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NEWS

Lecturers in world-first male studies course at University of South Australia under scrutiny

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LECTURERS in a "world-first" male studies course at the University of South Australia have been linked to extreme views on men's rights and websites that rail against feminism.

The lecturers' backgrounds are likely to spark controversy, but organisers of the predominantly online course, promoted as the first of its type in the world, insist they are not anti-feminist and "it's very difficult for anybody who has opposing views to get a word in".

Two lecturers have been published by prominent US anti-feminist site A Voice for Men, a site which regularly refers to women as "bitches" and "whores" and has been described as a hate site by the civil rights organisation Southern Poverty Law Centre.

The US site specifically welcomed the UniSA course as a milestone, editor Paul Elam saying it marked the end of feminists' control of the agenda.

One American US lecturer - US attorney and self-professed "anti-feminist lawyer" Roy Den Hollander - has written that the men's movement might struggle to exercise influence but that "there is one remaining source of power in which men still have a near monopoly - firearms".

He also argues that feminists oppress men in today's world and refers to women's studies as "witches' studies".

Another, US psychology professor Miles Groth, says that date-rape awareness seminars might be deterring men from going to university.

Mr Den Hollander has tried to sue ladies' nights for discrimination against men. He has likened the position of men today to black people in America's south in the 1950s "sitting in the back of the bus", and blames feminists for oppressing men.

The course, which has no prerequisites, begins this year and will canvass subjects from men's health to gender bias.

Course founder Gary Misan, from UniSA's Centre for Rural Health and Community Development, said they were "not anti-women" and that lecturers were associated with a range of groups.

"I wouldn't say any of them are extreme or anti-feminist," Dr Misan said.

"The aim of the courses are to present a balanced view and to counter some of the negative rhetoric that exists in society in general and in some areas of academe about men.

"It's very difficult for anybody who has opposing views to get a word in. As soon as somebody mentions anything they perceive as being anti-feminist, they're pilloried, and in some cases almost persecuted."

Dr Misan also said that writing something for a specific website did not necessarily suggest an affiliation.

Dr Michael Flood, from the University of Wollongong's Centre for Research on Men and Masculinity, said these types of male studies "really represents the margins".

"It comes out of a backlash to feminism and feminist scholarship. The new male studies is an effort to legitimise, to give academic authority, to anti-feminist perspectives," he said.

Flinders University School of Education senior lecturer Ben Wadham, who has a specific interest in men's rights, said there was a big difference between formal masculinity studies and "populist" male studies.

He said there were groups that legitimately help men, and then the more extreme activists.

"That tends to manifest in a more hostile movement which is about 'women have had their turn, feminism's gone too far, men are now the victims, white men are now disempowered'," he said.

"I would argue that the kinds of masculinities which these populist movements represent are anathema to the vision of an equal and fair gendered world."

Dr Wadham said that universities needed to uphold research based traditions instead of the populist, partisan approach driven by some.

Men's Health Australia spokesman and Male Studies lecturer Greg Andresen is also the Australian correspondent for US-based site *National Coalition For Men*, which declares false rape accusations to be "psychological rape", argues that talking about violence against women makes men invisible.

Asked about his connection to NCFM, he said they were the longest-running organisation in the world to look at discrimination against men and boys.

"Certainly they don't shy away from touching issues like false rape allegations, domestic violence, some of those hot topics," he said.

"We have had 20 if not 30 or 40 years where the only study on gender has been from a feminist perspective ... that's why I think this course is so long overdue," he said.

UniSA's Provost and Chief Academic Officer, Professor Allan Evans, said the courses covered important men's health issues and would equip allied health professionals who deal with men's health.

"All new courses are reviewed thoroughly prior to being offered to ensure they are suitable and beneficial to our students," he said.