

# Marketization of Education: An Ethical Dilemma

Samuel M. Natale · Caroline Doran

Received: 20 June 2011 / Accepted: 21 June 2011 / Published online: 7 July 2011  
© Springer Science+Business Media B.V. 2011

**Abstract** The Marketing of Education has become epidemic. Business practices and principles now commonly suffuse the approach and administration of Higher Education in an attempt to make schools both more competitive and “branded.” This seems to be progressing without reference to the significant ethical challenges as well as the growing costs to society, students, and educators in pursuing a model with such inherent conflicts. The increased focus on narrowly defined degrees targeted to specific job requirements rather than the focus on raising the level of students’ ability to engage in more abstract and critical thinking is accelerating. The impact on student world views and the lack of engagement with meaningful and challenging discourse has severely impaired their ability to become both engaged and reflective. This model has also impacted faculty morale as concern with lack of academic rigor continues to grow. An ethical crisis has emerged within education internationally and intervention is urgently needed.

**Keywords** Education · Marketization of education · Ethics in education · College rankings · Enrollment management · Faculty morale · Merit-based aid

It is still a rather common misconception that marketing should be primarily focused on admissions. Such a mindset fails to consider that students will often have

much greater value to the institution as alumni. Thus, it is important to establish strong relationships with students before they even arrive at the college, continue to build upon those relationships while they are attending college and ideally extend the value of those relationships across a lifetime. If IHEs do not consider the entire lifetime value chain of a student and connect the links in the chain with concepts such as IMC, they will undoubtedly lose considerable opportunities to advance their institutions. (Edmiston 2009, p. 173)

Education considered in such a context reduces students to a revenue stream and colleges to businesses; this is the contemporary face of education.

As educational leaders seek solutions to the complex problems facing their institutions, including rapidly shifting mission and changes which perhaps capture fewer and fewer qualified students, many perceive the marketization of education as a viable answer. Although the adoption of business practices may initially benefit universities, it remains questionable whether these new approaches benefit students and faculty. Focusing resources to elevate university rankings and to drive student enrollment may improve the institution’s revenues; however, is it wise to redirect the efforts of faculty from their core responsibility as educators?

## Shifting Priorities and How They Affect Universities and Faculty

The University Within the Context of the State’s and Society’s Goals

In recent years, the dwindling supply of federal funds coupled with the growth of consumer culture and growing

---

S. M. Natale (✉)  
Kellogg College, University of Oxford, Oxford, England, UK  
e-mail: samuelnatale@me.com

C. Doran  
St. Mary’s College of California, Moraga, CA, USA  
e-mail: carolinedoran@aol.com

fervor for corporate capitalism have done much to transform higher education (Molesworth et al. 2009). In such a society, students seek to secure a degree, rather than experience an education, with their goals limited to the acquisition of skills needed for employment and maximizing income. Within this context, universities are being pushed to produce knowledgeable students that society and employers deems valuable—not knowledge for its own sake or classical approaches that focus more on the process and ability to think. Additionally, higher learning institutions are being asked to graduate more students while maintaining the same standards of quality, closing achievements gaps, and becoming more efficient and productive organizations (Lingenfelter 2006).

The issue of accountability and the measurement of outcomes is now commonplace in education (Sigler 2007). Such accountability is usually couched in the language of accounting. The kinds of questions advanced by such a discourse include: Does the academy provide good value for money? Is money being spent wisely and well? Is there an appropriate social return on the billions of dollars that are invested in higher education, both directly and indirectly, by students and their parents, the state and corporations? In such a discourse, “wisely and well” are redefined by an increasing concern with the economic and vocational relevance of what is taught rather than by an older set of more liberal concerns. Do students have the requisite knowledge and skills to make them employable in a modern economy? Students may well be versed in the details of medieval history or the poetry of William Blake, but what can they *do*? Are they able to communicate and work in teams? Do they understand business? Do they have the key or core skills necessary for work?

Furthermore, newer economic and cultural imperatives mean that the state’s interest in the university is considerably more intrusive and less benign. Concerns with economic competitiveness, for example, mean that the state’s interests in the university are vested along new lines and dimensions. Because the state encourages or coerces universities to produce graduates who have more useful knowledge and who have developed the right kind of core generic skills, the modern university is at increasing risk of losing its distinctive and balanced character by emphasizing, for example, newer business values rather than the older academic ones.

Society’s relationship with knowledge is also changing: it is shifting to one where society is increasingly concerned with the utility of knowledge. A new model of higher education appears to be developing in which the pursuit of knowledge related to the “practical” rather than the pursuit of knowledge related to what is “true” or “good” has become the dominant goal. The knowledge society is interested only in *certain kinds* of knowledge and values

only *certain kinds* of learning. Therefore, students are torn between self-development and the need to have marketable skills. More so than in the past, students are focused on preparation for the workplace and are overly concentrated on content related only to the job (Molesworth et al. 2009). Such a new discourse potentially rips the roots of the university from its time-honored position.

Universities were once thought of as institutions for the public good, serving the interests of the community and the citizens of the world. A question central to the education debate, with the growing proportion of education being provided by non-traditional sources, is whether education is still a public good or whether it contributes to the development of society as opposed to the development of individuals (Knight 2006). Today education is largely viewed as a marketable commodity. Education, once seen as a process, has been reduced to job preparation, making higher education a product in which one invests for the purpose of one’s future employment opportunities in business and technology. Of the more than 1.5 million degrees that were granted in 2007–2008, the most common degrees were: 21% in business, 10.5% in the social sciences and history, 7% in health science, and 6.5% in education (IES 2009). Furthermore, rather than guiding and supporting the student in becoming more intellectually complex, universities and colleges that are highly commercialized serve to prepare the student to become a participant in the consumer culture and no longer strive to encourage the student’s reflection and critical thinking.

#### The University Within the Context of Financial Goals

The concern of any institution with a strong corporate orientation is to meet the demands of the student (consumer) in the most efficient (cost-effective) manner. Adoption of business practices by educational institutions is transforming the educational landscape. As business practices are accepted in education, students have been transformed into consumers, and, in some institutions, programs are deemed successful only when they drive revenue production or support the acquisition of corporate funding. Many institutions are headed by presidents who are paid like corporate executives, and recruitment of university leaders often focuses on the business acumen of candidates, rather than their expertise as educators or their commitment to learning (Marris 2005).

The changes in higher education reach far beyond vocabulary and run deeply into the heart of institutions. In an environment of academic production, courses that do not garner interest from large numbers of students may be eliminated. To improve the efficiency of faculty, universities may seek to reduce the hours that academics spend in discussions with students, creating an atmosphere of

passive, reproductive learning that does not encourage critical thinking and reflection by the student (Molesworth et al. 2009).

### The University Within the Context of Other Organizations' Goals

Corporations that desire greater tailoring of information fund universities to serve their own needs. But corporate sponsorship of research may be placing faculty members in a position where they face conflicts of interest and commitment. Faculty may be diverted from teaching to financially productive research and become preoccupied with producing research for corporations, securing grants from businesses and engaging in consultant assignments with corporate clients (Kaplan 1996).

In the past, research largely consisted of individual scholars engaged in a quest for new knowledge in their fields of study. Today there are research programs, collective projects with multiple researchers, consisting of individuals who are expendable and interchangeable. Some of today's research programs may no longer represent a search for knowledge; instead, they have become structured programs controlled by management with clearly defined business goals heavily influenced by corporations. Research is expensive and only certain disciplines generate funding. As corporate dollars pour into support pharmaceutical, technology, and biomedical research, research in other disciplines is no longer attractive because it cannot secure funding.

The ethical concern with this research focus, as posed by Yassi et al. (2010), is that the more universities come to depend on research funding from businesses, the more researchers are compelled not to deviate in their findings from the interests of those who fund them. Should their findings be incongruent with their funders, they risk their careers, which raises the question, or at least *should* raise the question, regarding the integrity of contemporary university research.

### Training and the Contemporary Model of Education

Historically, the university was seen as a community that nurtured ideas and innovations, built the morals of its students, and contributed to democracy through producing political and social leaders (Tilak 2009). This is no longer the case. Concerns with accountability, knowledge, and student abilities pave the way for new forms of assessment, monitoring and surveillance, where supposedly liberal processes are valued less than the measurable outcomes of higher education. Given the new grounding in absolute pragmatism, the university is pressured to produce graduates who are ready to blend into the workforce or into those

agencies of society responsible for social change. Curriculum that has been distorted to focus heavily on technology and business has undermined the core values of higher education. The earlier commitment of higher education institutions to a core curriculum is being eroded as they become training centers for industry (Miscamble 2006). The former distinction between education and training has collapsed here into a new hybrid. The study of the humanities may no longer be valued in this new environment. One wonders why though, when the actual outcomes of an effective liberal education involve, "the ability to listen carefully, to read critically, to write accurately and persuasively and to analyze exactly" (Ryan 1999, p. 17). There is now so much focus on workplace skills, that there is little value to knowing anything that cannot help students become more "marketable" in the workforce, garner a raise, or advance a career. Having read the Iliad is not likely to help in any of these respects.

### Faculty and the Contemporary Model of Education: The Teacherpreneur

While universities become increasingly focused on the application of business practices, one might question whether this new paradigm of higher education dismisses what was once thought to be the role of faculty members. In the new corporate model of higher education, faculty members are seen as providers of customer service and transmitters of industry-relevant skills. Professors are often no longer seen as scholars; rather they are viewed as employees with publications (Molesworth et al. 2009).

The new vision of higher education as an economic institution and knowledge as a product is likely to not be aligned with the fundamental values of many faculty members. Some claim higher education has been transformed, while many other and more seasoned academics see it as the death of the university as they have known it. As leaders of higher education institutions grow obsessed with the corporate vision of profit, faculty members are relegated to positions where they are less involved in the mission of their institutions (Thacker 2005). The role of faculty is changing dramatically.

Schools are commonly recruiting faculty from industry and now focus on their industry skills as opposed to their critical thinking skills (Molesworth et al. 2009). In fact, scholarship may no longer be a requisite skill for teaching in higher education. Even though business is the most commonly pursued undergraduate degree, the most common degree at the master's level is education, followed by business. The greatest number of degrees granted in 2009 at the doctorate level were related to health and clinical sciences, followed by education, engineering, biological and biomedical sciences, psychology, and physical sciences

(IES 2009). Therefore, what is emerging is a trend whereby pursuing a terminal degree in business is less common than in other fields, perhaps because so much focus is now placed on field experience among new business faculty. In an effort to satisfy the consumers' demand for preparation for the workplace, colleges and universities seek to maximize their connection with corporations, which may mean recruiting faculty from industry, drawing into question the qualifications of such individuals to be mentors in a deep and meaningful learning process. Moreover, the new financial demands lead to hiring more adjuncts (Meyerson 2005).

In earlier times, faculty members enjoyed significant autonomy over their teaching and research, but with the new emphasis on corporate management, this too has changed. Furthermore, the move to external accountability driven by financial rather than intellectual goals transforms faculty into employees through competence-based audits and assessments, and changes a community of scholars into a training ground for corporate workers with too much emphasis on finances and too little focus on the education of students (Gibbs 2006). More important, professors often feel compelled to focus on what will allow students to pass as opposed to focusing on critical thinking and reflection. Furthermore, because students are so focused on the post-graduation job hunt, they are overly focused on the outcomes of assessments (Molesworth et al. 2009). Combined, these relegate professors' role to one concentrated on grade-related outcomes, rather than on the process of learning.

Moreover, in an environment where higher education institutions have become research centers for corporations, the qualifications for faculty members, which were once thought to be scholarship and the ability to mentor students, are being replaced by the candidate's skill as an entrepreneur. Corporate influence is particularly widespread in the fields of medicine, biotechnology, and pharmacology. The media has exposed numerous tales of corporate funding by the tobacco, energy, and pharmaceutical industries where university-based researchers received millions of dollars to produce research in support of their corporate benefactors (Bridenthal 2005). Humanities, however, are less able to create marketable products for industry and attract less corporate funding, which has resulted in a trend toward higher salaries for top researchers who garner major corporate funding while adjuncts are teaching at barely livable salaries. Moral and civic-focused courses are often offered only at the introductory level, and some senior faculty members are unwilling to teach these lower level courses because they value their research activities over teaching.

Faculty members are often faced with balancing professionalism and commercialism in today's higher education environment. While institutions may no longer hire faculty to be active members of a rigorous intellectual

community, faculty members may now see their positions in the university as mere platforms for moving forward entrepreneurial agendas. And, every faculty member must have such an agenda or feel at risk. As objectivity of university-based research is questioned, the integrity of higher education is also questioned. This issue of teacher as entrepreneur (teacherpreneur) is exacerbated by disparity in pay. While salaries for university and college presidents may approach the levels of corporate executives, compensation for professors has barely increased (Marris 2005). The average salary for male professors in 2009 was \$79,706 and \$65,638 for females (IES 2009).

Statistics indicate a steady increase in part-time faculty positions and a reduction in tenure-track positions (Altbach 2009). Only 49% of full-time professors had tenure in 2008 compared to 56% in 1994 (IES 2009). There were 0.7 million full-time and 0.7 million part-time faculty in 2007, and the rate of part-time to full-time staff in education has also been growing. Between 1997 and 2007, part-time staff increased by 39%, whereas full-time staff rose by only 25%. Much of the growth in part-time staff can be attributed to the hiring of part-time faculty (IES 2009). For those teachers who are not fully employed outside of the school, they are likely teaching at multiple institutions to make a living. This should pose an ethical quandary for institutions and students: in many cases, these teachers are not making an acceptable living as they do not have a permanent full-time job. This impacts commitment to an institution and its students; professors who teach at multiple institutions at one time teach well beyond what is considered a full-time load for full-time professors.

Furthermore, in recent years, many not-for-profit universities have launched for-profit online and other degree-granting programs in which faculty members are expected to teach. With this additional workload, professors may find it difficult to be committed to the responsibilities once thought to be the essence of academic life: teaching, research, participation in the academic community, and governance of their institutions. Again, the ethical dilemma is whether the issue of fairness or reasonableness has been taken off the table for a cadre of employees that is seeing the core of their work changing like a daily menu. This surely impacts morale, which has a negative effect on schools and students.

### **Shifting Priorities and How They Affect Learning, Students, and Society**

Between 1988 and 1998, enrollment in colleges grew by 11% but, between 1998 and 2008, enrollment grew by 32% (IES 2009). In sync with the public's growing interest in acquiring a college education, this era has seen great changes in the *modus operandi* on the supply side. What

has emerged in the last 20 years, therefore, is an increasing focus on the marketization of education (Newman and Jahdi 2009).

The economic strife and reduced availability of federal funds for higher education in the 1990s created an atmosphere ripe for the leaders of America's colleges and universities to find the marketing strategies of the business community appealing, as they pursued their quest for new sources of funds with the added rivalry of the "for profit" sector. History indicates that securing funding has long been a challenge for American colleges and universities. Many of the private higher education institutions were funded through donations from nineteenth century industrialists, who later turned their attention to philanthropic activities. Following World War II, the GI Bill provided funding for the expansion of many colleges and universities, but a decline in the population in the 1970s and 1980s drove institutions to seek new methods of financial support (Hossler 2004). In these years, new trends such as federal funding for science and engineering research, as well as a growing application of aggressive marketing practices, including the use of financial aid for student recruitment, began to emerge (Miscamble 2006).

One of the problems imposed by the state on higher education is that state leaders view schools as having an independent income stream in the form of tuition and consequently, expect students to pay an increasingly larger proportion for the cost of their education (Sigler 2007). Tuition as a percentage of college's revenue has increased 10 points over the last 25 years. Tuition now comprises 36.3% of school revenues (SHEEO 2009). Student-derived revenue is now more important than ever, making student satisfaction more important than ever. Consequently, parents have become customers, students are now consumers, and education and research, once believed to be processes, are now seen as products (Miscamble 2006). Terms of the managerial vocabulary, such as performance assessment, quality control, and competitive edge, are also now commonplace in discussions of higher education. It is not difficult to understand how this new vocabulary has been so readily adopted, when one considers that corporate lawyers and business leaders hold the majority of positions on the governing boards of most universities and colleges in America (Miscamble 2006).

Colleges now operate as bottom line-oriented organizations and the marketization of higher education has been accompanied by the adoption of a managerialist ideology and a new drive for quality and efficiency, which has resulted in increased bureaucracy in many institutions (Lock and Lorenz 2007). Consequently, the composition of the varying employment classifications in educational institutions has also changed considerably, directly reflecting a shift in the importance of the administrative function

of education. For example, the percentage of non-teaching professionals has risen from 10 to 20% between 1979 and 2007 (IES 2009). From the perspective of an institution with a strong corporate focus, these changes may appear to be process improvements in that universities may be more cost-efficient and able to produce more graduates at a lower per capita cost, but this type of administrative approach to education is unrealistic (Goldspink 2007).

#### Enrollment Management and Student Aid

There are now more students (consumers) than ever interested in pursuing a college degree, and these consumers are paying a higher percentage of their education—schools are relying more heavily than ever on tuition dollars. Therefore, the contemporary face of education is extremely competitive. Schools have developed enrollment management strategies to allow them to be competitive and to influence whom and how many students they matriculate. Some of the practices employed in enrollment management are not without controversy, however, and they largely center on institutions' use of campus-based financial aid to attract preferential students. The use of need-based financial assistance has long been seen as an appropriate method of promoting diversity and inclusion of less affluent students in the college community, but merit awards, which have become increasingly popular both in private and public institutions, serve a different end.

Colleges offer merit-based aid to high scoring students to improve their rankings, elevate their prestige, and support their brand image. As the focus has shifted away from promoting the promise of social justice, access to quality education for low income students is being pushed aside in the pursuit of a corporate vision. One reason is that merit-based aid is instrumental in increasing the cost of getting an education (Lingenfelter 2006). Students from middle or higher income families are more likely than students from lower income families to receive merit-based aid (IES 2009). Also, with limited financial aid resources available, merit-based awards have resulted in fewer students receiving need-based aid (Ehrenberg 2005). Merit-based aid increased 212%, while needs-based aid increased only 47% between 1996 and 2004 (Marklein 2007). Moreover, while colleges are using merit-based aid to woo students they deem as most desirable, they are also spending more money on recruiting, leaving fewer resources available for faculty salaries and the education of students.

#### Enrollment Management and Rankings

Furthermore, rankings have taken on greater meaning in an environment where colleges are actively competing for students' tuition dollars. Students frequently turn to the

rankings of universities when formulating their application decisions (Thacker 2005). Playing the rankings game has undoubtedly contributed to the marketization of higher education. Because students and their families are paying a larger proportion of students' education, they are demanding information on retention rate, graduation rates, and job prospects—information that will indicate their return on investment (Sigler 2007). The down side to this is that, over the past decade, rankings have become increasingly important, causing educational institutions to redirect funds to improving their rankings in such publications as U.S. News and World Report (Lingenfelter 2006).

The rankings game is not always played fairly either. It is possible to improve a college's rankings in terms of 6-year graduation rates by relaxing standards, admitting highly qualified students, or throwing a lot of money at support services. Colleges can also improve their rankings by improving their spend-per-student, which discourages schools from being financially prudent. This increases the need for tuition or forces faculty to look for research funds (Ehrenberg 2005). Furthermore, schools are pressuring faculty into helping improve rankings (Hossler 2000). Diver (2005) highlights other practices, such as:

failing to report low SAT scores from foreign students, "legacies," recruited athletes, or members of other 'special admission' categories; exaggerating per capita instructional expenditures by misclassifying expenses for athletics, faculty research, and auxiliary enterprises; artificially driving up the number of applicants by counting as a completed application the first step of a 'two-part' application process; and inflating the yield rate by rejecting or wait-listing the highest achievers in the applicant pool (who are least likely to come if admitted). (p. 137)

There is an ethical issue with chasing ranking status. Playing the rankings game has refocused colleges on recruiting high potential students and persuading students who will likely have better grades from leaving for out-of-state schools through discounting tuition (Lingenfelter 2006). Also, the number of students receiving Pell grants in the top ranks seems to decrease as ranks improve, pointing to the use of the adjustment of tuition to influence rankings (Meredith 2004). An incidental outcome of this is that access to college for the financially disadvantaged would intuitively have to be more difficult. The ethical concern with rankings should be the emphasis it puts on seeking highly qualified students, deflecting attention from the tradition of wanting to make access to higher education equitable (Ehrenberg 2005).

Enrollment management has become a critical tool in playing the rankings game, and enrollment management in most public and private higher education institutions has

gained increased importance. Enrollment management offices are concerned with the positioning of the university's brand in the marketplace and are often leaders in designing marketing, pricing, and financial aid strategies employed to attract the institution's target consumer. A commonly used tool used to deploy information regarding a school's message is the college view book (Klassen 2000). In a study examining the content of view books, Klassen (2000) found universities communicate what they are about to prospective students through their view books. As an example of how view books are used as marketing tools, schools ranked in the top 15 of the U.S. News and World Report ranking of U.S. colleges and universities primarily employ imagery in their view books of engagement between students and professors, cultural events, and artistic activities. On the other hand, imagery used by tier four schools focuses on graduation, alumni events, and posteducational endeavors. According to Klassen (2000), the message sent by each type of university is that graduation can be achieved with little disruption in terms of jobs, relationship, children, etc. Schools are creating a vision of Utopia...degrees without any hassles.

By excising the disagreeable but common routines of ordinary life, all of the view books examined here have unwittingly sidestepped the very longings that have compelled young people for centuries to seek a higher education: service to humanity and their fellow citizens, commitment to family and work, and the search for higher meaning. (p. 21)

Ethically, these types of enrollment management/marketing practices are questionable. From the student's perspective, it is difficult to evaluate higher education as a consumer product and, for many students, the brand image of the institution as presented in such materials as the view books becomes the deciding factor. Studies indicate that students are influenced by effective advertising campaigns that begin to blur the lines between marketing a school and selling it (Nicholls et al. 1995).

#### Issues of Rigor and Utility of Learning

Colleges and universities are in threat of becoming institutions whose primary service is to prepare the student for lifelong consumerism rather than a "better life." People must remain more important than the acquisition of things. Student consumerism is pervasive in the U.S., where they believe that, regardless of effort, students deserve the degree they pay for and, should they not feel satisfied with the services rendered, they are justified in challenging the provider of that service—the teacher—about the perceived weakness of the teacher's performance. In addition, students are lazier, harder to motivate, and bored; they do not

want to be there; they want to get to work (Ng and Forbes 2009). There is no room for rigor or meaningful journeys in such an environment, and the marketization of education is largely to blame. When students are not happy, they can threaten to take their needed tuition dollars elsewhere, just as they would change car insurance to obtain a policy with better value. The problem is that these students are not forced to see that they are an integral part of the process and not just an addendum by administrators vying for rankings and tuition dollars.

Furthermore, obtaining a degree solely focused on employment denies students the opportunity to transform themselves on a personal level. The problem with this focus on content at the expense of critical thinking is that society no longer has the large number of creative critical thinkers required in a capitalist society (Raduntz 2007, p. 242). Moreover, the ethical issue posed by this orientation to please and not engage the student is that, for all the heartache evoked, the new model of business is not serving the universities any more adequately, as we hear from Arum and Roska in *Academically Adrift: Limited Learning on College Campuses*—at least 45% of undergraduates demonstrated “no improvement in critical thinking, complex reasoning, and writing skills in the first two years of college, and 36 percent showed no progress in four years” (Benton 2011). According to Benton, this is “just the beginning of the bad news” (para 1). Professors often feel compelled to focus on what will allow students to pass as opposed to focusing on critical thinking and reflection (Molesworth et al. 2009). In the long term, this can only spell demise on a personal and societal level, and teachers and schools, rather than improving society, are adding to its burden. Again, the marketization of education plays no small part in schools’ failure to improve the future of society.

## Problems and Solutions

### What to do About Rankings?

The marketing of colleges in the US is now more prevalent than at any other time in history (Klassen 2000), and this calls for an urgent conversation on the commercialization of education. First and foremost, the issue of rankings needs to be addressed. According to Lingenfelter (2006, p. 6)

In the past dozen years both state governments and institutions have spent increasing amounts of money for what amounts to expensive efforts to improve their rankings in U.S. News and World Report. Institutions are discounting tuition to attract more

students with better grades and test scores, and some of our states have been discounting tuition to keep better students at home.

Recommendations have been made that institutions should no longer cooperate with organizations that issue rankings. In fact, this is just what some schools have chosen to do. Colin Diver, president of Reed College, describes the school’s lack of cooperation with *U.S. News & World Report* ranking system as follows:

By far the most important consequence of sitting out the rankings game, however, is the freedom to pursue our own educational philosophy, not that of some news magazine.... We are free to admit the students we think will thrive at Reed and contribute to its intellectual atmosphere, rather than those we think will elevate our standing on U.S. News’s list.... Pleasing students *can* mean superb educational programs precisely tailored to their needs; but it can also mean dumbing down graduation requirements, lessening educational rigor, inflating grades, and emphasizing nonacademic amenities. At Reed we have felt free to pursue an educational philosophy that maintains rigor and structure—including a strong core curriculum in the humanities, extensive distribution requirements, a junior qualifying examination in one’s major, a required senior thesis, uninflated grades (not reported to students unless they request them), heavy workloads, and graduate-level standards in many courses. We have also felt free to resist pressure to provide an expensive and highly selective program of varsity athletics and other nonacademic enticements simply for their marketing advantages.... Unlike many of our rankings-sensitive peers, we feel no pressure to use part-time adjunct faculty or teaching assistants as an inexpensive but educationally dubious technique for even further increasing the percentage of small classes. (pp. 137–139)

### What to do About Branding?

The financial feasibility of many colleges is now dependent on marketing and maintaining market share (Edirisooriya 2009). Because the competitive landscape in education is now so competitive, schools feel they have no alternative but to differentiate themselves through branding. No person could argue for complete removal of a business model as it seems critical in these difficult economic times and, while one may question the appropriateness of marketing an institution, marketing in higher education is now a global phenomenon. Many in higher education are not pleased with their new roles as marketing representatives,

and many members of the higher education community do not have the experience to be skillful marketers. Furthermore, there is a degree of whitewashing enveloping the educational landscape as a result of this branding effort that might be considered misleading and unethical that needs to be addressed. Obtaining a degree should be hard work, it should require personal sacrifice, it should require personal accountability, and students who are not capable should be allowed to fail. Society should not be burdened with graduates who are not up to par and schools need to accept their responsibility in this regard by not attempting to sell utopia. Then, when students enroll, they are prepared to work hard for their degrees and will not expect to sail through the process simply because they are paying. Perhaps, institutions might then consider transforming their marketing-focused enrollment management offices into counseling services that encourage students to become participants in learning rather than consumers of education.

#### What to do About Faculty Morale?

Faculty spend 58% of their time teaching, 20% of the balance in research and scholarship, and 22% on issues, such as administration and professional development (IES 2009). With so many part-time and adjunct faculty, there is considerable pressure on full-time faculty to publish to meet standards for accreditations, such as AACSB, to serve on committees, and to engage in administrative effort. This is deeply problematic in an entrepreneurial environment. According to Goldspink (2007), faculty morale is low because so much focus is being placed on additional administrative responsibilities in an effort to achieve operational efficiencies. This also detracts from learning outcomes. Furthermore, Benton (2011, para 17) writes:

Students may be enjoying high self-esteem, but college teachers seem to be suffering from a lack of self-confidence. It starts in graduate school, when we begin to fear we are destined for unemployment, when we compare our pay with that of comparably educated professionals, and when we realize that—for all the sacrifices that we've made, often with idealistic motives—we are held in slight regard. Many people even think of us as subversives who 'hate America.' During the latest economic crisis—perhaps the endpoint of a 40-year slide—many of us have felt as if we've become expendable, if we are employed at all. That makes it hard for us to make strong demands on our students, or, perhaps more important, to stand up for any kind of change in our institutions.

A holistic approach is necessary to address the problem of low faculty morale, which has become epidemic. This issue

is a broad social one. Educators are no longer valued as they once were. A good place to start addressing this issue is to support a return of academic power to the faculty in the teacher–student dyad. Administrators need to examine the efficacy of anonymous student evaluations in determining teaching quality as it gives no voice to faculty. Administrators need to reevaluate the level of administrative burden placed on faculty when the ranks of full-time faculty are falling. These are becoming embedded ethical issues.

#### What to do About Critical Thinking and Dumbing Down?

The university was once seen as the center for investigation and critical thinking, and it would be a tremendous loss to society if higher education became an activity solely driven by the demands of a capitalist culture. Higher education has now come to be a means of securing material affluence, and education may no longer be viewed as a potentially transformative experience able to affect the student's intellectual perspective of the world.

The student as consumer perspective causes harm. It has the propensity to lower quality and promote a passive, disengaged student body. Because the consumer is always right, implicit in the student as consumer model is that students must be happy with the services rendered. When the consumer is an integral part of the delivery of education, one would have to question this consumer satisfaction orientation. Further, when the outcome of learning is reduced to a grade, with the student as a consumer and the teacher as the provider, the faculty is perceived as solely responsible for learning. This is problematic. According to Rojstaczer and Healy (2010), grade inflation has been on an upward trajectory since the 1980s, and it is very probable that this is as a result of student-based teacher evaluation. According to Benton (2011), it has become difficult to give students honest feedback as teachers must now envelop students with praise and encouragement to avoid student disappointment, thus retarding student growth. This new form of higher education is not likely to prepare students for corporate careers because it does not provide them with the opportunity to become critical thinkers, who are able to innovate and cope with change. Compounding this is the growing number of adjunct or part-time faculty whose performance is measured in large part by student evaluations and who are not always in sync with the institution's mission (Benton 2011).

Contemporary education is currently situated, uneasily between “traditional” and “relevant.” Teachers must once again emphasize supporting personal student transformation, even if they are under pressure from management and students to focus on the skills that support a job search (Molesworth et al. 2009). Faculty must concur on this.



### What to do About Ethical Issues in Research?

Externally funded research raises a host of ethical concerns. Yassi et al. (2010) call on universities to address the ethical issues posed by non-university funded research rather than jeopardize the integrity of research and scholarship. They also call for schools to deal swiftly with researchers who subordinate research integrity to their career goals and the demands of those funding their research.

### What to do About the Export Market?

Higher education, which was once viewed as contributing to the social and moral well-being of society, is now viewed through the lens of neoliberalism (Gibbs 2001), and we are also exporting this viewpoint. Education is now a highly exported product and its commodification in an international context raises the ethical urgency to act immediately ensure that the standard of education that is being exported is up to par.

The commercialization of education in a cross-border context calls for vigilant oversight in the provision of education and the portability of qualifications (Matsuura 2006). By 2025, there will be 7.2 million students worldwide (Bohm et al. 2002). The international market in higher education is valued in excess of \$30 billion with the U.S. ranking as the leading player. Exporting higher education programs to less developed countries has become big business. Non-traditional schools use virtual universities, branch campuses, and corporate universities and are creating a “new paradigm” of higher education (Matsuura 2006). This engages directly with the contemporary debate as to whether this increase in cross-border education undermines the traditional values of education in terms of the relevance of service, research, and learning/teaching (Knight 2006). Furthermore, according to Daniel (2006):

Cross-border provision without concern for equity and social justice has generated a backlash that manifests itself as restrictive regulations and punitive measures. This clearly indicates that the providers from the developed world must instill confidence and trust within the developing world by forging partnerships, facilitating the development of quality assurance mechanisms and building indigenous human resource capacity.

### Final Thoughts

Issues such as academic freedom are becoming less important than accountability; truth is deemed less

important than utility; performance is to be valued over thoughtfulness. The system of higher education that has worked for centuries was founded on the belief that education was a process. Today’s system cannot work because it views higher education as a product from a perspective of economic value. If a university in a consumer-driven culture is to educate students to participate as informed purchasers in the market economy, then the institution must prepare students by doing more than developing their sense of economic self-interest; it requires a university that mentors students in developing a moral understanding of humanity (Gibbs 2001).

In this belief system, the values of free-market policies, entrepreneurship, deregulation, and reduced government funding have replaced the commitment to social outcomes. With this major revision of higher education, universities are no longer seen as centers for intellectual activity. If the marketization of higher education continues, there may come a time when academics will become skills trainer with the sole purpose of transmitting knowledge to prepare students for employment—already, educators have taken a back seat to trainers and business managers (Raduntz 2007, p. 242)—and they will bear little resemblance to the scholars who once filled the halls of the universities and filled the minds of their students with ideas, questions, and visions.

### References

- Altbach, P. G. (2009, April 30). It’s the faculty, stupid! *The Times Higher Education Supplement*, 1894, 40.
- Benton, T. H. (2011, February). A perfect storm in undergraduate education, Part I. *The Chronicle of Higher Education*. Retrieved from <http://chronicle.com/article/A-Perfect-Storm-in/126451/>.
- Bohm, A., Davis, D., Meares, D., & Pearce, D. (2002). *The global student mobility 2025 report: Forecasts of the global demand for international education*. Canberra: IDP.
- Bridenthall, R. (2005, August). Review of the book University, inc: The corporate corruption of higher education, by J. Washburn. *Radical Teacher*, 73, 35–37.
- Daniel, J. (2006). Preface. In J. Knight (Ed.), *Higher education crossing borders: A guide to the implications of the general agreement on trade in services (GATS) for cross-border education*. Commonwealth of Learning and UNESCO.
- Diver, C. (2005, November). Is there life after rankings? *The Atlantic*. Retrieved from [http://www.reed.edu/president/speeches/atlantic\\_monthly05Diver.pdf](http://www.reed.edu/president/speeches/atlantic_monthly05Diver.pdf).
- Edirisooriya, G. (2009). A market analysis of the latter half of the nineteenth-century American higher education sector. *History of Education*, 38(1), 115–132.
- Edmiston, D. (2009). An examination of integrated marketing communication in US public institutions of higher education. *International Journal of Educational Advancement*, 8(3), 152–175.
- Ehrenberg, R. C. (2005). Method or madness? Inside the U.S. News & World Report college rankings. *Journal of College Admission*, 189, 29–35.

- Gibbs, P. (2001). Higher education as a market: A problem or solution? *Studies in Higher Education*, 26(1), 85–94.
- Goldspink, C. (2007). Rethinking educational reform. *Educational Management Administration & Leadership*, 35(1), 27–50.
- Hossler, D. (2000). The problem with college rankings. *About Campus*, 5, 20–24.
- Hossler, D. R. (2004). How enrollment management has transformed—or ruined—higher education. *Chronicle of Higher Education*, 34, B3.
- IES (2009). Digest of education statistics: Chapter 3 post secondary education. Retrieved from [http://nces.ed.gov/programs/digest/d09/ch\\_3.asp](http://nces.ed.gov/programs/digest/d09/ch_3.asp).
- Kaplan, G. R. (1996). Profits r us: notes on the commercialization of America's schools. *Phi Delta Kappan*, 78(3), 1–12. Retrieved March 17, 2011, from EBSCOhost.
- Klassen, M. L. (2000). Lots of fun, not much work, and no hassles: Marketing images of higher education. *Journal of Marketing for Higher Education*, 10(2), 11–26.
- Knight, J. (2006). *Higher education crossing borders: A guide to the implications of the general agreement on trade in services (GATS) for cross-border education*. Commonwealth of Learning and UNESCO
- Lingenfelter, P. E. (2006). The unfunding of public education. Presented at the Public Affairs Week, Baruch College, City College of New York. Retrieved from <http://www.sheeo.org/about/paulpres/baruch%20college.pdf>.
- Lock, G., & Lorenz, C. (2007). Revisiting the university front. *Studies in Philosophy and Education*, 26, 405–418.
- Marklein, M. B. (2007). Colleges taking another look at value of merit-based aid. *USA Today*. Retrieved from [http://www.usatoday.com/news/education/2007-03-14-merit-aid\\_N.htm](http://www.usatoday.com/news/education/2007-03-14-merit-aid_N.htm).
- Marris, E. (2005). Corporate culture nets big bucks for university heads. *Nature*, 434, 1059.
- Matsuura, K. (2006). Foreword. In J. Knight (Ed.), *Higher education crossing borders: A guide to the implications of the general agreement on trade in services (GATS) for cross-border education*. Commonwealth of Learning and UNESCO.
- Meredith, M. (2004). Why do universities compete in the ratings game? An empirical analysis of the effects of the U.S. News and World Report College Rankings. *Research in Higher Education*, 45(5), 443–461.
- Meyerson, G. (2005, August). Review of the book *Universities in the marketplace: The commercialization of higher education* review, by D. Bok. *Radical Teacher*, 73, 33–35.
- Miscamble, W. D. (2006). The corporate university: A Catholic response. *America*, 14–17.
- Molesworth, M., Nixon, E., & Scullion, R. (2009). Having, being and higher education: The marketisation of the university and the transformation of the student into consumer. *Teaching in Higher Education*, 14(3), 277–287.
- Newman, S., & Jahdi, K. (2009). Marketisation of education: Marketing, rhetoric and reality. *Journal of Further and Higher Education*, 33(1), 1–11.
- Ng, I. C. L., & Forbes, J. (2009). Education as service: The understanding of university experience through the service logic. *Journal of Marketing for Higher Education*, 19(1), 38–64.
- Nicholls, J., Harris, J., Morgan, E., Clarke, K., & Sims, D. (1995). Marketing higher education: The MBA experience. *International Journal of Educational Management*, 9(2), 31–38.
- Raduntz, H. (2007). Chapter 13: The Marketization of Education within the Global Capitalist Economy. In *Globalizing Education: Policies, Pedagogies, & Politics* (pp. 231–245). New York: Peter Lang Publishing, Inc.
- Rojstaczer, S., & Healy, C. (2010). Grading in American colleges and universities. Retrieved from <http://gradeinflation.com/tcr2010grading.pdf>.
- SHEEO. (2009). *State higher education finance FY 2008*. Retrieved from [www.sheeo.org/finance/shef\\_fy08.pdf](http://www.sheeo.org/finance/shef_fy08.pdf).
- Sigler, W. (2007). The age of outcomes. *College and University*, 83(2), 53–56, 58–60.
- Thacker, L. (2005). Confronting the commercialization of admissions. *Chronicle of Higher Education*, 51(25), B26. Retrieved March 17, 2011, from EBSCOhost.
- Tilak, J. B. G. (2009). Higher education: A public good or a commodity for trade? *Prospects*, 38, 449–466.
- Yassi, A., Dharamsi, S., Spiegel, J., Rojas, A., Dean, E., & Woolard, R. (2010). The good, the bad, and the ugly of partnered research: Revisiting the sequestration thesis and the role of universities in promoting social justice. *International Journal of Health Services*, 40(3), 485–505.