



## Episode 643: The One Kind of Diversity Colleges Avoid

Guest: John Hasnas

**WOODS:** I want to talk to you about an article you had in *The Wall Street Journal* very recently. We have your initial version of it linked on the show notes page. This being Episode 643, it's at [TomWoods.com/643](http://TomWoods.com/643). And it's about the subject of faculty diversity, which has been a topic since I was in school back in the early '90s, and it seems to me like the nature of the discussion hasn't changed at all, and the way they go about defining and pursuing faculty diversity hasn't changed at all. What exactly is being left out, in your opinion, of discussions of a diverse faculty?

**HASNAS:** Okay, well, when we are pursuing diversity, with regard to faculty hiring, we're always pursuing and increasing the numbers of either women or minority faculty. By minority I mean people from different races, different cultural backgrounds, different ethnic backgrounds. We are trying to — the university generally is trying to be more inclusive of people from a wide range of different genetic backgrounds, and that's what diversity means; it's to be inclusive in that respect. As far as I have experienced myself, there's no effort to reach out or include people from differing philosophical, ideological, or political backgrounds. So diversity doesn't usually include getting people with all ranges of opinion. It actually is restricted to getting people from various different cultural and ethnic backgrounds.

**WOODS:** Now, this of course is the theme we're going to want to discuss, but I can't help asking, not that it disproves anything, individual cases, but you've been at Georgetown for 20 years. I mean, that's no small thing. When you applied there, did everybody know, was it just screaming from your CV where you stood, or did you try to hide that? Or did you just let the chips fall where they may? What was your own strategy?

**HASNAS:** That's probably a poor question for me, because I'm a professor in a business school, but that's not the job I was trying to get. My degrees are in law and philosophy, and I went on the market to be a law professor or a philosophy professor. I'm a business professor, because that's the position I was able to obtain. Trying to be a professor, that's a very difficult position to get. In a way, landing a position as a professor is a little bit like playing in a tournament. Very few people get to make it to the NBA. Very few people can make it as movie actors or stars. It's a very competitive field. It's very difficult to get a job. For all I know, I was not a high enough rated candidate to get a job in the position that I was seeking. I did get a job in a business

school, and I was happy to be a professor, and I've been happy to be a professor since, but I can't tell you the degree to which my viewpoints worked against me. I suspect, of course, it did to some extent, but when you're a candidate you don't know.

**WOODS:** Right, right, of course. Yeah, you can't. But do you have any advice for anybody going on the academic job market? I'll tell you one piece of advice I give certainly is you shouldn't be thinking — well, this is before you get on to the job market, but when you get into your PhD program. I sometimes will encounter students who, they want to write the Austrian view of blah, blah, blah, or they want to do the libertarian history of the U.S. And I say, you will have ample opportunity to do all those things once you have your job, but right now you've got to write your dissertation — like, my dissertation has nothing whatsoever to do with libertarianism. Not at all. Now, there are ways you can make that work, but I think really your focus has to be make a contribution to your field. That's your primary focus. And then later you can pursue all the things that catch your fancy. Let's start there. Do you think I'm on the right track, at least with that?

**HASNAS:** Yes, I definitely do. If you're asking me what I tell people who want to become academics —

**WOODS:** Yeah.

**HASNAS:** — prospective students, them, it's easy for me to say what my advice is. You should work on what you care about, what's meaningful to you. Your job is to make a contribution to whatever field you're going to enter in. What your job is is to increase knowledge and seek the truth, and you should do that completely independently of any political agenda that you have. If you want to be a professor, you're not — well, in my opinion, if you want to be a professor, you're not trying out to be an activist; you're trying to add to knowledge, and you'll do your best work if you do the thing that you know best, that you care about, that you believe in. And I never recommend to people to hide anything that they believe, but just to do their best work. What you want to do is you want to show that you will make a contribution to the academic dialogue in whatever field you're in and that you'll be a good colleague, and that if you get a position, you'll be good in the classroom, do research that adds to knowledge, and be a good colleague. That's just general advice for anyone who wants to be a professor.

**WOODS:** Right, because we should bear in mind that one factor that the search committee is going to keep in mind, whatever ideological issue may arise, they are going to ask themselves, will we be able to stand having this guy down the hall from us for the next 20 years.

**HASNAS:** Yeah, that's the most important thing. They want someone who will be a good colleague and help advance the mission more than anything else, so you do want to show that you're a good colleague. No one likes to have a raving polemicist around, who's always causing disputes to arise that needn't arise.

**WOODS:** Right, right. You don't have to — you know, I once got a really good piece of advice from somebody at the Institute for Humane Studies, which is actually where I first saw you in the early 1990s, not that you would remember that, but I certainly do.

**HASNAS:** (laughing)

**WOODS:** And they said, look, any place you might happen to be standing, any building you might happen to be standing in, there are 27 people uttering some kind of error or another. It's not your responsibility to go and correct all of these. You have to pick your battles and decide what's, frankly, socially appropriate to do, and it's not always appropriate to do that. Get things off your chest by writing a newspaper column, but not by ripping people's heads off at the water cooler. I want to talk about search committees, and I was surprised that you mentioned this in your column, because I thought this is taking a little bit of a shot at your own institution.

But we can all give stories like this. Back when I was in academia, I was in a search committee for, I guess it was the, I don't know, some kind of head of student activities, some kind of thing like that. And we got a pretty good CV submitted to us from somebody in Texas who looked pretty qualified, but we were basically instructed not to consider this person because, well, if they're from Texas, there could be some kind of cultural incompatibility, by which they meant Texas is a more conservative state, we're running the risk of accidentally hiring a conservative. Now, if they had said, well, we can't hire anybody from such and such state because there's a really high percentage of black people there and there's a chance this person could turn out to be black, oh, of course everybody would be fired. We'd be hearing about it forever. But this was just considered normal, and nobody batted an eye.

**HASNAS:** Yeah, I think that that's not that unusual an experience. How can I put this? There's no intentional — I've never met anybody who's an intentional bad actor, or I don't think there's anyone who is — first of all, I'll back up and I'll make an observation. When I read about these matters, I see people often accusing university administrations of pursuing an ideological agenda. I don't think that's the case. I've never seen any administration that's pushing some kind of ideological agenda.

I'm at Georgetown. I think we have a great president. I think in the business school we have a great dean. These people are doing a good job. Generally speaking, people who are in the administration of universities are conciliators. That's why they're in those positions. They're the people least likely to be strict ideological adherents, and maybe this'll sound dismissive in a way it shouldn't, but they're the people least likely to be committed to some kind of principle. Their job is to make the university run effectively, and they're usually conciliators.

So it's not as if there's some conspiracy among university administrators to keep a certain viewpoint dominant in the academy. What's going on is something that's much more under the surface. I just think that most faculty assume that their position is correct, and they have an — when they're evaluation — in fact, I don't think any faculty is necessarily — very few faculty are intentionally ideologically biased. It's just when

they make judgments of what's good work and what's meritorious work, it usually is going to be work that looks like theirs.

The idea behind the diversity, the quest for diversity in universities is something like this: if the academy is dominated by white males from a common type of background, they're likely to judge to work of people from different cultures and different backgrounds, they won't appreciate its merits, they won't judge it as highly, they'll see it as not good work. And as a result, the university will remain insular, because the people making the decisions don't have a broad view. That's why there's a quest for diversity that brings in people from different cultural backgrounds.

In my opinion, something similar to that is what goes on, is most of the people who have the positions and are making judgments have a liberal left or a particular political, philosophical, or ideological viewpoint. They're not out to be exclusionary; it's just that when they make judgments of merit, they tend to see work by conservatives or libertarians as not good work. I mean, that stuff is clearly wrong. The way this comes across most often to me is the judgment that the work done by people who have a different ideological perspective is not good work, and that's why we don't hire. So the idea that we need some kind of impetus to increase ideological diversity is to somehow break this down. I don't know, am I — ?

**WOODS:** Yeah, I understand that.

**HASNAS:** All of us have our own personal experiences, but I personally remember once being on the job market, and we were discussing one of my articles, and one of the people on the hiring committee looked at me and said, how can you take that position without being a libertarian crank? I mean, the viewpoint being expressed was if I'm advocating this, then there must be something wrong with me. And it's not that this person had anything against me; it's just that his view of what's correct and what's true and what's good work this include a libertarian viewpoint. That's the kind of thing that we tend to run into.

**WOODS:** Now, I get that you're saying that it's not a malicious conspiracy, where they sit down and say, all right, everybody, we're going to make a deliberate attempt to exclude libertarians or conservatives. It's more a question of they put high value on their own work, and they assume that all right-thinking people and people with solid training and background are going to come to the conclusions that they come to. I get that. But it still seems like there is something malicious beneath the surface here, or at least blameworthy, in that, obviously what we have to say has at least — whether people agree with us or not, there are obviously some insights that we have that are at the very least worth considering. And that they're not even at a point where they can concede that suggests to me that they're not intellectually curious enough, and that's a demerit, in my view.

**HASNAS:** Yeah, I'm not going to disagree with you. For me, it's a matter of how much of this is conscious and how much of it —

**WOODS:** Right.

**HASNAS:** — is not conscious. I'm sure that there are some bad actors in important positions in the academy. I'm sure that's the case. Personally I haven't met anyone like that. The people I meet tend to be well meaning professors doing their job, but they have blinders on. They just can't see broadly enough. So another personal anecdote that illustrates this is I sent out an article which was making what I thought was a good argument for an unconventional and controversial position. And I got a review back, and the reviewer obviously was a professor. He cared about what he was doing; he wrote the review carefully. But basically what he said was, this article appears to be attacking this position, but since that's not reasonable, I can't read the argument in that — it seemed it was outside the bounds of his vision that somebody could be attacking a position that so many people on the Left had adhered to. And he reviewed the article as though it were something other than what it was. It wasn't malice behind it; it's just that there's a limited viewpoint, and that comes from so many people being within a certain range of opinions, so that after a while it's as though that's the entire scope of the range.

**WOODS:** You know, I know that you've done some colloquia with Liberty Fund, and I'm sure you've attended some as an attendee over the years. And my experience over the last few that I did is that there are usually 15 or so people at these events, and you have a discussion over the course of several days, and I know we had at least several people who were, let's say, middle of the road to somewhat on the Left to sort of spice up the conversation, I suppose. I don't know. I hadn't seen that early on, but I have been seeing that recently. And it's not like I'm just looking to pat us on the back, but our people think to do that. Our people say, well, we're having this colloquium, why don't we bring some people in from the other side, and we'll have a robust conversation. Maybe there is a Left-dominated colloquium somewhere that goes out of its way to invite people like us to spice up the conversation, but if it exists, I'm not aware of it.

**HASNAS:** Yeah, well, I'm sure they exist. Here's a distinction that may be useful, a distinction between people who have an old 1960s liberal viewpoint and people who have a more modern liberal viewpoint —

**WOODS:** Okay, I'm interested in this. Let's hear this.

**HASNAS:** Yeah, the old viewpoint is that you have a great deal of freedom of speech and you hear from everybody, and then you make your decision based on it. Everybody gets to speak. And that would be the ideological diversity viewpoint. When I do things, not just — you're right, with Liberty Fund, it's usually a mixed group. The Federalist Society tends to be like that. They will always invite people with differing viewpoints. Many of the organizations I work with have exactly that approach.

I run something at Georgetown called the Georgetown Institute for the Study of Markets and Ethics, and everything we do, all of our symposia have people from across the ideological divide. This is the model, what you want is a marketplace of ideas. So

when I put on a symposium, I do have some classical liberals, I have some left liberals, I try to have people from all different disciplines and viewpoints. I like that, because I think that if the viewpoint I'm representing is correct, the best way to show that is to put it alongside all the other arguments and let people see which arguments are best. So that's one model. And people at the Liberty Fund, people that I work with do that. But there are certainly people on the Left who do that as well.

However, there are a lot of people who, when you have academic conferences, they invite all of the leading intellectuals on the subject, and they're not intentionally trying to get a diverse set of viewpoints, and as a result you have many conferences where everybody is in the same ballpark, and there's little bits of differences about what's being said, but they don't get the same range of opinion. The extent that conservative or libertarian viewpoints are excluded from a great many of these events is problematic to me. If you can't answer the arguments, you're not advancing knowledge by ignoring them, and what's happening is, instead of engaging with interesting arguments, a lot of the academic world is ignoring them.

In the article that I wrote, what I had were statistics which show that in fields like social psychology, less than 1% of the faculty hold right-of-center viewpoints. There's been a recent study done that shows that only 13% of law professors identify as Republicans. What this means is that when you get these people together, there are viewpoints that just don't get represented, and you don't have a full discussion of ideas, as a result.

**WOODS:** And of course on a practical level, if you're holding an event not just for other academics but for the general public, it's going to be much more interesting for the public and you're going to get a much bigger turnout — I mean, I'm sure you know you get a much bigger turnout for a debate than you do for a lecture, so it actually works to the benefit of your event to have people of different points of view. Let me ask you this as we wrap up: you have experience then in business schools, and I'm slightly getting the impression that in a business school when you're applying for a position, there might be less of this going on. You might be heard more sympathetically, even though in some business schools, I know the trend towards so-called corporate social responsibility is pretty strong, but in spite of that do you think a business school is where a libertarian might have an easier time of it?

**HASNAS:** I can only speak for the school that I work at. I'm at the McDonough School of Business at Georgetown, and I find this to be on the whole a not ideological place. There's very little of what we're discussing in evidence here, and it may be because business schools and other professional schools, our job is to train people to perform their tasks well. Most of my colleagues — the subject of what politics we have very, very rarely comes up. When it comes up, it comes up in my little corner of the business school, because I do business ethics, and I do normative work. That's where ideological and philosophical topics and politics comes up more often. Law schools tend to be more ideologically insular, because it's a normative field. But for business schools, engineering schools, professional schools, at least in my experience, I think

that there's much less of the groupthink problem than there is in traditional humanities or social sciences.

**WOODS:** But as a subset of studying business, business ethics, again, my experience is that there aren't that many business ethicists who would take your point of view. I can think of Nick Capaldi at Loyola New Orleans, but I can't think of a whole lot of free market business ethics people. But that could be because I'm very far removed from the field.

**HASNAS:** No, no, you're right. But it is since I have now been involved with this for a long time. When I first took a position in the business school, business ethics academy was almost uniformly radically left wing. It was simply anti-capitalistic attitude. In fact, they almost defined themselves that way, so that's the way things were. As time has gone by, that's broken down a little bit so that there's a little more diversity now, but it's still a field in which things are skewed greatly to in favor of what would be considered anti-free market approaches. What's nice is that the younger generation coming up is doing more interesting work that is a little bit less polemical and ideologically driven. Having said that, when you're talking about business ethics you're talking about one of the fields in which it is skewed toward the Left.

**WOODS:** On the other hand, that gives you plenty to work on. You'll never run out of anything to do. So in any event, again, I'm going to link to your column at [TomWoods.com/643](http://TomWoods.com/643). And I'm glad things have worked out in your case, that you have congenial colleagues and that you're in a good and healthy environment. May that be the case for everybody, but especially those of us who are in the intellectual minority, to be able to go out there and just pursue what they want to pursue. Thanks so much for your time today, John. I really appreciate it.

**HASNAS:** Thank you.