

Harvard and the Crisis of Truth in Universities

By Patrick Keeney

The university has long been a battleground of competing visions—a place where ideas clash, convictions are tested, and truth is pursued through disciplined inquiry.



But over the past four decades, since at least the publication of Allan Bloom's [*The Closing of the American Mind*](#) in 1987, critics from across the ideological spectrum have sounded the alarm over the academy's slow drift away from truth. For Bloom, this was no mere academic concern; it signalled nothing less than a civilizational crisis. At stake is not simply the structure of the curriculum, but the very essence of the university—its calling to shape minds capable of judgment, hearts oriented toward moral seriousness,

and communities bound together by an unyielding fidelity to truth.

Jordan Peterson, one of Canada's most prominent public intellectuals, recently offered a sobering remark. In a recent

episode of [The Jordan B. Peterson Podcast](#), he stated, “I think the universities are gone. I think that Harvard is having this war with Trump and that Trump is 100% right.”

For a classical liberal shaped by academic norms—and a former assistant professor of psychology at Harvard from 1993–1998—his alignment with Trump is striking. That a scholar so deeply rooted in the academic tradition—and one who speaks with evident fondness for his time at Harvard—should now find himself in opposition to the very institution that once shaped him is a stark indictment of the university’s decline.

But Peterson is hardly a lone voice. [The U.S. Vice-President J.D. Vance put the matter bluntly](#): “The universities in our country are fundamentally corrupt and dedicated to deceit and lies, not to the truth.” He asks, “Why is it that our universities are so committed to some of the most preposterous dishonesties in the world instead of being committed to the truth?”

Vance’s judgment is echoed by Harvard psychiatrist and bioethicist Omar Sultan Haque, who recently [issued a scathing public indictment of his former university](#): “I stopped teaching at Harvard last year primarily because of its anti-truth-seeking culture, radical left-wing bias, racial and gender discrimination, and prevailing anti-intellectualism, which made continued participation a poor use of time. Harvard has strayed from its foundational mission of unbiased truth-seeking and has become ideologically driven. The university’s culture and practices prioritize ideological conformity over open inquiry and debate, suppressing dissenting viewpoints and compromising academic freedom.”

In his words, the university has become a site of “moral theater,” where faculty are chosen not for scholarly excellence, but for their fealty to the catechism of diversity, equity, and inclusion. Truth has been subordinated to ideology. Haque’s insider critique reveals how far Harvard

has strayed from its foundational commitment to *Veritas*—a betrayal not only of its past, but of its very purpose.

The views of Peterson, Vance, and Haque give voice to a growing public intuition: that the modern university has forsaken its role as a sanctuary for truth and inquiry, and become a stage for moral theatre and ideological conformity. Harvard—once a beacon of *Veritas*—now finds itself mired in cultural skirmishes, trading reasoned debate for orthodoxy, intellectual rigour for posturing, and treating dissent not as a catalyst for thought, but as a threat to be silenced.

Properly understood, liberal education is not about training activists, serving the labour market, or facilitating upward social mobility. Instead, it is a moral and intellectual apprenticeship—an education in character, judgment, and the pursuit of truth. It engages students in the great civilizational conversation, prompting them to ask, with Socrates: What is justice? What is the good life? What do we owe one another?

However, these foundational questions have been overshadowed by a technocratic ethos and a managerialist mindset that reduce education to the transactional delivery of content for passive consumers, assessed by key performance indicators and influenced by administrative risk aversion.

This supposed neutrality, however, is a fiction. Beneath the rhetoric of objectivity lies a narrow ideological orthodoxy, cloaked in the language of diversity, equity, and inclusion. The university no longer teaches students how to think, but rather what to affirm. Critical reflection is supplanted by conformity. The outcome is not the formation of morally serious individuals, but the conditioning of ideological functionaries—an academy increasingly assured of its righteousness, even as it forsakes its commitment to truth.

This betrayal goes beyond Harvard and is not merely an issue

in the United States. The Canadian academic landscape faces a similar challenge. One need only observe the rise of mandatory diversity statements, the marginalization of the humanities, and the ideological litmus tests that now dictate hiring, research funding, and curriculum development.

At day's end, these issues transcend partisan politics or political score-settling; it concerns the health of our civilization. As Peter Emberley and Waller Newell argued in their 1994 book [*Bankrupt Education: The Decline of Liberal Learning in Canada*](#), the malaise in the modern university is not due to funding shortages or governance issues, but the loss of first principles. They write: "... without a sense of what is valuable and enduring in our civilization, education becomes directionless, subject to the changing winds of politics, fashion, and market ideology." It is precisely this loss of *telos*—of guiding purpose—that threatens to render the university a hollow institution, bereft of coherence, and incapable of fulfilling its formative role in democratic life.

Their analysis raises troubling questions for Canada's publicly funded universities. What are we supporting? A liberal education rooted in the pursuit of truth and critical thinking? Or an ideologically driven apparatus committed to conformity?

Revitalizing liberal education should begin with a renewed commitment to its foundational purpose, which is the unimpeded pursuit of truth. This idea has been expressed in many ways over the millennia. However, this is how the Belgian sinologist [*Simon Leys*](#) put it: "A university is a place where scholars seek truth, pursue and transmit knowledge for knowledge's sake – irrespective of the consequences, implications and utility of the endeavour."

The university must be reaffirmed as a formative institution, one that nurtures imagination, cultivates judgment, and fosters ethical depth. It must once more pose essential

questions: What constitutes justice? What defines a good life? Furthermore, it should boldly acknowledge that education is inherently not morally neutral, but rather a profoundly normative endeavour, focused on forming autonomous and accountable individuals.

We require a vital discussion about the purpose of higher education. Are our universities still dedicated to shaping citizens capable of reasoned deliberation and civic engagement? Or have they turned into echo chambers, sanctuaries of orthodoxy where dissent is penalized and complexity is avoided?

The solution lies in recovering first principles. The university is neither a corporation nor a political instrument, but rather a moral and cultural institution entrusted with the preservation and transmission of truth—a role proudly embodied in Harvard's motto, *Veritas*.

Reviving this tradition is not merely an exercise in nostalgia; it is an act of democratic self-preservation. Liberal societies rely on citizens who possess critical thought, moral seriousness, and intellectual courage, and such individuals are not born but shaped, if they are shaped at all, within institutions dedicated to something greater than fashion or ideology.

We must not become complacent. To preserve our universities as sanctuaries of intellect and guardians of our civilizational legacy, we need to reclaim their essence, revitalize their purpose, and reaffirm their dedication to the one principle that validates their existence: *Veritas*.

Illustration from the university [website](#)

