

The Joke That Is Higher Education

A popular joke amongst recent college grads runs as follows: An engineering graduate asks, "How does that work?" A business accountant graduate asks, "How much does that cost? A liberal arts graduate asks, "You want fries with that?"

Such a joke reflects the flooded nature of the college degree market. When 2 percent of the population had a degree, those graduates enjoyed many economic opportunities and personal prosperity; but as that percentage has risen rapidly in recent years, the presumption that graduates automatically earn more is not necessarily true. And when their degrees are a total mismatch to the job market, they will have neither a serious job nor a way to repay their student loans.

We have confused higher education for the intellectually gifted with longer education—the training beyond high school required by anyone seeking to participate in a complex industrial, technological, and service economy. In addition, we have mistakenly assumed that since education is directed by the intellectually gifted, that the directors have practical wisdom. Yet the interests of educators are not identical to that of all the students, their parents, or other benefactors—trustees, donors, government, or society at large.

Symptoms of these problems abound. Recent parental revolts against K-12 school boards, particularly in Virginia, is one symptom. What do K-12 schools have to do with universities you may wonder? The teachers in the lower schools are products of the university system. If parents don't like what they see in their children's schools, then they probably wouldn't like what is taught in the universities either.

The debacle of student loan debt is another symptom, which

irresponsible governmental monitoring has brought to the attention of the general public. Add to this the phenomenal growth of university endowments, and the mismatch between what educators offer and what society needs becomes even more glaring.

Something has gone terribly wrong with education from top to bottom. An intellectual revolution is needed.

American philosopher Thomas Kuhn [once contended](#) that intellectual revolutions always involve challenging dominant paradigms. The intellectual world's current paradigm is the misguided belief that there can be a science of the social world in the same way that there is a science of the physical world. This utopian belief has led to the delusion that educators are and should be masters of the universe. The recent silencing of debate is an outgrowth of this worldview.

What role has government played in all of this? For starters, they contributed to the student loan problem. Challenged by the Soviet Union, the U.S. government initiated the first federal loan program in 1958, the National Defense Student Loan, now known as Perkins Loans. The federal government began guaranteeing student loans provided by banks and non-profit lenders in 1965, leading to a vast expansion of higher education.

This expansion had serious consequences. The [laughable accreditation process](#) by which educators evaluate themselves imposed a stifling uniformity. For [well-documented reasons](#), the humanities and social sciences, and ultimately the hard, or real, sciences, were captured by the political left, thereby leading to a curriculum advancing the idea that the Western inheritance, and the U.S. in particular, were responsible for all the evil in the world. Ironically, the federal government was subsidizing its own executioner!

Buoyed by such misguided and self-destructive generosity,

institutions of higher education raised tuition way beyond what inflation required. They further produced several generations of lower-quality—and sometimes incompetent—teachers, who acquiesced to the now dominant progressive ideology, while also expanding admissions to include vast numbers of either ineligible or under-prepared students. They then used this vast expansion to create a bureaucracy, creating jobs for ideologues who served as ideological commissars, lowering standards not only to cover up the inadequate achievement of the students, but also to disguise the laxness of the faculty and maintain high levels of funding.

No longer committed to defending Western values, these institutions stopped teaching the basic texts of Western literature and philosophy, making it impossible for students to understand the values which formed their nation. They further undermined the legitimacy of the U.S. as a nation-state by accepting vast sums of money to engage in [scientific research on behalf of Communist China!](#)

We need to begin the process of retrieving our heritage, providing meaningful education for all students so that they can experience individual prosperity and contribute to America's prosperity and greatness. Congress can help accomplish this by restoring fiscal accountability, fostering career education, freedom, and the promotion of our national interest. This is already present in previously proposed and pending legislation. To that end, we hope readers will [sign our petition](#) asking Congress to act on this legislation.

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