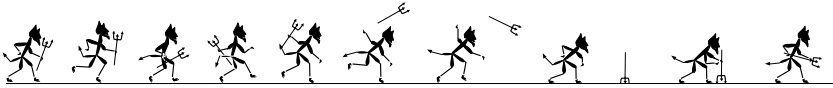


ACADEMIC KEYWORDS

A Devil's Dictionary for
Higher Education



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PREFACE

As the allusions in the title and subtitle for our dictionary suggest, we have produced a book that falls somewhere between Ambrose Bierce's infamous *Devil's Dictionary* (1911) and Raymond Williams's influential *Keywords* (1976). When Williams returned to Cambridge after World War II, he found that the terms underlying the campus sense of community no longer meant quite what they had before he had left. Their values and energies altered and refocused, invested in different agendas and projects, he and his classmates no longer used key terms in the same way. Concepts like *culture*, *democracy*, and *class* had acquired different meanings. So too on our own campuses and across the country we find that fundamental notions like what makes up a *faculty* can no longer secure shared values and commitments. Some of this uncertainty, to be sure, originates in a concerted effort to seize the meaning of terms like *affirmative action* or *sexual harassment* or *merit*. But the economic system of higher education has changed so drastically in a generation that material conditions no longer resemble those of a few decades ago.

Willingness to admit those altered material conditions—and to recognize who has gained and lost as a result of them—is often blocked by a vocabulary that reinforces various forms of false consciousness. In *The University in Ruins*, for example, Bill Readings argues that the appeal to something lionized as “excellence” both “marks the fact that there is no longer any idea of the University” and too often “protects the unrestricted power of [an institution’s] bureaucracy.” Excellence, in short, too often serves the purpose of rationalizing the corporatization of the university. Similarly, we show that the concept of a graduate student’s *apprenticeship* allows many faculty and administrators to defend or ignore unacceptable conditions of employment and the increased debt into which many student-employees are slipping. We highlight the problem by giving *debt* a separate entry.



In trying to speak the truth in an academic culture of self-deception we have also drawn on the satiric inspiration of Bierce's renowned dictionary. We thus mix respect with skepticism, analysis with humor, praise with criticism. We have devoted our lives to higher education and admire our colleagues' often badly compensated devotion to it. Yet we also think colleges and universities have work to do in repairing damage both internal to their institutions and external in the world of public opinion. So we defend teaching and research but criticize unwarranted administrative perks and the creeping corporatization of the academy. *A Devil's Dictionary for Higher Education* is not only a dictionary and a handbook but also a critical polemic on the state of the professoriate and the contemporary university.

Our *Devil's Dictionary* includes both full-length essays and short entries that make one or two points economically. The length of the entries does not reflect their relative importance but rather their current social and political status and what length seemed appropriate and necessary if we were to intervene in the relevant ongoing debates. **Sexual harassment**, a term that is unstable, contentious, and quite differently understood by different people, receives detailed analysis. The **corporate university**, a concept widely used but still unfamiliar to most academics, also required a detailed entry. Concepts undergoing major redefinition, sometimes without people being entirely aware of it, like the very notion of what it means to be a **faculty** member, are also examined at greater length. On the other hand, **affirmative action** in higher education, while intensely debated, is at least reasonably well understood within the academic community; the public may think affirmative action in faculty hiring means quotas, but faculty members know it does not; so there we felt a concise, principled statement highlighting key problems was more appropriate.

There is also considerable need—little understood and largely unrecognized—to redefine familiar terms for each new generation, to rearticulate them to new conditions. Many of us make the additional mistake of assuming academic culture will automatically socialize new members and familiarize them with key concepts. If that was ever true, the changing academic workforce makes it true no longer. We suspect that the number of graduate students who could readily give persuasive accounts of concepts like academic freedom may be quite small.

We also bring different kinds of evidence to bear on different topics. The entries on **debt** and **tuition** are largely statistical, because either recent or long-term figures carry the news that people need to hear. The entries on **sexual harassment** and **part-time faculty**, on the other hand,



rely heavily on individual stories to ground their arguments. Some of our evidence is factual, therefore, some anecdotal.

Some of the topics we address in a few pages have themselves been the subjects of entire books. In some cases, the subjects of our short essays have a long history of research and debate. The combined scholarly and popular literature about affirmative action alone, for example, constitutes a huge bibliography. We have not tried to cite most of the previous work on each of our topics but rather limited our own references to the books and essays that have had the most influence on us. We believe, moreover, that it is possible to intervene in some of these debates by way of focused position statements, which is what we have done here. We also think it is immensely useful to place all these controversial issues on the table at the same time, to take them up in relation to one another. That too is what we have attempted to do.

The terms we define and discuss highlight the changing nature of and climate for higher education in the new millennium. The terms include many that are the subject of current debate and others whose centrality and pertinence are often repressed. Through our dictionary, then, we hope to make an intervention in the struggle over the course of higher education in America; the book is designed to help people think critically about both our present condition and the uneasy future we face. It makes no claim to being definitive. As a guide to the language we should be speaking and the issues we should be debating, it is necessarily only a work in progress; it must be expanded by its readers.

Distance learning, for example, would not have been a recognizable term even a few years ago. It was but a few decades ago that no one would have thought an entry for *sexual harassment* should appear in such a book; indeed, until the 1970s the term was essentially unknown, though you could find discussions of *male chauvinism* as early as the 1930s. But no one would now argue about whether sexual harassment is one of the defining issues in academic life. With some of our other entries it is another matter. *Cafeterias* would be a prime choice for recognition among those who work in food services, but perhaps an irrelevant or invisible subject for many students and full-time faculty. Because two of our aims are to identify and to examine some of the sites of change and controversy in the contemporary—and emergent—university, we want readers to recognize what college cafeterias tell us about the university of the future.

A book that redefines familiar concepts and tries to make unfamiliar terms and concepts central to our picture of the academy is thus also a book devoted to consciousness-raising and reeducation. Hence, to return



to one example, while we try to discredit the now largely empty fiction that graduate study is a form of apprenticeship, we also try to educate a wide audience about the little-known work that goes into mentoring graduate students. Each definition wields the power of naming in a project urging readers to see the world of higher education differently. As readers move through the book both serially and by way of its interconnections, a detailed portrait of a strong but imperiled institution emerges.

From *cafeterias*, readers will be led to entries on *outsourcing* and *the corporate university*. Those entries in turn make other points of contact with the book's web of connections. The system of cross-references has several purposes: to help readers make contact with related issues, to make it clear that there are clusters of related entries in the book—such as the group of entries about academic organizations (*disciplinary organizations*, *the American Association of University Professors*, *the Modern Language Association*, and *the National Association of Scholars*) and the group of entries about academic labor (including *apprentices* and *part-time faculty*)—and finally to suggest how interconnected *everything* finally is in higher education. Much of academic culture militates against making such connections. Many of us work in our individual departments and disciplines, often ignorant of the most basic principles governing work, advancement, and compensation in the building next door. Faculty too often leave university governance to administrators and boards of trustees, a practice that worked well enough when budgets were flush and faculty were sought after. Now that funds are limited and Ph.D.'s are a dime for several dozen, leaving the business of the university to business executives is proving immensely destructive. We do not want the bottom line to be the bottom line.

We hope *A Devil's Dictionary* will help provide a wake-up call for those both inside and outside academia. It is a call for active engagement in the whole life of the university. Despite its occasional satiric and irreverent thrust, it is in fact a program for a recommitment to first principles. As Ernst Bloch asserts in *The Principle of Hope*, “informed discontent” properly “belongs to hope,” not despair. This book aspires in a number of ways to examine present conditions in the academy so as to promote concerted discussion on how to improve them in the future. It does so by challenging the categories we use to represent the academic workplace. Indeed our first purpose is to gain agreement that academia is indeed a workplace more than an ivory tower. To do so we have interviewed part-time teachers across the country and intensively researched the increasingly corporatized university.



Throughout the book our practice was for one or the other of us to take individual responsibility for writing the first draft of each entry. Then we sent the essay to the other for comments and suggestions. Often we added passages or made other changes. We have each also found it helpful to use the first person from time to time. A number of the entries are based on personal experience. Between us we have five decades in academic life, including both short and extended visits on many other campuses. That has been an important resource for the book, although not every colleague or every school will feel happy with the results. So, when the first-person voice is central to an entry, we have identified the primary author with initials at the end of the essay. That convention, we hope, will help make sense of unmarked references to place, like “here” or “on my campus.”

There are several high-visibility topics we have not taken up here because one or the other of us has addressed them before. The economics of book publishing (see *scholarly books*) made it impractical to reprint all those essays here that have already seen book publication. Cary Nelson’s *Manifesto of a Tenured Radical* (1997), for example, includes essays on campus hate speech codes, cultural studies, multiculturalism, political correctness, and the experience of the academic job market. His *Repression and Recovery: Modern American Poetry and the Politics of Cultural Memory, 1910–1945* takes up the issue of canonization in detail. Some terms that do not receive independent entries here do get discussed and defined along the way. The index will point readers, for example, to the places where we discuss flexibility, a piece of corporate vocabulary that has made its way into academia. Similarly, although we do not have a separate entry on the problems academic libraries face, the index will point readers to the entries on *outsourcing* and *scholarly books* for our comments on the crisis in library funding. Some topics, on the other hand, like the problem of part-time faculty, recur throughout the book. There again, the index will direct readers to passages beyond the relevant main entries. A few of the pieces in this book have appeared in *Academe*, the *Chronicle of Higher Education*, the *minnesota review*, and *Social Text*. We have also adapted some passages from essays appearing in *Against the Current*, *Profession, Workplace*, and the collection *Will Teach for Food: Academic Labor in Crisis* (1997), edited by Cary Nelson.

Finally, we should say that we make no apology for and offer no retreat from the very bleak, even apocalyptic, portrait we paint of higher education’s prospects. When part of this book was presented at the University of Chicago, a distinguished faculty member there rose to say, “Well,



you've heard Mulder's version of the story; now let me give you Scully's." We rather enjoyed the reference to television's *X-Files*, but we nonetheless believe higher education is in genuine trouble. There is no conspiracy to uncover, but there are multiple, uncoordinated forces working to alter higher education for the worse, not the better.

As for Chicago, well, the faculty there seemed happy with the state of things. When we met privately with graduate students, it was another matter. We have never encountered such rage from students. Because of Chicago's high tuition and the limited money made available for support, some graduate students there went into debt for \$20,000 to \$30,000 for their first year alone. Even those who did not go so deeply into debt were outraged at a culture that disposes of so many students so casually after the master's degree. They felt that Chicago used its reputation as bait to capture their tuition dollars, after which they were cast aside. A capricious judgment by one faculty member often determined whether they were admitted to a doctoral program. The witty dismissal of Chicago's Scully seems more to reflect the condescension of privilege than any sober assessment of reality.

Unfortunately, Scully's view prevails among many tenured faculty. If we have given such views rough treatment here, it is because we believe they are seriously misguided. The introductory essay, "Between Meltdown and Community: Crisis and Opportunity in Higher Education," gives an overview of our take on the present shape of academia and the emerging university of the future. The failure of the professoriate to recognize that the academic workplace is deteriorating is central to our perspective, as is the increasingly corporatized campus climate. Yet the introduction also lets us make clear at the outset where we think there is ground for hope—in organized collective action.

Collective action does not necessarily have to take the form of unionization. At small liberal arts colleges where shared educational values and a common sense of mission unite faculty and administrators, other participatory forms of community may well be better. At large institutions where corporate values dominate the engineering college and shape administrative decisions, while humanistic goals prevail in departments across campus, sweet talk about community may merely be delusional or mystifying. There are few institutions, moreover, where graduate students, part-timers, or secretaries can effectively represent their group interests without the formal right to negotiate binding contracts covering salaries, benefits, and working conditions. For lower-grade employees unionization



is the only realistic solution. They can only be full “community” members once they are paid fairly and gain a voice.

Many faculties, on the other hand, desperately need a legally binding contract limiting the percentage of non-tenure-track teachers the college can employ; they need legal language giving the faculty, not the administration, control over distance learning initiatives and corporate partnerships. To win these rights faculty need to be able to exercise collective force; they need to reallocate *power* on campus. Those who quail at “adversarial” or “confrontational” tactics in this context are simply rationalizing their impotence. A civil confrontation over faculty rights need not destroy collegiality. The changing nature of higher education will eventually compel many faculty to rethink their attitude toward unionization.

The introductory essay shows broadly why we believe this is the case; it thus provides the historical and political underpinning of the rest of the book. Along the way it also takes up some issues that do not have their own entries but are central to our perspective. The dictionary follows; it should help shed light on the concepts that guide us both consciously and unconsciously. Altogether, *A Devil’s Dictionary* urges a revolution in how we participate in the university of the future.

Books conventionally include expressions of thanks to those who helped. We may both certainly thank our academic partners, Paula A. Treichler and Nonie Watt, for their advice on the manuscript, their companionship, and the myriad sharing of their own university experiences. Now we come to a problem. We have about four dozen friends and confidants at various schools around the country. This book would not have the detail it has without their stories, without their help in interviews, and without the letters and documents they have sent us. And they have all—with varying degrees of passion—volunteered a willingness to remain unnamed. Given the information they have shared with us and their desire to continue doing so, maintaining the confidentiality of our sources seems like a good idea to us as well. A spy once known is of no further use. More surprising perhaps was the appearance of the same pattern among our *readers*. Most of those who read portions of the manuscript and helped us with their suggestions preferred to remain anonymous. Naming only a few of our readers seemed misleading, so we decided to name none. This is thus a book without an “Acknowledgments” page.

Introduction

Between Meltdown and Community: Crisis and Opportunity in Higher Education

As United Parcel Service (UPS) workers in the summer of 1997 took up the struggle to gain some control over their segment of American labor, a number of us in higher education realized it could be a story about us as well. Like many American industries, United Parcel Service has seen its part-time workforce grow rapidly while the percentage of full-time workers decreased. The future of work at UPS seemed clear—a small core of highly paid employees surrounded by vulnerable and underpaid part-timers. We need to stay flexible and competitive, pronounced UPS management, sounding much like a late-night infomercial for an exercise machine. Flexible and competitive. Sounds healthy. Must make sense. Just a matter of discipline.

Of course, many part-timers in academia would welcome the health benefits UPS offers its lower-grade employees. And they might welcome as well the union representation and solidarity, however fragile, that made a strike and a victory possible. Unlike academia, UPS has not seen its full-time work force dwindle; they remain a growth industry. If the corporate university should come on growth times, its managers will choose to grow as UPS has grown, in a spreading marginalized workforce.

We hear phrases like *flexibility and competitiveness* in academia as well, in part because they represent the only knowledge base corporate executives serving on boards of trustees are interested in bringing to bear on higher education. What this rhetoric actually means is another matter. *Flexibility* certainly means something to people hiring academic



professionals on soft money, but the term has little meaning when applied to the lower-division courses most adjuncts, part-timers and graduate assistants teach. We're not likely to drop composition courses because our splendid high schools have made such courses superfluous. In the end, *flexibility* is the hallmark of an institution devoted to serving the semester-by-semester training needs of corporations. When a local corporation calls up St. Thomas University in Minneapolis and asks for a new course, the university sets it up in months. When corporate needs change, the part-time faculty who teach the course can be sent packing. Flexibility does therefore mean a loss of intellectual freedom for academics, since it makes it easy to fire teachers. As Gary Rhoades and Sheila Slaughter put it, "flexibility is a trope (and trump) for power. Its repeated invocation is a means by which to legitimate changing the balance of power between faculty and administration, altering faculty's professional terms of employment" (17). Flexibility also points to an area of easily forgotten coincidence between UPS and higher education. UPS says it needs flexibility to deal with uneven seasonal employment needs. But most of us in academia—from cafeteria workers to faculty—are also inherently seasonal employees, something part-timers already know well. They don't need us in the summer; some corporate managers in academia are tired of the largess of year-round employment.

As for *competitiveness*, we have a consistent two-tier pricing system in the form of public and private education. The top Ivy League schools consider it a point of honor not to underprice one another, while public education, at a fraction of the cost, as we point out in the entry on *tuition*, remains a relative bargain. The rich should pay more to educate their children, the poor less. Meanwhile, we certainly seem able to market American higher education to the rest of the world, so downsizing or increasing flexibility for the sake of competitiveness seems to make little sense and to present a real danger. Indeed, many U.S. graduate and professional programs are heavily dependent on international students, so maintaining sufficient program quality to attract them is essential. Within a given price range, what competes is quality, prestige, convenience, glamour, and mystification.

Meanwhile, the winnowing away of tenured faculty lines is a genuine threat to the quality of higher education. Although many of them have been trained not to do so, tenured faculty nonetheless have the protection they need to speak frankly and controversially if they choose to do so. Along with campus unions, they can offer an effective counterbalance to administrative power. And many have the experience and institu-



tional loyalty necessary for curriculum development, recruitment, and long-term planning. At the same time, the exploitation of part-timers, graduate employees, and campus support staff has already critically eroded higher education's moral status. It is hard to idealize a robber baron university.

From the vantage point of the City University of New York, on the other hand, UPS looks positively utopian. In 1974, as Karen Arenson reported in the *New York Times*, adjunct faculty amounted to less than a third of CUNY's teaching staff; there were 4,924 adjuncts and 11,268 full-timers. By the fall of 1997 the number of tenure-track faculty had plummeted to 5,505, while across CUNY's seventeen campuses part-timers had grown to 7,500. Many of the part-timers by then were teaching a full-time load; they just weren't getting a full salary for doing so. One of us went out to dinner with a group of CUNY adjuncts in 1998. We wandered the streets of midtown Manhattan for an hour, looking for a restaurant they could pretend to afford. "Ethnic," a broad term these days, was the obvious choice, and a Portuguese restaurant looked like a good bet. A scout was sent forward to check out the menu while we crowded the doorway. "Main courses are about \$14." "Too expensive." "No way." We headed out again, ending up at a Chinese restaurant where everything was à la carte and where two of the part-timers settled for a bowl of soup. As Gappa and Leslie point out in their classic study, part-timers are a diverse group; but many are increasingly underemployed Ph.D.'s, and many depend on part-time teaching for their entire income.

What can we do for these people? Unfortunately, public support for faculty privileges is not strong enough now to wage a major national battle in defense of tenure, but we do not believe we will have to do so. Strong local efforts within institutions that still have a significant percentage of tenure-track faculty can often beat back power plays by boards of trustees, as has been the case in Minnesota at least for now. Such victories are likely to be temporary, but at least they can be waged successfully. Meanwhile, the American Association of University Professors (AAUP) continues to negotiate key cases and censure institutions that wantonly undermine academic freedom. The organization also continually disseminates the case for tenure and keeps that discourse in the air to counter the regular attacks tenure receives.

The UPS strike provides several key lessons for academia, however, because the union helped create broad public understanding of the problems of part-time work and the desirability of full-time employment. Since the most important way tenure is being undermined is by shifting



tenure-track lines to adjuncts and part-timers, the best defense for now may be a campaign to resist part-time work in academia. It is a case where parent/student self-interest can join with the ethical issue of fairness to the campus teaching staff. That is not necessarily a battle we can easily win, since transferring public sympathy from part-time UPS workers to part-time teachers will take work, but it may be at least a battle we can take up productively, an argument with productive points of articulation with other public beliefs.

If the issue of part-time work, then, is one key lesson, another is surely the solidarity between full- and part-time UPS workers. Management assumed such solidarity was impossible, that divergent interests and wages, sometimes different gender or racial identities, would keep these groups divided. But instead they joined in a common cause. It may be far more difficult for many academics to recast their identities to encompass full- and part-time workers, but the UPS strike at least shows us the benefits of doing so. And we have had warnings to alert us to the necessity of rethinking the relationship between supposedly secure and insecure employment in academia. Here and there across the country—there are cases in Arizona, Florida, and Illinois—a few institutions in financial crisis are abandoning tenure and some are being founded without tenure or full-time employment. There academic freedom is fragile at best.

Meanwhile, corporate and political America apparently view higher education as either a profit-making enterprise or a structure to move students through courses. That's all. Parents care above all about its credentialing function. Community colleges offer the best model of how to do this cheaply, but it's hard to combine community college staffing with Ivy League prestige. Parents understand that not all credentials are equal, but they often do not understand the relationship between distinguished faculty and institutional prestige. So much of higher education is drifting toward the community college model.

But there are still worse models out there. For something close to the nadir of ersatz postsecondary commodified education, read James Traub's "The Next University: Drive-Thru U" in the *New Yorker*. It's a chastening piece about the University of Phoenix, a substanceless, credentialing institution with, as Traub puts it, no campus life and no intellectual life. There are no tenured faculty, and no serious demands are made of the students. You can earn credit long distance or attend short courses taught at night by local business people and high school teachers. You will not be challenged, you will not need to think. You buy a degree and pick up a



school mug and blazer at what pretends to be the campus bookstore. One administrator there expressed discomfort with the way a new course in comparative religion was being taught; the right way to approach such a topic, he allowed, was to show how the same product could be marketed to multiple denominations. The Hartford Insurance Company, which once hired Wallace Stevens, prefers to get its M.B.A.'s from the Wharton School of Business, but Sonny's Tire Service or its equivalent—six outlets in the Southwest and growing—would be proud to hire a Phoenix graduate to help manage its accounts.

Part of what passes for education at Phoenix is simply job training, but it turns out it is hard to justify requiring a sufficient number of short job-oriented classes to accumulate enough credits for a degree. So students fill out their degrees by earning credit for life experiences. Parenting, Family Life, and Loss and Bereavement were among one student's retroactive "courses." Credit for being born is no doubt next. Phoenix's on-site "courses" meet for only six weeks. New classes begin monthly, all through the year. Nothing is taught in them unless it can be put to use on the job the following day. As an administrator at another adult education program remarks in the far more upbeat assessment of Phoenix offered by Mark Fischetti and his coauthors, these students "want a very streamlined, utilitarian, and narrow education" (51). Columbia University's Arthur Levine found that students in such programs often "wanted the kind of relationship with a college that they had with their bank, their supermarket, and their gas company. They say 'I want terrific service, I want convenience, I want quality control. Give me classes twenty-four hours a day, and give me in-class parking.' These are students who want stripped-down classes. They don't want to buy anything they're not using."¹

Phoenix has some fifty-nine "campuses," small learning centers, and distance education bases in Arizona, California, Colorado, Florida, Hawaii, Louisiana, Michigan, Nevada, New Mexico, Oregon, Utah, Washington, and Puerto Rico. Its corporate customers include AT&T, Kodak, IBM, and General Electric. Applications in other states are pending. Eighteen other schools, mostly small religious institutions, have contracted to offer Phoenix-style courses in seven other states. Phoenix stock sold for \$2.45 in 1994. It's now worth over \$40 a share. Some think other schools should climb on the bandwagon.

Ten years from now we'll be significantly farther along that path than we are now. Perhaps we may offer our own version of a faculty contract in the hypothetical corporate university of the future:



**MOBILE OIL
brings you
MASTERPIECE CLASSROOM THEATRE**

The Corporate University's Principles of Governance:

- 1) The student consumer is always right.
- 2) Contract faculty will maintain a cheerful and friendly demeanor at all times.
- 3) Contract faculty will avoid challenging, threatening, or upsetting student consumers.
- 4) All courses will be graded on the basis of clear, universally achievable goals. Divisive notions of excellence and quality will play no role in evaluating consumer performance.
- 5) All products of faculty labor are the property of the corporation.
- 6) Termination without notice is available for faculty noncompliance or insubordination.
- 7) All faculty members are provided with course syllabi and textbooks without charge. Management is responsible for course content.
- 8) All faculty possess presumptive redundancy. The need for their services will be reassessed each term.
- 9) All faculty must submit an annual report detailing how they can better serve the corporation's mission.
- 10) Faculty members have full academic freedom to accept these principles or to resign.

In many ways this is the world adjuncts and part-timers *already* inhabit. This dystopian satire is no more than daily life for many academics, and those in tenured positions who feel sorry for themselves need to see their own working conditions reflected in this cultural mirror. Many part-timers have little freedom to design courses, no role in governance, no job security, no power to defend themselves from irrational student complaints, and are subject to summary dismissal for the most trivial, confused, or flatly inaccurate reasons. Some work in fear or resignation, knowing their livelihoods depend on not offending administrators or



challenging their students. And they work for wages comparable to those in the worst illegal sweat shops in the country.

If this is to be the typical model of higher education in little more than a decade, some of the forces fueling this development will be demographic. The college-age population of eighteen- to twenty-four-year-olds in 1981 rose to a level of 30.3 million. It then declined to a low of 24.7 million by 1997. By 2010 it will have climbed back to its 1981 high. As Carol Frances points out, the traditional (and we would add, disastrous) way to predict the need for college faculty is to multiply the college-age population by the projected percentage of high school graduates expected to attend college. Then you divide the expected number of students by the typical student/faculty ratio and—*voilà*—you know how many faculty members we'll need. Yet as the last three decades have shown, there are other ways to meet this need—by graduate student and part-time labor.

The other demographic force at work is the dramatic increase in the number of faculty who will be eligible for retirement over the next half decade. Some have predicted that removing the mandatory retirement age for faculty members means these folks will continue teaching beyond age sixty-five or seventy. We believe that is not true. We think the overwhelming majority will retire. For one thing, the performance of the stock market in the 1990s has meant that many faculty enrolled in TIAA/CREF can now afford to retire. Even in the humanities some faculty members will have retirement accounts of over a million dollars; in exceptionally well paid fields like medicine, law, and business, faculty members will have multimillion-dollar retirement funds. Furthermore, the changing climate of higher education—including the shift from teaching to job training and the increasing surveillance of faculty labor—will lead many faculty to bail out. We are likely to have a shortage of faculty with long-term institutional memories and experience in governance. Managers will fill the vacuum, making higher education still less appealing.

By 2005, then, a surge in the need for *instructional services*, not necessarily college teachers—produced by the new wave of college-age baby boomer children and by retirement of faculty veterans of the Vietnam era—will provide a devastating opportunity simultaneously to further instrumentalize higher education and to increase drastically the percentage of part-time and adjunct faculty. Then the game will be over, and we can spend the next two generations squabbling about how to rebuild the educational system we thoughtlessly dismantled. If Levine is right, the long-term picture is worse. He predicts that in a few generations we'll end up with only a few residential colleges and a few research



universities; “most of the rest will disappear.” In that context the answer to the question “Is there a future for the Ph.D.?” is clearly “No.”

That is a longer time frame than we can address confidently, but we suspect our actions in the short term will make Levine’s prediction more likely. Thus the news that a new wave of undergraduates is about to flood our classrooms will lead many sleeping faculty to surface and spout glad tidings. “The end of the job crisis is in sight.” No one who makes a serious study of the economics of higher education believes this, but a lot of self-serving and self-important faculty members are surely destined to say so. The point now is not whether more jobs will become available but what sort of jobs they will be. A job that doesn’t pay a living wage is a form of slavery.

The academic McJob boom of the new millennium could end higher education as we know it, decisively proletarianizing the professoriate.² In ten years a substantial majority of college teachers will be part-timers, academic professionals, or clinical faculty. The titles are multiplying, but the bottom line is the same: no security, no benefits, no time for research or reflection, no academic freedom, no prestige, no institutional power. Think of college teaching as a low-level service job. The job boom may be sounding from a cannon aimed at our heads. For full-time tenure-track faculty may cease to be major providers of instruction. In many places, of course, they are already no longer the primary providers, but the trend may be radically accelerated when we face the *crisis* of new employment opportunities.

Yet it is no longer possible to hope we can address the job crisis for new Ph.D.’s on its own. The multiple crises of higher education now present an interlocking and often interchangeable set of signifiers. Conversation about the lack of full-time jobs for Ph.D.’s turns inevitably to the excessive and abusive use of part-time faculty or the exploitation of graduate student employees, which in turn suggests the replacement of tenured with contract faculty, which slides naturally into anxiety about distance learning, which leads to concern about shared governance in a world where administrators have all the power, which in turn invokes the wholesale proletarianization of the professoriate.

When Richard Chait, therefore, in an introduction to the New Pathways project, remarks, reasonably enough, that “technology threatens the virtual monopoly higher education has enjoyed as the purveyor of post-secondary degrees,” we can and must recognize the implications along all the other cultural and institutional fronts his warning effects.



But our own programmatic responses and strategies, adopted under pressure, can easily make things worse. Thus whatever external assaults on humanities research, tenure, sabbaticals, teaching loads, and other elements of university life are mounted will be underwritten by disastrous compromises made in good faith by departments themselves.

English departments, for example, are compelled financially and structurally to hire non-Ph.D.'s at a time when Ph.D.'s cannot get jobs. Doctoral institutions also hire postdocs at teaching assistant wages—often out of the altogether decent aim of giving them additional years to get traditional jobs—and in the process undermine the status of the profession and the future job market by proving that Ph.D.'s can be hired at half or less the typical current rate for new assistant professors. And the department that hires a new Ph.D. for \$3,000 a course is placing itself dangerously close to the salary scale adopted by the schools hiring Ph.D.'s for half that or less. Meanwhile, those with instrumental visions of higher education have no patience with the critical distance humanities faculty would like to maintain from their own culture. Their goal is to strip higher education of all its intellectual independence, its powers of cultural critique and political resistance.

From a national perspective, the struggle seems nearly over, incomprehensible as that may be to those on campuses where full-time tenured faculty with significant independence are still a major force. Viewed as a totality, the nation's faculty have already been displaced by marginal employees. As William Plater, a senior administrator at Indiana University/Purdue University in Indianapolis puts it, "The faculty no longer exists. It has been subsumed in an academic workforce of which tenured professors, tenured associate professors, and probationary assistant professors are only a small part, perhaps less than a third" (680).

Can this process, continuing but not yet complete, be reversed or resisted? Not entirely. But we are not impotent. Despite the paeans to powerlessness sung by virtually every president of every academic disciplinary organization, we are not powerless. That's the obvious lesson from the UPS strike: the workers did not roll over and play dead. Now since most tenured faculty take pride in rolling over and playing dead, we do have a personnel problem. But if we can find the troops, we can enter the battle. Here we are hopeful. For in the summer of 1997—here and there across the country—graduate student union activists were heading toward their local UPS facility to join picket lines and offer other forms of support. It remains to be seen whether the negative forms of academic



proletarianization—low salaries and abusive working conditions—can be more widely accompanied with a positive proletarianization: solidarity or identification with the working classes.

Campus union activism and solidarity with other workers on and off campus is one critical component of the defense and renewal of higher education. We need more radical workplace democracy, more militancy, and new alliances from below. We keep waiting for an administrator who welcomes such developments, but evidently neither he nor she is slouching toward Bethlehem to be born. Change will come from below, from the jobless, the exploited, the underpaid, the overworked. Perhaps their time will come again.

Throughout the country full-time cafeteria workers' positions with health coverage and retirement benefits are being outsourced to companies that replace them with minimum wage jobs with little or no benefits. And teaching assistants are watching their salaries succumb to inflation and their class sizes increase while the full-time faculty jobs for which they are supposedly being trained are disappearing. Most teaching or research assistants who work full-time for the whole academic year, especially those in the humanities not supported by the research grants scientists often receive, do not even earn enough money to live through the summer. There's not a college administrator in America without a gambling problem who could say the same. The part-time university employee who gets seriously ill is basically thrown out on the street without an income. The teaching assistant who has to buy health insurance for her children will find herself without enough money to buy food and pay rent. And the cafeteria worker who puts in thirty years may end up with little or no retirement income. The top salaries in higher education have become too high, while the bottom salaries have become too low. We have lost sight of the humane values that were supposed to guide us.

Is this the kind of community we want to be? Are these the values higher education should promote? Do you want your classes taught by people who have no reason to feel anything other than resentment toward their employers? Higher education's unfair employment practices threaten our public image and our mission. It is time for a change.

On many campuses that change is being spearheaded by support staff and graduate employee unionization drives.³ They are sending a message that democratic collective action is the key to revitalizing higher education. The only alternative, it seems, is to listen to the bad advice many senior faculty and administrators are giving us, especially senior faculty who have adopted uncritically the entrepreneurial disciplinarity of the



last few decades. Believing that their working conditions derive directly from their own accomplishments, not from any underlying social and political conditions, they typically urge us to wait until the system rights itself, as it surely must. They are so wonderful, the discipline has repeatedly told them, that they have come to believe it. They conceive their subject positions as eternal features of the culture. Surely, they think, the country will want more people just like them in years to come. So all is well. We are wonderful, some of you can be wonderful. That's all we know and all you need to know. Actually, those of us with security and disciplinary prestige, those of you with tenure-track jobs, may be among the last generations to be so lucky. Virtually no one outside the higher education community has any passionate commitment to keeping the research model of humanities disciplinaryity intact.

Yet tenured faculty continue to disparage or regret activism. At the 1996 annual MLA, held in Washington D.C., at a forum devoted to the job crisis, Harvard's John Guillory challenged us to confront the crisis in its proper historical perspective. "Ask yourselves," he implicitly urged the audience, "how the ancient Greeks would have responded to such a crisis."⁴ Not believing that history is much help in solving anachronistic riddles, we can only say now that perhaps the ancient Greeks would have gotten on their cell phones to talk it through. Guillory himself had a stern warning to extract from his parable: "The worst thing that could happen," he announced, pausing for appropriate dramatic effect while we trembled in the plastic amphitheater of ancient Washington, "would be to let this passing crisis deflect us from our proper focus on transcendent verities toward a concern with the contingent and the political." In published comments he has suggested that the politicization of graduate students was a kind of manifestation of psychological pathology. Now he went further. The job crisis, he offered in a dark prophecy, just might politicize the profession as a whole. Well, so far he has little to worry about. Business as usual continues apace.

Yet the job crisis may have produced a new critical theory. Call it "addled eco-feminism." We refer to the talk by Adalaide Morris, currently chair of the University of Iowa's English Department, which was presented on the same program. Morris spent twenty minutes offering a series of biological tropes for a profession in crisis. "The roots and branches are severed, cut off from each other and torn out of the ground. The webs are broken, the connections lost. The liquids that once flowed peacefully from branch to branch now drip on the ground and decompose." Morris never got beyond these images or offered any proposals,



though it seemed plausible to suggest that a dehumidifier might solve our problems.

An obscure segment of the American Left has also chimed in with a benighted program for radical change: quote Lenin. This compact suggestion—our own redaction of their voluminous writings—comes from a pseudo-Marxist cult headquartered at Syracuse University. They have no plan, no specific suggestions to make, but instead issue endless denunciations of other leftists in their house organs, *Mock Orange* and *Red Sphinxter*, usually flourishing quotes from Lenin as if these passages settle all questions of contemporary practice.⁵ Led by Professors Mas'ud Zavarzedeh and Donald Morton, the group has declared itself the only reincarnation of the spirit of revolution. No reform of higher education is acceptable to them, because every such move is an accommodation to capitalism, making the system run more smoothly and curtailing the inequities that might lead people to rise up in revolt. From their tenured roosts, these sirens of Syracuse inform us that the agony of lower-paid workers should be intensified to press them toward revolution. They have not suggested their own salaries be cut to make them more revolutionary still. We suspect, moreover, that underpaid teaching assistants are unlikely to overthrow capitalism no matter how badly they are exploited. A better formula for radical change, we believe, is a collective effort within a series of individual industries exhibiting comparable forms of exploitation.

Our general cynicism about the willingness of tenured faculty to join such collective activity is obviously in tension with our support for the principle of tenure. But ending tenure will not resolve the tension in a helpful way. The problem here is not with tenure but with the way recent generations of faculty have been trained and socialized. They have assumed that their interests lay with their careers and their disciplinary identities; everything else, from finances to academic freedom, could take care of itself. Now we know they were wrong. The solution is to get tenure-track jobs for a new generation of graduate student union activists. We obviously have no intention of letting tenured faculty off the hook or of failing to tell them what we believe their responsibilities are; we just don't want anyone to count on them.

Yet without a major collective effort, higher education as we know it will be over within a decade or two. This is not the polymorphous play of interpretations. It's a struggle with material consequences for an institution to which many of us have given our lives, with material consequences for all of us who work within this industry. We think it is time for a revolution in how we do business.



As part of that revolution we need to undertake several major projects:

1. Recover our own repressed institutional history, including the full human cost of the exploitive, unreflective graduate programs we have run for three decades.
2. Restore fairness to the campus wage and benefit system, making sure that all employees earn a living wage and have the same health care benefits. Recognize the right for employees to have a voice in their own working conditions and to opt for collective bargaining if they choose. Although alliances and a sense of community are critical in higher education, graduate students and part-timers must also organize to represent their interests with greater clarity and force.
3. Devote substantial energy to multiple forms of public outreach, from lobbying legislators to explaining our work to general audiences. Professional organizations should train faculty members as lobbyists at their national meetings.
4. Initiate stringent campus-based budget reviews, reducing or eliminating outdated, unnecessary, or ineffective programs. Faculty must take a primary role in evaluating programs and allocating resources.
5. Promote campus-wide democratic debates about the aims, practices, and future of higher education.
6. Resist on multiple fronts the corporatization of the university.

Each of these points has numerous components. Each component will confront vigorously resistant constituencies. And if we do everything well, the quality of public higher education will nonetheless decline in many states, especially at second-tier institutions. No matter what we do, a decade from now many states will no longer have either a public or a private research university that merits the name. But we believe we can preserve a viable system of education that supports at least the minimum freedom necessary to advance and adapt cultural knowledge to changing conditions.

For that project we will need Ph.D.'s who have the time and resources to devote to continuing research. Alternative careers in industry or high school or community college teaching—none of these alternatives let research faculty in the humanities do the critical cultural work for which they have been trained. Imagine where we would be now if the research of the last thirty years had remained undone—in the narrow world of the restricted racist and sexist canon, still ignoring the work of women and minority writers.



Yet many more of our future colleagues are going to have jobs that many of us would find utterly unacceptable, jobs with no time for the life of the mind, jobs that make a mockery of the very notion of the university. We can work to make things better, losing some battles and winning others, or we can passively let things get worse. We can take up the struggle to make campuses moral workplaces or abandon them to the ravages of late capitalism. The path we are on now will leave us victims of forces we could have influenced.

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