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Towards a History of the Professional: On the Class Composition of the Research University

Mark Paschal September 27, 2013



BISECTING A TUTOR'S SLEEP

Rolling a cannon ball downstairs in the dead of night was another phase of the popular sport of tutor-baiting.

At first glance, it seems like a rather hoary controversy: Mitch Daniels, as governor of Indiana, failing in an attempt to ban Howard Zinn's *A People's History of the United States* from K-12 classrooms. Another conservative politician attempting to control

what people can read and think, arousing the ire of a Left particularly adept at public displays of outrage. However, as a report by the [Huffington Post](#) details, this case possibly represents an existential threat to the modern research university: Daniels aimed to overtly determine the content of Teacher's Training courses at Indiana University. "Go for it," Daniels wrote. "Disqualify propaganda and highlight (if there is any) the more useful offerings. Don't the ed schools have at least some substantive PD (professional development) courseware to upgrade knowledge of math, science, etc." Not only that, but in the midst of a larger attempt to purge "anti-American" works (those that highlight women, workers and non-whites), Daniels attempted to cut funding from a professor who had had the temerity to criticize him.

While these attempts to curb academic freedom are risible on their own, subsequent uproar has focused on Daniels' qualifications for his current post: Daniels, now President of Purdue University – "an institution predicated on free thought," writes [critical-theory.com](#) – is neither a trained academic, nor has he worked as one. As the same site [details elsewhere](#), he couldn't even defend himself without resorting to plagiarism – the cardinal sin of academia! And the plot thickens: as governor of Indiana, Daniels appointed trustees who later appointed him President of Purdue. Even before that, he had attempted to use his political power to meddle in the academic affairs of public universities and the coursework of the women and men training to become teachers.

This little episode reveals a tremendous amount about the ideology surrounding universities and higher education, while also clarifying what the neoliberal attack on universities is really attempting to do, how ideology and state power make it possible, and why defending these institutions is a necessary but insufficient response. To get there, though, requires a jaunt through history, to see what animated the creation of the modern research university. This will entail a discussion of the parameters of "free thought," academic control of education, and the formation of the modern research university – all of which date back to the 19th century. The introduction of research

into the mission of higher education, a transformation which took place first in Germany and Scotland (where developing links between manufacturers, bankers, and universities were bolstering the burgeoning capitalist class), had profound and lasting effects; principal among them was providing a means by which faculty in the United States (where the state was far weaker than it was in Europe) could professionalize, organize, and create a new institutional form – a hybrid of European and US higher education now hailed as the American Research University.

To Control Labor

The hallmark of a profession is that it is self-regulating. No one else, its practitioners claim, has the power or knowledge to criticize or discipline it. For professionals to best operate, they need to be able to control, as much as possible, the conditions under which they work and under which they develop their rules of practice. As Terence Johnson, a sociologist of the professions, writes:

A profession is not, then, an occupation, but a means of controlling an occupation. Likewise, professionalization is a historically specific process which some occupations have undergone at a particular time, rather than a process which certain occupations may always be expected to undergo because of their “essential” qualities.¹

Another such sociologist, Eliot Freidson, writes that “the minimal characteristic of the professional employee, then, is technical autonomy, the freedom to employ discretion in performing work in the light of personal, presumably schooled judgment that is not available to those without the same qualifications.”² In order for this system of labor control to work, a mechanism to ensure quality of knowledge and service on behalf of all those certified as a professional is necessary – for academics, and many others, the university would turn out to be just such an institution.

Just because the profession is self-regulating, however, doesn’t mean that there is an

equal distribution of influence within its ranks. Through professional associations and conferences, the general body of professionals is enlisted to propose and police boundaries, but an internal hierarchy generally sets the standards, establishes the groundwork, and establishes high-level connections with those outside the profession. This means that there are those who rise to elite status within a profession, or who take on administrative or boss-like functions: however, they remain within the purview of the profession, responsible for the continuation of that profession's practices and independence. Research university presidents, for instance, have generally been ambitious academics who rose through the ranks. Mitch Daniels and Janet Napolitano **flout** this convention – in fact, Napolitano will be the first **non-academic** President of the UC. For professionals, the reach of outsiders into important administrative positions can be legitimately understood as an attack on their autonomy and their ability to control the conditions under which they labor.

In a capitalist society, professional labor operates within a field set by the struggle of capital and labor. At the birth of the research university in the US, crisis and social strife were obvious and constant. From the mid-century on, massive increases in immigration, the Civil War and Northern occupation of the South, Emancipation and Reconstruction followed by Jim Crow, urbanization, geographic and demographic growth, and waves of agricultural and industrial conflict engulfed the economic, social, and political field. At heart, these structural conflicts revolved around the control of labor, capital, and property. Whereas in late 19th century continental Europe, as Sergio Bologna has shown, a rigid European system of skilled and craft labor directly led to workers forming revolutionary workers' councils, in the US outright class conflict, while by no means absent, was ameliorated by a loose and fluid system of labor.³ The development of a new professional class – headed by lawyers, journalists, and academics – tied to university enrollment provided an occupational alternative to both skilled and unskilled labor, as well as a scientific solution to labor conflict. This

professionalizing layer (re-professionalizing, in the case of lawyers) began to organize on a platform of industrial efficiency and rationalization, humane working conditions, checks on capital accumulation, and opposition to slavery. Through organizations like the American Social Science Association (1865), they developed a cogent ideology; through magazines like *Harper's Weekly* (1857) and *The Nation* (1865), they fulminated on the issues; and through the formation of the Republican Party (1854), they formed a base of political power. However, it was through the formation of the modern research university, organized by academics and supported by these reformers, that they were able to consolidate, to a great degree, the autonomy of their labor.

Through prisons, unions, and the modern corporation, the state, the working class, and capitalists organized for class conflict. Through the research university (including its professional schools), the professional and managerial class organized to ameliorate this conflict in their interests. It is partly for this reason that academics received the support they did. These professionals set themselves for and against both capitalists and the working class, carving out space for themselves between the two as a mediating layer, the lubrication between capital and labor that would allow the smooth functioning of a renewed capitalism.

The central claim of my work is that the history of the university, in the United States and beyond, is the history of the self-organized activity of men and women who developed the practice of their labor into a new field and, in doing so, created a new institution – the modern research university – to determine, within the boundaries set by capitalist social relations, the conditions under which they practiced. While these academics by no means set themselves against capitalism, they sought, through professional training, to carve out a middle class, with its own interests and institutions, between the emergent capitalists and working class. Almost immediately upon constructing that institution, they faced the problem characteristic of every profession: what is its relationship to its client, and how does it consolidate what power it has? In

the case of the university, a whole new client base had to be developed; new rules of operation, new forms of teaching, new forms of knowledge production, and new associational bodies had to be brought into being; new relationships with the state, with the wealthy, with workers and with capital were developed; new forms by which to disseminate research and to inform peers had to be developed; and new legitimations had to be invented to bring more and more subjects and professions under the purview of the university – both to bring in income in the form of student fees and associational support, and to strengthen the role of the university in society. It was a long process that progressed through fits and starts over the course of the century.

Education

Higher education in the United States, from the Revolutionary War to the present, has developed outside of any centralized plan: the new states, Republicans, religious denominations, missionary organizations, towns, rich people, capitalists, women, teachers, mechanics associations, and other workingmen's associations all founded educational institutions to advance their causes (Republican democracy, craft worker autonomy, elementary education, the plight of freed slaves, and numerous other constituencies and concerns). That said, the colonial college, modeled on the examples of Harvard and Yale, was the dominant form of higher education. These colleges existed not for a class between capitalists and the working class, but rather for the elite managers of society (that poor students attended does not vitiate this claim). These colleges tended to serve two primary purposes: to imbue men with the basic moral and social knowledge necessary for later advanced professional training, and to provide discipline for the youth of the wealthy (for this reason, collegiate life played a more important role than books). A third purpose – to bring legitimacy to the speculative plans of town fathers on the frontier – helps account for the tremendous number of new such colleges chartered (and sometimes founded) once British rule could not stymie westward expansion.⁴ Traditionally, wealthier students took to law and medi-

cine while poorer students, often the first to attend college, took to the ministry (lacking the networks that would allow them to succeed in the other two).

While men and women together developed institutions that led to the professionalization of lower school teaching – beginning in the 1830s and reaching maturity with the advent of Normal Schools, whose function was to train teachers – men were the driving force for the development of research universities. For those seeking to pursue scholarly research, Europe was the best option. German and Scottish universities, possessing relationships with capitalist entrepreneurs and the state, had some especially intriguing features – perhaps most important, for the men who travelled abroad to these universities for advanced education, the opportunity to do research, teach a subject informed by that research, and the possibility, through the concept of academic freedom, of managing their own labor. (By the 1860s, women, too, travelled overseas for advanced study and found professional jobs at women’s colleges). While the large corporations that would come to dominate the land with the rise of railroads did not yet exist, some manufacturers and bankers in New York and other manufacturing cities saw in new types of research based education a means of maximizing the labor and capital they had at their disposal. As the century progressed, agrarian capitalists would also move to back the movement for a research university.

In the US, the occupation “college professor” began to emerge at Harvard in the mid-18th century, but the field would, for the next 100 years, be dominated by men who first made a mark in the non-academic world, and then returned to their alma mater to teach. Until the formation of the research university in the latter half of the 19th century, faculty had little control over the courses they taught, were appointed by denominational and board approval, stood *in loco parentis* above students, and, when they engaged in research, did so as a hobby rather than professional duty. The president, while he usually taught the course in moral philosophy – the capstone of college education – was not what we would call an academic today: he did not make a name

through research, he was not subject to the strictures of a profession, and he was appointed by a board that was beholden to a denomination or town leaders, not academics (because these did not yet exist).

Within the older colleges, however, demands for a new institution were coming ever more frequently as the composition of the academic workforce continued to change. Starting with George Ticknor and others in the 1810s, ambitious intellectuals had been traveling to Germany and Scotland to pursue an education beyond the capabilities of the US institutions. On their return, these *young* men, from wealthy families, took jobs at the old and new colleges dotting the countryside and began to try their hand at reform within the college. It is they who set the agenda and tone for what would become the standard for professional faculty (and public intellectuals). At the same time, the University of Virginia (UVA) and a few other schools, seeking to attract older students who were better equipped for higher studies, were importing faculty from Germany, Scotland, France, and England. As advances in transportation made travel to Europe less expensive, and as the occupation of professor became an option for graduates – with the expansion of older colleges and formation of several new ones, who could not count on successful alumni to shepherd their flock – more students began to make the journey overseas. Others, having been the student of one of these men, also turned to the practice of research and teaching.

One should not conclude that students as a whole were particularly interested in the mission of either the college or the reformers. The young men who attended colleges in North America in the first two hundred or so years were typically aged between 14 and 22, and came from fairly diverse class backgrounds.⁵ There were, officially at least, educational requirements to get into college: student's families either employed tutors or, for the poorer students, sent their young to one of the "wilderness academies" set up train ministers in the wilderness. Given the need for students, however, entrance requirements were often perfunctory. There was simply not enough demand

for higher education for student tuition funds to be denied. The families of younger students saw in education a means to instill discipline in their heirs and extend influence, mainly through careers in law (where lawyer statesman had been the highest ideal), but also the church, medicine and public office; through family wealth and influential community positions, they formed and coalesced an elite pattern of authority. Many of the wealthier students never received a degree, but instead attended for a year or two and then took positions within networks affiliated with their families. With geographical expansion, professionals (lawyers, doctors, and clergy) were not strong enough to enforce their monopoly on esoteric knowledge until the late 19th century: licenses or other markings of merit were unnecessary to enter any profession. However, networks still largely determined the success of former students.

With the burgeoning North Atlantic seatriade in the 18th century, a change came over the colonial college. The historian S.E. Morrison writes of 18th century students at Harvard that “the increase came largely from the seaports which reaped the first harvests from land speculation and West Indian commerce, and the rum business... The new crop of young men came to be made gentlemen, not to study.”⁶ The highest number of enrolled students in the 17th century was 22, in 1695; by 1718, there were 124 students. Wealth and student expectations affected student behavior. Historian Kathryn Moore cites some particular changes: a large increase in the number of misdemeanors, parties and pranks, debauchery, and petty theft – “the kinds of crimes that increasing affluence encouraged” – were on the rise.⁷ Drunkenness, fighting, card playing, sex, and other lewd acts were on the rise. Rote memorization, early mandatory chapels, capricious punishment, and terrible food were now less likely to cow the student into obedience.

More worrisome than individual misbehavior, however, was the new direction of student activity: organizing and inciting riots. The Bad Butter Rebellion of 1766 is one of the most famous. In it, writes Moore, a complaint about rancid butter “escalated to a

highly charged debate between the students, headed by the governor's son, and the board of overseers, headed by the governor, over the obligation to obey an unjust sovereign.”⁸ The rebels negotiated a truce wherein they signed a confession, but faced no consequences. Because faculty lacked the substantive power to punish them, and their parents largely refused, colleges lacked the leverage to impose their will on students. From time to time, some of the older and poorer students would band together to protect themselves and the school, mostly by informing on other students. However, this practice, as it betrayed student solidarity, was unpopular.



THE CALM BEFORE THE STORM

Uprisings were a common experience throughout the colonial and Republican eras. Where the Revolutionaries had, Carl Becker notes in *Cornell University: Founders and the Founding*, sought in the Rights of Man what they could not find in their rights as citizens (that is, justification for revolt), students, too, took to demanding better treat-

ment not as students, but in their claim to be men (though students continued to revolt for less auspicious reasons as well). Harvard faced student wrath a number of times, closing for a month in 1766, expelling several students in 1768 for a rebellion, and briefly shutting down in 1807 (to cite just a few cases). In 1830, Yale experienced a massive uprising known as the Conic Section Rebellion, which prompted the faculty to expel nearly half the students. At Princeton, half of the students were dismissed following a massive riot in 1806 that essentially crippled Princeton for the next three decades.⁹ In one skirmish, students managed to seize and hold a building. At South Carolina College, claims the early student life historian **Henry Davidson Sheldon**, “all the students but twenty-eight were suspended for refusing to inform on one of their number. Again, sixty were suspended; while, at one session, seventy-seven refused to return because the petition on their favourite grievance, eating, had not been granted.”¹⁰ In 1837, every member of the senior class at the University of Alabama was expelled. In nearly every case, students acted with their class; class consciousness and solidarity, in fact, is a major hallmark of the collegiate life before the rise of the research university. “The faculty,” Sheldon continues, “realized that the class organization furnished the support to outbreaks, and its attitude toward the class was bitterly hostile.” Education historian Roger Geiger writes that, “In the first three decades of the [19th] century, colleges experienced the worst student violence of their histories... these years were distinguished by episodes of collective resistance to college authority.”¹¹

For some professors, the answer to these disturbances was to end the enmity of students and faculty, freeing up time for specialized study and training. This, however, was an existential threat to the primary purpose of the college. If the culture of the college was to “discipline and furnish the mind,” as the **Yale Report of 1828** claimed (to create the conditions for expanding and training the mind and only then filling it), the disciplinary culture of the college must be maintained. While certain experiments

and accommodations for the times must be introduced, the totality of the college experience must revolve around this primary function. Against this disciplinary culture, professionalizing faculty began to organize for a university in which to perform research and engage in specialized research.

Near constant student revolt and riot, recalcitrant denominationalists, the problem of governance, academic freedom, funds, prestige (a corollary of pay), and lack of clients stoked crisis in the old forms as well as entrenched interests against the development of new. While the small frontier colleges had to experiment out of necessity (Oberlin, for instance, became the first college to accept both men and women, as well as black students), they lacked the resources to provide a material base for the professionalizing middle class. Several of these issues can be clarified by examining the formation of the University of Virginia.

University of Virginia and Student Revolt

Thomas Jefferson began planning for what would become UVA following an abortive effort to reform William & Mary, his alma mater. But it would take a half a century before he was able to get UVA up and going. With state rather than religious funds, he aimed to train professionals for a kind of administration that would be republican rather than monarchical, requiring democratic forms of education, trust between students and faculty, and the best faculty available. In addition to his own frustration with existing educational forms, Jefferson and Virginian leaders had several reasons to develop UVA: desire for an elite school in the South through which to teach the tradition of gentility, Northern contempt for the intellect of the South, and, signalled by the Missouri Compromise of 1820, Northern attacks on Southern sovereignty and regional autonomy. Jefferson bemoaned Northern indoctrination in an 1821 letter to his friend Joseph Carrington Cabell: “How many of our youths she [Harvard] now has, learning the lessons of anti-Missourianism, I know not... These will return home, no

doubt, deeply impressed with the sacred principles of our Holy Alliance of Restrictionists.”¹² The ancient purpose of higher education, to provide the legal and religious justification for forms of power, had to be picked up by the South and not just left to the North.

The Rockfish Gap Commission, tasked by the Virginia legislature with determining the site, validity, and breadth of UVA, had to work out what it was that higher education was to do. Where primary education should provide for the basics – the ability for all to transact their own business (initiate, calculate and keep contracts), develop literacy and patriotism, and maintain Republican social relations – higher education was to train those who would administer the state: those “on whom public prosperity, & individual happiness are so much to depend.”¹³ University education must, therefore, concern itself with the nature and forms of government and law, agriculture, manufacturing, commerce, and teaching math and the physical sciences. Because the orientation of those in a democracy should be towards society, that society should provide the funds necessary to educate them. By sidelining religion – UVA replaced the Professor of Divinity with a Professor of Ethics – it was hoped that an alliance between the State and University could supplant the historical relationship of state and religion. It was for this reason that George Washington, James Madison, and others supported a National University, though popular fear of centralized authority scuttled all such attempts.

Intellectual and professional training, by a faculty capable of such an education, was to supplement a new orientation to student life. One of the principal differences at UVA, Jefferson informed George Ticknor (who had been the first American student to travel to Europe for an advanced degree and later became a professor at Harvard) in an 1823 letter, would be overcoming the unfortunate habit, formed at Harvard, of making all students subscribe to one course of learning decided by the President. Students here would be allowed to attend those classes and lectures necessary for their own ed-

ucations. Not only would this overcome the narrowness of the classical curriculum, but it might achieve a new relation between student and faculty. Student discipline and insubordination were, Jefferson believed, the biggest block to democratic education. For this reason, they eschewed the long lists of rules and penalties that characterized every other school, choosing to teach with respect rather than fear. Further, students themselves were in charge of discipline, through student-led courts. He hoped that democratic principles would subvert rebellion and ease the chore of discipline.

Surveying the proposed university for the *North American Review*, Edward Everett, then a professor at Harvard who, like so many others, had also travelled to Germany to augment his education before teaching, noted that for all its admirable advances, there was still a glaring gap in the plan: there was no “destination” for the graduate of the college. Without a useful connection between education and the professional world a student could enter upon completion, it would be difficult to get the students necessary to make the experiment succeed. The connection between knowledge production, education, and post-graduate life still had a long way to go, though UVA would be a strong opening salvo.

UVA was chartered in 1819 and opened in 1825. Five European faculty members – four from England and Scotland and one from Germany – were brought in to augment three American faculty. Other than the German professor, the faculty were all under thirty. Jennings Wagoner, Jr, an educational historian, has written that

the youthfulness of some of the professors and their apparent lack of solicitude for the personal bearing and society of the students rather quickly provoked friction... Equally significant, the professors’ position of authority, their more serious and scholarly orientation, and the ethical code they embraced generated numerous “clashes of honor” between faculty and students. ¹⁴

Without a history of professional respect, Southern student culture, steeped in gentlemanly honor, would prove too strong for the proposed experiment.

UVA's students, on the whole, came from wealthier families than their Northern counterparts. Most of them came from the South, and most of their families owned slaves. Some older students, who were interested in serious study, used UVA as a graduate school. Most students, showed little inclination to study as there was no social advantage to doing so. Wagoner writes that only 55% of students, between 1825-1870, stayed for longer than one session, and only 11% were there for longer than three years. For those interested in study, the university was superb; for everyone else, lax discipline, foreign faculty members, and a cult of honor frustrated the advent of a new age.

Within just a few months of opening, these students had made a mockery of self-discipline and self-government while running roughshod over the faculty – who lacked the means and authority to rein them in. While heavy drinking and partying were common, what was really troublesome was the frequent use of guns on the grounds, and violence directed at faculty. Though against the rules, many students had brought their pistols, muskets, and rifles with them, and enjoyed firing them at night. They claimed that a firearm was necessary in case someone affronted their honor. Honor, on one occasion, was the reason given by a group of students for beating and horsewhipping the chairman of the faculty, while close to a hundred students watched.

While Jefferson died (1826) before things got too bad, he did witness his nephew smash whatever illusions he'd had about Republican forms and student discipline. In the very first semester, students set about showing their displeasure for the European faculty. On one occasion, students threw a bottle of human excrement through a professor's window while he was entertaining guests. The next night, Wagoner writes, a group of students dressed as "Indians," began shouting, "Damn the European profes-

sors.” Rather than let the disturbance lie, two faculty tried to intervene. One student was seized, though not before he called for help. Students flew out of their rooms and chased the professors off with sticks and stones – *and* words. The next day, sixty-five students presented a resolution stating that the faculty were at fault. Two of the European faculty immediately quit. The others demanded order be imposed by the Board. Jefferson, Madison, and James Monroe (all on the Board) and other distinguished board members gathered all those associated with the school. They implored the guilty students to confess so as not to make the innocent students sully their honor in defending them. At this point, Jefferson’s nephew stepped forward in guilt. The leaders were expelled; student self-government, within the first semester, had been shown to be wholly unworkable. This disturbance, though, was not even the most severe: in 1836 and again in 1845 the state militia was required to restore order, and in 1840 a professor died of a gunshot wound. New regulations (which were later relaxed) and a faculty composed of largely native professors – combined with larger systemic changes in student life and the social conditions of Southern life – helped bring a measure of peace to the campus before the Civil War. However, the experiment was understood by most to have failed.

Significantly, UVA was an elite project meant to develop a ruling class for its time, rather than a development by those who would work as faculty or attend as students. The institution was the product of the Enlightenment, the Revolutionary War, and Virginia’s fear of Northern aggression. This unsteady mix lacked a social movement ready to take it up and make it a principal institution of a new era. There were neither the faculty to organize the institution nor the society to require it. The composition of the faculty – international and with little connection to the area, students or culture – could not implement or sustain the desired reforms, and there was no social authority to impose order. It was the instantiation of an idea that lacked a base that could bring it into existence.

New York, The Great City

If an educational institution hopes to succeed, some significant element of society must have need of it. Higher education did not exist to provide students with intellectual choices, to satisfy curiosity about the world, or to provide a period of carefree years before assuming a position in the “real world.” To the extent that it existed for faculty, this was so that they might give back to their alma mater by training the next generation. The boosters and towns that competed for new colleges saw them as a source of legitimation (and therefore property value speculation); the denominations saw in them the means to maintain orthodoxy across generations and over an expanding geographical area. For the men who were teaching at a younger and younger age and with more academic training, however, the low salaries, long hours, lack of institutional support for research or the ability to specialize, entrenched interests of governing boards and their supporters, enmity between them and students provided impetus for thinking of and organizing new forms of higher education.

In fact, at an 1830 conference in New York City, a collection of scholars and their supporters (doctors, lawyers, bankers and politicians who were interested in raising the national and international prominence of their city) gathered to discuss the current state of higher education (stateside and in Europe), outline the frustrations with the existing state of higher education, and then to formulate a theory of the American research university. Meticulously transcribed in the **Journal of the Proceedings of a Convention of Literary and Scientific Gentlemen**, professors, presidents, and other interested men pointed to the composition of university boards, the trouble with student life, poor pay, lack of flexibility in curriculum, the inadequate division of mental and physical labor, the improper focus on the moribund professions, and the lack of a proper orientation towards education. Foremost among the professors’ discontents, an appendix to the Convention claimed, was that the existing colleges existed to “fit” young men “for the **common vocations** of life.” The University, absent as yet in the US,

existed not for students, but for the advance of science through research and publication. From science, commerce would follow. Regarding the latter, Rev. Dr. James Mathews, who introduced the event, claimed that the financial and cultural dominance of Munich, London, Berlin, and Paris came from their literary and scientific institutions – New York, to enter that pantheon, must have their equal.

Simply reforming the institutions could not be enough – the need was too dire. “The necessity,” claimed the Honorable Albert Gallatin, “of assimilating the system of education to the present state of society, is felt every where; and the governments of Europe, where the necessity is far less urgent, are daily adopting measures to that effect. But that which with them is only an anticipation is already with us an **imperious necessity**.” Entrenched interests – students, faculty, administration, and denominations – at the existing institutions were not particularly interested in the imposition of a new type of educational form, as the Conic Section Rebellion at Yale demonstrated. Speaking to the student’s ability to undermine academic efforts, Professor Henry Vethake claimed, “The fact is, that the existing state of things, which I am anxious to see altered, is the necessary result of the arrangement of the students into regularly organized bodies, and of the distribution among them of the usual distinctions and honors.” By breaking up the class structure, eliminating prescribed courses (and possibly degrees altogether), and eschewing humiliation and punishment, a new orientation towards students could be created. Most important, however, was simply raising the caliber of students. To do this would require a better system of lower schools and, as Lieut. Mahan (representing the West Point contingent at the conference) argued, the training of teachers in the new universities.

Part and parcel of the new enterprise, however, would be the professionalization of the faculty. Dr. Francis Lieber, a German born professor who emigrated to the US for political reasons, made this point explicitly: “Teaching in German universities, of which there are so many, forms a real profession, as that of the healing art, or that of

theology; the emulation therefore is much greater, than in countries where the Professors of universities form but a small body, not numerous enough for **emulation**.” Other speakers pointed out that Boards and low pay, in addition to the relationship to students, were determinative in developing the profession of faculty members. At Yale, for instance, faculty had no legal ability to decide in any way who they would work with.

Professor Jared Sparks, who would later become President of Harvard, claimed that the faculty alone should determine the composition of the faculty: “Such a body would be as capable as any other, to say the least, of judging in regard to the requisite qualifications of a candidate, and much more capable of deciding whether his personal qualities, traits of character, and habits of thinking, would make him acceptable in their community. It seems evident, therefore, that something is lost, and nothing gained by referring this nomination to another body of men, who have no interests in common with the party **chiefly concerned**.” With a professional President (a professor who, no longer teaching, was freed to focus on running the affairs of the university in the interest of the faculty *and* clients), and a faculty body that could determine its own shape and needs, the professoriate in the university would take the lead and determine for itself its own future.

In this way, science and the university would determine, to a large extent, the shape of economic, social, and political life. “Is it forgotten,” the Massachusetts-born historian and statesman George Bancroft asked, “that most of the brilliant and influential inventions of the last half century, are founded upon laws, scientifically established before the respective inventions for **practical life**?” He contended that theory and science should determine the common life of the people, rather than following behind it. The professional university, then, exists to set the stage for social and economic life; its specialized scientists, in all the branches the university, take the lead in developing the knowledge that determines where the common life of the people leads. The com-

mon life of the nation – the public good – become synonymous with the common life of professionals.

The resulting institution was plagued by controversy and in desperate need of support, but the principles it laid down were taken up by others in the aftermath. We have here, then, a gathering attempting to found a school based on the professional preferences of academics – professors were putting in place an institution through which their profession could take form, and supporting them were businessmen who saw that a professional faculty alone could investigate the natural and social laws that would advance business and bring peace between the social classes. Finding enough clients for their services would prove to be the make-or-break issue: would there be the material means to support them? Professionals, after all, do not create the material means for their own reproduction, but depend for their survival on a group interested in their services. Of course, of the men whose thought and work founded the institution, nearly all were independently wealthy and could afford to endure the low pay until the university took form. The early New York attempts at procuring funds from state and local coffers proved mostly unsuccessful. Tuition and increased enrollment were the primary means by which they sought to fund their new venture, but finding parents and students interested in their vision was to prove difficult. Plagued by slow enrollment from the beginning, they had to curb their ambitious plans.

Until the 1870s and the arrival of Cornell University, Johns Hopkins University, and the University of California, along with the slow reform of Harvard (which was losing its traditional base to Yale and Princeton), experiments would continue. The University of Michigan helped develop high schools to feed their need for better qualified students; both the University of North Carolina and Columbia University sparked high-profile debates concerning the qualifications to teach, and who gets to decide what those are; and at Brown University, a new curriculum, based on student electives, was being installed.

Brown, in fact, deserves an extra look. Part of the problem was a flux in the purpose of the college and the university in the antebellum years. If the power of the merchant class, as the dominant class in the Northeast and, by extension, in the West, was being subsumed into the social relations of industrial capitalism, training young men for its ranks could no longer be of primary importance. Of course, this process is uneven and envelops various regions asynchronously. For this reason, there remained much confusion over what exactly an institution of higher learning was supposed to be. For a school created by private entities, wrote Brown's President Wayland, the one who creates it looks to the market to determine what is in demand. Because the public does not lend its financial support, it can ask nothing of the institute. A Public College, however, is supported by the public and it has a right to visitorial powers. "Boards of Trustees or Corporations, are the agents to whom this power is committed, and they are bound to exercise it according to the design for which they were appointed."¹⁵ They grant publicly recognized degrees or certificates, and therefore there must be some way to judge the value of these. At that time, this degree meant that a graduate was proficient in those literary and intellectual pursuits prized by the merchant class. The difference between a private and public institution, then, lies in what is prized by the Public rather than what is prized by the market, a sect, or an individual philanthropist.

The Professional Academic

By mid-century, this new category of professor – the academic, the one interested in theoretical, not practical knowledge (a designation that dates to 1886)¹⁶ – had the clout and movement to push for control of institutions within which they taught. As more students who did not have independent access to wealth took jobs teaching, the imperative to form an institution to bring academic control of research, a living wage, and professional modes of control of labor increased. The elite within the field led the movement, though they responded to the demands of the emerging profession – and

helped shape those demands. Further, a critical mass of academics within existing colleges were forcing those colleges to do what they could to accommodate them and their demands while also forcing the profession's leaders to seek wealthy allies to help them found new institutions for the purpose of professional control and advancement. They were working both internally and externally to develop the institution they desired. In fits and starts, the form of the new institution took shape and the practice of the professoriate crystallized. Through research and experimentation, the academic would develop knowledge, not merely transmit existing knowledge. The import of the chalkboard (a West Point professor of mathematics used it first in 1801) allowed for the development of the modern lecture, where new information, not yet in books, would be disseminated to students; the scientific lab, popularized by Justus von Liebig's chemical lab at the University of Giesing, was an ideal site for advanced scientific study; and the seminar, a favorite of the Liberal Arts and Humanities, helped the professor, through small class sizes and the use of peer pressure to cow "mistaken" interpretations, steer students towards the proper methods to determine respectable deductions. Through electives, faculty could begin to specialize their teaching as well as research, while students could begin to specialize their learning in order to enter into fields that, with a rapidly industrializing and complex economy, required more knowledge.

With the widespread adoption of secondary education and the subsequent rise in the average age of college students, faculty could throw off the disciplinary function of the professoriate. By 1900, not only were unqualified students being rejected by research universities (and accepted, at a higher dollar cost, by old-style colleges), but universities were marketing themselves in order to recruit the high school students they wanted (Stanford was a pioneer, using a list of its faculty's publications to demonstrate its scholarly excellence). Faculty could, for the first time, begin to determine who would enter their own ranks, and further, the ranks of other professions.

Through grades, which replaced the now cumbersome evaluation processes that once dominated, faculty attempted to rank students by merit. It would take until the 1950s, though, when advanced degrees became more necessary for professional employment, for grades to dominate student life. Outside of the Humanities – **the scientific successor to the Liberal Arts** – academics no longer had to concern themselves with the plight of students.

Finally, with the power to select their peers, presidents, and division chairs, the faculty had gone a long way in determining the character of their labor. Boards and Regents would survive to allocate budgets (what could an academic possibly know about the pecuniary world, after all?) but academic decision-making – what was to be taught, who was to teach, who was to be a student, what counted as knowledge, what counted as proficiency with knowledge, etc – was now to lie with the faculty.

Of course, the story doesn't end there. Professions, by necessity, have to sell their services to clients; identifying clients and then establishing relations marked by professional autonomy was a task that, was largely accomplished in the early 20th century, even if it continues in some guises today. Academics tried the state, labor unions, capitalists, local towns, and other constituencies, with varying results. Efforts like the University of Wisconsin's "Wisconsin Idea," where the university was embedded into the fabric of the state through the writing of legislation, performing surveys, and certifying public sector positions, was one effort. Cornell University – the marriage of the land-grant university with the older liberal arts college – was the result of federal land-grant funding, Ezra Cornell's own vast wealth, and municipal bargaining – several cities bid to have the school, and Ovid, NY, also in the running for that federal land-grant money, was granted funds for an insane asylum instead. Gradually, capitalists, local and state governments, and students were found, and the universities found themselves in business.

Next was the question of academic freedom and professional autonomy. At Stanford, Chicago, and the University of Michigan, most famously, a few professors were fired or blacklisted for public advocacy of socialist, populist, or atavistic policy. What was upsetting in these cases, and what the defense of these professors revolved around, was not the content of what they said, but rather the ability of the professoriate, and not those outside their ranks, to scientifically adjudicate ideas. After all, if truth was to emerge, it would have to be in the free exchange of ideas, within a disciplinary association whose membership required extensive professional education – not through the arbitrary exercise of autocratic control. Such displays of caprice only served to undermine the power of consensus and scientific knowledge to defeat ignorance and demagoguery. For many, especially the academic elite, the university was to provide something of a blueprint for society: faculty, having reached their position and authority through the meritocratic rise in the profession, would offer professional opinions and, in debate with others who'd been admitted to their ranks, determine a proper course of action based on what the evidence illuminated.

The new academic associations created by faculty to sort out their methodology and purview – such as the American Historical Association, the Modern Language Association, and the American Sociological Society – worked to provide the framework for the self-organized and self-perpetuating disciplines.¹⁷ The American Association of University Professors (AAUP) engaged membership over the fight for academic freedom and other issues. The National Education Association and the Association of American Universities grew to assist university presidents and the growing administrative layer in the task of standardizing university practice and expectations.

There has always been an elite hiding in the self-organized professions. *Serving Power*, the work of Sheila Slaughter and Edward Silva, is an extensive exploration of how academic leaders set agendas for journals and conferences, worked out institutional relationships, and consolidated the power of the faculty. From the start, they were self-

supported, able to become academics when there was very little financial compensation. It was these men who developed the theory and argued the practices of the professoriate. In the process, they were also more likely to become presidents, to become the academic managers. In this position, their first loyalty, as Freidson's sociology of professionals reminds us, is to the institution, and to the profession second. Of course, no leadership could ever contain the operations of a vast and divergent faculty, which is never as quiescent as its detractors insist, nor as heroic as their allies insist. Of crucial importance, though, was that they too were academics and were committed to that ideology – having helped to develop and make it possible. The socialist and conservative radicals in their ranks, always a minority, were useful in pushing the boundaries of acceptable professional practice (and they rarely had more than a small percentage of support from fellow academics), and gave legitimation to processes now ensconced in university practice.

Towards the end of the 19th century, professionals would finally find in state legislatures and industrial capitalists the means to prosper. That support, however, would have to wait until the rise of the corporation, the social form capital takes to manage large combinations of capital and labor. Even then, it would take years of effort to prove to capitalists and the state that this form of labor and property had both a use and exchange value. The tycoon capitalists who first organized monopolies laid the groundwork for the use of this profession, but the corporation would take it to new heights. Thus, it is the self-organization of these men – and the need for support to continue this organization – that made possible the advent of the university. The university is the principal support to a type of labor protection that, for a century, offered a way out of manual labor, towards a middle class between capitalists and the working class. Its interests, to a large degree, became synonymous with “the public good,” though this good has always been planted in the soil of capitalist class conflict.

The Research University Today

But the working class cannot simply lay hold on the ready made State machinery and wield it for their own purpose. The political instrument of their enslavement cannot serve as the political instrument of their emancipation. — **Marx**, Second Draft of the Civil War in France.

What happens to these professionals in the late 20th century? Briefly, by the 1970s, as the division of labor within the university amplified, diversified, and stratified following the unprecedented expansion of the university system in the US following World War II, new imperatives presented themselves to the faculty. From the New Left, Student Power assaulted the authority of the university (and was brought to heel by massive government surveillance and repression); from the Right, capitalist retrenchment (supported by neoliberal ideologues and a national tax revolt) and intensified attempts to monetize university relations. The inauguration of new academic subjects (computer science, black studies, women's studies, queer studies) and new combinations of knowledge (inter-, post- and anti-disciplinary studies) represented an insurrection within the institution. They were all intensely political and represented the possibility for the university to reinvent itself.

Which it did. By arrogating more power to the top layers of academic administrative elite, some in the academic profession saw the possibility of imbricating themselves into the same social class as capitalists, rather than simply serving them. Federal, state, and local laws changed to make **students into consumers**; courts ruled that public, non-profit universities could patent and own intellectual property; a new type of capital, venture capital, was developed to accelerate the transmission of research into products; and a sub-class of faculty, the adjunct, was formulated to teach the dregs of the expanding university system – those composing the massive undergraduate base, forced into higher education as a college degree became a de facto requirement for admission into any of the professions, and many other occupations. Graduate students and adjuncts took on the bulk of the teaching, freeing star faculty from the responsi-

bility of lecturing to dullards for whom their words would be proverbial pearls before swine.

Because so much of professional labor – and now, importantly, so many workers – pass through, or wish to pass through, the university, the ideology of higher education structures how many of us understand work and who is supposed to control that work. The struggle for higher education today must be seen in at least two lenses. First, the struggle of labor involved in maintaining the university: academic labor, and what is termed “support staff”: groundskeepers, dining hall workers, admissions clerks – the hundreds of thousands of laborers whose exploitation the university relies on today. Second, the urgent need to create new types of educational institutions, which will likely be less focused on abstract knowledge and theory.

Since higher education in its current form is under attack, it is easy to fall back on old tropes about the sanctity of knowledge, education’s use for society, and other aspects of professional ideology. In reality, the university was an institution created for the control of a new type of professional labor, and it meant, for many, the opportunity to control the conditions under which they worked. This is still appealing to many who enter graduate school, though they quickly find that it is now more myth than reality. A defense of the university should then instead be a defense of the possibility of university workers – tenured, tenure-track, adjunct, graduate, and support staff – to determine their own work. Workers’ inquiry into university labor is a first step towards developing a form of resistance capable of uniting this disparate group. At present, it is rare to see much in the way of solidarity between sections of this differentiated, much less a sustained social movement. I suspect that this is because allowing adjuncts and support staff to control the conditions of their own labor would interfere with the ability of tenured and star faculty to pursue their own ambitions.¹⁸ This means that for a working-class movement to take hold within the university, the ideology and false protections of professionalism must be thrown off.

Defense of university labor conditions presents a further problem: the professional relationship involves clients and those who cannot become clients. In one sense, the clients of the university are Silicon Valley, the NSA, Boeing, Monsanto, and the like. However, the client is also the student, her family, and her community. The struggle over education is not simply the struggle over the labor of those in the university itself, but also the narrowing of occupational and educational choices available to prospective students. To move beyond the model of society created and fostered by the university requires the development of collective forms of education beyond capitalist social relations. Professionals who determines their labor within the boundaries set by capitalism cannot be models of anti-capitalist practice, because the professional can only exist in a world characterized by class conflict between capital and labor. As revolt, riot and street organizing explode all over the world, anti-capitalist movements must seek to understand that revolt demands the invention of new educational institutions, rather than a futile attempt to reform the old – new forms of education that allow students, neighborhoods, and collectives to physically intervene in housing crises, in food crises, in neighborhood solidarity movements, and to bring these conflicts into sharp relief.

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- 2 Eliot Freidson, *Professional Powers: A Study of the Institutionalization of Formal Knowledge* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1986), 140.
- 3 Sergio Bologna, “**Class Composition and the Theory of the Party at the Origins of the Workers’ Council Movement**,” *Libcom.org*, (July 23, 2005), accessed September 24, 2013.
- 4 Given these functions, it should not be surprising that blacks and indigenous peoples were ex-

cluded from higher education, until white society had a need to attend to such populations.

- 5 That they catered to several social classes did not, however, mean that all classes attended in equal numbers.
- 6 Quoted in Kathryn McDonald Moore, “Freedom and Constraint in 18th Century Harvard,” *Journal of Higher Education* 47 (1976): 109.
- 7 Moore, “Freedom and Constraint,” 109.
- 8 Moore, “Freedom and Constraint,” 110.
- 9 Princeton’s Great Rebellion of 1807 illustrates both the damage done to the colleges and the types of student who was at the forefront of the action. In that April, a great number of students rioted, shuttering Princeton’s doors for a decade. One of the ringleaders, Abel P. Upshur, would go on to become the US Secretary of State. Upshur, like many of the rioters, was Virginian from a wealthy plantation family. He was brought before the Board as one of those who led students to, “resist the authority of the College, and he persisted in adhering to the principles of the combination.” All the students were expelled, though most transferred to William & Mary or Yale. At William & Mary, one of the Princeton rioters, Andrew Hunter Holmes, helped incite another riot and was again expelled. (Holmes’ brothers all achieved a level of fame: his oldest brother was a member of the House of Representatives and later governor of Mississippi and would later become the senator of Mississippi; Hugh Holmes was a judge in the general court of Virginia. When he died in battle, he was a major in the army and the Virginia Legislature awarded his relatives a gold sword in his memory. Holmes’ sisters married prominent men and their sons populated legislatures, judges benches, and the upper ranks of the military.) The disciplinary action of the colleges seems to have largely been a mirage, as there was effectively no curb on those students who brought in tuition. When they were dealt with, they could easily transfer to another school: first, the schools official theological position claimed that God could transform these students if they would only submit themselves to authority; second, because no records existed; and third, because the tuition they brought was great enough to overcome whatever reticence might have stopped them.
- 10 Henry Davidson Sheldon. *Student Life and Customs* (New York: D. Appleton and Company, 1901), 299.
- 11 Roger Geiger, “Ten Generations of Higher Education,” in *American Higher Education in the Twenty-First Century: Social, Political, and Economic Challenges*, ed. Philip G. Altbach et al. (Baltimore:

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- 12 Thomas Jefferson, “Jefferson on the Virginia Legislature’s Attitude toward a University, 1821” in *American Higher Education: A Documentary History Vol I*, ed. Richard Hofstadter and Wilson Smith, (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1961), 224.
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- 14 Jennings L Wagoner, “Honor and Dishonor at Mr. Jefferson’s University: The Antebellum Years,” *History of Higher Education Quarterly* 26 (1986): 165.
- 15 Francis Wayland, “Thoughts on the Present Collegiate System, 1842,” in *American Higher Education: A Documentary History Vol I*, ed. Richard Hofstrader and Wilson Smith. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1961), 335.
- 16 The Oxford English Dictionary has several designations for “Academic,” but the above usage definitively took hold by the late 19th century. An adjectival usage also exists, dating to the early 19th century, but its applicability is unclear, since its usage appears to be derogatory, and not specific to university research.
- 17 In the Humanities and Social Sciences, they emerged from the break-up of political economy; in the Sciences, from the dissolution of natural philosophy.
- 18 Of course, there are wonderful examples of tenured faculty organizing for just such a movement, but they are a minority today.

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