



CASES AGAINST COLLEGE

America's most prestigious schools have faced so many lawsuits and investigations recently that higher-ed law may soon be its own practice area. Thank goodness for those billion-dollar endowments.
By Elizabeth Cantrell

MAY 2, 2014

The Department of Education releases a list of 55 colleges—including Dartmouth, Harvard, and Princeton—that are under investigation for their handling of sexual assault complaints. By June 2017 the list includes 240 schools.

JULY 15, 2015

A UC San Diego student wins his suit alleging that he was not awarded a fair trial in a sexual misconduct case. At the time, more than 40 accused students across the country had filed lawsuits against their colleges.

DECEMBER 6, 2016

A female Stanford University student sues, alleging that Stanford violated Title IX when it failed to protect her from a "known sexual predator on campus."

AUGUST 2, 2017

A group called Students for Fair Admissions sues Harvard for discriminating against Asian-Americans and giving preferences to other racial minorities.

SEPTEMBER 7, 2017

Education Secretary Betsy DeVos calls for an overhaul of how colleges investigate sexual assault, saying Obama-era guidelines violate accused students' rights.

NOVEMBER 21, 2017

On the heels of the student group lawsuit, the Justice Department begins investigating Harvard's admissions policies.

DECEMBER 15, 2017

The congressional tax bill places a 1.4 percent excise tax on endowment earnings at certain schools. MIT,

Stanford, Dartmouth, Yale, and Princeton are among them.

JANUARY 25, 2018

The Justice Department announces it will support two conservative groups that sued UC Berkeley last year claiming that campus policies illegally restricted them from bringing in speakers like Ann Coulter.

APRIL 5, 2018

In a letter to the dean, 51 students in Columbia's visual arts MFA program demand a tuition refund for the 2018 school year, claiming that facilities are crumbling, star faculty members are absent, and tuition is rising.

APRIL 9, 2018

The Justice Department announces it will investigate whether colleges have violated antitrust laws by sharing information about early-decision applicants.

APRIL 24, 2018

Hearings begin in a lawsuit brought against George Mason University by Transparent GMU, a student-led group, to disclose how donations from the Charles Koch Foundation were spent—and whether the tens of millions of dollars came with strings attached.

APRIL 26, 2018

In response to a complaint from a doctoral student at USC, the Federal Office of Civil Rights opens an investigation into Yale for discrimination—against men. The student alleges that the university violates Title IX by offering single-gender programs and scholarships exclusively for women.

cross-disciplinary methods of academic analysis. Politics entered the classroom as well.

"Many professors think their work is as much about social justice and advocacy as teaching," says Samuel Abrams, who just taught a popular "Presidential Power" class at Sarah Lawrence. "But I created that class because of student ignorance about what a president can and can't do." Unlike professors who bristle when told by department heads to come up with catchier names for classes, Abrams, 38,

obliges with enthusiasm. "College is a marketplace for ideas, so you have to be entrepreneurial with your courses," he says. "And in a world of digital domination, you have to be innovative to get attention." Also, given the popularity of so many quick-hit knowledge videos, including TED Talks and Ed X, showmanship sells.

Sometimes the sell is ridiculous. For instance, an online course offered by Harvard, "Power and Responsibility: Doing Philosophy with Superheroes," has a promotional video with cartoon graphics in which a lecturer in ethics and public policy strips off his glasses and button-down shirt to reveal a tight T-shirt with a big H over his less than fit torso. Meanwhile, a class in Brown's archaeology department, "Of Dice and Men: Games in Human Societies Past and Present," declares, in a bold play for enrollment, "Students will play games!"

Not all educators applaud the academic rush to fun and contemporary relevance. "It seems to me that higher education is going off the rails by offering so many classes with curb appeal," says Matthew Davis, a dean at the Santa Fe campus of the rigorous St. John's College. Andrew Delbanco, professor of American studies at Columbia, believes that certain writers never get old. "That's why there's value in a class that introduces great books rather than the latest superhero movie," he says. "To understand the present means engaging with the past."

Richard Saller, a professor and former dean



DON PENNY/STUDIO D (SPIDER-MAN)

Yale's Most Popular Class Ever: Happiness

US & Canada

Teaching philosophy with Spider-Man

LETTERS

Progressivism Has Destroyed Classical Education

Coming up with a catchy title is part of the strategy. Classical historian David Halperin's book *How to Be Gay* was based on a class he taught at the University of Michigan. Wayne Koestenbaum, a distinguished English professor at the City University of New York's Graduate Center, has published several books based on ideas he has used for classes. One of them was called *Humiliation*.

"Thinking across disciplines and making counterintuitive leaps keep the mind alive," Koestenbaum says. "If a name for a class doesn't make me giggle, it's not good enough."

He must be giggling all the time these days. At Hampshire College a recent class was called "Emptiness." At Oberlin "How to Win a Beauty Pageant" applied cultural studies methodology to aspects of feminism and politics. Occidental College offered a critical theory course on stupidity. The New School's website boldly advertises "Fasting and Spiritual Technology," which is about "the pleasure of no pleasure...expiation and purification, sacrifice and repentance." At Rutgers, meanwhile, "Politicizing Beyoncé" has been an attention-getter in the women and gender studies department—although it won't be taught next year, because its feisty professor was placed on temporary administrative leave after an offensive Twitter rant. Meanwhile, at Skidmore, "The Sociology of Miley Cyrus" studied "aspects of intersectional identities and media representation." Twerking, one would assume, was included in the syllabus.

And if zombies are your thing, you can study them at any number of schools.

To understand how all this happened, some deconstructive and historical analysis is required, not to mention a touch of semiotics and communications theory. In the late 1960s the fields of women's studies and black studies broke academic ground by promoting the analysis of traditional sexual and racial structures in a white male-dominated society. Gender studies, queer studies, and cultural studies followed, creating new and innovative

BUBBLES 101

A course catalog—based on actual classes—for the modern mind.

THE AMAZING WORLD OF BUBBLES, California Institute of Technology

INVENTED LANGUAGES: KLINGON AND BEYOND, University of Texas

HISTORY OF SURFING, University of North Carolina

WHAT IF HARRY POTTER IS REAL?, Appalachian State University

THE AMERICAN VACATION, Iowa State

GAGA FOR GAGA, University of Virginia

JUGGLING, Reed

WASTING TIME ON THE INTERNET, University of Pennsylvania

THE ART OF WALKING, Centre College

KANYE VERSUS EVERYBODY!, Georgia State

TATTOOS IN AMERICAN POPULAR CULTURE, Scripps College

THE SIMPSONS AND PHILOSOPHY, University of California, Berkeley

GETTING DRESSED, Princeton

THE JOY OF GARBAGE, Santa Clara University

UNDERWATER BASKET WEAVING, Reed

THE TEXTUAL APPEAL OF TUPAC SHAKUR, University of Washington

TREE CLIMBING, Cornell