

September 1, 2013

Mike Adams, a professor at UNC Wilmington, responds to a critic.

I want to take the time to thank you for writing and telling me that I should be fired from my position as a tenured professor because I am “the biggest embarrassment to higher education in America.” I also want to thank you for responding when I asked you exactly how you arrived at that conclusion. Your response, “because you insist that marriage requires one man and one woman,” was both helpful and concise.

While I respect your right to conclude that I am the biggest embarrassment to higher education in America, I think you’re wrong. In fact, I don’t even think I’m the biggest embarrassment to higher education in the state of North Carolina. But since you’re a liberal and you support “choice” – provided we’re talking about dismembering children and not school vouchers for those who weren’t dismembered – I want to give you some options. In fact, I’m going to describe the antics of ten professors, official campus groups, and invited campus speakers in North Carolina and let you decide which constitutes the biggest embarrassment to higher education.

1. In the early spring semester of 2013, a women’s studies professor and a psychology professor at Western Carolina University co-sponsored a panel on bondage and S&M. The purpose of the panel was to teach college students how to inflict pain on themselves and others for sexual pleasure. When you called me the biggest embarrassment in higher education, you must not have known about their bondage panel. Maybe you were tied up that evening and couldn’t make it.

Michael Graham on the president's college initiatives.

What was the dumbest idea of the summer of 2013: Ignoring previous Syrian chemical attacks? The □ Massachusetts tech tax? Letting Miley Cyrus pick out her own clothes?

How about this one:

Telling college kids that if they spend six years running up a student loan tab getting an unmarketable diploma, they’ll only have to pay back a fraction of what they borrowed. In fact, the less valuable their degree and the more money they borrow — the more they win!

And the more we taxpayers have to pay.

I know what you’re thinking: An idea that bad can only come from Washington, D.C.

So let me quote from the White House fact sheet on President Obama’s plans to make college “more affordable”:

“The president has proposed allowing all student borrowers to cap their federal student loan payments at 10 percent of their monthly [discretionary] income ... and forgives any remaining debt after 20 years of payments.”

So if Susy Science majors in a challenging STEM program (Science, Technology, Engineering or Math) and gets a good-paying job, she'd be on the hook for her entire student loan bill. Because she did the right thing.

But if Paulie Pompous parties his way to a degree in liberal arts before starting his job in "currency exchange and comestible retailing" (a.k.a. "Want fries with that?"), he'd end up paying back just a fraction of his loans. ...

College administrators and faculty should be very afraid when the left media writes something like [Thomas Frank](#) in his blog.

This essay starts with utopia—the utopia known as the American university. It is the finest educational institution in the world, everyone tells us. Indeed, to judge by the praise that is heaped upon it, the American university may be our best institution, period. With its peaceful quadrangles and prosperity-bringing innovation, the university is more spiritually satisfying than the church, more nurturing than the family, more productive than any industry.

The university deals in dreams. Like other utopias—like Walt Disney World, like the ambrosial lands shown in perfume advertisements, like the competitive Valhalla of the Olympics—the university is a place of wish fulfillment and infinite possibility. It is the four-year luxury cruise that will transport us gently across the gulf of class. It is the wrought-iron gateway to the land of lifelong affluence.

It is not the university itself that tells us these things; everyone does. It is the president of the United States. It is our most respected political commentators and economists. It is our business heroes and our sports heroes. It is our favorite teacher and our guidance counselor and maybe even our own Tiger Mom. They've been to the university, after all. They know.

When we reach the end of high school, we approach the next life, the university life, in the manner of children writing letters to Santa. Oh, we promise to be so very good. We open our hearts to the beloved institution. We get good grades. We do our best on standardized tests. We earnestly list our first, second, third choices. We tell them what we want to be when we grow up. We confide our wishes. We stare at the stock photos of smiling students, we visit the campus, and we find, always, that it is so very beautiful.

And when that fat acceptance letter comes—oh, it is the greatest moment of personal vindication most of us have experienced. Our hard work has paid off. We have been chosen.

Then several years pass, and one day we wake up to discover there is no Santa Claus. Somehow, we have been had. We are a hundred thousand dollars in debt, and there is no clear way to escape it. We have no prospects to speak of. And if those damned dreams of ours happened to have taken a particularly fantastic turn and urged us to get a PhD, then the learning really begins. ...

... This same industry, despite its legal status as a public charity, is today driven by motives indistinguishable from the profit-maximizing entities traded on the New York Stock Exchange.

The coming of “academic capitalism” has been anticipated and praised for years; today it is here. Colleges and universities clamor greedily these days for pharmaceutical patents and ownership chunks of high-tech startups; they boast of being “entrepreneurial”; they have rationalized and outsourced countless aspects of their operations in the search for cash; they fight their workers nearly as ferociously as a nineteenth-century railroad baron; and the richest among them have turned their endowments into in-house hedge funds.

Now, consider the seventeen-year-old customer against whom this predatory institution squares off. He comes loping to the bargaining table armed with about the same amount of guile that, a few years earlier, he brought to Santa’s lap in the happy holiday shopping center. You can be sure that he knows all about the imperative of achieving his dreams, and the status that will surely flow from the beloved institution. Either he goes to college like the rest of his friends, or he goes to work.

He knows enough about the world to predict the kind of work he’ll get with only a high school diploma in his pocket, but of the ways of the University he knows precious little. He is the opposite of a savvy consumer. And yet here he comes nevertheless, armed with the ability to pay virtually any price his dream school demands that he pay. All he needs to do is sign a student loan application, binding himself forever and inescapably with a financial instrument that he only dimly understands and that, thanks to the optimism of adolescence, he has not yet learned to fear.

The disaster that the university has proceeded to inflict on the youth of America, I submit, is the direct and inescapable outcome of this grim equation. Yes, in certain reaches of the system the variables are different and the yield isn’t quite as dreadful as in others. But by and large, once all the factors I have described were in place, it was a matter of simple math. Grant to an industry control over access to the good things in life; insist that it transform itself into a throat-cutting, market-minded mercenary; get thought leaders to declare it to be the answer to every problem; mute any reservations the nation might have about it—and, lastly, send it your unsuspecting kids, armed with a blank check drawn on their own futures.

Was it not inevitable? ...

... An educational publisher wrote to me a few months back; they wanted to reprint an essay of mine that they had seen on the Internet, where it is available for free. The textbook in which they wanted to include it, they said, would be “inexpensively priced,” and authors were therefore being asked to keep their reprint fees to a minimum. The low, low price that students were to pay for this textbook: \$75.95. “Approximately.”

I was astounded, but it took just a few minutes of research to realize that \$76 was, in fact, altruistic by the standards of this industry. Paying \$250 for a textbook is more like it nowadays; according to one economist, textbook prices have increased 812 percent over the past thirty-five years, outstripping not only inflation (by a mile) but every other commodity—home prices, health care—that we usually consider to be spiraling out of control.

The explanation is simple. The textbook publishers use every trick known to the marketing mind to obsolete their products year after year, thus closing off the possibility of second-hand sales.

What's more, textbook publishing is a highly concentrated industry—an oligopoly—which means they can drive prices pretty much as high as they feel like driving them. Meanwhile, the professors who assign the textbooks and who might do something about the problem don't have to pay for them.

Actually, that explanation isn't simple enough. The truth is that rip-offs like this abound in academia—that virtually every aspect of the higher-ed dream has been colonized by monopolies, cartels, and other unrestrained predators—that the charmingly naive American student is in fact a cash cow, and everyone has got a scheme for slicing off a porterhouse or two. ...I

... t is all so wonderfully circular, is it not? We know college degrees make us affluent because affluent people have college degrees; and we also know that we must spend lots of money on college—signing up for a life of debt, essentially—because we believe status signifiers like college ought to be fantastically expensive. Think about it this way for long enough and you start to suspect that maybe those fancy stickers you put in your rear window are what education is all about, the distilled essence of the whole thing. ...

... Administrators, it seems, have understood that the fortunes of their cohort are directly opposed to those of the faculty. One group's well-being comes at the expense of the other, and vice versa. And so, according to Ginsberg, the administrators work constantly to expand their own numbers, to replace professors with adjuncts, to subject professors to petty humiliations, to interfere in faculty hiring, to distill the professors' expertise down to something that can be measured by a standardized test.

It is not until you read Ginsberg's description of the day-to-day activities of administrators that the light bulb goes on, however. The particular pedagogy that motivates this class of university creatures is . . . management theory. They talk endlessly about "process management" and "excellence." They set up "culture teams." They attend retreats where they play team-building games. And whole divisions of them are dedicated to writing "strategic plans" for their universities, which take years to finish and are forgotten immediately upon completion.

Last year's attempted coup at my alma mater, the University of Virginia, gave us a glimpse of how this conflict can play out. The university's president, a sociologist, is a traditional academic; the university's Board of Visitors is dominated by wealthy figures from finance and real estate who wanted (of course) to dump the classics department and who thought the university needed to get with the online thing toot sweet because David Brooks had said it was a good idea in his New York Times column. When the board forced the president to resign last June, they cloaked the putsch in a stinky fog of management bullshit. ...

... The de-professionalization of the faculty is another long-running tragedy that gets a little sadder every year, as teaching college students steadily becomes an occupation for people with no tenure, no benefits, and no job security. These lumpen-profs, who have spent many years

earning advanced degrees but sometimes make less than minimum wage, now account for more than three-quarters of the teaching that is done at our insanely expensive, oh-so-excellent American universities. Their numbers increase constantly as universities continue to produce far more PhDs than they do full-time, tenure-track job openings, and every time cutbacks are necessary—which is to say, all the time—it is those same full-time, tenure-track job openings that get pruned.

What can I add to this dreadful tale? That it continues to get worse, twenty years after it began? Is there anything new to be said about the humiliation that the lumpen-profs suffer at the hands of their so-called colleagues? Can I shock anyone by describing the shabby, desperate lives they lead as they chase their own university dream? Will it do any good to remind readers how the tenured English dons of thirty years ago helped to set the forces of destruction in motion simply because producing more PhDs meant a lighter workload for themselves? ...

For the start of the humor section we have [Power Line's](#) post on the arctic expedition arranged to call attention to global warming. Because you read Pickings you already know they had to turn back. There's too much ice this year. The most in 20 years they say. God has a sense of humor.

Severe weather conditions hindered our early progress and now ice chokes the passage ahead.

*Our ice router Victor has been very clear in what lies ahead. He writes, “Just to give you the danger of ice situation at the eastern Arctic, Eef Willems of “Tooluka” (NED) pulled out of the game and returning to Greenland. At many Eastern places of NWP locals have not seen this type ice conditions. **Residents of Resolute say 20 years have not seen anything like. It's, ice, ice and more ice.** Larsen, Peel, Bellot, Regent and Barrow Strait are all choked. That is the only route to East. Already West Lancaster received -2C temperature expecting -7C on Tuesday with the snow.” ...*

Clash Daily

[An Embarrassment to Higher Education](#)

by Mike Adams

Dear Edward:

I want to take the time to thank you for writing and telling me that I should be fired from my position as a tenured professor because I am “the biggest embarrassment to higher education in America.” I also want to thank you for responding when I asked you exactly how you arrived at that conclusion. Your response, “because you insist that marriage requires one man and one woman,” was both helpful and concise.

While I respect your right to conclude that I am the biggest embarrassment to higher education in America, I think you're wrong. In fact, I don't even think I'm the biggest embarrassment to higher education in the state of North Carolina. But since you're a liberal and you support

“choice” – provided we’re talking about dismembering children and not school vouchers for those who weren’t dismembered – I want to give you some options. In fact, I’m going to describe the antics of ten professors, official campus groups, and invited campus speakers in North Carolina and let you decide which constitutes the biggest embarrassment to higher education.



Professor Mike Adams responded to a commenter who called him “the biggest embarrassment to higher education in America.”

1. In the early spring semester of 2013, a women’s studies professor and a psychology professor at Western Carolina University co-sponsored a panel on bondage and S&M. The purpose of the panel was to teach college students how to inflict pain on themselves and others for sexual pleasure. When you called me the biggest embarrassment in higher education, you must not have known about their bondage panel. Maybe you were tied up that evening and couldn’t make it.
2. At UNC Chapel Hill, there is a feminist professor who believes that women can lead happy lives without men. That’s nothing new. But what’s different is that she thinks women can form lifelong domestic partnerships with dogs and that those relationships will actually be fulfilling enough to replace marital relationships with men. I can’t make this stuff up, Ed. I don’t drop acid. Well, at least not since the late 1980s. But I promise this story is real and not an LSD flashback.
3. At Duke University, feminists hired a “sex worker” (read: prostitute) to speak as part of an event called the Sex Workers Art Show. After his speech, the male prostitute pulled down his pants, got down on his knees, and inserted a burning sparkler into his rectum. While it burned, he sang a verse of “the Star Spangled Banner.” I believe that stripping incident was almost as embarrassing as the other one involving the Duke Lacrosse team.
4. A porn star was once paid to give a speech at UNCG. The topic was “safe sodomy.” After her speech, the feminist pornographer sold autographed butt plugs to students in attendance. I’m not sure whether the ink could contribute to rectal cancer. I’m no health expert. But I do know it was pretty darned embarrassing when the media picked up on the story.
5. A few years ago at UNC-Chapel Hill, a feminist group built a large vibrator museum in the middle of the campus quad as a part of their “orgasm awareness week.” I think that was probably the climax of the semester, academically speaking. But they certainly weren’t too

embarrassed to display a vibrator that was made out of wood back in the 1920s. Keep your batteries charged, Ed. We're about halfway done.

6. A feminist administrator at UNC-Wilmington sponsored a pro-abortion event. During the event they sold tee shirts saying "I had an abortion" to students who ... well, had abortions. That's right, Ed. The students were encouraged to boast about the fact that they had killed their own children. That's how the UNC system is preserving the future of our great Tar Heel state.

7. The following semester, that same UNCW administrator sponsored a workshop teaching students how to appreciate their orgasms. I learned art appreciation in college. Today, college kids are taught orgasm appreciation. I will let you decide whether that's an embarrassment to higher ed., Ed.

8 A few years ago, a UNCW English professor posted nude pictures of under-aged girls as a part of an "art exhibit" in the university library. The Provost then ordered the nude pictures to be moved away from the library and into the university union. This decision was made after several pedophiles had previously been caught downloading child pornography in the university library just a few yards away from the location of the display. The English professor was incensed so she asked the Faculty Senate to censure the provost for violating her "academic freedom." The faculty senate sided with the feminist professor. The provost was later pressured to leave the university.

9. A different feminist professor at UNCW accused a male professor of putting tear gas in her office. She was later caught putting her mail in a microwave oven. She did this because she thought people were trying to poison her with anthrax and that the oven would neutralize the toxins. She was not placed on leave for psychiatric reasons. Instead, she was designated as the university's official "counter terrorism" expert.

10 And then there is Mike Adams. He thinks marriage is between a man and a woman.

So those are the choices, Ed. You can simply write back and tell me which of these professors, groups, or guest speakers has caused "the biggest embarrassment to higher education" – either in North Carolina or in America altogether. Or you can just concede that our system of hire education is the real embarrassment because it has been hijacked by radical feminism. And please pardon any puns – especially those that take the form of ms-spelled words.

Boston Herald

[Prez out to inflate college tab](#)

by Michael Graham

What was the dumbest idea of the summer of 2013: Ignoring previous Syrian chemical attacks? The Massachusetts tech tax? Letting Miley Cyrus pick out her own clothes?

How about this one:

Telling college kids that if they spend six years running up a student loan tab getting an unmarketable diploma, they'll only have to pay back a fraction of what they borrowed. In fact, the *less* valuable their degree and the more money they borrow — the more they win!

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So let me quote from the White House fact sheet on President Obama's plans to make college "more affordable":

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But if Paulie Pompous parties his way to a degree in liberal arts before starting his job in "currency exchange and comestible retailing" (a.k.a. "Want fries with that?"), he'd end up paying back just a fraction of his loans.

Obviously, giving away more money to encourage more mediocre students to create more demand for space on campus isn't going to drive costs down. Even someone as unfamiliar with basic economics as Obama (hello, "stimulus?") should be able to grasp "supply and demand."

Why such a dumb idea? Because politicians' parents don't want to face the real problem: Too many kids are going to college.

"Thirty-percent of the adult population has college degrees. The Department of Labor tells us that only 20 percent or so of jobs require college degrees. We have 115,520 janitors in the United States with bachelor's degrees or more. Why are we encouraging more kids to go to college?"

That question comes from professor Richard Vedder, author of "Going Broke by Degree: Why College Costs Too Much."

He notes that keeping the student loan/grant cash pipeline open means colleges must accept more students who are not college-ready. The result is a surge in grade inflation (the percentage of A's given out has gone from about 10 percent of all grades to 45 percent of all grades today). This in turn drops the value of diplomas.

University bureaucrats know this, which is why the American Association of University Professors has announced its opposition to Obama's proposal to evaluate how well colleges do their jobs.

In fact, colleges have watered down their academics so badly that a private company has now started offering an "exit SAT" test — the Collegiate Learning Assessment — so graduates can prove to prospective employers they actually learned something.

A college diploma has become a status symbol, a sign more “of social class than an indicator of academic accomplishment,” according to Stuart Rojstaczer, a professor who studied grade inflation.

But if you still have to take another test to prove you didn’t graduate with a degree in moron, where’s the “status?”

The U.S. higher ed system does a good (but expensive) job of educating elite students, and an even better job of screwing over mediocre, middle-class students who can ill afford their share of the \$1 trillion in outstanding student debt.

The Baffler **Academy Fight Song**

by Thomas Frank

This essay starts with utopia—the utopia known as the American university. It is the finest educational institution in the world, everyone tells us. Indeed, to judge by the praise that is heaped upon it, the American university may be our best institution, period. With its peaceful quadrangles and prosperity-bringing innovation, the university is more spiritually satisfying than the church, more nurturing than the family, more productive than any industry.

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When we reach the end of high school, we approach the next life, the university life, in the manner of children writing letters to Santa. Oh, we promise to be so very good. We open our hearts to the beloved institution. We get good grades. We do our best on standardized tests. We earnestly list our first, second, third choices. We tell them what we want to be when we grow up. We confide our wishes. We stare at the stock photos of smiling students, we visit the campus, and we find, always, that it is so very beautiful.

And when that fat acceptance letter comes—oh, it is the greatest moment of personal vindication most of us have experienced. Our hard work has paid off. We have been chosen.

Then several years pass, and one day we wake up to discover there is no Santa Claus. Somehow, we have been had. We are a hundred thousand dollars in debt, and there is no clear way to escape it. We have no prospects to speak of. And if those damned dreams of ours

happened to have taken a particularly fantastic turn and urged us to get a PhD, then the learning really begins.

College and Mammon Both

Go back to the beginning, back to the days when people first understood a character-building college diploma to be the ticket to middle-class success. We would forge a model republic of citizen-students, who would redeem the merit badges of academic achievement for spots in the upper reaches of corporate capitalism. The totems of the modern American striver were to be the University Credential and the Corner Office, and prosperity would reward the ablest.

And so the story remains today, despite everything that has happened in the realms of the corporation and the university. We might worry from time to time about the liberal professors who infest the academy, but school is still where you go to “write your destiny,” to use President Obama’s 2010 description of education generally. Go to college, or else your destiny will be written by someone else. The bachelor’s degree that universities issue is a “credential” that’s “a prerequisite for 21st century jobs,” says the White House website. Obama himself equates education with upward mobility—more schooling equals more success—as well as with national greatness. “The kinds of opportunities that are open to you will be determined by how far you go in school,” he declared a few years ago.

In other words, the farther you go in school, the farther you’ll go in life. And at a time when other countries are competing with us like never before, when students around the world are working harder than ever, and doing better than ever, your success in school will also help determine America’s success in the twenty-first century.

This is commonplace and unremarkable to the point of being utterly hackneyed. Everyone says this. It is obvious. Thomas Friedman, the *New York Times* foreign affairs columnist who has refashioned himself into the Lord Protector of Learning in recent years, says the same thing, constantly: you’d better have the schooling and the skills that the entrepreneurial class demands if you want to make even a minimal living. The higher education mantra is possibly the greatest cliché in American public life.

And so the dreams proliferate. Education is the competitive advantage that might save our skins as we compete more and more directly with China and Vietnam and the Philippines, the journalists say. Education is what explains income inequality, chime the economists, and more education is what will roll it back. In fact, education is just about the only way we can justify being paid for our work at all; it is the only quantifiable input that makes us valuable or gives us “skills.”

Quantifiable, yes, but only vaguely. No one really knows the particular contents of the education that is supposed to save us. It is, again, a dream, a secret formula, a black box into which we pour money and out of which comes uplift or enrichment or wish-fulfillment. How a college education manages to do these marvelous things—Is it calculus? Is it classics?—is a subject of hot controversy. All we know for sure is that people who go to college are affluent; it follows naturally that if you send more people to college, you will have yourself a more affluent country.

Indeed, to judge by the popular understanding of the dream-institution, the whole thing might as well be some sort of self-perpetuating cabal, akin to Skull and Bones or Sigma Chi. Maybe

college is able to work its magic because college grads hire only college grads, and after decades of “networking”—which everyone knows is more important than book-learning—they have managed to colonize the entire economy. No one knows for sure how it works, but everyone can see that it does work, and that’s good enough. Get yourself a bachelor’s degree from a “good school,” and those dreamy dreams of yours can come true. Get something else, like a cosmetologist license or a membership in the International Brotherhood of Teamsters, and you lose.

We don’t pause to consider that maybe we’ve got the whole thing backwards—that the big universities expanded in their heyday to keep up with industry demand, not to build the middle class. Instead, what everyone agrees on is this: higher education is the industry that sells tickets to the affluent life. In fact, they are the only ones licensed to do this. Yes, there are many colleges one can choose from—public, private, and for-profit—but collectively they control the one credential that we believe to be of value. Everything about them advertises it. The armorial logos, the Gothic towers, even the names of the great colleges, so redolent of money and privilege and aristocracy: Duke and Princeton and Vanderbilt. If you want to succeed, you must go to them; they are the ones controlling the gate.

What they sell, in other words, is something we believe to be so valuable it is almost impossible to measure. Anyone in her right mind would pay an enormous price for it.

Another fact: This same industry, despite its legal status as a public charity, is today driven by motives indistinguishable from the profit-maximizing entities traded on the New York Stock Exchange.

The coming of “academic capitalism” has been anticipated and praised for years; today it is here. Colleges and universities clamor greedily these days for pharmaceutical patents and ownership chunks of high-tech startups; they boast of being “entrepreneurial”; they have rationalized and outsourced countless aspects of their operations in the search for cash; they fight their workers nearly as ferociously as a nineteenth-century railroad baron; and the richest among them have turned their endowments into in-house hedge funds.

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variables are different and the yield isn't quite as dreadful as in others. But by and large, once all the factors I have described were in place, it was a matter of simple math. Grant to an industry control over access to the good things in life; insist that it transform itself into a throat-cutting, market-minded mercenary; get thought leaders to declare it to be the answer to every problem; mute any reservations the nation might have about it—and, lastly, send it your unsuspecting kids, armed with a blank check drawn on their own futures.

Was it not inevitable? Put these four pieces together, and *of course* attendance costs will ascend at a head-swimming clip, reaching \$60,000 a year now at some private schools. *Of course* young people will be saddled with life-crushing amounts of debt; *of course* the university will use its knowledge of them—their list of college choices, their campus visits, their hopes for the future—to extract every last possible dollar from the teenage mark and her family. It is lambs trotting blithely to the slaughter. It is the utterly predictable fruits of our simultaneous love affairs with College and the Market. It is the same lesson taught us by so many other disastrous privatizations: in our passion for entrepreneurship and meritocracy, we forgot that maybe the market wasn't the solution to all things.

An Accounting of Sorts

An educational publisher wrote to me a few months back; they wanted to reprint an essay of mine that they had seen on the Internet, where it is available for free. The textbook in which they wanted to include it, they said, would be “inexpensively priced,” and authors were therefore being asked to keep their reprint fees to a minimum. The low, low price that students were to pay for this textbook: \$75.95. “Approximately.”

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Actually, that explanation isn't simple *enough*. The truth is that rip-offs like this abound in academia—that virtually every aspect of the higher-ed dream has been colonized by monopolies, cartels, and other unrestrained predators—that the charmingly naive American student is in fact a cash cow, and everyone has got a scheme for slicing off a porterhouse or two.

Consider the standardized testing industry and its shadow, the test-prep industry. One of them is supposedly charitable, the other ebulliently profit-minded, but both of them have raked it in for years by stoking a pointless arms race among the anxious youngsters of the nation, each one fearful lest her dream be cancelled out by someone else's. The testing companies, each of which holds a monopoly over some aspect of the business, charge students hefty registration

fees, pay their executives fantastic salaries,* and scheme endlessly to enlarge the empire of the standardized test—persuading more people to take advanced placement exams, for example, and invading grade schools, where “No Child Left Behind” and the push for a “Common Core” have opened up vast frontiers for testing.

The test-prep people, meanwhile, match them step for step, charging students far, far heftier fees to help them beat the standardized tests and endlessly scheming to persuade new demographics—grade schoolers, notably—that they need cram school too.* Occasionally, news stories appear announcing that test-prep of this kind has little effect on SAT scores, but it’s really the news stories themselves that have little effect. What parent is going to be stingy when their child’s future appears to be at stake? And so the test-prep industry has boomed extravagantly for decades now; there are numerous entrants in the field, and the best established of them, Kaplan Inc., has branched out around the globe and into all manner of educational provinces. Although technically owned by the Washington Post Company, its revenues have dwarfed those of the newspaper for many years.

And we’re not even going to start with the test-fraud industry, which is apparently booming as well, as cases of mass cheating surface at Harvard, at prestigious Stuyvesant High, at the benchmark-crazy Atlanta Public Schools, and in South Korea, where SATs for the entire country had to be cancelled a few months back.

Consider the “enrollment management” industry, which helps colleges and universities acquire the student body they desire. Since what this means in many cases is students who can pay—the opposite of the “inclusiveness” most universities say they treasure—enrollment management is a job best left to quiet consultancies, who use the various tools of marketing to discover a student’s “price sensitivity.” In other words, if you give a discount of a certain amount to a student with a certain SAT score, will that be enough to persuade them to pick up the rest of the tab and attend your school? What will it take to lure them to their second choice? Their third? Enrollment management consultants know the answer, just as they know what kind of discounts to offer in order to maximize the institution’s revenue and boost its all-important test scores.

Consider the sweetheart deals that are so commonplace between university administrations and the businessmen who happen to sit on the university’s board of directors. Consider universities’ real estate operations, which are often thuggish and nearly always tax-free. Consider their army of Washington lobbyists, angling for earmarks and fighting accountability measures. Consider their massive investments in sports. Or their sleazy arrangements with tobacco companies and Big Pharma and high-tech startups.

And lastly, consider the many universities that have raised their tuition to extravagant levels for no reason at all except to take advantage of the quaint American folk belief that price tags indicate quality. From this faith in price correctness the nation apparently cannot be moved—there is simply no amount of exposure or reporting that will do it—and so the university inevitably becomes a luxury good, like a big Armani label you get to wear through life that costs a fortune but that holds no intrinsic worth at all. “It serves as a trophy, a symbol,” the former president of George Washington University told *Washington Monthly* magazine in 2010, describing his own (successful) strategy for making GWU into a top-tier school via gigantic tuition hikes. “It’s a sort of token of who they think they are.”

It is all so wonderfully circular, is it not? We know college degrees make us affluent because affluent people have college degrees; and we also know that we must spend lots of money on

college—signing up for a life of debt, essentially—because we believe status signifiers like college ought to be fantastically expensive. Think about it this way for long enough and you start to suspect that maybe those fancy stickers you put in your rear window are what education is all about, the distilled essence of the whole thing.

Where the Money Goes

The most poignant educational scandal of the moment concerns Cooper Union, the prestigious Manhattan art and architecture school which, from its founding in 1859 up till last year, offered an excellent education for free to everyone who was admitted. The way it did this was by carefully living on the limited funds generated by its endowment. Now that can no longer be sustained, and the school announced that it will begin charging students \$20,000 for tuition next fall. The reason everything had to change is that Cooper Union, like . . . well, like every other institution of higher ed in America, decided a few years back that it needed to think big and embrace change and build the brand. The first step in that process: erecting a fantastically expensive bit of trophy architecture across the street from its main building. (There was also a growing corps of administrators, and a departing president who needed to be paid close to \$1.1 million, but we won't go into that now.) Unfortunately, Cooper Union couldn't pay for this glamorous new tower, and so it had to borrow an enormous sum, like other corporations do. The "free education" thing was collateral damage. Better to be known for "vibrant" architecture, I guess, than for some old-fashioned nonsense about uplifting the non-wealthy.

The story of Cooper Union is a typical anecdote of the age of collegiate capitalism, and it's easy to come up with other examples of the lavish, unnecessary spending that characterizes American academia nowadays, that makes it "the best in the world." It's not just the showy new buildings, but the sports teams that give the alumni such a thrill, the fancy gymnasiums and elaborate food courts that everyone thinks you have to have if you want the cool kids to choose your diploma mill over all the others. It's the celebrity professors everyone has decided they must furnish sinecures for regardless of whether those celebrities know anything about the subject they are hired to profess.*

Above all, what the masters of academia spend the loot on is themselves. In saying this, I am not referring merely to the increasing number of university presidents who take home annual "compensation" north of a million dollars. That is a waste, of course, an outrageous bit of money-burning borrowed from Wall Street in an age when we ought to be doing the opposite of borrowing from Wall Street. But what has really fueled the student's ever-growing indebtedness, as anyone with a connection to academia can tell you, is the insane proliferation of university administrators.

Political scientist Benjamin Ginsberg tells the sorry tale in his 2011 book, [*The Fall of the Faculty*](#). Back in the day, Ginsberg tells us, American universities were governed by professors, who would take time out from their academic careers to manage the institution's business affairs. Today, however, the business side of the university has been captured by a class of professionals who have nothing to do with the pedagogical enterprise itself.

Administrators: Their salaries are generous, their ranks expand year after year, and their work requires no peer review and not even much effort. As Ginsberg reminds us, most of them don't teach courses, they don't squabble like English professors at the MLA, and no one ever suggests replacing them with adjuncts or temps. As tuition balloons, it is administrators who

prosper. In fact, their fortunes are an almost exact reverse image of the tuition-indebtedness of the young.

According to Ginsberg, “administrators and staffers actually outnumber full-time faculty members” nowadays, even though it’s the faculty members who do the real work of education that we believe is so goddamned important. The numbers are startling. While the ranks of full-time professors have grown at about the rate of university enrollment generally since 1975—which is to say, about 50 percent—administrations have expanded at an amazing pace. Administrators proper are up 85 percent, Ginsberg reports, while the number of “other professionals” employed by universities has grown 240 percent. Their share of university budgets has grown by similar margins.

Naturally, an ugly new class conflict has begun to play out amidst the leafy groves. Administrators, it seems, have understood that the fortunes of their cohort are directly opposed to those of the faculty. One group’s well-being comes at the expense of the other, and vice versa. And so, according to Ginsberg, the administrators work constantly to expand their own numbers, to replace professors with adjuncts, to subject professors to petty humiliations, to interfere in faculty hiring, to distill the professors’ expertise down to something that can be measured by a standardized test.

It is not until you read Ginsberg’s description of the day-to-day activities of administrators that the light bulb goes on, however. The particular pedagogy that motivates this class of university creatures is . . . management theory. They talk endlessly about “process management” and “excellence.” They set up “culture teams.” They attend retreats where they play team-building games. And whole divisions of them are dedicated to writing “strategic plans” for their universities, which take years to finish and are forgotten immediately upon completion.

Last year’s attempted coup at my alma mater, the University of Virginia, gave us a glimpse of how this conflict can play out. The university’s president, a sociologist, is a traditional academic; the university’s Board of Visitors is dominated by wealthy figures from finance and real estate who wanted (of course) to dump the classics department and who thought the university needed to get with the online thing toot sweet because David Brooks had said it was a good idea in his *New York Times* column. When the board forced the president to resign last June, they cloaked the putsch in a stinky fog of management bullshit.

When the coup took place, there was at first no explanation given at all. Then there appeared a leaked email from a super-wealthy trustee of the business school—Mr. Jefferson’s university suffered from a troubling paucity of “strategic dynamism,” he moaned. Oh, but that would change now that the plutes were in charge: “There will also be a strategic planning initiative commenced by the Board of Visitors with a focus on strategic dynamism.” Billionaire alumnus Paul Tudor Jones II soon chimed in with a newspaper op-ed informing Virginians that Jefferson himself would have welcomed the coup because he was a “change agent.” Reading these preposterous declarations at the time, I was convinced there had to be some deeper motive, that no one really talked this way. Since then, however, we’ve learned that these people *meant this stuff*. Read the board members’ emails back and forth to one another* and you start to realize that the poor president was the casualty of a long-running argument the University brass had been having among themselves about . . . “the rate of change.”

That the people who hold the ultimate authority at our institutions of higher learning are dedicated to a notorious form of pseudo-knowledge is richly ironic, and it is also telling. The

point of management theory, after all, is to establish the legitimacy of a social order and a social class who are, in fact, little more than drones. The grotesque top-heaviness of the American corporation is an old story: we have more supervisors per worker than any other industrialized nation, and quite naturally we have developed an extensive literature of bogus social theory assuring those supervisors of the rightfulness of their place in the world—a literature that also counsels everyone else to acquiesce to their subordinate station in the Great Chain of Free-Market Being.

And it's that "everyone else" you start to wonder about when you see copies of *Who Moved My Cheese?* in the hands of university administrators—the ones who must learn to accept the precariousness of their economic lives. Who might those people be, in the context of higher learning?

Professors, Of Course

The de-professionalization of the faculty is another long-running tragedy that gets a little sadder every year, as teaching college students steadily becomes an occupation for people with no tenure, no benefits, and no job security. These lumpen-profs, who have spent many years earning advanced degrees but sometimes make less than minimum wage, now account for more than three-quarters of the teaching that is done at our insanely expensive, oh-so-excellent American universities. Their numbers increase constantly as universities continue to produce far more PhDs than they do full-time, tenure-track job openings, and every time cutbacks are necessary—which is to say, all the time—it is those same full-time, tenure-track job openings that get pruned.

What can I add to this dreadful tale? That it continues to get worse, twenty years after it began? Is there anything new to be said about the humiliation that the lumpen-profs suffer at the hands of their so-called colleagues? Can I shock anyone by describing the shabby, desperate lives they lead as they chase their own university dream? Will it do any good to remind readers how the tenured English dons of thirty years ago helped to set the forces of destruction in motion simply because producing more PhDs meant a lighter workload for themselves?

No. What matters now is that the deed has been done. We have all seen how it went down and which disciplines have fared the worst—as it happens, the very disciplines that, back in the 1980s, housed the most fashionable, the most respected, the most theoretically advanced, the most aggressive, the most *intimidating* people on campus. Their heirs—their own students—have been transformed into minimum-wage flunkies. They were once the consummate academic players, and look at them now.

What their downfall shows us is just how easily systems of this kind can be made to crumble. There is zero solidarity in a meritocracy, even a fake one, as the anthropologist [Sarah Kendzior](#) demonstrates in a recent series of hard-hitting articles on the adjunct situation. Just about everyone in academia believes that they were the smartest kid in their class, the one with the good grades and the awesome test scores. They believe, by definition, that they are where they are because they deserve it. They're the best. So tenured faculty find it easy to dismiss the de-professionalization of their field as the whining of second-raters who can't make the grade. Too many of the adjuncts themselves, meanwhile, find it difficult to blame the system as they apply fruitlessly for another tenure-track position or race across town to their second or third teaching job—maybe they just don't have what it takes after all. Then again, they will all be together, assuredly, as they sink finally into the briny deep.

We Have Only Words Against

The system can't go on this way. It is too obviously a rip-off on too many levels, with too many victims. One of these days a breaking point will come, just as it did with Enron and the dot-coms and the housing bubble, and all the fine words spoken by our thought leaders will once again be recalled to make them look like imbeciles. The means by which cosmic justice will make itself felt is not clear just yet: free online courses, maybe, or a national tuition strike, or the debt-driven failure of a prestigious U or two, or maybe a right-wing backlash that finally figures out how the university's economic logic corrodes its social liberalism.

It's easy to understand what *ought* to be done about the higher-ed situation; there is a huge literature on this subject. The scandal has been understood, to varying degrees, for decades. Every example I have used here, every argument I have made, has been made or used by someone else already; after all, the people who have seen this go down are people who can write. The country was up in arms about tuition inflation in the late 1980s. Bill Readings published his depressing prediction, [The University in Ruins](#), back in 1996. *The Wall Street Journal* ran a shocking page-one story on enrollment management that same year. The proletarianization of the PhD has been a subject of countless exposés since the days of a teaching-assistant strike at Yale in the mid-nineties; I own two books of essays on the subject; no doubt there are a dozen more. Chris Newfield's account of managerialism and higher ed appeared in 2003, and Jennifer Washburn's [University Inc.](#) in 2005. Stanley Aronowitz predicted the slow demise of the professoriate in 1997, and Frank Donoghue told us exactly how the end was coming in [The Last Professors](#), published in 2008.

What *ought* to happen is that everything I've described so far should be put in reverse. College should become free or very cheap. It should be heavily subsidized by the states, and robust competition from excellent state U's should in turn bring down the price of college across the board. Pointless money-drains like a vast administration, a preening president, and a quasi-professional football team should all be plugged up. Accrediting agencies should come down like a hammer on universities that use too many adjuncts and part-time teachers. Student loan debt should be universally refinanced to carry little or no interest and should be dischargeable in bankruptcy, like any other form of debt.

But repeating this feels a little like repeating that it will be bad if newspapers go out of business en masse. Of course it will. Everyone who can think knows this. But knowing it and saying it add up to very little.

Despite the academy's noisy radicalism, its endangered meritocracy simply cannot summon the will to reverse the market tide. Despite the extreme prominence of the highly educated—the only members of President Obama's first-term cabinet to have no advanced degrees were the secretaries of transportation and education—virtually no one in politics has proposed taking the obvious steps that are needed to solve the problem.

What actually *will* happen to higher ed, when the breaking point comes, will be an extension of what has already happened, what money wants to see happen. Another market-driven disaster will be understood as a disaster of socialism, requiring an ever deeper penetration of the university by market rationality. Trustees and presidents will redouble their efforts to achieve some ineffable "excellence" they associate with tech and architecture and corporate sponsorships. There will be more standardized tests, and more desperate test-prep. The curriculum will be brought into a tighter orbit around the needs of business, just like Thomas

Friedman wants it to be. Professors will continue to plummet in status and power, replaced by adjuncts in more and more situations. An all-celebrity system, made possible by online courses or some other scheme, will finally bring about a mass faculty extinction—a cataclysm that will miraculously spare university administrations. And a quality education in the humanities will once again become a rich kid's prerogative.

And so we end with dystopia, with a race to the free-market bottom. What makes it a tragedy is that President Obama is right about education's importance. Not because college augments our future earning power, or helps us compete with Bangladesh, but because the pursuit of knowledge is valuable in its own right. This is why every democratic movement from the Civil War to the 1960s aimed to bring higher ed to an ever widening circle, to make it more affordable. Ours is the generation that stood by gawking while a handful of parasites and billionaires smashed it for their own benefit.

The only way out is for students themselves to interrupt the cycle. Maybe we should demand the nationalization of a few struggling universities, putting them on the opposite of a market-based footing, just as public ownership reformed the utilities in the last century. Maybe the college-aged should forgo the annual rituals and turn their eyes to German or Argentinian universities, in the same way that their grandparents use Canadian pharmaceuticals to hitchhike on a welfare state that hasn't yet been completely compromised. Maybe it's time for another Free Speech Movement, a nationwide student strike for tuition reform and debt relief. Whatever we do, it's time to wake up from the dream.

* Fantastic, that is, by the standards of public charities. The testing companies clearly see themselves as participants in the larger world of business and pay their executives accordingly. This is why the president of the College Board received "compensation" to the tune of \$1.3 million in 2009.

* "It takes the concept all the way to zero years old!" Jonathan Grayer [told Forbes in 2000](#). Grayer was then the CEO of Kaplan, the well-known test-prep company; he was speaking to *Forbes* about Kaplan's acquisition of a company that aimed to improve the math and reading abilities of kids in elementary school. *Forbes* continued: "In the case of a very young child, he explains, the parent who buys the book *Curious George* could be supported online with tutorial help: Instead of just reading the book to little Caitlin, a tutor might suggest the parent ask, 'What did Curious George learn from his experience with the broken bicycle?'"

* Example: Chelsea Clinton, who was hired by NYU as an assistant vice provost and then made cochair of a new campus institute, even though she has not yet finished her doctorate.

* They were obtained with a FOIA by the student newspaper, the *Cavalier Daily*.

Power Line

[Global Warming Expedition Foiled By Ice](#)

by John Hinderaker

If you want to tempt fate, organize an expedition to one of the polar regions to call attention to the perils of global warming. The [outcome is foreordained](#):

Severe weather conditions hindered our early progress and now ice chokes the passage ahead.

Our ice router Victor has been very clear in what lies ahead. He writes, "Just to give you the danger of ice situation at the eastern Arctic, Eef Willems of "Tooluka" (NED) pulled out of the game and returning to Greenland. At many Eastern places of NWP locals have not seen this type ice conditions. **Residents of Resolute say 20 years have not seen anything like. It's, ice, ice and more ice.** Larsen, Peel, Bellot, Regent and Barrow Strait are all choked. That is the only route to East. Already West Lancaster received -2C temperature expecting -7C on Tuesday with the snow."



Richard Weber, my teammate to the South Pole in 2009 and without doubt the most accomplished polar skier alive today, is owner and operator of Arctic Watch on Cunningham Inlet at the northern end of Somerset Island. Arctic Watch faces out onto our proposed eastern route. Richard dropped me a note the other day advising: **"This has been the coldest season with the most ice since we started Arctic Watch in 2000. Almost no whales. The NWPassage is still blocked with ice. Some of the bays still have not melted!"**

...we'd require at least another 50-60 days to make it to Pond Inlet. Throw in the issues of less light, colder temperatures, harsher fall storms and lots of ice blocking the route and our decision is easy.

So the expedition is being abandoned. Did this experience cause any second thoughts on the global warming campaign? Of course not!

Our message remains unaffected though, bringing awareness to the pressing issues of climate change in the arctic.

Right. Some would say the Arctic could use a little climate change, but don't hold your breath.



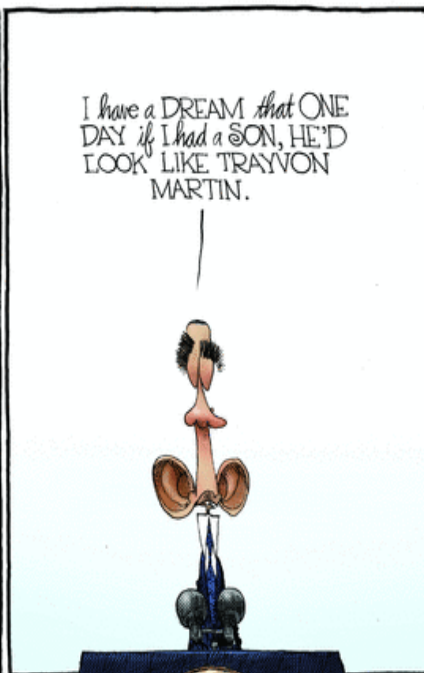
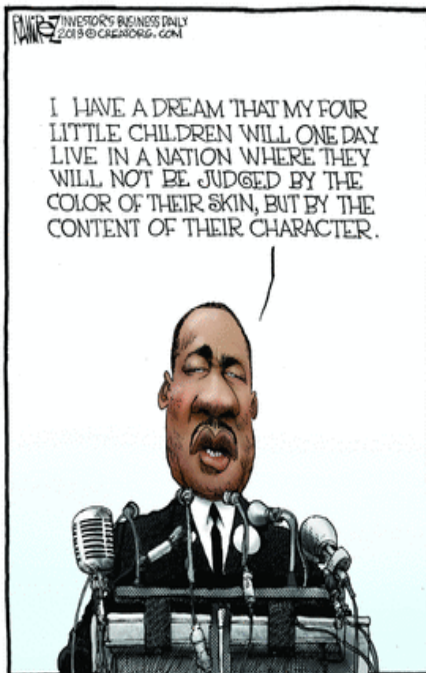




THE POLL RESULTS ARE IN!

9 out of 10 Polar Bears surveyed think Al Gore is full of crap!

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