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COMMENTARY

The Battle to Win Hearts and Minds Has to Begin at Home

■ Pro-American sentiment appears to be unwelcome at top U.S. campuses.

By NORAH VINCENT, Norah Vincent is a New York writer and a senior fellow at the Foundation for the Defense of Democracies, a think tank set up after Sept. 11 to study terrorism. Web site: www.norahvincent.com.

Reeducating Saudis and Pakistanis about the United States will be key in winning the war on terror, but it is beginning to seem like we will have to begin the propaganda wars at home.

Since the Sept. 11 attacks, conservatives and libertarians have been trying to counterbalance academia's left-lurching views on terrorism and the Middle East. They have recently redoubled their efforts.

Last week, for example, the American Council of Trustees and Alumni, co-founded by Lynne Cheney, wife of the vice president, released a report titled "Restoring America's Legacy," which asserted that of the top 50 colleges rated by U.S. News & World Report magazine, not one makes American history a requirement for graduation.

In his Sept. 17 Rose Garden speech on education, President Bush cited that report's findings as he announced new initiatives on history education.

Meanwhile, as American studies are in decline, Middle East studies programs and courses are flourishing, and Middle East Forum Director Daniel Pipes has reported they are largely tainted by "disinformation, incitement and ignorance," and the usual blame-America-first rhetoric, almost all of which goes unchallenged.

In response to this trend, Pipes has just launched Campus Watch, (www.campus-watch.org) a Web-based project intended to "reverse the damage" by keeping dossiers on offending professors and institutions and posting relevant news articles.

In a recent article, Pipes recounts how at Colorado College, Palestinian spokeswoman Hanan Ashrawi spoke Sept. 12 above quiet, nonviolent protests.

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Partners

In contrast, at Concordia University in Montreal, a riot by anti-Israel groups prevented former Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu from speaking. A similarly unsavory incident took place at San Francisco State University last spring, when an anti-Israel group displayed a poster on campus accusing Prime Minister Ariel Sharon of ritualistically killing Palestinian children. There is the problem in a nutshell. And it is widespread.

The Foundation for Individual Rights in Education, a libertarian legal action group, has been involved for the last year in some of the most controversial cases surrounding American-Muslim relations on campus.

The group's Web site (www.thefire.org) contains detailed information on a startling list of civil liberties abuses including, most egregiously, the suspension last fall of Kenneth Hearlson, a professor at Orange Coast College who, classroom audiotapes later showed, was falsely accused of calling four Muslim students terrorists. (Hearlson has been reinstated.)

Though the group has fought for the civil rights of both pro- and anti-American professors and students, its case list shows it has had many more of the former to defend.

On another front, conservative activist David Horowitz has launched his Campaign to Take Back Our Campuses. Horowitz's FrontPageMagazine.com is featuring, among other articles, the text of Lawrence H. Summers' controversial recent speech in which the Harvard president condemned a militant and one-sided pro-Arab climate in academe.

Anti-Israel views are increasingly finding support in progressive intellectual communities, Summers said, adding that such views have been "anti-Semitic in their effect if not their intent."

Most people agree that campus life should foster debate, not indoctrinate young people with one-sided views.

Those who are honest also concede that academe is dominated by the left. A recent survey by the Luntz Research Cos. for the Center for the Study of Popular Culture confirmed this: Only 3% of Ivy League professors reported they were Republicans, and only 6% considered themselves to be even somewhat conservative.

Obviously, the balance is out of whack, and this is potentially disastrous.

If we stand by and let young people learn to condemn their nation while eschewing study of its best traditions, and if we do nothing while they are encouraged to silence rather than confront opposing views, then we are well on our way to creating a network of madrasas far more harmful to our way of life than those in the Arab world.

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