PRINCETON STUDIES IN CULTURAL SOCIOLOGY

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BECOMING RIGHT

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crete resources that these three organizations offer to students. As suggested earlier, while all of these organizations share a fundamental message—"You need us because your college or university is not exposing you to intellectual diversity"—they also articulate that message differently: in populist form to "Joe Average" students (Roger Custer, YAF) and in more refined form to the "the best and the brightest," as the ISI's website puts it.[83] The students and alums we interviewed were aware of these distinctions—Eastern Elite respondents even more so than Western Public interviewees. In crafting their conservative personae and activities on campus, students draw selectively from this larger national conservative repertoire.

Chapter 4

How Conservatives Think about Campus

The Effects of College Reputations, Social Scenes, and Academics on Student Experience

What do conservative students discover when they get to campus? Certainly the arguments developed by the national organizations described in the last chapter—as well as by Fox News, the conservative blogosphere, and such books as Alan Kors and Harvey Silverglate's *The Shadow University* and David Horowitz's *Indoctrination U*—are intended to lead right-leaning students to expect the worst.[1] Critics accuse professors of politicizing the classroom when they should be exposing students to a canonical education in Western culture. They complain about administrators who, they say, mandate freshmen orientation programs and support libertine campus organizations that create a sexually decadent environment on campus. They condemn affirmative action admission policies, diversity requirements, speech codes, and what they see as an antipathy toward the military as wrong-headed and hopelessly "politically correct."[2] And while not all conservative commentators subscribe to a complete "indoctrination" model as per the David Horowitz title above, virtually all conservative critics argue that a hostile political atmosphere exists on American campuses that militates against diversity of opinion

and has a chilling effect on speech and expression—a problem for all members of the campus but especially for conservative students, who, it is said, are all too frequently at the mercy of their professors.[3] Given the multiple sources of information delivering this unified message, we would not be surprised to learn that right-leaning students at institutions of higher education across the country might experience their college years as one of embattlement.[4]

Yet the intimation animating the conservative critique—that students perceive that their colleges and universities are engaged in a massive program of liberalization—is questionable on a couple of counts. This is not just because no real scholarship of student perceptions has yet been conducted but also because it ignores the fact that there is considerable institutional variation in the field of higher education, which makes any hypothesis of uniform student experiences—of *anything* on campus, including political indoctrination—doubtful. Students today find themselves in postsecondary education settings that encompass everything from elite Ivy League universities to the for-profit online degree programs that advertise during daytime television. Even among Research I universities of the type we study in this book, a tremendous amount of variation exists. While there is certainly a high degree of institutional similarity between, say, the Duke Universities and the University of Minnesotas of the world (both schools employ ladder-rank faculty with PhDs, both require undergraduate students to select a major, and both put an emphasis on research productivity for graduate students and faculty, among other similarities), there are simply far too many different ingredients in the mix for any two universities to be exactly alike or, more to the point, to be precisely similar in how students perceive them. The basic organizational structures of universities, like the types of housing that students live in or the way students are required to fulfill distribution requirements, make a huge difference in students' experiences and impressions of their schools. Less concrete aspects of higher education, as well, have an impact on students' perceptions: a university's reputation or standing in the wider world, the expectations the university places on its students for what it means to be a member of its community, the social scene affecting friendship networks, student clubs, and athletics—each of these also plays a role in creating undergraduates' perceptions of their classes, their professors, and their political and social lives.[5]

Based on the assumption that specific campus organizational and cultural features shape students' experiences, this chapter delves into what conservative students say they find when they arrive on the Western Public and Eastern Elite campuses—and the degree to which students comment on their university's politics. Whereas chapter 2 introduced us to conservative college students both at the national scale and in our sample, and chapter 3 acquainted us with the broadest level of national conservative politics and organizations, this chapter focuses on the campus level, as does the rest of the book. Following a brief overview of the two schools at the center of our study, Western Flagship and Eastern Elite, we go into extensive detail on these campuses in three general areas. First, we look at the schools' reputations and characters, examining what our conservative interviewees said they expected to find on their college campus when they applied for admission and what their strongest considerations were in choosing to attend their university. Next, we turn to extracurricular aspects of college life, describing the social and residential scene at each school and our interviewees' perceptions of the student body, and how this causes them to feel that they fit in or stand out uneasily as conservatives. Last, we discuss academics. We go through the nuts and bolts of how several aspects of scholastic life work on our two primary campuses (such as registration procedures for classes, and when and how students select majors), and we examine how even these most basic organizational features of college life affect our students' experiences *as conservatives*. By examining students' interactions with this entire set of cultural ideas and structural arrangements on each campus, we find that being a conservative is a very different experience—in some truly remarkable ways—depending on whether a student goes to Eastern Elite or Western Flagship.

Yet despite these institutional differences, we also find that conservative students at both of these universities hold some ideas in

common as a result of understanding themselves to be in the political minority on their campuses. To varying degrees, interviewees at both universities described common disadvantages—and also benefits—of having opinions that go against the grain. We conclude this chapter with a discussion of the shared issues students say they face at their universities but that nevertheless result in a parting of stylistic ways on the different campuses—the subject of chapters 5 and 6.

WESTERN VERSUS EASTERN: AN OVERVIEW

Our comparison of Western Flagship to Eastern Elite leverages many dimensions of difference across the two university campuses.[6] Both are Research I, religiously unaffiliated universities, and both Eastern Elite and Western Flagship, the main campus in the Western Public system, have been identified in the conservative media and on the Internet as particularly (and problematically) left-leaning. However, in many critical ways these two universities are quite distinctive.

First, the Western Public system is a public, multicampus system that includes several campus locations throughout the state. Though our main focus is on its primary campus, Western Flagship, we also include data from interviewees on its other campuses—Western State, the land-grant university, and a smaller, commuter-oriented campus, Western Satellite. Both of these latter campuses are popularly considered by students, faculty, state legislators, and state residents to be more conservative than Western Flagship, which in addition to boasting a reputably "crunchier" student body is also located in a city known for its vibrant "blue state" politics despite being in a "red state" political landscape. The campus often is a political target for right-leaning politicians or other conservatives in the state: It is not unusual for Republican members of the state's legislature to deride the Western Flagship campus on the Capitol floor for being too far to the left of voters and thus undeserving of greater taxpayer aid, or for conservative alumni/ae to write letters to the local newspaper derisive of nearly everything related to the campus except the football team (and sometimes even the football team comes in for a dose of vitriol). It is also true that media pundits like Bill O'Reilly take shots at the university for being off-the-charts radical, and that members of the strong evangelical voting bloc in the state regard the campus with suspicion.[7]

Besides its reputation among conservatives for being liberal, Western Flagship is also notable at the national level for its recreational opportunities and sports.[8] Its Division I athletics program provides much of the school's national visibility, as does its reputation as a party school and the occasional misdeeds of its fraternities. The student body at Western Flagship (made up of 22,000 full-time undergraduates) is drawn primarily from within the state, with approximately 70 percent of the undergraduate population state residents. Women make up half of Western Flagship's undergraduate population (a greater percentage than that reflected by our interviewees), and 85 percent of the campus's students identify as white. Unsurprisingly, admission to Western Flagship is not terribly competitive (though it does get categorized as "highly selective" by organizations like the UCLA Higher Education Research Institute, or HERI, on the basis of median SAT scores), with only 20 percent turned away for admission.[9] Tuition is relatively low for state residents ($5,500 per year, not including room and board, and lower at the other Western Public campuses than it is at Western Flagship), and so while financial aid is not extensive—just 40 percent of incoming freshmen receive some form of assistance—a Western Flagship education is relatively financially attainable for state residents. Finally, although its students are not known in the aggregate primarily for their stellar academics, Western Flagship does boast a more elite honors college within the university, which offers highly competitive merit scholarships that encourage the most academically promising high school students to stay in the state for their college education. Outside the honors college, however, the student-to-faculty ratio is 18 to 1, and most classes taught by full-time faculty are large lecture classes, while smaller discussion sections are usually taught by graduate students. Adjuncts do a fair share of undergraduate teaching.

Eastern Elite University, conversely, is perceived not only by its students but also by the broader population as being an elite institution even among those in the upper echelon. The university's list of famed alumni/ae in numerous fields goes back virtually to the founding of the nation, and holding one of its highly coveted diplomas is considered by many to provide nearly limitless career opportunity. With a full-time undergraduate enrollment of just 7,000, Eastern Elite boasts an impressive student-to-faculty ratio of seven to one, and with nearly 23,000 high school seniors sending in applications each year for fewer than 1,800 seats, it is among the most selective universities in the country. Eastern Elite's high status and relatively small size—as well as its almost entirely on-campus social scene and generous housing—help create a largely cohesive community among its undergraduates.[10] All of these features have ramifications for how students perceive the university's administration, the professors who teach them, and the peers who live with them.

The Eastern Elite community includes substantial racial, ethnic, and regional diversity among the undergraduate population, which is typical of many of the most elite institutions in the United States.[11] Though the university is still majority white, drives for minority recruitment have helped Eastern Elite reach a 30 percent nonwhite undergraduate population.[12] The university has slightly more male than female students. In addition, the majority of students at Eastern Elite come from public schools, and 70 percent of incoming students receive some form of financial aid. While many of these students arguably hail from elite public schools, and Eastern Elite's high tuition plus room and board (about $50,000 per year) means many receiving funds are from the middle and upper middle class, these figures nonetheless point to the university's commitment to seeking out the best students regardless of their family's ability to pay out-of-pocket.[13] Even with all these other forms of diversity, however, conservative students are an ideological minority on Eastern Elite's campus.[14] Nonetheless, as we will see, Eastern Elite's elite status and sense of community seem to somewhat insulate these students from the negative effects of political difference experienced by students at Western Flagship and on other American campuses.

REPUTATIONS

Colleges' and universities' distinctive institutional reputations are important in determining both who applies and who is chosen for admission on certain campuses, and how undergraduates perceive themselves once immersed in the school. These institutional characters—what Burton Clark terms "organizational sagas"—simultaneously shape universities' reputations and serve to integrate students into campus communities during their undergraduate years and afterward, as devoted alumni/ae.[15] Though these reputations can be informal and based on shared lore or even gossip, they are also institutionalized in many ways, both by the schools themselves (such as in glossy brochures and information-saturated websites that are targeted to prospective applicants) and by outside interests (such as in college guidebooks or the various annual rankings like those published by *US News & World Report*).[16] These organizational sagas create a sense of the history of the university as a place, but they also implicate current students in the task of continuing to shape the legacy of the institution.[17] While it is true that each class of admitted students' tenure is short-lived—just four years or so—colleges and universities are not constantly pulled in different directions as students come and go. Instead, new students are incorporated into the university and invited to build on the reputations of their predecessors. For those who perceive themselves as fitting in with the university's character, there can be considerable benefits of community, camaraderie, and connections. However, for those who come to experience a disconnect between their own values and those of their university, college can be a more difficult time.

Though both Eastern Elite and Western Flagship are often characterized by critics as notoriously liberal, and though many of our interviewees—as prospective students—were well aware of these reputations, politics did not appear to loom large in their minds during the application process. Instead, other factors, such as value or academic rigor, appear to have been much more prominent in their considerations of which schools to apply to and attend. As one East-

ern Elite interviewee put it, in a way echoing the conservative critique of higher education, "Where else are you going to [go]? If you want a great education, you're talking about the schools that have a predominantly liberal bent and, so, that was just kind of a given" (Staci Congdon, Eastern Elite).[18] While this interviewee and some of her colleagues (at both universities) mentioned that they had entertained the thought of attending campuses with political reputations more in keeping with their own priorities, the students we interviewed were attracted to the best school they could get into and, for some (particularly at Western Public), that their parents could afford. They liked the "brand" they were investing in, and they thought attending their presumptive best choice—whether it was Eastern Elite or one of the Western Public campuses—would pay off in the future. It is true that we may have missed talking with the most turned-off conservative students enrolled at each of these schools (because they were uninterested in doing interviews), and we of course do not have in our sample any hard-line conservative or religious students who decided at the time of college applications to avoid such liberal campuses altogether by choosing to attend a college more to their political liking. However, we can say that in terms of *our* interviewees' college decision processes—the conservative students who *did* choose to attend Western Flagship or Eastern Elite—neither the universities' political tenor nor opportunities for political involvement appear to have had much impact on their choices.

FUN BUT PRACTICAL WESTERN FLAGSHIP

As indicated by sources such as *U.S. News & World Report*, Western Flagship is known for football, fraternities, and most of all fun. Students generally cite the on- and off-campus party scene, as well as the numerous opportunities for outdoor recreation afforded by its location, as the school's best-known assets. Several of the conservative students interviewed for our study expressed their understanding of the place they were about to join as freshmen:

> I guess I sort of liked the western atmosphere. But politics didn't have much to do with it. I thought I was going to come out to Western and be a Frisbee-playing, mountain-biking hippy. I still bike way too much, but the hippy part didn't happen. (Chuck Kelley, Western Flagship)

> I didn't really know that Western was like, kind of more liberal. I knew that . . . at the time, it was like one of the top party schools. (Samantha Hart, Western Flagship)

Western Flagship's students are often stereotyped as laid-back and not especially academically oriented. Incoming students tend to gravitate either to athletics and recreation—with seven in 10 students coming from inside the state, many have followed its Division I teams their entire lives—or to the Greek system. As one interviewee characterized his expectations, "[Before I came to Western Flagship] I thought mostly of college students wearing [the school colors], going to the football game, and getting drunk every night. So my perception of [the city where Western Flagship is located] was just a college party town" (Neal Thompson, Western Flagship). And indeed, some interviewees described partaking in the party atmosphere once they arrived on campus.

At the same time that all of the students and alumni/ae we interviewed were highly aware of the school's reputation for fun and recreation, they often also cited the relatively low cost of tuition as a more salient reason for choosing the Western Public system. State residents receive a reduced tuition rate, and some of our interviewees had won prestigious merit-based awards specifically to go to Western Flagship or to attend a private or public university in the state. Explained one interviewee, "I was going to stay in state because I received a scholarship that was an academic merit-based full ride" (Christina Young, Western Flagship). Numerous interviewees talked about having decided to matriculate at one of the Western Public campuses to save their parents money or of working to support themselves during college:

> Western Flagship wasn't my first choice necessarily, it's the choice that made the most sense because it was an in-state school and it was going to be the most bang for your buck. (Stephanie Cohen, Western Flagship)

> Pure and simple was money. I can't afford on-campus housing for the next couple of months. . . . I am still living with my parents at the moment. (Bryan Carhart, Western Satellite)

Though our Western Public interviewees came from a wide range of socioeconomic backgrounds (as described in chapter 2), a sense of pragmatism prevails in many of their explanations for choosing to attend a Western Public campus. One interviewee had even accepted admission to a private out-of-state university before having what she described as "a crisis at the last minute" when she realized, "Why would I want to graduate with $150,000 in student loans when I could just stay in-state?" (Lindsey Nicholson, Western Satellite).[19]

Western Flagship's reputation is built not just around opportunities for recreation or for saving money, however. Western Flagship and the community in which it is located are noted—especially by hard-right conservatives—for their liberal leanings. As such, many interviewees recall having been warned about this by friends or family members, though most who chose to attend Western Flagship did not characterize *themselves* as having been especially worried by this aspect of its reputation. Said one alumna, "I don't know how many times I heard, 'Are you a Democrat yet?' or 'What are they doing to you at Western Flagship?' " (Christina Young, Western Flagship). Even the Western Flagship College Republicans president who was responsible for the successful 2004 Affirmative Action Bake Sale, quoted above, did not describe himself as especially concerned about the political atmosphere on campus before he got there:

> I literally thought I was going to go to Western Flagship. . . . I was going to be involved in the rec, the outdoor education programs, things like that. *That's* what I researched up on, not so much the politics of that. And some people said to me, "Oh my god, Western Flagship—very liberal." But I said I'm not going there for that, essentially. (Chuck Kelley, Western Flagship)

For most of our conservative interviewees, then, Western Flagship's reputation as a liberal campus was overshadowed by its low cost and plethora of recreational options.

THE AURA SURROUNDING EASTERN ELITE

Eastern Elite University is known above all for academics, having a reputation as an elite school even among elite schools, with a lengthy roster of famous alumni/ae in a myriad of fields. Conservative students entering Eastern Elite are keenly aware of its place within the higher education pantheon, as are their parents and peers. Said one student from a mid-sized city in the Northwest, "When I got into Eastern Elite all my friends and family were like, oh my goodness, you can't turn down Eastern Elite!" (Shannon Yaffe, Eastern Elite). Another student from the rural south explained,

> There is an incredible mystique to [it]. . . . It was like this wonderful place where everyone was really smart and talked all the time, learning these great ideas. . . . That is the image I had in high school, was that Eastern was the place of intellectual discourse and debate and all-night discussion. (Keaton Townsend, Eastern Elite)

Many Eastern Elite interviewees described themselves as in thrall to this "incredible mystique" and the opportunities presented by "attending one of the best schools in the nation" (Derek Yeager, Eastern Elite). Only one Eastern Elite student expressed a sense that, as an applicant, he did not find Eastern Elite *that* different from the other schools he had applied to, explaining that "they were all very

impressive and it was certainly hard to judge, but Eastern Elite has its appeal and it was not too far from home. I certainly never had thought of it as the shining city sitting on the hill that I had to get to" (Drew Metcalfe, Eastern Elite). Drew's views are the exception, however, as most interviewees characterized gaining admission to Eastern Elite in terms that make it sound akin to finding one of Willy Wonka's golden tickets.

Eastern Elite conservatives cited numerous reasons for wanting to attend the school, with the most common being academics, their future careers, and, interestingly, their fellow Eastern Elite students. Although almost certainly not aware of the large body of formal educational research demonstrating just how highly consequential peers are for student success, these undergraduates shared a commonsense understanding that their fellow undergraduates were talented and exceptional people who were destined to follow the tradition of Eastern Elite alums and become leaders in their fields.[20] Students described anticipating building extensive social capital with their classmates:

> Growing up, I was always the odd one for actually studying, and it was great to be at a place where that was no longer an oddity but an expectation and a goal for people, that people wanted to do great things and make big changes. (Elizabeth Tennyson, Eastern Elite)

> There's something to be said for studying with these people and entering into that crowd. It's not for everybody. But . . . before I went to Eastern Elite I think I did fairly clearly think that that *was* what I should do, and that was sort of what I *wanted* to do. So it was more a matter of Eastern Elite's the best and I wanted to go to the best. (Nate Quinn, Eastern Elite)

Even one woman who described herself as initially worried that Eastern Elite students would be "stuck up" or "snooty" said any apprehensions were swept away when she arrived on campus for an admitted students' weekend. She explained,

> I was just floored, just by the caliber of these people that we were surrounded by. They were just so amazing. I was like, "These are the peers that I would love to be surrounded with." . . . I just was really impressed with how approachable the students were and how they kind of blew away any stereotypes I had, just in what you hear of Eastern Elite. (Tabitha Lanier, Eastern Elite)

Interest in joining this special community of exceptional students and faculty thus appeared to be the main factor in our respondents' desire to attend Eastern Elite—that and the payoff their credential would bring later. Whether formally via its exceptional academics or informally by providing access to a pool of talented peers who are not only impressive now but who can be anticipated to have high profiles in the future, it seems that for these students, Eastern Elite's reputation is seen as well deserved.

The possibilities inherent in admission to Eastern Elite likewise mean that these aspects of its reputation outweigh characterizations of it among conservatives as a liberal, even godless bastion of left-wing, relativist ideas.[21] Though most interviewees said they were aware of this reputation, it mattered less in their decision making than did the other reasons for attending Eastern Elite. For some this seemed to be a general consideration in choosing colleges to apply to rather than one specific to Eastern Elite. As one student said, "My criteria was academic rigor and was not related to a political litmus test" (Calvin Coffey, Eastern Elite). Others, though, talked more specifically about weighing what they had heard about Eastern Elite's politics against its other virtues:

> For me it was more of a, like what's the school's academic reputation that would bring me there? So my family is not overly political, my community is not overly political, it's not like I was thinking I'm coming from this small town [in the South] where everybody votes the way I do and how am I going to fare in this liberal faction of evil? . . . I've always had friends that are of different political beliefs. . . . Probably everybody has—like, you don't live in some cloister, and so it wasn't, the political bent of

the school really wasn't something that factored into my opinion. (Staci Congdon, Eastern Elite)

Similar to most Western Flagship interviewees, then, Eastern Elite respondents did not seem to have been overly concerned with the campus's political climate in making the decision to apply or attend. At both schools, students wanted the best they could get—one of the world's best universities (Eastern Elite), a premiere public institution with a reputation for recreation and affordability (Western Flagship)—and they prioritized those respective criteria rather than the schools' suspected political tendencies. Though the liberal reputation seems to have been already assumed by our interviewees at Eastern Elite (they had, after all, been aware of the conservative critique in the national ether), esteem for the university's incomparable educational opportunities and the possibilities for making connections with outstanding peers and its alumni/ae network appear to have been more influential in their decision making. As one interviewee explained, though he had heard Eastern Elite was liberal, "I had sort of taken it with a grain of salt. Like, well, you know, whatever. I certainly wasn't coming to Eastern Elite—I should stress this—with some kind of a battle mentality" (Vincent Long, Eastern Elite).

SOCIAL LIFE

Though in theory, the purpose of college is to provide students with academic knowledge, increase their complex reasoning skills, and prepare them for active participation both in the public sphere and in the labor force, in reality, much of what goes on in the life of the campus does not occur within classroom walls. When students initially arrive as freshmen, it is not academics but the social aspects of college life that they encounter first—moving into dormitories, engaging in orientation activities, meeting other new students. In

many ways, orientation begins students' informal education, what some have termed outside-the-classroom learning.[22] Then, through many ongoing informal interactions over the years in dining halls, dorms, apartments, or at social gatherings, undergraduates get a sense of what it means to be a student at their university—its shared norms and values and practices—and what is taken for granted as appropriate behavior among their peers. The college or university itself furthers this outside-the-classroom learning, not only by facilitating it in different ways (for example, by providing on-campus housing to a certain percentage of students or by funding a large variety of student clubs) but also by hosting nonacademic student events such as orientations, all-campus parties and festivals, and athletic competitions. In this way, we see campuses' organizational arrangements, or their structural features, creating opportunity spaces that implicitly encourage certain types of interactions among students while discouraging others. Though students can bend the formal and informal rules and can create new spaces for themselves, both formal campus structures and more informal peer group arrangements make some kinds of social life more easily accessible than others.

Undergraduates arriving at Western Flagship and Eastern Elite find themselves on campuses that are arranged in quite different ways. From their first encounters with their campuses and peers during orientation, students at Western Flagship and at Eastern Elite begin learning how their school works on the day-to-day level. Whereas Western Flagship students are plunged into a sea of fellow freshmen, swimming relatively blindly through university bureaucracies and impersonal crowds, Eastern Elite first-years are invited into a close-knit community that quickly builds a sense of "we"-ness. The differences between the social arrangements on these campuses contribute to the variance we see between Western Flagship and Eastern Elite conservatives' perceptions of their universities and their peers, and further, as we will see in the following chapters, contribute to their sense of what constitutes appropriate conservative styles of action on their campuses.

GETTING LOST AND FINDING FRIENDS AT WESTERN FLAGSHIP

Incoming freshmen arriving on the Western Flagship campus find themselves quickly swallowed up in the enormous size of the university. While freshmen arrive a week earlier than returning students for a welcome week of orientation activities where they can meet other first-year students, attendance is not required, and no one checks whether a new student participates or not. It's easy for freshmen to feel lost in the swirl of massive organized activities such as barbecues and pep rallies. For many students, the campus size makes finding a social niche early in one's college career imperative:

> I think in Western Flagship a lot of kids choose to identify with a sport or with the Greek system. . . . They choose to identify with a speech and debate team, a political organization. Because I think on a campus of that size, if you don't find somewhere to fit in, you're not going to meet people. (Lindsey Nicholson, Western Satellite)

> Well my freshmen year I had no idea, I didn't know anybody when I was coming here. . . . I was having trouble meeting people. I was in a dorm room where it was a lot of music and theater majors. And they were all extremely close from the beginning and I didn't really find a good niche in their group. So my mom and dad were like, "Go join some clubs, go try some different activities." And this one [College Republicans] was like, "Well, I know I'll have something in common with these people if I go to this meeting." (Brooke Gerson, Western Flagship)

As the first quotation implies, for many students the answer to a large campus environment is to turn to the Greek system. Though only 16 percent of Western Flagship students are officially involved in fraternities and sororities, a much larger proportion participates in that system's parties, and the social scene at the school revolves in large part around Greek events. This undoubtedly contributes to Western Flagship's broader reputation as a party school.

The conservative students we interviewed described varying degrees of fit with the wider undergraduate world at Western Flagship from their first year on. They characterized their peers as conforming to more or less two sets of stereotypes—the pot-smoking, laid-back hippies or the hard-drinking, party-hearty Greeks—which we see in interviewees' descriptions of the ways they personally did or did not fit with what they saw as "typical" Western Flagship students.

> I'd say a lot, such as I drive a truck, I don't drive a Subaru [*laughs*]. So I get looked at for that. A camo hat most of the time, and I get looked at [for] that. Just things like that. . . . I don't enjoy marijuana like most kids do here. . . . And I'm not really a California guy like all the frat guys. I don't really fit in with *that* crowd. So I would say out of place in a lot of things. (Kurt Tatum, Western Flagship)

> I mean, don't get me wrong. I hang out with them and all, and I listen to the same music as they do. I mean, besides politics and religion I fit in very well. I mean, I'm not a hippy, but I do fit in kind of well with them. I do all the same things that they do. If you're going to let politics overshadow everything that you do, then you're not going to have very many friends. So I don't mind them that much. (Kody Aronson, Western Flagship)

Like Kody, several other conservative students on the Western Public campuses described themselves as being friends with what they thought of as the great mass of non-conservative students at their university, an association that, in their formulation, was as often a matter of necessity as of choice:

> I had no choice [*laughs*]. I mean, honestly, if I wanted only Republican friends I wouldn't have friends! (Brittany Urban, Western Satellite)

> You know, I love it and I love the people I've come across. I have friends that are very liberal and I have friends that are conservative, more liberal than conservative because obviously the demographics tell us that.... [Without liberal friends] I'd be very lonely. (Kevin Sharkey, Western Flagship)

It would therefore be a mischaracterization to say that Western Public conservatives uniformly vilify their "liberal" peers. In fact, because of shared recreational and musical tastes, conservative interviewees reported that they had some social common ground with liberal classmates, although they also intimated that in a bid to keep the peace with their roommates or friends, they mostly did not talk about politics with them.

Despite these forms of sociability, Western Public, and especially Western Flagship, conservatives also reported feeling politically isolated on their campus. Though the student body at Western Flagship is not as homogeneously liberal as the above characterizations make it sound, there is truth to our interviewees' perceptions of being in an ideological minority. As we recall from chapter 2, UCLA HERI data on public flagship universities most like Western Flagship show that there are more self-identified liberals than conservatives enrolled in these schools (35.6 percent liberal compared to 20.1 percent conservative), though of course there are even more moderates than liberals (44.3 percent of incoming freshmen call themselves middle of the road)—so it is not clear whether our conservative respondents were assuming that middle-of-the-road students are also dyed-in-the-wool lefties. Whatever the precise basis of their calculations—though certainly the national conservative organizations' mantra of "liberal campuses" has a lot to do with it—our interviewees perceived that they were surrounded by liberals, and they said this was problematic.

Western Flagship conservatives reported feeling uncomfortable on campus, saying that they were both isolated and marginalized. One officer of the College Republicans said, "I know of a lot of students who are conservative who just don't speak at all. And they tell me, 'I'm just too intimidated because everybody's either going to look at me or think I'm an idiot or laugh at me'" (Hunter Devine, Western Flagship). Others told us that liberal students held ridiculous assumptions about them, engaged in ad hominem attacks, and made wild-eyed claims. One student reported,

> I don't want to say all of them because it's not really true, it's not as bad as it really sounds. But it's definitely there and you definitely feel it when you're further on the conservative side, I think. We're the big bad wolf.... At least that's the way I feel ... and I don't know why it is because, I mean, I'm not a bad person. I just have different views. The big bad wolf—we're *not* the big bad wolf. (Kurt Tatum, Western Flagship)

Another student recalled that "When I said that I supported Sarah Palin in one of my classes, another student called me a cunt" (Brooke Gerson, Western Flagship), and a recent graduate said, "I don't know how many times I've been called a fascist" (Neil Thompson, Western Flagship). Others who were visibly identified as "not liberal" said they are treated like foreigners on their campus, as per this ROTC cadet:

> R: There's also the people who have told me that I'm a "baby killer," which is like, "Okay. . . ."
> I: Other students, you mean?
> R: Other students, yes.... Just the general anti-soldier statements. And the feeling that I am not welcome. (Eric Leonard, Western Flagship)

In these and other examples, right-leaning students at Western Flagship said they had a strong sense of being on the political margins of their university. As chapter 5 demonstrates, the confrontational style used by right-leaning students at Western Flagship is in part a bid to expressively counter what they see as the social stigma associated with being conservative on their campus.

Before we get to that analysis, however, it is important to look at the structural features of the campus scene that amplify conser-

vative students' sense of being alone in a vast wilderness of liberals run amok. For one, the Western Public campuses offers few university-facilitated organizational opportunities (especially when compared to the abundance of such organizations at Eastern Elite) for students of differing political persuasions to sit down and talk with one another about their political ideas and beliefs. That leaves partisan speakers' events, students' political tabling to recruit members at the student union, and other relatively anonymous settings where liberals and conservatives can more or less sling mud at one another as the prime sites of idea exchange. It also renders conservative student groups the primary locations for right-leaning students to act and speak politically, meaning that when conservative students at Western Public do find themselves politically engaged—whether in an informal conversation or at a planned event—there is a much greater sense of hardened right versus left, or red versus blue, than there is a mutual recognition of shared experiences or affinities.[23] Conservative students share their war stories of marginalization with one another in these clubs and cement their sense of being outsiders.

In addition, conservatives' perceptions of being socially isolated are shaped by the residential situation on the Western Public campuses. For example, while all freshmen at Western Flagship are guaranteed on-campus housing, and 90 percent of them live in suite-style arrangements or more traditional dormitories with randomly selected (and therefore more heterogeneous) others their first year, upperclassmen do not have this housing option. Nor do students at Western Flagship say they would *want* it. Virtually no upperclassmen—save a small number of students who work as resident assistants—live in the dorms. Instead, they live off campus in less expensive apartments or Greek housing, where they no doubt come into less regular informal contact with classmates who have different ideological orientations. As studies of peer groups in both K–12 and higher education have indicated, when students are allowed to self-select into groups of their own choosing, the result is greater social homogeneity than when students are placed by others (such as teachers or administrators) into groups.[24] One well-known

consequence of self-selected homophily is that boundaries between groups grow more rigid, with a stronger sense of the difference between who "we" are and who "they" are.[25] By extension, because so few students at Western Flagship live on campus, where they could get to know one another in more intimate settings, there emerge many strongly bounded, small, mutually exclusive groups—rendering students outside one's own group as a relatively anonymous mass. This creates ideal conditions for a fairly weak set of community norms for respectful political discussions across the ideological spectrum, potentially explaining both liberals' and conservatives' shots at one another. While conservative students reported that they enjoyed social lives with liberal-identified classmates, we saw little evidence that they had much opportunity to talk seriously about politics with those "on the other side"—likely ratcheting up the animosity on campus for both groups.

BECOMING ONE OF "US" AT EASTERN ELITE

Eastern Elite students encounter an almost diametrically opposed social experience from the moment they set foot on campus for orientation their first year. In terms of sheer numbers, there are many fewer freshmen—about 1,800 of them at Eastern Elite (out of a total undergraduate student body of 7,000) versus 5,500 freshmen at Western Flagship—but it's more than simply a matter of how many or how few students attend events. Each orientation week event thrown by Eastern Elite is specifically designed to make freshmen feel truly embraced. For example, during one event, new students watch highly adorned faculty, upperclassmen, and alumni/ae parade by just for them. Each year following orientation, the university surveys freshmen to find out what, if anything else, they could have done to make them feel even *more* at home. Freshmen are made to feel that they are being welcomed into a community that is now their own; Not just *theirs*, but *ours*.

Four-year on-campus housing continues the process of community-building. Historian Julie Reuben reminds us that dorm

life has long been understood by elite university administrators to be a key feature in molding students' lives to the institution. She quotes an early Stanford University president Ray Lyman Wilbur, who in the first part of the twentieth century wrote that "when students are housed together there is developed a strong cooperative sense of loyalty and enthusiasm called 'college spirit' which has a profound effect upon the development of the character of the students and upon the welfare of the institution.'"[26] Thrown together seemingly randomly their freshman year, but allowed to select roommates for their subsequent time on campus, undergraduates at Eastern Elite are housed together all four years in college, which creates a sense of community throughout their college careers. Unlike at the Western Public campuses, at Eastern Elite it is unnecessary to live off campus. Yes, rental costs in the community surrounding Eastern Elite are more expensive, but on the whole, students *want* to remain in university housing.[27] Because of shared living arrangements and dining halls connected to dorms where most students choose to eat daily, undergraduates at Eastern Elite forge tight bonds with one another. With all this close contact within a relatively small student body, students at Eastern Elite, unlike those at Western Public universities, have a feel for one another. If you don't know the name, there's a decent chance you'll at least recognize the face.

Joining a conservative club is thus not as much of a social imperative for finding social connection as it is for right-leaning students at a larger school like Western Flagship. Nonetheless, Eastern Elite offers an impressive array of co-curricular activities and recreational opportunities, which the school's ambitious students take hold of with gusto. There are 300 official organizations on campus at Eastern Elite, 12 of which by our count are explicitly political. Eastern Elite's administration strongly maintains that the political ideology of an organization is never a factor in deciding its suitability for funding (and our interviewees told us they also believe this is true), so undergraduates on campus have rich opportunities to get to know a wide range of their fellow students well. Our interviewees expressed considerable enthusiasm for Eastern Elite's extracurricular programs:

> I really liked the extracurricular climate here. I loved it. It's so vibrant and so alive. Everyone does some type of extracurricular activity. People love being active outside of just their schoolwork, although that does suck up a lot of time. But yeah, I really liked this campus most in an extracurricular sense. (Shannon Yaffe, Eastern Elite)

> One thing I did like about Eastern Elite is they did get people, at least extracurricular that were into all different types of things. And in a typical weekend I could go to the football game, but then an a capella show and then a tap show. . . . People were all into different things and so there was no . . . one thing I really liked about Eastern Elite, there was no one dominant social scene, whereas I feel that, like at [another] school, like a lot of Greek life or something, then you're either in that scene or not. And I kind of like Eastern Elite because everybody could do their own thing. (Kingsley Griffith, Eastern Elite)

Although Eastern Elite has no Greek life, it does have a system of highly selective, invitation-only clubs that go back several generations and that are comparable to social fraternities in terms of both their means of admission and their social function on campus. However, the vast majority of students does not belong to or have much to do with these old boys' clubs. Ballpark estimates from a variety of sources put the participation figure at somewhere between 5 and 10 percent.[28]

Like their Western Public counterparts, Eastern Elite conservatives characterize the student body as politically left. And like Western Flagship conservatives, they are undoubtedly correct in their estimates of more liberals than conservatives on campus: as we saw in chapter 2, UCLA HERI data show that at private elite institutions like Eastern Elite, even more students than at public, highly selective institutions self-identify as liberal or far left; in 2001, that figure was 48.7 percent.[29] Despite being further outnumbered by liberals on their campus, however, and in stark contrast to Western Public students, conservatives at Eastern Elite University are generally

more sympathetic to their peers. Rather than stereotyping them as stoners, partiers, or name-callers, Eastern Elite conservatives see their liberal classmates as being for the most part not especially different from themselves. For example, one woman who described Eastern Elite as liberal (but not as liberal as she had thought it might be) characterized her classmates as follows:

> I mean it's interesting because I think there is a lot of [*sigh*] limousine liberalism at Eastern. . . . This is actually changing in the lower classes here; they've really drastically expanded the financial aid here, and stuff like that. And in the freshman and sophomore classes, there are much higher rates of people on financial aid. But most of my friends are people who sort of went to private school in Manhattan. So even though they're basically all liberal, it's not like their liberalism causes them a whole bunch of kind of different. . . . Or there's not as much, there isn't as much attention paid to the normal sort of buzz words that are associated with liberal causes. Like there's not among my friends. (Molly Nash Downing, Eastern Elite)

Molly's distinction is similar to that made by conservative pundit Ross Douthat in his memoir of attending Harvard University, *Privilege: Harvard and the Education of the Ruling Class*, where he describes such students as "parlor liberals," as opposed to the type of liberal student akin to those discussed by Western Public's conservatives, which Douthat terms "street liberals."[30]

Other students describe this less as a difference springing from the type of student that Eastern Elite attracts and more as part of the nature of Eastern Elite itself:

> I think one is that there are just so many opportunities for bipartisan dialogue. . . . We analyze these political issues on a very academic level. I think, two, it's just so many activities going on. It's just the nature of the Eastern Elite campus. People are involved in opera, choir, or whatever. Politics is just one dimension of daily life. And I think it's an often forgotten dimension of campus life. And I think, third, it's just we come to the realization that I'm not going to change *your* views and you're not going to change *my* views, so why try so hard to do that? So I have to think about that more, but also the fact that I'm friends with a lot of people in the Democrats . . . I know everyone in the College Democrats. We go out for ice cream, we joke, we talk. After a while that civility just develops. (Kyle Lee, Eastern Elite)

Just as the structural features of the campus at Western Flagship have consequences for what it feels like to be a conservative student there, so too the organizational dynamics at Eastern Elite affect students' political experiences at their university—although we see this going the other direction. Several of the informal dimensions of Eastern Elite life described above, particularly the wealth of on-campus housing and dining, contribute to the way that "civility just develops." Even as Eastern Elite students self-select into student-run groups (as do those at Western Public), in a larger sense they are kept together as part of a larger college community. This spatial closeness both encourages more frequent interactions and discourages students of whatever political stripe from alienating students of other stripes. At the same time, more formal elements of Eastern Elite campus life also provide spaces explicitly for bipartisan political discussion. Its Center for Political Institutions invites well-known public figures from both sides of the political spectrum to address its membership, while also hosting informal debates between Eastern Elite students. In this way, the university administration demonstrates a commitment to fostering mutual understanding and allocating equal resources regardless of ideology.[31]

These institutional qualities produce distinctive results for Eastern Elite undergraduates who identify as right-leaning. On the one hand, their constant exposure to their peers and the openness of informal discussions means that unlike at Western Public, conservative students seem to have a relatively easy time finding and connecting with one another. As one student observed, "I think just kind of keeping your ear to the ground during conversations with friends, I kind of ran into people who I didn't realize shared my views just by kind of listening to conversations in the lunchroom and things like that" (Melissa Preston, Eastern Elite). This is differ-

ent from the Western Public campuses, where several conservative students said they felt pressure to hide their views for fear of being considered a conservative "big bad wolf," and thus had a difficult time finding fellow travelers in informal social situations. One Western Flagship interviewee described this problem as conservatives on his campus needing a covert "handshake" (Eric Leonard, Western Flagship). Only one Eastern Elite interviewee expressed a similar level of discomfort, saying that

> I would definitely never, at say even a table with eight of my good friends in my dorm, I'd never say I voted for John McCain or something like that, because it just would.... I mean, one, it's just not really a socially appropriate thing to do. And two, I know that probably all of them didn't. (Staci Congdon, Eastern Elite)

This young woman's views are the exception rather than the rule, however—and she tended to keep her conservative views more on the down-low than most of our other interviewees. Nearly all other Eastern Elite conservatives characterized themselves as having more or less unproblematic relationships with left-leaning friends.

Further, for Eastern Elite students it seems that friendships with liberals are not only a question of numbers or convenience, as conservative students at Western Public often characterized them. Rather than talking about being friends with peers with different political views because they *have* to, Eastern Elite conservatives more often describe having left-leaning friends because they *want* to. One interviewee from a humble background explained at length the cosmopolitan virtues of having friends of varying political opinions:

> I think you have to have a lot of friends who aren't [conservative] if you're a conservative-view Republican, if you're a Christian. I mean, you're going to have friends who do not believe in the same thing as you do on Eastern's campus. And I mean that's good, that's a very good thing. I wouldn't want to have friends who are only like me. I mean at the same time I have my ... probably some of my best friends are in my Christian Bible study here, because we know so much about each other and we've grown so close. But my roommates are not, two out of the three of them, are not Christian. They're also my best friends here. I mean, there's not an overwhelming amount of Christians here [*laughs*], and so.... I mean what's the point anyway of only having certain kind of friends. That just defeats the purpose of Eastern Elite's diversity. (Shannon Yaffe, Eastern Elite)

Shannon's comment clearly echoes some of the Western Public interviewees' comments (basically: I'd be lonely here if I didn't reach out to people who don't believe everything I do), but in a larger sense, Shannon was saying something different. She said the social scene at Eastern Elite encourages all students, not just conservative ones, to mix, mingle, and meet as many different peers as they can.

From one perspective, this can be instrumental. As is pointed out to them from orientation through graduation day, Eastern Elite students are the cream of the crop and headed for great things, and thus their tenure as undergraduates can be seen as an extended opportunity for networking. The classmates they find common ground with today, including the liberal ones, will be the people they may be working with, in some fashion or another, tomorrow (a perspective we definitely do not see shared at Western Flagship). Even if Eastern Elite did not have such an outstanding reputation, the constant closeness that is forged by students' living, eating, studying, and socializing together generates bonds that make each student a visible member of the community. Unlike on the Western Public campuses, at Eastern Elite anonymity is not only not a given, it's hardly even an option.

ACADEMICS

Academics is the core mission of colleges and universities, at least officially, even if undergraduates in the aggregate are studying and

learning less (by some measures) now than they did in the past.[32] But however much undergraduates are actually acquiring academic skills, students would not be able to enjoy the social trappings of the "college experience" without going through a course of study that provides the structure for their college years.[33] While the main purpose of classroom learning is enrichment—exploring the fundamentals in a field, gaining critical thinking and complex reasoning skills—college courses also teach students plenty that is not contained on the syllabus. Rather than simply looking at what is officially taught in the curriculum, we may also consider the university classroom or lecture hall as an interactional space where students continue to learn the values, norms, and informal rules governing life on their campus. The actions of individual faculty members and other students certainly play a role here, but so too do the organizational arrangements of the university. How students choose their majors, what classes students are required to take to fulfill their distribution requirements, and how individual classes are set up all have an impact on students' perceptions of their place within the university.

In chapters 5 and 6 we examine how conservative students actively negotiate the classroom environment; here we look at how academics "works" at Western Flagship and Eastern Elite. As with social experiences, students at these two universities encounter quite different organizational arrangements regarding their formal education. Western Public students choose majors before they even matriculate and are plugged into an impersonal registration system, while Eastern Elite undergraduates enjoy the freedom to explore different courses before deciding on a particular path of study. These differences in levels of attention to the individual student continue inside the classroom. As we will begin to see here, and explore fully in the chapters that follow, this variation in institutional arrangements furthers Western Public and Eastern Elite conservatives' divergent opinions of their professors, their peers, and even themselves. Classroom experiences also reinforce students' understanding of the campus climate and how to negotiate being politically conservative in such a place. What we find, in short, is that several seemingly little things—

organizational features not ordinarily recognized as having any impact whatsoever on politics—in fact can have major consequences for students' sense of fit with their campus.

IMPERSONAL BUREAUCRACIES AND POLITICIZED CLASSROOMS AT WESTERN FLAGSHIP

Though Western Flagship's reputation is not built primarily on students' intellectual endeavors, academic study remains an important component of day-to-day student life. As at most large public universities, however, academic arrangements at Western Flagship are largely impersonal.[34] This sense of being a number rather than a face begins even before students arrive on campus, as incoming students must choose majors before they have ever taken a college course. Although students can change majors later, this is more easily said than done, as between major requirements and the university's general education requirements, making a significant alteration in one's course of study can result in an additional semester or year needed at the university, putting a dent in one of Western Flagship's main appeals, its affordability.[35]

Further, unlike at private institutions, where students have a better chance of getting into classes they want, when they want them, or even have weeks to "try out" several different classes at the beginning of the term, students at Western Flagship face a depersonalized registration system with little room for negotiation. They end up in classes they don't prefer or hanging in limbo on wait lists for classes they need. At Western Flagship, students register for classes online before each semester, having received a registration time based on the last two digits of their student identification number. Priority registration times are given based on class standing, athletics, and academic honors, with all other registration times determined by lottery. There are no guarantees for majors, meaning again that students may wind up needing extra time to complete their undergraduate education as they wait for space in courses they need to finish their degree.

Most classes at Western Flagship are large lecture courses. This style of teaching, which predominates at public universities, can strongly depersonalize faculty-student relationships both in and outside the classroom.[36] Many students complain that the bulk of their undergraduate years is spent in large lecture halls that are fairly anonymous, where professors are harder to connect with, and in which every student knows his or her teaching assistant significantly better than the professor—that is, for the students who go to discussion sections or review sessions.[37] The campuses of the Western Public university system provide few opportunities for undergraduates to be in smaller, more personalized classes; in fact, the few organizational opportunities for being in smaller seminar settings, such as Western Flagship's honors program, are largely disdained by most undergraduates as being overly academic, "not cool," and a strain because they remove students from the ordinary swing of things on their campus, at least according to one faculty member at Western Flagship who works with the honors college (Kim Kellog, Western Flagship).

Like most universities in today's higher education world, Western Flagship requires students to fulfill not only the requirements of a major but also to get academic breadth through a core curriculum, which at Western Flagship covers the social sciences, the humanities, the natural sciences, math, and a "diversity" course. As is the case at most large public universities, the set core, or general education, classes are generally larger and reputably less enjoyable than classes taken for electives or for major requirements and, as other educational researchers have documented, are viewed by most students as something "to get out of the way" or as "jumping through the hoops."[38] This is different from the general education requirements at Eastern Elite, which allow students to choose individual seminars that fit these different distribution areas rather than take prescribed survey courses.

At Western Flagship, it is in the general education courses that many students first become acquainted with academic thinking on topics like economic stratification, gender inequality, and racial diversity, which means that it is also in the general education courses

that many conservative students experience their most consternation with "liberal" concerns. As one alumnus described, other viewpoints are not included in this curriculum:

> I mean, if you look at the . . . and especially you're not going to get that in, you're not going to get any sort of contrary view in the Department of Education, a lot of the Philosophy Department, Ethnic Studies. Are you kidding me? Is there any curriculum at all in some of these Women's Studies classes about maybe feminism has backfired on the movement? Not even, I mean you could still teach a Women's Studies class that comes out on one side or the other, probably properly so, but when are you going to read more than *an* article by Christina Hoff Sommers that gets stuck into the reading curriculum so you can *mock* it? (Chuck Kelley, Western Flagship)[39]

While conservative students can try to avoid contentious material by choosing their majors carefully (as one student said of his field of study, "the engineering school is very . . . these are the numbers, do the math, and there's the answer"; Eric Leonard, Western Flagship), their inability to get out of general education requirements often means exposure to ideas they find disagreeable. This is not to say that they object completely to learning about topics like gender and race but rather that most claim the presentation of these areas is skewed and does not include alternative—usually right-identified—points of view.

What is ignited in conservatives on a campus with large class sizes, purportedly skewed core curricula, and an impersonal registration system is a more pessimistic view of professors and of the campus in general. While both campuses are home to a large majority of faculty who vote Democratic and identify as liberals, as Neil Gross's recent research has indicated, conservative students on the Western Public campuses are considerably more suspicious of their professors' motives in the classroom than are their peers at Eastern Elite.[40] This finding about Western Public students' higher suspicion levels of their professors also squares with research that demon-

strates that students with less academic preparation and who have parents with lower educational attainments have more negative assessments of faculty.[41] As we saw in chapter 2, students at schools like Western Flagship in the aggregate have lower SAT scores as well as parents with lower educational attainments than do students at Eastern Elite, so Western Flagship students may share in a more generalized culture of complaint about "distant" faculty. It is therefore likely that both campus features and selection effects lead to greater criticism of faculty.

While both Western Public and Eastern Elite conservatives characterize faculty as personally liberal, Western Public interviewees are far likelier to contend that their professors bring those personal politics into the classroom, or to describe negative experiences they themselves or their acquaintances have had with faculty, such as feeling they had to wordsmith written assignments so as not to betray their views and receive a punitive grade. Describing an instance when a faculty member called her out for an editorial she'd written in the local paper, one Western Satellite interviewee said,

> I would say that the single thing that stands out in my mind is that professors completely control the atmosphere of the classroom. They control the discussion, they control where it goes and when it stops. And in this case it stopped before I had the chance to defend myself. And I would say that was probably on purpose. (Lindsey Nicholson, Western Satellite)

Besides faculty, graduate student teaching assistants (TAs) also come in for a good deal of criticism from Western Public students: many of our interviewees asserted that TA-led discussion sections were absolute nightmares, since graduate students (or in some cases advanced undergraduate students) were seen to be unrestrained by professional norms and thus comfortable forcing their liberal politics on a captive audience. One interviewee talked extensively about negative experiences with TAs:

> I would have teaching assistants that would like say really bad things about the Republican Party in my discussion section, and

> that was hard. I was [like] "You're grading my papers." . . . I had a negative experience with a TA that just talked horribly about Bush or just about conservative viewpoints or things that were . . . we got into a lot of political discussions, and so when the person facilitating the discussion doesn't respect your opinion or your belief, that can be . . . that's really hard. . . . It was a hard semester because you really have to trust these people, to really share what you believe in those small-group discussions. And that's hard. (Christina Young, Western Flagship)

Students in the Western Public system thus more frequently accused faculty and TAs of politicizing the classroom, although even here most students said the majority of their campus experiences were fine. But where (as we will see below) Eastern Elite students regarded professors as serious scholars who would not think to sully their classrooms with ideological posturing, conservative students on the Western Public campuses were quicker to point to examples that they said revealed how faculty allowed politics to enter the classroom, as well as to occasions when their grades seemed to be at risk.

Western Public interviewees also pointed to particular incidents of faculty members visibly making them feel like social and political outliers. The student quoted above described a course in which the professor singled her out, asking her "Why don't *you* speak for the conservatives?" or "Why don't *you* shed some light on the other side?" (Christina Young, Western Flagship). In many other instances, though, students on Western Public's campuses recalled examples of faculty introducing liberal points of view or politically charged topics when these were not relevant to the classroom discussions:

> And you know, if I'm taking a macroeconomics class, I want to learn about economics, not about how horrible the Bush administration is—all semester long. And for me, it is a complete turnoff. . . . I'm open to criticism and to hearing criticism about things that maybe I support. But when you only focus on those criticisms, there's a problem. For example, in the class . . . when we were starting to get into the early race for the presidential

> candidates, it was always focused on "Oh, let's talk about the Democratic candidates." Let's give some air time to the *other* guys, too. Like, this isn't even the foreign policy class or political science class. And I understand that they are intertwined to a certain degree with macroeconomics, but let's get to the core of the topic. (Kevin Sharkey, Western Flagship)

> Actually, one of the better classes I've ever taken was the History in Rock 'n' Roll. The professor was intelligent, I mean very bright. It taught me a way to look at music and to look at ideas and dissect them and find out where is the original value in this idea. But I can't tell you how many times we got on the Iraq War or . . . and I understand that certain songs have political meaning. But it was—I think he said that democracy is the worst form of government because 51 percent of the people decide. I don't know. These are valid points and they're okay. I don't know. I would just like something in a History in Rock 'n' Roll class, I would rather not talk about why democracy is a terrible form of government. But having said that, I've learned a ton. (Conor Denning, Western State)

Even when conservative students at Western Public schools find classes they enjoy, they are sometimes dismayed by faculty who they say use the classroom or lecture hall as a space to air political views. Other students point out that even when content is relevant to the course, it often has a liberal bent. For example, a few students mentioned the preponderance of readings by the liberal Princeton economist and *New York Times* columnist Paul Krugman in economics classes. As one Western Flagship interviewee characterized it, even in courses where professors were not cracking jokes about George W. Bush, "There's always this tone of, this subtle tone of liberalism that probably at any one point isn't enough to be objectionable. But it's so constant. It's like a constant that it gets on your nerves sometimes" (Hunter Devine, Western Flagship).

Thus, Western Public interviewees found their creeping concerns about the liberal campus to be confirmed in classroom settings. Our

conservative respondents on the Western Public campuses described their professors and TAs as not simply liberal but as outspokenly so, bringing their personal political beliefs into the forum of the lecture hall or seminar room. Although we cannot adjudicate because we were not in the classroom with the students and alumni/ae we interviewed, it is possible that the depersonalized setting may in fact encourage this type of behavior by some instructors. When faculty do not know their individual students well, they may breezily assume that the students in the classroom *are* as left-leaning as the campus stereotype would have it, and shoot from the hip at Bush or Romney or some other conservative target. As one respondent commented, "They do stuff that hey, if I was more liberal I'd think that was funny and I'd laugh at that. But I don't think that's very funny" (Samantha Hart, Western Flagship). Or it may also be that in depersonalized environments, students are quicker to interpret faculty as more callous toward them. The more atomized setting may work both ways, distancing conservative students from their professors and bolstering their sense that faculty lord it over them as disempowered undergraduates.

In instances where conservative students talked about having more direct contact with faculty, this seems to have mitigated the divide:

> I found that in some of my classes actually I think the professors respected me more because they didn't really view me as a sheep. So I would start conversations with professors in the middle of class it seemed like sometimes. It was just me and the professor. And so I felt like I actually gained a little bit *more* respect from professors *some* times [*laughs*]. (Kody Aronson, Western Flagship)

Overall, though, given large class sizes, limited one-on-one time with faculty via office hours or other encounters, and some students' unwillingness to speak up or speak out, Western Public conservative students and alumni/ae often perceive their professors as outspokenly, inappropriately liberal and uninterested in hearing al-

ternative viewpoints. These organizational arrangements on the Western Public campuses not only shape students' dimmer views of their instructors but also lead many conservative students to want to engage in provocative political behavior both inside and outside the classroom.

ENDLESS POSSIBILITIES AND EXPERT PROFESSORS AT EASTERN ELITE

Unlike at Western Public, students say that academics are a primary focus at Eastern Elite. Small classes taught by full-time faculty—with a few large lectures thrown in with high-wattage celebrity professors—mean that undergraduates receive a level of care from professors that is becoming ever rarer at American universities. Rather than declaring a major when they enter, as many university students are required to do, Eastern Elite undergraduates enjoy a model more similar to that of a liberal arts college, where they may dabble in different fields before committing to one major. Most Eastern Elite students spend their first two years fulfilling general education requirements, which they choose from lists of classes in several broad subject areas (humanities, sciences, writing, and so on). Individual students thus develop their own directions, declaring a major area of study only at the end of sophomore year. The sense that students are in control is furthered by the way course selection works. Students enjoy a two-week "trying-out" period at the beginning of each term when they may sit in on as many classes as they like in order to decide which to enroll in. On top of that, enrollments are not capped, so there is even less of a sense of urgency surrounding which classes to take.

This wealth of educational opportunities provides yet more evidence for the abiding sense Eastern Elite University students share with one another that theirs is a special campus, a world-class institution, with unparalleled faculty and boasting some of the smartest students in the nation. Although they believe that faculty members tilt significantly to the left of the political spectrum, they insist that the vast majority of Eastern Elite professors are consummate professionals—the expression "experts in their field" comes up with some regularity—who do not and indeed *would not* try to indoctrinate students, as per the conservative critique. Eastern Elite students and alumni/ae seem unable to picture their professors as condescending to any Eastern Elite undergraduates, including conservatives, as easy, impressionable targets. Additionally, almost to a person, the conservative students we interviewed were adamant that they had never been penalized for their political views through lowered grades. They didn't see themselves as victims nearly to the extent that Western students did.

These themes were articulated again and again in the interviews with Eastern Elite students. While our conservative interviewees acknowledged their professors' putative left-leaning political beliefs, at Eastern Elite they made a consistent distinction between professional demeanor and personal beliefs.

> If you go to a school such as Eastern Elite, you expect a level of seriousness from your professors. I certainly read a lot of accounts of *other* students who had experienced bias . . . [but that] really wasn't my experience in school, and I was grateful for that. . . . If you polled them, I'm sure most [faculty] probably voted for Barack Obama, and for John Kerry before that, but at least in the courses I took, that did not jaundice in any way their presentation of materials. (Evan Dooley, Eastern Elite)

> I mean you probably know this, but most of the Eastern faculty is very, very liberal. But I have not encountered overwhelmingly liberal faculty in terms of *classroom conduct*. For the most part the faculty that I have encountered . . . have been very willing to not announce their personal political beliefs. In fact, they don't want to. (Elizabeth Tennyson, Eastern Elite)

Eastern Elite respondents understood their professors to be both knowledgeable and professional. While they acknowledged faculty members' likely political leanings, they did not feel this impinged on students' experiences in the classroom. Although we do not have data to substantiate this, it is possible that there are some differ-

ences between Western Public and Eastern Elite faculty. Eastern Elite faculty, who are highly selected and integrated into the elite environment, where neither graduate assistants nor adjuncts deliver lectures (as at less prestigious campuses) and where there are fewer noncanonical arts-and-science departments on campus that recruit faculty with weaker past socialization, may make it a greater point than their Western Public colleagues not to let their politics intrude into the classroom.[42] Whereas Western Public faculty may—like their students—be affected by the more anonymous classroom, Eastern Elite professors may be influenced by the seriousness of elite education, as well as by the fact that they know their students at a more personal level. The structural and cultural features of Eastern Elite should be presumed to work to some extent on faculty as well as students.

This is not to say, however, that Eastern Elite conservatives' reports of their classroom experiences were rosy without exception. Some students felt that the atmosphere of mutuality and closeness of the community can create problems when they lead to assumptions of ideological uniformity:

> It's very uncomfortable when there's a tacit understanding of a subject or idea . . . and suddenly you feel, like, yourself shrinking back. . . . And then when you add an authority figure to that, it just really does change it. I'm 22, and these professors are eminent heads in their field, and so you really don't feel like you could or should challenge this type of belief. (Staci Congdon, Eastern Elite)

Though this student clarified that she had suffered no "existential crisis" over class content, her comment underscores one of the potential problems of a small community that, while based on some amount of shared status, also contains within it a clear hierarchy of authority. While Eastern Elite students find faculty members' behavior to be much less egregious than do their colleagues at Western Public, as the above quotation suggests, their experiences in the classroom are not entirely unproblematic.

Part of Eastern Elite conservatives' easier experience, however, may be explained by their avoidance of particular classes, majors, and programs—particularly those identified broadly with multiculturalism and ethnic/gender studies—and a tendency to choose more "conservative" courses of study. As described above, the university's registration policy enables undergraduates to try out various courses before they commit to them, which allows conservative students to more easily avoid classes or professors whom they might find distasteful. As one student explained:

> But it's also, like, I've never taken a Critical Gender Studies class, for instance. If you take a Critical Gender Studies class you know what you're getting into. . . . And so maybe I have avoided those classes. . . . I think part of it is that a lot of the courses that I've taken have been kind of removed from those themes. (Molly Nash Downing, Eastern Elite)

Students can be particularly critical when they feel curricula stray too far from classical texts, especially in the humanities and social sciences, as this alumnus—a gay man who described himself as interested in the content of the course—reported:

> I took a class on Intro to Gay and Lesbian Studies. . . . [The professor] gave us like articles about lesbians fisting gay men, and all this just like *shit*, that I would really take her to task on. I'd be like, "You could really have given us *Phaedrus* to read by Plato, or you could have given us Virginia Woolf instead of this fucking article about lesbians fisting gay men!" (Edward Ingle, Eastern Elite)

In other words, some interviewees seemed to be saying it was a real shame that some faculty choose to stray from time-honored texts and bring in tendentious and flaky content, but they were still experts in their field.

Eastern Elite students' ability to test-drive their courses—as well as the pooling of information among the conservative minority

within an already relatively small and close-knit campus community where information circulates easily—helps them steer clear of course content they may find offensive or faculty members whom they consider politically unpleasant. Such avoidance is harder to accomplish at large, public universities such as those of the Western Public system, where course selection is more impersonal and tied to enrollment times and wait lists and where a greater number of majors and classes, as well as a larger student body, makes information sharing of this kind more difficult. Indeed, conservative students at Eastern Elite often hold up their choice of major as a reason they have not encountered issues with their coursework. Among our interviewees, economics, political science, and history were the most popular majors. Interestingly, however, these are also the three most popular majors among Eastern Elite students as a whole, implying that even within these relatively "conservative" fields, right-leaning students are unlikely to be among the majority. This tempers somewhat the conclusion that Eastern Elite conservatives' more positive experiences are solely the result of course selection.

To sum up, we find that Eastern Elite conservative students generally agree that they are not manipulated in the classroom. In both instances, their feelings seem to be very much connected to the idea of Eastern Elite as an exceptional institution, and of themselves, their peers, and their professors as being part of an elite intellectual community. This does not mean that Eastern Elite conservatives issue no objections about their campus. But for the most part, being at this nationally renowned campus seems to temper Eastern Elite conservative students' critiques. Students' belief in the Eastern Elite "brand" seems to mitigate their willingness to tarnish it by complaining too much about—or even *conceiving* of it as—a place where professors lack standards of professionalism.

SUMMARIZING THE DIFFERENCES

In some ways, then, the experiences of students at both Western Public and at Eastern Elite articulate with the conservative critique

of higher education: there is a shared sense on both campuses that conservatives are in the minority. In other respects, however, there is considerably less convergence between right-leaning students on these campuses. On the whole, we see conservative students on the Western Public campuses describing experiences that echo more resoundingly with the complaints of right-leaning critics: They believe that the student body and the professoriate are overwhelmingly liberal, and that an atmosphere of ideological conformity prevails on campus. While Eastern Elite conservatives likewise describe their peers and professors as predominantly left-leaning, their experience of this seems to be much less problematic. Eastern Elite students say they embrace the experience of learning alongside their liberal classmates and report that professors' personal ideological commitments rarely impinge on the classroom experience.

We can attribute many of these differences to the varying formal and informal organizational arrangements of these schools. Not just conservative students but all students at these two different universities learn about their place on their campus from their experiences with the campus's academic and social characteristics. While Eastern Elite students come to see themselves as prized members of an influential and elite community, Western Public students have a more isolating experience, and seek to find their own niche within a bureaucratic system that often treats them as little more than a set of transcripts and a student ID number.

THE UPSIDES AND DOWNSIDES TO "MINORITY" STATUS

Still, amid these differences, we also find commonalities. Foremost among these is that both Western Public and Eastern Elite students characterize themselves as being politically part of a minority on campus.[43] This self-understanding has important consequences for students in both university systems, consequences we found—somewhat surprisingly—to be relatively consistent across them. First, conservative students at both the Western Public campuses and

Eastern Elite characterize being in the political minority as having been, in some ways, an empowering experience. Second, and simultaneously, our interviewees at both schools described being in the political minority as generating feelings and experiences of isolation and marginalization. There are thus benefits and drawbacks to being a conservative student on what are popularly considered to be liberal college campuses.[44]

HONING ONE'S ARGUMENTS

Among interviewees in both university systems, we were surprised to find extensive discussions of the benefits that conservative students enjoyed from being in the political minority on their campuses. In contrast to the conservative critique of higher education, students at both Eastern Elite and on the Western Public campuses described their minority status on campus as having positive consequences for their intellectual, emotional, and political growth.[45] Students and alumni/ae on both campuses pointed out that being in what they thought of as a liberal milieu motivated them to strengthen their convictions and sharpen their arguments:

> I'm really glad I did [go to Western Flagship] as opposed to a conservative campus, because this campus has caused me to challenge my beliefs multiple times and I've actually really . . . in the same way that a politician gets . . . like Ronald Reagan made it to the top in California, and that experience of getting through a really liberal election and a liberal state helped him for when he ran for president later. And I really have been able to fine-tune my arguments and my thoughts and my politics as a result of being around so many liberal people. It's really helped me more, I think, than had I gone somewhere where I would have probably become more extreme in my opinions, rather than more moderate. (Hunter Devine, Western Flagship)

> I've been kind of forced to define who I am and to define and to ground and base these opinions in intellectual thought. And it's been good. I do feel like I'm on the spot a lot and I do feel like I always have to be a little bit on guard. And sometimes life gets a little stressful, and it's like, "Why can't we just stop talking about politics on dates" and "Don't make fun of me." But for the most part it's been very healthy. (Shannon Yaffe, Eastern Elite)

The degree of student consensus across campuses on this point is higher than on almost any other issue discussed in the interviews, a striking counterpoint to many critics' stated anxiety over the welfare of students on today's college campuses where "nobody dissents at all" (John Leo, Manhattan Institute).[46]

Even though being a campus conservative was often experienced as isolating, many interviewees found the experience enriching as well. Notably, several respondents at both universities claimed their minority status had given them a competitive advantage over their liberal classmates. Western Public conservative students castigated other undergraduates who simply drank the faculty's "Kool-Aid" (Conor Denning, Western State) and thus "can't hold an argument as well, [and] . . . don't emerge from school being seasoned debaters" (Kayla Shain, Western Flagship). Eastern Elite students similarly characterized their time at the school as an "opportunity to really face the tough questions, because you're going to get those at some point in your life anyway" (Kendall Nelson, Eastern Elite). Other students expressed similar views:

> I really sincerely feel that you become a much lazier thinker if you are part of the majority because you just aren't challenged that much. When you're in the minority you have got to do a lot of extra work. I read the newspaper every day, mostly because when you argue with people, if you can have a fact or statistic or an anecdote, that really strengthens your case. So it is kind of like you are studying for a pop quiz that could happen any moment. (Calvin Coffey, Eastern Elite)

> Going to school in a place like Western Flagship . . . forces conservatives to really be on their toes and to really know their issues. . . . And so it was always something that if I wanted to be-

lieve this or I wanted to support this, I had to be able to back it up. And I found that a lot of times I knew more about an issue because I *had* to. (Stephanie Cohen, Western Flagship)

In this manner, then, conservative students were able to transform their minority status on liberal campuses into a point of pride. This view also presents a point of commonality between interviewees on the Eastern Elite and Western Public campuses, despite their many other differences. Across campuses, these students drew strength from being in the ideological minority, and in spite of the trials they said they'd faced—the "pop quiz that could happen at any moment," for example—none said they would have had a better experience at a more conservative school. As one explained, "I'm not even sure if I would be happy on a conservative campus. There wouldn't be anything to do. Everything would be right" (Devin Daleo, Western Flagship).

ISOLATION AND MARGINALIZATION

At the same time that students offered assessments that being in the political minority generated benefits for them, conservative interviewees from both universities also described feelings of loneliness, isolation, and marginalization in both social and classroom settings. Virtually every one of our respondents referred at least once to the preponderance of liberal faculty and students they encountered in college, and the relative paucity of conservatives. Students from both Eastern Elite and the Western Public campuses talked about this feeling of being in the minority in similar terms:

At Eastern Elite there is a kind of sense that people wouldn't necessarily talk in class if they were conservative, so there was kind of an underground feeling. (Kingsley Griffith, Eastern Elite)

In a lot of respects Western Flagship has kind of polarized me because [being conservative is] almost like belonging to a secret society. . . . I'm sure there's plenty of us out there in reality, but we're just kind of afraid to mention it because it's such a hassle. (Eric Leonard, Western Flagship)

When you were sort of conservative at Eastern, you were a part of this counterculture. And inevitably you just ended up . . . if you're the type of person who wants to discuss politics *at all*, you ended up in many more arguments than the average student, who probably is just kind of generically politically liberal. (Vincent Long, Eastern Elite)

These descriptions of being part of an "underground," "secret society," or "counterculture" demonstrate how conservative students on both campuses shared a sense of themselves as belonging to a minority, and that this can lead to closing oneself off or not openly expressing political opinions. "I felt the need to kind of shut up a lot, like not say anything because I didn't want to outcast myself," explained one Western Satellite interviewee (Brittany Urban, Western Satellite).

When they do not "shut up," students sometimes recall instances where they themselves or others of like mind had peers turn on them:

My roommate a couple, maybe a month ago expressed her opinion that she was going to vote for John McCain. . . . And she was sitting at the dinner table and for an hour a couple of people kind of berated her and said that she was denying children education and she was sending soldiers to their death. And she came back to my room crying because it was like a very traumatizing experience to have people who are your friends saying things like this. So I think that is kind of a decent example of what can happen if, in just a random grouping of Eastern students you announce that you were doing something that probably 90 percent of them weren't doing. (Staci Congdon, Eastern Elite)

It was fellow students. It was the fellow students who were attracted to Western Flagship that outside of the fraternities and the sort of ones who show up to drink and [participate in recre-

ation], sort of the activists on campus are the far left progressive students, so that's who I eventually encountered pretty much on a daily basis. And they were the ones, the peers, were the actual pressure points in terms of applying those kinds of marginalization feelings. Once they know you're conservative or a Republican on campus, you're just a target. (Neal Thompson, Western Flagship)

Experiences of criticism or isolation like these can lead conservative students to feel uncomfortable speaking their minds even, as in the first example, among friends. This fits with other students' descriptions of having to watch out for politically sensitive areas. As another Western Flagship woman said, "Sometimes you have to avoid certain topics, but besides that you can still be friends because they're just topics" (Samantha Hart, Western Flagship).

CONCLUSION

Universities offer students many different possibilities for constructing their identities—both political and otherwise. However, a university's unique organizational arrangements make some outcomes likelier than others. Forging a different path may be difficult, given the practical limitations imposed by major requirements and tuition payments, to give two concrete examples. Describing a campus that is similar to Western Flagship in many ways, Elizabeth Armstrong and Laura Hamilton discuss the "pathways" that are available to students at a large midwestern public university.[47] Like Western Flagship, this campus promotes itself heavily around its Greek party scene and athletics, making these popular draws for affluent students who desire a fun, academically undemanding college experience. At the same time, however, as Armstrong and Hamilton point out, these emphases are not as appropriate for less well-heeled students who are looking for a practical education that will lead to secure employment. Carving out a unique path—as many of our engaged, conservative interviewees wanted to do—is difficult on a campus like Western Flagship, which is largely depersonalized.

At the other end of the spectrum, but in some ways no less confining, Robert Granfield's research looking at Harvard Law School in many ways echoes our findings about Eastern Elite.[48] Granfield describes how incoming law students, from varying backgrounds and with different ideological commitments and reasons for studying law, are socialized into what he terms the school's "collective eminence."[49] From orientation through to job interviews, these law students are told again and again that they are the best of the best, and that there is no need for them to compete with one another because there are spoils enough for all. As Granfield documents, this has consequences for these students' self-understandings and, further, for their career outcomes, as even those who enter with commitments to social justice and public law come to see themselves as candidates for only the very best jobs with large, white-shoe law firms.

Our findings about the cultural and structural features on these different campuses fit well with these other scholars' accounts of institutional campus features—although of course we extend their insights to the case of conservative politics. We find that conservative students share some perceptions and many ideological concerns across campuses, but that the distinctive features of each campus create different experiences with peers, faculty, and the university itself for right-leaning students. In both instances, however, the challenges these conservative students face are not challenges they face alone. Though one person's classroom experience, for example, may feel idiosyncratic or unique to that person, it is likely shared by another conservative student. And so, as this Western Flagship interviewee explained, conservatives on campus say they need to reach out to one another:

You just feel like you're ideologically very lonely because you go to class after class where everybody's agreeing on things that you don't agree with. And sometimes you just don't have the nerve to speak up about it. And then you're walking down the street and

> there are people protesting Bush and there's people protesting the Iraq War and there's people . . . and then there's professors joking about politicians that you admire all the time. And it just wears on you, it probably just wears on you. So it's good to have a few people who you're not afraid of saying, "Can you believe that Professor So-and-So blahblahblah." . . . It's good to get it out and off your chest and talk to other people. (Hunter Devine, Western Flagship)

Given their shared sense of being in the minority, and that in many ways, being politically conservative is not something that is encouraged at these schools, right-of-center students at both Western Public and Eastern Elite believe it is essential to find sympathetic friends with whom they can feel solidarity and from whom they don't feel the need to hide their thoughts or feelings. Conservative students do not believe they can fight all these battles or develop solutions to different problems they face—with professors, with peers, or with the university itself—on their own. Instead, they actively work to develop solutions to the challenges of their campuses and to create pathways of their own with the aid of student-run conservative clubs. As we will see in the following chapters, these provide right-leaning students not only with like-minded peers but also with an informal education in campus politics and what it means to be a conservative on campus—and, perhaps, beyond.

Chapter 5

Provoking Liberals and Campaigning for Republicans

Two Conservative Styles at the Western Public Universities

In this chapter and the following one, we provide answers to one of the central questions posed in chapter 1: What is it about university campuses—which are home to specific constellations of organizational and cultural structures—that make them such important influences on students' political expression? How is it that this influence can be so strong that what it means to *act like* a conservative student—even when ideological concerns are more or less shared across universities—can be so radically different from one campus to the next? Why does life at Eastern Elite University, for example, lead the majority of actively involved conservative undergraduates to settle into a "civilized discourse" style of conservatism while eschewing the confrontational style of activism so popular on the Western Public campuses? Conversely, at Western Public, why is "provocation" so dominant that we find little support for more deliberative discursive styles? In this same line of questioning, why do a handful of conservative students at Eastern Elite risk losing the respect not only of their liberal classmates but also of their conservative peers by using a style of aggressive conservatism we call "highbrow provocation," while at Western Public such a style barely

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To Edward, my love
A.J.B.

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