



'FEEL GOOD' MATRICULATION

By Bill Boyer

If you've been doing any reading, other than tweets and blogs, the question may have occurred to you: "What's happening in our schools?"

Rather than the Three Rs, emphasis appears to be on PC. A New Mexico elementary principal instructed his teachers to never call their students "boys" or "girls", according to his interpretation of the school's new Gender Identity Procedural Directive. And a suburban Washington high school promoted self-esteem by naming 117 pupils in a class of 457, as valedictorians. Then consider New York City's new guidelines for standardized tests (again, referencing *The Week* magazine), that ban undesirable words such as "dancing", "dinosaurs" and "birthdays", as they might "evoke unpleasant emotions in students"—with "Halloween" and "junk food" also on the list of proscribed words. Does this to you, as myself, conjure up bygone days of "book banning"?

While in "higher education" circles, a group of students at the University of Virginia demanded that the faculty be forbidden to quote Thomas Jefferson, since he had owned slaves—though also founding the school! With officials at the University of Florida offering free coun-

seling to students offended by Halloween costumes that "reinforce stereotypes of particular races, genders, cultures or religions". And African-American students at the University of Michigan requesting a 'segregated safe space', in the wake of the election, because "the police, as a union, has endorsed Trump."

Rather than ranking at the apex in the important field of education, youth in the U.S. (and England)—in the 16 to 19 age group—are among the most illiterate in the developed world, according to the OECD's latest literacy ratings: coming in at 21st; below even Poland, Germany and Italy. The U.S. also, according to College Board standings, shows up but 12th among developing nations in education—trailing Canada, South Korea, Russia, Japan, New Zealand, Ireland, Norway, Israel, France, Belgium and Australia.

It appears, again, that our emphasis should be on learning; rather than proclamations, such as the University of New Hampshire's Bias-Free Language Guide, which lists the word American as "problematic", with the admonition that "U.S. citizen" should be substituted, since there are other countries in North, South and Central America . . . also warning against use of words such as "rich" and "poor", and gendered terms such as "mothering".

And because our report card is so dismal, with the U.S. currently ranking 17th in reading, 21st in science and 26th in math, perhaps it's time to consider that "sensitivity" needs supplanted by—or at least take a backseat to—common sense: such as Yale's Erika Christakis, in maintaining that she didn't believe in banning costumes some would consider culturally insensitive, since "free speech and the ability to tolerate offense are the hallmarks of a free and open society". Furious students screamed and cursed at her and her husband, another faculty member, and demanded they resign. There also were complaints that the Christakis family hadn't done enough to make the school feel like "a place of comfort and home", rather than an "intellectual space". Can't help but wonder how these pampered pupils will cope in the "real world", huh?

Columnist Kathleen Parker opines that: "Concurrent with these episodes of outrage is the recent surge on campuses of 'trigger warnings' in syllabuses to alert students to content that might be upsetting, and 'safe zones' where students can seek refuge when ideas make them uncomfortable. It seems absurd to have to mention that the purpose of higher education is to be challenged, to be exposed to different views and, above all, to be exhilarated by the exercise of free speech—other people's as well as one's own."

An article in *The Atlantic*, by Greg Lukianoff and Jonathan Haidt, states: "Self-righteous, politically correct students are demanding that campuses become 'safe spaces', cleansed of all 'words, ideas and subjects that might cause discomfort or give offense'. Catering to these demands for 'trigger warnings' on 'upsetting' literature and historical events is corroding the quality of college education—but what's gone unsaid is the debilitating effect it is having on students themselves. . . . What's at stake here is not only academic freedom but also college students' 'mental health.'"

This current trend of mollicoddling is



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best summed up by Peter Gray, PhD, a research professor at Boston college writing in *Psychology Today*: "Where does this unresilient, needy generation come from? It is rooted in the way children are being parented over the past few decades and the decline in 'children's opportunities to play, explore, and pursue their own interests away from adults'.

"These kids were raised in an era when everyone gets a trophy and a star on their forehead—regardless of effort or results. They are accustomed to their 'helicopter parents' solving all their problems. They have not been given the opportunity to get into trouble and find their own way out, to experience failure and realize they can survive it, to be called bad names by others and learn how to respond without adult intervention.

"The result? Young people, 18 years and older, going to college still unable or unwilling to take responsibility for themselves, still feeling that if a problem arises they need an adult to solve it."

One recent example: Two college students "sought counseling because they had seen a mouse in their off-campus apartment"—after calling the police, who were kind enough to set a mousetrap.

One of this country's most prolific purveyors of modern prose, Louis L'Amour, stated in his *Education of a Wandering Man*: "Acquiring an education has many aspects, of which school is only one, and the present approach, I believe, is the wrong one. . . . Without claiming to have all the answers, I can only express my feeling that our methods of instruction do much to hamper a child in learning. We do not at present educate people to think but, rather, to have opinions, and that is something altogether different."

With the cost of college ranging up to \$60,000 a year—and more than 19,000 graduates now working as parking lot attendants, with another 300,000 serving as waiters and waitresses—it would appear that for young people who are serious about studying, the preference of learning an employable skill—such as can be acquired in a trade school—would trump a degree, anytime.

