



SECTION 2: DEGRADING THE WORKFORCE

PART 1: FULL-TIME FACULTY

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HIGHER EDUCATION AND THE CORPORATE PARADIGM:

The Students are the Losers

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As institutions of higher education throughout the US and abroad have adopted the corporate model, "efficiency" and profit have been emphasized, while students have been redefined as "customers", "consumers," and "clients." In reality, what we are currently witnessing, as the result of this corporate paradigm, is the destruction of American higher education. University presidents and administrators take on the roles of Chief Executive Officers, and business managers have not supported greater diversity or inclusiveness in academia, whether in terms of faculty or students. The bottom line has become making money rather than educating students or fostering an environment conducive to free intellectual inquiry and development.

Although faculty often object to the corporate paradigm, because of what it does to our profession and to us as individuals, it is important to keep in mind that ultimately it is the students and their education who suffer the most and have the most to lose. There are three trends, dictated by the corporate approach, that profoundly affect the quality of the education our students receive.

The Profit Motive in Teaching

The requirement for profits under the corporate model frequently results in the cancellation of classes when not enough students (measured by administration formulas) sign up. Thus critically important courses may not be offered. As the corporate takeover has proceeded, minimum enrollment numbers have risen significantly. Thus a course that in the past might have been offered with four to five students may now require a minimum of ten students, or run the risk of being cancelled. The needs and desires of the students that have signed up are simply disregarded.

A corollary and frequent consequence of this policy is overcrowding of those courses which are offered, so that students receive much less individualized attention from instructors. Laboratory courses, particularly in the sciences, are a good example of what happens under these circumstances. Rather than creating new lab sections when the demand for a lab course increases, all too frequently the response has been to keep the same number of sections and stuff more students into the lab. As a result, a lab that

twelve years ago had a maximum of twelve to fourteen students may suddenly be taught with 24 or more students. Quality of teaching inevitably suffers but, in addition, students may have to share equipment, and there may not even be enough room for all students to have bench space and suitable seating arrangements. The profit motive mandates this solution, since opening up new sections and hiring additional faculty to teach the extra sections is considered too "expensive."

Another manifestation of the profit motive is that, at the same time university administrators push faculty to obtain more external grant funds—with overhead going, of course, to the university, grants without overhead hardly even count, so far as most universities are concerned—they also withdraw subsidies for teaching and research. It is not unusual now for faculty and graduate students to have to pay for all photocopying, phone calls, and mailings out of their own pockets, even when these costs are related to their teaching and research. Travel funds that help defray the costs of attending professional conferences have been drastically cut back or completely eliminated at many universities. And subsidies for animal research--e.g. to maintain animal colonies used for research by faculty, graduate, and undergraduate students--have been eliminated likewise. As a result, teaching suffers, and certain types of student research opportunities are seriously curtailed or eradicated.

Threats to Tenure

The current trend is for universities to impose post-tenure review or eliminate tenure altogether. The party line is that these measures emphasize "accountability" and guarantee excellence in education. Unfortunately, the results are likely to have highly detrimental effects on the ability of faculty to do quality teaching. Doing away with tenure or implementing post-tenure review will inevitably have a chilling effect on academic freedom. Although tenure is a guarantee of job security for faculty, academic freedom also protects the student's right to hear diverse and uncensored opinions from their instructors. The freedom to be exposed to different points of view, and to information on controversial topics, is essential if students are to have the freedom to think. Learning to think, and to hear views that may not accord with those of the majority, is at the heart of scholarship--it is precisely what higher education is all about. Threats to tenure and to academic freedom are, at their very core, about intimidating faculty, thereby preventing them from engaging students in meaningful discussions about our society, about social injustice, and about the means to redress societal problems. Rather than being a potentially "subversive activity" that could lead students to question and challenge the powers-that-be, teaching would be reduced to the communication of formulaic, censored, safe information that promotes the viewpoints and agenda of the dominant segments of society, rather than conveying the realities faced by its less powerful and oppressed members.

Distance Education

Distance education is promoted as the cheapest way for universities to offer courses and degrees, but the reality is quite different. Some universities (if they can be called universities at all) give all their courses as "distance courses" taught on the internet. Other, more traditional universities have turned to the internet to a lesser extent. Students enrolled in such courses never have to attend a lecture, and their interactions with the "instructor" are completely through the internet and e-mail. Instructor and student may never meet, or even see, one another. Some distance courses offer limited opportunities for discussions with a faculty member and/or other students in a chat-room type format, but most long-distance courses do not include this option. As distance education becomes increasingly common, it will be possible for a student to go through an entire four-year course of study without ever having any meaningful contact with a faculty member and other students. Hands-on experiences, such as are necessary in many laboratory settings, will be impossible.

One is left with the question: "Is this education?" I suggest that long distance courses, at best, allow students to memorize a lot of facts. Memorization, however, is not education. From my perspective, the student-faculty relationship is critical and essential for intellectual growth and development; true education requires that faculty and students together and face-to-face have the opportunity to explore new areas of thought and engage in a dynamic exchange of views and ideas. Seen from this perspective, cyber-education is an oxymoron.

In summary, the current corporate takeover of higher education brings to mind the story of Faust. In contrast to Faust, who sold his soul to the devil for knowledge, many current university administrators and managers are in the process of selling the soul of knowledge and higher education for "big bucks"; and in the process both faculty and students are being damned to hell. The pretense and pretext proclaim that the corporate paradigm is about efficiency and guaranteeing high quality performance of faculty. The reality is that it is being used to co-opt faculty into creating "products"—the students—who will be apologists for the powerful, and who will generate more profits by taking their place as unthinking cogs in the wheels of our society's corporate machinery.

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