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Republican professors are scant at Bowdoin

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One thing is for sure in the 2004 presidential election-the Bush team should not count on too many votes from Bowdoin College faculty.

Recently the conservative Center for Popular Culture did a study on the political bias in the administrations and faculties of 32 elite colleges and universities and found that Bowdoin has 23 Democrats to every one Republican.

Republican professor Christian Potholm of the Government department said, "I believe there are only four Republican professors on campus, and I personally think it needs the attention of the administration and the Faculty Affairs Committee. Ideological diversity is as important as any other dimension...It puts a lot of pressure on the four Republicans to appear at forums and take positions they don't necessarily agree with simply so students can hear both sides of many contemporary issues."

The researchers looked at professors in the Economics, English, History, Philosophy, Political Science, and Sociology departments, "choosing these because they teach courses focusing on issues affecting the society at large."

The researchers then looked at the voter registration lists of the counties or states where the colleges and universities were located in an attempt to identify and match individual names. The Center realized that this approach affected their data, because at many institutions professors were not registered to vote or did not reside in the state or county that they were studying, but a certain trend became fairly evident.

The Center also points out that although the terms Republican and Democrat

may seem irrelevant in an academic background, researching for "conservatives" and "liberals" would have been difficult because everyone has different definitions of what these terms mean. The Center does not feel that there should be quotas when hiring teachers, but they suggest that there may be an unbalanced, politically-shaped selection in the faculty recruitment process.

The encompassing ratio for all 32 institutions was ten Democrats to one Republican, even though national registration figures show the number of Democrats are very close to the number of Republicans. The 32 schools chosen include the whole Ivy League, premier liberal arts colleges, the best technical universities like MIT, highly competitive public universities like the University of California at Berkeley, and other elite private universities such as Stanford. The Center could not positively identify one single Republican at Williams, Oberlin, MIT, or Haverford.

The Center hypothesized that this trend can be linked to "a comprehensive study by the Foundation for Individual Rights in Education [that] found that over 90 percent of well known college campuses have speech codes intended to ban and punish politically incorrect, almost always conservative speech."

These speech codes, according to the Center, have caused the hiring process for faculty to encourage left-leaning administrators over others. A possible remedy for this situation according to the Center is for institutions to adopt an Academic Bill of Rights that stresses the importance of intellectual diversity to the goal of academic freedom.

As far as recruiting teachers to Bowdoin, Dean of Academic Affairs Craig McEwen said, "We do not ask job candidates about their political affiliations or views, so they play no role in our selection of candidates. It would be inappropriate to have them play a role in my view. Our focus is on the capabilities of potential faculty as teachers and as scholars [or] artists. In the hiring process, we make every effort to insure that we have a wide pool of candidates drawn from all over the world."

Many conservative students on campus seem to find the lack of Republican representation in the faculty problematic. "I find it troubling that Bowdoin, an institution that prides itself on intellectual diversity and the free exchange of ideas, fails to employ a 'critical mass' of conservative faculty that would create such an atmosphere inside and outside the classroom. Instead of the faculty providing intellectual diversity, student groups such as the College Republicans have taken the lead in ensuring that conservative students have a voice on campus," said Daniel Schuberth '06, Chairman of the Maine State College Republican Organization and Maine Youth Coordinator for Bush-Cheney '04.

According to a Harvard study, "defying conventional wisdom, 31 percent [of college students] identify themselves as Republicans, 27 percent Democrats."

Schubert cited this study and said, "I think it is about time that Bowdoin recognizes that the ideological makeup of the faculty must resemble the ideological makeup of the student body."

Christopher Gaskill '04, President of the College Democrats seems to agree, "If the numbers are accurate, I certainly think it is a problem that there is such a bias within the faculty. School should be about letting students know all sides of issues and informing them on how to make their own choice. A Democrat to Republican ratio of 23 to one really interferes with such a process...if the numbers are true, there would need to be changes made."

The Center reported, "The impression that conservative values and ideas aren't welcome on campus is driven home daily to students until it becomes second nature. Professors generally do not grade politically, but a large enough percentage do that students-and not just conservative students-will take the prudent course of concealing what they actually think in order to protect their academic standing. This is obviously at odds with the educational mission of the university, but academic authorities have done little to address the abuse."

Professor Potholm said, "The most troubling thing of all is that these departments are making no effort to provide a more balanced departmental perspective."

Professor Daniel Levine of the History department disagreed. He said, "I think it'd be unethical to consider a person's political point of view when recruiting faculty. If someone's talking about history it doesn't matter. The changing perspectives in European history are not going to change based on a teacher's political affiliation."

In regards to Potholm's statement that Republican professors feel pressured to appear at forums, Levine said, "Republican professors can do whatever they want. They shouldn't feel pressured to do anything."

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