

THE FUTURES PROJECT

Policy for Higher Education in a Changing World

Saving Higher Education's Soul

Frank Newman
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The Futures Project: Policy for Higher Education in a Changing World
Brown University, Box 1977
Providence, Rhode Island 02912
401-863-9582
www.futuresproject.org

Saving Higher Education's Soul

New forces are reshaping higher education. For the last half-century higher education has grown in size, resources, and importance. Higher education has, as well, maintained a remarkably stable structure. Now, powerful changes are underway, driven by the entry of new providers of higher education, both for-profit and non-profit; the explosion of virtual education; rapid advances in technology; demographic shifts; and the globalization of a sector that has typically been open only to indigenous institutions. The higher education environment is increasingly competitive, and the reins of government are loosening worldwide in favor of market-driven decision making—a trend that is disturbing the tranquility of a stable, confident system.

The New Providers

662 for-profit institutions are awarding degrees.¹

1073 institutions are offering virtual courses.²

As market forces grow in importance there is a chance for significant gains or for significant setbacks. There is, for example, the possibility of greater access to education, new modes of learning, improved productivity, and even lowered cost. But there is also the danger of losing some of the important attributes of higher education, such as the commitment to provide the less advantaged an opportunity for education; or the tradition within higher education to take a long-term view of both students and societal needs; or the emphasis on learning and scholarship apart from maximizing revenue streams. In other sectors of society, heavy reliance on market-driven decision making has produced unanticipated problems. In the United States, for example, the shift toward market forces in health care did achieve containment of costs but at the expense of quality in doctor-patient relationships.

Stability and the University Structure

The stability of the university structure was illuminated in a famous quote of Clark Kerr, "About eighty-five institutions in the Western world established by 1520 still exist in recognizable forms, with similar functions and with unbroken histories, including the Catholic church, the Parliaments of Isle of Man, of Iceland, and of Great Britain, several Swiss cantons, and seventy universities."³

But it would be easy to underestimate the rate of change that is now underway. Over the same period of time, five fundamental concepts have characterized the institutions of higher education:

1. The assembly of skilled and scarce faculty.
2. The campus as the place of education.
3. Selected students.
4. Learning materials, primary books, gathered in the library—the center of learning.
5. Face to face instruction in the classroom.

While over the years these concepts have been democratized, particularly in the United States, it is stunning to realize that today higher education institutions exist that do not utilize any of the five concepts.

The nature of the higher education system of the future depends on how skillfully the new market forces are used and contained.

Higher education's special status is endangered

Over the long history of higher education, universities and colleges—both state-owned and private—have held a privileged position because they have focused on the needs of society rather than self-gains. They have in turn been given special responsibilities. As higher education becomes more closely linked to for-profit activities and market forces, its special status is endangered. Under the assault of new competitive pressures, the

protected status of higher education is eroding. With the growing emphasis on revenue streams, the advent of for-profit activities, large scale corporate sponsorship of research, higher presidential salaries, and other trappings of the corporate world there is a danger that the public and its political leaders will begin to view higher education as just another interest group void of those attributes that truly raise its interests above the marketplace throng.

Contrast in Mission Statements
<p>Harvard University: “Harvard college adheres to the purposes for which the Charter of 1650 was granted: ‘The advancement of all good literature, arts, and sciences; the advancement and education of youth in all manner of good literature, arts, and sciences; and all necessary provisions that may conduce to the education of the...youth of this country...’ In brief: Harvard strives to create knowledge, to open the minds of students to that knowledge, and to enable students to take best advantage of their educational opportunities....the College encourages students to respect ideas and their free expression, and to rejoice in the discover and in critical thought; to pursue excellence in a spirit of productive cooperation; and to assume responsibility for the consequences of personal actions.”⁴</p>
<p>City College of New York: “ City College was founded to offer higher education to the children of the working class and immigrants....For over 150 years CCNY has been a primary avenue to economic and social advancement for generations of New Yorkers who might not have had the chance to attend college....the university will continue to maintain and expand its commitment to academic excellence and to the provision of equal access and opportunity for students, faculty and staff from all ethnic and racial groups of both sexes.”⁵</p>
<p>Stanford University: “... qualify students for personal success and direct usefulness in life; and to promote the public welfare by exercising an influence on behalf of humanity of civilization, teaching the blessings of liberty regulated by law, and inculcating love and reverence for the great principles of government as derived from the inalienable rights of man to life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness.”⁶</p>
<p>Devry Institute: “...to provide high-quality career-oriented higher education programs in business and technology to a diverse student population. These programs integrate general education to enhance graduates’ personal development and career potential.”⁷</p>
<p>University of Phoenix: “...a private, for-profit higher education institution whose mission is to provide high quality education to working adult students....The University provides general education and professional programs that prepare students to articulate and advance their personal and professional goals.”⁸</p>

What needs to be saved?

It is, therefore, critical to ask what the soul of higher education is that needs to be saved. We need to clearly identify those attributes that are essential to preserving higher education’s role as servant to the needs of society so as not to lose them forever in the heat of competition. The Futures Project has focused on three such attributes:

- Socializing students so that they are ready to undertake their responsibilities in society. By socialize we mean the creation, through various university or college experiences, of those skills and attitudes necessary to be a contributing citizen.
- Providing all citizens social mobility through the opportunity for access to higher education. As that access has become a requirement for full participation in society, it is especially important to provide this opportunity to the less advantaged.
- Upholding the university as the home of disinterested scholarship in the pursuit of truth as well as open and unfettered discussion of critical issues.

In each case the question is will the new providers—the virtual institutions, the for-profit institutions, as well as the traditional universities who are forced to become “lean and mean” in order to compete with these new providers—concern themselves with these tasks or will they simply focus on providing students with the skills necessary to get a job?

Currently, university budgets are presented to the outside world as an opaque, interconnected, and tangled mass of programs. As a bundle they are assumed to work for the betterment of society. In industry terms, universities are total service, vertically integrated organizations. If competition with more focused, slimmed-down institutions forces an unbundling of these costs—splitting the case of student services that are less directly related to degree requirements or scholarship focused on the long-term development of knowledge—who will provide for these broader, more generalized societal needs?

There is already a trend toward outsourcing—not just the food service and the bookstore but such areas as student advisement, tutoring, career or placement services, on-line course management, even introductory math courses. While this may help bring needed efficiency how it is done is critical. Will this damage the nature of the campus experience? If, in addition, universities feel compelled to end the current cross subsidies, this will threaten the low enrollment disciplines, university sponsored research, and perhaps even community service and large central libraries. These trends are compounded by the new trend toward more “business like thinking,” with an emphasis on “revenue maximization” and the idea that every activity ought to support itself. The problem is not the application of these concepts to academic institutions, although even the terms offend many in the academy. Surely, higher education needs far more attention to these issues. Rather, the problem is to ensure that the drive for efficiency and revenue takes careful account of the broader purposes of higher education.

Unbundling the University

The modern university has assumed the responsibility for providing service and activities well beyond direct instruction. As competition increases, there will be pressure to “unbundle.”⁹

- “...Pulling a business process or operation apart, analyzing its individual components, and treating the components as commodities, to be performed by the most efficient bidder.”¹⁰
- “Distance learning by definition unbundles the campus-centric delivery model for the learner.”¹¹
- “Unbundling can reduce the cost of higher education by as much as 75-90%.”¹²
- E-Learning also encourages the unbundling of different instructional elements: content development; course delivery; testing and evaluation; and administration functions such as registration, payment and student record keeping. Traditionally, each academic institution has provided all these services for every area in which it offers instruction. E-Learning makes it easier to separate them, so that an institution can concentrate on the components and substantive fields in which it does best, and outsource others.¹³

Socializing Students to Their Role in Society

The most enduring role for the university has been the socialization of young people for their roles in society. We have focused on three types of socialization: socialization to the community, socialization to the life of the mind, and socialization to the profession.

Community

The fundamental purpose of educating young people is to prepare them for life in society, a purpose usually spelled out clearly in the institution's founding documents. In recent years much attention has been focused on preparation of students for the workforce

which, while important, is only part of the task.

Equally if not more important is the preparation for civic engagement or democratic participation—preparation, that is, for participation in the community as citizens of a democracy. In the last decade, a growing number of established universities have

focused once again on this once central mission, by making it a priority to engage students in community service.¹⁸ Universities and colleges provide many opportunities to gain the skills and attitudes necessary for successful participation in society, through both the academic and extra-curricular experiences. As society continues to change, the goals of such socialization continue to expand. In addition to the traditional aims, new demands include the development of global awareness, the capacity to appreciate gender, racial and ethnic diversity, the ability to work in teams, and so on. The increasing complexity of life makes the task of socialization all the more important.

What Matters in the Socialization of Students

- Research on the outcomes of the collegiate experience indicate that the most important impact flows from faculty/student interaction and student/student interaction, particularly “when organized around substantive, academic work.”¹⁴
- Living on campus provides a peer culture, “in which students develop close on-campus friendships, participate freely in college-sponsored activities, and perceive their college to be...concerned about the individual student...”¹⁵
- Students make academic and personal gains when they engage in community service.¹⁶

The positive outcomes attributed to these experiences include:

“intellectual growth..., increase in intellectual orientation, liberalization of social and political values, increases in interpersonal skills, ...maturity and personal development, educational aspirations and attainment, orientation toward scholarly careers, and women's interest in sex-atypical careers,...increased flexibility that permits one to see both the strengths and weaknesses of complex issues.”¹⁷

Socializing Students to What Role?

A tension has always been inherent about the goal of socialization. Is it to make the society work effectively or to change society?

Jean-Jacques Rousseau: “As I was born a citizen of a free State, and a member of the Sovereign, I feel that, however feeble the influence my voice can have on public affairs, the right of voting on them makes it my duty to study them...”¹⁹

Aristotle argued that the task of education was to create critics of society and that it is “...the mark of an educated mind to be able to entertain a thought without accepting it.”²⁰

While both are important, given the dangerous erosion of voting and other participation in the political process by college graduates, it is time for a bigger dose of Rousseau, with a reminder of the consequences of non-involvement from Plato, “One of the penalties of refusing to participate in politics is that you end up being governed by your inferiors.”²¹

When one examines the powerful changes taking place in higher education today, fundamental issues come to the forefront about the need for socialization.

1. What is the right balance between socializing students to fit into society—as it is—as opposed to socializing students to question society? These are not mutually exclusive—students must learn not only to question society,

¹⁸ Campus Compact: Higher Education in Service to the Nation, A Season of Service 2000. [Brown University](#) Jan. 2000-Dec. 2000.

thoughtfully and responsibly, but also to accept and support more of the central tenets of society such as participation in the democratic process itself.

2. Which students need what forms of socialization? Does a student need socialization once in a lifetime or different versions at different times? Surely older, working students do not need the same preparation for life beyond the campus that the traditional college freshman needs.
3. What elements of a college or university experience contribute most significantly to the socialization of students? How can the university maximize the positive elements and minimize the negative?
4. To what degree do faculty feel a responsibility for the task of socializing students as opposed to feeling responsible only for teaching their subject?

While socialization may be one of the most important tasks performed by the university, it is not clear that the new for-profit institutions and the new virtual institutions see it as a central responsibility. Even if they were to accept the responsibility, it is not clear what sort of socialization can be provided in, for example, a virtual setting. For-profit institutions have generally indicated that they will focus only on the development of workforce skills and avoid major efforts to round out the student's education, which are expensive to undertake. Perhaps of more concern, it is not clear whether the growing presence of for-profit activities within traditional universities will lead to the ultimate scaling back of those activities not directly connected with the more narrowly defined teaching tasks.

The Danger of Socializing Experiences Available Only for the Advantaged

If a growing share of higher education institutions do not provide much opportunity for the socialization of the student because of the growing number of for-profits and of virtual institutions, or because traditional institutions strip down their approach in order to compete, there could be important consequences for social mobility.

Campus socialization is key for less-advantaged students as it often provides the skills necessary to navigate the system. Derek Bok and William Bowen showed, "The growing numbers of blacks graduating from colleges and professional schools, and the consequent increase in black managers and professionals, have led to the gradual emergence of a larger black middle class... These developments contrasted sharply with the conditions of blacks possessing only a high school education or less."²²

Life of the mind

The second important task in this arena is socializing the student to the life of the mind. By this, most universities mean the introduction of the student to sophisticated intellectual concepts, giving the student a life-long ability to think critically. It is often assumed that the clearest avenue to attaining this ability is exposing the student to subjects not normally encountered outside the academy—such as philosophy, or history, or literature. It is commonly assumed that, by studying under faculty deeply immersed in intellectual pursuits, and by occasionally attending lectures or symposia in which well-known intellectuals put their ideas on display, the students will themselves become more intellectually oriented. Similarly, students are encouraged to attend and participate in cultural events made readily available—concerts, theater, art exhibits, and more.

All of this reflects the university's view of the student as a long-term project. The hope is that these efforts will lead students to an understanding of and an appreciation for intellectual discourse—to a wider reading for intellectual development and to a broader range of the intellectual interests.

The Unresolved Issue—A Life of the Mind for What Purpose?

Conflict: "Pure" as opposed to "practical" intellectual development.

PURE:

Cardinal Newman, in 1852, opposing usefulness as a goal of higher education, argued, "The Philosophy of Utility, you will say, gentlemen, has at least done its work....and I grant it—it aimed low, and it fulfilled its aim." Instead, he proposed "a pure and clear atmosphere of thought..." which would lead to "the true and adequate end of intellectual training...Thought or reason exercised upon knowledge."²³

Robert Hutchins, the president of the University of Chicago, dropped football, championed the concept of great books and wanted the professional schools to focus on theoretical concerns.

"Vocationalism leads, then, to triviality and isolation; it debases the course of study and the staff. It deprives the university of its only excuse for existence, which is to provide a haven where the search for truth may go on unhampered by utility or pressure for 'results.'"

"As education it is the single-minded pursuit of the intellectual virtues. As scholarship it is the single-minded devotion to the advancement of knowledge. Only if the colleges and universities can devote themselves to these objects can we look hopefully to the future of the higher learning in America."²⁴

PRACTICAL:

Thomas Jefferson: The University of Virginia should focus on the development of "...the statesman, legislators and judges, on whom public prosperity and individual happiness are so much to depend" as well as to "harmonize and promote the interests of agriculture, manufactures and commerce...."²⁵

The attempt to socialize a growing share of each age group to the life of the mind raises difficult questions:

- Is the purpose to encourage the student to be sophisticated intellectually in order to enjoy the life of the mind, or is there a practical purpose for such intellectual development that benefits society? Why, in other words, should society be interested? With the growth of virtual education and the spread of for-profit firms, has the pendulum swung too far to the practical?
- Will the same modes of socialization to the life of the mind work for an ever broader share of each age group of students?
- Which of these activities make an impact and which are cheerfully ignored by the students?

Given that the new providers of higher education are focused on a much simpler view of intellectual skills, primarily aimed at preparing the student for success in the workplace, is there a danger that institutional concern for development of the mind might atrophy? While it is certainly conceivable that the new technologies now emerging could be used, both online and in traditional classrooms, to improve student learning and, in the process, advance the intellectual commitment and interest of the student, there is, at the moment, no evidence that this is taking place.

Profession

The third task of socialization is the orientation of students to a life in the profession. Many professions, such as medicine, nursing, or law, have over a long history developed rituals that expose students to the mores of the field. The presentation of laboratory coats to medical students is one example. These have the goal of ensuring that students recognize they are entering a noble profession and assuming important responsibilities. Such efforts at orientation are not merely confined to the professional schools. Ph.D. candidates are socialized to the ways of the academy. The military academies socialize students to the traditions of the armed forces. New teachers are prepared for life in the school.

There is, as well, another aspect of socializing each student to the profession. Much of the most important knowledge in a profession is tacit and not written down. The student must be “there” to learn it (i.e., must be engaged with professionals in real situations). Such tacit learning is often accomplished by apprenticeships of one sort or another—formal or informal. For example, graduate students in physics need to absorb what is an interesting question to research. They need to learn what sort of evidence would help solve the question.

Activity, Context and Culture in Socializing for a Profession

John Seely Brown:

- “Learning from dictionaries, like any method that tries to teach abstract concepts independently of authentic situations, overlooks the way understanding is developed through continued, situated use.
- Unfortunately, students are too often asked to use the tools of discipline without being able to adopt its culture. To learn to use tools as practitioners use them, a student, like an apprentice, must enter that community and its culture. Thus, in a significant way, learning is, we believe, a process of enculturation.
- When authentic activities are transferred to the classroom, their context is inevitably transmuted; they become classroom tasks....Classroom procedures, as a result, are then applied to what have become classroom tasks. The system of learning and using (and, of course, testing) thereafter remains hermetically sealed....Consequently, contrary to aim...success within this culture often has little bearing on performance elsewhere.”²⁶

With the new wave of providers, this form of socialization may well be in danger. Given the growth of online courses, there is a need to rethink how socialization to a profession can take place in the virtual setting. How, for example, can a student at a virtual law school gain a sense of the traditions of the legal world? How can a graduate student in physics or literature gain what Jerome Bruner has called a “cognitive apprenticeship”? Here again, the question is less whether such socialization can be done than whether it will be done. There is, at least, some evidence that, when used skillfully, electronic conferencing can help students understand the nature of their chosen profession and help them prepare for their entry.²⁷

²⁷ Judith Weedman. “Burglar’s Tools: The Use of Collaborative Technology in Professional Socialization.” *San Jose State University* May 1998. June 2000
<<http://www.asis.org/Conferences/MY98/Weedman.html>>.

Flaws in the current mode of socialization

While there are good reasons to worry about the loss of traditional ways, it is important not to ignore the flaws and failures of the current socialization process when looking ahead to a changed world of higher education. While some useful research on campus activities exist that describes their effect on students, most institutions have not seriously examined the benefits, or the cost, for the wide range of activities currently offered as part of the campus life experience. Most of the rituals involved in the socialization of students to their chosen profession, for example, have not been examined for years, if at all. We know little how such socialization takes place, whether it works, or how essential it is.

It is also clear that not all socialization is positive. For example, many students on campus are “socialized” to the heavy drinking of alcohol. Often Ph.D. candidates are socialized to the belief that their time spent teaching or counseling students should be minimized in order to focus on scholarship. Despite the growing diversity of students enrolled in universities, a great many students continue to self-segregate themselves in social settings. Most studies of student development show that faculty involvement in the lives of students is a critical influence. But, with the current faculty focus on the process of scholarship, is this a lost art?

<p style="text-align: center;">Socialized the Wrong Way</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• The number of students drinking declined in 1998, but the consumption of those who did rose.²⁸• In 1998, alcohol related arrests rose by 24.3%²⁹• College students are three times as likely as non-students to “exhibit pathological and problem gambling.”³⁰
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Growing risk from for-profit activities and revenue maximization

The growing importance of both virtual education and for-profit education means that all of these questions need to be raised from a new perspective. With these new providers offering a more focused version of the collegiate experience, will the broader preparation of the student as an institutional mission begin to erode? Or, will competition eventually lead to greater diversity among institutions, with some providing thoughtfully structured opportunities for socialization? If the latter occurs, will these opportunities be available primarily for already advantaged students?

The growing competition also raises another danger. The increasing emphasis on the student as a "consumer" has led to pressures for improved food, or housing, or even fitness centers. As universities and colleges increasingly treat students as consumers, students and their families increasingly respond as consumers—looking for amenities and bargaining over student aid packages. But does this provide the student with an appropriate socialization to the community? And, to what degree does the institution’s view of socialization conflict with the students’ own agendas—agendas which are increasingly focused on “getting a good job”?

<p style="text-align: center;">Focusing on Careers—in the Sixth Grade</p> <p>In a recent New York Times series of interviews, sixth graders showed an intense preoccupation with getting into college—and the right college—in order to gain access to good jobs.³¹</p>

Encouraging Social Mobility

There are still today individuals who are not full participants in the workforce or in civic life, despite the democratic ideals of our society. It is hard to maintain a functioning democracy when a significant part of the population does not have equal access to the benefits of that democracy. Education, including higher education, plays a key role in determining the opportunity for upward mobility and both civic and workforce participation. The public, therefore, needs to decide what form of democratic society it desires and then fashion a higher-education system to achieve that end. What is needed is not merely a rhetorical commitment, but dedication to a practical, functional system that is open to all motivated individuals. Today, more than ever before, it is access to higher education that determines who participates fully in society.

Motivation for College as a Means of Upward Mobility

When asked if a college education is the most essential element of achieving success in this country, African-American parents (47%) and Hispanic parents (65%) are more likely to say yes than parents of high school students as a whole (35%)³²

In the United States, there is a long tradition of using higher education as a vehicle to encourage social mobility. Despite this, and despite a long period of prosperity, there is still a large share of the population that lacks the skills demanded by the new economy. This is true even as we benefit from the longest sustained economic boom in our history.

The March Toward Social Mobility Through Higher Education

- 1830-Oberlin College is the first to admit women as well as men.³³
- 1847- City College of New York is created for students from low-income families.³⁴
- 1850-Cooper Union is established with the mission to education poor children—free of tuition.
- 1862-The Morrill (or, Land Grant) Act passed with an emphasis on the “education of the sons and daughters of the laboring class.”³⁵
- 1867-Morehouse College and Howard University are among the first historically black colleges.³⁶
- 1944-The Serviceman’s Readjustment Act (The G.I. Bill) opens, providing student aid for every veteran.³⁷
- 1960’s & ‘70’s-Community College movement massively expands³⁸
- Late 1960’s-Affirmative action movement opens higher education institutions to minority students.
- 1972- Higher education amendments provides Pell grants and other student aid for low-income students.

The question, then, is whether higher education can be used in new and more effective ways to create a more inclusive society rather than how it had been used earlier to create an exclusive society. In attempting to address this issue, it is

Escaping From the Bottom Income Quintile

It is becoming increasingly clear that to participate fully in American society, it is no longer enough to get a job. Rather, it is important to get the right job and that is, more than ever, dependent on education. The recent Federal Reserve “Survey of Consumer Finances,” showed that over the course of the current economic boom, median income (adjusted for inflation) remained remarkably flat.

During the last few years, as the job market tightened, the opportunity for the less skilled has improved somewhat. The report noted the impact of education on earnings, “...median income between 1989 and 1998 rose appreciably only for families headed by college graduates. Between 1995 and 1998, median income grew for all families except those whose head had not completed a high school degree.”³⁹

However:

- “In 1996, 49% of high school graduates with family income in the bottom 20% enrolled in college versus 78% of high school graduates with family income in the top 20%.”⁴⁰
- “45% of high school graduates whose parents held less than a high school diploma enrolled in college, compared to 85% of students whose parents received a bachelor’s degree or higher.”⁴¹ “25% of college students whose family income was greater than \$60,000 attended private, not-for-profit, 4 year institutions compared to 14% of students with a family income less than \$30,000.”⁴²
- In 1999, 43% of undergraduate students with family incomes below \$20,000 receive a degree within 5 years compared with 68% of those with family incomes above \$60,000.”⁴³

important to realize that even more than how higher education is *delivered*, it is how it is *distributed* that determines who in society gets the fruits of economic progress. Thinking about both delivery and distribution can help create more realistic opportunities for those still left behind.

Policy options

Governments have available many policy choices to assist in creating real opportunities—financial aid to students, improved connections between job training and higher education, outreach programs from higher education that encourage underprivileged students to prepare adequately for higher education, skillful remedial education, to name just a few. As institutions become more market-driven, it is urgent that policymakers realize that market forces alone are unlikely to solve this problem. There is a difference between fulfilling a need and fulfilling market demand. Students who are poor and harder to educate have a need. Easy to educate students who have the resources to pay for part of their costs represent a market. The task is a political one: to use government policy, such as financial aid, in ways that bring together needs and markets.

One policy area with the potential to help access is the revolution in technology. A growing body of research demonstrates that, used wisely, technology can help close the gap between advantaged and less advantaged students. As yet, however, technology is as much contributing to the problems of social mobility as to their solution. The “digital divide” poses a major new threat. As the price of technology drops, the crux of the problem is more likely to pivot on who has access to and knowledge of this technology—particularly at home—than the cost of technology. While the new technologies have the potential for improving access and mobility, the tendency so far has been to use them to enhance the opportunities for those already participating fully in society, using technology, for example, to provide upgraded skills for the already employed. If this situation persists, it is likely to become even harder for the less advantaged to gain access to the best opportunities.

The Digital Divide

Households with incomes of \$75,000 or higher are more than twenty times more likely to have access to the internet than those at the lowest income levels, and more than nine times as likely to have a computer at home.⁴⁴

The time is right

As things now exist, this country is enjoying the longest, most powerful economic boom ever, as well as budget surpluses at the state and federal level. The danger to its continuation is a growing labor shortage. The economy also faces a future in which a growing share of its recruits will be minorities, often children of immigrants. If ever there were a time for a determined national effort to prepare and encourage all citizens for access to higher education, this would seem to be it. Yet this subject has captured relatively little attention—in the business community or the political world. The Federal Reserve has argued for slowing the economy. The high tech industry has argued (successfully), for increasing the quotas for skilled workers from abroad. While these may be useful in the short run, a longer-term strategy focused on intensive education of those still lacking the necessary skills would be more productive. Meanwhile, in the academic community, the focus has shifted toward attracting the advantaged students. Affirmative action and remedial education are under attack.

Surely, higher education's efforts at affirmative action and remedial education can be improved, made more effective and made more equitable. But there is a danger that the United States will miss a major opportunity as market forces come to play a large role. As competition between institutions increases, each segment of higher education will attempt to outdo the other by trying to attract the best possible students; they will pass those students viewed as marginal in the admissions process down to the next level of selectivity—leaving the hardest to educate students to those institutions with the least resources.

Providing a Safe Place for Disinterested Scholarship and Unfettered Debate

Over the past half-century, with the movement from the industrial age to the information age, research, and particularly scientific research, is more and more valued. As the public comes to understand the ultimate practical value of scientific research, there has been a corresponding growth in the appreciation of the university as the home of such research.

But it is not just research in the hard sciences that the university provides. Objective research on every dimension of life now guides public understanding, including public policy—from who is receiving health care, to the flow of investment funds into various forms of capital development, to questions of growing income disparity, to the success or failure of new approaches to schooling, to the safety of genetically engineered foods. As society becomes more complex, the need for information that can be trusted grows.

The university provides another important service in that it frequently serves as the place of free and open debate about critical issues. At its best, when the university performance meets the level of its traditions, all sides are heard and there is an emphasis on evidence rather than on ideology. As a part of this tradition, university faculty undertake research which illuminates societal problems by bringing fresh evidence and insights to bear on contentious issues. Further, as part of this tradition, the university seeks to encourage its students to think critically, to ask questions, and to challenge accepted dogma.

It is these characteristics that make universities so critical to the establishment and maintenance of democracy. It is also these characteristics that make universities threatening to authoritarian governments. Given the present upheaval of societal conventions—found for example in the growing aggressiveness of the media, the confusion between news and entertainment in the electronic media, the growing public skepticism with regard to the political system—the role of higher education as a social critic is more important than ever.

The assumption has always been that any challenge to this open and objective character of university research would be external, hence the efforts to protect the concept of academic freedom. With the changing structure of higher education, the new danger is more likely internal to the academic community. The growing prominence of virtual

institutions, for example, raises interesting questions. With almost all of the virtual programs that have emerged so far, the focus is on the role of the institution in helping the individual student develop knowledge and skill, often with a strong career focus. The corporate role of the institution as an agency of civic debate and objective research is, so far, absent.

It is conceivable that the capacity of the virtual institutions could be used to create a new and more effective opportunity for public debate. For example, it might well be that the technology of the Internet and computer could be used to create a system of public interchange that could rejuvenate the political process. Such a use for technology has yet to capture the interest of higher education, and the techniques that will be required are, as yet, underdeveloped. We are left wondering if virtual institutions will expand their capacity for debate or ignore this central function. What is required to move the proponents of virtual to this level of inquiry?

A more serious threat comes from the spread of for-profit involvement. This threat does not come principally from those universities founded originally as for-profit entities who have never seen this role as part of their mission. It stems more from the growing use of for-profit activities by traditional, non-profit universities—either through subsidiaries or more often through alliances with for-profit firms that take on part of the academic task, such as organizing and operating the university's virtual courses. The critical question is whether the need to ensure profit, or even in the case of non-profit activities to maximize revenue, will create a chilling effect on the university's role as a center of open and objective debate and scholarship. The danger, in other words, is one of self-censorship. In fact, while evidence is hard to come by, a subtle shift toward caution seems to have been underway on campuses for some time, a shift likely to be exacerbated by these dangers.

Avoiding the Trap of Nostalgia

As society attempts to think through and adapt to the changes that are inevitable as market forces advance in higher education, there is a need to avoid being blinded by nostalgia, by the assumption that the performance of higher education matches its rhetoric. Asked simply, are students being effectively socialized to life as citizens now? There is a serious question that has puzzled many university officials in the United States: the voting rate of recent university and college graduates has continued to decline despite the growing interest in community service on the part of these graduates during their student years. What does this say about the effectiveness of the socialization process?

Are students actually inculcated into the life of the mind as a result of their time spent at the university? As a greater and greater share of students attend some form of higher education, is there any evidence that society is becoming more intellectual, more culturally sophisticated?

Do students find faculty open to the role of mentor and intellectual guides? Or, do students see faculty as more interested in their disciplines and their publications?

Are universities serving as centers of debate and discussion with regard to the crucial issues facing society? Are they truly open to all sides of the debate? Have they helped create an informed open debate on such crucial issues as income disparity, the role of immigration, affirmative action, or the structure of the healthcare system?

It seems clear on many fronts that the academic community should favor the New World of market oriented policies. Certainly, the goal ought not to be preservation of the status quo. Rather, as change comes, the goal should be to create policies that help modify pure market forces in ways that enhance positive socialization, social mobility, and the university's role as a source of objective information. The goal, as well should be to develop the means of using the new technologies to enhance rather than diminish higher education's critical roles.

Options for the future

As policy makers face this daunting task, there are options available and possibilities for new approaches to policy.

In the field of social mobility, for example, there's a good deal of evidence that university-sponsored outreach programs, financial aid for the less advantaged, widespread use of technology in the schools, and other such policies can sharply improve access to higher education for the less advantaged. When dealing with the question of the socialization of students, well-designed virtual programs, while not as powerful as well-designed on-campus programs, create positive experiences for students by creating faculty/student as well as student/student interaction. Even more important, institutions can create mixed systems of traditional and virtual coursework which

Student Aid for Whom?

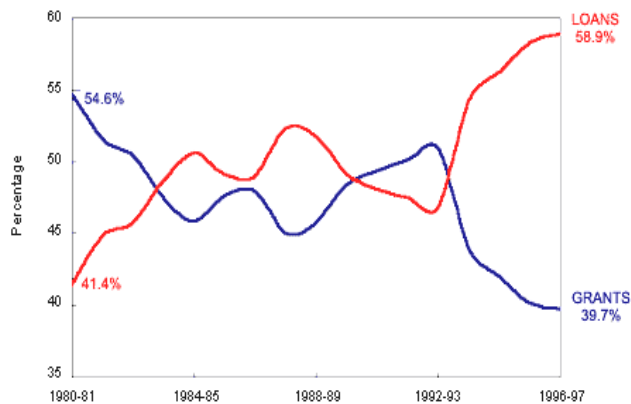
Over the last decade there has been a significant increase in student aid including from the federal level, through the Hope Scholarship (a tax credit) and increased student loans; employers through employee tuition assistance and employer sponsored training. But this aid has helped the advantaged most and the less advantaged least.

- "For poor people, the hope scholarship is virtually meaningless...First, workers need to earn enough money so they have a \$1500 tax burden to slice off...A single parent earning \$20,000 a year might pay taxes of just a few hundred dollars a year. Even worse, the parent or student has to front the \$1500 when tuition is due, say in August. They don't get the refund until the following spring. Poor people can't come up with those monies upfront..."⁴⁵
- "Generally, middle-class students at private colleges; out-of-state students at public colleges; continuing education students; and professional-school students are receiving the tax credit. Community-college students; recipients of generous aid packages; independent undergraduates; and doctoral students with fellowships do not receive tax credits."⁴⁶
- "Students and families with incomes:
 - greater than \$50,000 nearly half the total tuition-tax credit.
 - incomes less than \$30,000 received 25%."⁴⁷
- "In 1995-96, unmet need for a dependent full-time undergraduate at a public 4 year institution was:
 - \$3,800 lowest income quartile
 - \$400 highest income bracket."⁴⁸
- "1998-99: \$64.1 million student aid awarded:
 - 52% Federal loans
 - 11.3 Federal grants."⁴⁹
- "1995-96 79% of undergraduates worked while enrolled in college, working on average 25 hours per week."⁵⁰
- Participation in employer-provided training:
 - "Employees with only H.S. diploma – 60%
 - Employees with bachelor's or higher – 90%"⁵¹
- "...being in the lowest earnings quartile was associated with lower probability of receiving training than employees in higher earnings quartile."⁵²
- Employees with household incomes of:
 - "\$50,000 –33% received employer aid (3 times more likely)
 - \$20,000 or less – 10.4 % received employer aid"⁵³
- "White, non-Hispanic employees received more training than Black, non-Hispanic or Hispanic employees"⁵⁴
- "7% of part-time employees receive employer assistance
37% of full-time employees receive employer assistance"⁵⁵
- "50% of executive, administrators, and managers received employer aid compared to 4 % of helpers, laborers, or cleaners."⁵⁶

help insure that students gain more than just workforce skills. Research on the effects of students in virtual courses has shown that the use of the Internet can be a boon to those who would have been reluctant to participate in the traditional classroom.

Percent Share of Grants vs. Loans, 1980-81 to 1996-97⁵⁷

Figure 9. Percent Share of Grants vs. Loans, 1980-81 to 1996-97.



SOURCE: *Trends in Student Aid: 1987 to 1997*, The College Board.

As technology advances, the crucial issue is whether we will have the imagination, foresight and political will to employ it wisely in the service of society. Will we create virtual courseware that increases student engagement and capitalizes on different learning styles or will we simply drift into doing what is easiest? Will we use technology to transform pedagogy in the classroom? Will we use it to enhance community debate and discussion or focus only on workforce skills? A variety of experiments have demonstrated that technology can be used to create opportunities for debate and discussion on a broad range of difficult subjects as well as over a wide geographical area. Can the use of virtual technologies be used to create new forms of interaction that foster the university’s role as a home of objective research and public debate?

As the new competitors get stronger, many traditional institutions will feel compelled to emulate their narrow focus and compromise their historic functions. Will the academy drift toward the mean, toward a universe of relative sameness, or will the growing competition expand the array of differing alternatives, creating institutions more skilled at serving students with different needs and at different times in their lives?

As change accelerates, will the academic community grasp the enormous opportunities that lie ahead? It is likely that all of the forces changing higher education—virtual instruction, the computer and its effect on pedagogy, the for-profit ventures—will not manifest themselves in only their pure forms. Rather the system is likely to encompass all sorts of variations and mixtures. The opportunities are, as a result, stunning in their scope. The real threat to higher education is that we will focus only on the short-term gain that these new forces offer us, that we will search for ways to maximize institutional

⁵⁷ “Percent Share of Grants vs. Loans, 1980-81 to 1996-97.” [College Board Online](http://www.collegeboard.org/policy/html/tfhfig9.html) July 2000 <<http://www.collegeboard.org/policy/html/tfhfig9.html>>.

revenue rather than pursue the longer-term goals that have formed the backbone of higher education for centuries.

How to take advantage of these opportunities will absorb our attention over this decade, but it seems clear that two strategies will not work:

- A rush toward for-profit activities and narrow uses of technology in the hopes of maximizing revenue streams will erode much of the fundamental purposes of higher education and lose for it the special place it now holds in our society.
- A retreat to a smug determination to “stay just as we are” in the face of these barbarian challenges will ensure that traditional higher education misses the excitement and promise these new forces hold and is bypassed by new and more alert competitors.

Rather, the task is to ask hard questions. How do we improve the way we currently educate and socialize students, create social mobility, serve as a center of objective scholarship and debate? How do we use technology to improve learning, expand access and reduce cost?

The task ahead for policy makers is to ask how a thoughtful set of policies can modify and shape the emerging market forces so as to help the system of higher education evolve into a more responsive and effective system.

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Director, The Futures Project: Policy for Higher Education in a Changing World
September 2000

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