Advice To College Students: Don't Major In English

by Phyllis Schlafly October 3, 2007

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The bad news is that Shakespeare has disappeared from required courses in English departments at more than three-fourths of the top 25 U.S. universities, but the good news is that only 1.6 percent of America's 19 million undergraduates major in English (according to Department of Education figures). When I visit college campuses, students for years have been telling me that the English departments are the most radicalized of all departments, more so than sociology, psychology, anthropology, or even women's studies.

That's why it was no surprise that Cho Seung-Hui, the murderer of 32 students and teachers at Virginia Tech, was an English major.

In the decades before "progressive" education became the vogue, English majors were required to study Shakespeare, the preeminent author of English literature. The premise was that students should be introduced to the best that has been thought and said.

What happened? To borrow words from Hamlet: "Though this be madness, yet there is method in it." Universities deliberately replaced courses in the great authors of English literature with what professors openly call "fresh concerns," "under-represented cultures," and "ethnic or non-Western literature."

When the classics are assigned, they are victims of the academic fad called deconstructionism. That means: pay no mind to what the author wrote or meant; deconstruct him and construct your own interpretation, as in a Vanderbilt University course called "Shakespearean Sexuality," or "Chaucer: Gender and Genre" at Hamilton College.

The facts about what universities are teaching English majors were exposed this year by the American Council of Trustees and Alumni (ACTA). English majors are offered a potpourri of worthless courses.

Some English department courses are really sociology or politics. Examples are "Gender and Sociopolitical Activism in 20th Century Feminist Utopias" at Macalester College; "Of Nags, Bitches and Shrews: Women and Animals in Western Literature" at Dartmouth College; and "African and Diasporic Ecological Literature" at Bates College.

Many undergraduate courses focus on extremely specialized subjects of interest only to the professor who is trying to "publish or perish," but of virtually no value to students. Examples are: "Beast Culture: Animals, Identity, and Western Literature" at the University of Pennsylvania; and "Food and Literature" at Swarthmore College.

Some English departments offer courses in pop culture. Examples are: "It's Only Rock and Roll" at the University of California at San Diego; "Animals, Cannibals, Vegetables" at Emory University; "Cool Theory" at Duke University; and "The Cult of Celebrity: Icons in Performance, Garbo to Madonna" at the University of Pennsylvania.

Of course, English professors now love to teach about sex. Examples are: "Shakesqueer" at American University; "Queer Studies" at Bates College; "Promiscuity and the Novel" at Columbia University; and "Sexing the Past" at Georgetown University.

Some English-department courses really belong in a Weirdo department. Examples are: "Creepy Kids in Fiction and Film" at Duke University, which focuses on "weirdoes, creeps, freaks, and geeks of the truly evil variety"; "Bodies of the Middle Ages: Embodiment, Incarnation, Practice" at Cornell University; "The Conceptual Black Body in Twentieth-Century and Contemporary Visual Culture" at Mount Holyoke College; and "Folklore and the Body" at Oberlin College.

Replacing the classics with authors of children's literature is now common. Assigned readings for college students include Dr. Seuss, J.K. Rowling, The Wizard of Oz, and Snow White.

Twenty years ago, University of Chicago Professor Allan Bloom achieved best-seller lists and fame with his book "The Closing of the American Mind." He dated the change in academic curricula from the 1960s when universities began to abandon the classic works of literature and instead adopt multicultural readings written by untalented, unimportant women and minorities.

Bloom's book showed how the Western canon of what educated Americans should know (from Socrates to Shakespeare) was replaced with relativism and the goals of opposing racism, sexism and elitism. Current works promoting multiculturalism written by women and minorities replaced the classics of Western civilization written by the DWEMs (Dead White European Males).

Leftwing academics (often called tenured radicals) eagerly spread the message, and students at Stanford in 1988 chanted "Hey hey, ho ho, Western civ has got to go." The classicists were cowed into silence, and it's now clear that the multiculturalists won the canon wars.

Shakespeare, Chaucer and Milton have been replaced by living authors who toe the line of multicultural political correctness, i.e., view everything through the lens of race, gender and class based on the assumption that America is a discriminatory

and unjust racist and patriarchal society. The only good news is that students seldom read books any more and use Cliffs Notes for books they may be assigned.

ACTA says "a degree in English without Shakespeare is like an M.D. without a course in anatomy. It is tantamount to fraud." College students: don't waste your scarce college dollars on a major in English.