

 **TODAY'S "SHORT TOPIC"**
WAS SUSTAINABILITY
REALLY THE
ISSUE?



By Stephen L. Bakke  July 2, 2015

Here's what provoked me:

An opinion writer bemoaned the lack of academic objectivity and freedom regarding topics such as environmentalism and sustainability. Debate doesn't exist and dissent is harshly suppressed. Rather than being legitimate academic disciplines resulting in degree programs, they have become almost a religion and a "lens" through which to view all of life. Differences of opinion and diversity of thought is totally lost.

Here's my response:

Was Sustainability Really the Issue?

In "Sustainability is not an evil plot," July 2, Kathleen Sevig melodramatically recalls the Dust Bowl of the 1930s and Steinbeck's "Grapes of Wrath" while accusing Katherine Kersten of claiming an evil plot is going on in colleges and universities, in "Campus Sustainability," June 28.

Kersten enthusiastically endorses "responsible environmental stewardship" but has long been opposed to what she would consider "distractions" from true academic disciplines. She's unhappy that sustainability has become an ideology rather than a discipline to be discussed and debated. Even though campuses are supposed to be places to exchange ideas, Kersten points out that "dissent is harshly suppressed" and alternative opinions are shut out by discouraging "honest analysis of costs and benefits" of environmental and sustainability issues.

Kersten observes that rather than being an academic discipline, sustainability has become a "'lens' through which to view all of life." With official "Green Guides" and "Sustainability Literacy Assessments," they are telling students: "Here's what you should believe and we're going follow up to make sure you're in compliance."

Kersten bemoans wrapping this ideology into movements with other non-academic causes, all being guided by "diversity and equity" coordinators. She reminds us that ironically, these institutions are becoming financially unsustainable, and in a death spiral, while sometimes charging students upward of \$50,000 per year.

Ms. Sevig, sustainability is not evil, and was not the issue! You could garner Kersten's support if institutions exercised academic neutrality regarding very important environmental issues, and didn't throw money away, leading inevitably to economic failure.