions on due process protections; maximizing the number of legislative districts that will elect racial minorities; support for the Black Lives Matter movement; mass release of criminals from prison; decriminalizing drugs; ending enforcement of our immigration laws; amnesty for illegal aliens; open borders; race and sex preferences in education and employment; persecution of conscientious objectors to homosexuality; advocacy for “transgender rights”; support for the anti-Israeli Boycott, Divest, and Sanction movement; avowal of a right to abortion; and mob violence to enforce the social justice policy agenda.

Social justice advocates’ emphasis on words such as *justice*, *equity*, *rights*, and *impact* all register social justice’s fundamental goal of acquiring governmental power. Social justice advocates tend to dedicate any activity in which they engage to the effort to achieve the political ends of social justice. Activism is the exemplary means to forward

social justice. This word signifies the collective exertion of influence via social justice nonprofit organizations. *Activism* may take the form of organization-building (staff work, fundraising, membership recruitment), publicity, lobbying, and actions by responsible officials in pursuit of social justice. It may also take the form of “protest”—assembling large numbers of people on the streets to “persuade” responsible officials into executing the preferred policies of social justice advocates. Social justice activism formally eschews violence, but far too many social justice advocates are willing to engage in all “necessary” violence.

Social justice activists in the university are subordinating higher education toward the goal of achieving social justice. Social justice education takes the entire set of social justice beliefs as the predicate for education, in every discipline from accounting to zoology. Social justice education rejects the idea that classes should aim at teaching a subject matter for its own sake, or seek to foster students’ ability to think, judge, and write as independent goods. Social justice education instead aims directly at creating effective social justice activists, ideally engaged during class in such activism. Social justice education transforms the very definitions of academic disciplines—first to permit the substitution of social justice activism for intellectual endeavor, and then to require it.

Social justice educators define education as *the practice of social justice activism*. *Experiential learning*, which is vocational training in social justice activism, is the heart of social justice education. Other prominent elements include *action learning*, *action research*, *action science*, *advocacy-oriented research*, *classroom action research*, *collaborative inquiry*, *community research*, *critical action research*, *emancipatory research*, *participatory action research*, and *social justice research*.

Most colleges and universities today operate under tight fiscal constraints, which lead to dwindling numbers of tenure-track faculty jobs and allow expanding numbers of administrative jobs. These constraints shape the means by which social justice educators extend their influence. They focus on four broad strategic initiatives: 1) the alteration of university and department mission statements; 2) the seizure of internal graduation requirements; 3) the capture of disciplines or creation of pseudo-disciplines; and 4) the capture of the university administration.

The first strategic initiative, alteration of mission statements, provides a wedge by which to pursue the latter three. Social justice educators pursue these other three initiatives with the practical goal to reserve as many jobs as possible for social justice advocates, particularly in higher education, K-12 education, and social work. The capture of the university administration, above all, gives social justice advocates a career track and the expectation of lifetime employment. Social justice advocates want to reserve for themselves *all* of the ca. 1.5 million American jobs for postsecondary teachers and administrators.

Social justice advocates’ first goal is to incorporate *social justice*, or related words, into college and university mission statements. This social justice vocabulary sometimes serves as hollow words to fob off social justice advocates. Yet it also works as a

promissory note for more detailed changes to impose social justice education. A social justice mission statement generally indicates that a higher education institute no longer really aims to educate students. It really aims at social justice activism, and it will only provide education that doesn't conflict with social justice ideology. The ideal of social justice does not complement the ideal of education. The ideal of social justice *replaces* the ideal of education.

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Social justice advocates' most important curricular tactic within higher education is to insert one or more social justice requirements into the general education requirements. They give these requirements different names, including Diversity, Experiential Learning, Sustainability, Global Studies, and, forthrightly, Social Justice. This tactic forces all college students to take at least one social justice course, and thereby maximizes the effect of social justice propaganda. The common practice of double counting a social justice requirement so that it also satisfies another requirement powerfully reinforces the effect of social justice requirements. These requirements also effectively reserve a large number of teaching jobs and tenure-track lines for social justice educators. No one but a social justice advocate, after all, is really qualified to teach a course in social justice advocacy. The direct financial burden of social justice general education requirements is at least \$10 billion a year nationwide, and rising fast.

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Social justice advocates also have taken over or created a substantial portion of the academic departments in our universities. The departments most likely to advertise their commitment to social justice are those most central to the social justice educators' ideological vision, political goals, and ambition for employment. The heaviest concentrations of social justice departments are the Identity Group Studies, Gender Studies, Peace Studies, and Sustainability Studies pseudo-disciplines; the career track departments of Education, Social Work, and Criminology; and the departments dedicated to activism such as Civic Engagement, Leadership, and Social Justice. Social justice takes over departments by incorporating social justice into their mission statements, inserting departmental requirements for social justice education, and dedicating as many elective courses as possible to social justice education. When

social justice educators control departments entirely, they rapidly shift the definition of that discipline so that it requires social justice education. These changes make it practically impossible to study that discipline without embracing social justice.

Social justice departments denominate their vocational training in activism as *experiential learning*—or related terms such as *civic engagement*, *community engagement*, *fieldwork*, *internships*, *practica*, and *service-learning*. *Service-learning* usually refers to relatively unpoliticized experiential learning, which habituates students to the basic forms and techniques of activism, while *civic engagement* usually refers to more avowedly political social justice activism. The term *experiential learning* disguises what is essentially vocational training in progressive activism by pretending that it is no different from an internship with an engineering firm. Many supposedly academic social justice courses also focus on readying students for experiential learning courses—and for a further career in social justice activism. Experiential learning courses are what particularly distinguishes social justice education from its progressive forebears. Experiential learning courses, dedicated outright to progressive activism, drop all pretense that teachers and students are engaged in the search for knowledge. *Experiential learning* is both a camouflaging euphemism and a marker of social justice education.

While social justice education has made great strides among university professors, its dizziest success has been its takeover of the university administration. Higher education administration is now even more liberal than the professoriate. The training of higher education administrators, especially within the labyrinth of “co-curricular” bureaucracies, increasingly makes commitment to social justice an explicit or an implicit requirement. These administrators insert themselves into all aspects of student life, both outside and inside the classroom. Overwhelmingly, they exercise their power to promote social justice. Social justice administrators catechize students in social justice propaganda; select social justice advocates as outside speakers; funnel students to off-campus social justice organizations that benefit from free student labor; and provide jobs and money for social justice cadres among the student body. The formation of social justice bureaucracies also serves as an administrative stepping stone to the creation of social justice departments. Perhaps most importantly, university administration provides a career for students specializing in social justice advocacy.

Higher education’s administrative bloat has facilitated the growth of social justice bureaucracies—among them, Offices of Diversity and Multicultural Affairs; Title IX coordinators; Offices of First-Year Experience and Community Engagement; Offices of Student Life and Residential Life; Offices of Service-Learning and Civic Engagement; Offices of Equity and Inclusion; Offices of Sustainability and Social Justice; and miscellaneous institutes and centers. These bureaucracies focus on *co-curricular activities*, which consist largely of social justice activities such as Intersectionality Workshops and Social Justice Weekend Retreats. Social justice administrators aim to subordinate the curriculum to the co-curriculum, as the practical way to subordinate the pursuit of truth to social justice advocacy.

Social justice administrators have set up institutions that make social justice advocacy inescapable. Offices of Residential Life have turned large amounts of housing into venues for social justice advocacy. The most intensive advocacy proceeds through *Living Learning Communities*—housing units dedicated to themes such as Global Citizenship, Gender and Social Justice, and Social Justice Action. Bias Incident Response Teams, which rely on voluntary informers (“active bystanders”) throughout campus, dedicate themselves to gathering reports of “bias incidents”—which, practically speaking, can include any word or action that offends social justice advocates. Bias Incident Response Teams act as enforcers of social justice orthodoxy on campus. Break and Study Abroad programs have also been largely taken over by social justice advocates, and are now frequently exercises in service-learning and social justice advocacy. Offices of Residential Life subject students to social justice education even while they are eating and sleeping, Bias Incident Response Teams monitor every private social interaction, and Study Abroad and Break programs subject students to social justice education even while they are away from campus.

The social justice bureaucracies sponsor a large number of social justice events on campus. These events are the actual substance of social justice education on campus. The varieties of social justice events include activism programs, commencements, community mobilizations, conferences, dialogues, festivities, films, fine arts performances, hunger banquets,¹ lectures, projects, residence hall programs, resource fairs, retreats, roundtables, student education, student training, workshops, and youth activities. The subjects of these events have included activism, ally education, Black Lives Matter, civic engagement, community organizing, diversity, food, gender identity, health care, illegal aliens, implicit bias, leadership, LGBTQ, mental illness, policing, power, prisons, racial identity, social justice, and sustainability.

The social justice bureaucracies also engage in large amounts of student training. This student training identifies, catechizes, and provides work experience for the next generation of social justice advocates. This student training is especially useful for training the next generation of social justice educators. By scholarships, the provision of student jobs, and linking social justice cadres to careers, social justice educators ensure that social justice education is linked to social justice jobs for graduates. The Diversity Peer Educator of today is the Dean of Diversity of tomorrow. Today’s Social Justice Scholar will become tomorrow’s Dean of Student Affairs. Student training provides the cadres for social justice activism.

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1 “During a Hunger Banquet, each group experiences the wealth or poverty of their representative group. The very rich dine on a meal that most North Americans would consider standard: meat, vegetables, side dishes and clean water. The middle class receives a small bowl of rice and beans, typical of the meal that middle-class households often consume around the world. The poorest group sits on the floor, receiving only a communal pot of rice that leaves them all hungry.” Host a Hunger Banquet, Food for the Hungry, <https://www.fh.org/2014/03/06/host-a-hunger-banquet/>.

Social justice education, in addition, prepares students for positions in private industry (human resources, diversity associates), progressive nonprofit organizations, progressive political campaigns, progressive officials' offices, government bureaucracies, K-12 education, social work, court personnel, and the professoriate. University administration and faculty directly provide a massive source of employment for social justice advocates: the total number of social justice advocates employed in higher education must be well above 100,000.² Soon *all* of higher education may be reserved for social justice advocates, since university job advertisements have begun explicitly to require affirmations of diversity and social justice. These ideological loyalty oaths will effectively reserve higher education employment to the 8% of Americans who are progressive activists.³

Since social justice educators have to publish a minimum amount of peer-reviewed academic research to receive tenure, they have also created an apparatus of journal and book publication as *cargo-cult scholarship*—an imitation of the form of academic research, largely consisting of after-action reports on social justice activism on campus. The core of this cargo-cult apparatus is a network of hundreds of academic journals dedicated to social justice scholarship, whose editors and peer reviewers are also social justice educators. Their specializations mirror the range of social justice education—ethnic studies and gender studies, education journals and sustainability journals, journals devoted to critical studies, dialogue, diversity, equity, experiential education, inclusive education, intercultural communication, multicultural education, peace, service-learning, social inclusion—and, of course, social justice.

The bureaucracy of accreditation plays an important role in forwarding social justice advocacy at America's colleges and universities. Some accreditation bureaucracies require *diversity*, or other keywords that can be used to justify the creation of social justice requirements, programs, or assessments. Where accreditation bureaucracies do not explicitly require social justice advocacy, college bureaucrats often justify social justice advocacy as a way to fulfill other accreditation requirements. In both cases, social justice advocates within colleges and universities twist accreditation to advance their own agenda.

Education reformers must disrupt higher education's ability to provide stable careers for social justice advocates. These reforms cannot be aimed piecemeal at individual campuses. Social justice education is a national initiative, which has taken over entire disciplines and professions. Social justice's capture of higher education must be opposed on a similarly national scale. Above all, the opposition must aim at cutting off the national sources of funding for social justice education. A priority should be to deny public tax dollars for social justice education.

² This is an informal estimate. No detailed study exists; one is sorely needed.

³ Stephen Hawkins, et al., *Hidden Tribes: A Study of America's Polarized Landscape* (More in Common, 2018), p. 6, https://static1.squarespace.com/static/5a70a7c3010027736a22740f/t/5bbcea6b7817f7bf7342b718/1539107467397/hidden_tribes_report-2.pdf.

Nine general reforms would severely disrupt social justice education:

1. eliminate experiential learning courses;
2. remove social justice education from undergraduate general education requirements;
3. remove social justice education from introductory college courses;
4. remove social justice requirements from departments that provide employment credentials;
5. remove social justice positions from higher education administration;
6. restrict the power of social justice advocates in higher education administration;
7. eliminate the “co-curriculum”;
8. remove social justice requirements from higher education job advertisements;
and
9. remove social justice criteria from accreditation.

Most importantly of all, college students must cease cooperating with social justice requirements. A mass, coordinated campaign of civil disobedience, in which students simply stop taking social justice classes, attending social justice events, or obeying social justice administrators, would deal a body-blow to social justice education.

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