

A Time to Read, A Time to Reconsider:

“Radical” Foreign and Political Changes to Universities

Are universities choosing books and authors based on their political beliefs?

Yes, university professors can choose textbooks and authors partly because of their intellectual, ideological, or political perspectives. However, textbook selection can also be influenced by academic relevance, departmental requirements, cost, availability, and other practical considerations.

There are several distinct ways this can happen:

- **Academic relevance:** A professor selects an author because the book fits the course's subject, methodology, or learning objectives.
- **Intellectual tradition:** Professors may prefer authors associated with particular schools of thought, including **Marxist**, conservative, liberal, feminist, libertarian, religious, or other intellectual traditions.
- **Personal scholarly preference:** Professors frequently assign books by authors whose research they know or whose work they consider useful to the subject being taught.
- **Departmental or institutional influence:** Departments, curriculum committees, accreditation requirements, or program directors can influence textbook selection.
- **Ideological selection:** A professor may deliberately choose material that supports, examines, or challenges a particular political or social framework. This can be valuable for intellectual debate, but it can also raise questions about viewpoint diversity when competing perspectives are systematically excluded.
- **Publisher and textbook availability:** Cost, licensing, editions, accessibility, and availability can matter as much as the author's political beliefs.

For Consideration

When examining the selection of a university textbook, several questions can be asked:

1. **Who selected the textbook?**
2. **Did the professor personally select it, or was it selected by the program or department?**
3. **What is the author's academic background and what affiliations do they have?**
4. **What ideological or political perspectives, if any, appear in the book?**
5. **What alternative textbooks are commonly used for the same course?**

6. **Does the university use the same textbook across different sections of the course?**
7. **Has the professor published a syllabus or explanation for the textbook selection?**

These questions can help distinguish an ordinary academic selection from a deliberate ideological choice.

How University Articles Are Written

University articles can come from several different processes.

1. **A professor writes an article independently** based on their research.
2. **Several researchers collaborate** and are listed as coauthors.
3. **Graduate students and professors collaborate** on a research project.
4. **Research teams** at universities produce papers with many authors.
5. **Students write papers** that may later be published in student journals or other publications.
6. **Universities commission articles or reports** for particular programs or research centers.
7. **Academic journals publish submitted research** following editorial review and, for research journals, generally some form of peer review.

Universities and the Study of Marxism and Communism

Universities in the United States and abroad offer courses examining Marxism, communism, socialism, and related political theories.

For example, the **University of California, Santa Cruz** offers a course titled “**Black Marxism.**”

The university's course catalog describes the course as part of its “History of Consciousness” curriculum.

Source: University of California, Santa Cruz course catalog.

Princeton University offers “**Global Marxisms,**” examining Marxist thought in an international context.

Source: Princeton University, Department of History.

The University of Pennsylvania also offers courses concerning Russian communism and the history of communist political systems through its Russian and East European Studies curriculum.

The University of Edinburgh offers “**The Marxist Imagination in Europe**,” examining Marxist and post-Marxist thought and subjects including communism, capitalism, class, imperialism, gender, race, and the environment.

The University of York offers “**Communisms**,” examining the development and implementation of communist ideas, including subjects such as Stalinism, authoritarianism, propaganda, famine, everyday life, and the decline of communist governments.

Nanjing University has a **Center for Studies of Marxist Social Theory** devoted to research concerning classical Marxist theory, Marxist theories of social development in modern **China**, and contemporary Marxist social critique.

My Own Perspective as a Student

As someone who has taken a feminism course at university many years ago, I have a positive review of the experience. I remember having some debate within the aviation domain because aviation was once a predominantly male-dominated field. A lot has changed over the course of the last two decades.

While I still feel that feminism courses can offer great perspective, I also feel that men should be able to offer their own perspectives on male forms of suppression within our society and how those experiences have manifested over time. The same principle can apply to other political, social, and historical subjects.

I have not yet taken a communism course. The positive side of teaching courses on communism is that the information can be used for good purposes: intellectual debate, historical understanding, critical thinking, and understanding the full complexity of how communism has been used historically as a political system and, as an instrument of war and state power.

I see why these topics can be valuable subjects at universities. Universities should offer a safe classroom environment in which students can learn about difficult subjects, including political systems. At the same time, I feel that universities have taken the “left political arena” too far during this era, and it can feel distasteful when political culture begins to dominate the culture of the classroom. The culture of politics should have boundaries separating it from the culture of education.

This is difficult to explain because the boundaries surrounding the myriad political debates we face are assuredly complicated. Simplifying the classroom so that students can focus on learning rather than extreme political conflict could make students feel safer and less as though they constantly have to defend themselves, adopt a political opinion, or participate in political disputes.

I no longer feel that many environments, including classrooms, are necessarily “safe spaces” for every student because of coerced or forced political pressures. While many professors are expected to approach their subjects academically and without inappropriate bias, it can

sometimes feel as though we have entered into a “sphere” of left politics on campus, and within this “newly normalized” sphere the classroom exists.

Regardless of political affiliation, American students deserve an education that allows them to develop their own unique and special voices without being hindered, suppressed, or drowned out by a sea of global voices. American students should be able to encounter ideas from around the world while still having the opportunity to understand, preserve, question, and contribute to their own American cultural traditions.