The Set of Emails triggered by showing the film “Hijacking Catastrophe”

On Monday, October 4, the film “Hijacking Catastrophe” was show as part of a film series connected to the course, Sociology 125. Contemporary American Society. The film is sharply critical of US policy in Iraq and the underlying militarism it reflects. After the film I received an angry email from a student, which – with the student’s permission – I circulated along with a comment on the issue. There followed a flood of emails, many expressing a great deal of hostility towards the perspective of the class.

My final reply to these issues begins on pp. 38

Original Email

Date: Mon, 4 Oct 2004 23:55:17

From: John Smith <badgerguy33@yahoo.com>
Subject: Negative Campaigning in Soc 125 class is unacceptable
To: wright@ssc.wisc.edu


Perhaps you missed the memo referred to in the above September 27 Daily Cardinal article, “UW to profs: Keep politics out of class,” written by Amanda Buhman. Or even more likely, you got the memo, and are obviously so full of yourself that you don’t believe you have to adhere to the state law. Whatever the reason, I find it appalling that you continue to use your position as a professor to preach your political views and platform to your class.

The article states that “state workers, including university professors, cannot legally engage in political campaigning while on the job.” The article refers mostly to the concept of wearing pins or displaying signs favoring one candidate or the other. While I suppose you technically may not be in violation of this policy, since you have not explicitly told us which candidate to vote for, you clearly are abusing your power by using lecture time and mandatory out of class time (film screenings) to influence your student’s political views.

I don’t know what you consider the film “Hijacking Catastrophe,” but that’s about as close to negative political campaigning as you can get. I truly don’t understand what makes you believe that it’s acceptable to present such a biased film as this one. You may not have directly told us not to vote for Bush, but I think your film choice spoke for itself. Choosing to show a film which directly calls our president a “coward” and “not
qualified” to be president, sure seems like campaigning to me, and obviously expresses your views on the upcoming election, especially when you consider you have yet to present any material supporting Bush or his policy. Both this film, as well as the “documentary” on the 2000 election, present purely one sided 

opinions, which undoubtedly will come across as fact to much of the class. And I’m sure you are well of that. That’s your intention.

What makes matters worse is your embarrassing effort to justify these one-sided presentations. Your assurance that you tried to find material opposing the opinions presented in “Unprecedented: The 2000 Presidential Election,” and that you wished to have multiple sides represented for this week’s film sound great, but it’s difficult to ignore the fact that this has not yet happened. One has to wonder how hard you are trying and how much you really care. I especially love how you tried to justify tonight’s film by opening up discussion after the film to a “public forum.” Your idea of a public forum consisted of a full 21 people who stayed to listen to you justify further why Bush’s policy is wrong. You knew full well the whole time that very few would stay, while most of the class went home believing the biased OPINIONS presented in the film.

I don’t think it’s expecting too much of a professor to keep his personal political agenda out of class. However, it is obvious that you are too high on yourself to actually admit that there are points of view besides your own. I can live with your selected liberal readings and lectures. As annoying as they are, I realize that you are too stuck up to offer other views, and that your class will forever remain “Liberal American Society.” However, I believe that tonight’s film crossed the line. To actually require students come during non-class hours to watch you present your case against President Bush and his policy is absurd, and bordering on illegal.

I know that sending you this will do little good. You clearly will not change your teaching method, because based your ludicrous explanations in lecture, you seem to have justified in your head why this incredibly biased material is acceptable. And if history is any indication, you will probably read parts of this in class and tell me why you’re right, and I’m wrong. After all, that seems to be what you do best.

Sincerely,

Everybody in your Soc 125 class that isn't a flaming liberal
Reply to my request to circulate the email

Date: Tue, 5 Oct 2004 20:45:33 -0700 (PDT)
From: John Smith <badgerguy33@yahoo.com>
Subject: Re: Negative Campaigning in Soc 125 class is unacceptable
To: Erik Olin Wright <wright@ssc.wisc.edu>

It is fine with me if you distribute the email. I thought you might wish to do so, which is why I created a new email account with the name "John Smith", since I did not want my name released. Thank you for your response.

-Matt

Erik Olin Wright <wright@ssc.wisc.edu> wrote:
Hi John,

I would like to distribute you email to the class as a whole if it is OK with you. I think your objections reflect a legitimate point of view, a legitimate concern, and thus should be shared with the class. If you give me the green light on this, I will circulate it to the entire class. I would also, of course, be happy to talk about the class with you -- both about the specific issue you raise about partisanship and the more general issue of the liberal bias in the overall material.

-- Erik

My message to all students

Date: Wed, 06 Oct 2004 01:13:51 -0500
From: Erik Olin Wright <wright@ssc.wisc.edu>
Subject: Message from a Soc125 student: Negative Campaigning in Soc 125 class is unacceptable

Dear Students in Sociology 125 --

I received the long message below from a student in the class who felt very distressed at what he felt to be unacceptable negative campaigning on my part. He felt that I had crossed the line from simply presenting my perspectives (however biased those might be) on issues concerning American society, to engaging in "Negative campaigning" around the presidential election.

This is a difficult issue, I think. I certainly agree that it is inappropriate for a Professor to
actively campaign for a political candidate in a classroom. The difficulty arises when the substantive material in a class happens to intersect the electoral cycle. I feel that "Militarism" is an important topic in the study of American society, and an especially important topic at this moment in history. As I explained in class, the basic thrust of militarism in the US has been supported by both parties and every president in the last 50 years, so while I am very critical of militarism, that criticism is not directed at only one American political party. But I also believe that there has been a significant intensification of these tendencies since 2001, and that this intensification has pervasive ramifications for democracy, as I explained in the lecture. I do not think that any of the factual material I presented on this theme was incorrect, and while my claims about the negative ramifications are certainly controversial, I do not think that they are just a "matter of opinion".

This brings us to the question of the film, "Hijacking Catastrophe". The film is in places somewhat strident and polemical, but I believe that its basic analysis of the trajectory of militarism over the past fifteen years and its specific analysis of the foreign policy doctrines of Neoconservatives as expressed in the Project for a New American Century are accurate. My feeling in choosing the film was that the official US government perspective on the war and the dynamics leading up to it has gotten enormous publicity on TV and therefore even if the film is one-sided, it would be viewed by most students with a lot of background exposure to the official views of the conflict. The film, in effect, is engaged in a dialogue with the mainstream view on these events, and I had hoped that it would be viewed in that spirit. I genuinely regret that some students have found the film offensive and unacceptable and feel that it was inappropriate for me to show it because of the upcoming election. I see my role as a professor to stimulate serious thinking and debate, to present controversial material and challenge students with critical ideas, and there are times when I find it impossible to do this without criticizing government policy and people in power.

I would be happy to discuss these issues with anyone.

See you in class on Wednesday.

-- Erik Wright

MESSAGES FROM OTHER STUDENTS IN THE ORDER RECEIVED

Date: Wed, 06 Oct 2004 03:28:18 -0600
From: KENNETH LENNELL TATE <kltate@wisc.edu>
Subject: Nothing but support
To: Erik Olin Wright <wright@ssc.wisc.edu>
Erik,
I am enjoying your class and am learning about aspects of government I didn't know existed. The knowledge you have presented thus far is invaluable and I look forward to doing the readings. I like how you stress time and time again to challenge the material presented in class and how you've always been straight forward in lectures.

Much support and thanks ahead of time,
Ken

Hello professor Wright,

I just read your email by a sociology student, against flaming liberals. I just want you to know that although i am a flaming liberal myself, i support your teaching and yes i do see a little bias, maybe in the films. you are doing an excellent job explaining the material in class. I think this student crossed the line because in no way are you campaigning for anyone. You began the class by telling your views right out of the gates and that was awesome. If I was a conservative, or by definition resistant to change, I probably would listen to your views and disregard them right away and hope for an A in the class because I would try to still learn the material. I know that you have not changed the curriculum to fit the war on Iraq, it just happens that way. I think his conservative views and his/her resistant to change is helping his emotions get involved and blocking his learning, but if you can't reach the stubborn, you will not smoke a bowl, or be free spirited, but by definition tolerant of change.
Thank you, enjoying the class a lot

Professor Wright-
I'm sorry students feel it is necessary to berate you without explaining their opinions. I'm am relatively middle ground on this whole issue. I took this class because I am going into journalism and I wanted a stronger background in American government. I am pretty uninformed in the realm of everything political, so my only complaint of the curriculum is that I am receiving one side of an issue without any knowledge of contradictory arguments. I'm afraid that if I would decide to become politically active on an issue, I wouldn't have a full understanding of what I was up against. I hope you understand what I mean. I really enjoy the class, I think I am being introduced to some issues of which I was completely unaware. My only request is that you give the conservative argument to each issue, whether it comes from the news, a press release, etc. Even if you explain to us why you disagree, I would like to see their arguments laid out. The most informed person is able to generate counterarguments, based on their opponents weaknesses; I would like to be able to do that. Thank you for understanding and I hope this email is less harsh than others I'm sure you have received.

-Breanna Burmeister

Date: Wed, 06 Oct 2004 16:03:53 -0500
From: CHELSEA ROCHELLE ANDERSON <cranderson5@wisc.edu>
Subject: reaction to email
To: Erik Olin Wright <wright@ssc.wisc.edu>

Dear Professor Wright,

First off, many of my views gravitate to the conservative side – and although I really enjoy your class, it is not because I whole-heartedly agree with everything you say. If fact, there are some topics where I can only shake my head. . .saying that, you raise some excellent points to consider. You argue a view, offer evidence* for that view, and present it in a passionate, yet intelligent manner. From day one you’ve said that we will not agree with everything (or anything, for that matter) you say, so take it for what it is worth.

I am a bit embarrassed for the sake of the conservative point of view, and I hope you know that some of us are willing to engage in intellectual discussion in which we can walk away knowing that each point of view was heard. I believe that outside of lecture you are very willing to discuss matters that differ from your perspective, but you will present your views in class.
As far as negative campaigning goes, you describe yourself as a “wild-eyed left wing liberal,” in which you will obviously support the candidate(s) that share more of your viewpoints. Yes, it may irk me a bit in class when Nader and Kerry are glorified more than Bush, but what can I expect? We enrolled in this class and you let us know from day one what we were getting into. I could see if the student up-in-arms were upset about your views persuading students who do not know where they stand, but then he should make an effort to provide another side of the story, maybe in the following ways:

1.) He could encourage the College Republicans (with whom he may be affiliated) to attend discussions (as in the Fahrenheit 9/11 film) so that both sides could be heard,

and/or

2.) He could gather information supporting the other side, and if approved by you (not necessarily agreeing, but deeming it intelligent, relevant information), could distribute it to the class.

These are just points to think about.

I heard a quote recently with which I really resonate: "Be passionate, yet objective."

Thank you, and see you at noon on Thursday during office hours,
Chelsea Anderson

*Biased evidence? Maybe. But we all find evidence, sources, statistics, etc. to support our views. No matter how unbiased we try to be, we are all biased due to our human nature.

Date: Wed, 06 Oct 2004 16:21:15 -0500
From: KATHERINE ELIZABETH KOSCHNICK <koschnick@wisc.edu>
Subject: Re: Message from a Soc125 student: Negative Campaigning in Soc 125 class is unacceptable
To: Erik Olin Wright <wright@ssc.wisc.edu>
Cc: soc125-2004@lists.students.wisc.edu

I too was extremely offended by the movie Monday and Tuesday night. I understand that some of the media takes the opposing view of the war, but regardless of others opinions, I feel that I pay a decent amount
of money to be educated about facts of life in order to be better equipped to make my own decisions, not mere opinions no matter how much fact or experience they may be based on. I don't mean any disrespect to you as a professor but these are my true concerns with the class. I understand everything I am being taught and have attended every film showing but the last one I could barely manage to force myself to sit through, it was that disturbing. I also understand your intentions of wanting to expose us to a different perspective however when this perspective is presented as fact to an entire class in which most of the students are fairly uninformed, this perspective is received as fact and makes a huge impact. I was also very offended by the comment in a previous lecture concerning rich business men whom you encouraged to exclaim, "I'm a greedy bastard and I don't care about the welfare of others." My uncle is a fairly wealthy businessman and he has strived his entire life to be where he is today. He works 7 days a week, 10-15 hours a day to earn a living for his family and I was taken aback at the remark referring to him as a 'greedy bastard.' I hope you take these comments with utmost respect but maybe just take into consideration the views of a student. Thank you for your time.

Date: Wed, 06 Oct 2004 17:23:16 -0500
From: ELIZABETH ANNE BEHNKE <ebehnke@wisc.edu>
Subject: sociology 125
To: wright@ssc.wisc.edu

Hi Professor,
It seems like you receive a lot of email complaints from students in 125 so I thought that I would add mine to the bunch. My only complaint with your class is that you begin every lecture with a 15 min. apology for your teaching style. This isn't necessary. You told us you would present a biased opinion one the first day of class and seeing that we are a group of supposedly intelligent adults everyone should be able to handle that. There is no reason that politics should be kept out of the classroom because it is an election year. Professors shouldn't tell students how to vote, but it is your job to educate us, and if through further education students political views change, well, as long as we are well informed I don't think that's a bad thing. Of course, I happen to agree with you politically so maybe I just don't see the offensiveness of this class. I went to church with my Grandmother a few weeks ago, and I sat there and was told outright who to vote for. Now that is what I consider using a position of authority inappropriately. What you're doing is not-so stop apologizing.
Date: Wed, 06 Oct 2004 18:00:49 -0500
From: KIERAN JOSEPH GROGAN <kjgrogan@wisc.edu>
Subject: Re: Message from a Soc125 student: Negative Campaigning in Soc 125 class is unacceptable
To: Erik Olin Wright <wright@ssc.wisc.edu>

Professor Wright,
I apologize for some of my fellow students. An open mind is a valuable gift, and apparently some of my classmates do not value it as I do. I could talk at length regarding this subject, but I will waste neither my nor your time. I just basically wanted to say don't be discouraged.
Yours,
Kieran Grogan

Date: Wed, 06 Oct 2004 18:17:47 -0500
From: BENJAMIN IAN LOVE <bilove@wisc.edu>
Subject: Re: Message from a Soc125 student: Negative Campaigning in Soc 125 class is unacceptable
To: KATHERINE ELIZABETH KOSCHNICK <koschnick@wisc.edu>
Cc: Erik Olin Wright <wright@ssc.wisc.edu>, soc125-2004@lists.students.wisc.edu

I don't mean any disrespect to anyones opinions but I do not believe that the professor has shown these films out of malice. I feel that the whole purpose of these movies IS to expose us to the other side of the story that we so rarely as citizens and viewers of media that is so often controlled by corporations and the like view. I do not think 'Highjacking Catastrophe' was anymore extreme than any other movie we have so far watched. I really do not understand what all the fuss is about. I also do not agree with either of you that people in this class are so stupid that they can't decide for themselves what is fact and what is information being stretched. Are people too braindead to have their own opinions and decide for themselves what they believe? I also would like to point out that at the beginning of
almost every lecture the professor has pointed out that he is expressing what he believes and we do not have to agree with it. If his opinions or viewpoints bother you so much maybe you should have thought about dropping the class instead of complaining. This campus is notoriously liberal and I am not saying that you have to be, but it is not such a shock to see or hear or read things that are swayed to the left. It would be nice if we could maybe view more opinions that are more conservative but if you want to see that watch FOX NEWS. I am sure that this will satisfy your appetite for conservative support of George W. Bush. Now you can let everyone else enjoy this class that the professor has been teaching for many more years than you have even had opinions about politics. I again think that if this class is a big problem for either of you, you should have listened more carefully to the professor express how he was going to run the class from day one instead of attacking him now. This is just one person's support for the professor and hopefully more students agree with me.

From: GALEN MATTHEW POOR <gmpoor@wisc.edu>
Subject: I vow not to freak out on you
To: Erik Olin Wright <wright@ssc.wisc.edu>

Hi, I'm Galen Poor, a student in your Soc. 125 class.

Everybody is certainly freaking out about presenting opinions on campus. I am in the committee that is bringing Michael Moore to campus, and at our first meeting a bunch of republicans showed up and got pretty aggressive about how inappropriate it is to present speakers with political views on the University's dime. We have also tried to represent the right, to bring conservative Moore-like speakers. But, go figure, they're either not interested, way out of our budget, or insane (as Ann Colter's agent warned us).

As for the movie- Two years ago, during the Iraq War, I saw a Frontline Iraq special, "The War Behind Closed Doors". It covered the "Project for the New American Century" crew as thoroughly as the movie you showed, and it had interviews with people everyone can respect, like Colin Powell, Brent Snowcroft and Washington Post & New York Times journalists. The movie certainly comes to some of the same conclusions as "Hijacking Democracy" does, but in a more "objective" way. Here's a link to the page:

http://www.pbs.org/wgbh/pages/frontline/programs/info/2113.html
I think the fact that so many people are freaking out about "Hijacking Democracy" just goes to show how much important information and views do not get picked up by the mainstream. Nothing was too controversial about the content of the movie, I've known most of that stuff for two years! Which is extremely frustrating, almost nobody else does! The only way to make any sense of the last four years is to know a basic history of the neo-cons. Maybe you could teach us that information using primary sources- like excepts from the National Defense Plan document, etc.- and let us draw our own conclusions. This way you stay in the clear, and we get to be the one's with opinions!

All my sympathy,

Galen Poor

Date: Wed, 06 Oct 2004 20:30:15 -0500
From: LINDSAY BETH DELEEUW <lbdeleeuw@wisc.edu>
Subject: Message from a Soc125 student: Negative Campaigning in Soc 125 class is unacceptable
To: soc125-2004@lists.students.wisc.edu

I agree with Benjamin...Prof. Wright made it perfectly clear right from the start that his liberal stance would certainly be made evident in the way that he teaches this class. He also made it clear that he is more than willing to accept that fact that not everyone holds these same views. Honestly, then, why is everyone whining about it now? It takes a lot of nerve for you folks to bash on the professor when, despite his biased viewpoints, has made it a point to remain openminded to those who do not share his beliefs.

Here's another point: Although I definately classify myself as "liberal" in many aspects, I would not go so far as to say that ALL rich people are "greedy bastards," for example, and I don't think that this is what the professor was trying to convey either. However, I do believe that the information we are presented in class, and the movies that the professor has chosen to show us, are an excellent source of an alternative view that most normal people rarely see or hear about.

Furthermore, how can you accuse these documentaries of being completely fictional? How could you NOT believe that Bush is a coward, considering that HE purposely dodged HIS military duty but has now gone onto lead our country into a war where he is sending
thousands of American soldiers out to die, and how does he justify this? WITH LIES and deception. What I want to know is, WHERE IS THE OUTRAGE???

The professor encouraged those of you who oppose his standpoint to JUSTIFY your beliefs...so to all of you Bush lovers, why exactly are you so angry?

I would like to say that I personally am glad that I am taking this course during an election year, when it is so critical for people like you and I to see the issues being presented to us as REAL and TRUE, regardless of our political beliefs, and be able to evaluate our own views based on ALL of the information--not just what the current administration and their buddies over at FOX want us to see.

From: SAMUEL NEUMAN FRENTZEL <sfrentzel@wisc.edu>
Subject: Re:Message from a Soc125 student: Negative Campaigning in Soc 125 class is unaccepteable
To: soc125-2004@lists.students.wisc.edu

I would like to point out the fact that we are, or should be, focusing on the course itself. It is irrational and unfair to say that the biased material presented in what is supposed to be a non-partisan class is justified because of material presented by the media. I did not sign up for Sociology 125: The Counterpart to Fox News. We should be ignoring all outside sources here, no matter which side of the spectrum they present and support. The question at hand here is whether or not the material presented WITHIN THE COURSE is fair. I personally believe it is not.

These courses are not designed to present biased views, especially during such a critical political time in America. If we examine the course itself (solely the course) we see that a liberal agenda is dominant. Yes, the Professor laid out fair warning and all conservatives had the chance to bail out early on. And yes, the Professor is open to other viewpoints and support for those viewpoints. I respect both of these claims made by Professor Wright. However, if he is open to these viewpoints, he must find a way to present them. It is ludacris to suggest that several conservatives in this land of liberals can counter the Professor's beliefs and present them in an equal manner to the class. We do not have lecture time to do so. We cannot choose videos or create outlines to present to
everyone. We aren't as well-versed as he is in doing so. And to say "Go watch Fox" is utterly ridiculous. I could tell you to focus your attention on Dan Rather, Peter Jennings, or Tom Brokaw. I do not feel that this course should have the intent to counter what is presented by one station.

This course is a classic example of the lack of regulation on issue ads presented by Free Speech for Sale: A Bill Moyers Special. There were complaints over the attacks against Cindy Watson in television advertisements that were not regulated by campaign laws because they never said "vote for" or "vote against". That's exactly what is occuring in our class and I cannot stand for it.

This is not to whine or complain. I realize I could have backed out much sooner and I am certainly open to anti-Bush sentiments and liberal viewpoints. In fact, I welcome them in spirit to an essay by Walter Lippman entitled The Indispensable Opposition. All I suggest is that, within the realm of the class, both sides on a matter are given, or at least referred to. And stop telling me to go watch Fox News. We're talking strictly about the class here. Be reasonable.

Date: Wed, 06 Oct 2004 21:40:03 -0500
From: MATTHEW SCOTT BUNKE <msbunke@wisc.edu>
Subject: Re: Message from a Soc125 student: Negative Campaigning in Soc 125 class is unacceptable
To: LINDSAY BETH DELEEUW <lbdeleeuw@wisc.edu>
Cc: soc125-2004@lists.students.wisc.edu

Why did I wait until now to "whine?" Because up until this point, Professor hadn't shown us a film which attacked Bush's policy on Iraq, attacked his military service record, called him a coward and not qualified to be president, and even went as far as to try to mock the president's image and public speaking. What about this is acceptable as part of a college course? I was willing to put up with the liberal bias in class...he told us this would be the case, and as annoying as it was, I can live with that. But to show a mandatory film bashing a political candidate (more than just his policy) is absurd.

I signed up for Contemporary American Society...not the "Erik Olin Wright Lecture Series." A college course, especially an introductory level course, is not a forum for a professor to express his OWN personal viewpoints. If he wishes to do this, then he may use out of class time to preach his political views in his own "lecture series".
I agree completely with the student who said that Professor Wright didn't show the film out of malice. No, he showed it out of arrogance. It takes true arrogance to believe that you have the right to present partisan material during class time, and that if somebody doesn't like it, they can watch Fox News. It takes true arrogance to believe that your own opinions are important enough to base an entire class on. No offense to Professor Wright, but I didn't sign up for this class to learn how YOU feel. Sorry to burst your bubble.

Michael Moore will be in town in a few weeks...perhaps we could add him to the docket as a guest speaker? He'd fit in rather nicely.

From: SENNECA ANNE DI TUSA <saditusa@wisc.edu>
Subject: Re:Message from a Soc125 student: Negative Campaigning in Soc 125 class is unacceptable
To: soc125-2004@lists.students.wisc.edu

First off, why do most of you (esp. the people that have defined themselves as liberal) feel the need to make politics an “I can insult you better” game. If this gets you anywhere, it shows that you too have lost your cool as much as you claim that the “Bush lovers” have. Politics is meant to involve a fair debate, without being nasty. I suggest that if you cannot do this, perhaps you can’t handle this issue either.

Secondly, I too joined this class to learn and be more educated about society and American culture from a sociology point of view, not a political one. So to that extent, I am a bit disappointed. Hopefully, as Professor pointed out, after the democracy phase of the class, there will be much less politics involved. However, I don’t appreciate the fact that a lot of you have claim nobody knows anything about the liberal point of view. I find it hard to believe on a campus, that as Benjamin points out, is notoriously liberal, that no one hears enough about liberal issues. I’m neither hard core liberal nor conservative, but rather I prefer to pick and chose what I believe from both sides. But regardless, I noticed everyone is very keenly aware that Fox News portrays a conservative viewpoint, which is most likely true. However, I find it very interesting that not one person has mentioned the utter and complete bias that CNN brings in being our liberal news association. If you guys are going to bash, at least be able to bash yourselves as well.

I believe that perhaps the Professor did earnestly try to find an opposing conservative viewpoint documentary to the latest film.
However, in terms of the films that we have watched, I don’t think the intensity of opinion they portray is necessary. I actually have a hard time watching them, though I try, because a majority of what I hear is a lot of liberal rhetoric and propaganda, with the truth of what they have to say smashed somewhere in between. I want to know these people’s views, but not by listening to them complain and bash incessantly. I don’t believe for one second, that there aren’t documentaries where the narration is neutral and then presents both sides of the story.

Now keep in mind again, I’m not proud of a lot of things Bush has done, so it’s not worth the time to bring up the “you’re a Bush lover” nonsense, but I’m sorry to say this class is pretty skewed. As a primary educational class for a lot of people who may not follow the news or politics, this class’s views could very well push them to one side without them hearing the full history of both sides, or it may force them to believe that conservatives are some kind of monster and that they need to breed the pro-liberal counterattack. I believe that’s wrong. Only after one has heard everything about both sides, should they be able to then make an honest decision. Politics are a very serious business, and unless you follow the news from every source like a hawk, you probably should not be trying to shove your views on others. I know I don’t even follow enough news to be the most informed that I could be.

So, that’s all I wanted to say. Hopefully, this class will tone down a bit.

Date: Wed, 06 Oct 2004 22:21:00 -0500
From: BENJAMIN IAN LOVE <bilove@wisc.edu>
Subject: Re: Re:Message from a Soc125 student: Negative Campaigning in Soc 125 class is unacceptable
To: SENNECA ANNE DI TUSA <saditusa@wisc.edu>
Cc: soc125-2004@lists.students.wisc.edu

I think it's funny that people accuse the 'liberals' in this class as attacking when only two of us have even bothered to respond as opposed to about seven who seem to be on the conservative side. It seems that the ones who have a problem are the ones defending George W. Bush.
For the people who claim that the information presented in the flims is completely true and that we can't "ignore the facts," just remember that the film makers probably had some notion to exaggerate certain aspects to get their point across and to get opinions circulating. After all, they are trying to market their product.

Also, for those who say that FOX is our main news source and that this class offers the alternative to what we are shown, it really isn't. I know of few people who really rely on FOX to get their news on a daily basis. After all, there are many other stations out there that offer a more liberal perspective.

I understand that some people see the lecture material, reading, and films as acceptable and that those who don't agree should "bail out" of the class; after all, we each chose to take this class. But Mr. Wright, you should encourage more of those people to stick around. If every person who might be leaning to the right of the political spectrum were to drop the class, you'd be preaching to the choir. Then there would be no true, open debate because most people would agree with the material or maybe wouldn't have opposing sides to present in discussion. I know that I can't tell you how to teach the class, but toning down the intensity just a little might encourage people to stay around and want to learn. Because in a true democracy, everyone's voice is heard.

P.S.: I think everyone would appreciate it if such immature terms as "Bush lovers" and "flaming liberals" were left out of intelligent conversation. Keeping a cool head on either side of the debate truly means keeping an open mind.
To: BENJAMIN IAN LOVE <bilove@wisc.edu>  
Cc: soc125-2004@lists.students.wisc.edu

I've been reading all these emails and let me first start by saying I am a strong Kerry supporter and detest just about EVERYTHING Dubya has done as our president. He is a horrendous human being and I truly can't find anything positive about him. However, this is an introductory course not an opinionated lecture series...or rather it is on my schedule AS that. The professor is plain ignorant and overbearing with his liberal (and I don't use that term as Republicans use it - negatively) view points on EVERY issue. There is not a class that goes by where I can walk out of it without saying to myself "Jeez, I felt like that was just as much propaganda as anything else." It is a shame that students trust professors as they are in a place of education and the leader of the class just douses us with his beliefs rather than any information to help us make decisions on our own...Which is the real learning purpose to you? It comes down to the point that as he is supposed to be presenting facts, he is presenting opinion in a forum where that should NOT be there and there is school policy against it. It really is that simple...Oh, and remember, this comes from a KERRY supporter.

Date: Wed, 06 Oct 2004 23:35:31 -0500  
From: HAILEY RAE POBANZ <pobanz@wisc.edu>  
Subject: STOP!  
To: soc125-2004@lists.students.wisc.edu

Well.. lets just say, regardless of our opinions, getting this many emails from "angry conservatives" and "flaming liberals" gets a little bit old. And most of this sprouted from one bad egg deciding to disrespect a professor. Thank you bad egg for filling my inbox!

Someone sick of hearing people bitch

Date: Wed, 06 Oct 2004 23:47:08 -0500  
From: CAMERON MICHAEL LEWIN <cmlewin@wisc.edu>  
Subject: Re: STOP!  
To: HAILEY RAE POBANZ <pobanz@wisc.edu>
Controversy over content of Sociology 125

Cc: soc125-2004@lists.students.wisc.edu

Its not disrespect...It's voicing opinions and if you don't want to read them it doesn't take more than 5 seconds to check them off and delete them...So too bad. :-)

From: Dustin Choy <dchoy@wisc.edu>
Subject: Re: Message from a Soc125 student: Negative Campaigning in Soc 125 class is unacceptable
To: soc125-2004@lists.students.wisc.edu

"Sticks and stones will break my bones but words will never hurt me..."

Wow i think you guys need to relax a little. I'm sick of checking my email and seeing 100 emails from my sociology class. Is this really a big deal? It's not life threatening, and i don't think anyone should be so worked up about it that they lose sleep. The most entertaining part of this whole argument is when people bad-mouth the professor. Sometimes i nod off in that class, but even i remember when he warned us about how he teaches the class. The last time i checked he's a successful professor and we're a bunch of undergrads so it's humorous how some of you think you have the right to say of the things you've been saying to him in these emails. i think the word i'm looking for is respect, yeah that's it. some of you may not like the way the class is being taught, but you have absolutely no right to make it a personal with the professor like some of you did. at least be professional about it so people actually take your argument into consideration. i don't see how calling the professor "arrogant" or "ignorant" is going to help the issue at all. i also think that was still early in the semester when you could drop the class still. those of you that are complaining should just grin and bear it, we're at midterm almost, i think you whiners can handle another month or two of this it won't kill you. i'll admit that i'm extremely immature, but you guys are redefining the word by the emails you're writing. come on, to the girl that was complaining about her uncle being rich or whatever, do you really think that mr. wright meant every rich business owner in the country is a bastard? that's stretching it a little if you ask me. i used to work for an extremely rich businessman, and when mr. wright said that i didn't take offense to
it. you know why i didn't? because it's NOT THAT BIG OF A DEAL AND IT'S HIS OPINION. lighten up everyone, there's no reason for anyone to be emailing the professor and complaining about his class. it's his class, so as the saying goes, "love it or leave it"

sincerely,
one of the guys that sits in the back, comes a little late to lecture, and doesn't get his undies in a bundle when he doesn't agree with someone's opinion

Date: Thu, 07 Oct 2004 00:09:57 -0500
From: LUCILLE MARTHA STRAWN <lmstrawn@wisc.edu>
Subject: Thought provoking......
To: soc125-2004@lists.students.wisc.edu

I think we are all forgetting that our Professor, whether we respect his opinions or not, has probably been teaching longer than most of us have been alive. And I may be wrong, but I doubt that his teaching strategies have changed much over the years. It seems the only reason our class is so outraged by his bias is because of the upcoming election. As long as we hold true to ourselves and stick to what we believe is right (and vote according to our own beliefs), I don't think this single professor is capable of swinging the entire state of Wisconsin democratic, in the two months we will have been taking this course, with the students in an insignificant intro to Sociology course. And I know we have all heard Professor Wright say that he may seem bias and we are welcome to disagree with him, but have any of us really thought of what is behind those words? By us sending arguments and complaints back and forth and to the Professor himself is exactly what he is trying to do. He is provoking us to THINK! He wants us to get mad. He wants us to complain. He knows his teachings will actually leave the classroom if he creates them in such an atmosphere. He is probably sitting back reading these emails and smiling because he is watching the youth of America actually use their minds in other ways than finding this weekend's wop party or playing video games!

Date: Thu, 07 Oct 2004 00:16:16 -0500
From: MEGAN L PAULSON <mlpaulson@wisc.edu>
Subject: Re: Message from a Soc125 student: Negative Campaigning in Soc 125
In response to the e-mail from Dustin Choy:

It was refreshing to see an e-mail that didn't contain so much unresolved anger, but I have to say, your nonchalant attitude seems a little out of place. This is a great thing, that we're having such a spirited debate and that people really do care about what they're hearing. This is democracy. People are exercising their First Amendment right! Mr. Wright, if you planned things to work out this way, you're very clever. And even if you didn't, it's working out well. Young adults with developing views of the nation and world around them are forming opinions and voicing them. I personally find it a treat to open my mailbox and see so many responses from the class. It tells me and everyone else that the future of the nation will be in the good hands of competent, thinking members of our generation.

Date: Thu, 07 Oct 2004 00:25:55 -0500 (Central Daylight Time)
From: Lee Hubanks <ntruder97@ameritech.net>
Subject: Re: STOP!
To: soc125-2004@lists.students.wisc.edu

First of all, everyone take a deep breath. Some people are getting a little too worked up here. Now, if you don't like these e-mails, you don't have to read them. We are using email for its intended purpose, so if you don't like the discussion, you do not have to participate in it.

Secondly, nobody is outraged here. Though some may be portrayed through e-mail as being terribly upset, I think somewhat offended by the content of class is a better way of describing our feelings. The professor is obviously a very well educated man, very deserving of respect, and has been VERY respectful of everyone's comments on the class mailing list. So everyone, lets keep our cool here.

Anyway, lets analyze the true issues here...

The fact remains that the film we watched this week presented an absurdly one sided opinionated, (as opposed to factual) explanation of the Iraq war, preaching the age old government conspiracy theory that the tough little cowboy George W. Bush and his neo-conservative cabinet simply wanted to flex their
muscles and take over the respect of the world. And to do so, lied to the American public, etc etc etc, so on and so forth. All speculation at best.

BECAUSE we have NOT been shown the alternative view, on practically ANYTHING, this class pushes the limits of campaigning. Because after all, as stated in most of these e-mails, nobody signed up for a one sided liberal politics class.

It should be made very clear that there is a HUGE distinction between a teacher who is openly liberal, and teaching bias liberal opinions and theories.

I am not either 100% liberal or conservative. (conservative on views of military and the DP, and liberal on most of the other stuff) My views split down the middle. I love learning about the opposing view and hearing the opposition to what I believe... Because it makes me build better arguments, BUT...

...

the bottom line.....

...

This is a college sociology class where we are supposed to be taught facts about contemporary American society, but in all areas dealing with politics, we have been given a severe dosage of extreme liberal propaganda; and nothing of the opposition. And obviously people have noticed, because they have spoken out about it.

-Lee

Date: Thu, 07 Oct 2004 01:23:05 -0600
From: KENNETH LENNELL TATE <kltate@wisc.edu>
Subject: Re: STOP!
To: Lee Hubanks <ntruder97@ameritech.net>
Cc: soc125-2004@lists.students.wisc.edu

Prof. Wright,
I know there are no movies next week, but just go ahead and show Fahrenheit 9/11 on monday and tuesday, these kids have no respect.

Very happy with the class,
Ken
p.s. KATHERINE ELIZABETH KOSCHNICK, pretty sure no one ever stood up in lecture and said "KATHERINE ELIZABETH KOSCHNICK's uncle is a greedy bastard."

Date: Thu, 07 Oct 2004 02:27:22 -0500 (Central Daylight Time)  
From: Lee Hubanks <ntruder97@ameritech.net>  
Subject: Re: STOP!  
To: soc125-2004@lists.students.wisc.edu

Thanks on behalf of everyone for the input. That really added a lot of insight to our discussion.

Date: Thu, 07 Oct 2004 01:33:53 -0600  
From: KENNETH LENNELL TATE <kltate@wisc.edu>  
Subject: Re: STOP!  
To: Lee Hubanks <ntruder97@ameritech.net>  
Cc: soc125-2004@lists.students.wisc.edu

I'm sorry, did you just send your sociology class a moving smiley face?

Date: Thu, 07 Oct 2004 02:55:43 -0500  
From: MATTHEW FLOYD NICHTER <mnichter@wisc.edu>  
Subject: evolution of the 'bush doctrine' - documents fyi  
To: soc125-301@lists.students.wisc.edu, soc125-303@lists.students.wisc.edu, soc125-308@lists.students.wisc.edu, soc125-312@lists.students.wisc.edu, soc125-318@lists.students.wisc.edu

These are the main documents mentioned in the film...


2) The Project for a New American Century's 1998 letter to Clinton:
http://www.newamericancentury.org/iraclintonletter.htm

3) The 2000 report by the PNAC, "Rebuidling America's Defenses" (contains the 'Pearl Harbor' quote):

4) The 2002 National Security Strategy of the United States:
http://www.whitehouse.gov/nsc/nss.pdf

Washington Post & NY Times on '92 DPG leak1.htm

Date: Thu, 07 Oct 2004 03:38:44 -0500
From: BRADINN KEITH FRENCH <bkfrench@wisc.edu>
Subject: LOL
To: soc125-2004@lists.students.wisc.edu

Guys,
This stuff is hilarious. I have never witnessed message board-like flame warfare on a class e-mail list. Can we reduce the 1 page essay responses to short and witty 1 or 2 liners though? That would preserve the comedic gold of this massive abuse of a list-serve. Maybe people can even start adding pictures after their responses of John Kerry getting hit in the face with a football with the caption, "PWNED!!1", or George Bush falling off a Segway. That would be excellent.

Date: Thu, 07 Oct 2004 04:53:13 -0500
From: jennifer bohn <jenniferbohn@wisc.edu>
Subject: Contemporary American ESociety: from Email to Ediscussion
To: Erik Olin Wright <wright@ssc.wisc.edu>

professor wright,

i assume you've been getting the same emails as i have. i do have an idea, if you want to allow discussion, but in a different forum.
i believe, perhaps erroneously, that there is a place on myuw (learn at uw - the discussion tab at the top of the page) where a message board-like discussion can be set up. this seems like the perfect opportunity to take advantage of it, if in fact such a thing does exist.

once again, i could be wrong. but it's just an idea.

thanks,

jennifer bohn

Date: Thu, 07 Oct 2004 10:43:43 -0500
From: MEGAN LEE STUBENVOLL <mlstubenvoll@wisc.edu>
To: soc125-2004@lists.students.wisc.edu

I would just that like to say it is one thing for people to voice their concerns, but i have a hard time being sympathetic to the emails that just sprout off phrases like "he is ignorant" or an idiot, or whatever other kind of negative comment comes to mind. I think that everyone has the right to complain and take action when they are upset, but by using these statements whose sole purpose is to be nasty, it doesn't make me want to listen. I think that we are all adult enough to be respectful while voicing our opinions. i know it will make me a lot more likely to listen to what all of you have to say.

Date: Thu, 07 Oct 2004 11:25:15 -0500
From: NICOLE MARIE NELSON <nmnelson3@wisc.edu>
Subject: a thought
To: soc125-2004@lists.students.wisc.edu

I really love politics, and I respect both sides of the political spectrum and would never hate or insult anyone who had different beliefs than me, that said I'm conservative and I plan on voting for Bush in the election. What I think is funny is that if our professor was an ultra-conservative and showed movies on issues such as religion or pro-life views on abortion, there would be a HUGE response. The majority of people in the class would be outraged. No one wants to watch movies, or hear a lecture that presents one side as true, especially if its not what you believe. I can give you so many examples in class where he presents the conservative side as wrong, and the liberal side as right. Its so easy to defend a professor that shares the same view as you, but to the few people in the class that are conservative, its hard to sit through something that you disagree so much with. I like our professor, but what he is doing is wrong. This is American Society, not what is wrong with america today, or my opinion on our government, you simply shouldnt teach
Controversy over content of Sociology 125

like that. Be honest, if you are against the war, if you dont like the current administration, and you believe that we need a change come November, you wouldnt like to sit through a class hearing about how great our government is doing, or why we are good for going to war. So please try to consider how some of us are feeling. I am open to hearing other points of view, but this class is ridiculous.

Date: Thu, 07 Oct 2004 11:44:49 -0500
From: SCOTT BRADFORD COLSON <sbcolson@wisc.edu>
Subject: Coming to your Defense
To: wright@ssc.wisc.edu

Prof Wright,
Perhaps you could pass this message along to those who aren't 'flaming liberals.'

Knowledge is produced by representations- news media and other sources construct narratives that represent the real. When the discourse used in construction of those narratives reflects the interest of the dominant institutions, we call that 'hegemony.' For example, the hegemonic impact of the signifier "9/11" is so strong in this country, few question its 'transcedental status.' In the film 'hi-jacking catastrophe', the documentary shows just how that signifier plays a role in hegemony, and thus the 'passive ideology' of everydayness. To state something is biased because it is counter-hegemonic is nothing more than a tautology- the concept of a bias is always predetermined by the hegemonic ideology. The key part is this: no new knowledge is produced by reproducing hegemonic discourse; instead, only a questioning of these practices (especially at the discursive level) is the only way to produce non-dominant knowledge. I find the first (unknown) students email simply ignorant of the concept of criticism (look at how deep the hegemony of the 'partisan' infects his/her discourse): s/he explains that any criticism of bush's policy is not only has no place in the class room (in sociology, nonetheless), but directly implicates you, the prof, by telling the students to vote for kerry. HIS/HER CONCLUSIONS ARE LAUGHABLE. The latter of the student emails is simply void of any relevent information worth discussing, except for her defense of her uncle, simply as perhaps a small failure on your part to help educate our students of 'framework' analysis. Just because when a student thinks big business they think 'nice uncle' is not the issue- rather, students, rather than question the systematicity of capitalism ever
increasing limits (to quote Oliver Stone's Wall Street, "When will it be enough? Never.").), resort to family arguments and subjective qualities of people one knows.

Pass this on, if you wish, because it seems to be missing link between the rich and important information discussed in class and ignorance of a few students.

Thank you for your time,
Scott Colson

Date: Thu, 07 Oct 2004 12:01:14 -0500
From: STEVEN PAUL KOPPA <koppa@wisc.edu>
Subject: Emails
To: Eric Olin Wright <wright@ssc.wisc.edu>

Hey prof.,
I just had a quick question for you about the email list. Are you on our email list? Because I'm assuming not which means you are missing out on some major debate. If you would like I could forward them to you, just let me know.

With that said, I feel that you are doing a great job teaching this class. Don't feel most of this class agrees with the few conservatives who are bothering to email everybody. I believe a lot of people just don't have time or patients to email.

Thank you,
Steve Koppa

Date: Thu, 07 Oct 2004 12:04:18 -0500
From: STEVEN PAUL KOPPA <koppa@wisc.edu>
Subject: Idea
To: soc125-2004@lists.students.wisc.edu

I really think that everybody needs to take a few min. and look at this. Just click where it says "Play this land."

http://www.jibjab.com/
Hello fellow annoyed students,
I will try to make this as brief as possible, no explanation needed.
I don't need emails asking "did you just put a smiley face in the email?"
"Refutation" like this is worthless and annoying.
I would like to thank Katherine for opening up this forum, since people
are too timid to speak up in discussion (where these discussions SHOULD
be taking place).
I deeply apologize for propagating this virus, but there are proper
forums for discussion and MY EMAIL ACCOUNT is not one of them.
Could we please engage each other on a personal level? Or in a chat
room? Or one of the thousands of possible ways other than this?
BECAUSE IF YOU DO NOT HAVE AT LEAST AN UNDERGRADUATE DEGREE, I
DO NOT
DESERVE TO HEAR PREACHING (FROM EITHER SIDE) which clogs my email
account.
Let me be perfectly clear. I am not anti-debate and sharing views, but I
am FOR regulation in the sense that this debate actively engages every
student in this class without their consent. This is a problem. I
could write so much more, but I will write none of it. I am really
really sorry for adding to the problem of sending emails to the entire
class, and as I do it I make the solemn promise that no matter what hate
emails are spun out in response to this, I will not reply to the entire
class, only people who email ME. that is how it should be. I am asking
for it now, before I wasn't, and I would like to respect those of you
who do not give 3 (pardon my french) shits about what I have to say.
Yours,
Kieran Grogan

Date: Thu, 07 Oct 2004 13:11:20 -0500
From: ELIZABETH MARIE LEDVINA <emledvina@wisc.edu>
Subject: Re: Message from a Soc125 student: Negative Campaigning in Soc 125
I woke up with like 50 emails from you people and thats not cool...bottom line is, if you dont like the class or disagree with the professor, drop it, and relieve the rest of us from this bullshit...he has been saying since day 1 that "you dont have to agree with what he says" how much does it take to get it through your heads? he wastes 10 or 15 minutes of class time each day trying to tell you dumb people that same thing and that cuts into the rest of our learning time, those of us who actually wants to hear what he has to say...there is no need to take sides here, just listen and shut up or get out

ps- for those of you who havent been at this university long, there are going to be many classes you disagree with things in, thats just how it is, its not a perfect world that is meant to fit each and every one of your needs and thoughts..thats just common sense that you should be smart enough to know if you are smart enough to attend this university

please stop this and leave us alone!
more experience and exposure to societal issues then any of the rest of us and i love to hear your take on what you have learned. if people dont like the setup of the class they should just drop it and stop wasting the rest of our times. i got over 30 emails today from the class list arguing back and forth about this issue and i think it is rather sickening to many of us. i think you are doing a great job so far of as a professor, you admitantly said that you are biased in some issues and you accept the repercusions of doing so. i believe u to be very noble and i hope you continue teaching in the same fashion. i respect what you have to say, not because i am a left wing liberal, but because you are an educated man that has a lot to offer to us, especially those of us yearning for higher education like law school. thank you for your time and dont get discouraged by the words of a few.

p.s. if you could ask in class for ppl not to send their opinions via class email lists that would be appreciated...i dont have the time or the energy to hear people argue about the way YOU teach YOUR course

thanks for the great education, i appreciate it

Liz Ledvina

Date: Thu, 07 Oct 2004 14:50:28 -0500
From: KELLY MARIE SCHLICHT <kschlicht@wisc.edu>
Subject: idea
To: soc125-2004@lists.students.wisc.edu

Why don't we all stop worrying about our differences and focus on one common thing....like studying for our midterm, perhaps? Don't you think that's a little more important??!!??!!??!

Date: Thu, 07 Oct 2004 16:05:59 -0500
From: MATTHEW SCOTT BUNKE <msbunke@wisc.edu>
Subject: Re: Message from a Soc125 student: Negative Campaigning in Soc 125 class is unacceptable
To: ELIZABETH MARIE LEDVINA <emledvina@wisc.edu>
Cc: Dustin Choy <dchoy@wisc.edu>, soc125-2004@lists.students.wisc.edu

Date: Thu, 07 Oct 2004 16:05:59 -0500
From: MATTHEW SCOTT BUNKE <msbunke@wisc.edu>
Subject: Re: Message from a Soc125 student: Negative Campaigning in Soc 125 class is unacceptable
To: ELIZABETH MARIE LEDVINA <emledvina@wisc.edu>
Cc: Dustin Choy <dchoy@wisc.edu>, soc125-2004@lists.students.wisc.edu
I can't help but laugh at this email.

Let me get this straight...what you're basically saying is that you're time is more important than mine? I should put up with 75 minutes of bullshit in class, not to mention the out-of-class video time? But you're too important to spend 30 seconds deleting email? What, you don't like these emails? You don't agree with them? You don't like putting up with this bullshit?

JOIN THE CLUB!!!! Starting to realize how the rest of us feel in class?

Date: Thu, 07 Oct 2004 17:04:21 -0500
From: HEIDI ARMINA NUNNEMACHER <nunnemacher@wisc.edu>
Subject: Soc 125 email debate
To: wright@ssc.wisc.edu

Hi Professor,

I am concerned that you haven't responded yet to the massive email debate. As others have mentioned, it really is an abuse of the class email list. I would really appreciate it if you emailed everyone to remind them of this. Some people have asked the others to stop, but I doubt that anyone will have an impact except you. If you encouraged an alternate form of debate, like a message board or post-movie forum, that might help.

On another note, I am enjoying the class. I understand that you are presenting facts, not opinions, and therefore do not interpret the class as inappropriate.

Thanks!
~Heidi Nunnemacher

Date: Thu, 07 Oct 2004 17:07:25 -0500
From: LINDSAY BETH DELEEUW <lbdeleeuw@wisc.edu>
Subject: chill out
To: soc125-2004@lists.students.wisc.edu

LET'S STOP THE HATE, people. Seriously. As much as I love to debate about these things, and as amusing as this all may be, bashing on your
classmates or the professor is way out of line. If you have something relevant or thoughtful to say, great, but don't email the whole class just to insult one person. Take it up with that individual if you really feel the need. I'm sorry to send this out to everyone, but some of these messages are just absolutely ridiculous. If you disagree with someone, perhaps you should consider talking to that individual and save the class from hearing you bitch about someone else.

Date: Thu, 07 Oct 2004 17:24:33 -0500
From: JESSE PAUL BOUMAN <bouman@wisc.edu>
Subject: this is the coolest thing ever
To: soc125-2004@lists.students.wisc.edu

Hello,

My name is Andy. I am not a member of this class, but my friend is. When he told me about the colossal amount of e-mails being sent out by members from this class, I envisioned maybe 5 or 6 complaints. I was not prepared for the onslaught of responses. I have read each e-mail very carefully and have just a few comments about what I have read. Folks, LUCILLE MARTHA STRAWN hit the nail on the head and she articulated it much better than I ever could have, but the fact is that Professor Wright has what most professors just dream about, students who are passionate. You all should be proud of being part of such a unique event. I never have been a part of something where so many people have had an opinion on an issue and took the time out of class to express that opinion. Thank you for producing the most entertaining inbox I have ever seen.

Andy Hansen

amhansen2@wisc.edu

P.S. If you don't want to read these e-mails, don't. The only one who can complain about their inbox being clogged up is my friend Cubby, and that's because we have started a national movement to put jjpalet@wisc.edu down whenever we sign up for one of the many pornography sites on the internet.
You guys should just start a Soc. 125 chat, because half the ppl are complaining about getting too many e-mails, where only the people interested in the real issues would go to the chat and everyone else can be left in peace.

Professor Erik Olin Wright, fed up with disrespectful students and the conservative contamination of contemporary American Society, reveals his true identity as the mutant Magnanimous!, and leads an army of mutant liberals to war with humans.

In class on Wednesday I ALMOST suggested a list serve for our class! At my former institution I took a class on labor history in the US (another class where political passions naturally rise) and as part of the requirements for the course we had to participate on the class listserv/weblog... It was a productive outlet for all students personally as well as an exercise in democracy where productivity
relies on there being conflict. I wish I could help some with the technical issues involved but I really have no idea how it is done. If at all possible I would highly recommend such an addition to the class website!

Carly Yuenger
Student 201

Date: Fri, 08 Oct 2004 02:59:26 -0600
From: PETER O INNVAER <poinnvaer@wisc.edu>
Subject: 'cuz i'm drunk enough to care
To: soc125-2004@lists.students.wisc.edu

first of all - bryan mueller is the man for his prowess with photoshop (or possibly microsoft paint) and his severe burn of our professor.

second of all - i'm generally not one for a bunch of badmouthing and all this hootenanny over politics, but in the spirit of the two forties of mickey's fine malt liquor i just drank while watching broadcasts of both robin hood (the one with morgan freeman) and low budget 90's porn, i must say this whole debate is like masturbation. we may get all worked up and sweaty and excited, but in the end -what gets accomplished? our little swim teams all over the walls of room 6210 of humanities? granted it may make the walls a little thicker and enrages folks who don't think exactly as we do, it really doesn't mean a thing.

let's get the facts straight- erik professor dude olin has extremely leftist views rivaling those of zack de la rocha and would like 350 minions to think the way he does. i dont see zack de la rocha making any bag lunches so i dont think it's a big deal that he thinks this way. nobody's REAL viewpoints are ever changed by swayed statistics and biased presentation. so if he beileves in democracy as much as he claims to he will take all viewpoints into account and treat the rest of this course accordingly. and if he doesn't i think we all reserve the right to beat him savagely with pillow cases full of oranges (no bruises).

and on the question of minions thinking the way he does- if anyone really cares about politics and wants to make real change, emailing soc 125 students is not the way to go. i dont care much about politics-judging by my shitty post i care about kevin costner, pornography, and annoying the hell out of everyone on the soc 125 maling list. so if a bunch of blow-hards wanna dazzle people with their oh so insightful political rhetoric, i suggest they do it from that tiny stage in
library mall. (that crazy jesus guy, gideon's bible in hand, will enjoy the company)

this day in politics, the metaphor is the voice of the people...so i ask, do band-aids heal broken legs?

america, at its current stage, is the little brother of history. every good drug dealer i've ever met is a little brother.

taking a fundamental view of the world, what is the the next step or goal of human nature? i attest that it is communication. humans are the only group of animals that don't look, or think, exactly alike, and therefore - wars, bigotry and domination will occur. the current stage in evolution is getting past these differences. communication with the end result of understanding is what must and will happen. it just takes awhile. on a small scale, all this "hate" and arguments is what we need right now...

where am i? fourthly? fifthly? anywho...that's my take on this.

maybe next week, instead of whatever political movie we have planned, let's watch e.t. the extra terrestrial - i love that movie.

and sixthly, i'm horribly intoxicated, with little hope of remembering the last hour, so i bid thee all farewell and whatever becomes of my thoughts i don't care a whole lot, just that people realize communication among different parts of society is a good thing, that's all i hope for everyone involved.
Message from me from MIT

Date: Sat, 09 Oct 2004 16:46:50 -0500
From: Erik Olin Wright <wright@ssc.wisc.edu>
Subject: The firestorm in Sociology 125

Dear students in Sociology 125,

I have been away from Madison for several days at a conference at M.I.T. I just now have had a chance to check my email and, of course, was greeted with a mailbox full of exchanges about politics in the classroom. In will prepare a more extended reaction when I get back to Madison, but I just wanted to say two things quickly:

(1) Even though some of the emails have been extremely hostile, given the intensity of the feelings over the issues, I understand (I think) why some students have expressed themselves in such angry ways. I would, of course, prefer a more respectful form of communication, but I understand that sometimes this is very difficult. I hope that my replies are taken as respectful of everyone.

(2) I am concerned that the controversy over the session in the course on Militarism and my decision to show a specific film in conjunction with that section has spilled over to an undifferentiated indictment of every section and theme of the course. Much of what I have taught in these first five weeks falls squarely within the mainstream of political sociology and does not embody a specifically "liberal" or "radical" approach (whether biased or not). For example, the extended discussion we had of free riding, rational ignorance, electoral systems, and voting rules presented ideas and concepts that are as relevant to a conservative political approach to American democracy as to a liberal one. (Indeed -- these tools of analysis are more often associated with conservative approaches). I think it would be a great shame if those students in the class who object so vehemently to my political orientation ended up discounting all of the ideas of the class on the grounds that everything I say must be "bullshit" (I noticed that a few students have characterized every session of the class as 75 minutes of bullshit). These are valuable intellectual tools with very wide application, and are not contaminated by my political stance.

I will write a more careful reply to the discussion when I return to Madison.

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Comments I made in Class, Monday October 11, 2004

The Controversy

I know many of you are sick of the issues raised in the email storm trigger by the film Hijacking Catastrophe, and some of you have explicitly said that you resent class time being absorbed in these matters. This will – I hope – be the last time I directly say anything about this, but I do feel that there are some things that need to be said.

I have a number of points I would like to make:

1. Sociological meaning of these events. The phenomenon of this exchange is itself a pretty interesting thing to think about sociologically in a course about Contemporary American Society. The sheer fact of this intense exchange of views both among the students in the class and between you and me reveals much about our society. There are few places in the world, even in other developed democracies, where students would feel entitled to engage in this sort of attack on a professor. I think it is a good thing, a tribute to our cultural and political openness, that students are prepared to challenge authority figures. It is also, ironically perhaps, one of the legacies of the 1960s. I think this reflects two important features of the situation: first, you are not afraid of professors – you don’t feel that we have arbitrary power to harm you, and second, that you are not intimidated by knowledge or expertise, but feel that you have just as much right to your views as I do to mine. This is a very American view of things, I think. Of course, sometimes it means that people are overly certain about their uninformed opinions and unwilling to acknowledge that someone else might know more than they do about something.

2. Lack of Civility. I understand the intensity of feelings, but I am saddened by the lack of civility in some of the exchanges. I think it is a good thing that we have had a vigorous dialogue and that so many of you weighed in on the issues, but the hostility of the rhetoric in some cases was not, in my judgment, constructive and did not promote mutual understanding.

3. perspective vs distortion. I do bring a perspective to bear on the subject matter of this course, and this perspective embodies a political stance as well. But does it really generate bias, and what do we really mean by bias? I would like to distinguish between having a perspective and distorting one’s analysis to support that perspective. Let me give one specific example from our lectures: the study of electoral campaigns and the problem of money in politics. I will examine five claims from that discussion. Only one of them – I think – directly reflects my political values. Here is how I would separate the issues:
The following three propositions I believe to be factually correct claims that most sociologists and political scientists would agree with regardless of their political stance:

(1). The idea “Political equality of citizens is an important component of democracy” is a very widely held value. Most Americans hold this value and it is enshrined as a principle American democracy. “One person one votes” captures this idea.

(2). This value sometimes comes into conflict with another broadly held value – that people should be able to spend their money as they please to advance ideas and political positions they care about.

(3). Given huge inequalities in incomes and wealth in American society, the ability of people to turn private economic power into political power by using their money in politics undercuts political equality and thus weakens democracy.

The following claim is a statement of my own political values and priorities, and thus reflects my political perspective:

(4). In the conflict between these two values – (1) the centrality of political equality for true democracy, and (2) the importance of individual freedom to spend money on politics as one wishes – I place greater weight on the former and feel that it is desirable to create big obstacles to turning economic power into political power even if this means sacrificing a bit of the value of individual freedom to spend. Sometimes it is necessary to face real trade-offs between values that one holds I think giving up a little individual freedom to spend one’s money as one likes is worth it if this results in a big increase in political equality and democracy.

The policy recommendation:

(5). The policy recommendation we explored – the Patriot Cards -- illustrates how one could accomplish the trade-off in #4. I think this is an objective analysis of how Patriot Cards work, and thus the analysis itself is not distorted, even though it is being discussed because of my perspective.

Now, I do not think that there is any “bias” in this discussion. None of the factual descriptions of electoral politics and campaign financing was distorted, and the discussion of the Patriot Cards correctly illustrated a solution to the problem of money in politics if one agreed that this was a problem. My political stance entered this discussion in two ways: first, in choosing the topic in the first place – if I didn’t care about political equality and see this as a core value in democracy, then I wouldn’t think insulating political power from economic power was so important to study; and second, in my judgment about how these two values should be balanced against each other.
4. **What it takes to make the case for bias.** To argue that there is systematic bias in a lecture or a film, therefore, it is necessary to show that there really are distortions. These can be misrepresenting facts or leaving out facts, or faulty reasoning. It is not enough to disagree with the conclusions, or even to identify a political stance you dislike; you need to show where this stance has lead to a distortion. It is certainly not enough to denounce a person because you disagree with their political orientation to prove that what they have said is distorted.

5. **The intellectual content of the course.** Finally, I think it would be a great shame if those of you who were so upset by the film “Hijacking Catastrophe” and by what you feel are the biases in my lectures were to reject out of hand all of the ideas we are studying. Most of what I have been explaining in class are basic intellectual tools for thinking about society and politics. These tools are broadly used by social scientists of every political persuasion, liberals and conservatives alike. The idea of the free rider problems or rational ignorance, for example, are powerful and important ideas. The idea that different voting rules have an impact on the nature of political competition does not reflect my own political perspective; this is a broadly accepted idea. It would therefore be a real mistake to think that all of these ideas are somehow contaminated because I have presented them.

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**Additional emails after the lecture**

Date: Mon, 11 Oct 2004 14:03:42 -0500  
From: XUEHAO ZHANG <xuehaozhang@students.wisc.edu>  
Subject: For those who think it's not acceptable for professor express his political stands in class  
To: soc125-2004@lists.students.wisc.edu

Certainly I dont know which disrespectful student brought this up first, he Quoted "it's against the state law for professionals doing political campaign while on job" thus alleged that professor is not suppose to address his opinion on issues regarding the ruling parties. First I am going to say I am neither a conservatist nor liberal, but I really would like ask you to go back read the course title "CONTEMPORARY AMERICAN SOCIETY", you fools. What we are studying here is what's going on around us today, it's inevitable for the professor to come across material that are overlap ing with current political issues. He is not imposing anything on anybody, besides you can argue if you had any objections but you can NOT tell him to STFU. Those mindless duped conservatist maybe should NOT take this class at all. Dont go spoil the fun for others listen to the lecture, especially my fun, and dont abuse the soc 125 student email to flood everyone's email account (gosh I thought better not be virus attack or something
when I saw 60 unread emails sitting there )