



What's Wrong with Today's Universities? Can It Be Remedied?

Today's colleges and universities have become centers for high-cost political indoctrination. It is a unique system in human history, where those being indoctrinated and poorly trained for the real world have to pay their indoctrinators either through spending their family's savings or obtaining government-subsidized loans. To ensure that the indoctrination does not deviate too much from the politically correct line, teachers and administrators have erected a control system to guarantee that only those who accept groupthink about racial, ethnic, environmental, and economic injustices are allowed to teach.

This system of control begins with who gets admitted to graduate school, which dissertation topics are approved, who is hired into the professoriate, who is tenured, and later, for a chosen few, who get to become high-salaried administrators. Then just to make sure there are no cracks in the system, professors organize gender studies and ethnic studies programs so they can mobilize campus activists to attack any deviationists in their ranks. As a further fail-safe to this iron cage, federal bureaucrats impose and interpret an array of regulations on colleges and universities. Title IX has proved an effective tool for cracking male-dominated athletics at universities and even a better instrument for enforcing groupthink on campus.

George Orwell's Big Brother Newspeak appears crude by comparison with the current academic understanding of "academic freedom," "community of scholars," "social justice" and "free speech zones."

Orwellian 'Academic Freedom'

Across America, universities and colleges are creating "free speech zones" and restricting free speech. There used to be a "free speech zone" called America, but no longer on college campuses. Instead of allowing professors and students to speak freely in the classroom or on campus, university administrators have undertaken policies to restrict free speech. Of course, "hateful" speech

is restricted. The zone might allow an evangelical preacher to talk about sin and the Bible (surrounded by mocking students in most cases), but speech that might offend minority students, Muslim students, female students or other favored groups is actually forbidden. In the classroom, faculty talk on and on about identity politics, how privileged white males oppress racial minorities, committed genocide on Native Americans, enslaved Africans, kept women in their homes and created political systems, like American democracy, to maintain white privilege. This sort of speech is acceptable and, indeed, encouraged.

What they cannot talk about, without being extraordinarily careful, is anything that appears to be blaming the victim. This means that professors have to tread carefully on subjects pertaining to racial, gender or religious issues. If these topics are raised either in a "free speech zone" or in the classroom, both teachers and students have to preface their remarks with a myriad of qualifications showing they understand the complexity of these issues.

Yet restricted speech goes beyond just thinking twice about what might be said. The code word today is "micro-aggression." Speech, body language or tone can be taken as "micro-aggression" if a sensitive student sees it as such. The University of California system president, Janet Napolitano, actually issued examples on her website of what might be considered micro-aggressive behavior (<http://www.thecollegefix.com/post/22839/>). Included in the examples of aggressive speech are phrases such as "Land of Opportunity" or "Affirmative Action is racist." Other forbidden comments are "Everyone can succeed in this society, if they work hard enough"; "Where are you from?" or "Where were you born?"; and "When I look at you, I don't see color."

Committing a micro-aggression is subconscious racism, sexism, white male privilege, xenophobia and homophobia. The guidelines assume that "micro-aggressive" behavior can be well-intended. Telling female or black male students that if they work hard, they can succeed suggests that women and

blacks who have not succeeded lack ambition or are lazy. The lesson should be that women who have not broken the “glass ceiling” or blacks who live in poverty should blame the full complexities of racism, sexism, cultural hegemony and white male privilege, historically and today.

To ensure that faculty got the message, the UC system organized faculty leader training systems throughout the 2014-15 academic year at all nine of the UC campuses. The sessions were aimed at teaching faculty how to avoid offending students and peers, and devoted time to explaining how to hire a more diverse faculty. The assumption is that faculty of color and women will be more sensitive because they have experienced overt and subtle expressions of oppression.

In his novel *1984*, George Orwell’s Big Brother uses fear of torture to break Winston Smith’s subversive thoughts. Big Sister in 2015 does not use physical torture to impose academic conformity, although one suspects that these training sessions on “micro-aggression” must have been excruciatingly torturous to sit through. No concern was seen about the *macro-aggressive* imposition of a publicly supported university’s administration restricting commonplace expressions by individual faculty members.

Devouring Their Own?

Laura Kipnis, a feminist faculty member at Northwestern University in Illinois, drew national media attention when she came under attack by students at her university for an essay she penned for the *Chronicle of Higher Education* in February 2015. Her essay, “Sexual Paranoia Strikes Academe,” in flamboyant language intended to elicit emotion, defended professors dating undergraduate and graduate students. She declared that when she was a student, “The gulf between students and faculty wasn’t a shark-filled moat; a misstep wasn’t fatal. We partied together, drank and got high together, slept together. The teachers may have been older and more accomplished, but you didn’t feel they could take advantage of you because of it. How would they?” She objected that “sexual paranoia” was stalking university life, and she abhorred it.

Strict codes of conduct between professor and students, she argued, have seeped into every aspect of campus life, language, curriculum, academic discussion and social life. Faculty are expected to warn students that what they might read or hear in a lecture or class discussion could be upsetting. To protect student sensibilities, professors are required by university administrators to issue “trigger warnings” about such material. Students assigned the Latin poet Ovid, for example, need to be warned that they would read about Romans raping Sabine women.

Kipnis took particular aim at the use of Title IX to impose these codes. Shortly after the Northwestern University administration issued its code of student and professor conduct, the university Title IX coordinating committee issued further language clarifying the code. “We all received a long email from the committee,” Kipnis recalled. “The committee was responding to a student-government petition demanding that ‘survivors’ be informed about the outcomes of sexual-harassment investigations.” She took particular umbrage with the committee’s repeated use of the word “survivor.” “Wouldn’t the proper term be ‘accuser’? How can someone be referred to as a survivor before a finding on the accusation—assuming we don’t want to predetermine the guilt of the accused, that is.”

Her essay was intended to be inflammatory, and that it was. She came under attack from two directions, student protest and legal complaint. Student demonstrators began hauling mattresses around campus, suggesting that Kipnis wanted to turn Northwestern in a student-professor bordello. The worst was to come, however. Kipnis’s defense of a philosophy professor who had been found not guilty of charges of sexual assault led to other students filing a Title IX complaint against her. Kipnis was brought before a university committee under Title IX. She was not allowed legal representation, the right to call witnesses on her behalf, or the right to confront her accusers. The charges were dropped, but the whole proceeding reeked of a star chamber. Even progressive *The Nation*’s cultural columnist Michelle Goldberg found it difficult to defend the students’ actions. Goldberg concluded, “The politics of liberation are an uneasy fit with the politics of protection.”

What made this episode so painful for the left was that Kipnis was one of them. No one doubted her feminist credentials. In her essay, she called for the chemical castration of rapists and celebrated the feminist revolution in higher education. Her defense of professor-student sexual liaisons certainly did not emanate from a conservative moral outlook.

Deeper Issues: Cost, Quality

While some conservatives gloated that the academic left was devouring itself, and progressives fretted about whether to support the feminist professor or student feminist activists, the overarching issues that university administrators and professors should be worrying about is the quality of education colleges are providing at a very high cost to students.

Today’s college student pays on average about \$13,300 per year at a four-year public institution. This is double what a college student paid (\$6,800) in 1967. Private college costs have tripled during this time. This increase has led to

student debt of more than \$1 trillion, creating a bubble that should cause national anxiety. What are students getting for this education in a global market? Not much, it appears.

A 2015 study by Educational Testing Service (ETS) of millennials in the U.S., Europe and Japan reveals the failure of our educational system to train future workers for an increasingly knowledge-based economy (Educational Testing Service, *America's Skills Challenge: Millennials and the Future*, 2015). Competency in literacy, numeracy and problem solving is essential for success in an advanced, complex economy.

The ETS study shows just how woefully handicapped our youth are in developing these skills. The figures are startling:

- Literacy*: American millennials rank lower than 15 of the 22 participating countries, only above Spain and Italy.
- Numeracy*: American millennials rank last along with Spain and Italy.
- Problem solving*: American millennials rank last along with Slovak Republic, Ireland and Poland.

The details of this report are even more alarming. American millennials in the 90th percentile of academic achievement scored lower than the other top-scoring peers in 15 countries, beating only Spain. Worse yet, the scores of our U.S. millennials with low levels of educational attainment (in the 10th percentile) were less than those of their counterparts in almost every other participating country. The youngest age cohort of this generation (16- to 24-year-olds), those who could be in the workforce until 2065, ranked dead last among their peers in numeracy and were at the bottom in problem solving. We are graduating more students from college, and we spend more than most European countries on public education, but we are failing to train our children for a globalized, competitive economy.

University budgets have soared since the 1960s. The demands of students, professors and administrators have all contributed to the cost of higher education. Today's students demand more than a single dorm room with bunk beds. They expect to live in campus apartments. No longer will a cup of regular coffee at the local diner do; instead, café lattes at the campus Starbucks are required. They demand fancy recreational facilities, with workout machines, treadmill and cycling machines. Classrooms with a lectern and a blackboard aren't good enough. Classrooms need to be smart, with equipment allowing professors to put on Powerpoint presentations so students can learn visually, even while they look at their computers or iPhones instead of taking notes. All of this costs money.

Professors' salaries have risen faster than those of any other professional group except doctors. A full professor today at a public four-year doctoral institution makes on average \$126,981. Of course, there are wide disparities within universities and between universities. Nonetheless, higher salaries for professors contribute significantly to the cost of education. Professors demand more pay for teaching fewer classes. Meanwhile, more university administrators are being paid corporate-level salaries. Added to this are the high costs of athletic coaches and staff.

The rising costs of university and college education have been subsidized by the federal government through student loans and research grants. These federal subsidies have allowed colleges and universities to increase student tuition. It's a pyramid scheme. Students go into debt to pay for a college education in hopes of a well-paying job to pay off their debt. Meanwhile, billions of dollars of unpaid student debt build the wobbly pyramid.

Administrators Respond to the Crisis

Under pressure to pay for rising costs, university administrators have turned to expanding their pool of students by online education, while cutting their labor costs. Few people in higher education truly believe that online education is as good in terms of quality as an on-the-ground education. The promise is that online education will improve. It probably will, but there is a big difference between having a classroom discussion with actual students in the classroom, and an online chat room. One-on-one conversations with professors after class or during their office hours about the course a student is taking or career plans are hard to replicate in a virtual course. Chatting online does not allow for much in way of a personal experience.

While expanding their customer base, colleges and universities are cutting their labor costs through the hiring of adjunct professors. Tenure is a declining status at most universities. Today only about 20 percent of all classes are being taught by tenured professors. In the meantime, adjunct professors have an incentive to give higher grades. Students with higher grades give more favorable course evaluations, increasing the likelihood that the adjunct teacher will be rehired the following year.

What Can Be Done?

Nineteenth-century colleges were mostly private and denominational schools, Protestant or Catholic. Their purpose was to train their students in moral character and leadership. It was common in Protestant colleges for the president of the university to teach the capstone class on moral character. The primary text was Francis Wayland's

Elements of Moral Science (1835). This book was rooted in Scottish Common Sense Realism, Christianity and laissez-faire economics. The purpose of colleges was to train virtuous citizens.

We cannot return to the past. The 19th-century college is dead, except for a few small colleges still concerned with concepts such as a virtue, honor and higher values. Public and private colleges, with few exceptions, are under financial stress, especially as state governments have cut funding. This is a perfect time for donors, alumni and the public to insist that universities be concerned with civic literacy and the contributions of Western culture (even within a global context). Alumni, donors and foundations can entice administrators and faculty to endow centers and professors who offer traditional courses that introduce students to Aristotle, Plato, the Federalist papers, Abraham Lincoln and authors of great literature.

As Winston Churchill once said, never let a good crisis go to waste. In this perfect storm within universities, an environment has been created for real climatic change.

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In Memoriam: Martin Duggan

The Cardinal Mindszenty Foundation mourns the death of our longtime board member and distinguished journalist Martin Duggan on May 27.

Martin worked his way up the ranks of the *St. Louis Globe-Democrat* to become its editorial page editor, providing an influential conservative voice to the daily newspaper for many years. He gave frequent political commentaries on radio and TV shows. Most memorably, he created, produced and hosted KETC-TV's popular *Donnybrook*, an Emmy award-winning roundtable of spirited discussions on current issues which is still among the most-watched local shows on public television nationwide. Martin was a devout Catholic, a strong abortion opponent, a devoted husband of 73 years to Mae Duggan, a loving father and grandfather, and a beloved old-school gentleman. He will be missed.

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