

**The Still Divided Academy: How Competing Visions of Power, Politics, and Diversity Complicate the Mission of Higher Education**, by Stanley Rothman, April Kelly-Woessner, and Matthew Woessner. Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield, 2011, 296 pp., \$39.95 hardbound.

### Academe's House Divided

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The book under review, *The Still Divided Academy*, has a complicated past. Not only does the book hark back to *The Divided Academy*, the 1975 work by Everett Ladd and Seymour Martin Lipset,<sup>1</sup> but Ladd and Lipset collaborated on the investigation that is the basis for this 2011 book. That alone gives

<sup>1</sup>Everett Carll, Ladd, Jr., and Seymour Martin Lipset, *The Divided Academy: Professors and Politics*, a Carnegie Commission sponsored study (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1975).

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*The Still Divided Academy* a special place in the literature.

The investigation, conducted through telephone questionnaire in 1999, was a large-scale survey of faculty, administrators, and students. The size of the sample (4000 respondents, 1600 of them students) and the very high response rates (53 percent for students, 72 percent for faculty, and 70 percent for administrators) ensure the study a lasting place. Also important is that the investigators know the rank of the respondent's institution, making important comparisons by rank possible. The 1999 study is known as NAASS, for North American Academic Survey Study.

The NAASS project suffered from a series of setbacks: Ladd passed away in 1999; Lipset's health was failing in the years before his death in 2006; the chief originator carrying the project forward and the book's first author, Stanley Rothman, also faced prolonged health problems. In 2007, Rothman recruited April Kelly-Woessner and Matthew Woessner, the book's two other authors. We are sad that Rothman passed away earlier this year, but happy in the knowledge that he saw the project through to its consummation.

Between 2002 and 2005 some results appeared in articles Rothman coauthored with, variously, Lipset, Neil Nevitte, and S. Robert Lichter. A 2005 article in *The Forum*, reporting ideological imbalance among faculty and publication-based evidence of ideological discrimination, was one of several conspicuous articles around that time criticizing the professoriate for being heavy on “liberals” and very light on conservatives and classical liberals/libertarians.<sup>2</sup>

According to a 2008 *Chronicle of Higher Education* article, the inheritors of NAASS, both associate professors in Pennsylvania, are a mixed couple: April Kelly-Woessner, a Democrat who never thought she could marry a conservative, and Matthew Woessner, a lifelong Republican and Fox News fan.<sup>3</sup> The couple actively work on academic ideology, apart from the Rothman project, and in 2011 punctuated the publication of *The Still Divided Academy* with an op-ed in the *Washington Post*, “Five Myths about Liberal Academia,” one supposed myth being: “Conservative

academics are ostracized on campus.”<sup>4</sup> The Woessners usually write together in a voice that is respectful to all sides, drawing from the insights of the establishment/Left, as well as from conservatives and classical liberals. Given *The Still Divided Academy*’s roots in Ladd and Lipset and the ideological complexities of Lipset and Rothman, the NAASS project has fitting successors in the Woessners.

The place of the book is also complex in that it takes up a variety of topics, each related to questions in the NAASS; not only on professorial ideology, but also on perspectives on the role and mission of the university, perceptions of power and control within the university (or university governance), attitudes about campus diversity and affirmative action, and perceptions of academic freedom and people’s willingness to discuss viewpoints.

Another important feature of the NAASS study is its firm basis for comparing professors and administrators. The authors of *The Still Divided Academy* note that most administrators are former professors, and indeed the results reflect the commonality: “We find

<sup>2</sup>Stanley Rothman, S. Robert Lichter, and Neil Nevitte, “Politics and Professional Advancement among College Faculty,” *The Forum* 3, no. 1 (2005), article 2, <http://www.cwu.edu/~manweller/m/academic%20bias.pdf>.

<sup>3</sup>Robin Wilson, “Conservatives Just Aren’t into Academe, Study Finds,” *Chronicle of Higher Education*, February 22, 2008, F22.

<sup>4</sup>Matthew Woessner, April Kelly-Woessner, and Stanley Rothman, “Five Myths about Liberal Academia,” *Washington Post*, February 25, 2011, <http://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-dyn/content/article/2011/02/25/AR2011022503169.html>.

little evidence that administrators serve to moderate the views of the faculty. In terms of party affiliation, our survey reveals no significant difference....On the social policy issues, administrators echo the views of the faculty.”

The survey was also given to students, so there are various comparisons to draw. On the statement, “The less government regulation of business the better,” 53 percent of the students, while only 36 percent of the faculty, agreed (strongly or somewhat). Identification as Republican was 26 percent among students, 11 percent among faculty, and 12 percent among administrators.

The authors had to make a choice about whether to focus on discussing the 1999 findings, as opposed to supplementing those findings with those of studies done since 1999, and they decided to take the former course, in the reasonable assumption that these things change slowly. Moreover, the information is valuable in considering trends. The book should certainly be on the shelf of anyone with an abiding interest in any of the important higher education questions it addresses.

Because the book is based on 1999 snapshots, it does not have longitudinal data about, say, how an

individual student changes through time. However, the student data includes year-in-school, and the data set is large enough to pick up some statistically significant differences between the cohorts. For example, more-senior students, relative to less-senior students, are slightly more inclined to agree that “Homosexuality is as acceptable a lifestyle as heterosexuality” and slightly less inclined to agree that “The government should work to reduce the income gap between rich and poor” and “The government should work to ensure that everyone has a job.”

The book, then, addresses a wide variety of higher education issues, and considers different groups (faculty, administrators, and students), which allows for a variety of comparisons to be made. Here I highlight a few specifics on campus ideology, but there are findings on many other higher education issues.

NAASS contained a question asking the respondent to place himself on a ten-point scale, “Left to Right,” but that question was asked only of those who had answered “Yes” to the preceding question: “When it comes to political matters, do you ever think of yourself in terms of Left and Right?” As it happens, only 64 percent of the respondents moved on to the

Left-Right self-placement question, limiting the usefulness of that question. The problems seem to have led the authors of *The Still Divided Academy* to omit these two questions entirely. (The matter, including a related admission about a problem in the 2005 article in *The Forum*, is explained only in Rothman and Lichter's chapter in *The Politically Correct University*).<sup>5</sup> As one who dislikes the Left-Right and, even more, the liberal-conservative framework, I am keenly interested in the fact that 36 percent of respondents said "No" to "When it comes to political matters, do you ever think of yourself in terms of Left and Right?" I regret that the authors do not treat the matter in the book.

Thus the authors work often with the hardy and transparent variable of party identification. The breakdown is done by broad field—humanities, social science, etc.—and not, alas, by departments. In the humanities, the ratio of those identifying themselves as Democrat to those identifying as Republican in response to the NAASS survey is 12 to 1, in the social sciences 6.5 to 1. The ratios go up slightly as the age of the professor

goes down, so unless there is some tendency, on balance, for Democrats to turn Republican, the ratios will be even higher in the future.

There are also many identifying as "Independent," about 28 percent, but other research shows that most of such respondents vote Democratic. Also, the authors use general population surveys to compare Republican professors to Republicans at large, which show that the former much more often agree that the government should work to reduce the income gap between rich and poor.

The Republican professors are also somewhat more often pro-choice and accepting of homosexuality than Republicans at large. Still, only 25 percent of Republican professors agree, strongly or somewhat, that homosexuality is as acceptable a lifestyle as heterosexuality.

Another finding is that the faculty Democrat-to-Republican ratios rise as we go up the academic pyramid. Although the authors say the effect is "relatively modest," I think the magnitude is actually quite significant (an economist like me sees a large loss in utility in a few less in the number of Republicans when they are so scarce).

Since we know that the top-ranked universities have vastly disproportionate influence, this result is important. I wish that

<sup>5</sup>Stanley Rothman and S. Robert Lichter, "The Vanishing Conservative—Is There a Glass Ceiling?" In *The Politically Correct University: Problems, Scope, and Reforms*, ed. Robert Maranto, Richard E. Redding, and Fredrick Hess (Washington, DC: AEI Press, 2009), 65.

*The Still Divided Academy* provided a breakdown combining Democrat-to-Republican, fields of study, and rank. The authors report that six months following the release of the book the full data will be provided at the Roper Center database at the University of Connecticut.

I was struck by the results on “More environmental protection is needed, even if it raises prices or costs jobs.” Among humanities professors, 95 percent agreed (strongly or somewhat) with this statement, as did 91 percent of social science professors. These percentages alone tell us so much. With agreement rates that high, we get a sense of what most of the “independents” and “others” on the party question must be like, as well as what many campus Republicans must be like.

As for “The less government regulation of business the better,” 23 percent of the humanities professors and 26 percent of social science professors agreed with it. These results are interesting, but perhaps hard to interpret because of the lack of specificity. Also, as usual, women proved to be more often Democratic and interventionist in their responses.

The NAASS findings that are most striking, and most challenging to classical liberal and conservative critics, concern the question about

unfair treatment based on political views: “just over 2 percent of [faculty] respondents believe that they have been treated unfairly as a result of political beliefs,” and that belief is no more common among Republicans than among Democrats. Also, only 7 percent of Republican faculty respondents report a problem (either fairly serious or very serious) of discrimination against those with “right-wing political views,” and similarly mild findings pertain to self-censorship.

These findings need to be taken seriously by those—like me—who suspect pervasive biases against classical liberals and conservatives. *The Still Divided Academy* does not attempt to integrate the findings of other studies, but on the subject of discrimination there are, in fact, several that cut the other way. With respect to perceived discrimination, for example, Bruce L.R. Smith, Jeremy D. Mayer, and A. Lee Fritschler found “very conservative” professors five times more likely to think a preference for hiring and promoting “liberal” professors existed at their institution than “very liberal” professors thought such preference existed for “conservative” professors (although the “very conservative” were no more likely than the “very liberal” to perceive discrimination against

themselves).<sup>6</sup> In addition, sociologist George Yancey asked scholars whether or not a variety of characteristics would tell against a candidate in hiring and found comparatively negative attitudes toward fundamentalists, evangelicals, and Mormons, among others, with humanities and social science scholars about as favorable toward communists as toward Republicans.<sup>7</sup> I also alert the reader to the fact that my own 2003 study of six scholarly associations found that Republican-voting scholars were considerably more likely to have landed outside of academia.<sup>8</sup>

Still, the findings of Rothman et al., as well as the findings of Smith et al., beyond the cherry-picked ones just reported, prompt me to wonder why my own intuitions and impressions about “liberal” Democratic bias are not better borne out by survey evidence. Several thoughts occur to me. One is simply that the liberal-conservative

framework lacks power, for a number of reasons. A second has to do with choosing and surviving the academic gauntlet so as to be in the position to respond to a survey addressed to professors. Another suspicion concerns human psychology: perhaps the non-Left individual, settled into his academic habitus, simply will not believe that he dwells in a deeply flawed or biased setting. To believe clear-mindedly that this is deeply flawed or biased would entail a permanent mindset of embattlement or cynicism. The data of Smith et al., show stronger impressions among “very conservative” professors of discrimination occurring campus-wide than occurring within “your department.”

*The Still Divided Academy* contains many other valuable findings. The conception of the project circa 1998 was an important step toward a renewed attention to higher education issues, and the results have played a critical role in discussions of the politics of the professoriate, their influence on students, and so on. Gratitude is due to the NAASS’s originators and to the Woessners to seeing the project through.

*Editor’s Note:* A version of this review, amplified with page references to *The Still Divided Academy*, is available on [www.nas.org](http://www.nas.org).

<sup>6</sup>Bruce L.R. Smith, Jeremy D. Mayer, and A. Lee Fritschler, *Closed Minds? Politics and Ideology in American Universities* (Washington, DC: Brookings Institution Press, 2008), 85–89.

<sup>7</sup>George A. Yancey, *Compromising Scholarship: Political and Religious Bias in American Higher Education* (Waco, TX: Baylor University Press, 2011), 123.

<sup>8</sup>Daniel B. Klein and Charlotta Stern, “Professors and Their Politics: The Policy Views of Social Scientists,” *Critical Review* 17, nos. 3–4 (2005): 257–303, [http://www.criticalreview.com/2004/pdfs/klein\\_stern.pdf](http://www.criticalreview.com/2004/pdfs/klein_stern.pdf). For the results on Republicans more often landing outside academia, see 273–75.