Widespread student support for beleaguered professor Peter Boghossian

The International Youth and Students for Social Equality at Portland State University
17 January 2019

Professor Peter Boghossian of the Philosophy Department at Portland State University (PSU) is at risk of losing his job due to the publishing of the so-called "grievance studies" hoax last fall. The articles he wrote with non-academic colleagues James Lindsay and Helen Pluckrose were made-up, satirical pieces of research that mimicked the post-modernist language of "critical" race, gender and sexuality studies.

Eight of their "hoax" articles were accepted by journals, including a "radical feminist" edit of part of Adolf Hitler's *Mein Kampf* and proposals to train men like dogs after observing "rape culture" in Portland dog parks.

An investigation by Portland State University found Boghossian to be in violation of academic ethics and standards of the Institutional Review Board. These bureaucratic mechanisms have been brought down on the scholar after months of backlash from dominant pseudo-left forces within academia, specifically from the humanities and social sciences. Boghossian awaits to hear what disciplinary action will be taken against him, which includes the possibility of losing his job.

Early this week, members of the International Youth and Students for Social Equality (IYSSE) at PSU distributed dozens of leaflets around the campus and spoke with students about the "grievance studies" hoax. Even though no tenured or adjunct faculty at PSU have come on record to defend Boghossian against retaliation, there exists a sentiment of support among students and staff who are disillusioned with identity politics.

Quinn, a pre-med student at PSU, heard about the Boghossian case recently. "The dog-humping article and the fat body-building one were seriously funny, but it is also very serious. The *Mein Kampf* one is messed up. I don't like that, I don't think anyone should like that.

"It's good to know that someone is taking a risk to reveal that problem, and clearly he is taking a risk because he's getting backlash from it."

"I am super passionate about science and the defense of objective truth," Quinn said of the broader relevance of the hoax studies for the defense of scientific rigor. "I want to go into research. I am sure I will be guilty of bringing biases into my work, as everyone is. But I want to do my best to keep biases and politics in general out of my research, because research should be more about seeing what is really out there rather than searching for data one wants to find."

Connor, an undergraduate in accounting, explained his experiences as a former student of Professor Boghossian. "Peter tries not to be political, but to get to objective truth. He believes there is a right and a wrong that exist without a religious backing … And he doesn't come at you with an agenda, to make you believe his ways. Not that he doesn't have one, but he is aware that he has one."

"We need people who are willing to kick the beehive, when something isn't working how it should be." Connor continued, "It would make sense that institutions don't particularly like someone who is counter-institutional. Anyone critiquing a situation shouldn't get backlash. He hasn't hurt anybody. It does say something about PSU when they are going after Peter, of all people. We need black sheep at the universities, otherwise there's just a homogenous set of ideas."

Arthur, a tech worker at a firm near the university, said he was glad the study caused "major shock waves."

"If a study goes along with the ideology of the publication, then it can be accepted even if it isn't a valid study that develops our understanding of reality. We need to be scholarly and scientific in our work. As of late, there have been so many studies even on both sides of the political spectrum that aren't very scholarly. Anyone who stands up to talk about these issues should not be silenced."

Ally, a communications major, explained, "When we call out someone on their behavior without having an in-depth discussion about the ideas, whether they're right or wrong, it undermines the freedom of expression and speech. It's interesting how Boghossian and the other two figured out how to get these articles submitted by masking false information in the right ideology and words. Academia should be more rigorous than that."

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"I think academia should be rigorous and held to high standards, and when it is found to have fallen from that, it is a problem that should be addressed," said **Ben**, an undergraduate studying computer science. He agreed with the assessment that more students are questioning the validity of postmodernist and subjective thinking because of the seriousness of the political situation. "That's really happening, and we should be focused on understanding politics."

An undergraduate student named **Bethlehem** said, "He is the only professor I've had that I disagreed with, but the way that he presented his reasoning, it was, like, undeniable. So I was still able to listen with open ears."

Speaking of the intense backlash he received for the hoax studies, she said, "This is what goes down in philosophy, but that's one of the whole points of philosophy--to question and to search for truth." Bethlehem agreed that affluent and privileged sections of the middle class are the strongest proponents of subjective identity politics and the strongest opponents of Boghossian.

She stated that the fact that the hoax articles were published in journals "makes me feel like my degree is so invalid." She hadn't read the anonymous letter from university faculty posted in *The Vanguard*, a student-run paper, that stated Boghossian's work "jeopardizes the students' reputations, as their degrees in the process may become devalued."

Yousef, an undergraduate in Sociology, said, "I really like the idea of someone challenging the semi-religious beliefs that self-titled liberals hold. I like the idea of putting it to the test, putting stress to it. The retaliation made me upset. There was an issue that was highlighted and PSU's response was that it would be too difficult to fix it, so they would rather embarrass and threaten him.

"These are outright fear tactics, based on false information … That journals could accept *Mein Kampf* as intersectional feminism devalues my education so much more than someone exposing that could." He clarified, "These political theories and social theories may have started in a good direction, but they went way past the original point. You can't play that card [of being oppressed] to subjugate someone else."

Kambetty said, "I love this guy [Boghossian]. He's my favorite teacher ever. His class was amazing. He wasn't afraid to bring up controversial topics. He wasn't afraid of taking risks and bringing in diversity.

"I'm not going to lie. My very first time at Portland State, I had to take a pop culture class and we had to write an essay on homoerotic relationships between Spock and Captain Kirk in *Star Trek* and learn about porn fan fiction. I was like, 'What is this school?' The professor was from gender studies, which I don't have any issues with gender studies but just the way that it's being taught. It's not doing the topic justice.

"Boghossian was someone who could critique people like Judith Butler, someone who is really praised at this university. I just appreciated seeing those different views."

Nora, a Film major at the school, "A lot of people support him. It's always important to critique things and ask questions ... It doesn't surprise me [that he faces retaliation], unfortunately. Portland specifically and PSU specifically has done some questionable things in the recent past," referring to the campus police shooting of Jason Washington.

Isaac, a Public Health major, said, "Professor Boghossian is a genius. He is a bit abrasive, but he knows what he is talking about, and he is speaking of necessary things not just for students to know about the world and the complexities of society and sociology. But he also helps round people out, in a diligent and intelligent way. We need professors like him in schools across the country to make sure logic and intelligent thought is not lost in the angst of popular politics. We need people like him at PSU so that we can still pursue social justice, without following bandwagons and losing our minds to flights of fancy through our emotions."

He agreed that while the academics of the Frankfurt School, postmodernism and similar subjective schools of thought try to sound radical and even socialist, they "don't even know what Marxism is."

"All the good things in the world that good people are trying to push for, like social equality, need the type of objective and rational thought for it to be achieved. If it's not intelligent thought, or not objective thought, it's only going to give the upper-hand to the evil that uses intelligent and objective thought. You need to be able to confront the world with a solid head on your shoulders."

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