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INVITATIONS

93 The Thought & Action Review Panel invites your submissions for “In Order to Form a More Perfect Union,” a special focus section in Spring 2016.
As we go to bat for the soul of liberal arts education, we run the risk of forgetting what we’re fighting for. Skills, jobs, and even self-enrichment were not historically regarded as the ultimate goals of the liberal arts. They were byproducts. The reason it was called “liberal” in the first place by early adopters like Seneca was because it was supposed to cultivate a free human being. Education on the liberal model aimed to liberate.

Try searching for references to freedom in contemporary college or university mission statements. Even at democratically enlightened campuses such as the University of California, Santa Cruz—born out of the ferment of the 1960s with student-designed curricula—you’ll see references to social responsibility, innovation, and transforming paradigms, but they’re squeamish when it comes to mentioning freedom and liberation. These are loaded terms that seem uncouth in today’s educational public square, which is odd. From Socrates to the 18th century democratic revolutions, freedom was understood as the open-minded pursuit of truth. To be free meant being at liberty to examine the presuppositions of self and society, interrogating contradictions and independently arriving at conclusions without having to rely on the guidance of authority figures or social norms. Freedom’s orientation was truth seeking, not job or happiness seeking. It wasn’t a path to the successful or well-adjusted life, because rather than accommodating oneself to the world its ultimate objective was to ruthlessly examine and relentlessly question the world. When Martin Luther...
King, Jr. self-identified with the Socratic legacy, it wasn’t because he thought it would guarantee him job security and personal serenity. The point of that kind of learning was to unsettle you, leaving you less adjusted to the world. I can accept an ability to navigate the world as a practical necessity, but becoming well adjusted to it is giving up too much.

The liberal arts should embrace its roots instead of denying what’s most valuable about it: the free pursuit of truth. My own institution’s mission statement comes close to what I consider getting it right: Liberal education here is known as a “search for truth in all its dimensions.” An idea with medieval roots, truth ranks just below freedom in today’s list of hardest-to-find mission statement references.

It had to do with wedding faith with reason, but in everyday practice it gave those who were curious a green light to employ rational and empirical methods to understand themselves and their world without having to fret over heresy charges. Beyond religiously affiliated institutions you hardly ever see it anymore. That’s because “truth” is a relic. It has become best practice for colleges and universities to refer to things like service, excellence, leadership, and rankings, instead of risking suspicion that your institution missed last century’s epistemological boat by failing to realize that hardly anybody talks about truth in earnest anymore.

Even in philosophy, which was partly responsible for putting it to rest, it’s not actually true that truth remains a dead concept. But before considering truth’s afterlife, it’s helpful to consider the origins of two other concerns that dominate our liberal arts landscape. The burning question on many people’s minds has become whether learning should be instrumental or not. Are we teaching skills or self-enlargement? In ancient Greek terms, are we after technē (téχνη) or episteme (ἐπιστήμη), interested or disinterested knowledge? The first kind isn’t concerned with eternal truths or principled ethics so much as craft and skill. The second kind treats knowledge like a personal quest. Somewhere down the line we collectively agreed that one or the other of these should be salient, but why? Why does today’s liberal education debate concentrate on skills and self-enlargement while ignoring truth and freedom? An obvious answer is dollars and cents. In a world in which how-to and self-help books outsell everything else, higher ed marketing follows suit. But I suspect the causes run deeper than that. Current fixations with self-enlargement and a very narrowly defined form of critical thinking are the rippling effects of intellectual trends that flourished in the early and middle 20th century.

The liberal arts should embrace its roots instead of denying what’s most valuable about it: the free pursuit of truth.
TRUTH IN THE TWENTIETH CENTURY

The first of these two intellectual trends was existentialism, which attempted to come to terms with 19th century challenges to the concept of truth. If need be, Nietzsche’s “God is dead” can serve as a convenient signpost for those challenges, as long as we bear in mind that Nietzsche saw himself as merely the messenger of something that had happened in modern culture and a protagonist for honest (and yes, joyful) confrontation with its consequences. Instead of wallowing in despair, existentialists reframed the nihilistic threat as an optimistic occasion. The absence of truth became both an opportunity as well as a responsibility to transform meaningless existence into something subjectively meaningful. You could either live in a state of bad faith by pretending everything rests on traditional assurances, or you could live authentically by mapping yourself onto grids of self-made meaning. The fact that such meanings don’t inhere in an absurd existence means that you’ll have to craft your own values. “Existence precedes essence,” Sartre concluded. The choices we make about how to live determine the kinds of people we become.2

Existentialism’s rival school was logical positivism, a proof-based philosophy that held that every verifiable position could only be confirmed empirically or logically. It’s often overlooked that logical positivism shared existentialism’s nihilistic starting point. The so-called unanswerable questions that perennially vexed philosophy—God, causation, truth, freedom—were meaningless questions. It wasn’t that they were false in the sense that you couldn’t empirically verify them. Linguistically speaking, the questions themselves didn’t mean anything. They were literally nonsense. When logical positivists talked about truths, they were talking about that which could be derived from observable measures of validity and utility. Because so-called laws and moral truths are culturally authorized conventions for judging and acting, it isn’t a question of what is true about them, but of describing how claims made on their behalf function in the terrain of public statements.

Existentialism and positivism lodged a heart/brain splinter deep in the liberal education psyche. One of them turned truth into a meaning-making mandate (a.k.a. self-creation, self-fulfillment, self-enlargement), while the other one reduced it to the practical assessment of statements and knowable facts (in today’s terminology, critical thinking). The fashionableness of these two movements has waned, but they haven’t disappeared. Logical positivism endures as insular styles of analytic philosophy and lines of elegantly crafted computer engineering code. Existentialism’s residues float around the pop-culture zeitgeist as phrases and...
acronyms like *carpe diem*, #YOLO, and life is a journey not a destination. And yet their influence continues to set the agenda for the debate about liberal education's purpose. Freedom and the now-defunct search for truth, which were for centuries inextricably bound to one another, have schizophrenically morphed into two distinct higher-ed personalities. Pragmatic, clear-cut notions about critical thinking vie for class time and institutional dollars with fuzzier notions about constructing worlds of meaning and living authentically.

*If we want to salvage the soul of liberal arts education, I recommend taking a second look at the untimely concept of truth.*

**LIBERAL EDUCATION AND POVERTY**

If we want to salvage the soul of liberal arts education, I recommend taking a second look at the untimely concept of truth. Truth, for one thing, isn't reducible to something we can positivistically verify. It isn't simply what “works,” because the world as it exists doesn't exhaust what can be said to be true. The way I'm thinking about truth begins with Plato's Socrates, who didn't pursue truth by excelling at competence in the world’s knowledge but by exposing its contradictions. Plato’s ontology, his notion of truths as timeless and immaterial Forms, is rejected today by most. It was eroded by 17th and 18th century empiricism, 19th century utilitarianism, and 20th century pragmatism, existentialism, and positivism, until it was nearly laid to rest by postmodernism. But not quite. Repudiating any kind of truth whatsoever hasn't been the last word, ironically not even in the most obscure strains of avant-garde theoretical humanities. There are many examples to which we could point, 3 but French philosopher Alain Badiou has done more than probably anyone to recover something still valuable in the Platonic universe of ideas about truth.

At times Badiou's language sounds like a throwback to Plato's metaphysics. At other times, he immerses himself in logic and set theory. His decision not to confine himself to just one of philosophy's common languages, and not even just to philosophy proper, stems from his desire to think beyond the conclusions about truth that have become commonplace. Here's how he defines truth: a moment of rupture within existing laws of being and appearance, or within what we might call the way of the world. What's crucial about this definition is the idea that “truths exist as exceptions to what there is.” 4 He calls those disruptive moments *events*, and he argues that the act of witnessing truth's events is what it means to become a subject. Being a subject is never sociologically or biologically guaranteed. It isn't
reducible to “bodies or languages,” which is to say to simply being an individual or a member of a community. A subject is more than identity. You become one by being faithful to an event of truth when it’s been glimpsed, and by announcing it as an event in the world. When subjects faithfully announce events of truth in the world, they produce genuine knowledge, which is more than just what is known, real, or existent.

Experimenting with the application of Badiou’s approach to today’s debates around the value of a liberal arts education yields interesting insights, because liberal ed has become an education in bodies and languages in at least two ways. For one, it has become an exercise in teaching students the skills needed to navigate worlds of objective knowledge (bodies) and the systems, mechanisms, and procedures within which those bodies of knowledge function (languages). Students are taught how to traverse such things as markets, technology, jobs, policies, information, literacy codes, money, products, knowledge procedures, patterns, statistics, communication systems, institutions, services, data—in other words, all the various components and clusters comprising the world as we know it, and the codes that organize them into more or less smooth-functioning processes. For another, students are taught the ethos of what Badiou calls the “democratic materialism” of bodies and languages: recognizing the multiplicity of identities, perspectives, and experiences, and the stance of tolerance that has come to define successful enlargement in liberal education. It sees a world comprised of individuals with rights attached to communities of equally valuable differences. The underlying logic of democratic materialism, whether of the skills-type or the enlargement-type, is relativism, which is once again the legacy that positivism and existentialism bequeathed us.

What’s wrong with that? It isn’t that it’s wrong, just inadequate. There are indeed bodies and languages that students should encounter, know, engage, and tolerate, “except that there are also truths.” What does it mean to say that truth exceeds knowledge? For many of us in the liberal arts, it means the goal of liberal learning goes beyond knowing what’s out there, how it functions and how to function within it. The liberal learner is searching for truths that aren’t always compatible with known procedures and the realities they administer on a daily basis. I would also argue that liberal learning doesn’t reach its satisfactory conclusion in an accommodating disposition that avoids judgment by default. Acquiring an expanded horizon isn’t simply about acknowledging the plurality of bodies and

What does it mean to say that truth exceeds knowledge? It means the goal of liberal learning goes beyond knowing what’s out there.
languages. It’s also about considering what’s true about the plethora. It’s positing claims and making judgments that have to do with what’s infinite amid the finite flux of details and distinctions encountered in daily life.

TRUTH AS AN EVENT

The best way to illustrate this is to think about what it looks like in the classroom. Here, for example, is what I mean when I say to ethics students that we’re going to search for truth in all its dimensions by thinking about world poverty. Students first become acquainted with the facts—with how the world really is. Students learn that the world’s richest countries account for less than 20 percent of the world’s total population but consume 81 percent of its resources.

They learn that 44 percent of the world’s population lives below the poverty line and consumes less than two percent of the world’s resources, and that 18 million people die each year from preventable poverty-related causes. At the same time, they learn that the world’s richest countries account for less than 20 percent of the world’s total population but consume 81 percent of its resources, and that just one percent of that 81 percent would tip the scale by lifting the world’s poor above the poverty line, potentially saving in the neighborhood of 18 million lives yearly.6 That’s what there is.

Students often respond by asserting more of what there is. There is also human nature, they’ll say, which many understand as a timeless truth, even if they claim they don’t believe in timeless truths. Human nature serves as a handy rationale for why world poverty exists, why it will continue to exist, and why it has to exist. Besides, there’s also capitalism. They’ve come to believe that capitalism is like human nature—that it does, will, and has to exist in pretty much the same forms we know it today. These forms not only cannot, but should not offer ultimate solutions to world poverty. Existing forms of capitalism shouldn’t even try to offer solutions, some students conjecture, because that would contradict human nature.7 According to the law of rational self-interest, nations should take care of themselves, not one another. Even if nations were by some freak of nature to become inclined to take care of others more than they currently do, then according to capitalism’s laws of appearance and being this would be tantamount to enabling bad behavior, making things worse not better. You come to expect truisms about teaching a man to fish and the inevitable lifeboat analogy.

Students will often go on to assert that what there is isn’t even exhausted by the laws of human nature and capitalism. There’s also overpopulation, scarcity, local government corruption, climate, cultural maladaptiveness, laziness, and the
like. So they learn more about what there is. They learn that overpopulation isn’t the true culprit for those 18 million yearly deaths, because food scarcity is a myth. The world wastes or loses more than a third of the food it produces each year, or close to what would be needed to bring an end to global deaths from starvation. They learn that most of today’s poor nations weren’t always poor—it wasn’t until modern times when they began losing their traditional livelihoods that they began losing so many lives to hunger. They learn that the map of today’s global poor corresponds almost exactly to the map of yesterday’s colonized. And that First World administered debt and development programs produce at least as much poverty as

Immersed in knowledge about what there is, you’ll occasionally have a student voice a disruptive truth... an eventful intervention into classroom discourse.

they reduce, while reaping profits from the tariff and subsidy policies they enforce on so-called developing countries but don’t uniformly enforce on themselves.

Students eventually wade through theoretical debates about whether charity is what ethicists call a “perfect” duty, or whether it’s just a meritorious way of earning moral brownie points. They grapple with whether charity or structural changes to the global economy should be considered the primary moral duty, and with whether a person’s moral duties extend only to fellow countrymen or whether it’s possible that geographic distance and nation-state borders could have nothing whatsoever to do with moral duties. They weigh the merits of suffering versus citizenship as logical starting points for ethical responsibility. They evaluate common sense moral principles like having a duty to help if you can and repairing the harms for which you’re responsible.

Immersed in knowledge about what there is, you’ll occasionally have a student voice a disruptive truth. It’ll be a comment that isn’t intended as an eventful intervention into classroom discourse, but that’s what it is. “So basically,” the student will say as though thinking aloud to herself, “we’re kind of choosing to let 18 million people die every year even though we could easily stop it from happening, which if you think about it is almost like being an accomplice to murder, to mass murder.” Other students will be uncomfortable with that and they’ll want to massage the wording of the claim. Something tells them that words such as “choose” and “murder” can’t possibly apply in this case. Nothing in the world validates the application of these words to the realities of global poverty. There’s almost no precedent in mainstream conversation to support the idea that the global poor die because the global rich let them die, or that by the logic of any other context this would be something like negligent genocide. Your thoughtful student has stum-
bled onto a thought almost by accident, and here’s how we should think about it: Truth has emerged as an exception to what there is. It has emerged as an exception to accepted knowledge about human nature, an exception to accepted knowledge about how the world works, and as an exception to how we’re supposed to perceive and process the relevant information. What has emerged is an event, a rupture in thinking and knowledge in the form of a question about what’s, in fact, “true.”

The problem is that students aren’t accustomed to thinking about truths that contradict what’s real and realistic given currently existing arrangements. They’re not used to the idea that what is real in the world might be false, and that what’s

Students aren’t accustomed to thinking about truths that contradict what’s real. They’re not used to the idea that what is real in the world might be false.

true might be what’s currently nonexistent, unobserved, or unverified. That’s because we’ve trained them to equate truth with reality and with what’s known. We’ve trained them to respond to dilemmas in one of two ways: first, by using “critical thinking skills” to come up with pragmatic solutions inside the constraints of existing frameworks, discourses, and procedures, and second, by internalizing problems as self-creating “narratives” that have to do with things like sympathy, awareness, accountability, fate, human nature, rational self-interest, optimism, pessimism, making sense of things beyond our control, making meaning out of a hopelessly absurd existence, or what have you. Such is the lingering impact of positivism and existentialism in the form of so-called “critical thinking” and “self-enlargement.”

OPEN THOUGHT

The search for truth in all its dimensions should clear the way for open thought, which means it shouldn’t be shackled to what there is. It should open the way to thinking that whatever the limiting conditions and factors, a world in which 18 million people unnecessarily die each year is a deeply untrue world. You’re thinking, this is asking students to think in counterfactuals, and what’s the use in that? How can you sell it if it doesn’t have real-world impact? Open thought, I’m arguing, isn’t trying to be useful, but it’s also not some abstract fiction even when it falls on the side of the nonexistent. Open thought opens the world to possibilities that have been denied by closed systems, closed procedures, and closed languages. While truth might be unreal and unrealistic right now, its realization depends on the willingness of subjects/students to announce, name, and enunciate truth events, and to be faithful to what currently seems groundless or absurd. None of which has a chance of happening as long as the search for truth is reduced to “thinking critically” about what’s empirically and observably there, or when it’s
reduced to the narcissistic act of subjectively digesting the world’s problems within
the private cosmoses of our own paths to self-enlargement.

While I’m cautious about the way existentialism has been handed down and
watered down, I’m sympathetic with Sartre’s dictum. Existence preceding essence
means we’re free to make choices as individuals, as societies, and as educators
about how to live, and those free decisions create new natures, new realities, new
truths. Critical thinking and self-enlargement are valuable tools and byproducts
of a liberal arts education, but they can (and in today’s climate I think do) serve
a purpose that’s difficult to describe in any other way than ideological. By teach-
ing students how to function within and become well adjusted to a world beyond
which it is assumed there are no other possibilities, education isn’t acting as a
source of liberation. It’s acting as a source of legitimation.

But the historic mission of the liberal arts was to be a resource for challenging
the idea that things are what they are and can’t be any different. In 1953, drawing
inspiration from Thomas More’s *Utopia*, Maynard Hutchins argued that the true
purpose of liberal education is to promote intellectual development and philo-
sophical diversity.9 The promise of a liberal education was that when the search for
truth is independent of utility, authority, and self evidence, when it’s free to seek
truths that the world’s course doesn’t validate, then those who seek truth are truly
free. By downgrading truth and sidelining it to the more marketable goals of how-
to and self-help, we might indeed extend the life of the liberal arts by another
decade or two, but absent the centrality of truth and freedom it isn’t going to be a
life worth living.  

E N D N O T E S

1. Seneca’s epistle on “liberal and vocational studies” does not score points for gender-neutral lan-
guage (despite the fact that Roman girls were not excluded), but it is crystal clear about liberal
learning’s ultimate aims: “You see why ‘liberal studies’ are so called; it is because they are studies
worthy of a free-born gentleman. But there is only one really liberal study, that which gives a
man his liberty. It is the study of wisdom, and that is lofty, brave, and great-souled.” Seneca,
*Moral Epistles*.

2. Sartre, “Existentialism is a Humanism,” in *Existentialism is a Humanism*, pp. 17-72.

3. For example, Adorno, “Truth-content is the task of critique,” or, Derrida: “The value of truth
(and all those values associated with it) is never contested or destroyed in my writings.” Slavoj
Zizek is the most vehement among contemporary philosophers about the poor state of truth
today. Here is Zizek taking stock in *Repeating Lenin*: “We live in the ‘postmodern’ era in which
truth-claims as such are dismissed as an expression of hidden power-mechanisms—as the
reborn pseudo-Neitzscheans like to emphasize, truth is a lie which is most efficient in asserting
our will to power. The very question, apropos of some statement, ‘Is it true?’ is supplanted by the
question, ‘Under what power conditions can this statement be uttered?’ What we get instead of
the universal truth is the multitude of perspectives, or, as it is fashionable to put it today, of ‘nar-
ratives’—not only literature, but also politics, religion, science, they are all different narratives,
stories we are telling ourselves about ourselves, and the ultimate goal of ethics is to guarantee
the neutral space in which this multitude of narratives can peacefully coexist, in which everyone,
from ethnic to sexual minorities, will have the right and possibility to tell his story.”


7. This, by the way, is an argument that essence precedes existence, or that human nature determines what kind of lives we can lead, which Sartre was opposing when he concluded the opposite, that existence precedes essence.


**Works Cited**


Is Assessment Destroying the Liberal Arts?

by Karin Brown

While higher education has typically included exposure to the values and ethos of the liberal arts, traditional liberal arts education has been in retreat and under threat for a while now. What role has the assessment movement had on this retreat? Is assessment, in fact, part of the deterioration of higher education?

Assessment in academia began in the early 2000’s. Now, decades later, in my own department at San José State University, the assessment process is incredibly bureaucratic (to say the least), laborious and time consuming. And we aren’t alone. Across the nation faculty at a wide range of institutions similarly scramble to assess, and assess over and over again, their students, majors and entire programs. Meanwhile, students’ learning is not improving; on the contrary it is deteriorating: Retention and graduation rates are falling as well. With declining academic standards and college completion rates, it is not logically possible to claim that assessment (or anything else for that matter) is improving higher education.

With those experiences in mind, and also after witnessing the way in which the Elementary and Secondary Education Act—the so-called “No Child Left Behind” law of 2001—and its frequent high-stakes assessments have impacted K–12 education, it is perfectly logical and necessary to ask: Is assessment harming higher education as well?

There are two possible answers. The first, and best-case scenario, is that assessment does not improve the quality of instruction but does not harm it either.

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If this is true, the only damage is a waste of time and resources that could be better invested in students, and clearly any effort we can divert to serving our students better is very much in order. The second possibility is that assessment is one of the reasons the quality of instruction is deteriorating, and in this case it is pernicious.

The answer given below is, simply put: yes, assessment does indeed harm the liberal arts and higher education in general. However, the criticism offered here is of assessment in its current practice and not of the need for evaluation and improvement in college and university teaching.

The liberal arts are not about what the students learned, but about learning to think about what they learned.

THE BUSINESS MODEL IS THE UNDERLYING PHILOSOPHY

The idea that universities have been operating on the business or corporate model is not new. But what exactly is the business model and how does it relate to assessment? We can look at the business model in terms of its goals and methods. The main goal for business is to maximize profit. The method whereby one can maximize profit is increasing efficiency, effectiveness, and productivity, or in “doing more for less.” Thomas Auxter, in the 2010 *Thought & Action* article “Radical Transformation in Higher Education: Where do We Go From Here?,” tellingly points out that implementation of the business model is to be carried out through accountability. Accountability, Auxter explains, means being able to measure outcomes in terms of productivity and numbers: “Outcomes must be quantifiable, measurable, and testable.” In academia, measuring effectiveness and accountability are conducted through assessment. We are asked to take our educational goals and set them in the form of student learning outcomes that can be quantified, measured, and tested. What then is the adverse effect?

For the purpose of this discussion, we will examine two categories of educational goals: primary and secondary. Primary educational goals are intellectual and moral. Intellectually, students learn to ask questions, analyze, criticize and think for themselves. We ignite their curiosity. In the liberal arts there is always more than one possible answer to a particular question and, hence, we have an opportunity to teach our students to become open-minded. In the end the liberal arts are not about what the students learned, but about learning how to think about what they learned. But an intellectual grasp of the material is not enough.

By teaching social and political issues, such as race, gender, immigration,
or the status of our prison system, for example, we hope to raise awareness and heighten our students’ social consciousness. We also hope they will become engaged citizens and educated voters. In other words, we aim to affect behavior. Education is and should be a transformative experience and the real test of success in the classroom is embedded in the life long skills students acquire. Thus, the most significant learning goals in the liberal arts cannot be quantified. Can I seriously ask my students do you love to read books now? Are you more thoughtful? Have you overcome your prejudices? And yet if my students leave my class the exact same way they came in, I have failed them as an educator.

We aim to affect behavior... If my students leave my class the exact same way they came in, I have failed them as an educator.

Secondary educational goals are competency in a specific subject matter and writing skills, and these goals can be quantified and assessed. Given the mandate to assess educational goals, and because only the secondary goals are assessable, they are now championed as the goals and, thus, provide a reductive approach to education. This is the manner in which standards decline. We already witnessed such a decline in K–12 education with the No Child Left Behind initiative. The goal became the standardized test and the curriculum was reduced accordingly. In academia, assessment reduces education to information delivery.

It gets worse. With educational goals being simple and impoverished, the door is open to the business model’s method of maximizing profits. After all, this is a model geared toward cutting cost and increasing productivity. To maximize profit we need to reduce the price of labor, and the more we do with less, the better. Cheap online education (such as MOOCs) is now welcome because what you cannot quantify and sell does not exist, so goals such as teaching students how to question, think and criticize (which requires coaching and a lot of it) are not on the menu. Indeed, how could eliminating something that does not exist be a problem? In other words, reducing education to information or trying to capture educational goals in a one sentence crude metric facilitates the reduction, even the elimination of the liberal arts.

Academia is not only modeled after business, it is also annexed to it. The functional purpose of higher education these days is to produce workers able to perform and increase wealth. This state of affairs is topsy-turvy. Instead of academic values such as social and environmental responsibility influencing the business world, the business world has not only influenced but is profoundly shaping academia and forcing everyone into a cookie-cutter, number-crunching game, while leaving little room for quality considerations. Needless to say, well-educated
students would provide a better workforce, but this point is beyond the scope of this article.

THE BUSINESS MODEL ENCOURAGES ANTI-INTELLECTUALISM

Furthermore, colleges and universities and the liberal arts in particular are bastions of intellectual life. In his famous 1962 book, *Anti-Intellectualism in American Life*, Richard Hofstadter defines the intellect as “critical, creative, and contemplative side of the mind.” He contrasts the intellectual who finds the life of the mind worth having for its own sake, with the zealot who hones in on one idea, becomes obsessed with it, and dedicates his resources to the service of his limited conception. By no means am I calling assessment proponents zealots. But I am arguing that attempting to capture the complexity of a university education in several very general and superficial single-sentence goals is anti-intellectual. That is also not to say that learning goals, in and of themselves, constitute a problem. Quite the contrary, learning goals provide insight into courses and programs, and serve as objectives. The harm is embedded in the attempt to assess them, first in limiting the scope of education to short term goals that can be quantified and then in imposing fixed and rigid learning goals.

Hofstadter argues that the business model and the intellectual model (or the business man and the intellectual, as he puts it), possessing different sets of values, are bound to conflict. The intellectual, he writes, must be free to criticize and to question, and these are values that conflict with the utilitarian values of the business world. Similarly, we are not free to question or criticize the learning goals; quite the contrary, they are set as practical goals that we must achieve and certify in great numbers. One of the ways in which Hofstadter defines anti-intellectualism is as resentment of the life of the mind. Applied to assessment in academia, the issue is not resentment, but only that the qualities, virtues, and values of the life of the mind cannot be reduced to assessable learning goals and should not be limited and fixed. The business model in education becomes an anti-intellectual model, thereby destroying the liberal arts.

A key way we see anti-intellectualism in academia is in the movement toward standardization. As of now, learning goals are somewhat standardized (another common denominator with No Child Left Behind). At San José State University,
for instance, we have general education categories, and despite the fact that there are several disciplines within a category, they all share the same learning goals. How can this be? Learning goals should not only be discipline specific, but they should be course and professor specific. This is a university. We teach out of our expertise, and our expertise varies. If the reader concedes that diversity is an essential feature of intellectualism, then standardization by definition is anti-intellectual. In philosophy we take very seriously the Kantian idea of respect for autonomy. The argument here is that intellectual activity hinges on autonomy. Learning in the liberal arts depends on freedom and creativity, and that approach stands in stark contrast to predefined narrow goals. Professors cannot and should not be told what to teach or how. When that happens we can no longer function as university professors.

**Honesty Is Still a Virtue**

As mentioned above, only assessment of secondary educational goals (testing for competence in a particular subject, or evaluating writing skills) is possible. In essence, these goals are already assessed during the countless hours we read, edit and grade our students’ papers. The grades are an indication of success or failure in mastery of these goals. And yet we are told that grades are not assessment, hence the need for assessment. The truth is that anything over and above evaluating papers and exams is at best superfluous and at worse fake. Professors are forced to write all kinds of reports that amount to a sham and a charade. Moreover, the “assessment” is not actually assessment; it is a euphemism for supervision. We need to distinguish between assessment, which is a procedure that takes place between faculty and students, and reports about assessment that take place between faculty and the various levels of review. In other words, having to report what my students learned to administrators who then report to the accreditation committee is not an assessment of students’ learning goals, it is a report on my assessment of students’ learning goals. Let’s be honest about it - this is pure monitoring and supervising of university professors. For such an elaborate process to be implemented what does it tell you about the value and respect of the professoriate?

The extensive supervision (in the form of assessment) in its current practice amounts to a disrespect of the professoriate. In fact, it is insulting and demeaning. It robs professors of their autonomy and reduces them to employees who have to
report to a supervisor. We professors consider ourselves professionals. We were hired for our good teaching skills and the expertise we possess. We now find ourselves being supervised and monitored by administrators and people from other disciplines, lacking the qualifications to evaluate material in our disciplines. We are not trusted to do our job, and we are forced to prove that we are trustworthy. It’s depressing to say the least. And it’s an unfortunate approach that kills morale and thereby undermines our commitment to teaching. People are more productive when they are respected and trusted. People do more, they volunteer more, and they go above and beyond the call of duty when they are happy and appreciated.

Faculty — myself included — have been criminally silent... We must speak up. We must seek a culture that restores quality, honor, and respect.

A MORE FRUITFUL APPROACH

The need for faculty to evaluate what works in our classrooms, and implement changes accordingly, certainly exists. But the shift needs to be a cultural one. When any given practice is voluntary, it has much more meaning and is more successful. Inspiration and motivation bear more fruit than draconian methods of supervising and monitoring.

Discussions regarding teaching ought to take place within disciplines in department meetings, curriculum committees, or retreats. In addition, the emphasis in academia needs to shift from articles written by faculty to ideas taught by faculty, or from publishing to teaching. While research is often what defines us as professors, the pressure to produce articles in peer-reviewed journals has been implemented at the expense of teaching. The result is a surplus of journals and articles with a smaller and smaller circle of readership. Might it be suggested that here, too, we see the influence of the business model? To be considered “productive,” we need to see product. The student who tells you they were deeply affected by your class has no room in the business model, but the number of articles you authored certainly does.

Is assessment destroying the liberal arts and thereby academia? The answer, once again, is unequivocally yes. Current assessment processes and the vested interests of assessment partisans destroy academia through inherent anti-intellectualism and a totalitarian approach that is contrary to the spirit of freedom essential for a university to thrive.

The culprits are not college administrators; they are just trying to make sure their institutions are accredited. Faculty—myself included—have been criminally silent. The enforcing bodies are the accreditation agencies. Accreditation agencies that once guarded quality in higher education are now, consciously or not, spear-
heading a corporate-influenced movement that compromises that very quality. We must speak up. We must seek to abolish harmful assessment systems and replace them with a culture that restores quality, honor, and respect. Departments must be given responsibility for the education of their students. Allow me to close with a question that was actually posed to me: But how do you know that what you do is working? In fact, I evaluate and assess my work and my students’ work after every class. But that does not answer the question. The answer is in the alternative: Trust professors to possess expertise, integrity, and a work ethic. Imagine that!

**ENDNOTES**


2. In an illuminating and interesting manner, Auxter traces the application of the business model to academia to a plan initiated by Ronald Reagan’s administration for changing the priorities in higher education. Auxter, “Radical Transformation in Higher Education: Where Do We Go From Here?,” pp. 59-69.


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American higher education is in the midst of a staffing crisis. More than three quarters of faculty members work off the tenure track, often with no job security, low wages, and few prospects for advancement. While the contingent labor force is diversified—including highly qualified but part-time laborers piecing together positions at multiple institutions, working professionals teaching a single class, and full-time instructors on short- and longer-term contracts—many struggle to make a living wage, work without benefits, and lack the means and support that would enable them to fully serve the needs of their students or otherwise pursue a successful scholarly career. Additionally, graduate students are a key source of academic labor, though one that has too often been mistreated and ill supported. 

And the current academic labor market offers many of them little chance to pursue the careers for which they think they are preparing. This situation is starting to receive the scholarly and public attention that it deserves, but the challenges are daunting with real effects on higher education and its many constituents.

This pattern of academic staffing is routinely decried as the “new normal” in American higher education. The current condition is extreme, but a more accurate representation would be that it is the modern iteration of the old normal. Although the situation has varied over the centuries, contingency and tenuousness

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are the historic conditions of significant portions the faculty. They were only overcome at the mid-20th century. Even then, within 25 years, faculty conditions were already in retreat. The struggles over salaries, working conditions and governance that fostered the expansion of collective bargaining in the 1960s were a bellwether of the end of what some might consider a “golden age” of the faculty. Yet even that golden age was quite tarnished for those whose race, religion, ethnicity, sexuality, or gender kept them from participating as equal partners in the ascendant faculty.

No single volume charts the full and complex history of the faculty and no single essay can offer anything close to one. As such, I offer something more episodic, highlighting contentious issues and pointing to the longstanding challenges facing those teaching in American colleges and universities. This paper is organized chronologically into four main sections—colonial, early national, post-Civil War, and Inter-War periods—followed by a brief comment on the “golden age.” Each points to contestations over faculty roles, rights, and status while arguing that the antecedents to current struggles appear throughout. And, analogous to modern times, even when some on the faculty prospered, many others did not.

**Harvard’s master beat his assistant teacher with a cudgel for two hours... an inauspicious beginning for the American academic profession.**

**INSTRUCTORS IN THE COLONIES AND NEW REPUBLIC**

Higher education in what is now the U.S. dates to 1636 and the founding of Harvard College, a bold act aimed at educating public servants and clergy, while also serving cultural purposes in the new and struggling colony. Harvard likewise struggled at first. In 1639, the institution’s master, Nathaniel Eaton, hired Nathaniel Briscoe as an assistant teacher. Three days into Briscoe’s employ, Eaton turned on him and they exchanged words and fought, with Briscoe eventually retiring to his room. Eaton, ignoring advice of a constable, entered Briscoe’s room, had him held down by two men and beat him with a cudgel for two hours, hitting him some 200 times about the head and shoulders. When Eaton was interrupted and Briscoe, believing he was about to be murdered, fell to his knees and prayed for his soul, Eaton resumed, believing he was being blasphemous. After an investigation, Eaton was dismissed and fled, Harvard closed for a year, and Briscoe left Cambridge for Milford, Connecticut. It was an inauspicious beginning for the American academic profession.

Things could only improve for instructors at Harvard, but they remained dif-
ficult. Until the creation of the first professorships in the 1720s, the teaching force consisted of the president and one or two young tutors, typically recent graduates who were assigned to shepherd a class or two for its entire four years if they stayed long enough. Very few did. Theirs was, according to Clifton Shipton, “a miserable life” from which most tried to escape. While some have suggested that Shipton’s view was harsh, it’s clear that being a tutor was not lucrative—salaries “offered a young man enough, just enough, to keep him in his job if his love of teaching and learning, and of the College made him want to stay.” For a brief period beginning in the late 17th century, tutors assumed greater control and institutional influ-

Many colleges were chartered with clearly delimited faculty roles in governance and a heavy reliance on transitory tutors.

ence, but that control was fleeting. Tutors soon become subordinated not just to the president and the governing boards, from which they had their expectation of participation removed, but in the mid-18th century, to the professors as well. There became a substantial and intentional differentiation between the so-called permanent faculty (who could still be removed and were likewise excluded from governance roles) and the larger group of tutors who worked under different conditions, including term limits on their employment. These limits, proposed in 1716 and finally instituted in 1734, allowed Harvard to remove tutors without showing cause while simultaneously using the threat of nonrenewal to further control them. As Burton wrote, “The tutorship was purposefully made a second-tier teaching assignment.”

Faculty at other colonial colleges likewise struggled for autonomy and influence; and they likewise started a long professionalization and differentiation process. In the mid-18th century, faculty at the College of William and Mary may have been the best positioned. Founded in 1693 but without a college curriculum for almost three decades, the six professors, who were largely part-time due to the lack of funds, held significant power. That power, though, was consistently under attack by the external governing board, was diminished in the 1750s and 1760s, and destroyed by a 1790 court ruling confirming external control. The other colleges were chartered with more clearly delimited faculty roles in governance and a heavy reliance on transitory tutors. At the College of New Jersey (now Princeton University), for example, only two of the 11 tutors appointed before 1760 served more than two years. A similar situation remained for several decades. “Instruction was,” according to Wertenbaker, “badly handicapped in these early years by the constant changing of tutors. These young men were usually recent graduates who were preparing themselves for the ministry and so had
no thought of retaining their positions permanently. Even had they been attracted to the life of the instructor, the £65 or £75 a year paid them by the trustees was so insufficient for their needs that unless they took a vow of celibacy they could not remain.”

The addition of professors at existing and new institutions increased in the years after the Revolutionary War. The number of professors in American higher education was 10 in 1776 but 94 in 1800. Still, tutors outnumbered professors at most institutions. Professors were generally older than tutors and were frequently assigned a subject area, rather than a graduating class or two as remained most

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Academic freedom was nonexistent. Faculty could be and were fired for various offenses, including supporting the wrong political candidates.

often the case with tutors. They also generally stayed in their positions significantly longer. And while this has been treated as an indication of the early professionalization of the faculty, it was only the professionalization of one portion of the faculty. It was likewise the further degradation of the tutors. Tutors remained “a cheap labor device” with little prospect for careers as professors.

THE “AGE OF THE COLLEGE”

Sixty years ago, Richard Hofstadter’s Academic Freedom in the Age of the College told of a brief flourishing of American colleges in the early national period, followed by a significant and devastating retreat away from exploration and vitality. Waves of revision have highlighted a much more complex and experimenting system of colleges and schools than that which Hofstadter described, but no such revision to his understanding of the tenuousness of the faculty exists. Academic freedom was nonexistent. Faculty could be and were fired for various offenses, including supporting the wrong political candidates, speaking out on controversial social and economic issues, critiquing the nation’s racial hierarchy, offending denominational religious sensibilities, and running afoul of powerful stakeholders. And they lacked any recourse for their dismissals. Even the University of Virginia, founded by Thomas Jefferson in 1819 and designed to provide faculty with greater authority and autonomy, could not escape from the limitations placed on faculty. Jefferson himself restricted the texts used in law, as a way to protect students from Federalist writings. Moreover, his first hire, Thomas Cooper, resigned under external pressure over his religious beliefs before even beginning his position. In ensuing years, as president of South Carolina College, Cooper argued for academic freedom yet simultaneously encroached on the freedom of his faculty. He eventually lost his own position due to his provocative political stances.
In the early 19th century, the relative proportion of professors to tutors began to shift. At Harvard in 1800, there were roughly the same number of tutors and professors, but tutors still composed 75 percent of the faculty at Yale and more than 60 percent at Brown. Two decades later, professors were in the majority at all three institutions. By 1839, tutors only represented 15 percent of the academic workforce, although they remained part of instructional staffs for several decades, at some places until after Civil War. Their positions remained “temporary, dead-end appointments” with little opportunity for advancement. In fact, the status of tutors was so low that when the University of Michigan governing board declined hiring a tutor in 1847 and instead devolved the work to two other faculty members, the professors protested that the work was demeaning and beneath them. One withdrew from the work. The other eventually resigned. Not withstanding specific events such as these, professors had more prestige than tutors and, at some institutions, had considerable say in academic policy. By mid-century, they increasingly identified with specific disciplines and pursued specialized training. While professorial salaries were significantly higher than those of tutors, most institutions remained poor and salaries remained low, especially in the Midwest and among the poorer denominations. Retrenchment was “one of the characteristic actions of nineteenth century college trustees.” Indeed, Rudolph highlighted the multiple and various ways that institutions deprived professors of not only decent salaries, but also the salaries that they were promised.

Just as important, as the numbers of professors increased, their security decreased. Whereas the appointments of the few colonial professors had been assumed to be permanent and dismissals took place after hearings and with cause, the situation was quite different in the 19th century. Professors were at-will employees and could be removed for any offense. Without the need to justify dismissals, hearings largely disappeared as well. At many public institutions, all faculty were on one-year contracts, making their retention an affirmative, rather than default, act. Mass dismissals, while not common, were also not unknown. At the University of Michigan, when a board member submitted a resolution to dismiss a faculty member in 1851, the board acted in a much more sweeping manner. Bothered by infighting, it fired the entire clerical faculty. The University of Wisconsin dismissed its entire faculty seven years later, and did so again in 1867.
The decades after the Civil War saw the more rapid professionalization of the faculty as increasing numbers studied in Germany, earned doctorates, assumed disciplinary identities, and came to dominate the new professional associations. This professionalization, and the correspondent ascendancy of the expert, had real value for a portion of the faculty, but it simultaneously revealed two weaknesses. First, the professionalization process was, in part, fought through battles over academic freedom. The highly publicized cases of the late 19th century helped faculty make claims for authority and autonomy, but at the same time revealed the tenuous nature of their positions. Academic freedom was not yet established and faculty at both the new universities and the more numerous smaller colleges were subject to pressures, restrictions and dismissals if they offended their administrations’ or boards’ sensibilities, especially on economic, religious and social issues.22

Just as importantly, the professionalization of the faculty was linked to the stratification of the faculty. Part of this was a modernization process, necessitated by the growing departmental structure and institutional disinterest in having multiple professors in the same discipline. As such, positions of associate professors and assistant professors began to spread and form the basis of what is now considered the traditional faculty ladder, though with severe limitations on advancement to the highest level. The ladder system was not merely a means for efficient organization. It was also a way to disenfranchise what would soon become the bulk of faculty.23 As H. W. Rolfe recalled in reflecting on the beginnings of his career in the 1880s, “I saw the universities of monarchical Germany were, in constitution, essentially democratic, while democratic America’s were monarchical—an autocratic head, a favored group of important professors... and a large body of associates and assistants, some few of whom will struggle up into the estate above them, while most are forever barred from what they might have won if there had been a fair competition.”24 Domineering full professors who autocratically ran departments was a problem well into the 20th century, and was one of the significant threats to academic freedom and faculty employment in the era.

Although tutors had disappeared or were disappearing from many colleges, at the burgeoning universities they were being replaced by a cadre of similarly under-resourced and temporary (though often better credentialed) instructors. As Creutz wrote in his study of the faculty at the University of Michigan, they were used
to “enlarge the teaching staff while preserving the authority and prestige of the chairman-professor and, at the same time, minimizing costs.” 25 Indeed, when he proposed to the trustees that the institution add instructors to the faculty in 1870, Acting President Henry Frieze pointed to institutional poverty and the need to teach more students with quite limited funds, as well as the desire to relieve elite faculty of rudimentary work. He pointed to similar practices at much wealthier institutions and outlined a system in which professors would oversee and check up on their subordinate instructors. Michigan began the practice the next year and escalated it under Frieze’s successor, James Burrill Angell. But, these instructors remained on tenuous appointments, as did the rest of the faculty. 26 This expansion of lower tiers of faculty, first instructors and then assistants was not merely a phenomenon at the University of Michigan. At Johns Hopkins University, “Financial problems brought a new urgency to the expedient of utilizing young men at low salaries and rotating them rather than promoting them.” 27 Indeed, many institutions had a “sub-faculty,” at times derogatively referred to as the “scrub faculty,” from which little upward movement was possible and no permanency existed.

Faculty complained about their pay in the late 19th century, but Kimball and others have argued that they were actually fairly well off when compared to others in the workforce and their communities—an understanding Leslie captured by noting the period was one “when professors had servants.” Kimball ascribed the concern to the ascendancy of the faculty and their views of themselves as elite and deserving of being treated as such. They viewed the extreme salaries of industrial executives and sought their place among them. Yet, here, too, issues of differentiation were at play. Faculty salaries varied greatly across regions—the four institutions that Leslie studied were in the second highest paying region if the trends of the 1850s remained in place. 28 More importantly, though, is the differentiation within institutions. “Professors” may have had servants, but they were only a part of the academic labor market. As Stricker argued, “The expansion of higher education was financed, in part, by paying the labor force less…. Instructors, who taught the most, were paid the least; worse, their average salaries fell whereas those of full professors rose.” 29 At Wellesely College in 1879, for example, senior faculty were paid $1,500 while instructors might make as little as $300. Still, the institution was rare in at least one respect—although the faculty received low wages, they were not differentiated by gender. At other elite women’s colleges, women were

Many institutions had a “sub-faculty,” at times derogatively referred to as the “scrub faculty,” from which little upward movement was possible.
routinely denied positions as full professor and were paid significantly less than men of the same rank. At many male and coeducational institutions, women were excluded from the faculty altogether.

After the turn of the 20th century, some viewed the stratification of the faculty as a crisis, with Stanford University assistant professor Guido H. Marx perhaps the most strident in his writing. In 1909 and again in 1913, he claimed that 50 to 65 percent of the faculty at many institutions were temporary instructors and assistants, with as many as half turning over each year. Cornell University was a prime example of the larger trend: in 1868, 64 percent of its faculty were full pro-

More than 100 years ago, then, the treatment of graduate students, like that of other members of the sub-faculty, was already a concern.

фессоры and 20 percent were assistants but by 1910, the proportion of full professors to temporary instructors was reversed. Nineteen percent were full professors while 35 percent were assistants and 28 percent were instructors. Marx warned of the implications for both the students who were increasingly unlikely to have the opportunity to study with renowned faculty and for the underpaid and temporary instructors who had little chance of gaining a permanent position. He highlighted the unfairness of the system and argued that luck, opportunity, and privilege allowed a minority to achieve a professorship, and afforded them salaries three to four times those of the instructors who did most of the teaching.

Based on a survey of assistant professors at the 22 Association of American Universities institutions, Marx elsewhere pointed to highly differentiated institutional conditions—whereas at some institutions assistant professors noted satisfaction with their place and influence, others experienced far more difficulty. While focusing on the problems facing junior faculty, Marx was just as concerned about the treatment of graduate students, many of whom—46 percent in his study—assumed significant debt in pursuit of their degrees. He was “deeply impressed by the deplorable effect of the system of scholarships, etc., which do not entirely support the recipient, but act as bait and encourage him to go on with graduate study, while piling up an indebtedness which, under prevailing conditions, will ride his shoulders like a veritable old man of the sea. It is a good way to break hearts.” He continued, “The manipulation of fellowships for the purpose of ‘building up a strong (i.e., large) graduate department’ lies dangerously near the immoral; and this is doubly true when the fellowship carries with it burdensome teaching duties which make of it but a disguised underpaid instructorship.” More than 100 years ago, then, the treatment of graduate students, like that of other members of the sub-faculty, was already a concern.
INTERWAR PERIOD

During the interwar period, some significant strides were made for the faculty, though not for all of the faculty. Founded in 1915, the American Association of University Professors (AAUP) began to provide a faculty voice in governance and academic freedom. Over time, the organization garnered real gains for professors, and helped entrench academic freedom and tenure protections into American higher education. But at its founding, the association was for a select group of senior faculty at elite institutions. One professor and department chair, when approached to join the nascent organization, condemned it as “a self-constituted aristocracy of older men.” Although the AAUP soon relaxed its membership requirements, its elitism was one of the considerations that led faculty to form 21 campus locals affiliated with the American Federation of Teachers (AFT) in the 1910s and early 1920s. Another was a devastating salary situation during and just after World War I. At the University of Illinois, for example, an AFT local survey of faculty found a deplorable economic situation. Faculty reported the need to work extra jobs to support their families and that they could not afford basic necessities, including needed medical and dental care. One claimed that a family member’s death would soon surely result. But these unions were not just about the poverty and tenuousness of the faculty. They were also about its “degradation,” as a member of the Howard University local noted, especially the degradation of those who taught undergraduates and in less prestigious fields.

Salaries returned to pre-war levels for many in the 1920s, though were still differentiated and fell short of what the profession deemed suitable. And, the sub-faculty continued and at some places expanded. In 1918, in response to difficult economic conditions, the University of Washington created the rank of “associate,” one step below that of instructor. Although many were graduate students, associates were to have had at least two years of teaching experience prior to appointment and their positions were to be temporary with no chance for advancement. They were also disproportionately women. In 1920, 22 percent of the teaching staff was sub-faculty, including 60 percent of women on staff. Five years later, just over half of the staff and more than 80 percent of the women were on the sub-faculty. During the depths of the Depression, the university cut the wages of its regular faculty and sub-faculty. When things improved slightly, they restored them for the faculty, but not the sub-faculty. This was fitting with President Lee Paul Sieg’s view that instructors and associates were “underpaid

Faculty reported the need to work extra jobs to support their families and that they could not afford basic necessities, including medical and dental care.
individuals” whose problems “were still not official problems of the faculty.”

Of course, the University of Washington was not the only institution to rely heavily on graduate students and recent graduates with low salaries. At the University of Wisconsin, more than a third of undergraduate classes were taught by graduate students in the 1930s, though the staffing was highly varied by department—some departments had no instructors or assistants, while some were composed of 80 percent instructors and assistants. And when the budget situation became dire, associates’ and instructors’ salaries were disproportionately negatively affected. It is, then, unsurprising that almost 70 percent of the members of the University of Wisconsin Teachers Union—perhaps the most active college faculty union in the country—were assistants and instructors. The AAUP Committee Y’s national study of higher education and the Depression offers an incomplete picture but confirms the presence of large numbers of instructors, especially at colleges with enrollments of more than 2,500. A survey of AAUP chapters found that, in the early 1930s, instructors were the single largest category of faculty (not including assistants, about whom no data was gathered), often approaching 40 percent of the faculty at the largest institutions. Although some institutions retained associates and instructors out of compassion in a difficult job market, the “plight of the academic underclass” was such that “the competition for non-tenure positions tended to turn new Ph.D.s into scramblers for openings that demanded heavy workloads at cut-rate pay...” Indeed, in his 1942 *The Academic Man*—a title that points to the gendered structure of the faculty—Logan Wilson described the “unadmitted exploitation” of instructors and the “mental anxiety” that the onerous work, intense competition, lack of security, and low remuneration caused for instructors.

**“The competition for non-tenure positions tended to turn new Ph.D.’s into scramblers for openings that demanded heavy workloads at cut-rate pay...”**

In the decades after World War II, faculty and higher education more broadly made significant strides. An expanding system of higher education and an acceptance of a tenure system created a so-called “golden age” for faculty. Between 1949 and 1966, average faculty salaries increased significantly and faculty positions were far more plentiful than they had ever been. Yet all was not well. The faculty workforce remained highly differentiated. In the early 1960s, for example,
roughly one-third of college faculty (not including graduate students) worked part-time. Graduate students, when added to the figures, comprised roughly one-seventh of the instructional staff. As the first African American to garner a regular faculty appointment at a predominantly white institution did so in the 1940s, but clearly opportunities were severely restricted for all but white men. As Caplow and McGee argued, hiring was often influenced by nepotism and based on institutional prestige; women were entirely outside of that prestige system and “of no use to a department in future recruitment.” They argued that female scholars were “not taken seriously,” which “blighted” their prospects of a career. Discrimination on religious bases took place during graduate training and at the entry point of careers; on race it was “nearly absolute.” And, though the adoption of 1940 Statement on Academic Freedom and Tenure had created tenure protections, the controversies over communism in the late 1940s and 1950s demonstrated that professors were unwilling or unable to defend their politically suspect colleagues. They were similarly useless to those purged for their sexuality. The period was one of significant retreat from stated ideals, and pointed to an inherent weakness in the faculty.

To the extent that it existed, this “golden age” was short lived. By 1968, when Jencks and Reisman published their book declaring the triumph of the faculty, the cracks were already present. In the late 1960s, and even more so the 1970s, the economic situation and lack of input in governance was such that faculty began large scale organizing, collective bargaining and, when necessary, striking. So, too, did graduate student teaching assistants at places like the University of Wisconsin. The economic job market tightened in many fields, and retrenchment took its toll on the faculty. And throughout, the stratification of the faculty and the contingency of a sizeable portion remained constant. In his 1977 follow-up to The Academic Man, Logan Wilson simply repeated much of the language that he had used 35 years earlier to describe those of the lowest faculty ranks and status.

A ‘NORMAL’ IN NEED OF CHANGE

Contingency and casualization are among the most pressing challenges facing American higher education, but they are not new. Rather, they are deeply embedded and have, to varying degrees, been part of the staffing of colleges and universities for centuries. While the modern situation is extreme—and no his-

Hiring was often influenced by nepotism and based on institutional prestige; women were entirely outside of that prestige system.
historical situation is exactly analogous to another—the antecedents of the current crises exist, and at times are striking. In this essay, I have highlighted some of those antecedents, intentionally emphasizing the points of contention and the difficulties faced over time rather than providing a full and complete picture. In so doing, I have pointed to the larger structural issues in the staffing of American colleges and argued that the professionalization of the faculty was also the stratification of the faculty. While that professionalization provided great benefits to some, it simultaneously created a “sub-faculty” or an “academic underclass,” with few rights, low pay, onerous loads, little respect, and little realistic hope to ascend. As stakeholders in higher education consider, and hopefully address, the current version of this condition, it’s important to remember its long history. Temporary surges in funds, short-term efforts around an immediate crisis, or locally based solutions are unlikely to change the fundamental and longstanding problems of academic staffing. Rather, something more systemic, and perhaps more radical, is needed.

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18. Rudolph, American College, 193-200; Burke, American Collegiate Populations, p. 47.
22. Furner, Advocacy and Objectivity, Metzger, Academic Freedom, pp. 145-77; Cain, Establishing
Academic Freedom, pp. 8-17.

26. Frieze, President’s Report 1870, pp. 4-5; Frieze, President’s Report 1871, p. 23; Angell, President’s Report 1872, p. 4; Angell, President’s Report 1873, pp. 3-4.
32. Marx, “Problems Assistant Professor,” p. 19.
37. Committee on Educational Policy, “Report,” pp. 11-15; Groves, “Retrenchment at the University.”
38. Willey, Depression, Recovery, p. 25.
40. Wilson, Academic Man, p. 69.
41. Bowen, “Faculty Salaries.”
42. Simon and Grant, Digest of Education Statistics, p. 88.
45. Schrecker, No Ivory Tower; Graves, Wonderful Teachers.
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During the past five years, when asked whether to offer more classes online I have answered, “No,” but when I say that, my colleagues ask: “Why not?” I find the second question harder to answer. Those who favor face-to-face courses often do so for intuitive reasons. In spite of the technological changes taking place in our culture, some of us appreciate campuses and live people in real classrooms, but we rarely communicate the rationale for such a preference. In The Great Good Place, Ray Oldenburg suggests that we do not currently value physical spaces. He points out, with regard to locations where people gather, “We are inadequately equipped to defend even the idea of them.”

In this era, where we scrutinize the outcomes of postsecondary schools, we pay scant attention to the value of spending time within the walls and on the grounds of our institutions. We actually reached a point where we mock the enterprise.

On most campuses, mine included, sociology departments teach courses that serve as part of a liberal arts curriculum. Therefore, in sociology, we take a service-oriented approach. Students from all over campus enroll in our classes. On one level, I find it rewarding to know that we include my discipline in a wide assortment of degrees, but the focus on service also puts me in the position of fielding questions from colleagues, with respect to how and when to deliver classes. In particular, as the chair of a department, I receive requests to teach more sections and a wider range of courses on the Internet.

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We now refer to the traditional classroom experience as “seat time,” and when you reduce education to something that takes place on your backside, it begins to sound absurd. Thus, most of us find it difficult to give thought to, let alone study, what it means to spend time on a campus in the company of others.

Through the growth of online courses and degree programs, we have shrunk the proportion of students who participate in schooling as a real, as opposed to a virtual undertaking. This situation could be a tragedy or it could be acceptable. At the moment we do not know. Because we rarely conduct research on the meaning of the campus experience, we have been left to simply watch it disappear, without

The classroom experience as “seat time...” When you reduce education to something that takes place on your backside, it begins to sound absurd.

the ability to comprehend the consequence of its absence. In what follows, I examine how we came to where we stand today. I also suggest that we shift our efforts in outcomes assessment toward the question of what it means to spend real time with classmates, and a teacher, in the name of education.

THE PURPOSE OF PLACE

Over the course of human history, nations worked to provide open spaces where members of the public could exchange their views, find common goals, and learn from each other. The construction of significant places—grand coliseums and amphitheaters—were seen as a key to the promotion of civic-mindedness. Likewise, in our own past, Americans paid attention to the role that a campus serves as a “third place” between home and vocation. The pillars and arches of historic campus design reflect the degree to which we valued forums where diverse bodies of students and faculty came together.

Historically, we sought to create a public institution when we built a college or university, but today we see schools in a different light. As states decrease spending on our institutions, we are more likely to see education as a private investment. At the same time, we are also likely to view the outcomes of schooling from a personal and psychological standpoint, as opposed to seeing them in social or cultural terms. We concentrate our assessment of students on cognitive and statistical outcomes. We often reduce studies of education to psychometrics or cost-benefit calculations. That is in part because we prefer the sciences to the arts, which tend toward moral and aesthetic matters. Education is a human enterprise, so an outside observer might wonder why we do not turn to the humanities for an understanding of our work in schools, but we prefer the instrumental and the quantifiable.
The assessment movement beginning in the late 20th century did a good deal to draw attention to students and their development, at a time when institutions focused, perhaps too much, on externally funded research. Since then, however, the movement appears to have replaced one single-minded focus with another. In the case of assessment, we established a consensus around the thought that cognitive learning outcomes were the sole determiner of our success. The focus on cognition suited faculty and staff in the early stage of the movement. We found learning easy to measure. We administer tests. The results are convenient. Our numbers stack up well in charts and graphs. Simple. Like the businesses that often

With our thoughts narrowly focused on our product, we lost interest in the process through which students become educated.

serve as our model, we were marching on well-trodden intellectual terrain. The assessment movement gave us a purpose and a product—learning outcomes.

The impact of this approach has been profound. With our thoughts narrowly focused on our product, we lost interest in the process through which students become educated. We began to see the complex social and cultural nature of the college experience from the one-dimensional standpoint of manufacturing. With the production of learning outcomes stated as our goal, we began to disregard the process that students move through on the way to acquiring skills or a body of new knowledge.

For example, if the stated learning outcomes of an online course are the same as those of a face-to-face offering, then we deem the classes equivalent. Although, to construe such disparate experiences as equal, we are forced to concede that cognitive outcomes are the only outcomes that matter. Learning objectives are important, but colleges and universities are also charged with turning college freshman into college graduates. By all rights, freshman and graduates ought to be different people. When someone chooses a college and a major, they are choosing narratives with which to understand themselves and their role in society. For the remainder of their days, students will face the questions, “Where did you go to school?” and “What did you study?” We describe who we are and what we are like in the stories that we tell in response. Therefore, values, behavior, dispositions, and identity are also necessary to consider when answering the question of how college affects students.

Our classes and programs foster skills and impart knowledge, but knowledge and skill are not the most crucial or lasting components of becoming educated. Current research suggests that students forget the facts that they memorize, and they also lose the abilities that they learn to succeed on exams and projects. The
traits and values developed in college persist throughout much of adulthood, however. One’s identity and one’s status as a graduate remain in place for life. Higher education is largely a social, as opposed to a cognitive endeavor. If the effort to assess the outcomes of our work is to serve us in the future, we will need to press out beyond psychometrics, into fields like sociology, philosophy, and anthropology. These disciplines contain methods that we can use to study the meaning that students give to and take from their experience on a campus. Such fields also offer frameworks that can help us to conceive of going to college as a life-changing ritual in our culture.

In the 21st century, the college campus stands as one of the last bastions of physical space devoted to meaningful exchange.

The Cultural Role of the Campus

In social environments, we develop habits of association. We hone the traits suited to life in a democracy. We learn to listen, speak with clarity, and build bridges between divergent points of view. In the past, democratic nations developed forums and spaces for people to hold conversations, create relationships, and forge identities as citizens. In the words of National Medal of Arts recipient, Ray Bradbury, “The idea is as old as Athens at high noon, Rome soon after supper, Paris at dawn, Alexandria at dusk.” Between the 1838 publication of Tocqueville’s Democracy in America and the 2000 release of Putnam’s Bowling Alone we reduced the number of public places where people gather to share ideas. In the 21st century, the college campus stands as one of the last bastions of physical space devoted to meaningful exchange.

The process of engaging others is formative. It may not reflect learning with regard to “content,” but in the process of taking part in the life of an institution, students learn how to function as members of communities. Time spent on campus and in classrooms is a key component of education. In the article, “Foundations of Place,” David Gruenwald explains that our environment is pedagogical. In his words, “Places teach us about how the world works and how our lives fit into the spaces that we occupy.” He goes on to suggest, “Places make us: as occupants of particular places with particular attributes, our identities and our possibilities are shaped.” The experiences that we have, in place, become the memories that make us who we are. The process of attending a school holds the promise of becoming an important chapter in our life stories.

In his philosophy of education, John Dewey stressed the importance of giving attention to the process that students move through on the way to graduation. He suggested the question of how we teach is, possibly, more important than what
we teach. He urged educators to begin their practice by giving thought to their ideal image of society. For instance, if we wish to live in a nation where people sit quietly and listen, he suggested that schools requiring stillness and silence would help to reach that end. On a similar note, if we wish to live in a country where people stay home and surf the Internet, schools that use the Internet as a vehicle for instruction would create an avenue to that future. But if we wish to live in a culture where people come together in public places to hold honest conversations about the most compelling issues of the day, then schools must allow students to practice those habits.

If we wish to live in a culture where people come together in public to hold honest conversations, then schools must allow students to practice.

In the 1964 classic, Understanding Media, Marshall McLuhan gave us the well-known principle: “The medium is the message.” With regard to television, we retain bits of content after watching a program, but the important thing to note and study, with respect to TV, is the notion that we became a nation of screen-watchers through the advent of the medium. Similarly, in education, we focus our attention on the short-term gains in skill and knowledge that we can document, but we neglect to study the broad impact of the campus as a physical and cultural environment.

McLuhan’s onetime student, Hugh Kenner, once suggested, “What you’re taking for granted is always more important than whatever you have your mind fixed on.” We fix our assessment of students on cognitive outcomes, but education is actually a socializing institution. The environments that we create impact people. In The Great Good Place, Oldenburg describes a scenario where a colleague asked the environmental psychologist, Roger Barker, “How would you explain human behavior?” In response, Barker said he merely needed to know “where the individual in question was located—if the person is in church, he ‘acts church.’ If a person is in a post office, they ‘act post office.’” Apart from a handful of studies, scholars have done little to research what it means to “act college” or university.

Without good research on the behavioral impact of spending time on campuses and in classrooms, it is difficult to tell if our courses and programs contribute to achieving our broad goals. Of course, we pursue diverse objectives. One of our aims involves students acquiring workforce-related skills. In A Larger Sense of Purpose, Harold Shapiro acknowledges that our institutions “must serve society by providing educational programs in high demand,” but he points out that faculty and students are also expected to, “raise questions that society does not want to ask.” In other words, a graduate is more than just a set of abilities. We expect students to become certain kinds of people during the course of their education. In
particular, we expect them to become the sorts of citizens that are willing to take a critical stance in relation to inequity or injustice. It is not by chance that social movements often take root on campuses: civil rights, anti-war protests, battles for equality, and environmentalism.

Will students who earn their credentials online participate in the movements of the future? The Internet has proven useful as a tool for organizing, but what of online courses, built around lists of cognitive outcomes? Do online classes offer students a means to challenge and change the way they see themselves? Or will the documenting of competence online encourage compliance? Conformity?

We lack the means to answer the important question: Who do students become during the course of the time that they spend on a campus?

Will the process of meeting course objectives on a website provide students with compelling chapters to add to their life stories? As the testing of memory and skill overshadow our efforts at character development, will graduates still take on the traits that we associate with educated people: dignity, idealism, thoughtfulness? As an institution, will higher education continue to serve as a platform from which to address pertinent cultural issues? Will pressing problems, such as our present level of polarization, become more severe as we downplay the importance of students and teachers engaging one another in reality, as opposed to the virtual? I do not know the answers to such questions. My concern is that these questions are currently without answers, but we press ahead anyhow, changing the nature of the college and university experience.

An Alma Mater is a Collection of Memories

Over the past 20 years, the movement to assess learning became institutionalized. We committed ourselves to approaching cognitive outcomes as a product, our end goal, the one that we assess. Here in the late stages of the assessment movement, we would do well to turn at least a portion of our efforts toward evaluating the actual process that students move through on the journey to becoming graduates. We have grown astute when it comes to measuring what students know. We also document what they can do, but we lack the means to answer the important question: who do students become during the course of the time that they spend on a campus? Future research should focus on the question of how the process of becoming educated changes a person. If we fail to study and communicate the broad impact of schools as places and education as a cultural experience, it is likely that students will miss opportunities for growth, and society could also
lose its capacity for well-reasoned critique.

Not long ago, I stood in front of a chalkboard after class. Three students came up to talk through some of the finer points of the discussion that we were ending. As the conversation lingered, new students began to file into the room. They were coming in early, for a course about to start. Eventually, we had to stop talking to make room for the class scheduled to begin. As I gathered my things, one of the students who came into the room to wait for the next course said something from her chair. She said, “So, this is what I missed.”

I said, “Excuse me?”

She repeated, “This is what I missed.”

I said, “I don’t know what you mean.”

She said, “Talking and thinking, together.”

The student told me her name, which I recognized. She explained that she had taken my course—the one that I was wrapping up—online. I remembered some of the papers that she had written, but I did not recognize her face. Of course, she was right. She missed a lot. I think I probably did, too. In some ways, I suspect that we all suffer from the diminishment of education as a place for people to meet and hold conversations. I suspect that many of us feel this way. Unfortunately, the issue resides in the realm of feelings and suspicions. In The Great Good Place, Oldenburg suggests, “In a world increasingly rationalized and managed, there must be an effective vocabulary and a set of rationales to promote anything that is to survive.” For higher education to survive as a vital, physical and social institution, staff and faculty will need to make a case. We need to conduct new research, but that research must bear in mind that a college graduate is a collection of memories and stories, told and retold to confirm oneself and one’s place in the world.

In an essay on her pending graduation, Marina Keegan suggested that her education succeeded in terms that she could only describe as The Opposite of Loneliness. With regard to her schooling, she wrote:

It’s not quite love and it’s not quite community; it’s just this feeling that there are people, an abundance of people, who are in this together. Who are on your team. When the check is paid and you stay at the table. When it’s four a.m. and no one goes to bed. That night with the guitar. That night we can’t remember. That time we did, we went, we saw, we laughed, we felt.
We should all have such memories. At this stage in the history of higher education, given the turn toward digital methods of “content delivery,” we face the need to study and ensure that students leave us with a library of memorable and formative experiences.

ENDNOTES

1. Oldenburg, The Great Good Place, from the Foreword, p. x.
2. For an analysis of growth rates in online education, see Allen and Seaman’s Grade Level: Tracking Online Education in the United States, a publication of the Online Learning Consortium.
3. For data showing the decrease of state funds to higher education, see Mitchell and Leachman’s “Years of Cuts Threaten to Put College out of Reach for More Students,” a report from the Center on Budget and Policy Priorities.
4. For a discussion of the changing curricular values in the state of Florida, for example, see Anderson’s “Rick Scott Wants to Shift Funding Away from Some Degrees.”
5. In contrast to our current efforts in learning outcomes assessment, see Chickering’s Education and Identity, for a thorough description of the change-in-self that occurs during the course of an education.
7. For a theoretical description of the role of education in identity development see, Chickering’s Education and Identity. For a review of historic studies, see Feldman and Newcomb’s, The Impact of College on Students, Volume One. Jones et al. Identity Development of College Students, and Hanson (Ed.) In Search of Self: Exploring Student Identity Development offer a contemporary view.
12. Gruenwald, Ibid.
13. See Dewey, Democracy and Education.
14. See McLuhan, Understanding Media.
17. See Moffett, Coming of Age in New Jersey: College and American Culture, and Nathan, My Freshman Year: What a Professor Learned by Becoming a Student.
20. For a more complete discussion of the relationships between life stories, identities, and behaviors see Gottschall’s The Story Telling Animal: How Stories Make us Human, and McAdams’ The Redemptive Self: Stories Americans Live By.
WORKS CITED


Employability and the Liberal Arts: A Career Readiness Initiative

by Katherine E. Brown

When discussing the role of higher education as it applies to students, responses often devolve into two opposing camps: one for people who advocate for and defend the role of liberal arts education as basic to the preservation of democracy and freedom, and the other for people who care about the connection between what students learn in classrooms today and how well prepared they are to enter and succeed in their desired careers. But concerns with the employability of our graduates need not be read as an invitation to erode the liberal arts values underpinning public higher education. What purpose is served by serious, committed teachers and scholars adopting a defensive posture in conversations about the employability of our students? We miss important opportunities to make the case for liberal arts, humanities, and public higher education in new ways when we approach the employability conversation defensively.

College Readiness, Career Readiness, and Employability

Higher education faculty, administrators, and staff have made significant commitments and strides in the past decade toward recruiting and retaining undergraduate students from under-served and at-risk populations. Many of us are fortunate to be at campuses with programs designed to encourage college readiness, persistence, and academic success of first-generation college students,

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military veterans, underrepresented, and returning or nontraditional students. We speak the language of “high impact practices,” undergraduates working with faculty in research, community service learning, and the importance of internship courses. We see how these all play a role in keeping students focused in college. Opportunities to connect theory and practice inside and outside the classroom are fertile ground for students to explore post-collegiate next steps. Skills and connections developed in “college readiness” activities also contribute to “career readiness” and employability. Yet, as embattled advocates of public education are navigating the upheavals of what Slaughter and Rhoades refer to as “academic capitalism,” it becomes easy for some faculty to regard any reference to “skills translation” or “career readiness” as a euphemism for feeding the kids into a nameless corporate chipper.

Some reticence to participate in “the employability conversation” may be, for others, based on awareness of the limits of our frames of reference or recent experiences. For faculty who have been exclusively employed in higher education, or those whose last job search was ages ago, this is understandable. The presence of campus career centers with resources, staff, current information, and advice for specific steps and tools useful at various stages of career exploration may lead faculty to assume we have little to add to the conversation. We also know students must seek answers on their own to many questions about their future careers. However, faculty can help students engage and employ their critical thinking, goal formation, and research abilities long before (or after) these students visit a campus career center. Every educator has more to offer than they may realize to help students find connections between the ideas and issues we engage deeply with on our campuses and students’ emerging career interests and goals.

**P O S S I B I L I T I E S , R E W A R D S , A N D C H A L L E N G E S**

This essay offers some possibilities, rewards, and challenges associated with developing assignments, activities, and programs for faculty seeking to showcase and expand the ways we prepare students for post-college life. It begins with reclaiming or discovering the everyday opportunities we have to help students articulate what they can bring to the table as members of any organization. This question connects the employability conversation to a tenet of the National
Education Association (NEA) mission “to help students succeed in a diverse and interdependent world.” Success is broadly defined, but for many it likely includes finding a “fit” between our values, skills and abilities, and the goals, needs, culture, and practices of an employer. Many possibilities flow from reflecting on how we encourage students to connect what they are learning in our classrooms to planning their next steps after college. Some rewards include seeing students confidently making a case for what they have to offer organizations of interest to them, taking initiative, and developing and claiming a professional voice of their own in communicating with new audiences inside and outside academe.

**We will not be at the job interview. Students must be able to make the case for themselves: “Why me for this opportunity at this organization at this time?”**

Among the challenges are these: How and where may educators play a role in helping students talk about their ideas, goals, and abilities to people who are not their teachers, peers or others inside the discourse of an academic discipline and campus environment? What does such a role require of faculty in terms of thought and action? The National Association of Colleges and Employers (NACE) publishes an annual list of the top 10 skills that surveyed employers seek from college graduates. Many of the skills ranked highly year after year are practiced in our classrooms and other campus learning environments every day, including the ability to “verbally communicate inside and outside the organization,” to “work in a team structure,” to “obtain and process information,” and to “make decisions and solve problems.” Consider this: if a student’s interest in social justice, conservation, public policy, or child development leads to his or her seeking employment in a non-profit organization, in public service or teaching, mere “interest” and a resume alone won’t land a job for which there are many qualified, committed applicants. While many faculty can easily articulate the connections between what we teach and the benefits to non-profit or for-profit organizations of hiring our graduates, we will not be at the job interview. Students must be able to make the case for themselves. Long before that interview moment, students need practice demonstrating their soft skills and answering the question: “Why me for this opportunity at this organization at this time?”

Faculty can help students recognize the importance of soft skills developed inside and outside the classroom long before their senior year or first job interview. We can access the wisdom and talent in our networks of alumni, former students, area professionals and supporters of the humanities and liberal arts who populate many career fields. The professional staff and administrators we interact with every day, in career centers, offices of service learning, and community engage-
ment, are also excellent resources for making contacts for guest lectures, panel events, mentoring, and other opportunities for conversation and networking for students.

SKILLS TRANSLATION IN CONTEXT AND COURSEWORK

Once a year, I teach a course I designed over a decade ago as a faculty member in the Communication Department at CSU San Marcos. This course lends itself to adaptation by a variety of departments and programs. I offer this description of it as an example of how to resist the tendency to portray any concern with employability as somehow anti-intellectual, or as a rejection of the ideals and traditions of liberal arts education.

The course begins with a series of professional communication exercises. Any instructor can find available textbooks with exercises of this type. Students learn (or review) the basic elements, conventions, and genres of professional writing such as letters, e-mail and memos, and reports and proposals. They practice audience-centered communication in oral presentations demonstrating application of these skills, and they also learn collegial ways to offer and receive peer feedback on presented work. For example, a student might be tasked with composing and presenting a letter that responds to an inquiry of a particular type. Her peers’ feedback to that presentation will attend to word choice, tone, and inclusion of pertinent details. Where some students assume at first that there is one correct way to write such a letter and one correct way to interpret it, the limits of this view soon become apparent. Each student reflects on the feedback received, and then decides what to incorporate and what to disregard, relative to her goals and information provided about the context, the task and her own interpretation of its nuances. Students learn clarity and concise writing, the importance of revising drafts, and proofreading. Students at any level can benefit from these exercises, and many have had some practice with these forms in high school or freshman year in college, but students who are preparing to communicate with new audiences, conducting career research or working with a mentor often take such activities more seriously.

Next, students write a curriculum-reflective essay about ideas and experiences abiding in memory from their major coursework. I want students to be
able to answer those basic questions posed to them by friends, family and potential employers or mentors about why they chose their majors, and what they’ve learned. This activity helps prepare students to explain the contribution their studies have made to their toolkits for living.

Martha Nussbaum’s book *Cultivating Humanity: A Classic Defense of Reforms in Higher Education* speaks of three capacities cultivated by a good liberal arts education: (1) critical self-reflection, (2) being a citizen of the world, and (3) the narrative imagination. Her second book, *Not for Profit: Why Democracy Needs the Humanities*, further explores the importance to democracy itself of privileging the creative, critical, imaginative aspects of the humanities and liberal arts, resisting the pull of efficiency and profit motives.

The related assignment in the course I am discussing here is to write a paper reflecting on coursework, connections between the student learning outcomes for the major, and Nussbaum’s ideas. It’s worth noting the vitality of these ideas in many fields and disciplines. Gregory Petsko wrote an open letter to the president of SUNY Albany in 2010, characterizing that executive’s decision to eliminate several programs in languages and the arts as a “Faustian Bargain.” Petsko, a professor of biochemistry, celebrated the crucial role studying languages, art, and literature has played in his own career, and in advancing recognition in all fields that what we often think of as problems of only one place, moment or people can be found elsewhere in the record of human history and experience.

The third text I use in this course is a novel, in keeping with Nussbaum’s advocacy of the importance of the “narrative imagination.” Many novels, films, plays, poems, or other texts explore individual choices, interpersonal relations, and the institutional and societal power dynamics playing out in workplaces. Students explore how fictional representations of work, workplaces and characters came to be as they are and where they are, what the people in the story want from their lives, and whose values are served or are in conflict in a novel. I am confident readers of *Thought & Action* can easily generate a list of novels, films, or other texts exploring how the concerns of their academic disciplines play out in fictional depictions of work and workplaces. Any number of discipline-specific research, writing, and speaking assignments around this topic could be constructed to align with course learning objectives. These reflections (on curriculum, on depictions of work and workers) can easily accompany the professional skills exercises. They also complement other course assignments, such as writing a career research paper, conduct-
There are many ways faculty might engage the employability conversation without abandoning the values of public higher education.

course regularly. One solution is for faculty to include career exploration, professional writing, analysis of representations of work, or interview assignments in existing courses. Another is to offer an interdisciplinary or college-wide version of such a course for students from several majors to do both common and individualized assignments linking career exploration to their programs of study.

In 2013, the dean of CSU San Marcos’ College of Humanities, Arts, Behavioral and Social Sciences launched a Career Readiness Initiative.11 I am the faculty director of this initiative. Several administrators, faculty, staff, students and engaged community members have participated in activities to cultivate career readiness among our students. Without the pre-professional support often associated with careers such as nursing or teaching, liberal arts students with many career possibilities to explore can benefit from structured opportunities to inquire about particular paths. In talking with students about these paths, faculty can engage in a dialogue about skills translation.

In the first two years of the initiative, contingent and tenured faculty alike from half a dozen programs and departments in our college volunteered to showcase their career readiness-related practices in teaching and other work at our campus faculty center. We also have organized a series of panels on different employment sectors (non profit, public, etc.) in which professionals reflect on how they formed their career paths and how, specifically, students from liberal arts and humanities backgrounds might explore these careers. These panels offer deeper kinds of engagement for students than interactions typically possible at a large campus-wide job fair, namely opportunities to discuss the connections between college majors and career paths. We also have benefited from strengthened connections between faculty and career center staff. In addition, we began a new Career Mentoring Network for Humanities, Arts, Behavioral and Social Sciences
majors, pairing volunteers (area professionals, alumni and campus professional staff) with students. On another level, collaborative work among several units across campus has contributed to the creation of an Office of Internships to inform and support community members, students and faculty who seek to expand student participation in internships. Finally, we are preparing a pilot adaptation of the course structure I described earlier in this essay to serve those students and faculty in departments and programs currently not able to offer such a course.

We are at different stages in achieving the goals of each of these efforts as we move out of an “initiating” phase into fostering a culture of career readiness in our college. Hopefully, readers of this journal may be encouraged to reexamine and reframe the notion that the employability conversation is outside the immediate concerns of those safeguarding the great traditions of public higher education. It is important to remember some students have access to models for building a career path versus getting a job. Some have contacts who can help them gain access and navigate occupational and professional routines and cultures, while others do not. We understand this when we work to build ladders and pipelines to higher education. But we also must understand this when we relate to our students’ transition from our campuses into occupational and professional routines, cultures and networks. A career readiness initiative offers another way faculty, students, staff, and friends may work together to mitigate inequities and the consequences of uneven access to resources and information. This approach to thinking about the “employability of our graduates” advances the cause of strengthening public education.

E N D N O T E S
1. From Thought & Action’s Call for Papers for a Special Focus for Fall 2015: “The Greeks and Romans saw the liberal arts as the tools necessary to make a person free. But some students and many policymakers today more likely see public higher education as a means simply to make people employable.”
3. Slaughter and Rhoades offered an analysis of the emergence of several intertwined developments they refer to as “academic capitalism” in Academic Capitalism and the New Economy: Markets, the State and Higher Education.
6. Ibid, figure 1, NACE Employers rate the skills/qualities sought in new college hires.
9. Petsko’s Open Letter to George M. Phillips was published in Genome Biology.
10. See Nussbaum, Cultivating Humanity chapter 3, for description of how the narrative imagination allows one to “to be an intelligent reader of another person’s story.”
12. I wish to thank and acknowledge Dr. Adam Shapiro, dean of the College of Humanities, Arts, Behavioral and Social Sciences at CSUSM; Dr. Darlene Piña, associate professor of sociology and co-developer/co-administrator of the Career Mentor Network, and the students, faculty, staff, panelists, mentors, sponsors and friends engaged in the programs and activities of the Career Readiness Initiative. Thanks to my “Power Writer” colleagues for their encouragement to submit this article.

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Buyer Beware: Lessons Learned from edTPA Implementation in New York State

by Deborah Greenblatt and Kate E. O’Hara

As states across the country continue their implementation of the edTPA, a complex and high-stakes certification requirement for teacher certification, there are important lessons for educators and education advocates to learn from New York State’s implementation. As Linda Darling-Hammond, developer and promoter of the edTPA, cautioned at the 2014 American Educational Research Association meeting: “New York is a prototype of how not [original emphasis] to implement teacher performance assessment.”

edTPA stands for the Teacher Performance Assessment Portfolio, an assessment of teacher readiness developed by The Stanford Center for Assessment, Learning and Equity (SCALE) and the American Association of Colleges for Teacher Education (AACTE) but nationally distributed and scored by Pearson Education, Inc. It differs from previous assessments in that it purports to measure “performance” by requiring student teachers to compile a portfolio, including lesson plans, student work samples, a short classroom video (15 to 20 minutes), and a lengthy “instructional commentary” of 40 to 60 pages.

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Currently, there are 622 educator preparation programs in 35 states and the District of Columbia participating in edTPA. Some states are still exploring its use while others require edTPA as part of program completion or for state licensure. Among them, New York’s story is unique: Although the New York State Education Department had begun working with Pearson in 2009 on its own teacher performance assessment, it switched to the edTPA when it became available in February 2012. The handbooks and rubrics were made available to faculty and students in New York’s schools of education that same spring. New York only conducted one year of field testing before fully implementing the edTPA as a high-stakes assessment.

As a result of the rapid rollout, faculty at colleges of education had little time to reflect on their data and prepare their students for success: “We have basically set up a cohort of our students to fail,” warned Jamie Dangler, vice president of the United University Professions (UUP), the union of State University of New York educators, to New York State Education Department officials in January 2014, “and the consequences will be disastrous for students and teaching programs.”

With the federal push to standardize a national evaluation requirement for pre-service teachers, all states and their educators must also consider and contend with the impact of profit-oriented corporations in the teacher preparation process. The certification of teachers has been taken out of the hands of the states and now turned over to a for-profit company that has much to gain from a national adoption of the edTPA: Pearson Education, Inc.

Concerns over the corporatization of teacher certification are fueled by Pearson’s lack of transparency. When participating in Pearson workshops, trainings, or test scoring, faculty have to sign non-disclosure agreements. Faculty are not allowed to share materials with their colleagues or their students. Furthermore, although the edTPA Myths and Facts document asserts the criteria for selecting and training scorers is “rigorous,” the teacher candidates’ score reports do not include the qualifications of their scorer nor is specific data about edTPA current scorers readily available online.

It is our hope that educators, activists, and policy makers will benefit from the lessons we have learned in New York and join our effort for a certification process that does not standardize teacher education programs but rather draws upon an effectively designed certification process and represents what is important to the profession, not politicians and corporations.
Lesson One: edTPA is Called a Teacher Performance Assessment—But that Doesn’t Mean it is One

While many stakeholders would agree that a performance assessment is a more effective way to measure teacher readiness than a pencil-and-paper test, the edTPA cannot fill that role. The edTPA relies greatly on teacher candidates’ reading, writing, and technological skills. Candidates are allowed to include only up 15 to 20 minutes of video to “feature the teaching and learning emphasis” for their subject area.6

For first-year teachers to be “effective,” the edTPA weighs heavily on data analysis skills, while de-emphasizing skills such as adaptability, relating to students’ interests, and fostering a cooperative environment. Additionally, the lengthy and tightly structured edTPA requirements have changed the focus of the student teaching experience and seminar from preparing for the first year of teaching to preparing to pass a test and create lessons under constraints that make the test an unauthentic assessment.7

Student teachers are faced with the challenge of manipulating both the structure and the content of their lessons to meet the demands of the edTPA. While student teachers are typically stressed about their coursework or teaching lessons, they now have the additional anxiety of making sure their teaching practices are labeled and organized according to the limitations of the edTPA questions, often struggling to manipulate what has been genuinely successful, into something that instead meets the unrealistic and unfamiliar demands of the test. A professor colleague elaborates, “We used to share successes and challenges in seminar, working together, digging deep. Now all we seem to do is go through the handbook page by page to make sure we understand what is expected of our students.”

Lesson Two: The edTPA Privileges Certain Student Teaching Placements

The challenges of the edTPA are exacerbated in schools in low-income communities where our K–12 students often are not scoring well on standardized tests. Not only are these schools more likely to have scripted curricula, but they also have students with a variety of special needs.8 Teacher candidates will need special permission to deviate from the mandated curriculum to showcase their best work in their videos, which can be a challenge depending on several factors such as how much principal surveillance the cooperating teachers are under or how much cooperating teachers are willing to “break the rules.” These conflicts often cause cooperating teachers to decide not to host a student teacher in future semesters.9
Although the edTPA purports to assess how general education teacher candidates address the needs of special education students as per their Individualized Education Program goals and the needs of English language learners, these prompts are not relevant in certain settings. Candidates placed in more homogeneous settings will not face these additional demands, while those in more diverse classrooms must clearly address the needs of these students to score well. Although these teacher candidates may be better prepared for their careers when they student teach in such settings, schools of education may be motivated to sacrifice that preparation to improve edTPA passing rates.

There is no evidence the edTPA has predictive validity, the ability to forecast future “success,” for any measure.

Lesson Three: The edTPA Scoring is Inconsistent

Although the edTPA is based on National Board for Professional Teaching Standards, there is no evidence the edTPA has predictive validity, the ability to forecast future “success,” for any measure. SCALE, the originators of the edTPA, made a statement on the validity and reliability of the edTPA as follows:

A set of validation studies was conducted to confirm the content validity, job relevance, and construct validity of the assessments. In combination, these studies documented that the assessment is well-aligned to the professional standards it seeks to measure, reflects the actual work of teaching, and that the score measures a primary characteristic of effective teaching. Inter-rater reliability was evaluated using several different statistical tests. edTPA reliabilities reported here range from .83 to .92 (indicating the percentage of scorer agreement).

This statement, however, addresses reliability or validity when it comes to inter-rater reliability only. In the same document, SCALE states the edTPA gives states the “ability to use a nationally available common measure that is valid and reliable to evaluate pre-service teachers’ readiness to teach.” It is certainly arguable if this common measure is truly valid and reliable. The National Center for Teacher Quality agrees saying:

What may be a very good culminating exercise for any program to administer is not necessarily a sufficiently valid and reliable measure of either an individual teacher or the quality of a program. For example, the edTPA allows candidates to choose the lessons they will deliver, rehearse as many times as they wish, and edit the videotape of their teaching. If a prospective elementary teacher chooses to teach a lesson on parallel lines rather than on equivalent fractions (because she really...
dislikes fractions), and even then edits out an instructional faux pas, is the resulting lesson a valid assessment of her overall teaching skills?14

Additionally, many teacher candidates and teacher educators question the consistency in the scoring of the test. A colleague from a State University of New York campus shares her experience: “My students did pass, but ironically the ones that weren’t as strong — you know, in pedagogy, or in classroom management— they passed, and passed with higher scores than my stronger candidates.” Experiences such as this call into question the reliability of the evaluations and the training of the Pearson evaluators.

According to a former Pearson evaluator, originally when portfolios were reviewed at scoring centers, two people graded each of the portfolios. However, scoring is now done remotely and scorers are recruited from across the country, even if their state does not use the edTPA. Also, now only one person scores each edTPA portfolio.15 Although there are “quality control” measures put in place by Pearson, with random portfolios being “back read” by a supervisor, it is not clear how often back reading is done.16 Given that scorers are paid per portfolio and are not held accountable until one of their portfolios is randomly selected for additional scoring, there is no existing measurement of inter-rater reliability.

According to Nancy A. De Korp, coordinator of Education Programs, Office of Higher Education for the NYSED, there is also a protocol if the total score is at, or around, a passing score. In this case, a second scorer will review the portfolio.

A third scorer (a scoring supervisor) will evaluate the portfolio if either 1) Scorer 1 and Scorer 2 are discrepant (more than one score point apart) on any rubric, or 2) Scorer 1 and Scorer 2 are on opposite sides of the recommended professional performance standard (for decision consistency). A .5 score occurs when two scorers have evaluated a portfolio and their score on the rubric is averaged. Scorer 1 and Scorer 2 may have exact agreement or adjacent agreement on each rubric. Any discrepant rubrics (more than one score point apart) are sent to a supervisor for resolution.17

However, we have seen instances where teacher educators, those who have assessed teacher candidates’ performance multiple times across the semester, have a different evaluation than the Pearson scorers. One teacher candidate shared with us that, although she was the only person in her student teaching seminar
to get an A, she failed the edTPA. Her professor evaluated the portfolio herself, using the Pearson rubrics, and disagreed significantly with the scorer’s findings. As a result she is considering an appeal; however she would have to pay $200 to do so.\textsuperscript{18}

Allowing per diem scorers of the edTPA to be the gatekeepers to the profession depersonalizes the relationship between teacher candidates and their students, cooperating teachers, field supervisors, and professors in a very troubling way.\textsuperscript{19}

\textbf{Lesson Four: The edTPA Shifts the Focus of the Student Teaching experience to Test Preparation}

Teacher candidates spend hours reading, rereading, examining, and understanding their edTPA content specific handbook, the \textit{Making Good Choices} guidebook, and other associated edTPA documents. In addition to the time devoted to typical planning, there are rubrics and prompts that must be dissected, discussed, and understood in order to earn a passing edTPA score. Candidates spend many additional hours analyzing student data, compressing and uploading videos, and writing pages of commentary, leaving little time for planning of high quality lessons. Jen Boerner, a graduate student at SUNY Brockport, said that the biggest drawback to the edTPA was the lack of attention she was able to pay to all of her special education students: “I feel I lost out on a lot of student teaching. I really couldn’t do as much as I wanted. I couldn’t go over all the lesson plans I wanted to try out because I was teaching to the test. That was unfortunate.”\textsuperscript{20} In some cases, instead of teaching follow-up lessons in the days after their edTPA “learning segment,” candidates spent their nights answering the writing prompts for Pearson. It’s also important to note that in addition to the time committed to edTPA and student teaching, many teacher candidates are taking additional courses to maintain their financial aid eligibility. With so much at stake, the reality for many teacher candidates is that they often need to leave their coursework unfinished, miss classes and deadlines, or simply hand in acceptable, rather than exemplary work so they can focus on constructing their edTPA portfolio.\textsuperscript{21}

\textbf{Lesson Five: The edTPA Privileges Candidates and Institutes of Certain Financial Status}

One must consider the repercussions of the increase in the cost of the exams package, which has now doubled to over $600. The exams package includes the
edTPA plus the Educating All Students exam, Content Specialty Tests, and the Academic Literacy Skills test. Although Pell grant recipients are eligible to get a voucher for the $300 edTPA portion of the exam, they are not guaranteed one. Only 600 edTPA vouchers were distributed across all of New York State for all eligible teacher candidates.  

For example, when Hobart and William Smith Colleges applied for vouchers for its 24 students who received federal Pell grants, they received an e-mail from ESTestVoucher @Pearson.com saying that vouchers were allocated proportionally to institutions based on the number of undergraduate Pell recipients reported by each institution. For Hobart and William Smith’s 24 eligible students, they received only one voucher. At New York University, dozens of undergraduates and graduate students with specific financial aid and GPA requirements were eligible to enter a lottery to try to “win” one of only eight vouchers. Unfortunately, not all schools advertise these vouchers either. In some cases, students don’t know that such a voucher exists unless an individual faculty member makes an effort to inform their students.  

Teacher candidates who can afford to attend well-funded teacher credentialing programs often enjoy additional support services, including the services of a full-time edTPA resource person. Schools with funding for that kind of position can provide edTPA workshops, seminars, and one-on-one consultation. Because of the benefits of these funded positions, teacher candidates’ course work or seminars do not have to be dedicated to edTPA preparation. Some colleges have subject specific edTPA coordinators who conduct workshops for students on the edTPA throughout their teacher education program which then allows teacher candidates to prepare for portions of their portfolio prior to student teaching experience. On the other hand, in colleges where funding is limited, online modules are often used or a website hosting edTPA resources is created to reach a broader audience of teacher candidates across disciplines. However, this approach leaves candidates with more general information and no human interaction. Additionally, while a single edTPA coordinator at one college might be in charge of all edTPA content portfolios, their counterparts at a wealthier school might have coordinators for each certification area.  

Lesson Six: The edTPA Privileges Candidates from Certain Linguistic and Cultural Backgrounds  

A teaching candidate may have carefully planned and successfully taught an
effective “learning segment” but unless the candidate has also learned the language of the edTPA exam, followed particular directives, understood rubric objectives, and crafted their commentary by thoroughly reflecting the terminology designed and used by SCALE, she or he risks a failing score. This goal of learning the language of a teacher “bar exam” specifically disadvantages teacher candidates of color, as noted by Christine D. Clayton, Department chair of the Pace University School of Education:

Recent data from other states (where the assessment is not a certification exam) indicate that some groups, including teaching candidates of color and those from linguistic minority groups, were failing edTPA at disproportionate rates. Other reports showed evidence of candidates who performed well on edTPA, but did not earn fair supervision reports when actually teaching students.26

Wayne Au, associate professor in the education program at the University of Washington, expresses a legitimate concern, “Given the severe lack of teachers of color and teachers from working-class backgrounds, I wonder if the edTPA will systematically reproduce race and class inequalities, like every other high-stakes standardized test.”27

Lesson Seven: The edTPA Technology Requirements Privilege Certain Candidates and Institutions

The edTPA requirements assume that institutions have the technology that candidates need to complete their portfolio; it is also assumed that candidates possess the technology skills needed to create and share their edTPA portfolio. Purchasing or renting the required recording device for the taping of learning segments creates a financial burden on many candidates and institutions of higher education. Furthermore, the use of technology can prove challenging even to those with basic familiarity with the equipment. Teacher candidates must have the digital literacy skills to not only know how to use the device appropriately but they must also know how to “compress” and upload their videos according the required Pearson specifications. There are many issues related to the video component of the edTPA portfolio, from the quality of the recording to technical problems during the videotaping process.28 One City University of New York teacher candidate contacted her supervisor about her learning segment. She explained that even though the lesson she taught went well and she pleased with the work her
students had produced, she was not able use a video clip from that particular lesson because her camera ran out of battery and her backup recording device ran out of hard drive space.

Other candidates reported technical issues in the uploading of their portfolios to the edTPA platform. Students have reported it taking them approximately two hours to review all the prompts, submit all the sections, and to upload their materials to meet the specific criteria, which include everything from the size and style of the font to the specifications for compressing and uploading videos.

"The moral of this story is to predict what the raters might want, and give it to them, no matter how relentlessly repetitive and monotonous..."

BUYER BEWARE

The practical and ethical implications for implementing the edTPA are complex and significant. From our experiences in New York State, it is arguable whether or not the edTPA adequately assesses teacher performance. However, what we can say with certainty is that the edTPA privileges student teacher placements; shifts student teaching of candidates to test prep by candidates; has inherent inconsistencies in the scoring by Pearson; privileges certain candidates and higher education institutions; and makes assumptions about candidates’ technology access and skills.

As teacher educators, we have learned significant lessons, and so have our teacher candidates. “The moral of this story is to predict what the raters might want, and give it to them, no matter how relentlessly repetitive and monotonous the rubrics may be.” A follow-up lesson is that the teacher candidates do truly “perform” on this test, determined to create a show that their audience will like. With edTPA portfolios being outsourced nationally, teacher candidates can only hope that their performance earns them applause from the lone worker being paid $75 per portfolio. Although currently the edTPA is being used by more than 70 percent of teacher certification programs in the country, the flaws are evident. A word of advice from New York: Buyer beware.

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The Public University: Recalling Higher Education’s Democratic Purpose

by Michael T. Benson and Hal R. Boyd

The modern university has been called, “a series of separate schools and departments held together by a central heating system,” and, in a play on this line, “a series of individual faculty entrepreneurs held together by a common grievance over parking.”¹ Whether parking, heating, or, more probable today, WiFi, these tongue-in-cheek caricatures belie a more serious worry that higher education is rudderless, lacking a unifying raison d’etre. Across the U.S., pockets of politicians view higher education in economic terms, seeking to peg public funding to the size of post-graduation salaries or other criteria ostensibly focused on outcomes more than inputs.² Professors and administrators, at times at odds with this perspective on higher education, see cultivating critical thinking as college’s central purpose.³ Meanwhile, student feedback demonstrates the vital role relationships play in university life.⁴ These and other visions of higher education may initially appear to conflict; yet, we argue that they often operate in concert to serve higher education’s broader public purpose—that of supporting our national democracy.

In Derek Bok’s Higher Education in America, the former president of Harvard University divides the historical aims of the American academy into several distinct periods.⁵ “Until the Civil War,” he writes, “most colleges in this country

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[had] only one aim—to educate an elite group of young men for the learned professions and positions of leadership in society.  

Institutions such as Harvard and Yale strove to “discipline the mind and build the character of their students” through “strict disciplinary code[s]” and “compulsory attendance at chapel.” In the early years of the Republic, however, this monolithic, ecclesiastical form of education began to bifurcate. By the mid-19th century, new ideas about the role of college gained support.

As industrialization and agriculture expanded, demand increased for training in the so-called practical sciences. Benjamin Franklin and the leaders of what became the University of Pennsylvania had anticipated this shift by founding an institution to teach “those things that are likely to be most useful,” in addition to the “most ornamental.” This kind of vocational-minded schooling would later inspire the Morrill Land-Grant Act of 1862 (discussed below), which subsidized the creation of public agricultural and industrial colleges across the U.S. Within only a few decades, other pragmatic programs launched in “domestic science, engineering, business administration, physical education, teacher training, and sanitation and public health.”

Around the same time, historically black colleges and universities (HBCUs) proliferated as a result of the Second Morrill Act. The Act required states to either eliminate race as part of admissions criteria or provide a separate state-sponsored institution for African Americans. Finally, in the late 19th century, universities undertook more rigorous scientific research. In 1873, the wealthy bachelor Johns Hopkins bequeathed his fortune to fund a college that made its purpose the discovery of new knowledge. Other schools such as Harvard and the University of Chicago followed by awarding Ph.D. degrees and engaging in extensive scientific inquiry. The American research university was born.

Today, many post-secondary schools trace their origins to one or more of the aforementioned movements. However, in narrating the sweeping genesis of contemporary higher education, scholars tend to overlook the democratic ethos woven into its history. In this article we highlight three figures—George Washington, Justin S. Morrill, and Harry S. Truman—and discuss how they envisioned higher education fostering more fulsome democratic engagement, raising the country’s global reputation, cultivating goodwill between states and nations, and expanding opportunities for more Americans. From the founding years of the early Republic, to the Civil War and World War II, they lived during some of America’s most

In narrating the sweeping genesis of higher education, scholars tend to overlook the democratic ethos woven into its history.
tumultuous times. Their efforts solidified the long-standing democratic purpose of higher education that still informs its mission today. And yet, as we discuss, when it comes to increasing opportunities for the most economically disadvantaged, higher education desperately needs to regain this democratic vision.

**George Washington and the National University**

Some of America’s greatest proponents of public higher education were themselves not college graduates. Harry S. Truman, for example, was the only U. S. president of the 20th century without a college degree, yet he established the highly influential Commission on Higher Education and helped administer the G.I. Bill. These initiatives marked “a substantial shift in the nation’s expectation about who should attend college.” Likewise, U.S. Senator Justin S. Morrill of Vermont was a self-educated merchant and the champion of legislation that helped establish public universities in every state in the union. George Washington’s schooling was similarly limited, but he became the early Republic’s most prominent proponent of a national university and, among the founders, was arguably second only to Thomas Jefferson in promoting civic-minded higher education.

From the beginning of Washington’s presidency to the end of his life, establishing a national university remained a primary focus. Not only did he publicly promote the idea, but he also donated seed money. Washington’s rhetoric on the subject suggests he hoped a national university would assuage inter-colonial discord and ensure that the nation’s future leaders learned a uniquely American political curriculum. In his mind, teaching republican principles and constitutional governance was as vital to protecting liberty as maintaining a skilled army.

Furthermore, Washington’s own lack of formal education likely influenced his crusade to secure for others (albeit exclusively white males) the opportunities he himself never possessed. As one biographer observed, not attending college was “a deficiency that haunted him throughout his subsequent career.” Whether haunting or not, his academic background differed from those around him. Thomas Jefferson, for example, studied at the College of William and Mary and read law under the famous George Wythe; John Adams attended Harvard and learned law from John Putnam; James Madison went to the College of New Jersey (now Princeton) and spent a post-graduate stint studying with the school’s president when it comes to increasing opportunities for the most economically disadvantaged, higher education desperately needs to regain this democratic vision.
John Witherspoon. Both Alexander Hamilton and John Jay attended King's College (now Columbia). Washington undoubtedly observed the role that his colleagues' educations had on our nation's founding.  

Although the idea of a national university was discussed by Benjamin Rush and later by the delegates at the Constitutional Convention in 1787, Washington resurrected the proposition throughout his presidency. In his First Annual Message to Congress he observed, “There is nothing which can better deserve your patronage than the promotion of Science and Literature.” The acquisition of knowledge, he continued, was the “surest basis of public happiness” and essential to the “security of a free Constitution.”

Washington again returned to the idea in his Eighth Annual Address to Congress: “I have heretofore proposed to the consideration of Congress, the expediency of establishing a National University; and also a Military Academy.” As he saw it, the former was important not only for “National prosperity and reputation” but also to prepare the “future guardians of the liberties” in the “science of Government.” Meanwhile, the military academy would secure freedom through creating “an adequate stock of Military knowledge for emergencies.”

Washington wished to insert similar ideas in his canonical Farewell Address, but Hamilton—who helped draft it—thought the proposal was best discussed in his annual message to Congress. For his part, Washington continued to promote the plan well into retirement and went so far as to bequeath “fifty shares which I hold in the Potomac Company … towards the endowment of a UNIVERSITY to be established within the limits of the District of Columbia.” Congress eventually enacted the proposal for a military academy in 1802, but Washington’s dream for a national university never came to fruition. It remained a matter of congressional debate well into the late-19th century and is still discussed today.

Washington understood how a public university could benefit students, boost prosperity, enhance the nation’s global standing, and help diminish provincial tendencies. Along with Rush, Jefferson, Madison, and others, he crystallized the idea that higher education was a public good that could help shape the nation’s “future guardians of the liberties.”
More than half a century after Washington’s death, Congress passed the single most significant legislation for the democratization of higher education. The Morrill Land-Grant Act of 1862 apportioned to each state endowments of land to be sold and used for the “support, and maintenance of at least one college” that—without excluding classical studies—would focus mainly on agricultural and mechanical arts, as well as military instruction. It is hard to overstate the public and private impact of this new “liberal and practical education” tailored for the “industrial classes.”

Today, the original land-grant universities have graduated countless civil servants, business leaders, and luminaries in the arts and sciences. Alumni include more than 500 Rhodes Scholars, 500 federal legislators, 200 governors, and a handful of U.S Supreme Court justices, vice presidents, and foreign heads of state. Over the years, hundreds of Pulitzer Prize winners and Nobel laureates have affiliated with these institutions as students, professors, and researchers. Currently, the CEOs of Apple, Walmart, Ford, Verizon, BP, Berkshire Hathaway, McKesson, and Koch Industries—eight of the globe’s largest companies—are land-grant alumni. The aggregate endowments of the schools total more than $64 billion, and by a conservative estimate they annually educate more than 1.5 million students. In short, these institutions significantly impact the nation and the everyday lives and careers of Americans.

In Congress, few probably foresaw the long-term significance of the measure when it passed amidst the turbulence of the Civil War. If anyone sensed its importance, however, it was Justin S. Morrill, the congressman who championed the measure. Born in 1810 in Strafford, Vermont, Morrill came from hardscrabble circumstances with little formal schooling. He received a basic elementary education and then attended local academies (akin to high schools) for two terms. On the advice of his lifelong mentor Judge Jedediah H. Harris, Morrill took a job as a local merchant’s clerk. Though his formal schooling ended early, he never lost an innate autodidacticism. He borrowed books from Harris on “the History of England, . . . Thomas Jefferson’s Notes on Virginia, the Federalist, and various Sir Walter Scott and James Fenimore Cooper novels.” While working in Maine he took a class in bookkeeping and spent his Sundays devoted “to study or general
We have schools to teach the art of manslaying... shall we not have schools to teach men the way to feed, clothe, and enlighten the great brotherhood?
the Civil War. Officers from the schools served in the Spanish-American War and World War I. In the early 20th century, the campus programs evolved into the now-familiar Reserve Officer Training Corps (ROTC). With the outbreak of World War II, thousands of ROTC officers helped America’s initial mobilization. More than a decade later, President Dwight D. Eisenhower bore witness of the “efficacy of that training” and the “great services” the land-grant officers “rendered to the United States of America on the field of battle.” In addition to military training, Land-Grant scientists engaged in agricultural and engineering research to aid the war effort. Thanks to the G.I. Bill, these schools would greatly expand

**Pitched as a “square deal” for veterans, the G.I. Bill included unprecedented educational subsidies for the nation’s returning veterans.**

as they provided an educational landing place for thousands of World War II’s returning G.I.s.

**THE TRUMAN COMMISSION AND EXPANDING EDUCATIONAL OPPORTUNITIES**

During 1943, the American Legion promoted legislation that eventually became The Servicemen’s Readjustment Act of 1944 (known today as the G.I. Bill). The primary author of the legislation was American Legion leader Henry Walter Colmery. Pitched as a “square deal” for veterans, the bill included, among other benefits, unprecedented educational subsidies for the nation’s returning veterans. The measure passed unanimously through both chambers, and—one week after D-day—President Franklin Roosevelt signed it into law. “Ultimately,” scholar Suzanne Mettler writes, “more than twice as many veterans used the higher education provisions than the most daring predictions officials had forecast.”

By the expiration of the first bill in 1956, nearly half of the 16 million World War II veterans received some kind of educational training through the program. In 1947 alone, G.I.s accounted for nearly half of all students enrolled in American colleges. Given this remarkable growth in the nation’s post-secondary schools, President Harry S. Truman organized the President’s Commission on Higher Education.

Despite having never completed a college degree, Truman, like Washington, led some of the most sagacious and highly educated minds of his age. The cabinet he inherited upon President Roosevelt’s passing included Secretary of Labor Frances Perkins (a student of Mount Holyoke College, Columbia University, and
the Wharton School of the University of Pennsylvania); Secretary of War Henry L. Stimson (a graduate of Yale College and Harvard Law School); Attorney General Francis Biddle (who graduated from Harvard with both undergraduate and law degrees); and Secretary of the Interior Harold L. Ickes (who did the same at the University of Chicago). While a young captain in World War I, Truman grasped the value of a college degree when—as a self-described “old rube”—he was assigned to lead infantry training for “Harvard and Yale boys.” Little did he know then that such experiences might come in handy for his not-so-dissimilar role 27 years later.

“I want to see things worked out so that everyone who is capable of it receives a good education . . . [and] a chance to put his education to good use.” — Truman

Though Truman did not graduate from college, he held strong convictions about expanding the citizenry’s access to post-secondary opportunities. Addressing graduates at Howard University, the historically black university in Washington, D.C., he expressed remorse at the thought that some of the graduates could be denied opportunities to use their new skills due to racial prejudice. “I wasn’t able to go to college at all,” he confessed. “I had to stay at home and work on the family farm.” While some are denied opportunities for “economic reasons,” he explained, still others are denied opportunities “because of racial prejudice and discrimination.” He continued: “I want to see things worked out so that everyone who is capable of it receives a good education. I want to see everyone have a chance to put his education to good use, without unfair discrimination.” These sentiments exemplified the work of the President’s Commission on Higher Education, which became known colloquially as the Truman Commission.

Assembled in 1946 and active until its last report in 1948, the Commission contained “outstanding civic and educational leaders,” and Truman charged the group with examining “the functions of higher education in our democracy” as well as “the means by which [the functions] can best be performed.” The result was a widely praised and scrutinized six-volume report titled Higher Education for American Democracy. The work laid out a philosophical vision for American higher education and provided practical recommendations to confront both contemporary challenges as well as those on the nation’s horizon. “Long ago our people recognized that education for all is not only democracy’s obligation but its necessity,” the report stated. “Education is the foundation of democratic liberties. Without an educated citizenry alert to preserve and extend freedom, it would not long endure.”

Around the same time, and only five years before the famous desegregation
case *Brown v. Board*, W. E. B. Du Bois remarked, “Of all the civil rights for which the world has struggled and fought for 5,000 years, the right to learn is undoubtedly the most fundamental.” These sentiments echoed those articulated in the U.S. more than a century-and-a-half earlier, and yet sadly for most black Americans the struggle for equal educational opportunities was just beginning. In another particularly prescient passage, the Commission’s report warned what bears repeating today: “If the ladder of educational opportunity rises high at the doors of some youth and scarcely rises at all at the doors of others, while at the same time formal education is made a prerequisite to occupational and social advance, then education may become the means, not of eliminating race and class distinctions, but of deepening and solidifying them.” Preventing this phenomenon is just as important to strengthening democracy at home in the 21st century as it was in the 20th.

**HIGHER EDUCATION’S CONTEMPORARY RESPONSIBILITIES TO DEMOCRACY**

For Washington and his contemporaries, the case for higher education was not only about “prosperity,” but also about educating youth for political participation, raising the country’s international standing, and diminishing provincialism. For Morrill and his allies, investment in higher education promised to yield agricultural and economic returns and help the nation remain globally competitive; but it was equally about expanding opportunity for the “sons of toil” and helping “enlighten the great brotherhood of man.” For Truman and his commission, economics and global competitiveness played a role, but more important were the ways higher education could help sustain democracy through global understanding and expanded educational access. “Equal opportunity for all persons, to the maximum of their individual abilities and without regard to economic status, race, creed, color, sex, national origin, or ancestry is a major goal of American democracy,” the report stated.

Contemporary universities still aim to boost individual success. Data shows that, even with troubling tuition hikes, the long-term financial returns from a college education far exceed the individual monetary investment for most students. Campus startup incubators and industrial collaboration initiatives help turn university research and innovation into products, services, and new businesses.
that help grow local and national economies. Colleges and universities also aim to provide high quality general education and create a campus atmosphere that prepares students for life-long civic engagement and sustained pro-social behavior. Aside from the obvious societal benefits that come with educated surgeons, judges, engineers, and others, studies suggest that those who attend college exhibit increased levels of political participation and are more likely to attend churches and become involved in various social causes. College graduates exhibit better health and contribute to the state through paying their taxes. Meanwhile, study abroad programs and international students help spread goodwill overseas as the nation’s research production continues to bolster its global reputation.

By these and other metrics, contemporary universities are fulfilling, or actively striving to fulfill, the democratic missions outlined by the likes of Washington, Morrill, and Truman. Fully detailing the promises and perils of contemporary higher education within our democracy deserves more space than we dedicate here. Suffice it to say however, that in some areas universities are faltering and need major improvement. A recent report by the Pell Institute for the Study of Opportunity in Higher Education says that while the rate of affluent students graduating from college has gone from 40 percent in the 1970s to 77 percent today, the rate has only increased from six percent to nine percent for low-income students over the same period. Other reports have questioned such figures, putting the graduation rate closer to 17 percent for the lowest quintile of students. Even these and other more conservative estimates are sobering in light of the Truman Commission’s call nearly 70 years ago to expand opportunity “without regard to economic status.” Commenting on the state of inequality in the U. S., the chancellor of the University System of Maryland, William E. Kirwan, recently remarked:

Our public universities—especially our public flagship campuses—have the obligation to help expand access to higher education for more low-income, first-generation, and non-traditional students . . . not just those students fortunate enough to win some sort of “lottery of birth.” Our flagship campuses have the broad statewide reach and historic responsibility embedded in our Land Grant traditions to take on this challenge and help reestablish the American Dream for the millions of people who have seen that dream become a nightmare. There can be no more important responsibility and calling, nor a priority more critical for the long-term success and prosperity of our state and nation.

If our system of higher education is to live up to its legacy of supporting democracy and improving minds, we must solve this challenge.
If our system of higher education is to live up to its legacy of supporting democracy and improving the minds and lives of all able and willing citizens, we must solve this challenge. The university, after all, is more than just a place for scholars to share a heating system or a common grievance over parking. It is a sanctuary of citizenship where young and old come to expand their skills, broaden their horizons, and prepare themselves for the rigors of 21st century citizenship. Washington, Morrill, and Truman never graduated from college, but they understood better than most that the aims of democracy are inextricably connected with the aims of the nation’s universities. The Morrill Land-Grant Act passed amidst the Civil War while the G.I. Bill came during World War II. This history teaches us that our contemporary political and economic challenges do not serve as a ready excuse to jettison our nation’s democratic ideal for higher education; rather, daunting difficulties should remind us just how important it is to recapture the democratic purpose of higher education in America.

ENDNOTES
1. The former quotation is attributed to Robert Maynard Hutchins, former president of the University of Chicago and the latter comes from Clark Kerr, former president of U.C. Berkeley. See Kerr, *The Uses of the University*, p. 15.
2. A majority of states now allocate at least some funding for higher education based on institutional performance matrix. See “Performance-Based Funding For Higher Education.”
5. Bok, *Higher Education in America*.
9. Bok, *op cit*.
10. Gilman, “Inaugural Address of Daniel Coit Gilman as first president of The Johns Hopkins University.”
12. Thomas Jefferson founded one of the first public universities in the U.S., the University of Virginia. He considered the university, including its iconic architectural design, one of his greatest accomplishments in life. It was there he also developed a unique model for higher education, focusing on equipping leaders with tools for political participation and allowing students to elect courses. Jefferson’s passion for a civic-minded education is best captured in his famous “Bill for the more general diffusion of knowledge.” While the Virginia legislative proposal did not pass, it still serves to document Jefferson’s vision for education in the Republic. “[I]t is believed,” he said, “that the most effectual means of preventing [Tyranny] would be to illuminate, as far as practicable, the minds of the people at large...it is generally true that people will be happiest whose laws are best, and are best administered, and that laws will be wisely formed, and honestly administered, in proportion as those who form and administer them are wise and honest; whence it becomes expedient for promoting the public happiness that those persons, whom nature hath endowed with genius and virtue, should be rendered by liberal education worthy to receive, and able to guard the sacred deposit of the rights and liberties of their fellow citizens...” 18 June 1779, Founders Online. For more on Jefferson’s views on education and the early Republic, see generally Roth’s *Beyond the University: Why Liberal Education Matters.*
23. Ibid.
25. Statistics gathered from “Past winners and finalists by category”; and “All Nobel Peace Prizes.”
26. Information obtained from company biographies and other publicly available sources.
27. In 2014 the annual consolidated revenues for each of these companies exceeded $100 billion.
28. See “U.S. and Canadian Institutions Listed by Fiscal Year 2013 Endowment Market Value and Change in Endowment Market Value from FY 2012 to FY 2013.”
30. Ibid.
32. Ibid.
34. Ibid, p. 8.
35. Congress, Senate, Senator Harlan of Iowa, 35th Congress, 2nd session, p. 720.
40. Mettler, op cit.
41. Truman, “From Harry S. Truman to Bess Wallace, June 27, 1918.”
42. Truman, “Commencement Address at Howard University, June 13, 1952.”
46. Education for American Democracy, p. 29.


50. See Baum, Ma, and Payea, “Education Pays 2013 The Benefits of Higher Education for Individuals and Society.”

51. Ibid.

52. The United States research universities account for 11 of the top 20 global institutions ranked for scientific research by the journal Nature. See “Table 2: Top 200 institutions.”

53. We discuss these topics at greater length in a forthcoming book on the subject.


55. In scrutinizing the methodology of the Pell Institute’s study, cited above, Matthew Chingos of the Brookings Institute and Susan Dynarski of the University of Michigan estimate that the college graduation rate for the top income quartile is closer to 54 percent while the lowest quintile is closer to 17 percent. See Chingos and Dynarski, “How can we track trends in educational attainment by parental income? Hint: not with the Current Population Survey.” In their 2011 working paper, Bailey and Dynarski demonstrate “that inequality in college persistence explains a substantial share of inequality in college completion. These differences in persistence may be driven by financial, academic, and social factors.” See “Gains and Gaps: Changing Inequality in U.S. College Entry and Completion.”

56. Kirwan, “Keynote Address delivered at University of Kentucky Sesquicentennial, February 23, 2015.”

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I

n 2014, a new wave of performance-based funding for higher education swept through state legislatures. The effects were far-reaching, and much more serious than anything faculty had experienced at the hands of governors and legislators in the two previous waves of performance funding.

The most striking difference in the new state laws is the punitive element. Now, when universities and colleges deviate from the quantitative goals set uniformly by legislators, regardless of individual missions, regions, or constituencies served, state funding is cut. The new legislation threatens to defund much of public higher education. It also threatens to racially resegregate systems, especially university systems.1

Make no mistake. This is a shell game constructed by state legislators who aim to move taxpayer money around and around, and finally siphon it off from higher education.

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Thom Auxter served as statewide president of United Faculty of Florida, an NEA-AFT affiliate, representing 23,000 faculty and graduate assistants at 11 public universities, eight public colleges, and one independent university, from 2001 to 2015. He has been a philosophy professor at the University of Florida since 1973 and is the author of Kant’s Moral Teleology, as well as more than two dozen articles in ethics, the history of philosophy, and the philosophy of culture.
The extreme effects of this latest scheme for “reforming” higher education are easier to evaluate if we begin by looking at the original goals of legislators and other politically influential actors who moved us to performance funding. This perspective is what Kevin Dougherty and Rebecca Natow offer in *The Politics of Performance Funding for Higher Education: Origins, Discontinuations, and Transformations.*

**THE FIRST TWO WAVES**

Dougherty and Natow describe and analyze the history of the two waves of performance funding that first emerged in the 1990s and then again in the wake of the Great Recession (2007-08). They also offer a quantitative analysis of trends (with charts and annual statistics) in eight representative states, which helps to correct the record of what actually has been achieved.

When the first wave occurred, Reagan’s “New Federalism” had devolved the funding of many important federal programs onto states, causing significant state budget shortfalls. At a time of imposed austerity, exacerbated by an economic downturn, higher education seemed like a “luxury” compared with mandated state responsibilities, such as K–12 schools, law enforcement, prisons, and Medicaid.

But there is more to this story than just assessing competing demands for limited funds. Dougherty and Natow describe “the rise of a neoliberal discourse that emphasized the inadequacies of government and the importance of introducing business-like structures and methods and market-like processes into public administration.” These market-driven methods and processes are supposed to introduce efficiency into government, diverting funds to meet other urgent needs, or to save taxpayers’ money, by taking funds otherwise “wasted” in higher education.

Legislators were initially reluctant to introduce or enforce tough measures. They set quantitative targets based on goals that institutions had already identified for themselves, such as graduation rates or access to programs. They preferred to see each institution compete against its own record to serve more students successfully.

The reward was usually a “bonus” on top of regular funding levels. While this seems innocent enough, the camel’s nose is already under the tent.

The Great Recession sets the stage for the second wave of performance funding. As state economies falter and nearly collapse, we find conservative state legislators joined by some increasingly influential policy-oriented organizations, such as the Gates and Lumina Foundations, calling for tougher enforcement of performance funding. Soon, governors and state university governing boards jumped onto the bandwagon.

Legislatures responded by requiring uniform indicators to measure every institution. These indicators, such as rates of academic progress and graduation, were built into the base funding of institutions. With that, failure to make progress means institutions can actually lose the money that funds their regular operation. The consequence is no longer merely the loss of a bonus.
This prepares the way for the era of increasingly severe punishment, with the screws tightening each time conservative legislators reach for their stock in trade: slightly reducing taxes on citizens while passing along large tax breaks to special interests. With these objectives in mind, we already have the rationale for entering the third wave.

Dougherty and Natow interview “over 200 political actors” who were on the scene in eight states at the time of pivotal events. These actors include state and local higher education officials, state legislative representatives and staff, governors and their advisors, business community members, as well as academics and consultants. Their testimony reveals early warning signs of what was to come. They lay bare the goals and motives of policy makers on both sides of the issue. This, in turn, makes it much easier to evaluate what has been at stake in the struggle all along.

Some predicted disastrous consequences for higher education. In Florida these actors clearly believed that performance funding would lead to reductions in funding, loss of university autonomy, and a racially exclusive system.

For several reasons, Florida, where I have served as president of the statewide faculty union, was first to set a policy that is both the most radical in the nation and the most closely watched by other states who would seek to imitate it. What did Florida officials say, as the first wave was ready to begin?

A board of regents official notes that the board was not looking forward to performance-based funding at that time. “The universities saw it as punitive in nature and as a mechanism whereby there would be excuses to take funding away rather than having funding added.”

Moreover, erasing institutional missions from all significant evaluations was seen as a way to enforce conformity. There was strong suspicion that the state’s refusal to recognize institutional missions would establish a one-size-fits-all system of performance indicators that would harm and eventually eliminate distinctive programs—along with the promising students in those programs.

A university official who often advocated for Florida A&M University (FAMU), the only historically black college and university (HBCU) in the state university system, summed up his reservations about the emerging situation, arguing to the authors that measurements cannot be “accurate” if they exclude mission. How can numbers be meaningful without recognizing that FAMU is an HBCU? “I felt that the value added to a student who entered as a freshman and graduated with a bachelor’s degree was a hell of a lot more than at the University of Florida…. These performance schemes did not take that into [account]. I mean, they thought you knew there was this level playing field out there, and everybody started from the same spot.”

THE THIRD WAVE

As the third wave breaks, these predictions have been confirmed. In 2014, at the bidding of Governor Rick Scott and his appointees to the university system’s Board of Governors, the Florida Legislature established perfor-
mance funding for all public universities. They claimed their radical agenda would increase quality and accountability.

The United Faculty of Florida (UFF) legislative action teams in each city pushed back and won enough support from faculty-friendly legislators in both parties to get modifications of some of the most draconian measures. However, after two years of implementation, it is clear the policy is certainly not about quality, or even about accountability. It is political gamesmanship.

This shell game shifts the state’s money from some universities to others: giving meager increases to three winners, less to five others, and seriously destructive cuts to three losers. In 2014-15 its proponents dangled $100 million of “new” funding of front of universities. In 2015-16, the “new” funds are $150 million.

The bait is hardly impressive. A one-time bonus for “extras” does nothing to cover expenses in the $4.5 billion state university system. With flat legislative funding for the last three years, universities need much more than this.

The other category of “new” money is redistribution. In 2015-16, $250 million will be subtracted from some university budgets, “the losers,” and shifted to others, “the winners,” following the annual performance evaluations. This amount will grow exponentially every year. The goal is to shift substantial amounts of money out of the university system while appearing to provide “new” extra funds to some universities.

The governor’s game is to disinvest while appearing to increase investment. He proclaims how beneficial the extra funding is. He needs to convince everyone this has happened although the highly-touted “increases” fail to cover even basic increases in universities’ operations costs. Adding the burgeoning costs in administrative bloat for implementing a new do-or-die performance system could mean encouraging universities to decrease faculty costs and compromise instruction for students.

INDICATORS OF “EXCELLENCE”

Are the 10 indicators of “excellence” used in the performance system impartial in their effects? Will all universities be treated equally with all the metrics? Or can some metrics skew the results so as to in effect create winners and losers?

One indicator is chosen each year by the state board of governors. Because the board is hardly politically neutral, the choice they make could depend on how much public uproar they might have to endure. Another indicator is chosen annually by each university’s board of trustees. Here institutional loyalty trumps the “tough love” ideology that comes with the political appointment. One other indicator is seemingly impartial, e.g., the percent of undergraduates with a Pell Grant.

However, even these “impartial” metrics cannot outweigh the other indicators designed to identify losers. For example, six-year graduation rate, academic progress rate, and average cost per undergraduate degree will predictably push FAMU into the bottom category.

To be sure, FAMU is not on a level playing field. Its students from Florida are mostly drawn from urban high schools and poor communities where achievement gaps have been persistent. FAMU’s students also are often the first in their families to go to college. How can this not affect readiness for college?
Once on campus, many FAMU students struggle to overcome deficiencies resulting from a history of institutionalized racism at the same time as they struggle to do well in college. How can this not affect the academic progress rate?

Meanwhile, FAMU students cannot always afford to pay tuition and expenses—not without taking off semesters, or even years, to work and save. How can this not affect FAMU’s six-year graduation rate?

All things considered, it is an extraordinary achievement for many FAMU students to graduate with a bachelor’s degree. Ignoring the mission of FAMU and dismissing the excellence of the institution are built into a performance system that cannot recognize these circumstances and challenges.

There is no sign that the governor or his political allies in the Legislature are troubled by these racially-exclusive results. For that matter, they also seem willing to live with attacks on other forms of excellence that do not fit within the system they have designed to cut the public investment in their state university system. The collateral damage to Florida students and families is an acceptable price to pay so that performance funding can work as Scott and his cronies intend.

Consider the case of New College of Florida, which is the honors college of the State University System. Last year, Princeton Review, U.S. News and World Report, Forbes, and Kiplinger all recognized it at the top of their national rankings – where it consistently places among the top three public liberal arts colleges in the nation in both academic quality and value for cost.

Does New College deserve to lose state funds because it scores below other institutions in the metric of recent graduates’ salaries? The salaries of liberal arts and sciences graduates typically are lower than that of professional-degree holders immediately after graduation, but studies show that 10 years later they actually out-earn their peers. Or, if graduates choose jobs with socially important responsibilities, their salaries may be less impressive, but their societal contributions can be greater. Should New College be punished in Florida for average cost per undergraduate degree when it is at the top of national rankings for best value for cost?

By refusing to recognize New College’s mission in the system and reducing its evaluation to expectations established for research universities Scott and company guarantee New College’s excellence will be invisible. It has been a loser in the performance ranking for two years in a row, and the financial consequences now threaten its very existence.

**THE CHOICE**

Performance funding today is a scheme for defunding higher education to pay for other state expenses and tax breaks for the largest corporations. Even worse, it is a scheme for defunding and eliminating higher education for people of color and the economically disadvantaged. Politicians are attacking the democratic system of higher education that has been in place since the 1980s when Governor Bob Graham and the legislature voted for an inclusive policy of higher education designed for all citizens who are ready for it.
Today, Governor Scott and the legislature are promoting something radically different. They do not announce or discuss the significance of this change in policy. Indeed they assiduously avoid getting citizen approval for this epoch-making cabal, which already disenfranchises African-Americans and may end by disenfranchising much of the emerging non-white majority in Florida.

An authentic recognition of quality would mean fully recognizing that every institution has a unique mission and a unique set of strengths that could be developed with adequate funding. That is quality.

Performance funding turns out to be a political game that destroys excellence while claiming to recognize it. If politicians win this game, they will take credit for increasing quality after defunding the university system and turning it into the least it can be and still be called a system. But if those who care about the universities organize now and expose the political strategy and tactics we are facing, we can stop them before the damage becomes irreversible. We can reclaim the promise of the universities in a system that is fully inclusive and democratic.

ENDNOTES

1. While there are performance-funding plans for many public colleges and community colleges, the main focus today is on plans for universities. A much higher proportion of university funds come from legislatures, and the overall state budgets for university systems are typically much higher too. If the goal is for legislatures to take back some of the money previously allocated to higher education, the money is mostly to be found in university budgets.


7. For details about metrics and implementation of the plan visit the Florida Board of Governors website at [www.flbog.org](http://www.flbog.org). Here newspeak is elevated to a work of art. Excellence in relation to unique individual university missions becomes “system-wide excellence” for all universities reduced to a number (0-5) for each of 10 indicators. Repetition of any funding from the legislature to continue the performance program becomes “new” money given to the universities. Taking money away from some universities to fund others becomes “new” awards.

8. The governor’s plan to eliminate some funding and redistribute the rest to preferred universities depends only in part on support from the Legislature which needs to provide only minimal funding to start the process. His hand-picked Board of Governors is then ready for its radical plans. The board decides which universities fall into the bottom three losers. It also decides what proportion of funds a university gets back (six and 12 months later depending on changes the institution is making) if it falls into the bottom three. In hearings (June 2015) board officials warned university leaders that the plans they have just submitted are only the beginning of the process. Universities can expect sharp increases each year in the numbers required for success. The first year (2014-15) was merely a trial run to test the plan and to show universities how badly they could be hurt. No university actually lost money. But the board warned (in its June 2015 meeting) that in the future standards will be much more rigorously enforced. The list of losers and the amounts lost will grow. The implication is that whatever funds are not spent will return to the state. The board also voted for an allocation of zero performance funds for FAMU.
and New College in 2015-16. Meanwhile, the amount taken from their budgets for redistribution to others more than doubles (to approximately $14 million and $2.5 million respectively). When FAMU leaders were questioned in the hearings, several board members reprimanded them for poor performance in comparison with other universities. One member made the threat explicit. The board is not hearing the right words from FAMU leaders: “We have to get there or we might not be here.”

9. Now that universities are under the board microscope and invidiously compared with others, they have an incentive to keep secret their techniques for achieving anything. They are also motivated to hide the tricks they use for fudging on numbers. Welcome to the brave new world of transparency and accountability.

10. I am grateful to Elizabeth Davenport, Gretchen Garrity, Susan Hegeman, Fred Kowal, Jennifer Proffitt, Raul Sanchez, and Suzanne Sherman for comments and suggestions on the text.
Invitations

The Thought & Action Review Panel invites your submissions for “In Order to Form a More Perfect Union,” a special focus section in Spring 2016.

Has there ever been a time when unions are more vilified? As the rights of working people to wield power collectively are undermined by deep-pocketed activists, as anti-union opponents successfully deploy Orwellian doublespeak to urge the adoption of “right to work” laws and the rejection of fair-share union fees, and as the casualization of academic labor makes it ever more difficult for faculty and staff to share in governance and speak up for the public good, the Thought & Action Review Panel invites responses that reflect upon the role of unions on campus, the value of membership, and the mutual action required to assert the rights of workers to organize.

Consider the following questions: What does it mean to you to be a member of a union? Does your union play a role in defending the public good in your community, or the rights of students to a high-quality public education? Do unions support educational innovation? As the academy becomes increasingly “corporatized,” and as faculty labor becomes increasingly contingent, what role should unions play?

Submissions are due January 1, 2016.

As always, other submissions about issues in higher education, including the art of teaching, are very welcome and will be considered apart from the special section. New scholars are encouraged to submit, as are poets and visual artists. Please understand the panel prefers short to long and seeks a “reader-friendly” tone. Please also appreciate that specific guidelines around style must be followed. All submissions will be entered automatically into the competition for three $2,500 “NEA Excellence in the Academy” awards.

For more guidelines around style and the process of submitting, visit www.nea.org/thoughtandaction, or contact Editor Mary Ellen Flannery at mflannery@nea.org.