



A Young Christian Woman Reports from a Large Campus

(Editor's note: In November we featured an essay from a conservative male college student entitled "Gen Z, Social Media, and Envy." This month we present an essay on college life from a female Christian perspective.)

I am a young, conservative, Christian woman attending a large state university. I chose to attend state university because I wanted a good education in Economics and I thought it would give me valuable opportunities and cost less than attending a solid liberal arts college. While my time spent at the university has been fruitful and I have learned a great deal, it has also opened my eyes to many cultural problems with Gen Z in particular, as well as with our public higher education system.

I desire to pursue knowledge, while simultaneously pursuing the good, the true and the beautiful. I find that at state university, school is often drudgery instead of enjoyment in the challenge of pursuing truth and knowledge. Many students dread showing up to class, skip when they can and eagerly anticipate the end of the semester. When I hear from other students at smaller liberal arts colleges, many of them have their ups and downs, but overall they enjoy their education and the challenges that come with learning and mastering difficult subjects and ways of thinking.

What is different about the state university world?

First of all, I have noticed *my generation's chronic reliance on technology* on my campus. It's practically revolutionary to have a class that's "tech free"

(including tests)—I have one of those, and it's refreshing. In between class periods, the majority of students walk to their next class with eyes glued to their phones or impenetrable headphones covering their ears. Students rarely make eye contact when walking, and when they do, they quickly avert their eyes.

Starting a conversation with a stranger—even to ask for directions—is one of the most intimidating things you can do. Discussion does happen in class, but it usually takes a while to get going. When students refuse to engage verbally, our professors are noticeably disheartened, but there's not much they can do.

More Tech, Less Reading

As technology use increases, it seems that reading is decreasing. Just last week, when I walked into class with a three-volume set of Civil War history that I was taking home, my classmate looked shocked. I showed him what I had, and he told me that he had a couple of boxes of Encyclopedia Britannica books from his grandmother, boxed up in his basement. He said he was going to put them up on shelves by his TV. "Not to read," he explained—"just for show."

"Are you not much of a reader?" I asked.

"Why would I read?" he replied.

"To learn?"

He shook his head. "I haven't read a book since probably sophomore year." He is a senior in college. As someone who was raised to love knowledge and reading, I found his statements discouraging. On a

broader note, this makes me more concerned for my generation. Covid-19, with its lockdowns and canceled school, forced students my age online. Now, tech use is through the roof, and hobbies and necessities that used to be common, like reading, are in steep decline.

In terms of the university's approach to reading, we do not read economic theory in my economics classes. We discuss policy ideas, and we briefly mention famous economists, but all we know about these economists is roughly when they lived, and what equation or concept they popularized. We do not read Friedrich Hayek, Adam Smith, Milton Friedman or even Karl Marx. The most economic theory reading I have done thus far in my time at college is in my technology-free class on the history of Western political thought.

Prof: 'Friedman was wrong'

As an example of the economic theory teaching we get, my professor in my (required) environmental economics class began the semester by telling us that "Friedman was wrong." He proceeded with a less than adequate two-minute summary of who Friedman was and why he was wrong, and then moved on. He ended that inaugural lecture by stating that "binary thinking is born from simplification" and encouraging us to be open-minded, always looking for things to change our minds about.

I was shocked by his obvious lack of belief in objective truth and saddened that a public university was promoting—and even requiring—a class that encouraged this. We reduce problems to policy and an equation. Instead of looking to history to formulate solutions for present problems, we blindly plow full speed ahead, ignoring the wisdom from those who came before us.

This is not a problem that is unique to the economics department. A couple of my friends have expressed their annoyance with classes and professors that are not challenging them. It seems to be a common pattern throughout the humanities to offer a relatively small

number of in-person courses, require few if any tests, provide open-note quizzes and short-answer questions, mandate online discussion boards (as opposed to in-person dialogue) and require minimal reading of primary sources and the classics. As students, we often pay hefty sums of money for our education. If we are not learning useful, challenging material, what is the point?

In the realm of civil discourse, it's even more difficult—particularly for me as a conservative. Not all of my professors are liberal, but I can usually tell which ones are, aren't or don't care. It's hard to challenge a professor when he is an "expert" in a topic and in charge of a class, and you are neither. It's even harder when your fellow classmates don't say anything.

It's also difficult to bring up questions about politics, policy or religion with my classmates. Growing up, my generation was taught never to discuss politics, religion or money—yet those are the very things we should be talking about, especially as young people! We are all in school, wrestling with what we'll do with the rest of our lives. Universities used to be great forums for debate. Now we're afraid we'll offend someone by asking a genuine question.

Dating by Phone Apps, Hookups

Another problem is the dating aspect. I didn't attend college with the belief that I would find my husband here, but of course there's always that hope. Yet my generation was raised with a dependence on phones, video games and dating apps. Don't want to leave the comfort of your home to meet someone? No problem. There are countless apps you can get that enable you to "meet" someone in every way possible except for the one that truly matters—face to face.

Walking around my campus, I've been disheartened to see that many of my schoolmates find greater enjoyment in the party and hookup culture than they do in searching out a spouse with whom they can faithfully spend the remainder of their lives. No wonder it's hard to find a good man here.

Radical Feminism Doesn't Help

Add to that the problem of radical feminism. The men in my generation have been taught since birth that women are entitled to exactly the same treatment as men. Women can work all the same jobs as men, women can and should provide for their families, women are just as strong as men, etc. Gone is the chivalrous protector role that men used to strive to fill.

I've been shocked recently at how rare it is for my fellow male students to hold doors for the female students. Since there is no longer a difference between the sexes, there is no longer a need—or even a desire—for men to step into a provider role. In my experience, this has led to young men who are afraid to ask young women out, unsure of their place in their girlfriend's life, and afraid of committing to long-term relationships.

They also struggle with their role as a natural-born leader. I only know a few openly conservative men on campus—most of my conservative friends are female. I have more male friends who are deeply religious, but they tend not to speak publicly about their political beliefs.

Conservative Women Exist on Campus

And yet, there is hope. In a culture where we're told that Gen Z women are the most liberal demographic, most of my conservative friends at the university are women. They are women who want to do something to save America and her people. My best friend wants to be a lawyer, another good friend wants to teach history to kids, another wants to work in state and local government, and another wants to work in international politics.

All of these women are strong, godly and driven to make changes. We are equipped to make these changes and find community through a few clubs on campus, internships, and fellowship and seminar opportunities.

I have had incredible opportunities to network and build relationships with likeminded conservative students through a political dialogue club on campus and through the campus College Republicans club. I have the privilege of serving both as an officer. I met my best friend through the political dialogue club, and I was able to join up with some of my conservative friends to restart our defunct College Republicans chapter.

Clubs and Internships

In the College Republicans chapter, we are continuing to recruit new members and planning events where conservatives can meet one another and find friendly community in the face of opposition. Our goal is to develop responsible, conservative citizens, change the minds of others through respectful debates and dialogues, and protect conservatism on our campus. Through working with fellow students to advance conservative values, we have built a community of intelligent and driven young people who I am confident will continue the fight for truth at our university long after I graduate.

My conservative professors have helped me with internship and networking opportunities as well, including an internship at the Heritage Foundation this past summer. At Heritage I was blessed to work in the DeVos Center for Human Flourishing (formerly the DeVos Center for Life, Family, and Religion), where I did focused research on issues such as abortion, transgender hormone “therapy” and vaccines. Through our weekly lecture series, I learned about domestic and foreign policy issues, the natural law, and the definition and application of conservatism, among other things.

All the interns were given copies of Russell Kirk's *The Roots of American Order* and Thomas Sowell's *A Conflict of Visions*. One of the policy directors, who had majored in economics, gave me Hayek's *The Road to Serfdom* and encouraged me to read it.

The goal of the internship directors, and I believe everyone at Heritage, was to equip us as young

conservatives to go out on the offensive for conservative values—not just defending them but *promoting* them. At Heritage, I made friendships that will last my whole life, learned what it means to be a “happy warrior” and emerged equipped to further the conservative movement wherever I find myself in the future.

In addition to my time spent at Heritage, I had the privilege of interning for the Acton Institute and twice for the Center for Arizona Policy. Through these wonderful experiences, I learned the process of lawmaking, took notes on numerous legislative floor sessions, committee and caucus meetings, performed topical research, catalogued books, learned hospitality and reception work, and so much more. My time spent at the Center for Arizona Policy is even more applicable now, after my summer at Heritage.

At Heritage, I was more focused on learning conservative policy and values and implementing those in a focused area. At the Center for Arizona Policy, those values connected directly with lawmaking of all shapes and sizes. These experiences have shaped my understanding of America and her political system, and I am excited to apply what I have learned wherever I may go.

While sometimes I regret not attending a conservative liberal arts school, when I reflect on the experiences and opportunities I have had at state university, I repeatedly conclude that I would not be where I am today if I had not chosen to attend state university. And,

despite its shortcomings, I do believe there is hope for the state university world—but it is not found in more federal funding or in forcing students to write more papers.

How to Improve Classes

Instead, it will be found in

- teaching good, comprehensive, challenging history and humanities courses,
- supporting students in pursuing knowledge with excellence,
- fostering a more Socratic method of teaching and interacting with teachers and fellow students in the classroom, and
- encouraging students to respectfully debate and challenge one another’s ideas of religion, policy and more.

The young conservatives I have met at my state university are intelligent, motivated and dedicated individuals who are committed to working together to defend and promote conservative values. There may not be many of us at our university now, but our hope is that our actions now will change the future.

To our readers, we wish you a blessed Christmas and thank you for your loyalty and generosity which keep us going!

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