

Professor: My Students Can't Handle Opposing Political Views Anymore

As a college teacher, I try to listen to all points of view, and I want students to feel they can speak up in class to express their own thoughts, and to challenge anything I say in class. I tell them, "Don't believe anything I tell you. This is college and you should be thinking for yourselves. If what I say doesn't seem right to you, speak up and I will strive to give you a respectful hearing."

Last week, early in the semester, a student abruptly left my classroom. I didn't think too much about it. (This happens more often than you would think. Often, students will go to the restroom and come back in a few minutes later.) Later, a colleague in the hall who saw the student leaving told me the student was swearing, was visibly agitated, grouching about the politically liberal views of college professors. [While evidence supports this](#), this is the first time to my knowledge that someone has included me in that group.

What caused this student to categorize me as a liberal professor? The topic we were discussing was the federal budget. I mentioned that it was balanced when Bill Clinton left office, and the deficit has grown ever-larger through the Bush, Obama, and Trump administrations. I also mentioned that tariff revenue was around 5 percent of total federal tax revenues, and that tariffs were mainly employed as trade barriers rather than as a revenue source, citing President Trump's tariffs as an example. And, I mentioned [President Trump's request to Congress for funds to build the border wall](#) between the United States and Mexico. When he was campaigning, Trump said the Mexicans would pay for the wall.

I'll admit that last one about the wall was a bit of a poke at the president, but the growing budget deficits and the tariffs seem like important budgetary issues, and President Trump's part in them seem reasonable to discuss, because the Republican Party historically has supported balanced budgets and free trade.

I'm not the first one to observe that politics seems to be increasingly polarized these days, and it seems clear to me that the student who abruptly left my classroom characterized me as a liberal professor because of my comments about the president's policies. Except for the wall comment (was I going too far there?), I didn't even view them as critical, but just statements of fact. Deficits have been rising throughout the Bush, Obama, and Trump administrations, and President Trump was enacting tariffs as trade barriers. Those are facts. Am I blind to my own liberalism?

Look at the Supreme Court appointment processes for Neil Gorsuch and Brett Kavanaugh. Seems to me those appointments would have been pretty smooth sailing some years ago; now they have become partisan issues. And in my own state of Florida, the primary winners who will face off in the race for governor in November were the most extreme candidates: Trump supporter Ron deSantis, and Bernie Sanders-endorsed Andrew Gillum. We Floridians will not have a middle-of-the-road governor.

With polarization has come intolerance: people [abandon their friends and family](#) when they seem to have the [wrong political views](#). And, I had a student storming out of my classroom, angry at liberal college professors, because I questioned President Trump's policies. I'm not confessing to being a liberal—not yet, anyway—but at least one of my students has spotted some leftist tendencies in me.

When my class meets again, I don't plan to moderate my "liberal" views on budget deficits, trade policy, and immigration, but will try to encourage my students to speak up

rather than storm out if they question something I've said.

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