

Mitchell's Take on Academia Today

2011 is when I first met Brandon Christen. The following year I met Zack Dodson. Christen and I had met during the early days of the formation of the Secular Student Alliance at UCM. Dodson and I were in a class together called women and minorities in media. All three of our paths wound up intersecting in the Vienna Circle.

The Vienna Circle is the creation of Brandon Christen. The organization was born out of his disdain for banal conversation and noticing a rising climate of anti-intellectualism at UCM, so he got together with others who have a similar intellectual hunger.

One of the goals of the organization is to try and provide an alternative to a vapid anti-intellectual environment that places more emphasis on pop culture and sports and is quick to condemn that which veers too far from those confines as “weird.”

No one member has been able to pin point a single reason alone why anti-intellectualism has grown, but most would agree the situation/climate was created by a combination of factors, both socially among the student body and structural/ systematic factors related to the university.

I think a major factor concerning why both intellectualism and the study of the humanities has been devalued is heavily related to the decline of an industrial economy and the rise of a post-industrial/knowledge-based economy, which has led to a climate in which the sheer volume of people pursuing a bachelor’s degree has increased, and in response, the value/worth of that degree has decreased, as possessing one is now a requirement in more fields than ever before, even mundane jobs that do not heavily challenge the intellect, like “event planner” or a garden variety “office professional.” As this has happened, the lines between education and vocational training have been effectively blurred.

[A great many college students now approach institutes of higher education as a glorified trade school, with importance only placed on that which applies to the major, and all other knowledge gets labeled as unimportant, unnecessary, and unworthy of paying attention to.](#)

The end result of the college as trade school only mentality is that a number of college graduates finish college with a degree, but a limited scope of knowledge. The VC represents a mentality that is the opposite of the college as just a trade school notion. With the members of the Vienna Circle learning is not limited to the classroom.