

# The Reason Why Universities Don't Give Their Students Challenging Texts

In a recent article for [\*The Times Higher Education\*](#), a variety of university professors from Great Britain and Australia note a common theme in today's students: an inability to read anything of length or depth.

Take, for example, the following quotes:

*"Our undergraduates – and postgraduate students as well – seem mainly not to be avid readers ... recommending whole books would be rather daunting..." – Jo Brewis, University of Leicester*

*"Incoming undergraduates have had their attention habits fashioned in a totally different world than that of those who are teaching them. ... They are perhaps less used to concentrating for long periods of time and working through the nuances of an argument developed over the course of many pages." – Tamson Pietsch, University of Sydney*

*"I recently had a student suggest an alternative book for a module I am teaching which they found easier to engage with. It was a good book, but it was not really academic enough and I am still unsure if that matters or whether I should be recommending more readable books. There is currently a disjuncture between the types of reading we want students to engage with and the types students feel able or willing to do." – Jenny Pickerill, University of Sheffield*

Many students today pride themselves on being knowledgeable, critical thinkers, quick to point out bias or racial and

economic inequities. But while quick on the draw when it comes to issues like these, will their knowledge be shown to be superficial if not grounded in the deep and essential texts which undergird the thinking of Western Civilization?

Alexander Hamilton once said:

*“Men give me some credit for genius. All the genius I have lies in this: When I have a subject in hand, I study it profoundly. Day and night it is before me. I explore it in all its bearings. My mind becomes pervaded with it. Then the effort which I make, the people are pleased to call the fruit of genius. It is the fruit of labor and thought.”*

By avoiding difficult texts in our colleges and universities, have we tossed out the opportunities to create many real “geniuses”?

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