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Schools of Thought: Using AI to Assess the Ideological Orientation of Academic Departments

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Abstract

This study examines whether academic departments exhibit ideological orientations that may influence their openness to students with differing political views. Using AI, the scholarly output of 823 tenure-track faculty across 50 departments at Florida's largest public universities was analyzed to generate departmental profiles and assess ideological tendencies. Results were compared with profiles from civic centers. AI-generated advice to hypothetical applicants was coded by human raters to evaluate departmental hospitality to liberal and conservative students. Findings suggest departments lean left and may be less welcoming to conservative students, whereas civic centers lean right but are no less welcoming to liberal students than traditional departments are to conservative students.

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Introduction

The term “school of thought” generally connotes a group of academics who have all subscribed to a dominant view or set of views. The Chicago School of Economics, for example, is generally thought to come out of the work of Frank Knight, Milton Friedman, George Stigler and other economists at the University of Chicago who wrote on issues of free-market economics and monetarism (Miller, 1962). In a similar vein, the Austrian School of Economics originated at the University of Vienna and was principally influenced by the writing and ideas of Carl Menger, Ludwig von Mises, and Friedrich Hayek (Boettke & Leeson, 2003). Often, schools of thought spread through the students of the foundational thinkers who go on to serve in academic appointments at other institutions. At times, whether through the spread of students or the sheer influence of the foundational scholars, a school of thought can impact an entire discipline.

In this paper, I use the term “schools of thought” more generally, not to indicate a specific set of ideas that originated from a particular program, but to denote a department that has a coherent set of values or presuppositions. I am not interested in whether a particular department subscribes to the Chicago or the Austrian School of Economics, the Frankfurt School of Critical Theory or the Yale School of Literary Criticism. Rather, I am interested in whether the faculty in an academic department overwhelmingly subscribe to a particular set of ideologies such that they may be perceived to be either ideologically left or right, progressive or conservative.

This work is motivated by the “growing partisan divide in views of higher education,” where Republicans increasingly have a low opinion of higher education (Parker, 2019), and the recent attention to higher education by Republican legislatures (Siddiqi & Regnier, 2025). Siddiqi & Regnier (2025) identified 45 civic centers in the United States. This number included centers at public and private universities, 26 of these centers were at public universities with 14

of these being created “through acts of legislation” (p. 7). As noted, these legislatively created civic centers are perceived to be oriented toward the political right. *Inside Higher Education* (Quinn, 2024) noted this in a piece titled: *The Curious Rise of a Conservative—or Civic Minded?—Center at the University of Florida*. In the piece, Paul Carresse, a foundational member of the School of Civic and Economic Thought and Leadership at Arizona State University, and William Inboden, then director of the Hamilton Center for Classical and Civic Education, addressed or qualified this conservative perception. Nevertheless, Quinn (2024) suggested one need look no further than the legislative intent to discern a center’s orientation. Rainwater and Cassanello (2025), authors of *Proselytizing Speech: Florida’s Publicly Funded Conservative Centers*, likely agree with this interpretation. They identified Florida as a national leader in the emergence of civics institutes.

While critics of these institutes, such as Rainwater and Cassanello (2025), criticize the perceived right-leaning orientation of these centers, they fail to acknowledge the substantive critique that universities are overwhelmingly staffed by faculty on the left. A 2025 analysis of social media profiles of 4,169 faculty at 542 institutions, for example, identified 35.9% of faculty as “far left” and 33.4% as “liberal,” while identifying 13.2% as “conservative” and just 0.2% as “far right” (Havey & Her, 2025). This analysis included faculty at the largest institutions but also deliberately identified faculty at smaller private and religious institutions.

Given the well-documented concentration of left-leaning faculty in higher education, it is not unreasonable to consider whether such a significant concentration of liberal faculty, especially in particular departments, may constitute a left-wing school of thought. That is the question considered in this analysis: to what extent are existing college departments ideologically oriented toward the political left or right? Using faculty scholarship, I assess whether a

department has an overarching ideological framework, which may make the department hostile for students of a different ideological orientation.

Given Rainwater and Cassanello's identification of Florida as a national leader in the civic center space, this analysis uses departments from Florida's five largest public universities. These include: Florida International University, Florida State University, University of Central Florida, University of Florida, and the University of South Florida. Within these institutions, I selected 50 departments or schools whose subject matter most directly overlaps with the domains occupied by the newly created civic institutes. This includes fields such as economics, English, history, philosophy, religious studies, public policy, education policy, and political science, among others. The aim was not to survey every academic unit, but to examine those disciplines most likely to shape civic, political, and moral discourse. In total, 50 academic departments were included in the analysis. A full list of departments is provided in Appendix 1, though I do not report individual department information in this paper.

After identifying the departments, I compiled faculty rosters from each unit's official webpage in order to identify the tenure-track scholars who constitute the department's intellectual research core. I included faculty at any tenure-track rank but excluded adjuncts, visiting faculty, and administrators without active research portfolios. To be included in the initial list, scholars had to have at least five publications. The final analytic sample consisted of 823 tenure-track faculty members from Florida's five largest public universities.

To provide a comparison, I wanted to compare traditional departments to Florida civic centers. However, at the time of analysis, only one of Florida's civic centers was constituted in a way that resembled an academic unit, the Hamilton School at the University of Florida. Since I am only providing anonymous departmental information for the traditional academic units, I

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expanded our pool of civic centers to include four of the most well-established centers in the nation. This includes: the School of Civic Leadership at the University of Texas at Austin, the Salmon P. Chase Center for Civics, Culture, and Society at Ohio State University, the School of Civic and Economic Thought and Leadership at Arizona State University, and the School of Civic Life and Leadership at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill. In total, the scholarly activity of 92 civic center faculty was used to create profiles for these five civic centers.

I used artificial intelligence programs to analyze each faculty member's academic work and to build department profiles. Once the department profile was created, I asked the AI programs to consider what advice it might give to a liberal or conservative student applying to the program. The results suggest the five civic centers may indeed be staffed by individuals on the right, but this rightward lean is not nearly as concentrated as the leftward lean of traditional academic departments.

Literature Review

As noted above, Havey and Her's (2025) social media analysis found that far left or liberal faculty outnumber conservative or far right faculty by roughly 5 to 1. Though the numbers may vary, this finding is hardly new. Magness and Waugh (2022) state, "Since the earliest measures in the 1960s, the modal college professor has sat to the political left of the American public" (p. 359). From 1969 to 1998, they note, the percentage of faculty who identify at "far left" remained relatively consistent. Then in the early 2000s, something changed. The percent of faculty that identified as "liberal" or "far left" climbed. By 2015, according to Magness and Waugh (2022), more than 60% of faculty identified as liberal. A survey of 2,335 faculty at 146 research universities in the United States in 2025 found similar results (Wright, Saxe, & Hecht,

2025). Most faculty identified as liberal (56%) or extremely liberal (16%), while just 10% identified as conservative. The numbers skewed even further to the left in the humanities, where 57 percent identified as liberal and 26 percent identified as extremely liberal (Wright, Saxe, & Hecht, 2025).

While surveys are one method of identifying political orientation of faculty, others have analyzed the matter using party registration or political donations. Langbert (2018), for example, analyzed political party registration of 8,688 faculty in 51 of the top 66 ranked liberal arts colleges in 12 states. He found 39 percent of the colleges in his sample were devoid of Republican registrants and roughly 78 percent of the academic departments had either zero Republican registrants or so few to make a difference. In a follow-up analysis, Langbert and Stevens (2020) noted some limitations with this methodology, such as many states do not require party registration, and additionally looked at the political giving of 12,372 faculty members. They find a mostly consistent story.

Owens and Woodworth (2026) used a similar method to analyze giving data reported by the Federal Election Commission. Specifically, they examined the giving of faculty and staff at the five largest public universities in Florida, the same universities included in my analysis. Consistent with other analyses, Owens and Woodworth found the number of donations, the total dollars donated, and the percentage of donors all leaned toward the Democratic party. For each of the five universities, over 80 percent of the individuals giving gave to Democrats.

The fact that faculty lean left is largely settled. Mariani and Hewitt (2008) note, “The debate over faculty ideology has shifted away from whether college faculties are liberal (the evidence from most studies suggests they are) towards an examination of the causes and consequences of left-leaning professoriate” (p. 774). Using various surveys, they seek to

examine whether students change their political orientation and find little evidence to suggest that faculty are effective at influencing student beliefs. Still, others worry about the political bias of faculty. In his book *Indoctrination U*, Horowitz (2007) argued that faculty members are injecting a political agenda into the classroom. In his analysis, Burmila (2021) attempts to refute this claim, “Although firmly entrenched in the wider American political discourse today, the belief that academia is dominated by liberal bias is not well supported by research” (p. 601). Magness and Waugh (2022) disagree with this assertion:

“It is not necessarily problematic for professors to all lean one way or the other politically, as long as they are committed to free and open inquiry. Problems arise, however, when academics obfuscate and deny the reality surrounding the political ideologies of university faculty. ... The changing ideological landscape has not only made nonleft constituencies feel increasingly unwelcome on campus—it has also started to materialize in hiring discrimination against faculty applicants with nonleft perspectives in several of the most politically skewed disciplines. (p. 366)

What is the effect of faculty orientation?

While the point is taken that the mere fact of a left leaning faculty does not necessarily mean ideological discrimination is occurring, it is possible to consider the extent to which political orientation influences various aspects of academia. Indeed, in some instances it seems clear that faculty orientation is having an impact. In an analysis of syllabi available on the “Open Syllabus Project” website, Shields et al. (2025) find that faculty tend to assign texts on one side of contentious issues, “such as racial bias in the American criminal justice system, the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, and the ethics of abortion” (p. 2). Assigned readings on the left are rarely balanced by countervailing views on the right.

It may also be the case that political orientation shapes how researchers reach conclusions when analyzing data. Borjas and Breznau (2026) contacted 71 research teams, comprised of 158 faculty members. They first asked the researchers a specific question about the impacts of immigration. They then asked the teams to analyze a set of data on the topic. Interestingly, they found the pro-immigration researchers produced analyses that were more supportive of immigration and anti-immigration scholars produced results that were more negative toward immigration. If faculty are overwhelmingly on the left, we may wonder what impact this could have on research. In an analysis of essays in *American Quarterly*, Kahlenberg and Lin (2026), for example, found 80 percent of the articles published between 2022 and 2024 were critical of America, while 20 percent were neutral. Not a single article was positive. The articles focused primarily on racism or imperialism. Could political bias or orientation be shaping research here? And is it possible that the political orientation of faculty may shape what findings are able to be published, leading as Rothman, Lichter, and Nevitte (2005) suggest “political conservatism confers a disadvantage in the competition for professional advancement” (p. 13).

Some have sought to test these sorts of claims of bias empirically. Woodzicka, Boudreau, and Hayne (2024), for example, randomly assigned 98 faculty members to analyze the profile of a student who either had pink hair or a brown bun. While they found that the student’s physical appearance influenced the professors’ perception of the student’s political orientation, they did not find a significant impact on the professor’s ratings of students’ logic or reasoning. While these smaller experimental studies may raise concern, they are individual measures. They are assessing how an individual professor performs when isolated from the influence of peers. It is possible for professors to be objective in this case, while also allowing their beliefs to influence policies or practices in other areas. In a faculty survey, for example, Finley and Tiede (2025)

found that the political views of professors change how they view institutional policies, such as affirmative action and who should be qualified to teach (Finley & Tiede, 2025). Similarly they might influence job announcements or position requirements, such as requiring applicants to submit statements in support of diversity, equity, and inclusion policies (Paul & Maranto, 2022).

Summary

The research evidence is clear that faculty tend to be politically left leaning. This has been documented by survey research, political registration, and political orientation. Moreover, there is evidence to suggest this leftward lean may influence research, publications, and university policies. To date, no one has systematically analyzed the research profiles of faculty using AI in the manner outlined in this study. While some have analyzed departments using political giving or party registration, these methods are somewhat limited. Most faculty are not registered with either party nor do they donate to political causes. Yet, all faculty in the tenure ranks are scholars who produce research. By analyzing the research of scholars for ideology, I am able to add to the body of knowledge by determining the extent to which faculty orientation may influence how open a department is to differing views.

Methods

Given Florida's reputation as a national leader in legislature-led higher education reform and creation of civic centers, Florida's five largest public universities were identified for this analysis. These include: Florida International University, Florida State University, the University of Central Florida, the University of Florida, and the University of South Florida. Within these institutions, I selected 50 departments or schools whose subject matter most directly overlaps with the domains occupied by the newly created civic institutes. This includes fields such as economics, English, history, philosophy, religious studies, public policy, education policy, and

political science, among others. In total, 50 academic departments with some similarity to civic centers were identified.

After identifying the departments, I compiled faculty rosters from each unit's official webpage in order to identify the tenure-track scholars who constitute its intellectual core. I included faculty at any tenure-track rank but excluded adjuncts, visiting faculty, and administrators without active research portfolios. To be included in the initial list, scholars had to have at least five publications. This yielded a total of 910 faculty members. Following verification of publication records, 87 individuals were removed due to insufficient scholarly output, resulting in a final analytic sample of 823 tenure-track faculty members from Florida public universities. As noted previously, 92 faculty members from five civic centers were also analyzed to provide a comparison group.

To analyze faculty scholarship, I identified two web addresses linked to each faculty member's academic profile. This typically included (1) the professor's university profile page and (2) a Google Scholar page or a personal website. I then used three different AI programs to analyze each individual faculty member from a department and create a department profile.

AI Evaluator Pack

To evaluate each faculty member and create a department profile, an AI evaluator pack was developed and loaded into each AI. The evaluator pack first declared the purpose of the project: "All [individual faculty] evaluations are performed solely to generate a comprehensive, evidence-based department profile." The AI Evaluator Pack outlined a series of "hard rules" the AI program was required to follow. For instance, the AI was directed to start with the user provided links. The AI could expand from there but could "include only items written or spoken by the scholar with verifiable authorship." AI was instructed not to use "institutional reputations,

third-party commentary about the scholar, unsourced summaries, crowdsourced ratings,” and “general social-media sentiment.” These restrictions were to keep the focus on the scholar’s own produced work.

The AI Evaluator Pack outlined eight axes for evaluation, and each scholar was assigned a rating ranging from -10 to +10 on each of these axes (Appendix 2). The hard rules required axis independence, meaning values from one axis were not to influence the rating on another axis. Additionally, the AI was directed that “every non-neutral score must cite concrete evidence.” If the evidence was “thin or mixed,” the AI was directed to “move the score toward 0 and lower confidence.” If there was no evidence on an axis, AI was directed to provide an “N/A” rating.

The AI was instructed to start developing the scholar profile through an “anchor & seed” process. This started by browsing the links provided and extracting key information, such as name, affiliation, and key research topics or phrases. The AI was to extract the “top 10 recent peer-reviewed articles, working papers, or authored non-academic works (op-eds, policy briefs, testimony).” Next, the AI was directed to expand the search with targeted searches until it was able to reach evidence saturation. This was defined as “ ≥ 3 primary sources for $|\text{score}| \geq 7$; ≥ 5 for $|\text{score}| \geq 9$; or no new substantive content after 3 consecutive null results.” These directions tamper scores, requiring higher levels of evidence to provide higher scores. For each axis, AI was provided with a description, a guiding question, and key judging criteria.

The first five axes focus on research methodologies and are not particularly relevant to this analysis. The remaining three axes focus on ideologies or normative domains and serve as the basis for the analyses in this paper. For Axis 6, equity $\leftrightarrow$ merit, the AI programs assigned a number from -10 to +10 based on how issues of equity, fairness, inclusion, redistribution, and

recognition of marginalized groups were treated in the scholarly works of a faculty member. The guiding question for this domain was: “Does the scholar primarily judge policies/practices by how they advance equity (fairness/inclusion) or merit (excellence/performance)?” For Axis 7, centralized ↔ decentralized/market, the guiding question asked, “Does the scholar favor centralized, hierarchical coordination or decentralized/market/network coordination as the primary means to achieve goals?” Finally, Axis 8, progressive liberation ↔ traditional virtue, asks, “To what extent does the scholar’s authored work affirm conventional moral frameworks (e.g., national allegiance, nuclear family, sexual restraint) or advance revisionist ethical paradigms (e.g., identity-based autonomy, cosmopolitan ethics, sexual liberation)?” The following scoring scales were provided in the AI evaluator pack for Axes 6-8 (Table 1).

Table 1: AI Evaluator Pack Scoring Scales for Normative Axes

Axis 6: Equity ↔ Merit	
-10 to -8	Purely Equity-Oriented: Equity and gap-closing are central; merit is minimal or subordinate.
-7 to -4	Predominantly Equity-Oriented: Equity concerns are primary; merit is secondary.
-3 to +3	Mixed / Balanced: Equity and merit are both substantive and weighed roughly equally.
+4 to +7	Predominantly Merit-Oriented: Excellence/performance primary; equity secondary.
+8 to +10	Purely Merit-Oriented: Excellence/performance centered; equity minimal or incidental.
Axis 7: Centralized ↔ Decentralized/Market	
-10 to -8	Purely Centralized: Strong preference for hierarchical, top-down governance and uniform standards.
-7 to -4	Predominantly Centralized: Leans toward centralized planning/standards with limited autonomy/competition.
-3 to +3	Mixed / Hybrid: Blended models: central guardrails with local autonomy or market mechanisms.
+4 to +7	Predominantly Decentralized/Market: Prefers autonomy, competition, or federated networks; central roles are supportive.
+8 to +10	Purely Decentralized/Market: Strong preference for distributed decision rights and market/network coordination; minimal central control.
Axis 8: Progressive Liberation ↔ Traditional Virtue	
-10 to -8	Purely Progressive Liberationist: Replacement/disruption of traditional moral norms is a central, explicit aim across the corpus.
-7 to -4	Predominantly Progressive Liberationist: Frequent arguments to revise/replace inherited moral norms with limited defenses of continuity.
-3 to +3	Mixed / Pluralist: Balances affirmation and critique of moral norms; neither pole dominates.
+4 to +7	Predominantly Traditional Virtue: Regular defenses of conventional moral frameworks (e.g., national allegiance, family, sexual restraint); change framed as incremental.
+8 to +10	Strong Traditional Virtue: Sustained, explicit defense of traditional moral norms as guiding standards.

Once each individual faculty member had been analyzed, AI was then prompted to complete a departmental evaluation including a six to eight sentence department summary in full sentences. Following the completion of the department profile, AI was asked to answer three questions: (1) Suppose a conservative graduate student wanted to apply to this department. What would you advise? (2) Suppose a liberal graduate student wanted to apply to this department. What would you advise? (3) What are the 2 or 3 core dogma of this department?

Coding of Advice Questions

The AI advice for conservative and liberal students was generally written in short statements or sentences. To make sense of these data, human coders were employed to categorize the advice. The AI responses from Grok, Gemini, and CoPilot, were anonymized and a unique identification code was given to each department. The human reviewers were asked to rate each piece of advice on a four-point original scale (4 = Encouragement, 3 = Advice, 2 = Discouragement, 1 = Do Not Apply) based on a provided coding rubric (Table 2).¹

Table 2: Human Coding Rubric for Advice to Student Applicants

Rating	Description
4	Encouragement –The description says this is a good fit or encourages the student to apply.
3	Advice – The description offers advice, such as seeking out specific faculty or framing scholarship in specific ways.
2	Discouragement – The description suggests the department might not be a good fit or otherwise seems to suggest the student might consider other options.
1	Do Not Apply – The description flat out says do not apply or that the department is not a fit.

Given the ordinal nature of the scale, with meaningful directional differences between categories (e.g., potentially larger conceptual gaps between encouragement and discouragement), I employed quadratic weighting to assign partial credit for near agreements while applying

¹ Items were initially coded in the reverse order.

progressively harsher penalties for greater disagreements (e.g., 1 vs. 2 penalized less than 1 vs. 4). Inter-rater agreement was evaluated using multiple chance-corrected coefficients suitable for multiple raters and ordinal data: Fleiss' kappa (extension of Cohen's kappa for ≥ 3 raters), Gwet's AC (robust to prevalence/imbalance issues), Krippendorff's alpha, and Brennan and Prediger's coefficient. Analyses were conducted in Stata 18 using the kappaetc package with quadratic weights. Reliability was computed separately for liberal and conservative student ratings to examine potential differences by perspective. Within each AI platform, the percentage agreement (weighted) among the three coders was 95 percent or higher for both liberal and conservative advice (Table 3). This indicates that coders assigned identical or adjacent categories in 95-98 percent of cases.

Table 3: Inter-Rater Reliability Measures for Three Coders of AI Student Advice

Test	Grok Conservative	Grok Liberal	CoPilot Conservative	CoPilot Liberal	Gemini Conservative	Gemini Liberal
Percent Agreement (Weighted)	0.95 (0.1)	0.98 (0.0)	0.95 (0.01)	0.98 (0.01)	0.95 (0.01)	0.95 (0.01)
Brennan & Prediger	0.84 (0.02)	0.91 (0.02)	0.82 (0.03)	0.93 (0.02)	0.82 (0.02)	0.81 (0.04)
Fleiss' Kappa	0.81 (0.04)	0.78 (0.06)	0.51 (0.10)	0.81 (0.07)	0.59 (0.08)	0.47 (0.09)
Gwet's AC	0.84 (0.02)	0.96 (0.01)	0.88 (0.02)	0.97 (0.01)	0.87 (0.02)	0.89 (0.03)
Krippendorff's Alpha	0.73 (0.06)	0.53 (0.10)	0.36 (0.36)	0.67 (0.16)	0.50 (0.10)	0.26 (0.10)
N = 55 department ratings per person						

Since each academic department was evaluated by three AI programs and then rated by three independent human raters, each department had a total 9 ratings each for the liberal and conservative advice. Rather than average the figures, I report the percentage of ratings in each of the 1-4 categories.

Results

Consistent with analyses of faculty political orientation by survey, political giving, or party registration, an analysis of the research profiles of faculty members reveals a clear leftward lean. The goal was to determine whether a clear ideological orientation emerges from the research faculty who constitute the intellectual core of a department. In other words, does the department subscribe to an ideological school of thought that may make the department hostile to some students. To test this, three AI programs were asked to provide advice to conservative and liberal students when considering a department. Human coders then rated each response, resulting in a total of 450 ratings for each department on the conservative and the liberal question. The results make clear that Florida's existing academic departments are not welcoming environments for students interested in conservative thought. They are, however, incredibly welcoming of liberal students.

Advice from all three AI platforms to liberal students was overwhelmingly positive (Table 4). Ninety-nine percent of the ratings for Grok's advice to liberal students either provided advice or encouragement to apply. Meanwhile, just 32 percent of the conservative advice received similar ratings. While 37 percent of Grok's advice to conservative students was rated as "discouragement," 31 percent of the advice essentially told students "do not apply." Though the other AI programs did not have as high a percentage in the "do not apply" category, the findings were consistent. Sixty-four percent of CoPilot's advice to conservatives was negative, while just 1 percent of the advice to liberal students was discouragement. Meanwhile, 55 percent of the advice from Gemini to conservative students was negative, while four percent to liberal students was rated as negative. When all of the responses were combined from all three human coders and all three AI programs, 98 percent of the ratings for liberal students was positive advice or

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encouragement, while just 38 percent of the advice to conservative students was positive. In short, roughly 62 percent of the 50 academic departments are comprised of scholars whose collective work was deemed by AI to be incompatible with the ideas of conservative applicants.

The five civic centers included in this analysis have been accused by some as bastions for right-wing or conservative thought. Similar to the previous analysis, I provide the percentage of ratings from the three human coders. The five civic centers included in this analysis are clearly comprised of faculty more closely engaged in scholarship in the conservative tradition. Thus, the AI advice to conservative students is much more positive. The advice from Grok to conservative students was rated as “encouragement” by all three human coders, 87 percent of the Co-Pilot advice was coded as positive, as was 100 percent of the Gemini advice to conservative students. Yet, while the civic centers were more welcoming of conservative thought, they were not more inhospitable to liberal students than traditional academic departments were to conservative students. Fifteen percent of the advice to conservative students considering one of the 50 traditional departments told the students “do not apply,” while just seven percent of the advice to liberal students considering civic centers received the same rating. When combining “do not apply” and “discouragement,” 62 percent of the advice to conservative students at public universities fell into this category compared to 60 percent for liberal students at civic centers. As an example of the types of advice students were given by AI, here I present just a few quotes. Grok’s advice to liberal students considering one department was overwhelmingly positive, “This is one of the most ideologically welcoming and reinforcing environments in the country for progressive, social-justice oriented students.” Meanwhile, the advice for conservative students considering the program was clear: “Do not apply unless you are prepared to keep your political and philosophical views private for several years and are genuinely interested in

mastering critical, equity-focused scholarship as the price of admission.” The liberal advice for another department stated, “This is an excellent fit. You will find abundant mentorship and a highly supportive culture for research on structural oppression, LGBTQ+ issues, racial justice, and progressive policy.” Meanwhile, Grok told conservative students considering the department, “Do not apply unless you are comfortable working in an environment where equity, critical race theory, feminist, and progressive-liberationist frameworks dominate nearly every research area. You will be an extreme outlier.”

Table 4: AI Advice to Student Applicants at 50 FL University Departments and Civic Centers, Percent of Total Ratings by Category

AI Platform - Student Views	Do Not Apply	Discouragement	Advice	Encouragement
50 TRADITIONAL ACADEMIC DEPARTMENTS				
Grok - Conservative	31%	37%	25%	7%
Grok - Liberal Advice	0%	1%	22%	77%
CoPilot - Conservative	7%	57%	35%	1%
CoPilot - Liberal	0%	1%	5%	93%
Gemini - Conservative	7%	48%	40%	5%
Gemini - Liberal	1%	3%	36%	61%
Combined – Conservative	15%	47%	33%	5%
Combined – Liberal	0%	2%	21%	77%
5 CIVIC CENTERS				
Grok - Conservative	0%	0%	0%	100%
Grok - Liberal Advice	13%	80%	7%	0%
CoPilot - Conservative	0%	13%	47%	40%
CoPilot - Liberal	0%	40%	53%	7%
Gemini - Conservative	0%	0%	47%	53%
Gemini - Liberal	7%	40%	53%	0%
Combined – Conservative	0%	4%	31%	64%
Combined – Liberal	7%	53%	38%	2%

Dogma of Departments and Civic Centers

Of all the AI programs, Grok tended to write the most robust statements on advice and departmental dogma. All three human coders rated Grok’s advice to conservative students as “do not apply” for 10 academic departments. The dogma of these departments is clearly oriented to the political left. Grok mentioned “equity” as part of the core dogma of eight of the ten

departments most hostile to conservative students. For one department Grok wrote, “Equity is the primary lens for evaluating policy success.” For another, “Equity, decoloniality, and progressive critique of traditional power structures are moral imperatives that properly infuse scholarship.”

The most hostile departments to conservatives also tended to focus on a critical orientation or focus on marginalized groups. This occurred in nine of the ten dogma statements from Grok. Grok described the dogma of one department this way, “Systemic critique of oppressive institutions is a scholarly obligation.” Another statement said, “Literature must serve redress of oppression.” And still another, “Success in politics and policy is measured primarily by equity and inclusion of historically marginalized groups.”

The dogma statement also revealed half of the departments had a strong focus on sex, gender, or progressive moral norms. One Grok dogma statement read, “Traditional moral frameworks (especially around nationalism, family, and sexual restraint) are suspect and usually framed as obstacles to justice.” Another stated, “Traditional gender/sexual binaries and market-driven policy solutions are inherently suspect and often harmful.” Another stated, “Traditional moral frameworks are suspect and frequently harmful when they appear in schools.” Mind you, this department focused on the preparation of educators.

While these are the departments that are most hostile to conservative students, they nevertheless represent one-fifth of the traditional departments included in this sample. When scholars analyze surveys of political orientation or voter roles, they often offer a qualification. They might say something like, “While most faculty may be liberal, this does not mean they discriminate against conservative students.” The same might be said here. There is no evidence that these faculty would discriminate against students. Yet, the advice to students and the

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departmental dogma created here was crafted after reviewing the academic output of faculty from the department. If a conservative student were to review the scholarship of these departments, he or she would see departments that were dominated by ideas contrary to their own. It may not matter whether the faculty are actually hospitable, the dominant school of thought displayed by the department may dissuade students from even considering the department.

In comparison, the five civic centers tended to focus on western or classical traditions and frameworks. They emphasized markets and decentralization, merit and excellence. Two of the five dogma statements explicitly stated that “rigorous scholarship” or “historical/textual understanding” was a priority over activism. The full Grok created dogma statements of the five civic centers are included below.

- Engagement with Western/classical traditions; Rigorous scholarship over activism; Virtue/excellence from historical resources.
- Excellence and merit over equity; Traditional moral virtues indispensable; Markets and localism superior to central planning.
- Merit/excellence over mandated equity outcomes; Decentralized/federalist coordination over centralized mandates; Classical/traditional moral frameworks as resources for civic renewal.
- Deep engagement with the history of political thought, classical and American founding texts, and interpretive methods as the primary scholarly mode. Preference for merit, excellence, and civic virtue over redistributive equity as evaluative lenses, alongside support for decentralized constitutionalism/federalism. Commitment to sustaining

republican order, civic literacy, and traditional/inherited moral-political frameworks (with limited embrace of progressive liberationist paradigms).

- Classical liberal and republican traditions (Cicero, Locke, Hume) provide enduring moral and civic anchors; family/parental authority and decentralized spheres are essential to genuine liberty; scholarship should prioritize historical/textual understanding over activist prescription.

While the AI advice to students makes clear that the five civic centers included in this analysis are much more hospitable to conservative ideas than the 50 traditional academic departments, the dogma statements illustrate that the civic centers are adding legitimate scholarly lenses that are not presently covered in the existing academic units on campus.

The civic center dogma tends to focus on the promotion, study, or promulgation of a western or classical tradition or heritage. These themes do not appear in the 50 departmental Grok dogma statements. The only time “classical” appears is in reference to a classics department, but not in the same context as the civic centers. The civic centers also stress the importance of virtue. Grok only mentioned virtue positively in the dogma statement of one of the 50 academic departments, “virtue and agency as central to human flourishing and responsibility.” Meanwhile it was negatively mentioned twice as one dogma statement read, “Traditional moral virtues are frequently problematized or rejected,” while another stated, “meritocratic or traditional-virtue frameworks are suspect or oppressive.” A similar thing occurred in regard to “merit,” which was positively mentioned in the civic center dogma statements. In dogma statements for the 50 academic departments, merit tended to be treated as suspect. One statement read, “Systemic, centralized reform is preferred over market or meritocratic solutions,” while another said, “merit

and tradition are subordinate or suspect.” “Civic(s)” was never mentioned in any of the dogma statements for the 50 departments.

While not every traditional academic department is hostile to conservative thought, you are more likely to find traditional departments focused on issues diametrically opposed to the ideas of the civic centers than you are to find overlap between the departments and the civic centers. As the dogma statement for one traditional department said, “Progressive revision of traditional norms around family, gender, sexuality, and national identity is a moral good.”

Discussion and Conclusion

In recent years, there has been an increase in the number of legislatively-created civic centers at public universities. These centers are generally created by Republican-controlled legislatures and are thought to be conservative bastions. In this paper, I use AI to analyze the scholarly output of faculty members at 50 academic departments in Florida’s five largest public universities. Using the faculty’s scholarly works, I again use AI to create a department profile, assess the department’s hospitability to liberal and conservative students, and write a departmental dogma statement. The same process is used for five of the largest civic centers. This process reveals several important things about the new civic centers and traditional academic departments.

First, it is true that the civic center’s scholars tend to wrestle with scholarly issues from perspectives that are traditionally considered “conservative.” This means they tend to focus on market-solutions to public policy issues, they value the western liberal tradition, and they prize virtue and merit over issues of equity. This makes these centers more welcoming to students interested in conservative thought than traditional academic departments. Conversely, it may

make these departments less desirable for students interested in progressive policy issues. Those students may find a more welcoming home in the traditional academic departments that lean left.

Each traditional academic department was evaluated by three AI programs, and the output was coded by three human coders. This produced 450 total scores for each department. When the AI was asked to give advice to a conservative student considering the 50 traditional academic departments, just 38 percent of the advice was positive and just 5 percent of the departments were a great fit for conservative students. That is the equivalent of 2.5 of 50 departments. Meanwhile, 98 percent of the advice to liberal students was positive and 77 percent said the departments were an ideal fit.

In addition to providing advice on the fit for conservative and liberal students, each AI program produced a dogma statement for each department. Again, it must be emphasized that these dogma statements were derived directly from the scholarly productivity of faculty in the department. It is clear from this exercise that the five civic centers are offering something on college campuses that is simply not being covered in traditional academic departments. This is of particular interest since the 50 departments included in this analysis were specifically included because of their similarities to civic centers.

It should be noted that criticism of these centers does not just come from the left. Conservative Scholars, Maranto and Woessner warned in 2012 that if conservative faculty or conservative ideas are concentrated in these sorts of centers they will not be taken seriously by others in academia. They write, “Although an isolated presence on campus is better than none, conservatives should realize that mainstream academics take these places no more seriously than professional athletes view an intramural sports team” (p. 472).

It certainly may be the case that traditional academics may look upon legislatively-created civic centers with suspicion. Given that the faculty in these centers are not approaching their scholarly activity through an “equity oriented” lens that questions traditional moral norms, the faculty in these civic centers may naturally be at odds with some traditional academic departments. Given that the impetus for these centers is often to promote appreciation for and understanding of America’s founding principles, it appears they seem to be accomplishing that goal.

It remains to be seen whether civic centers provide a redout to conservative faculty or if they will lead to a greater presence of conservatives or center-right faculty in higher education. Whittington (2021) suggests, “Centers and programs on campus that provide a visible focus of intellectual activity for conservative students and scholars and for scholarly topics and themes of interest to the political right can break down stereotypes and encourage greater dialogue and communication” (p. 15). He continues, “Conservatives might still not flock to academic careers in large numbers, but the academy should at least take steps to emphasize that they would not be unwelcome if they did” (p. 15).

Though some are hostile to the creation of these civic centers (Rainwater and Cassanello 2025), it is clear they are creating a space for conservative thought on campus. It is well documented that university faculty lean left, yet the project of higher education needs conservative voices to thrive (Shuls, 2020). This is not just because the truth-seeking mission of higher education requires viewpoint diversity, but because the public nature of higher education demands it. Higher education is losing support, especially on the political right. Given that roughly half of states are red, higher education institutions, especially in these states, cannot afford to deny conservative thought a place on campus. If traditional academic departments are

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not willing to allow the presence of thinkers who explore issues from traditional moral frameworks, free-market orientations, or through the lens of merit and excellence, then it may fall to centers to create welcoming environments for these sorts of thinkers.

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Appendices

Appendix 1: List of Traditional Departments Included in Study

Florida International University	Economics Educational Policy Studies English Global and Sociocultural Studies History Philosophy Politics and International Relations Public Health and Social Work Public Policy Religious Studies
Florida State University	Classics Economics Educational Leadership English Entrepreneurship History Philosophy Political Science Public Administration and Policy Religion Social Work Sociology
University of Central Florida	Community Innovation and Education Economics English History Philosophy (Including Religion) Politics, Security, and International Affairs Public Administration Sociology
University of Florida	Human Development & Organizational Studies in Education Classics Economics English History Philosophy Political Science Religion Sociology and Criminology and Law
University of South Florida	Economics Educational Leadership and Policy Studies English History Humanities and Cultural Studies Interdisciplinary Global Studies Philosophy Public Affairs Religious Studies Social Work Sociology & Interdisciplinary Social Sciences

Appendix 2: Description of Eight Evaluation Axes

Axis	Descriptor
Axis 1 Theoretical ↔ Empirical	Measures the source and nature of knowledge: - Theoretical develops or critiques ideas, models, or normative frameworks. - Empirical relies on observation/data to test or generate evidence. <u>Guiding Question:</u> Does this scholar primarily build or test ideas?
Axis 2 Qualitative ↔ Quantitative	Measures methodological orientation: - Qualitative seeks meaning and context through non-numerical data. - Quantitative uses numerical data and statistical methods to identify patterns or causal effects. <u>Guiding Question:</u> What is the primary mode of data collection and analysis used in the scholar's work?
Axis 3 Foundational ↔ Practical	Measures the teleological aim (purpose) of scholarship: - Foundational deepens understanding by developing theory, clarifying concepts, or explaining mechanisms/values. - Practical seeks to change or improve policy/practice by designing, testing, or evaluating interventions/implementations. <u>Guiding Question:</u> Is the work primarily aimed at deepening understanding (foundational) or producing actionable solutions (practical)?
Axis 4 Normative ↔ Descriptive	Measures whether the work advances prescriptive value claims vs. neutrally describes/explains phenomena: - Normative articulates what ought to be. - Descriptive characterizes what is with minimal prescriptive judgment. <u>Guiding Question:</u> Does this work primarily argue about what ought to be, or describe and explain what is?
Axis 5 Interpretivist ↔ Positivist	Measures underlying epistemology—how knowledge and truth are conceived: - Interpretivist prioritizes meaning, context, and co-construction of knowledge. - Positivist prioritizes objective measurement, hypothesis testing, and generalizable regularities. <u>Guiding Question:</u> Does the scholar treat knowledge as context-bound and meaning-centered (interpretivist) or as objective and generalizable (positivist)?
Axis 6 Equity ↔ Merit	Captures the normative lens for evaluating policy and practice: - Equity emphasizes fairness, inclusion, redistribution, and recognition of historically marginalized groups. - Merit emphasizes performance, outcomes, excellence, and competitive or achievement-based evaluation. <u>Guiding Question:</u> Does the scholar primarily judge policies/practices by how they advance equity (fairness/inclusion) or merit (excellence/performance)?
Axis 7 Centralized ↔ Decentralized/Market	Captures preferred governance and coordination logic across fields: - Centralized = concentrated authority and uniform planning/standards. - Decentralized/Market = distributed authority, autonomy, and emergent coordination via competition or networks. <u>Guiding Question:</u> Does the scholar favor centralized, hierarchical coordination or decentralized/market/network coordination as the primary means to achieve goals?
Axis 8 Progressive Liberation ↔ Traditional Virtue	Evaluates the extent to which the scholar's authored work affirms or critiques conventional moral frameworks—such as national allegiance, the nuclear family, and sexual restraint—in contrast to endorsing expansive conceptions of personal identity, sexual autonomy, and cosmopolitan or post-national ethics. <u>Guiding Question:</u> To what extent does the scholar's authored work affirm conventional moral frameworks (e.g., national allegiance, nuclear family, sexual restraint) or advance revisionist ethical paradigms (e.g., identity-based autonomy, cosmopolitan ethics, sexual liberation)?