

Life campus co



Allen Fredrickson photo

Students recount challenges and frustrations

“The University is not partisan to any party or ideology,” the University of Wisconsin Board of Regents proclaimed back in 1964, “but it is devoted to the discovery of truth and to understanding the world in which we live.”

WPRI President Mike Nichols and *Wisconsin Interest* Editor Charles J. Sykes recently sat down with seven conservative

as a conservative



bucking the liberal trend in the UW System

students from UW-Madison and UW-Milwaukee to find out whether, in their view, the state's universities are as ideologically neutral as their leaders once contended.

In the pages that follow, we let the students speak for themselves — a right they say they aren't always afforded in the classroom.

Watch video of the round-table discussion at wpri.org.

Cover Story

THE PARTICIPANTS



Kyle Beesley,
political
science major,
UW-Milwaukee



Dana Dahms,
human development
and family studies
major, UW-Madison



Devin Gatton,
political science,
history and religious
studies major,
UW-Milwaukee



Justin Lemke,
finance major,
UW-Madison



Nile Porter,
economics major,
UW-Milwaukee



Jake Regner,
economics major,
UW-Madison



Matt Sama
business/
marketing major,
UW-Milwaukee

Q Sykes: So how many of you feel that most conservatives on a college campus have to keep their mouths shut?

Justin Lemke: *Being conservative, you're kind of an outsider here. When I had my own radio show freshman year on the student radio station in Madison, I talked about conservative issues and had guest speakers. I would get calls to the station complaining, "Why is this student on here telling his opinion?"*

Q Sykes: You're outspoken. What do you think most conservative students at UW-Madison do? Do they keep their heads down? Do they learn not to express their opinions?

Lemke: *I think most of them do. There are a lot of homegrown Wisconsinites at Madison. But when they come to Madison, they know it's liberal. They know they're out of place, so they don't say anything.*

Q Sykes: (Addressing Nile Porter) You have the double bump — you're a member of a minority group and you're a student on a liberal university campus. What is that like? How surprised are people to find out that you are a conservative at UWM?

Porter: *They are very surprised, and I enjoy that. I'm not afraid to share my opinion. Sometimes, though, among certain groups, it's taboo. I was on student government's executive board, so I was one of seven, and they were all liberals. And it seemed, since I was the only black on the board, there was this expectation that I was going to present myself in a certain way, argue for certain points and take up certain issues. And I think our advisers were frustrated that I wasn't willing to do that. A lot of kids in the Black Student Union say, "When are you going to come join the club?" And I tell them, "I'm going to join when you guys accept me for*

my beliefs," which is probably never, which is OK.

Q Nichols: Do you get a lot of blowback? There sometimes is a presumption that, if you're African-American, you're a Democrat, you're liberal.

Porter: *Yeah, I get that from my family. That's why I was kicked out of my house. I helped with Scott Walker's nomination papers; my mom is an MPS teacher. She was very upset and told me to leave, but we're cool now.*

Q Sykes: You all are familiar with the phrase, "the snowflakes," right? You know, the permanent cry-bullies on American university campuses? You saw that at the University of Missouri. We're going to see these kinds of uprisings all across the country at every campus, including Madison and Milwaukee, where the usual suspects will come forward with their list of demands and the spineless administrators will cave in.

Devin Gatton: *At UWM, we have the Black Student Union, Students for a Democratic Society and Youth Empowered in the Struggle. They had a "die-in," and a number of us went there with our own signs, with our own message, to counter this. Ironically, the ones who were angrier were the white students. The black students engaged us pretty well, and we had a good conversation. We disagreed on the issues, but it was pretty civil.*

Q Sykes: So rather than being intimidated by all of this stuff, you're turning it around and pointing out the absurdity of the "snowflake rebellion." Is it going to create a backlash, where people say, "This is silly. This is ridiculous. We're not that fragile. We don't need to have our safe spaces with our movies of

puppies and chocolate chip cookies every time we hear a conservative idea”?

Gatton: *We don't really care about that. I'm married with kids. I spent eight years in the Marine Corps. If a 19-year-old is crushed by what I say, I really don't care. I'll continue doing what I'm doing, and it's not going to bother me whatsoever if they're crying in the corner.*

Q Sykes: **What is wrong with kids these days? It does appear that a lot of college students like the free-stuff thing, right?**

Lemke: *It's actually quite sad when you talk to these people because they don't have freedom. We try to empower them with education, teach them another side of it, so they learn, "Oh, wait. Yeah, I do keep a budget. I do want to do whatever I want in my life. I don't want someone else telling me what to do."*

Q Nichols: **Is part of the problem that there's subtle, or maybe overt, indoctrination coming from the professors?**

Lemke: *You're 100% right. I took a journalism class last semester, and my grade went up when I started talking like a liberal. I was failing it the first couple of weeks because I spoke my mind. I just changed it to a liberal perspective.*

Q Nichols: **So you pretended to be a liberal in order to get a better grade?**

Lemke: *Right, and I tell people this story, and they think, "Oh, that was just you, Justin. That's not real." I talked to another student, whom I didn't even know, and asked him, "Did you have to do this, too?" And he said, "Yeah, I had to do the exact same thing."*

Q Sykes: **You think ideology affects the grades you get? That professors will actually grade**

you differently?

Gatton: *My dad is a college professor up north, and he told me when I started college, "It doesn't matter what your position is. It doesn't matter what your idea is. Write what the teacher wants you to write. That's how you get the grade. Do what the teacher wants. Worry about your positions when you're out of school."*

Q Sykes: **Jake, you've experienced it even in economics?**

Jake Regner: *Actually, last semester, I took an Intro to Public Policy class and, the professor had us watch the debates. And, interestingly — I think there were three debates throughout the semester — she said, "Watch the Republican debates." Not once did she want us to watch the Democratic debates. And each time, she said, "Now, when you watch these debates, pay attention and see how they frame this issue or how they don't frame the issue." You could just sense this sort of hostility.*

Q Sykes: **Others on this grade issue?**

Dana Dahms: *I actually started out as an education major. I am not one anymore. I lasted a semester in education. I would get out of class, and I would call my mom and say, "Guess what they're teaching us? This is completely political, and all I want to do is learn how to teach. I don't want politics in it."*

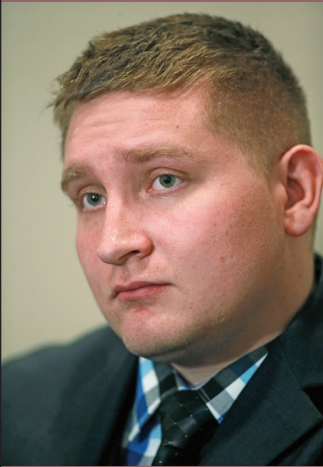
Q Sykes: **Give me an example. What were they teaching you?**

Dahms: *It was a lot of the "Black Lives Matter" movement because that was happening at the time. A lot of classroom-to-prison pipeline, how having police in schools is bad — just very liberal things. And in class discussions, I didn't really have an opportunity to express my opinions.*



“It's definitely a problem that education students are being taught with a liberal perspective and that there's no hope because we spend 18 or 13 years of our lives in schools, and we have these leaders who are fundamental in our lives and they're always so liberal. The schools churn out liberals, and then those students teach in schools. It's such a pipeline.”

— Dana Dahms



“In my American Sign Language class, the professor actually put in her syllabus that we are oppressing her when we’re speaking our own language. So, by speaking English in her class, because she is a deaf person, we oppress her. That’s what we’re facing. Liberal professors want us to feel like victims. I want to show them I am not a victim.”

— Kyle Beesley

Q Sykes: The bias in the classroom convinced you to not go into that profession? Do you think conservative prospective teachers are selecting out because they encounter that sort of thing?

Dahms: I think so. I had a long discussion with my parents because teaching was what I planned to do, and they said, “There is always private school teaching.” And I said, “I don’t know if I can handle four more years of hating classes and leaving upset every day.”

Q Nichols: Do you think there’s a gravitation to certain areas such as economics by conservative kids because they feel it’s an easier path for them? So there’s a segregation that happens by political ideology in the university?

Dahms: Yes, I do think that.

Matt Sama: I actually have two different experiences. One was when I was at Milwaukee Area Technical College before I transferred to a four-year university. I took a sociology course, and it was basically Socialism 101. It was basically the instructor trying to use human behavior and interaction to justify socialism and to justify stealing from somebody in order to give to somebody else. She actually said, “I owe something to society and, as a result, society owes something to me,” which has nothing to do with sociology. And I, on a regular basis, would raise my hand and say, “What does this have to do with anything? Why are we talking about Karl Marx as it pertains to sociology?” It was frustrating because she would single me out and almost scream at me on a daily basis just because I was asking, “What if we tried it this way?” The other scenario was at UWM. I took a film class about multicultural America. And the second week, we were assigned to write about white privilege. I immediately dropped the class, and I will never sit through something like that again. So I understand Dana just saying, “You know what? I’m done

with this.” But it’s also important for us to put up the good fight.

Q Nichols: You felt as though you couldn’t challenge the notion and still get a good grade?

Sama: Yeah, and one of the things that this sociology class talked about was wages, and I wrote about the minimum wage and how it disproportionately affects black Americans and minorities. And it was just a shouting match the moment I presented my paper to her.

Q Nichols: Where are the conservatives on campus?

Regner: Usually in the economics department. In fact, the most unbiased professors I’ve had have been in the economics department.

Lemke: My finance professor took a half-hour of our class time to talk about how our government is running itself into the ground. And he said, “This isn’t going to be opinionated.” He just put out the facts from the Congressional Budget Office. I talked to some students afterward, and some said, “Oh, he just wants everyone to vote Republican.” I said, “How can you see that as voting Republican? He just put facts out there.”

Q Nichols: Where are the liberal professors hiding? Or maybe they’re not hiding. Where are they most apt to be dominating an entire department?

Gatton: Political science is bad. I have a teacher right now who is a self-proclaimed Marxist. He is not only proud of that, he uses very far-left papers for examples.

Q Sykes: So is this education, or is this indoctrination?

Gatton: Both. I don’t think you can separate one from the other right now.

Sama: One of the things I’ve noticed is that

since President Obama was elected, a lot of these professors have come out and shown who they really are because they now feel comfortable with where society is headed. Society is heading toward a radically, very leftist, very socialistic-sympathizing society. You're seeing more and more teachers who were otherwise a bit more impartial and fair now empowered by this leftist movement.

Kyle Beesley: It seems like the younger generation feels more entitled. It's kind of weird that they believe they're owed something by society. I never got that when I was younger. I don't know where this came from. I don't know if their parents are teaching them that, but that's what I see on campus. And that's why Bernie Sanders, I think, is gaining so much traction with our generation — they all feel like they're owed something.

Sykes: One law professor from the University of Chicago said it's OK that we infantilize college students because many of them are not actually grown-ups. How do you react to that?

Beesley: There's a good term for this, what in the Marines we called "mothers of America." And they would say, "Well, we can't do this anymore because of mothers of America. We can't put you through the wringer because they'll come yell at us. They'll say that we're being too hard on you." So there's a "wussification" of America, where young people are treated as infants almost through their adult lives. So they're not actually living an adult life until they're out of college. They're babied by their parents. They're never going to mature mentally, whereas in the Marines we did because we had to mature. You don't see that with college kids because their parents are not putting them through the wringer.

Sykes: So Kyle just said the rest of you guys are wusses, I think. Does anybody want to

respond to that?

Gatton: I can't help but agree with Kyle on this, as much as I don't want to. But he hit the nail on the head. I know, as a parent, that if I let my children get away with something the first time, they're going to continue doing it. So I don't let my kids get away with it. However, parents in past generations have allowed their kids to get away with things over and over. So when the kids get to college, they say, "Well, my parents let me do it. I need to be able to do it here as well." And then the college says, "Well, they're not ready yet, so we need to continue the process that they went through with their parents." Unfortunately, that's not how the real world works. None of them is prepared to deal with adulthood because they were never forced to do so in their own homes.

Nichols: So you think there's going to be a harsh reality for a lot of these kids when they get out of Madison?

Lemke: Every day.

Nichols: What happens when they face that reality and they find out that what they've been told is not getting them a job or resulting in the life they thought they were going to have?

Lemke: They complain about having high student loans. Your gender and women's studies major will not get you anywhere. It just won't. But they never tell you, "By the way, there's no job at the end of this."

Porter: When I was on student government, I noticed that a lot of the students were in those majors. They were being cultured to work for the university. It's this big, self-sustaining machine. They don't need the approval of business; they don't need the approval of any influential person or entity outside of the university. It's just this big bubble where they can create these radical thoughts and never have to pay or answer for it, which is ridiculous. **WI**



“Liberals tend to think about the present. For example, when tackling poverty, a lot of liberals will prescribe a Band-Aid, or a quick solution, which is throwing money at the issue. Conservatives will probably think years down the road, realizing that there's a hurdle after this first one, taking a moment to think about it and then proceeding. They advocate for education, so people can sustain themselves and pass down those beliefs to their children, which tends to lift society as a whole.”

— Nile Porter