

OPINION

Left is parading social science as history

By Bella D'abrera

The Australian

17 October 2017

The history and substance of Western civilisation that are essential to understanding our present and shaping our future are not being taught to history undergraduates.

Instead, the focus of a typical undergraduate history degree has shifted from the study of significant events and subjects to a view of the past seen through the lens of the identity politics of race, gender and sexuality.

The Institute of Public Affairs' audit of the 746 history subjects offered in 35 universities - *The Rise of Identity Politics: An Audit of History Teaching at Australian Universities* - has shown that the movement that sought to infuse the humanities curriculum across the Anglosphere with identity politics has come to fruition.

Identity politics encapsulates two main ideas.

The first is that an individual's political position (and many other things, such as moral worth) is defined by their identity. The second is the way in which a person is to be treated is decided according to that person's identity.

The suspicion that history as an academic discipline has been successfully hijacked by left-wing cultural theorists is no longer hearsay or speculation. The audit reveals that at least 244 of the 746 history subjects belong to the social sciences. History departments are replete with subjects that examine the study of human society and social relationships, not historical events or periods. Take for example *Gendered Worlds: An Introduction to Women's and Gender Studies* at the University of NSW; *Masculinity, Nostalgia and Change* offered at the University of Western Australia; Monash University's *Nationality, Ethnicity and Conflict*; and the University of New England's *Being Bad: Sinners, Crooks, Deviants and Psychos*.

None of these subjects belongs in a history department.

In comparison, of the 746 subjects on offer, just 241 explain the material and technological progress and belief systems of Western civilisation.

That there are fewer subjects devoted to what can be termed as the essential core topics of Western civilisation than social science topics is evidence the humanities have been captured by the left-wing exponents of identity politics.

Alternatively, where the essential core is taught, the audit has shows there is a large disparity between the topics covered. For example, the most widely taught topics are ancient Greece (58), World War I (53), World War II (53) and Nazism/fascism/communism (48). The Middle Ages (38), the Renaissance (30) and any subject of British history (17) are comparatively under-represented.

This means the option to learn about significant historical events and periods that took place in the intervening millennia is unavailable to most history undergraduates in Australia.

Those students graduating with an undergraduate degree in history will emerge from university with a distorted ultra-thematic view of the world, past and present, in which we are divided into oppressors and the oppressed.

Indeed, there is a direct correlation between the proliferation of trigger warnings, cultural appropriation and safe spaces (which are rapidly becoming the norm on campus) with the identity politics being propounded in the classroom.

The more that students are taught to view history in terms of identity politics, which by its nature is divisive, the more it will manifest on campuses across Australia, creating inequality where there is none.

The modern professoriate has in this case repudiated the great humanist tradition on which most of Western civilisation and the Western university has been built.

That tradition was founded on an all-consuming desire to engage with the genius of the past.

A university should be a place where ideas are exchanged and reason is practised. By shutting down freedom of speech, silencing debate or censoring course materials, the universities are encouraging a highly censorious, highly politically correct culture that is harmful to the mission of education which justifies the universities' existence. History is now treated as a science, where class has been replaced by the identity politics of gender, race and sexuality.

Bella d'Abbrera is director of the Foundations of Western Civilisation program at the Institute of Public Affairs.