Accuracy in academia strives for balance

DON FEDER | On college campuses throughout the country any ideology is fine as long as it's liberal or farther to the left

REED Irvine tends to bring out the beast in liberals. The editor of the Washington Post once called him a "miserable, carping retromingent." (As this is a family newspaper, I can't tell you what the last invective means. Suffice it to say, you won't find the expression in a Mother's Day card.)

For the past 16 years, Irvine has waged unremitting guerrilla warfare on media bias, through his organization Accuracy In Media. Not content with incurring the great displeasure of media moguls, Irvine has another sacred cow in his sights — higher education.

Years of fighting slanted reporting led Irvine to the conclusion that the genesis of the problem lies with the education journalists and other opinion makers are getting. Liberal-left indoctrination in the classroom has produced a generation of collectivist leaders.

From this realization came the impetus for Irvine's new group, Accuracy in Academia. The organization proposes to use student volunteers to monitor classroom discussion in disciplines such as political science, history and economics. The monitors will report instances of bias to AIA, which then will request equal time for opposing views. If this isn't forthcoming, they'll publicize the bias among students, alumni and the general public.

The proposal has elicited the usual reasoned response from academic alarmists, to wit: "intellectual goon squads" (Thomas Mann, executive director, American Political Science Association), "frightening ... irresponsible" (Ernst Benjamin, general secretary, American Association of University Professors) "McCarthyism of the '80s" (Bertell Ollman, professor of government at New York University) and "a brain tumor on the American educational scene" (Frank Vandiver, president, Texas A&M).

Poppycock! AIA is not advocating censorship. It will not seek to have anyone removed from a faculty position or gagged. All it's asking is balance.

The academics fear not censorship but exposure. They'd rather the public didn't know that there's more brainwashing in the average liberal arts classroom than in a Maoist re-education camp.

The radical students of the '60s are the professors of the '80s. (An estimated 10,000 college instructors are self-proclaimed Marxists.) Many use their tenured positions to propagandize students. Their incredibly one-sided lectures are reinforced by equally loaded reading lists. If opposing perspectives are mentioned at all, it's only to ridicule them.

Administrators are every bit as sectarian. Except for the occasional token conservative, campus speakers, whose honoraria are paid by the university, run the gamut from liberal to communist.

The left has other privileges as well. Most colleges boast various special interest departments (black studies, women's studies) which are hotbeds of radicalism, operating on the premise that capitalism is responsible for all social ills. Gay student associations and other groups attacking the Judeo-Christian ethic enjoy university funding, along with anti-business lobbies like Nader's Public Interest Research Groups.

For the left, college is a gold mine; for the right, it's the shaft. Consider administration efforts to sabotage campus conservative publications. Universities, which subsidize left-wing journalism via the official student newspaper, will go to great lengths to attack privately-funded conservative journals, attempting to prevent distribution on campus and block the publication from using the university's name.

This is hardly a recent phenomenon. In the early '50s, William F. Buckley Jr. chronicled liberal hegemony at his alma mater in "God and Man at Yale." John Le Boutillier discussed the ideological significance of the color crimson in "Harvard Hates America" (1978) while Benjamin Hart documented the persecution of conservatives at Dartmouth in "Poison Ivy" (1984).

Between Buckley's protest at Yale and Hart's stand at Dartmouth, I experienced the heart of darkest liberaldom at Boston University. Assigned reading for my political science courses included the works of Marx, Lenin, Che Guevara, SDS-founder Tom Hayden, Malcolm X, socialist Michael Harrington, Marxist luminary Herbert Marcuse, and liberal historian Arthur Schlesinger Jr. In four years of undergraduate education, I was assigned not a single book by a conservative, libertarian or free marketeer.

Academic freedom (fraudom?), as currently practiced, means professors are free to intimidate and indoctrinate their students. Administrators are free to subsidize radical ideologies and sponsor speakers who primarily reflect one point of view.

It does not mean that conservative students are free to publish their journals, bring speakers to campus with university support or even challenge the left bias enumerated above.

In short, academic freedom is a one-way street; the traffic moves only to the left. Accuracy In Academia seeks to permit intellectual discourse to flow in both directions.