

## MINDING THE CAMPUS.COM

Selections from the Manhattan Institute's web magazine

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## EDITOR'S NOTE

The economy and the presidential race understandably dominate the news these days. But if pollsters asked better questions, the state of higher education might show up as a close third. Large numbers of Americans now wonder whether colleges and universities cost too much and teach too little: student loan debt runs to \$110 million per year, and a 2011 study reported that 36 percent of our college students learn nothing or almost nothing in four years of alleged study.

Minding the Campus provides informed commentary on the many controversies now roiling higher education. Among them: The emergence of online education and resistance to it; the drive to hold teachers responsible for their productivity and the quality of their teaching; the parallel drive to hold colleges responsible for graduates who can't find jobs; the rapid decline of the humanities and the social sciences; the huge and expanding diversity bureaucracies; the war on fraternities; the apparently endless argument over racial preferences and legacies; and the stunning one-sidedness of college faculties—the University of Iowa counts one Republican among its 50-member history department and is fighting hard to avoid hiring a second one.

These are important stories. Follow them on Minding the Campus. —JL

John Leo, *Editor*

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Charlotte Allen, *Contributing Editor*

## HARVARD LOVES TO IMPOSE ORTHODOXIES

Harvey A. Silverglate | January 4, 2012

Although our beleaguered universities continue their seemingly inexorable march from being institutions of higher education to resembling, more and more, political and social re-education camps for the young, every now and then the students demonstrate that they remain well ahead of campus administrations and faculties when it comes to appreciating the true role of our colleges and universities: It appears that our universities' efforts at attitudinal indoctrination have not been wholly successful.

We see the latest example at Harvard in an editorial in the college newspaper *The Harvard Crimson*. Headlined "A University, Not A Think Tank: Harvard should not issue a formal position on inequality" ... the undergraduate journalists take their professors to task for continuing on the perilous journey of politicizing the institution by seeking to have the school, in the editorial's words, "use its position to make a statement against social inequalities."

*Continued on page 3*



## TRYING TO PROVE TEA PARTIERS ARE RACIST

Robert Weissberg | November 2, 2011

Among those prizing truth, modern social science does not enjoy an especially good reputation. As a political scientist myself, I've long encountered conservatives who often complain that much contemporary social science does little more than demonize conservative views. Unfortunately, such grumbling is often correct. But that said, complainers rarely grasp how this bias is imposed and, more important, why bias passes professional scrutiny. The answers are simple, the rules for conducting research themselves permit social scientists to create "reality" and with that power, run-of-the-mill dishonesty is unnecessary.

To illustrate how research can be weaponized for ideological purposes, all the while honoring the conventions of modern social science, consider a paper presented at the 2011 American Political Science Association's annual national meeting castigating the tea party movement as "racist." It was written by a well-respected academic who heeded all the accepted (and scientific) disciplinary conventions. Indeed, I strongly suspect that the ideologically-driven tea party bashing was scarcely noticed by peers who initially screened the paper or were in the Seattle audience when it was presented. This is the point: bias is so deeply ingrained, so professionally acceptable, that it escapes notice. According to Professor Gary Jacobson...tea party folk are less sympathetic to blacks than other Americans, confirming an oft-made charge that behind the calls for less government and cutting debt lurks the demon of all modern demons, racism.

How is this determined? It rests entirely on responses to three questions asked in a 2010 survey. One concerns affirmative action: Affirmative action programs give preference to racial minorities in employment and college admissions in order to correct for discrimination. Do you support or oppose affirmative action? The second and third questions measure what is labeled "racial resentment:" Do you agree or disagree with the following statements?

*The Irish, Italians, Jews and many other minorities overcame prejudice and worked their way up. Blacks should do the*



*same without any special favors* (strongly agree/somewhat agree/somewhat disagree/strongly disagree).

*Generations of slavery and discrimination have created conditions that make it difficult for blacks to work their way out of the lower class.* (strongly agree/somewhat agree/somewhat disagree/strongly disagree).

That's it—the horrifically complicated topic of "racism" is reduced to three simple-minded questions about beliefs (not behaviors). To be blunt, Professor Jacobson has exercised god-like power to decide that those who oppose racial preferences believe that blacks should make a greater effort to work their way up without special treatment and are not hurt by generations of slavery and discrimination are "unsympathetic" to blacks and therefore "racists." ...What about the premises underlying these questions? Does affirmative action broadly "correct" past discrimination?

Let me stress that this analysis meets all the requirements of professional political science. ...No conflict exists between pushing an ideological agenda and doing respectable social science. The trick is to control the data (i.e., reality) at the onset of research, to pick and choose the meaning given to the data (e.g., "racial resentment") and then cover everything with the gloss of science—statistics, technical jargon, graphs and charts, innumerable scholarly citations, and arcane technical discussions. This research is no more dishonest than the casino's perfectly legal built-in advantage. Again, it is the power to decide reality, not dishonesty that creates bias.

*Robert Weissberg is professor of political science, emeritus at The University of Illinois-Urbana, and occasionally teaches in the NYU politics department MA program.*

## HARVARD LOVES ORTHODOXIES *Continued from page 1*

...In fact, this would hardly be the first time that the student journalists had to lecture their teachers on the contours of intellectual freedom and of the dangers in crossing the line from education to indoctrination.... In 2006 the faculty managed to drive out the university president, Lawrence Summers, for suggesting the existence of scientific evidence of women scientists' gender-based overall predisposition not to perform at the highest levels, in contrast to their male counterparts. In 2009, the dean of the Law School publicly embarrassed and castigated a student for a controversial private e-mail expressing the student's interest in seeing more scientific research results on the hot-button issue of race and intelligence. And at the beginning of the last semester, the Harvard College dean of freshmen sought to impose on all new arrivals a "Freshman Pledge."

...In the last year alone, Harvard's highly regarded student newspaper ("The University Daily Since 1873," bibles the masthead proudly) has failed twice to defend freedom of conscience at Harvard. In response to the

pledge controversy...the *Crimson* editorial board called for the imposition of a moral code.... And two days earlier,... the same editorial page supported the December 6th vote of the Harvard College faculty to exclude from the Harvard Summer School catalogue two economics courses taught by Indian economist Subramanian Swamy. The reasons for Swamy's effective expulsion from the faculty was his authorship of an editorial—for a newspaper in his native India—urging the Indian government to take drastic steps in response to Muslim extremism....

...As the Swamy and pledge editorials equally show, even student editors are not completely immune from the increasingly dangerous politicization of the academy that threatens academic freedom and, indeed, the whole concept of a liberal arts education. The danger, of course, is that within another generation, the constant pressure from faculty and administration to water down the liberal arts university's traditional mission will have converted the students into unquestioning followers of their politicized elders.

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*Harvey A. Silverglate, a Boston lawyer, is the co-founder and chairman of the board of The Foundation for Individual Rights in Education (FIRE), and the co-author of The Shadow University: The Betrayal of Liberty on America's Campuses.*

## HOW FEDERAL AID DRIVES UP COLLEGE TUITION

At Bloomberg News, Virginia Postrel writes about how federal subsidies intended to make college more affordable have instead encouraged rapidly rising tuitions.... Subsidies for colleges also divert young people away from vocational training that receives fewer subsidies but leads to jobs with better pay and more value for America's economy. In *City Journal*, Joel Kotkin writes about the increasing demand (and correspondingly attractive pay) for workers in manufacturing, who often need vocational training rather than college educations....

States spend billions of dollars operating colleges that are little better than diploma mills in terms of academic rigor, yet manage to graduate few of their students—like Chicago State University, "which has just a 12.8 percent six-year graduation rate," and UT El Paso, which graduated only "1 out of 25 students in a timely manner." As states send more and more mediocre students to college, students learn less and less. "Our colleges and universities are full to the brim with students who do not really belong there, who are unprepared for college and uninterested in breaking a mental sweat."... Although education spending has exploded in recent years, students "spent 50 percent less time studying compared with students a few decades ago, the research shows."... — *Hans Bader, December 9, 2011*

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*Hans Bader is senior attorney at the Competitive Enterprise Institute.*

# THREE CHEERS FOR USELESS EDUCATION

J. M. Anderson | November 23, 2011

Several years ago *Harper's Magazine* ran two articles on "The Uses of Liberal Education." One article, subtitled "As a weapon in the hands of the restless poor," was written by Earl Shorris, and describes how poor and underprivileged members of our society were eager to study the great books and benefited from them.... The other essay, subtitled "As lite entertainment for bored college students," was written by Mark Edmundson of the University of Virginia, and pretty much speaks for itself. ...In one instance he writes about students who would come to his office to tell him how embarrassed or intimidated they felt when he corrected them in front of other students in class.

...The contrast between these two essays is probably evident... On the one hand you have people struggling for their existence, but taking big ideas seriously and applying them to their lives in concrete and meaningful ways; on the other hand you have young people largely from the middle- and upper-class who see education... as an entitlement and a means....

...The authors are essentially posing the same question that everyone associated with higher education ought to be asking: What is education? And more specifically, What is its value, and What are we here for? If you put these questions to today's undergraduate students, most would tell you that... they are in college or university for practical (i.e., economic) reasons.... Undergraduate education is valued for its economic benefit—i.e., for doing and getting—which explains the success of degree mills like the University of Phoenix. They're open for business, and business is good.

The message that attending college should lead to economic advancement and more money is one that is sent by education critics and reformers from the president of the United States on down. ...The president himself provided the rationale. The way "to build a firmer,



Hip! Hip! Hooray!

stronger foundation" for economic growth, he wrote in the *Washington Post*, is "to create the jobs of the future within our borders" and to "give our workers the skills and training they need to compete for those jobs."

...A chief reason why higher education is under attack and derided as useless is that most Americans...confuse education with training. The danger of equating higher education with skills training is that students are only taught instrumental knowledge and remain ignorant of the general interests of human beings.

*The value of liberal education derives from showing students that there is more to life than crass materialism.*

...While education in general aims to remove ignorance, impart knowledge, and develop intelligence, liberal education in particular is valuable because it promotes liberal culture and generates a broad outlook in students.... The value of liberal education derives from its formative process, from showing students how they might be liberated through literature or that there is more to life than crass materialism....

...What could be more beneficial and practical than to see through shams, to know a good person when you see one, to learn to live life well? Maybe it's time for colleges and universities to get back into the business of offering this kind of useless education.

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*J. M. Anderson received his Ph.D. in history from Syracuse University. He is the author of The Honorable Burden of Public Office: English Humanists and Tudor Politics in the Sixteenth Century (New York, 2010), and a manuscript in search of a publisher, Why Can't Professors Teach? Why Liberal Education Has Failed and What Modern Educators Must Do To Save It.*

## THEY CAN'T RENEGE ON STUDENT DEBT

Charlotte Allen | December 2, 2011

Sometimes the left is onto something. Take, for example, the latest twist in the “Occupy” movement: Occupy Student Debt. The new activism front, which began in with a Nov. 21 rally at Occupy Ground Zero, New York’s Zuccotti Park, is trying to collect a million online signatures from debtors pledging to refuse to repay their student loans.... Before the end of 2011, the total amount of outstanding student debt is expected to exceed \$1 trillion for the first time in history.



...According to data from the U.S. Education Department, the overall default rate on student loans was close to 9 percent in 2010, up from 7 percent in 2009. That’s highly troubling. But it would be nice if the Occupy people would focus more closely on the factors that undoubtedly led to the student-debt explosion—such as rampant tuition inflation and a lack of borrowing responsibility on the part of students themselves....

That seems unlikely, though, given the predictable ideological proclivities of the Occupy crowd. The highest-profile leader of the debt strike is Andrew Ross, a professor at New York University. On Oct. 16 Ross led a teach-in titled “Is Student Debt a Form of Indenture?” in the atrium of a Wall Street office building near Zuccotti Park. Ross painted a lurid picture of a predatory banking industry growing rich on federally subsidized interest payments, fat loan-collection fees and default penalties, and a 2005 overhaul of federal bankruptcy laws that made it nearly impossible to get rid of student debt in bankruptcy court.

...Ross’s information was slightly out of date. In early 2010 Congress forced commercial banks out of the stu-

dent-lending business, and the sole fat-cat lender in the student-loan market is now the federal government itself.... That sort of financial ignorance figures for Ross, who is not an economics or political science professor as one might think, but an English professor who leads NYU’s American-studies program....

...As of this writing, more than two weeks after Ross issued his call to action, only 2,144 people had signed the “Debtors’ Pledge” on the Occupy Student Debt website. For many students and recent college graduates, any possible satisfaction gained from sticking it to the Man is likely

outweighed by fear of wage garnishments, government confiscation of tax refunds, ruined credit ratings, and a dearth of sympathy from working people who managed to pay their own debts. Furthermore...90 percent of recipients of bachelor’s degrees graduate with less than \$40,000 worth of debt.

*The sole fat-cat lender in the student-loan market is now the federal government itself.*

That suggests that the real problem with escalating student debt might be unwise choices made by youthful bor-

rowers who would be better off attending a cheaper public college and working part-time and summers rather than heedlessly piling up loans. The other problem is ever-escalating tuition and fees.... The reasons for the tuition hikes are many: strapped state budgets, bloated university administrations, fancy campus facilities, too much subsidization of faculty research instead of teaching. Those University of California-Davis students who got pepper-sprayed were protesting tuition increases that could total 81 percent over the next few years. Encouraging students to make smarter loan decisions and university administrators to trim their costs ought to be the focus of any move to reduce student debt. But those ideas obviously aren’t sexy or Marxist enough for the class-warfare-obsessed Occupy movement.

*Charlotte Allen is a Minding the Campus contributing editor.*

## ARE TOO MANY PEOPLE GOING TO COLLEGE?

*These are excerpts from a January 11 debate co-sponsored by the Manhattan Institute's Center for the American University and the John William Pope Center for Higher Education Policy. The debaters were George Leef, research director of the Pope Center, and Peter Sacks, economist and author of Tearing Down the Gates: Confronting the Class Divide in American Education.*

### George Leef

Just as we caused a destructive, resource-wasting housing bubble by pushing the idea that home ownership was good for almost everyone, so have we caused a resource-wasting higher education bubble.

In our higher education bubble, many of the educations purchased by students are the equivalent of houses without roofs. Many Americans today graduate with a college education in name only, having gained little or nothing in useful skills and knowledge....

Last year, the Center for College Affordability and Productivity released a paper documenting the large percentage of people who have bachelors degrees (or higher) working in jobs that most high schoolers could easily do. The report said "60 percent of the increased college graduate population between 1992 and 2008 ended up in these lower skill jobs."

The labor market is glutted with people holding college credentials. Just because a country "produces" a lot of college grads does not mean there will be commensurate jobs for them.

A second common belief is that it's advantageous for a country to have a high rate of college completion because it improves economic competitiveness.



**YES**

*Many Americans today graduate with a college education in name only, having gained little or nothing in useful skills and knowledge.*

(But) there is no necessary connection between a nation's "educational attainment" level and the vitality of its economy.

University of London professor Alison Wolf provided examples of nations that have "invested" heavily in higher education yet have listless economies (such as Egypt) and others that do little to promote higher education yet enjoy very productive and growing economies (such as Switzerland).

Now I'll mention two costs. One cost of the expansion of college has been a corresponding decline in academic standards.

As college enrollments rose in the 70s, 80s, and 90s, K-12 standards were falling, with the result that an ever-increasing proportion of college students entered with weak academic skills and often an attitude that was indifferent toward learning.

A second cost is credential inflation. The more college grads in the labor force, the more employers require job applicants to have college credentials, even for jobs that call for no academic preparation.

Credential inflation is hard on poor people who are prevented from competing for jobs they could do and hardest of all on poor people who spend money they need for other things on college credentials, only to wind up in low-pay jobs anyway.

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*George Leef is director of research for the John William Pope Center for Higher Education Policy.*

## ARE TOO MANY PEOPLE GOING TO COLLEGE?

### Peter Sacks

Okay, college isn't for everyone. The real argument here is whether we are over-investing in higher education leading to bachelor's degrees, and if so, how do we legitimately ration higher education opportunity.

We've all heard the stories of the elevator operator with a master's degree or the waiter with a Ph.D. But the data suggests these stories are just that, the seemingly frequent, yet incidental.

Given the education and skill requirements of the U.S. economy now and in the future, this country is largely undereducated for the future. We are producing too few BA degrees and advanced degrees relative to the skill sets employers actually need and will need.

The evidence suggests that public investments in human capital, including higher education, yield long-term economic rates of return that far exceed most standard investments in technology or capital.

To ask whether too many people are going to college begs another question: If too many people are going to college, then who are these people? How should we as a society ration a more restricted level of educational opportunity? If we actually did decide as a nation that too many people are going to college, then how should we fix this problem, and what are the far-reaching implications of this fix? Are too many kids from wealthy families going to college? Are there too many college-goers enrolled in social work? Are too many lower middle class kids seeking higher education? Whom exactly are we encouraging when they should not be encouraged?

Young people born to families of modest incomes and relatively low levels of education—who already bear the brunt of the lack of college access—will also bear the li-



**NO**

*We are producing too few BA degrees and advanced degrees relative to the skill sets employers actually need and will need.*

attained no more than a high school diploma now have grandchildren who are doctors, professors, and engineers.

Those stories should remind us of who we are and how we got here. We have what we have because of sacrifices—investments in human capital—that past generations made, for us.

on's share of the burden of any policy to roll back education opportunity.

As the chosen ones, however, students from families who have the ability to pay for admissions slots at universities—which, by the way, would dramatically shrink because of dwindling subsidies—well, these chosen few would become our new, self-perpetuating aristocracy.

At the dinner table, equal opportunity means that parents want their children to have opportunities they never had themselves. After a few generations of striving, grandparents who had

*Peter Sacks is an author, economist, essayist and social critic. His most recent book is Tearing Down The Gates: Confronting The Class Divide In American Education.*

### ATTENTION STUDENTS!

Minding the Campus is interested in student perspectives on current campus issues.

We've published articles by students from UC-Berkeley, Yale, Dartmouth, Princeton, the University of Delaware, and elsewhere and are now forming a College Contributors program. We are searching for dedicated students to write monthly articles about a wide range of topics, preferably revolving around academia.

If you are interested in blogging for the Manhattan Institute, please e-mail your name, institution, class year, and two short recent writing clips to CAU director Alison Smith at: [asmith@manhattan-institute.org](mailto:asmith@manhattan-institute.org)

# CENTER FOR THE AMERICAN UNIVERSITY

The mission of the Manhattan Institute's Center for the American University is to draw attention to the condition of the contemporary university. The CAU highlights the major challenges facing today's universities, including rising costs, the lack of intellectual pluralism, and the failure to provide students with a substantive education. Prescriptions for reform to restore the best traditions of liberal education on American campuses are set forth in the CAU's three unique initiatives: [MindingTheCampus.com](#), the [VERITAS Fund](#), and the newly created [Adam Smith Society](#)—a group of business school students and alumni dedicated to exploring links among the economy, government, and society. For more information on any of our programs, contact CAU director Alison Smith at [asmith@manhattan-institute.org](mailto:asmith@manhattan-institute.org).

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If you have stories to report or comments to offer, write to [editor@campusmind.com](mailto:editor@campusmind.com).

The screenshot shows the Minding The Campus website interface. At the top, there's a navigation bar with 'HOME', 'FORUM', 'OUR ESSAYS', 'PODCASTS', 'LINKS', 'ABOUT US', and 'CAU'. The main content area features several sections: 'Most Accessible Professors' with a list of institutions; 'The Keeton Case--An Abuse of Academic Power' by Peter Wood, including a quote and a 'Continue reading...' link; 'LATEST COMMENTARY' with several article titles and dates; 'FORUM' dated January 17, 2012, featuring 'No Research, Please, Unless It Helps Our Cause' by Roger Clegg; 'PODCASTS' with 'The Online Threat to Traditional Universities'; 'RECENT ESSAYS' with 'Look Who's Endorsing a Race-Based View of Knowledge'; and 'All Essays >>>'.

### News Round-up

A daily selection of the best opinions and reports from major newspapers, magazines, and student publications.

- Ivy Grads Pick Teaching Over Wall Street, **William D. Cohan**, *Bloomberg*
- The Menacing Higher Ed Bubble **J. P. Cassil**, *Washington Times*
- Private-College Presidents Getting Higher Salaries, **Tamar Lewin**, *NYT*
- Where Were Penn State's Trustees? **Anne Neal**, *WSJ*

### Exclusive Essays from Leading Higher Ed Experts

Obama Campus 2012 By **Mark Bauerlein**  
Those Pesky Conservatives Just Aren't Bright Enough By **Walter Olson**  
Your Tax Money: Yes to Muslim Women, No to Muslim Men By **John S. Rosenberg**  
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—David French, director of the Alliance Defense Fund's Center for Academic Freedom

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—Harvey Silverglate, attorney, civil libertarian, co-author of *The Shadow University*

"Minding the Campus is indispensable to understanding the degradation of higher education in America today and the sad circumstances into which we send our nation's young minds and sensibilities."

—Alan Charles Kors, professor of history, University of Pennsylvania, co-founder of FIRE



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