Academic Capitalism in the New Economy: Challenges and Choices

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The authors contend that "academic capitalism," defined as "the involvement of colleges and faculty in market-like behaviors," has become a key feature of higher education in the United States. This article examines institutional practices in every sector of higher education. The authors urge academic faculty and professionals to engage more deeply in shaping and controlling both academic work and the relationship between the institution and the marketplace. Finally, the authors speak to the need to "republicize" colleges and universities, that is, to reaffirm the university's public purposes and financing.
—Editors

What we are calling "academic capitalism in the new economy" is a regime that entails colleges and universities engaging in market and market-like behaviors.[i] What do we mean by that? How is the present different from the past? After all, colleges and universities have long operated bookstores and sold tee shirts and coffee mugs for profit, and professors have long written textbooks and engaged in consulting for profit.

We believe the difference is a matter of breadth and depth. Colleges and universities—particularly public colleges and universities faced with a major loss in state support—now develop, market and sell a wide range of products commercially in the private sector as *a basic source of income.* This goes far beyond nonacademic consumption items (such as logos, tee shirts, etc.). Today, *higher education institutions are seeking to generate revenue from their core educational, research and service functions*, ranging from the production of knowledge (such as research leading to patents) created by the faculty to the faculty's curriculum and instruction (teaching materials that can be copyrighted and marketed).

We see these developments as the emergence of an academic capitalist knowledge/learning/ consumption regime. By "regime," we mean that within each of these realms lies: a systematic revision and creation of policies to make these activities possible; a fundamental change in the interconnections between states, their higher education institutions and private-sector organizations to support such activities, blurring the boundaries between the for-profit and not-for-profit sectors; and a basic change in academy practices—changes that prioritize potential revenue generation, rather than the unfettered expansion of knowledge, in policy negotiation and in strategic and academic decision making.

The regime we identify is the product of a shift in the nation's political economy and the actions of a network of actors and organizations. For some time, we have seen the U.S. shifting from an industrial to a knowledge/information-based economy, leading colleges and universities to connect to new networks and types of businesses and industries. Some adjustments in academic programming to encompass the challenges of a shifting global economy obviously make sense. What makes less sense is to substantially restrict the academy to meeting short-term economic priorities—and what makes still less sense is to reduce the other significant roles that higher education has to play. These include providing access to the economy for a broader proportion of the population; preparing citizens for a democracy in a new, high-tech, global world; and addressing a range of social problems and issues that attend the shift to a knowledge-based economy.

We have seen the ascendance of neo-liberal and neo-conservative politics and policies that shift government investment in higher education to emphasize education's economic role and cost efficiency. This shift has led governmental agencies to cut funding for public higher education (along with most public services). The combination of these cutbacks, along with competition among institutions, leads academic managers to play the leading role in advancing academic capitalism on campus. Yet faculty, too, are also complicit. In this article, we will try to clarify in concrete ways how revenue generation comes to be prioritized over the core educational activities of the academy.

The salient factors in this shift are directly connected to the increasingly corporatized, top-down style of decision making and management in higher education. Higher education has experienced what George Keller (1983) called "the management revolution in the academy," which has involved academic managers exercising greater strategic control over the direction of colleges and universities. Increasingly, the presidents of higher education institutions are both seeing themselves as, and being labeled as, CEOs. In this context, their faculties have increasingly become "managed professional." [ii] Academic capitalism in the new economy encompasses, but constitutes more than, these developments.

In this article, we focus particularly on the curriculum and on copyrighted materials in mapping out academic capitalism in the new economy, for these are the defining features of its emergence. We open with a concrete example of such academic capitalism within academic departments, followed by an analysis of a national sample of institutional policies and collective bargaining agreements. We then identify the challenges that academic capitalism in the new economy presents to faculty, concentrating on the control of academic work, the structure of professional employment, and the stratification of academic fields and educational functions. Further, we discuss choices that faculty face, collectively and individually, having to do with governance, labor organizing and bargaining unit membership, and educational purposes. In closing, we speak to the need to republicize (with a hard "c," making more public) colleges and universities, offering alternatives to academic capitalism in the new economy.

Department Heads in Public Research Universities

We start with a description of two computer science department heads, drawn from interviews of 135 department heads at 11 public research universities.[iii] From the same institution, one had been the department head for almost a decade; the other, its current head, had been recruited three years previously from a university with a reputation for close ties to the business community. The two men could not have been more dissimilar, and the transition in leadership from one to the other represents essential elements of the story that is told in current literature about entrepreneurial activity in U.S. research universities. That storyline focuses on research, on the shift from producing basic science (supported by federal grants) for publication to producing applied science in conjunction with industry for the development of patents and, therefore, a new revenue stream for the university.[iv] But we place even more emphasis on the fact that the two department heads represent an example of "educational entrepreneurialism," an increasing departmental focus on moving curriculum and instruction to new markets, primarily in pursuit of revenue. The change in departmental focus tells part of our story about academic capitalism in the new economy: the prioritizing of potential revenue generation in a range of decisions about curriculum and instruction.

The former head was a classic academic—from tattered, wrinkled, loose-fitting sports coat and open-necked (poorly matching) shirt, to his commitment to "basic research" and his disdain for market-oriented science, evidenced in this quote:

> Generally, the powers that be favor this. It is encouraged, and it creates problems. It's not the kind of research that faculty think they should be doing in an academic setting. If you don't come up with the answers industry wants you to find, what do you do? I've seen a lot of conflicts. Others say it is the most important thing we can do to show that we are useful. Our department head thinks it's important.… I haven't had the connections with industry. If I had to feed my family and needed something to do, perhaps I would have developed such connections.

Opinionated and outspoken, the former head openly acknowledged disagreement within the department about entrepreneurial directions.

In contrast, the current head of the department—immaculately dressed—did not acknowledge any disagreements in his department concerning entrepreneurialism. He was clear that he had been brought to the university to increase the unit's ties to business, and he listed, in bullet fashion, several new centers that connected his faculty with industry. Yet what was particularly striking to us about his strategic plans for the department was their focus on course offerings.

> Most of the professional colleges want Introduction to Programming courses. We are also proposing an Introduction to Programming for the sciences. If we get our way, we would see another year of three courses across the university. That would generate 30,000-40,000 student credit hours.

When asked how his unit could possibly staff such a dramatically expanded set of course offerings, he replied, "Such courses are graduate teaching assistant compatible." Graduate employees, of course, can be excellent teachers, but the department director was speaking entirely in efficiency terms—offering the courses as cheaply as possible. In the context of a university that had gone to a budgeting system that directly rewarded student credit hours, the new head was seeking to increase market share, and thus revenue. He sought to deliver education cheaply; yet his definition of "efficiency" directly conflicts with the more than decade-long pressure with regard to accountability and quality from state legislatures seeking to ensure that students are being taught by tenure-track faculty. Indeed, the new head's aim was to establish Computer Science as a separate school, servicing all undergraduates with courses staffed by graduate-student labor. Such a strategy was, like his research plans, opposed by the former head:

> I like very much the relationship with other units, and not just sciences. It encourages us to be less engineering oriented in our programs. … I like being at a university. What's the point of being here? I like the fact that students take courses across different fields.

The former head's focus was on educational considerations—on quality education, not on revenue—and on the broad liberal educational mission of a university. As he said, "What's the point of being here?"

This rumpled academic was articulating views that speak directly to the push, from both policymakers and businesspersons, for higher education to produce well-rounded graduates who have learned how to think and have sharpened a wide range of communication and writing abilities. In other words, the introduction of a short-term business mindset within the academy runs counter to what business, policymakers and society say they want from the academy. The academy does not necessarily best serve its purpose by taking on a short-term, profit-maximizing mentality.

In talking with other department heads for our study, it became clear that the new head was not alone in his strategic revenue orientation to curriculum and instruction. What we found across settings was an "educational entrepreneurialism" that was more prevalent than a research-oriented entrepreneurialism at the collective, departmental level.[v] Facing an increasingly competitive internal marketplace for state monies, and with these funds more tightly linked to student credit hour production, many department heads (like the new computer science head) were looking to increase lower-division undergraduate credit hours by offering courses or programs that were packaged in ways to attract students.

In some cases, prerequisites (e.g., in math) and standards were lowered in order to attract students to what was clearly a lower-quality offering. In all cases when deciding on course and program offerings, the driving motivation was credit hour production, not educational quality. This is not to say that the newer courses lacked all merit; after all, courses can be both attractive and of high quality. Rather, the point is that they were not being designed with the aim of systematically enhancing student learning. Similarly, many departments were developing new undergraduate degree programs, again with the principal focus being on the short-term market, with little concern for students' or society's interests being served. As one geology department head we interviewed stated:

> The whole thing is marketing. The whole thing is how many more bodies do you process. Administrators actually use these terms. The whole revision of the curriculum is to attract more majors.

Some units were also expanding their summer school offerings, again with revenue being the foremost consideration. As one department head put it, "Summer can be quite lucrative. Chemistry 101 is like a fast dentist: It can generate lots of revenue." Concentrating on making more money evades academic considerations concerning what students can handle and learn in these short-term summer courses. This attitude also evades quality considerations stemming from the fact that summer courses were more likely to be taught by graduate assistants and adjuncts who are poorly supported and not integrated into the basic work of the academic programs for which they are generating credit hours. Again, the push for revenue generation was leading academic units to pursue practices for which state policymakers and the public had long been criticizing the university.

Many other units in the sciences were developing "professional master's degrees," targeting students for the business world, since they could afford to pay more (not uncommonly in differential tuition) and have a master's degree delivered to them more cheaply than traditional graduate students. These thesis-free, terminal master's degrees were all about tapping into a new market for the specific purpose of generating revenue that would support the more valued departmental graduate programs.

Again, the pursuit of revenue was taking academic units in directions counter to what state policymakers and the public had been demanding for years. Part of the reason professional master's degree programs were cheap to run is because they were staffed by graduate assistants, who were now teaching not only at the undergraduate but at the graduate level as well. Another reason these programs were seen as moneymakers is because universities could charge students more while providing them with less. It is clear that such programs benefit the universities financially; but it is far from clear that business or society at large actually benefit from them.

Not all of the entrepreneurial activity in departments was focused on curriculum. Some units were directly involved in fundraising, particularly focusing on private-sector industries to which their departments were linked. Many colleges, and even some departments, had formed advisory boards on which representatives of key industries as well as wealthy individuals sat. Although these boards served primarily in a fundraising capacity, they also clearly influenced the conceptualization and development of new programs and activities by the academic units. Increasingly, part of the calculus was the consideration of how this will play in the corporate marketplace and whether it will generate new revenue in the short term.

Academic Capitalism in the New Economy in Other Institutional Sectors

Our department head study concentrated on public research universities. But similar patterns of "instructional capitalism" can be found in other sectors of higher education.[vi] Most public universities, for example, are experiencing similar types of market-focused curricular orientation in their undergraduate and master's programs. And less-selective liberal arts colleges are reducing their emphasis on the liberal arts and developing new market and employment-oriented programs, particularly in business.[vii]

In the two-year sector, institutions have pursued the marketplace even more aggressively. The growth area of programs and enrollment is in contract education and certificates that are geared to particular companies and to short-term employment needs.[viii] As the balance of emphasis shifts to these programs, it shifts away from providing access for underserved populations to the kind of broad-based educational programs that enable them to reach their full potential in the new economy. Ultimately, we all pay a price if community colleges fail to perform this function. Democracy's colleges are increasingly being driven by a focus on servicing the economy and industry, and not just locally.[ix] One remarkable development is the rapid entry of community colleges into the market for international students, eschewing their historical focus on local, underserved populations, largely because they can charge these students much more in tuition than what locals pay.

Along these same lines, in both two- and comprehensive four-year institutions, particularly in the public sector, there is also an increasing investment in distance education at the expense of the underserved. With new information and instructional technologies, there is the promise of increased efficiencies in producing student credit hours. There is also the promise of being able to deliver education to new student markets, particularly to those that are more able to pay. The revenue focus that is central to these activities may well result in diverting attention and resources away from providing access to underserved minority and low-income populations and toward student populations that are more likely to be Anglo, employed and already successful in and served by the educational system. Indeed, reports from the U.S. Department of Education's National Center for Education Statistics point to just this pattern in online education. With this market calculus, the very meaning of "access" shifts to "accessibility." The idea is to make higher education more physically accessible and convenient to employed persons in business, as opposed to enhancing access for those students who face cultural, social and economic barriers to entry.

Again, what is problematic is the shifting balance of emphasis that takes public higher education away from expanding educational and economic opportunities for underserved populations. It serves all of our interests to grow the middle class. But given the ongoing digital divide in American society, the push to deliver education online promises to focus more educational resources on populations that are already part of the middle class, rather than on working- and lower-class populations, in ways that will expand and enrich our economy more broadly.

With the move to expand distance education and online courses and programs, there is an increasing orientation towards generating revenue from educational materials. In fact, some institutions, such as Columbia, New York University, Temple and the University of Maryland, have undertaken for-profit, online initiatives.[x] Although several of these efforts have failed, essentially going bankrupt, institutions continue to emphasize the market potential of various copyrighted materials, courses and programs. This pattern is evident in the institutional policies of a wide range of colleges and universities, which have become like venture capitalists—investing public monies in the potential benefits of an online industry that has thus far proven even less successful than the dot.com industry. Part of the problem with this activity is the lack of accountability in the use of public monies in what thus far have been high-risk, low-return ventures.

(Re)negotiating Institutional Policies and the Pursuit of Revenue from Copyrightable Educational Materials

The commercialization of copyrightable educational materials has involved a rewriting of marketplace "rules" to facilitate the entry of academic institutions into the private-sector marketplace. Traditionally, it has been typical for individual academics to make their own connections to control the commercial use of their copyrightable educational products, such as books and articles. Under an academic capitalism regime, institutional policies are created to give colleges and universities, rather than individual academics, ownership and royalty claims relative to the intellectual products of faculty and employees.

At the federal level, legislation has been enacted that furthers institutional interests with regard to intellectual property. The Digital Performance in Sound Recording Act of 1995 made illegal the use of the Internet and other new technologies to bypass the music industry, an extension of existing copyright protection laws. The Telecommunications Act of 1996 stimulated the expansion of e-business by deregulating monopolies in both the technology and business realms. The Act fostered cooperation across public- and private-sector boundaries and facilitated the commercialization of copyrightable educational materials. Similarly, the Technology, Education and Copyright Harmonization Act of 2002 modified previous restrictions on distance education and provided colleges and universities with effective encouragement to develop the internal capacity and infrastructure for monitoring and managing the commercialization of copyrightable educational materials.

Consistent with the pattern in federal legislation, recent years have also witnessed a change in—some would argue a relaxation of—accreditation standards of the various voluntary accrediting associations. This enables and facilitates academic capitalism in the realm of copyrighted educational materials and programs. For example, there has been a shift to an "outcomes" model of assessment (e.g., judging institutional quality on the basis of student test scores) versus "input-based" assessment (e.g., evaluating the institutional structures and processes that promote quality education). Today, the accrediting agencies are placing much less emphasis on requiring institutions to have strong, shared governance procedures, a preponderance of full-time faculty, extensive library facilities or face-to-face instruction; instead, these agencies are concentrating on quantitative measures of student performance, such as minimal test scores and maximum graduation rates. Such changes are, in part, connected to a changing political and professional context; they are also directly related to the lobbying efforts of proprietary universities that simply could not meet the old requirements. These changing requirements facilitate a range of academic capitalist practices, including increased managerial aggressiveness to achieve service and labor cost "efficiencies."

The changes seen over time in federal law and regional accreditation standards are evident as well in the institutional policies and collective bargaining agreements of colleges and universities. We undertook an analysis of the copyright policies of two sets of institutions—non-unionized public and private universities in six states (California, Florida, Missouri, New York, Texas and Utah) and a national sample of over 300 collective bargaining agreements (drawn from the Higher Education Contract Analysis System, jointly produced by the National Education Association and the American Federation of Teachers, but also including contracts bargained by other associations/unions).

In examining the content of copyright policies in both non-unionized and unionized institutions, we found several patterns had emerged that clearly pointed to the increased aggressiveness of colleges and universities in seeking to commercialize copyrightable educational materials. Policies are increasingly incorporating terminology like "work-for-hire" and "within the scope of employment," embedded in the 1976 Copyright Act, terms that extend institutions' ownership claims to the intellectual products of their employees. Some of the most widespread language found in the contracts (three-quarters of those with intellectual property provisions) has to do with "use of institutional resources" in creating the products. Put in the context of the increased emphasis on the use of technology in instruction, such language is critical. More often than not, there is an underlying equation to the policies: If the faculty member uses institutional technology to create the materials, those materials are then owned by the institution. The idea has an impact on all instruction, not just online courses, because the presumption is that better teaching comes through the use of technology.

The intellectual property policies and collective bargaining agreements also make clear that institutions are increasingly investing in the development of an internal capacity to produce copyrightable educational materials, apart from materials created by full-time faculty. In other words, academic capitalism in the new economy is not just a matter of institutions seeking to commercialize and capitalize on the intellectual products of individual faculty; it also involves bringing new actors (less independent adjunct faculty and professional staff) into the process by which instruction is developed and delivered. That leads us into our discussion of the challenges and choices that are presented to faculty, collectively and individually, with the emergence and growth of academic capitalism in the new economy.

Challenges and Choices for the Academic Workforce

Academic capitalism in the new economy presents significant challenges and choices to academic labor collectively, as well as to individual academics. In particular, we speak to three interrelated features of the commercialization of curriculum in the academy. First, strategic decisions about the development, investment in and delivery of curriculum are being increasingly driven by short-term market considerations—and are made outside the purview of shared governance.

Second, the structure of professional employment on campus is changing in ways that move faculty away from the center of academic decision making and unbundle the involvement of full-time faculty in the curriculum. For example, other professionals (e.g., in teaching centers) are increasingly being identified as “the experts” with regard to pedagogy; the emphasis is on learning, not teaching (making the teacher less central to the process); and the curriculum is being divided into a set of tasks performed by various personnel rather than all being performed by the single faculty member who is developing the course.

Third, commercialization of the curriculum is moving institutions away from a commitment to providing access to underserved low-income and minority students and toward an investment in providing convenient accessibility and continuing education to student populations that are not only more advantaged but are already being served in our higher education system. In short, the emphasis is on students who cost less to serve and who can afford to pay more, at the expense of less privileged and historically underserved student populations.

Challenges to the curricular centrality of academics and academic considerations
Academic capitalism in the new economy involves academic managers (particularly presidents and provosts, as well as academic deans) playing a more active role in shaping the curricular configuration of colleges and universities. Such strategic shaping can take various forms. One relatively indirect form of shaping the curriculum lies in a system of budget allocation mechanisms and incentives that involve turning the academy internally into a competitive marketplace for centrally allocated resources. As referenced earlier, this encourages departments to redesign their requirements and curriculum in ways that are driven more by short-term market than by educational considerations. The incentive is to move toward curricular offerings and delivery systems that maximize student numbers and cost efficiencies, even if they are at the expense of educational quality considerations.

Such budgeting mechanisms are part of a "management revolution" in U.S. higher education that seeks to connect more closely with external markets and to move internally toward market-based processes and criteria in allocating resources and evaluating academic units and programs.[xi] With such mechanisms comes greater managerial influence in strategic decision making, resource allocation and curricular change. Moreover, even when academics are involved in academic assessment of programs, market-based criteria are central to the process.

A more direct process by which academic managers shape curriculum is through their decisions about which programs to develop and how they will be delivered. Just as most colleges and universities have experienced institutional restructuring in recent years—with an assessment of existing programs—so too, in most institutions, have academic managers undertaken decisions about creating new programs and about whether to deliver current or new programs by means of unconventional delivery systems, particularly through distance learning and online courses and programs. Even as most higher education institutions in the U.S. experience a degree of financial stress, most are steering considerable investments to new programs, generally seen as a means by which to tap into new markets and generate new sources of revenue. Those may range from biotechnology in research universities to high-tech occupational programs in community colleges, both of which require significant new capital and monies for added labor costs. At the same time, many institutions are making substantial capital and labor investments in various forms of distance and online education, in addition to technologically mediated, campus-based instruction. A whole range of important decisions in these areas falls outside the purview of academic involvement in shared governance, including decisions about whether or not to use technologies on campus (e.g., WebCT, Blackboard) and to what extent to expand both continuing and distance education. These decisions, like those with regard to the core curriculum of colleges and universities, are increasingly shaped by market considerations, as academic managers (and academic department heads, as we discussed earlier) see these new curricular forms and delivery systems as mechanisms for generating new revenue.

Finally, academic managers increasingly view the intellectual and instructional products of faculty as an added source of revenue. The expansion of distance and online offerings and the undertaking of for-profit initiatives in these realms, speak to the aggressive pursuit of academic capitalism in the new economy—seeking to deliver and capitalize on educational services in a range of markets and with a range of intellectual products. As a result, we are witnessing an increased institutional investment in the development of technologically mediated educational materials.

The changing structure of professional employment

Central to the above-stated processes of commercializing the academic curriculum is an elimination of full-time faculty in their control of curriculum and academic decision making. That de-centering is evident in the dramatically changing structure of professional employment in higher education. It is also evident in the changing conception of how instruction should be produced, with academic managers promoting a model that unbundles the role of faculty. In those institutions where distance and online education are a major focus, this also involves setting up what is essentially a "virtual assembly line" on which faculty members are but one group of many professional specialists involved in producing instructional materials.

In the past 20 years, faculty employment has shifted from being overwhelmingly a full-time position, and on the tenure track, to an occupation in which nearly one-half of the faculty workforce nationwide is part-time, with the majority not being on the tenure track. Of course, in the two-year sector, the proportion of part-timers is much higher, accounting for two-thirds of all faculty members. Lately, attention is being directed toward another growing part of the faculty workforce: so-called “contingent faculty” who may be full-time but are not on the tenure track. Recent research on the newest cohorts of faculty hires has found that most are not on the tenure track.[xii]

What we are witnessing is more than just a short-term managerial commitment to cheaper employees in tight financial times; rather, it is the emergence of a new model of service delivery in higher education. We are seeing a commitment to a new model of employment (part-time) in delivering educational services that matches the so-called “temping” of employees in the broader workforce, particularly in the service sectors of the new economy. Given the almost complete lack of professional protections and provisions for part-time and contingent faculty members and their inability to participate in academic governance—at least in the absence of a union—this shift in professional employment accords substantially greater influence to academic managers in all sorts of curricular matters.[xiii]

A second aspect of the shift in professional employment is the dramatic increase in the numbers and proportion of so-called “support professionals,” namely, those personnel with advanced degrees who are neither faculty members nor administrators. As a proportion of the campus professional workforce, faculty numbers have fallen in the past 20 years to what is now little more than one-half of all campus professional employees. In contrast, the proportion of administrative positions nationally, despite all the faculty complaints about the numbers of bureaucrats on campus, has actually remained about the same—around 12 percent. The growth area has been in the increasing number of non-faculty professionals, what Rhoades has called “managerial professionals”—not because they are managers themselves but because they are more dependent on managers and less organized collectively than are faculty.[xiv] With regard to instruction and curriculum, professional personnel are being hired in continuing and distance education programs at teaching and professional development centers, in offices and facilities that are involved in developing various high-tech and multimedia educational materials for their expertise in the use of instructional technology. In short, various non-faculty professionals are involved in the production and delivery of higher education instruction.

What this changing structure of professional labor reveals is an unbundling of the traditional faculty role. If in the past faculty members designed curriculum, developed the content, delivered the class, did the advising and conducted the assessments, we now see an increasing effort to parse out those roles to other professionals. This is most evident in the case of online and distance education, where we are moving toward the establishment of "virtual" educational assembly lines, with full-time faculty providing the content but non-faculty professionals and part-time faculty playing several roles—from designing the platform and the format for the class, to delivering the curriculum, to providing advice and technical assistance to students, to assessing the students, and to the program as a whole.

In the brave new world of academic capitalism in the new economy, full-time faculty will no longer be the craft workers with control of the entire production process. They will, instead, be piecework specialists. And indeed, the current pay for faculty who develop online and distance education materials and courses is calculated at "piece rate" remuneration. Arguably, we are seeing some movement toward this unbundling even with on-campus instruction. As technologically mediated instructional formats and tools are increasingly emphasized, other professionals become increasingly important in defining the educational space and, indirectly (sometimes directly), in affecting the content. They also come to play a greater role in assessing the quality of faculty work, as in teaching and professional development centers that claim expertise in instruction and instructional innovation.

What is lacking entirely as we move toward this model of delivering educational services is any ongoing assessment of, and accountability regarding, the relative costs of producing instruction in this manner (taking into account growing capital costs and shifting, but not necessarily declining, labor costs) or the quality of this sort of education in terms of the nature of student learning and critical thinking that is valued not only within the academy but by employers and society at large. Ironically, at precisely the time we have established in most colleges and universities serious annual reviews of faculty, we are moving the educational process well beyond the confines of these employees and, instead, to managers and other sets of professional personnel for whom we have very little in the way of ongoing, annual, serious peer review in terms of the quality of their education-related activities.

From access to accessibility

In our view, moving to the marketplace—and moving toward the increased use of technology in instruction—involves moving colleges and universities away from "access" (for students who are not employed and do not have easy access to good jobs) towards "accessibility" (benefiting the already employed). Partly this has to do with a societal commitment to technological advances as a source of problem solving; however, it also has to do with a (mistaken) belief on the part of policymakers and many academic managers that delivering education with technology will reduce costs.

The two movements work hand in hand to essentially reverse a pattern established over most of the 20th century: a push to increase access for low-income and minority student populations. Interestingly, academic capitalism in the new economy involves the pursuit not of mass markets, but of various privileged, niche student markets, with the effect being to change one of the basic functions of most higher education institutions in the U.S.

In emphasizing market considerations in developing and delivering curriculum, potential revenue generation from new student markets becomes a driving concern. Preferred students become those who are willing and able to pay more for educational services. Institutions are not only raising tuition at rates well above inflation and any increases in household income, they are also charging fees and differential tuition for various programs, as well as shifting to an increasing emphasis on merit-based financial aid for students. As colleges and universities look to increase revenue streams from students and to increase efficiencies in moving students through higher education, low-income students are being priced out of much of the higher education marketplace.

The increased emphasis on technology has a similar effect—for different, but related, reasons. With technology, the very meaning of "access" changes. Access has to do with delivering instruction to those who cannot or do not want to make it to campus at particular times. In practice, it actually has more to do with convenience—for many on-campus students and for working people—than it has to do with spanning great physical distances. So the targeted populations are disproportionately employed, and in middle-class occupations. Many already have some higher education. And according to national statistics, students taking college courses from a distance are more likely to be Anglo. Who gets left out of the picture? Left out may be the very populations that we have as a country targeted for increased access for over half a century: low-income and minority students. In short, we redefine access in ways that focus on boundaries of time and space (and convenience), directing attention away from cultural, social and economic barriers.

In an academic capitalism in a new economy that focuses on revenue generation and high-tech service delivery, such patterns make sense. But they represent a fundamental role reversal for the overwhelming majority of public and private colleges and universities in the U.S. And they also represent a turning away from one of the most fundamental, democratic purposes of the academy.

Choices for academic labor and for individual academics

In the face of the challenges identified above, academics are—collectively and individually—confronted with important choices about their status relative to the curriculum and to the private marketplace. We consider three interrelated questions that involve various choices: Who controls and what criteria shape academic work? How do we conceive of and reconfigure the production of academic work by professionals? Should academics engage the commercial marketplace, and to what extent, with regard to copyrightable educational materials and curriculum.

Although, in the abstract, who controls the curriculum and what criteria guide strategic decision making are two different issues, in practice we argue they are connected. Academic capitalism in the new economy involves academic managers arrogating more control over the curriculum. And one mechanism for legitimating, and at the same time exercising, that control is to prioritize budgetary, economic and strategic issues in the processes that surround building, investing in, restructuring and de-investing in academic programs.

Confronted with this growing pattern, academics and their units may choose to play the game, jockeying for position relative to other academic units in a game of "academic survivor." They may take on embedded entrepreneurial values and seek an advantage within the context of existing market competition over what academic curricula and which programs will thrive in an increasingly stratified academy. In the educational entrepreneurial strategies of the department heads, we can see evidence of units adopting one or another of these positions. However, we would argue that to simply play by the well-established capitalistic rules of the game is to cede academic control over the curricula. And to cede the central role of academics to collectively establish the criteria by which the academic program and purposes of the academy are judged is to cede control over the academy's future path.

The path down which we are headed involves a fundamental rethinking of the role not just of faculty but also of professionals generally in the production of academic work. Academic capitalism in the new economy is moving us toward a model of reduced complexity of academic work and breaking down the interconnected activities of professors and the discretion that they exercise in enacting their craft into discrete, delimited parts. It is, in a high-tech world, a reconceptualization of a virtual assembly line in which employees work on separate parts of the whole process. As such, faculty become merely one set of professionals among many. But in this conception, all of the professionals lack a holistic sense of craft.

For everyone involved, professional discretion is delimited by standardized production processes. These production processes are most evident in the case of online and distance education. Confronted with this situation, one typical faculty reaction is to see such changes as occurring on the margins of the academy, not touching the institution's core academic programs. The strategy in this case is essentially to ignore and seek to marginalize curriculum produced in this fashion. Part of this faculty reaction is also to marginalize those managerial professionals involved in the new processes. However, we would argue that to ignore the changes afoot in the academy in terms of the production of education is to ensure that, in the future, faculty will become de-centered and de-professionalized.

We believe that faculty members have a strong professional interest in joining forces with other professionals involved in producing instructional materials. In our view, curriculum should be shaped primarily by professionals acting on the basis of long-term professional considerations as they relate to the needs of clients and of society at large.

Perhaps the greatest threat posed by academic capitalism in the new economy is that it is becoming part of the way we talk about and define ourselves. Many faculty are complicit in the pursuit of academic capitalism. To some extent, this is understandable given lagging faculty salaries. Like academic institutions, we look to generate new revenue streams; to, in some sense, capitalize on our personal production. This is evident not just in the lives of individual faculty, but in the collective negotiations of faculty unions with regard to intellectual property. In the case of copyrighted educational materials, faculty negotiators do attend to the control of the (re)use of materials, at least partly because of concerns about educational quality. But the most common clause in intellectual property provisions of collective bargaining agreements is the one that addresses ownership and shares.[xv] In short, much of the current struggle between faculty and managers is over who gets how much. We see a danger in simply playing according to the rules of the game. That danger is identified by a faculty negotiator in a community college when talking about the intellectual property provision that his team negotiated:

> I guess we are competing in some sense with some big private companies. But the courses should be geared to our students. Our first priority is our students, not to compete in markets.... The minute you get into making a profit, to competing in the market, then you almost change yourself into something you are not.

In our view, that is exactly what is happening in many places—we are changing ourselves into something we are not. And it is our belief that there are some feasible alternatives. We believe that in negotiating intellectual property rights, the interests of the public should receive more attention. What does that mean in practice? It could mean setting aside some of the monies generated—not just for the institution and the creator, but also in a fund that contributes directly in some way to the public interest of the local community in which the college or university exists. After all, some portion of patent royalties are, in some contracts, placed in a "research improvement fund." Why, in the case of copyrighted educational materials, could we not think about establishing a "community improvement fund"?

Another option is to simply say that we will not commercialize the curriculum—period. Nationwide, a few contracts do just that. For example, Oakton Community College's contract has a clause that reads: "Any videotapes or audiotapes made of distance learning courses are for student use, and may not be used for any commercial purpose." In other words, take the educational materials out of the commercial marketplace. Or sell them only at cost. In short, focus our commitment to both educational interests and to the broad public interest.

Conclusion: Republicizing Higher Education

In the world of not-for-profit U.S. higher education, it is common these days to hear of the incursion into our academic jurisdiction of for-profit higher education institutions. Such references are often made as a rationale for leveraging change in academe, particularly in the way we develop, package and deliver our educational "services." The University of Phoenix (UoP) figures prominently in this discourse about the increasingly competitive environment for educational services that not-for-profit colleges and universities now face. One generally encounters in the academy a widespread disdain for the standardized, cookie-cutter model of education provided by the UoP and other for-profit entities, which calls for little critical thinking on the part of either students or instructors. At the same time, however, there is a growing shift on the part of not-for-profit colleges and universities down a path that essentially models UoP's practices. And colleges and universities are increasingly internally driven in this direction, not only by academic managers but also by many faculty who are in some sense complicit in the commercialization process.

These days we frequently read about the external threat to U.S. higher education, represented by profit-oriented businesses. Books like *Steal This University* (2003), *Universities in the Marketplace* (2003), *The University in a Corporate Culture* (2003) and *The University in Ruins* (1996) offer a collective story of this external threat to and takeover of the university.[xvi] The subtext is that the takeover is led by the moral equivalent of the Philistines. Without trivializing the significance of external entities in shaping the academy, our work draws attention to the embeddedness of academic capitalism in the new economy. To paraphrase Pogo, "We have met the enemy and they are us."

In closing, then, we make the case for academics and organized academic labor to call for a "republicizing" of U.S. colleges and universities. What do we mean by that? We mean: reprioritizing institutional decision-making about academic programs. And we would emphasize that the word is "republicizing"—*not* "Republicanizing"—higher education, whether accomplished by Republicans or by Democrats adopting Republican policies. Currently, governmental policies and institutional practices involve making the public space of not-for-profit higher education primarily a domain of market activity. They involve disinvesting in the public interest functions of higher education. They involve demanding accountability for employees, but not for employers and their ventures. And they involve orienting higher education in such a way that it benefits the interests of the few at the expense of the many.

We believe that in place of these policies, faculty and their associations and unions should reprioritize the democratic and educational functions of the academy, in addition to the local economic roles in community development that colleges and universities can play. They should systematically challenge the privilege and success of the private-sector economy that is being mirrored in higher education today, subjecting the increased investment in entrepreneurial ventures to more public discussion and more public accountability. After all, as with the dot.coms in the private sector, much academic capitalism ends up losing revenue and cost shifting to the consumer—in higher education in the form of higher tuitions. We believe that faculty and their associations and unions should redirect attention to just who exactly is benefiting from certain forms and patterns of higher education provision, and in doing so emphasize the importance—particularly during a time in which some states are realizing a new majority population—of expanding educational opportunity for those who have historically encountered social, economic and cultural barriers to entry. In the face of academic capitalism in the new economy, academics and their associations and unions should consider their own participation in this process and begin to articulate new, viable, alternative, paths for colleges, universities and academics to pursue.

ENDNOTES

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