

Chapter 4

Privatizing public higher education: Selling off the alma mater

The original documents for the establishment of Rice University, located in Houston, Texas, explicitly forbid the institution from charging tuition. The founders of Rice wanted admissions to be competitive, but they also wanted tuition to be free so that talented students from poor families could attend. In 1966, the university filed a lawsuit to free itself from the rules it established in its own charter. The university prevailed and began charging tuition in 1967.¹

Today it costs about \$60,000 (tuition, room and board) to attend Rice, about double the annual salaries of most Americans in their twenties.² On its website, Rice proclaims that the university is "often cited as one of the country's 'best value' private schools because its tuition tends to be lower than at peer research universities."³

In many ways, the transformation of Rice from highly-selective, free, public university to elite, expensive, private university echoes the broader trends in higher education over the past fifty years. Students want to go to college, but tuition is more expensive and financial support for public higher education is waning. Colleges must continually scramble to stay solvent.

As a result, public universities have raised tuition, privatized countless parts of its operation, and instigated an endless quest for funding from non-governmental sources.⁴ In the 1960s, The University of Michigan once received 80% of its funding from the state; now it receives 16%.⁵ State support at The University of Oregon has declined to 9%.⁶ The University of Virginia has dropped to 6%,⁷ The University of California system has been reduced to 5%,⁸ and The University of Colorado at Boulder has sunk to less than 4%!⁹ During the decade between 2008 and 2017, forty-five states cut funding to public higher education.¹⁰ The ten states with the largest cuts to higher education are shown in Figure 1.

Figure 1: Ten states with the largest cuts to public higher education for the period 2008-2017

State	Percent change in state spending per student, (adjusted for inflation and rounded), 2008-2017
1. Arizona	54%
2. Louisiana	45%
3. Illinois	37%
4. Pennsylvania	34%
5. Alabama	34%
6. Oklahoma	34%
7. South Carolina	34%
8. New Mexico	33%
9. Delaware	27%
10. Kentucky	26%

The retreat of state funding has created tremendous pressure on the viability of public institutions, which in turn, has led to rocketing tuition hikes.¹¹ In 1984-85, the average tuition, fees, room and board rates charged for full-time undergraduate students at public universities was \$3,682; today average costs have escalated 570%, to around \$21,000.¹²

The next public university to “go private” has become an ongoing topic of speculation.¹³ In the past few years, policymakers in Michigan, Oregon, Virginia, California, and Colorado have considered legislation that would have turned their flagship public campuses into private institutions.¹⁴ University of Virginia’s Darden College of Business officially cut ties with the state many years ago. The Anderson School of Management at The University of California at Los Angeles (UCLA) opted to stop accepting state funding in 2014.¹⁵ To survive consecutive years of deep budget cuts, public institutions have sold or leased assets, and started “doing business differently,” which has meant finding any possible way to increase revenue.¹⁶

Funding for higher education tends to be drawn from discretionary funds, and higher education funding frequently gets “crowded out by increases in mandatory expenditures” such as Medicaid and pension obligations.¹⁷ Another factor inhibiting higher education funding has been the escalating costs of prisons. The number of incarcerated Americans resulting from new, harsh drugs laws ratified in the 1970s and 1980s forced some states to allocate more dollars to prisons than colleges.¹⁸ While a prisoner certainly deserves food, medical care, and a clean and well-lighted place to sleep, funding prisons over colleges may send the wrong message (that the state values prisons over universities).

Most public institutions of higher education were established to serve the needs of citizens within its borders, but states’ dwindling contributions have forced dramatic cost-cutting measures and frantic searches for new income streams. The depth of state budget cuts has forced most public institutions to either “let quality slip or privatize.”¹⁹

Privatization in public higher education institutions typically comes in three forms:

1. Outsourced services (for example, contracting with a business to take over food services rather than operating food services as part of university operations)
2. Business-oriented financial systems (for example, making decisions based upon the possibilities for profit rather than on potential ways to serve the public)²⁰
3. Alternatives to colleges and universities.

Outsourced services

Americans take a great deal of pride in their college alma maters. Recreational vehicles are purchased for the sole purpose of driving to collegiate sporting events to “tailgate;” licensed, logo-emblazoned clothing is acquired and proudly worn; homecomings, campus events, and reunions have become benchmark occasions; sizable sums of money are donated during university fund drives; arguments with fans from other universities loyal to (presumably) inferior institutions are everyday occurrences. When the school fight song plays, some devoted alums find it difficult to fight back tears.

Although student satisfaction is at the heart of institutional loyalty, all universities today (as in 100%) outsource at least some components of the college experience.²¹ Most data available on privatization is gathered through surveys that are voluntarily completed by mid-level college administrators.²² However, articles in peer-reviewed journals often cite a

particular survey published in *American School and University Magazine* from 1996.²³ Because state funding has been in continual decline since 1996, such older surveys may not offer accurate accounts of the true state of privatization.

In 1996, areas for privatization included food services, bookstores, custodial services, maintenance, and computer services.²⁴ Since then, public institutions have outsourced an ever greater number of functions, including remedial academics, health and counseling services, advising, recruitment, retention, accreditation, marketing, financial services, parking, police/security, residential housing, and academic programs. As can be seen from Figure 2, the variety of outsourced services has grown significantly.

Figure 2: Commonly privatized services in public institutions in 1996 and 2017²⁵

1996	2017
Food services	Food services
Bookstores	Bookstores
Custodial services	Custodial services
Maintenance	Maintenance
Computer services	Computer services
	Remedial academics
	Health and counseling services
	Advising
	Recruitment
	Retention
	Accreditation
	Marketing
	Financial services
	Parking
	Police/security
	Residential housing
	Academic programs

Recent privatization agreements have been massive, both in terms of money and length of contract. A contract between Tennessee’s public institutions and Chicago-based Jones Lang LaSalle (JLL), a property management company, was worth \$1.9 billion over five years;²⁶ The University of Georgia System also signed a contract worth \$2 billion that gave Corvias, a private company, the rights to several properties on Georgia’s public campuses for the next 65 years.²⁷ Ohio State University’s entire parking-services department was sold for \$483 million to QIC Global Infrastructure, an Australian company.²⁸ As a result, parking services on Ohio State University’s campus will be owned and operated by QIC for the next 50-years. A year after the deal was announced, the Chief Financial Officer at Ohio State, who brokered the deal, quit the university to go to work for QIC.²⁹

One of the biggest trends on public campuses in recent years has been the transfer of the construction and operation of residence halls to private interests. Six and a half billion dollars worth of transactions involving privatized housing on college campuses occurred in 2016, alone.³⁰ According to one of the large private suppliers of collegiate housing, Education Realty Trust, a corporation with publicly-traded stock (symbol=EdR), business has been brisk:

EdR grew its collegiate housing assets by 19% in 2016 with the delivery of more than 2,500 beds at the universities of Kentucky, Mississippi and Virginia Tech totaling \$175 million and the acquisition of five communities serving Wisconsin, Arizona, Colorado State and Oregon State for a total of \$287 million. EdR currently has nearly \$1 billion in active development projects to be delivered in 2017-19 at tier one universities such as Arizona State, Boise State, Colorado State, Hawaii, Kentucky, Michigan State, Minnesota, Northern Michigan, Oklahoma State, Pittsburgh and Texas State. These active projects represent a 41% increase in our collegiate housing assets over Dec. 31, 2106 and most importantly, 31% of the developments are on-campus.³¹

At the moment, enormous amounts of money are funneling into public higher education, but there are strings attached. The character and mission of a public institution get muddled by the profit motive of the many businesses popping up across campus. In 2016, one-in-three institutions outsourced their online programs to businesses.³² Unsurprisingly, institutions of higher education are not anxious to acknowledge that many of their online programs are actually pre-packaged products developed by corporations, such as Pearson, Academic Partnerships, Education 2 Go, Bisk, Everspring, Apollidon Learning, and 2U.³³

Most students who apply for an online graduate program in the Eli Broad College of Business at Michigan State University probably do not know that their courses will most likely not be taught by MSU full-time faculty, but by temporary workers hired by Bisk, a corporation that specializes in “curricular design, online education, and student support.”³⁴ Concerning the quality of online faculty, the contract between Michigan State University and Bisk states, “Faculty teaching Courses to degree-seeking students shall hold at a minimum a master’s degree(s) from an institution that was, at the time of the degree was awarded, an institution accredited by a regional accrediting association or another accrediting association.”³⁵ With regard to program content, the contract states,

Bisk shall be solely responsible for designing, building, contracting for, hosting, maintaining and managing all required computer code, databases, hardware, software, networks, and other functionality necessary to deliver the online Offering, including marketing, application, retention, Course delivery, electronic communications and testing.³⁶

While this is an impressive array of responsibilities for Bisk, it makes one wonder what the tenure-track faculty in the Broad College of Business actually do. Perhaps the details of how revenue is shared reflects the true nature of the “partnership:” With regard to profit-sharing, the contract elucidates that

Once the Business Analytics master’s degree Program is launched, the following shall apply: As calculated on a fiscal year basis (i.e. July 1 to June 30) MSU shall be entitled to 32% and Bisk shall be compensated with 68% of the Gross Revenue.³⁷

When students consider the online nursing programs at Arkansas State University or The University of Texas at Arlington, they may not understand that these programs involve

no real interactions with full-time faculty. Yet, full-time faculty are largely responsible for the reputation of a university.³⁸

As Michigan State University's online programs are managed by Bisk, whose headquarters are in Tampa, Florida (1230 miles from Lansing), online programs at University of Texas at Arlington and Arkansas State are managed by Academic Partnerships, a corporation headquartered in Dallas, Texas. In addition to creating course content, Academic Partnerships offers ready-made programs for advising and retention, and sells the popular online course platform, Canvas.³⁹

Prospective students who visit the Arkansas State website (<http://degree.astate.edu/online/degrees>) wanting more information about online degree programs are directed to a page designed and created by Academic Partnerships, not by Arkansas State. As of this writing, even the homepage for UTA's nursing program is housed on servers owned by Academic Partnerships, as indicated by its web address, <https://academicpartnerships.uta.edu/online1/degrees/#nur>.

Figure 3: The RN to BSN program at Arkansas State University. <http://degree.astate.edu/online/degrees>

The screenshot displays the 'RN to BSN' program page. On the left, a sidebar lists 'Undergraduate Programs Online' including Bachelor of Arts in Communication Studies, Criminology, Political Science, Sociology, and General Studies, as well as Bachelor of Science in Strategic Communications – Social Media Management, Bachelor of Applied Science, Certificate in Leadership Studies, and Certificate in Social Media Management. The 'RN to BSN' program is highlighted in red. The main content area features the program title, duration (12 months*), credit hours (36**), and tuition (\$236 per credit hour). It includes a note that the price includes an administrative fee and describes the program as flexible and convenient for working nurses. A list of benefits includes increasing clinical knowledge, strengthening leadership skills, enhancing decision-making, using evidence-based data, and qualifying for various career opportunities. On the right, a 'Request Information' form is visible, with a dropdown menu set to 'RN to BSN' and input fields for First Name, Last Name, Email, Phone, and Zip Code. A red 'Learn More' button and the phone number 866-621-8096 are also present. A disclaimer at the bottom states that submitting the form constitutes a digital signature agreement for contact regarding educational services.

Figure 4: The RN to BSN at University of Texas at Arlington.
<https://academicpartnerships.uta.edu/online1/degrees>

The screenshot displays a webpage for nursing programs. On the left, a sidebar lists various programs under 'Nursing Programs Online:', including 'RN to BSN', 'RN to MSN', 'BSN', 'MSN - Family Nurse Practitioner', 'MSN in Nursing Administration', 'MSN in Nursing Education', 'MSN in Adult Gerontology Acute Care Nurse Practitioner', 'MSN in Adult Gerontology Primary Care Nurse Practitioner', 'MSN in Pediatric Acute Care Nurse Practitioner', 'MSN in Pediatric Primary Care Nurse Practitioner', and 'DNP'. The main content area features the 'Registered Nurse to Bachelor of Science in Nursing' program. It specifies a duration of 'as few as 9 months' and '35 Credit Hours', with a tuition of '\$8,995'. A description states that the program is designed for working RNs with a flexible schedule. A list of bullet points highlights that the program is nationally accredited, has more than 6,500 graduates in less than 6 years, and is among the top nursing schools. An orange 'Apply Now' button is present. To the right, a 'Request Information' section contains a form with fields for 'First Name*', 'Last Name*', 'Email*', 'Phone*', and 'ZIP Code*'. Below the form, it says '*All fields required.' and includes a 'Learn More' button and the phone number '866-489-2810'. A small disclaimer at the bottom of the form states: 'By submitting this form, I am providing my digital signature agreeing that The University of Texas at Arlington (UTA) may email me or contact me regarding educational services by telephone and/or text message utilizing automated technology at the telephone number(s) provided above. I understand this consent is not a condition to attend UTA or to purchase any other goods or services.'

Figures 3 and 4 show that the programs from ASU and UTA use almost the identical webpage design, save for the color-coding of the font and a few buttons. On its corporate website, Academic Partnerships boasts that it increased enrollment in the nursing program at University of Texas at Arlington from 137 students to over 19,000 students relatively quickly.

In eight years, thanks to AP’s very effective integrated marketing that combined digital and traditional marketing with robust field sales activity, the CONHI’s [College of Nursing and Health Innovation] RN-to-BSN program has grown from 137 students on campus to an expected 19,000 total nursing students in 2017, making it the largest and one of the fastest-growing state university nursing programs in the United States.⁴⁰

The online nursing program at the University of Texas at Arlington has become popular because it has been designed to be completed quickly and “at the student’s convenience.”⁴¹ With an enrollment of almost 20,000 students, one might think that University of Texas at Arlington nursing faculty would be massive. Yet, the nursing faculty at UTA consists of only 18 tenure-track faculty and 3 administrators, yielding a student/tenure-track faculty ratio of roughly 1000 to 1. At that ratio, if a faculty member spent a half-hour writing a personalized note to each of the 1000 students in class, it would take about two months.

Obviously, logistics dictate that the responsibility for teaching online courses in the nursing program at UTA must be outsourced. UTA uses a mix of some part-time “clinical faculty” and lots of temporary workers hired by Academic Partnerships to handle the load. Unlike tenure-track faculty, these instructors may not be required to hold the Ph.D., are not subjected to scrutiny from their peers, and are not expected to engage in research or service. In addition, institutions are not required to furnish these workers with office space, health

insurance, benefits, or a living wage. In short, temporary workers are used because they are much cheaper to hire and easier to fire than are tenure-track faculty.

The webpage showcasing education degrees offered through LSU’s online programs (Figure 6) is virtually identical to the home pages for the nursing programs at ASU and UTA, except for the color of the font and buttons. Online providers, like Academic Partnerships, utilize a single template to achieve “economies of scale,” a template that reduces costs, but diminishes distinctiveness.

Figure 5: The <http://lsuonline.lsu.edu/online/degrees>

Human Sciences & Education Programs Online:

- [M.A. in Education with a Specialization in Higher Education Administration](#)
- M.Ed. in Educational Leadership
- M.S. in Human Resource Education with a Concentration in HR and Leadership Development
- M.S. in Human Resource Education with a Concentration in Workforce Development
- Grad Certificate in Workforce Development
- M.S. in Kinesiology with a Specialization in Sport Management
- M.S. in Social Work

Master of Arts in Education with a Specialization in Higher Education Administration

36 credit hours | \$481 per credit hour*
Duration: as few as 15 months

The Master of Arts in Education with a specialization in Higher Education Administration is designed for students seeking careers in student affairs and higher education administration.

Learn from the same respected LSU faculty and practitioners about developing a leadership vision, higher education knowledge, and management skills to assume leadership positions such as:

- Recruiting
- Admissions
- Financial aid
- Counseling
- Greek affairs
- Career planning and placement

All master's candidates in the HEA specialization are required to complete a standard comprehensive final exam. The program consists of 12 courses. Each course is 7 weeks long.

*The LSU Board of Supervisors may modify tuition and/or fees at any time without advance notice.

Request Information

M.A. in Higher Education Admi

First Name*

Last Name*

Email*

Phone* ZIP Code*

***All fields required.**

Learn More

or call 877-670-4521

By submitting this form, I agree, via my digital signature, that Louisiana State University (LSU) may email me or contact me regarding educational services by telephone and/or text message utilizing automated technology at the telephone number(s) provided above. I understand this consent is not required to attend LSU.

Outsourced programs in higher education tend to make the same kinds of promises—a course of study that is not too difficult, of short duration, flexible, with minimal fieldwork, no internship, and a degree from an institution of higher education that, on its face, seems legitimate.⁴² Businesses “have essentially become comprehensive contract manufacturers for higher education institutions, delivering services that range from point solutions (e.g., student retention and video lecture tools) to comprehensive service provision across the student life cycle (e.g., enrollment management, online learning delivery and models, and student support services).”⁴³ An employer might not realize that a degree that features the logos of Michigan State University, University of Texas at Arlington, Arkansas State University, or LSU might, in actuality, be a receipt for the purchase of an Internet degree on the inside.⁴⁴

Recently, The University of Florida signed a multi-million dollar agreement with mega-testing and publishing giant Pearson to develop a series of totally online bachelor’s degrees. However, the university reneged on the \$186 million agreement at the last minute and began pursuing the online expansion in-house instead.⁴⁵ Bolstered by the belief that online education costs less than face-to-face instruction, Florida’s Board of Governor’s Innovation Committee promised that 40% of all future undergraduate degrees from public institutions in the state would be delivered online by 2025.⁴⁶

The online program management space is growing 35% annually, despite the fact that many administrators in higher education have found outsourcing courses to be ineffective and unprofitable.⁴⁷ In general, students perceive online degree programs to be “easier” and “less effective” than traditional programs.⁴⁸

Recently, the U.S. Department of Education requested that Western Governor’s University, a popular online institution, return \$712 million in federal financial aid because there was a dearth of “interaction between instructors and students” and therefore, the courses could not be considered university caliber.⁴⁹ The report concluded that most courses were not designed to offer “regular and substantive interaction with an instructor.” Of the sixty-nine courses investigated, none had more than two interactions with an instructor over the course of an entire semester.

32 of the 69 courses described no substantive interaction with an instructor. Course design materials for 27 courses described one substantive interaction with an instructor. Course design materials for ten courses described two substantive interactions with an instructor.⁵⁰

No courses had more than two interactions. The conclusions from the Inspector General’s report reiterate the overwhelming sentiment expressed by business leaders. “Most employers would prefer a job applicant with a traditional degree from an average school over one with an online degree from a top university.”⁵¹

Business-oriented financial systems

The response by public institutions of higher education to the continual panic over funding has resulted in the adoption of new accounting systems. The trend has been for institutions of higher education to convert from budgeting based upon history, formula, and “program priority” to financial systems with non-negotiable “clean lines,” such as zero-based budgeting (ZBB) or responsibility-centered budgeting (RCB). Such financial systems hold programs strictly accountable for all revenues and expenditures. Programs that do not “pay their own way” through adequate enrollments must either downsize to meet lower revenue realities or face closure. Programs that make money might receive financial incentives appropriate to the level of additional tuition dollars generated.

These new financial systems have had significant consequences on how universities are run and how universities perceive of their mission. Among the consequences have been the following:

- A. A de-emphasis on service to the community and state
- B. An increase in out-of-state students
- C. An increase in the use of adjuncts, temporary, and “clinical faculty”
- D. Support for popular majors and a withdrawal of support for unpopular majors
- E. Changes in the mode of delivery

A. A de-emphasis on service to the community and state

The *Faculty Guide* of University of Massachusetts at Amherst, a land-grant institution, describes a faculty member’s obligation to provide public service as “offering assistance to regional cities and towns; and engaging in outreach in such areas as public health, environmental safety, transportation, public finance, and education.”⁵² Despite the obvious

benefits of service to the state and community, service is, by far, the least important measure of the three major criteria—research, teaching, and service—that are used in higher education for considerations of promotion and tenure.⁵³ While the quality of teaching matters somewhat, “scholarship is more important for purposes of evaluation,”⁵⁴ with service coming in at a distant third.

The guiding principles for the University of Colorado, according to Article 1, Part C of the Laws of the Colorado Regents, is that the university will “strive to meet the ***needs of the State of Colorado***, including health care, technology, work force training, and civic literacy” (bold italics are mine).⁵⁵ Consider this guiding principle in light of the mission statement on the university’s website:

CU-Boulder recognizes the exceptional opportunities associated with its ***role as a research university***, and values the unique strength and character ***research achievements*** bring to undergraduate education. It is keenly aware of its responsibility for educating the next generation of citizens and leaders, and for fostering the spirit of discovery ***through research***. Indeed, CU-Boulder believes that its students, both graduate and undergraduate, benefit from the comprehensive mix of programs and ***research excellence*** that characterize a flagship university. (bold italics are mine)

While the guiding principles articulated in Article 1, Part C of the Law of the Regents focus on service; the mission statement of University of Colorado at Boulder focuses on research. Indeed, the priorities of the institution are reflected in the very structure of its website, which features sections describing academics, admissions, research, and campus life, but nothing about service or community outreach.

To denote the absence of service is not to denigrate the University of Colorado but to underscore the movement in public higher education towards research and away from service. Once upon a time, many faculty in public institutions were expected to devote the equivalent of one-day-per-week towards service activities—to the state and community.⁵⁶ Today most public institutions of higher education go more in the direction of Texas A&M, who in 2006 declared a priority for the “commercialization of research” and productivity of grants, particularly with regard to promotion and tenure decisions.⁵⁷

B. An increase in out-of-state students

Although public institutions once were expected to serve the state and its citizens, one outcome of the nationwide budget crunch has been an increase in out-of-state enrollments at state-supported universities. The reason for the increase in out-of-state students is simple—such students pay appreciably more in tuition than in-state students. Figure 6 shows the percentage of out-of-state students at selected public universities. The University of Vermont became a public institution in 1862. Despite being the flagship institution for the state, three in four students at UV come from outside the state. The University of Alabama, established in 1820, has as its mission “to advance the intellectual and social condition of the people of the state.” Such a goal may be challenging for UA since most of their students are not from Alabama.

Figure 6: Out-of-state enrollment at selected public universities

Institution	Percent of out-of-state students
University of Vermont	75%
University of Alabama	59%
University of Oregon	49%
University of West Virginia	49%
University of Arkansas	44%
University of Colorado at Boulder	41%
University of South Carolina	41%
University of Missouri	33%

C. An increase in the use of adjuncts, teaching assistants, temporary instructors, and “clinical faculty”

Adjuncts, teaching assistants, temporary instructors, and clinical faculty are far less expensive to hire and easier to fire than are tenure-track faculty. That is why adjuncts comprise 70% of all instructors in institutions of higher education.⁵⁸ The policy of using the cheapest possible labor reduces costs and boosts profitability, sometimes admittedly, at the expense of quality.⁵⁹

D. Support for popular majors and a withdrawing of support for unpopular majors

The most popular areas of study in higher education today are business, the health professions, social sciences and history, psychology, and biology. In general, programs in these fields receive “first rung” support because enrollments in these majors are usually sufficient to pay for a program’s costs. However, in areas such as classics, educational foundations, foreign languages, literature, linguistics, philosophy, cultural studies, and religion, enrollments may be insufficient to support program expenditures.⁶⁰ In recent years, the natural progression of events has been to maintain popular programs and to close programs with low enrollments. Thus, popular majors flourish while less popular majors vanish.

E. Changes in the mode of delivery

In the belief that online courses are cheaper to run, most universities and colleges have encouraged faculty to transform traditional courses into online formats.⁶¹ To achieve economies of scale, public universities have rushed to expand enrollments in online courses, allowing enrollments of up to 1,000 students in a single class. About one-in-three students in higher education takes an online course.⁶² Despite the lure of online courses, much research indicates that, keeping other variables consistent, online courses are no more profitable than traditional, face-to-face courses.⁶³ The profitability of online courses comes in enrolling large numbers of students, then paying adjuncts significantly less than faculty to do the work.⁶⁴

If there is an upside to the incursion of business practices into the daily operations and curricula of higher education, it is that public institutions still have some degree of control over the details of the contract. Although administrators at Michigan State University, UT Arlington, Arkansas State University, and LSU outsourced programs for economic gain, at least it was their choice to do so. Increasingly, functions of the public university are being sold off in the spirit of market-based economics without any input, whatsoever, from the faculty of the institutions.

Alternatives to colleges and universities

In the preface to *The Rise and Growth of the Normal-School Idea* (published in 1891), the Commissioner of the U.S. Bureau of Education, then part of the Department of the Interior, wrote as follows:

Numerous changes have taken place that point in the direction of a wider and more general recognition of the importance of education as a university study. The school of pedagogy in Clark University, the reorganization of the Albany Normal School, the new departure taken by Harvard in the matter of pedagogy are among the suggestive signs of the times. They indicate, let us hope, that the time is not far distant when an untrained teacher will be considered a greater absurdity than an untrained doctor or lawyer.⁶⁵

More than a century later, America still lives with the absurdity of untrained teachers. Now, in many states, unvetted new teachers outnumber educated new teachers by wide margins.⁶⁶ For example, in Texas, more than half of all new teachers buy teacher certification through online businesses, such as I-Teach Texas (<http://www.iteach.net/texas/>) and A+ Texas Teachers (www.texasteachers.org).⁶⁷ According to the most recent data available, I-Teach Texas and A+ Texas Teachers gave certification to 4912 customers in 2015. Meanwhile, the program at The University of Texas at Austin, which requires of prospective teachers two years of field experience and a 3.0 grade point average, graduated only 310.⁶⁸ Oklahoma issued about 2000 emergency teacher certifications in 2017 while The University of Oklahoma, which requires two years of field experience and a 3.0 grade point average, graduated only 181 new teachers.

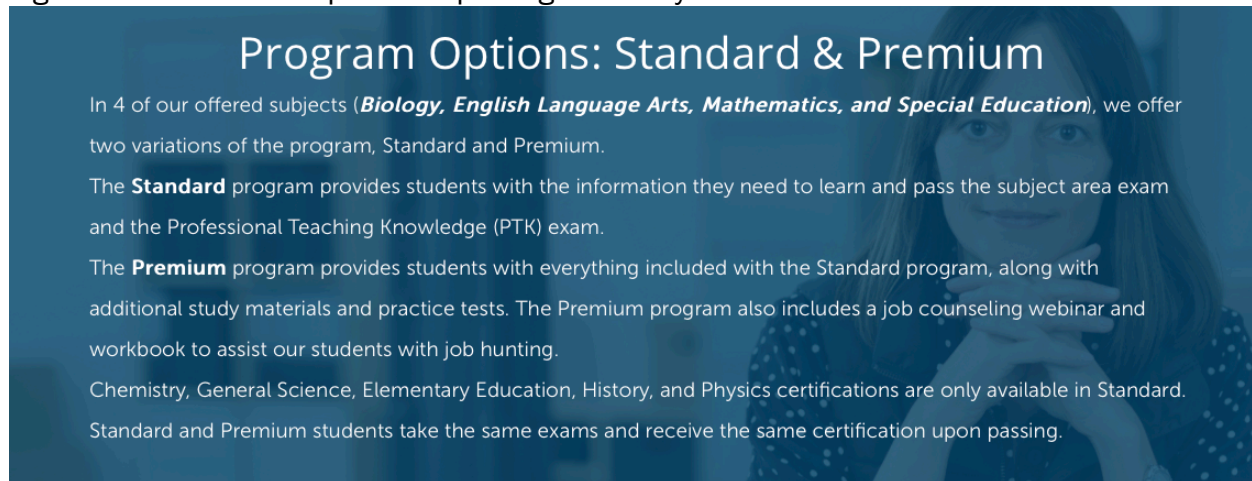
The proliferation of unvetted teachers has been abetted by a rash of legislation at the federal and state levels that encourages teaching certification to be bought and sold on the open market rather than earned in the classroom.⁶⁹ In most states today, anyone who wants to become a teacher can get a job even if they have no knowledge of learning and human development, have no previous experience with children, and possess horrid communication skills.⁷⁰

Placing unvetted, unproven, and unsupervised individuals in classrooms has resulted in record numbers of cases of teacher misconduct. The Texas Education Agency adjudicated 222 cases of teacher misconduct in 2016, most of which involved sex acts with minors. In addition to the 222 cases, the Texas Education Agency had a backlogged caseload of over 1,100 additional incidents.⁷¹ In addition to increased teacher misconduct, the achievement levels of Texas' children on various assessments have not been encouraging. In 2015, for example, Texas posted its lowest SAT (Scholastic Aptitude Test) scores in decades.⁷²

ABCTE, the American Board for Certification of Teacher Excellence, also known as "The American Board," offers teacher certification for purchase for those who want to teach right away. ABCTE is active in Arkansas, Arizona, Florida, Idaho, Mississippi, Missouri, New Hampshire, Oklahoma, Pennsylvania, South Carolina, Tennessee, and Utah. As with customers of I-Teach Texas and A+ Texas Teachers, ABCTE customers avoid all university interaction and bypass all course work, field work, supervisors, mentor teachers, and internships.⁷³ ABCTE students also avoid all state teacher competency exams. Instead, they take a special multiple-choice exam created by ABCTE and evaluated exclusively by ABCTE. If students are worried about passing the ABCTE exam, they can pay additional money to

obtain a “customized study guide,” or they can re-take the exam as many times as they want. As with buying seats on an airplane or selecting a hotel room, ABCTE students have the option to go for a “standard package,” or if they are willing to pay a little more for a “higher grade of product,” they can go “premium,” which includes more help in preparing for the ABTE test.

Figure 7: Standard and premium packages sold by ABCTE.



Program Options: Standard & Premium

In 4 of our offered subjects (*Biology, English Language Arts, Mathematics, and Special Education*), we offer two variations of the program, Standard and Premium.

The **Standard** program provides students with the information they need to learn and pass the subject area exam and the Professional Teaching Knowledge (PTK) exam.

The **Premium** program provides students with everything included with the Standard program, along with additional study materials and practice tests. The Premium program also includes a job counseling webinar and workbook to assist our students with job hunting.

Chemistry, General Science, Elementary Education, History, and Physics certifications are only available in Standard. Standard and Premium students take the same exams and receive the same certification upon passing.

Selling teacher certification over the Internet can be lucrative and most businesses typically charge between \$5,000 and \$10,000. Of course, additional costs may include preparation kits, exams, and exam re-takes. For sellers of teaching certification, business expenditures are fixed and relatively low. Programs are created for the web, and can be used again and again. Precious few full-time employees, if any, are needed, and overhead costs are minimal. As with courses at Western Governor’s University, interactions with an actual instructor are rare.

ABCTE was established with a \$5 million grant from the U.S. Department of Education when it was headed by Rod Paige. I-Teach Texas and A+ Texas Teachers gained the right to circumvent institutions of higher education through well-funded lobbying efforts, which have only increased with time and profits.⁷⁴

Teacher preparation standards in many states have become so porous that they are, by-and-large, nonexistent. Once the exclusive domain of universities, the preparation of teachers has been re-distributed to businesses, school districts, regional service centers, churches, community colleges, and charter schools. The Relay School of Education was approved to certify teachers in 2011, though it is not a university, but a non-profit business.⁷⁵ While university-based teacher preparation programs have experienced significant declines in enrollment, Relay recently increased by 40% enrollment on its 15 campuses.⁷⁶

Another method of bypassing teacher preparation programs in higher education has been the emergence of micro-credentialing. Micro-credentialing is supposed to focus on discrete skills. The major supplier of micro-credentialing online courses is Digital Promise, a “non-profit” business whose investors include: Capella University (a for-profit university), Samsung, Verizon, Apple, Google, Chevron, Follett, Houghton-Mifflin-Harcourt, and McGraw-Hill. President of Digital Promise is Jason Langué, who graduated with an MBA from Stanford, then worked as an investment banker. The Chief Executive Officer of Digital Promise is

Sanford Kenyon, a former executive at PayPal and EBay who has 25-years of experience in the software business. Current online courses advertised on the Digital Promise website include *Competency-Based Rubric Design*, *Anti-Bias Instruction*, and *Checking For Understanding Using Whiteboards*.⁷⁷

Among the advantages of microcredentialing, according to Knapp and Associates International, a management consulting firm, are that it does the following:

- Creates a potential revenue stream
- Expands the shelf of value-added products and services for customers
- Expands the role of certifiers by giving them the opportunity to work with educators and other partners
- Allows for continuing candidate engagement throughout the credentialing life cycle.⁷⁸

Perhaps in documentation, somewhere, one of these investment groups discuss the effects of online, money-making ventures on developing the hearts and minds of young children.

The Tennessee Department of Education has already signed a deal with BloomBoard, parent organization of Digital Promise, to provide microcredentialing to teachers in schools throughout the state.⁷⁹ In 2017-18, leaders from the Tennessee Department of Education began linking microcredentialing to the “state’s licensure advancement system.”⁸⁰

With the rise of Digital Promise, ABCTE, and the plethora of alternative certification providers, colleges and universities have less to do with the preparation of the nation’s teachers. It is no surprise that enrollment in teacher preparation programs at colleges and universities has declined up to 40% nationally in the past few years.⁸¹

Another online education business worth mentioning is American Public Education, which is not public at all, but a corporation that is traded on the NASDAQ stock exchange under the symbol APEI.⁸² APEI owns several subsidiaries including American Military University, which services thousands of military personnel, and National Education Seminars, also known as Hondros College of Nursing. With only 390 employees, APEI provides online education to approximately 90,000 customers.⁸³ While not at the 1000 to 1 ratio of Academic Partnerships, APEI still achieves a lofty student/faculty ratio of 231 to 1.

In contrast, the student/faculty ratio at The University of California at Berkeley is 18 to 1. Berkeley also employs an additional 12,000 staff who provide auxiliary services, such as advising, counseling, health care, research, technology services, clubs, extracurricular activities, and library services to students on a real, physical campus of 1232 acres.⁸⁴ In its annual report, APEI admits that it cannot compete with traditional colleges in terms of excellence of programs or depth of experience of faculty. Instead, its niche is to provide “attractive options for all students looking for high quality, affordable and flexible programs.”⁸⁵

INTERVIEW WITH KELLY FEILLE, FORMER TEACHER CANDIDATE

I (identified as Q, the questioner, below) interviewed Kelly Feille (KF), an assistant professor of education, who received her initial teaching certification through one of Texas’ many online businesses that promise few demands for teacher certification. Hundreds of billboards located on Texas highways advertise one such program with the sales pitch, “Want to teach? When can you start?”

Q: Tell me about the experience of getting teacher certification online.

KF: From what I remember, there were pretty typical online-class learning components. Modules that consisted of readings, maybe some videos, and quizzes. Everything was rather decontextualized. I worked at the time as a sub in the district and tutor at the elementary school where my husband taught 5th grade. I learned most of what I needed to know about classroom management from watching him and his colleagues, not from the online modules.

Q: Why did you choose online certification?

KF: It was the easiest route to the classroom. I did research into possible modes of certification and the online program seemed to be the easiest.

Q: What was good about it?

KF: I could go at my own pace. I could plow through modules I found easy, and take my time with content that may have required a little more energy. Scheduling around work was no problem, and I finished much quicker than I would have with a university based certification program.

Q: What are some shortcomings of online teacher certification?

KF: There was zero required fieldwork. I can't imagine being able to put anything I learned into practice without watching my husband or the experiences I was having as a substitute teacher and tutor. Most people probably go through the program without stepping foot into a classroom. I can't imagine I would have been successful if I would have done that.

Q: To what extent did the online program prepare you to be a teacher?

KF: The online program didn't prepare me. It just gave me the paperwork I needed.

Q: Did the program include work in public schools?

KF: There was no required time in schools. I had two or three observations during my first year as teacher (probationary year) where someone watched me and provided feedback.

Q: Did you do an internship?

KF: There was no internship.

Q: Did you have a mentor teacher?

The program assigned a "mentor" who did my observations. I wrote some reflections to her during the probationary year, but I don't recall a lot of support.

Q: One of the advantages of typical face to face classes is that you are in a class with peers. Did you have peers in the online class?

KF: No peers. Only teachers I sought out on my own.

Q: Did you ever meet the instructor of the program?

KF: My “mentor” had been a classroom teacher. She was retired at the time she was working for the program.

Q: Most online programs in Texas are not graded. Did you receive any grades in your online program?

KF: No grades.

Q You are a science teacher. Did any of the online program relate specifically to instructional methodologies in science?

KF: My certification was actually for Math 4-8. My minor in college was mathematics, and I thought that’s what I wanted to teach. However, my first job was Science and Social Studies. So, after getting my initial certification in mathematics for grades 4-8, I also became certified as 4-8 generalist. Science was definitely not a focus of my program. In the online program, content relevant pedagogy was not covered.

Q: Did you ever see a film or listen to an audiotape of yourself teaching?

KF: Not that I remember.

Q: Knowing what you know now, would you still get your teacher certification online?

KF: I wouldn’t (and don’t) recommend quick, online teacher certification to others. My circumstances were unique. I had a mentor in my husband. I had other mentors at the district level through friendships established while I subbed and tutored. I felt supported professionally. But, I had to work very hard to become a good teacher, and I did most of the work on my own by seeking out professional development opportunities constantly. I spent every summer at workshops. Weekends, at workshops. Afterschool, at workshops. Without me scrambling to find decent professional development, I wouldn’t have made it, to be sure.

Q: In Texas, more than half of all future teachers get their certification through online programs that are not affiliated with any university. Is this a positive or negative trend?

KF: Online programs cannot provide the level of support needed to develop a successful classroom teacher. Potential educators need to be reflective, life-long learners who are committed to working with other educators and constantly evaluating their own practice. I know I did not gain that from my online program. I think online teacher certification is a negative trend.

Q: Online teacher certification programs threaten to kill traditional university-based teacher preparation programs. What advice would you offer to traditional university-based teacher preparation programs to better compete with online certification programs?

KF: University programs have to take into account the needs of students. Non-traditional students and post-baccalaureate students come with extensive life experiences that *may* make them uniquely qualified to be in the classroom. Going online is probably not the solution for universities, but universities need a convincing argument as to why being in a community of learners makes better educators. Universities should consider flexible scheduling to meet the needs of non-traditional students.

Quality in higher education

The college experience can be transformative. Indeed, on its website, Harvard College claims to provide “a deeply transformative experience—intellectually, socially, and personally.”⁸⁶ At Cornell, college is “a transformational experience that opens up possibilities for students, teaches them to think critically and to be lifelong learners, and helps them develop philosophies of what a meaningful life and career should be.”⁸⁷

The great contribution of higher education to an individual’s general welfare is well established.⁸⁸ “Income gains from college degrees are near all-time highs, and college graduates face much lower risk of unemployment.”⁸⁹ Figure 8 shows the relationship between unemployment and education.⁹⁰ An individual with less than a high school diploma is about three times more likely to face unemployment than an individual with a bachelor’s degree (Figure 8). On average a person with less than a high school diploma makes less than half the salary of someone with a bachelor’s degree (Figure 9).

Figure 8: Unemployment and education

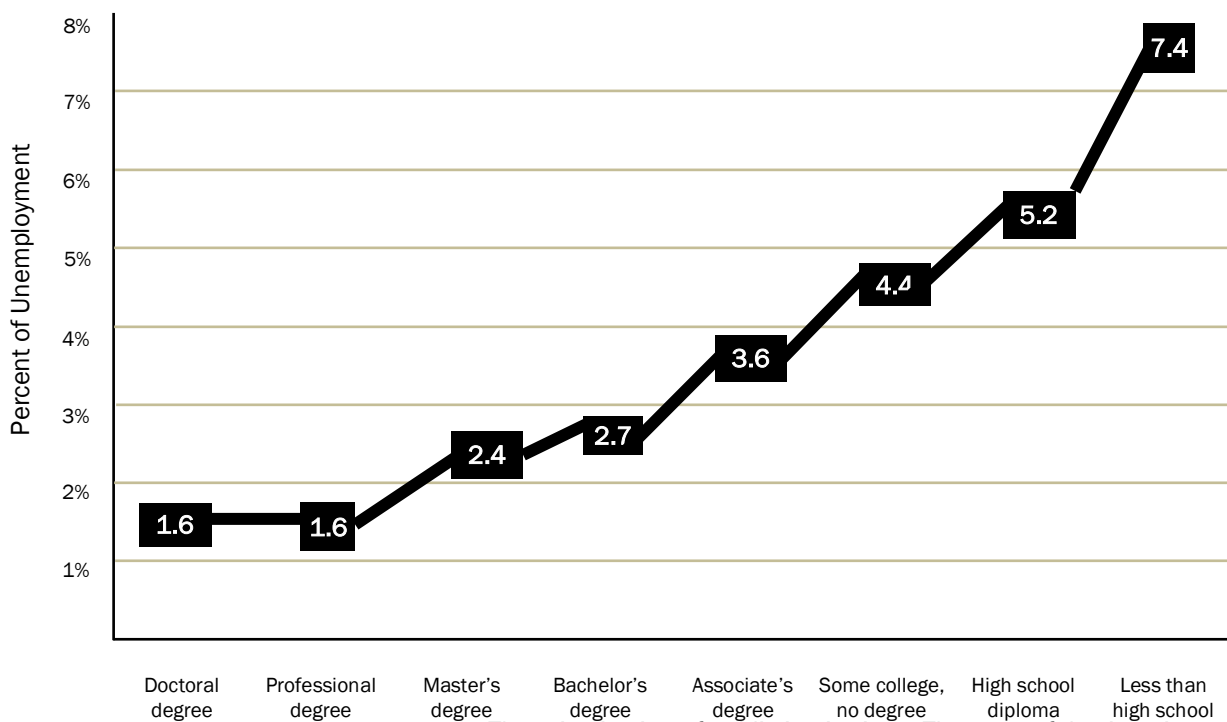
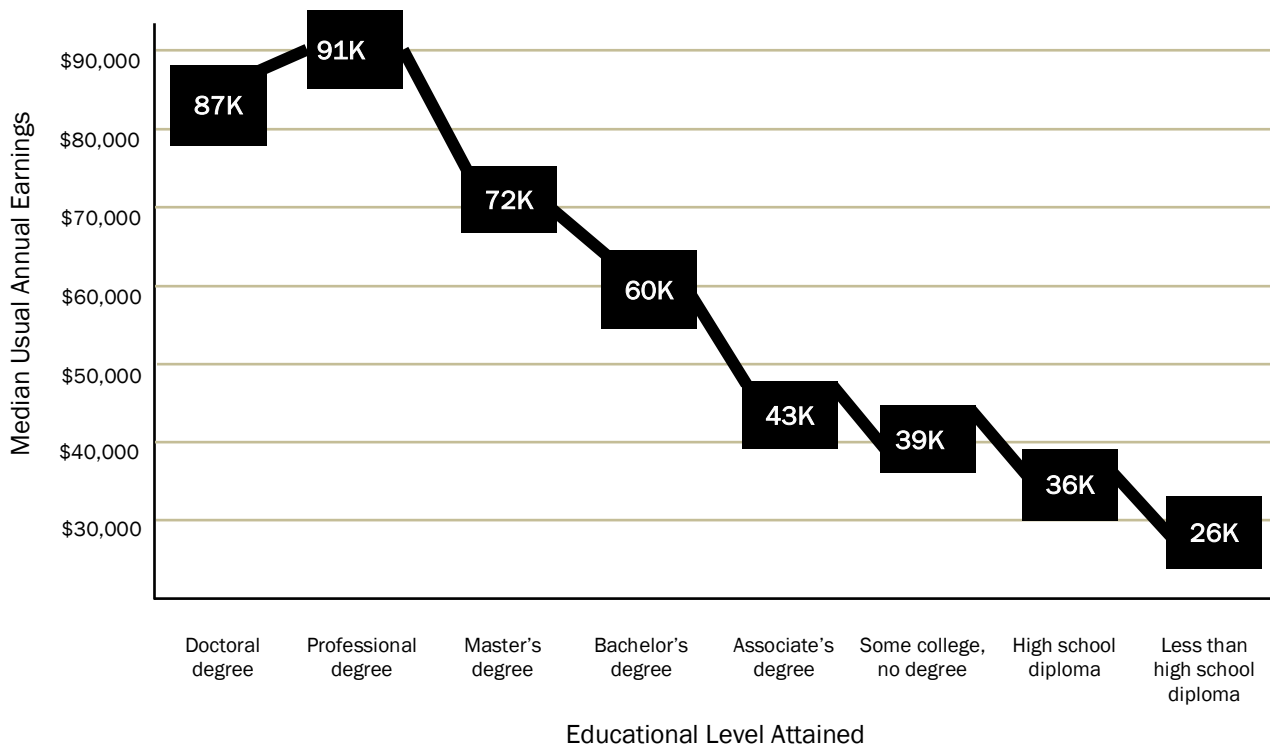


Figure 9: Average annual earnings by educational attainment, 2016



During the period from 2010 to 2016, individuals with at least some college education captured 11.5 million of the 11.6 million jobs available, leaving precious few jobs for any workers with a high-school education or less.⁹¹ In addition to earning more money and being more securely employed, persons with at least a bachelor's degree tend to have the following characteristics, which differentiate them from persons who have had no college:

- 1) They commit fewer crimes⁹²
- 2) They are less likely to be recipients of governmental aid⁹³
- 3) They make higher salaries and save more money⁹⁴
- 4) They pay higher taxes⁹⁵
- 5) They are more likely to own their homes⁹⁶
- 6) They have fewer health problems⁹⁷
- 7) They live longer⁹⁸
- 8) They have more hobbies and spend more time engaged in leisure time activities⁹⁹
- 9) They are more likely to vote¹⁰⁰
- 10) They are more likely to volunteer¹⁰¹
- 11) They are more adaptable and socially mobile¹⁰²
- 12) They tend to experience much higher levels of happiness and life satisfaction.¹⁰³

A bachelor's degree has market, private, and social benefits that sum to over one hundred thousand dollars.¹⁰⁴ In part, that means that a sociologist with a bachelor's degree who works for a state's human-services department might earn a low annual salary, but she makes a positive contribution to society, tries to enhance her quality of life, participates in the economic system, and is not a drain on government services.

In comparison, the unemployed high-school drop-out is more prone to illness, more likely to find himself/herself in court, more likely to spend time in prison, and more likely to utilize welfare, public housing, and food stamps. Indeed, health care, crime, prisons, and welfare are enormous drains on state and federal budgets. One way to reduce the rising costs of government would be to increase the level of education of all Americans.¹⁰⁵

Despite the personal and social benefits of the bachelor's degree, the number of students enrolled in college in the United States has dropped slightly every year since 2013.¹⁰⁶ The decline of students enrolling in postsecondary education has been most steep among students from low-income families.¹⁰⁷

The retreat of the poor from postsecondary institutions is not just attributable to higher costs, but also to the shift from grants to loans. When universities "granted" students money for attending college in an earlier era, there was no expectation that students would ever have to pay back the funds upon graduation. Pell grants used to cover 75% of costs to attend a public four-year college; today, they only cover about 30%.¹⁰⁸ Loans have filled the gap. Of course, student loans have been profit-centers for financial institutions; students now owe about \$1.5 trillion of debt.¹⁰⁹

One of the larger servicers of student loans is Navient Corporation, who holds over one hundred million dollars in student debt. Navient has benefitted handsomely from the shift from grants to loans, as a recent annual report indicated. Note that profits are "federally-guaranteed."

Navient holds the largest portfolio of education loans insured or federally guaranteed under the Federal Family Education Loan Program ("FFELP"). We also hold the largest portfolio of Private Education Loans. Navient services its own portfolio of education loans, as well as education loans owned by the United States Department of Education ("ED"), financial institutions and nonprofit education lenders. Navient is one of the largest servicers to ED under its Direct Student Loan Program ("DSL").¹¹⁰

The reliance on corporate finance for college enrollment has skewed financial aid toward wealthy families and away from students from families with lower incomes.¹¹¹ In the United States, only about 38% of funds for higher education are publicly-funded. In countries like France, Germany, Great Britain, Scandinavia, Canada, Mexico, Japan, and South Korea, 70% of funds for higher education are publicly-funded.¹¹² Thus, in terms of providing funding for public higher education, the United States is near the bottom of the world.¹¹³

Historically, higher education in the United States has been "the great equalizer," but the current decline in support for colleges and universities in combination with the rise in costs make attending American colleges and universities impossible for many poor students.¹¹⁴ "The better-off public may be lulled into thinking that the American economy can get by with limited opportunities and 20th century standards for educational attainment so long as their own families are well-educated. The educational and economic edge the United States once enjoyed in comparison to other nations has been eroding."¹¹⁵

One reason that college is a transformational experience for so many people is its intensity—a rush of unfamiliar people, cultures, knowledge, relationships, and interactions, accompanied by rigorous demands that require focused attention, expanded perspectives, and real, concerted effort. It is difficult to imagine that “transformational” would describe the experience of a student taking the microcredential course, “Checking for understanding using whiteboards.” Or, the Western Governor’s University online course that involves zero interactions with an instructor. Or, Academic Partnership’s nursing program that offers a series of brief, multiple-choice exams. Or, ABCTE’s “premium” upgrade that provides an “insider’s” guide to the ABCTE test.

While there is nothing inherently wrong with any of these commercial offerings, their goal is to maximize profits, not to provide a transformational experience. Plutarch noted that “the mind is not a vessel that needs filling, but wood that needs igniting.”¹¹⁶ If these profit-centered academic programs continue to proliferate, they will denigrate the nature of the university experience and damage the reputations of the universities who use them. These privatized programs fill very little; they ignite nothing. But they are cheap to create and maintain, and they are capable of generating huge profits for their CEOs.

Consequences of privatizing public higher education

Businesses invest in public institutions because returns on investment are attractive and predictable. Businesses are not interested in taking over services that lose money; they want enterprises that consistently make money. Thus, the services that have the greatest potential to generate consistent revenues for public institutions are the very services that tend to get privatized. Institutions of higher education have difficulty selling off services that operate at a loss.

The GED (General Education Development) exam was developed by The American Council of Education (ACE) in 1942 as a service to help establish high-school equivalency levels for returning soldiers. High-school dropouts took the exam using only pen and paper, and they were evaluated by ACE. The exam cost under \$50.

In 2014, Pearson Corporation purchased the GED exam from ACE and immediately raised the cost to \$150 and made it available only online, despite data that indicates that only about 50% of individuals who did not graduate from high school owned computers.¹¹⁷ In 2013, almost a million Americans took the GED when it was administered by ACE. In 2014, after the administration of the GED was taken over by Pearson, only 248,000 took the exam. When a public institution privatizes, the control of the service moves from the public institution to a business whose main concern is profit and self-propagation. In financial terms, serving the state, considering the general welfare of students, and advancing the public good are liabilities to be avoided.

Privatizing public higher education, consequence 1:

As public higher education becomes increasingly privatized, institutions are losing touch with their public mission.

Privatization is happening so quickly and on such a massive scale in higher education that it is difficult to stay current. Once the privatized parts of an institution are removed—food services, bookstores, custodial services, maintenance and housekeeping, computer services, remedial academics, health and counseling, advising, recruitment, retention, accreditation, marketing, financial services, parking, police/security, residential housing, and academic

programs—what is left? What remaining part of the institution is worthy of allegiance, praise, and tailgating?

Part of the role of state institutions historically has been the promise of social mobility. With tuition continually rising, grants declining, and loans increasing, poor students find it difficult to stay enrolled. “Individuals from the highest-income families were 8 times more likely than individuals from low-income families to obtain a bachelor’s degree by age 24 (77 percent vs. 9 percent).”¹¹⁸ Such a differential in the attainment of college degrees is indicative of a system based upon wealth, not merit.

With the emphasis on research and revenue, public institutions are in danger of losing sight of the reason they were established.¹¹⁹ In the past, state institutions could always point to the preparation of teachers as part of their mission, an obvious way to demonstrate commitment to the education of future generations. However, with teacher certification being transmogrified into a product traded on the open market, future teachers are moving into the classroom with no vetting, no courses, no field work, no internship, no supervision, and no university or college affiliation.

As a result, the concept of service has been re-interpreted to mean service not to the state or community, but to research, to publications, and to the self. Faculty at public institutions who do meritorious service may receive a note of thanks at the end of the year for their untold hours of pro bono work, but it does little to secure their jobs.

Privatizing public higher education, consequence 2:
The highly personal, intensely-human, transformational nature of the collegiate experience is becoming commodified, standardized, and monetized.

When institutions offer the same courses, created by corporations for mass consumption, there is no reason to choose one institution over another. In fact, there is no reason to choose a university at all. When a program devolves into a standardized product, there is no need to establish relationships with faculty because faculty do not matter. The goal is obtaining a degree with a recognizable logo.

The new breed of corporate-mediated degrees are depersonalized, mechanized, and banal. Course content is static, interactions with humans are rare, and the only outcomes that matter are the number of correct answers on the end-of-term, multiple-choice test. One of the maxims in higher education always has been that a university’s reputation resides in the quality of its faculty. If the faculty for a program is a machine and a few, underpaid temporary workers, a university’s reputation will eventually reflect the change.

Privatizing public higher education, consequence 3:
Outsourcing higher education services propagates low standards, low wages, and low loyalty.

Part of the reason a public institution decides to outsource services is to reduce fiscal obligations. When a corporation assumes control, it must make a profit. This inevitability quickly translates into lower wages for workers and higher salaries for administrators. When corporations take over university services, previous employees are typically fired while a new crop of workers is hired—at far lower salaries, with cuts as high as 50%.¹²⁰ Often, these businesses reduce benefits and may only offer part-time employment rather than full-time employment to avoid having to provide benefits.

A recent report on privatization of custodial and security services in California found that salaries for contracted positions were about 20% lower than non-contracted positions and about half of “contracted janitors and 32 percent of contracted security officers had no

health insurance coverage.”¹²¹ As a result, most janitors and security officers had at least one family member who received “support from one or more public assistance programs.”¹²²

A consequence of privatizing higher education that is not immediately apparent is the effect of long-term, private leases on public campuses. Only a year after outsourcing food services to Chartwells Corporation, 3,500 Texas A&M students signed a petition in protest. Chartwells raised prices substantially, forced students to purchase costly meal plans, and the university had to close cafeterias for several days because of rat and cockroach infestations.¹²³

The right time for a turnaround

1861 was not a banner year for Abraham Lincoln. Only a few months after he became president, 11 southern states and nine million American citizens seceded from the union. Then, his eleven-year-old son Willie unexpectedly died. In fast succession, the rebels won the battle of Shiloh, killing 13,000 union soldiers and sending general U.S. Grant in retreat. In June in Virginia, the confederate army, led by Robert E. Lee, routed 105,000 Yankee soldiers led by Lincoln’s hand-picked general-in-chief George McClellan.¹²⁴

Somehow, during this time of strife, disappointment, and tumult, Abraham Lincoln maintained enough clarity of mind to sign into law The Morrill Land-Grant Colleges Act in July of 1862. The modest proposal of the Morrill Act was to offer financial support to every state that agreed to establish public colleges “open to all.”

There is plenty to admire in what American public universities and colleges have accomplished and what they might accomplish if they can manage to remain accessible, open, and free of undue influence. If the privatization of public higher education continues, assumptions about equality, education, and opportunity in America will need to be revised.¹²⁵

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