

**Opening Statement of Tim Groseclose for the Constitution and Civil Justice  
Subcommittee of the House Judiciary Committee**

**September 27, 2018**

Good afternoon. My name is Tim Groseclose. I currently am a professor of economics at George Mason University. I am also the holder of the Adam Smith Chair at the Mercatus Center, a think tank affiliated with George Mason.

I joined George Mason and the Mercatus Center in July, 2014. Before that, for eleven and a half years I was a professor of political science at UCLA.

Later I'll discuss some incidents that I've witnessed of bias toward conservative professors. Most of those occurred during my tenure at UCLA.

Before UCLA, for approximately four and a half years, I taught at the Stanford Business School. Before that, I taught at Ohio State, and before that, I taught at Carnegie Mellon. Along the way, I have held visiting positions at Caltech, Harvard, and MIT.

Two of my research projects are especially relevant to the bias I'll discuss.

One is a method that I created to measure, quantitatively, the slants of news outlets. That is, the method gives a number that says how liberal or conservative a news outlet is. The method also gives numbers to describe how liberal or conservative congressional speeches are. Consequently, the method can make conclusions such as: (i) the average *New York Times* article has about the same slant as the average Joe Lieberman speech, and (ii) the average story on Fox News' *Special Report* has about the same slant as the average Susan Collins speech. In the project I defined "unbiased" as having the same slant as a speech by the average member of Congress. By this definition my method concludes that, by and large, all mainstream media outlets are left of center, and conservatives, who for decades have been claiming a liberal bias of the media, have been largely correct on this claim.

The second research project sprang from some administrative work. During 2005-2008 I was a member of UCLA's faculty oversight committee for undergraduate admissions. During that time there was widespread belief that the UCLA admissions staff was giving racial preferences to black and Latino students, which violated Proposition 209, a clause of the California Constitution. Near the end of my term on the committee, I asked admission staff members for a random set of 1,000 applications. They refused. I asked several more times, and they continued to refuse. Eventually, I resigned in protest, and several media outlets reported my resignation. The incident led eventually to my writing a book, which is entitled *Cheating: An Insider's Report on the Use of Race in Admissions at UCLA*.

I'd like now to discuss the bias against conservative professors in academia. I can't say that I have proof. I have not done any sort of systematic statistical study like I did with my research on media bias or my research on UCLA admissions.

Instead, I'd like to report a series of anecdotes—specifically, eight anecdotes. Although, again, not proof, they give some strong circumstantial evidence of the bias. I think they give readers a good feel for the environment that a conservative professor faces at a typical American university.

### **Anecdote 1**

When I was at UCLA, a political science professor from another university presented his research at a seminar. His research examined campaign contributions from senior executives at major corporations. His goal, like my media bias research, was to compare corporations to members of Congress and answer questions such as, "Is the average senior executive at Disney more or less liberal than, say, Joe Manchin?" "Is the average senior executive at Google more or less liberal than, say, Chuck Schumer?"

He found that the bulk of corporations were fairly liberal, about as liberal as the average Democrat in Congress. He even found that the vast majority of financial corporations were left-of-center.

After his talk, I told him: "You know who would love your results? Ann Coulter. I kind of know her. Would you mind if I sent her an email? I bet she might write about your research."

He quickly replied: "Oh, please don't do that. That could only hurt my career."

### **Anecdote 2**

Around spring 2012, UCLA reviewed me for what I thought would be an automatic promotion. UCLA, however, denied me that promotion.<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Specifically, I was reviewed for a promotion from "Professor Level IV" to "Professor Level VI." Originally, the recommended raise for a "step" at UCLA was 8%. However, because of financial difficulties at UCLA, at the time of my review raises for step promotions had dropped to around 4%. Since my potential promotion was two "steps," my total expected raise was two times the latter amount, or about 8%. According to several senior colleagues, the following was the rule of thumb for a step promotion. If a professor published a book, then that merited a promotion of two steps. If a professor published three articles at peer-reviewed journals, then that merited a promotion of one step. If a professor had made serious progress on a book, including giving to the review committees a significant fraction of a completed manuscript, then that also merited a promotion of one step. Since my last step promotion, I had published a major book, *Left Turn*:

I was appalled and shocked, and my wife was even more appalled and shocked. “If they’re going to treat you like that,” she exploded when I told her the news, “you *should* become deadwood.” By that she meant I should follow the path that some professors adopt once they receive tenure—they stop doing research and only do a bare minimum amount of teaching.

Shortly after, a professor friend from George Mason called. “We have a job opening for a senior professor,” he said. “Would you be willing to apply?”

“Yes,” I responded. “And you happened to pick the exact right time to ask,” I added.

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*How Liberal Media Bias Distorts the American Mind.* The book, I think nearly everyone at UCLA would agree, had much greater impact than the average book from a UCLA professor. For instance, it was a minor best seller—at one point it was ranked among the top 250 books on Amazon. It had been the focus of several media stories, including approximately a dozen reviews, a couple dozen radio interviews, and about a half dozen television interviews. An associate editor of *Perspectives on Politics*—the leading political science journal for reviews of books—had announced that an entire section of an upcoming edition of the journal would be devoted to my book. Thus, it was reasonable for me to expect a “two step” promotion. All the initial stages of my review were favorable. UCLA had asked several scholars outside of UCLA to write letters. All the letters recommended that I be promoted at least to Professor Level VI. One letter even recommended that I be promoted to Professor Level IX, which came with a new title, “Distinguished Professor.” A committee of professors from the political science department gave me a favorable review. So did the chair of my department. So did my dean. But at the next stage, I did not receive a favorable review. UCLA’s Committee on Academic Personnel, an anonymous university-wide committee, recommended that I not be promoted. The next step was decided by Carole Goldberg, UCLA’s vice chancellor of academic personnel. My understanding is that if she had followed CAP’s recommendation, I would remain at Professor Level IV. She chose a compromise decision, to promote me to Professor Level V. This was actually a worse outcome for me than if I had stayed at Level IV. The reason is because it would mean that my book would only count for one step. I would have been much better off if I had asked to be promoted to Level V when I had finished approximately half the book, and then use the remaining half to apply for my review to Level VI. In essence, Goldberg’s decision meant that approximately half my book would be wasted. Instead, if I had remained at Level IV, I could have applied again the next year to reach Level VI. Because of Goldberg’s decision, I would consequently need to produce much more work—approximately three peer-reviewed articles or half a new book—and have to wait approximately three years before I could be reviewed for Level VI.

I eventually was offered that job. As my wife and I considered the offer, we concluded that UCLA discriminated against me because of my research on media bias and UCLA admissions. We are convinced that—if the data instead had produced results that would please progressives, or perhaps if I had fudged the analysis to produce such results—then UCLA would have given me the promotion.

My wife and I also concluded that the discrimination would likely continue and that, consequently, my salary would not keep pace with inflation. We estimated that, no matter how hard I worked and no matter how outstanding my research and teaching might be, my inflation-adjusted salary would likely drop by 25 percent or more by the time I would retire.

We decided to leave UCLA and move to George Mason.

In fairness to UCLA, I must admit that I have no proof that UCLA discriminated against me. Further, I suspect that reasonable people will believe that UCLA may have had legitimate reasons for denying me the promotion.

However, I hope such skeptics will consider the following facts. First, UCLA is a much more prestigious university than George Mason. For instance, organizations that rank universities typically rank UCLA at around 25<sup>th</sup> and George Mason at around 150<sup>th</sup>. Second, after eleven and a half years in Los Angeles, my wife and I had many friendships and other deep connections to the area. The same was true of our two children who, at the time, were in first and seventh grade. Third, the weather in Southern California is much, much better than the weather in Northern Virginia.

Given those facts, why would a family make such a move? Even if you doubt that UCLA really discriminated against me, I hope you'll consider that my wife and I must have *believed* that UCLA was discriminating against me. It's weird for a family to choose such a move. Some extraordinary events must have occurred to cause a family to make such a decision.

### **Anecdote 3**

I witnessed even worse discrimination against James Enstrom, a UCLA colleague, friend, and fellow conservative.

Several months before my review, Enstrom had published an article showing that diesel particulates do not have the mortality effects claimed by many previous studies. In fact, his article showed that the best evidence is actually consistent with a nil effect. This angered many in the environmental establishment, and it led, I'm convinced, to Enstrom losing his job as a research scientist at UCLA (although he eventually sued UCLA, and the court forced UCLA to re-hire him).

Enstrom had long been something of a gadfly to environmental scientists. Before his work on diesel particulates, he had published a study showing that the effects of second-hand cigarette smoke are not nearly as harmful as many other researchers claim. In another incident Enstrom blew the whistle on illegal activities by some of his UCLA colleagues, which caused them to lose their positions on the scientific advisory board to the California Air Resources Board. Specifically, Enstrom noted that some of the advisory board's members were violating a California law that limited the number of years that they could serve on the board.

In addition to all these things, Enstrom did the scientific equivalent of an end zone dance. Around the time that he published his work on diesel particulates, he criticized a report that was sponsored by the California Air Resources Board. Part of his criticism was to expose that the report's lead author, Hien Tran, had lied about receiving a PhD from UC Davis. Instead, Tran received his PhD from Thornhill University, an online diploma mill.

At a presentation at a scientific conference, Enstrom flashed a power-point slide illustrating Tran's Thornhill diploma, and then he flashed a slide of his own diploma—a Ph.D. in physics from Stanford University.

Soon after, Enstrom's department at UCLA held a quasi-secret meeting. The leader in organizing the meeting was John Froines. Now a tenured professor at UCLA, Froines is perhaps most famous for being the bomb expert of the Chicago Seven, the group charged with inciting a riot at the 1968 Democratic National Convention. The attendees of the meeting voted not to renew Enstrom's contract, which meant that, in effect, Enstrom would be fired from his job at UCLA.

#### **Anecdote 4**

For decades, political scientists have worried that their research underestimates the degree to which racism affects voting decisions. One major problem is that, if a voter is racist, then he or she is unlikely to admit that to a pollster.

One way to counteract the problem is to use a "list experiment," an innovative technique devised by James Kuklinski, Michael Cobb, and Martin Gillens.

Just after the 2008 election, political scientists Simon Jackman and Lynn Vavreck used the list-experiment method to estimate the number of people who voted for or against Barack Obama because he is black. Perhaps surprisingly, they found that more people voted for Obama because he is black than voted against him because he is black. That is, Jackman and Vavreck's research suggests that, on net, Barack Obama's skin color *helped* him during the 2008 election.

Around 2010, Vavreck and Jackman completed a draft of a paper and presented it at a panel at the American Political Science Association meetings. According to many accounts, the audience was extremely hostile to them. "Basically, the whole room turned against them," a political scientist told me.

I read the draft paper, and I thought it was methodologically sound, and I found no reason to doubt the accuracy of their results. Further, I am aware of no scholar who has proposed reasons to doubt the accuracy of their findings.

Yet Vavreck and Jackman, it appears, have abandoned that research. It has now been eight years. The research has not been published, and the researchers no longer list the working paper, nor any version of it, on their web sites.

Perhaps it is unfair to speculate on their motives. But I strongly believe that part of the reason they abandoned the research is because of the leftwing bias in academia. The results, although accurate, are not pleasing to the progressive consensus in political science. Jackman and Vavreck, in my view, are very smart, talented, and prolific researchers. In 2010, I believe that they and others could see that they were on a trajectory for much success, including the strong likelihood of being offered endowed professorships and being named to honor organizations such as the American Academy of Arts and Sciences. Indeed, now, in 2018, Vavreck holds an endowed professorship, and Jackman has been named to the AAAS. If they had continued their 2010 research, however, those honors would have been jeopardized and possibly not occurred at all.

### **Anecdote 5**

As I neared completing my book on UCLA admissions, I asked several conservative professor friends if they would write endorsement blurbs for it. Most refused, however. It's possible that their reasons were related to the merit of the book—that they simply didn't think the book was very good. But none offered any doubts about its accuracy nor mentioned any other reservations about its content.

Instead, I strongly suspect that their reasons were because they feared retaliation. As one friend admitted, "I'd love to write a blurb. But the problem is that I have a very distinct last name, and my daughter is applying to colleges this year. I'm afraid that I'd hurt her chances of getting into a good school."

Many studies have documented the underrepresentation of conservatives among American professors. This anecdote illustrates how the underrepresentation is magnified and can feed on itself. That is, conservatives in academia—much more than liberals, I warrant—fear retaliation if they endorse the work of their fellow conservatives. Liberals in academia don't face the same fears—at least not to the same degree as conservatives. This is simply because of the numbers—there are fewer conservative professors to retaliate against them.

As a consequence, not only are there fewer conservatives in academia, their research is less effective because it is less likely to receive favorable endorsements—even from their fellow conservatives.

### **Anecdote 6**

In the previous anecdote, I suggested that my conservative friends would face retaliation if they endorsed my book. I do not have proof of that, however, I at least have some suggestive evidence.

One friend, after I asked him to write a blurb, told me: "I started writing the blurb, but it got longer and longer. I think I can do even better. I'd like to write a full-length review of your book."

He did. The review offered much praise of my book, and it was eventually published in an academic journal.

Several months later, he told me. "I'm not sure I should have written that review. I was recently nominated to the American Academy of Arts and Sciences. But then I was turned down by a vote of the membership. I always thought the vote by the membership was pro forma. I've never heard of anyone being voted down at that stage. At any rate, something weird happened. I don't have proof, but I suspect that my review of your book was the cause."

### **Anecdote 7**

While most of my anecdotes document bias against conservatives, I don't want to overstate the case. I believe there are pockets of academia that are genuinely fair to conservatives and largely free of bias. As this anecdote helps to illustrate, the field of economics comes close to that ideal.

Before I describe the anecdote, it is useful to provide some more background about my media bias research. One aspect of the research that I believe is a significant innovation is my idea to compare media content to congressional speeches. Although now that idea may seem simple and obvious, no one had thought of it before my research. Before my research, thousands of media studies had been published. But none compared media content to congressional speeches. Since my research was published, however, I would estimate that something like a quarter of all media-bias studies compare media content to congressional speeches. I don't believe any of those studies would exist if I hadn't introduced the idea.

Another aspect that I believe was a significant innovation was my statistical method. To compute the estimates, I couldn't use any of the "off the shelf" statistical routines, like, say, a regression. Instead, I had to create my own. This involved writing a computer program that was more than 500 lines long. My method involved "maximum likelihood estimation," a technique I learned in a class during my second year in the PhD program at the Stanford Business School. That class required as a pre-requisite an entire year of PhD-level econometrics courses. Those courses, in turn, required many undergrad-level math and statistics courses, including an entire year of calculus.

In short, my method required not just creativity but several years of specialized training.

Among the leftwing political scientists who commented on my research, almost all focused on petty criticisms. Very few, if any, mentioned any the innovations involved with my method.

The opposite was true in economics. One incident helps illustrate this. Just after I'd written a draft of a paper describing the research, I presented it at a seminar at the Stanford Business School. One of the attendees was Justin Wolfers, a young Australian professor with extremely leftwing views. His views—I think he would admit—are not just standard-American-Democratic-party liberal, but more like European-socialist liberal. He is more liberal, I would warrant, than every, or at least almost every, member of Congress.

He asked some questions during my presentation that made clear that he was skeptical of my results. But after the seminar, he approached me and congratulated me. "This is rock star material, mate," were the first words he said to me.

His praise was echoed in other corners of economics. For instance, a prestigious economics journal, the *Quarterly Journal of Economics*, eventually published the results.

A few years after the results were published, I was invited to be a member the 400-or-so-member committee that is responsible for nominating scholars for the economics Nobel prize. I have good reason to believe that the main reason for this honor was my research on media bias.

### **Anecdote 8**

Once, while I was a professor at UCLA, some colleagues and I were chatting in the political science mailroom. We noticed an academic economics journal on the table in the center of the room. Like many academic journals, its front page listed the titles of its articles. One title was something like "Was Americorps a Success?" I announced to my colleagues, "You know, the great thing about economics journals is that we don't know the answer to that question. We have to actually read the article to find out. If that were a political science or sociology journal, we'd already know the answer. If the authors found that Americorps was not a success, there's no way the article would be published. In fact, the authors would probably bury the research before even trying to get it published." Everyone in the room, although they were all political science professors, seemed to agree.