

Is the Jig Up for Elite Higher Education?

By Victor Davis Hanson

Over the last three decades, elite American universities have engaged in economic, political, social, and cultural practices that were often unethical, illegal—and suicidal.

They did so with impunity.



Apparently, confident administrators assumed that the brand of Harvard, Yale, Princeton, Stanford, and other elite universities was so precious to the nation's elite movers and shakers that they could always do almost anything they wished.

By the 1970s, non-profit universities had dropped pretenses that they were apolitical and non-partisan.

Instead, they customarily violated the corpus of iconic civil rights legislation by weighing race, gender, and sexual orientation in biased admissions, hiring, and promotions.

Graduation ceremonies became overtly racially and ethnically segregated. The same was true for dorms and "theme houses."

So-called "safe spaces," in the spirit of the Jim Crow South,

reserved areas of campus solely for particular races.

Affluent foreign students often openly protested on behalf of designated terrorist groups like Hamas.

First-Amendment-protected free speech all but vanished on elite campuses. Any guest speaker who dared to critique abortion on demand, Middle East orthodoxy, biological males dominating women's sports, or diversity/equity/inclusion dogmas was likely to be shouted down, or on occasion roughed up.

University administrators either ignored the violence done to the Bill of Rights or quietly approved when their rowdy students were turned loose on supposed conservatives.

But in their hubris, the universities began a series of blunders that may now end them as they once were.

They began gouging government agencies such as the National Institutes of Health and the National Science Foundation by grabbing anywhere from 30 to 60 percent of individual campus grants as "overhead."

Yet they usually charged most private foundation grants a far more modest 15 percent surcharge—as if a lax government did not object to overcharging.

They pushed for a vast expansion of the student loan program, whose portfolio of federally guaranteed loans reached \$1.7 trillion. But once the federal government guaranteed student loans against default, universities began jacking up their fees and tuition well above the annual rate of inflation.

Elite universities did not grasp that the more they began warping their curricula with diversity/equity/inclusion gut courses, radical green agendas, and postmodern race and gender theories, the less time they had to offer students their once gold-standard general education curricula of Western Civ,

history, literature, philosophy, math, and science.

Soon employers started to notice that the new therapeutic courses were also married to race and sex-based admissions.

The SAT and ACT were, for a time, dropped. So were comparative rankings of high school grade point averages.

Soon, once iconic degrees were no longer any guarantee of the ability to write and speak well, think analytically, or compute competently.

Employers often began to prefer graduates from those state schools where DEI was muted, admissions were competitive, and teaching remained rigorous and non-ideological.

Finally, after October 7, 2023, growing anti-Semitism on campuses became unapologetic, overt, and violent.

Thousands of Middle Eastern guest students brazenly cheered on Hamas terrorists.

The campus Marxist orthodoxy that Jews and Israel were “victimizing white people” and Palestinians were noble “non-white victims” ensured that Jewish students were chased and physically attacked on campuses.

A disgusted public watched invertebrate administrators either greenlight the anti-Semitic violence or ludicrously deny it.

So, there was bound to be a public reckoning. And now it has arrived.

Congress will soon pass legislation that will tax the annual multimillion-dollar income from multibillion-dollar endowments at somewhere between 15 and 20 percent.

There will be no more “overhead” or “surcharges” on government campus grants allowed larger than 15 percent.

Those two reforms alone could cost some of the richest

campuses nearly a half billion dollars a year in lost income.

Racially offensive DEI programs will disqualify schools from federal support.

Foreign student guests who break U.S. laws or violate university rules will have their visas yanked and be shown the door to go home.

Campuses will have to abide by the First, Fourth, Fifth, and Sixth Amendments of the Bill of Rights or forgo federal funds.

All these remedies enjoy broad public support.

For the first time in memory, a majority of Americans disapprove of current higher education. Only ten percent of Americans believe an Ivy League degree translates into becoming a better American worker.

In a nation of declining fertility, smaller numbers of youths choosing college, and a federal government \$36 trillion in debt, universities have very little leverage.

They can return to the original mission of offering rigorous, meritocratic, and disinterested education, guarantee constitutional protections for all on campus, and slash their vast administrative bloat.

Or if not, they are free to continue as they are, ensuring only further mediocrity, public dislike—and eventual irrelevancy.

First published in [American Greatness](#)