

Editors' Introduction

Neoliberalism in Higher Education: Practices, Policies, and Issues

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THE GLOBAL PANDEMIC CAUSED BY THE CORONAVIRUS HAS EXPOSED the weaknesses of an economic system focused on the use of neoliberal practices and policies to promote the expansion of capitalistic interests. In the United States, the pandemic has highlighted a system of governance focused on utilizing the working class and middle class as a revenue stream for the top one percent of US society. While the working and middle classes have faced the challenges brought about by job layoffs resulting from corporate mergers and the lack of an economic support system to provide a survivable quality of life, the top one percent has enjoyed the benefits of increasing monetary gains from tax cuts and stock market investments. The US Treasury and the Federal Reserve, for example, devised a \$500 billion dollar loan program for large companies that would not require them to preserve jobs or limit executive pay (Stein & Whoriskey 2020). Critics of the program argued that large companies would use the federal help to reward shareholders and executives without saving any jobs.

The coronavirus pandemic has also exposed the precariousness of higher education institutions that have utilized neoliberal practices to transform higher education from a public good into a marketplace for generating revenue (capital). The neoliberal belief in the self-interested individual, a self-regulated free market, and free trade have resulted in policies of deregulation, privatization, increased accountability, and fiscal austerity (Olssen & Peters

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2005, Venn 2020). Increasing student enrollments, the courting of donors and their contributions, and growing public sentiments that “intellectual curiosity” should not be funded by taxpayers serve as catalysts for infusing higher education with marketplace principles and practices (Giroux 2010, Kandiho 2010, Martinez 2018, Oleksenko et al. 2018).

Ironically, the three pillars of higher education’s integrity as a social and public good—teaching, research, and service—have been transformed by neoliberal principles into revenue generating enterprises. Reduced state funding and the infusion of marketplace principles and practices have resulted in the treatment of students as a revenue stream for raising tuition, which, in turn, increases student dependence on loans benefiting primarily Wall Street private lenders. The pressure to increase the number of donors, especially those with deep pockets, has expanded staff numbers in donor/development offices, making them key stakeholders in the monetization of higher education (Schulze-Cleven et al. 2017).

Research grants have become a tool for generating indirect cost benefits for bloated administrations and turned faculty into predators in the pursuit of grants. The increased indirect cost benefits for higher education institutions from research grants promote competition between institutions that determines placement in a hierarchical structure based on the generation of research awards and attendant monies (Gildersleeve 2017). An institution’s standing in higher education is no longer a reflection of its promotion of intellectual inquiry, but rather the institution’s success in generating research monies and a portfolio of donorship and endowment.

Service is no longer treated as a public good but has been transformed into a means for the exploitation of students via student internships as free labor to industry. Higher education institutions are now using service to show state legislatures that the value of higher education is found in the preparation of students for future employment. All of the pressures associated with these changes have further opened the door for neoliberalizing higher education (Ingleby 2015).

Neoliberal ideology does more than just pursue business principles of efficiency and production at a large scale involving the merger of manufacturing industries and labor. Neoliberal ideology identifies bodies—students, staff, and faculty—as having a purpose in the production of profit for capital expansion via economies of scale tactics. In higher education, these tactics include increased utilization of adjunct faculty in the classroom to eliminate the hiring of tenure-stream faculty, increased class sizes in order to make instruction more profitable, and the promotion of impersonal online instruc-

tional delivery models to expand instruction beyond the physical classroom (Daniel 2016). Virtual or online instruction is a cost-effective method for higher education that expands the scale of production by increasing the enrollment of students beyond the structural limitations of the classroom, thereby generating more tuition revenue. In short, higher education has become the victim of a hostile takeover by neoliberal principles that utilize higher education as a laboratory for economic practices and redesign work roles to monetize the value of higher education.

The Challenges of Liberalism to Higher Education

The purpose of this issue is to discuss the many characteristics of higher education that subscribe to neoliberal practices. We bring to the reader's attention areas in higher education that may often be overlooked as neoliberal policies and practices. The portrait of higher education that emerges continues to shift from a context for intellectual inquiry to a context ruled by neoliberal ideology and practice. Indeed, neoliberalism is deeply embedded within institutions of higher education today despite its failings in the economy.

Amy Perry's article discusses how neoliberalism has had a dramatic impact on higher education in the United Kingdom. She traces the history of neoliberalism in broad strokes from the pre-Thatcher years to the post-Thatcher years and identifies three key trends in higher education: widening participation and the politics of aspiration, the emergence of the student entrepreneur-consumer, and the marketization of higher education. With specific reference to the third trend, Perry discusses the use of internet-based education by higher education institutions and its potential impact on students. The coronavirus pandemic has posed major challenges for student recruitment and increased the precariousness of students in the instructional process.

In his article, Christopher Robbins illustrates how the neoliberal restructuring of public higher education in the United States serves to devalue or revalue the humanities and social sciences. He discusses the impact of academic capitalism on knowledge production and application, the university's relationship to both the state and global capital, the marketization of higher education and the commodification of knowledge, increasing contention over academic freedom, the increased influence of foundations on university governance, priorities, and practices, and the redefinition of faculty labor and governance. In a related way, researchers have identified the resultant and intensified transformation of higher education from a public good to a

private interest in two senses of the term—individual self-advancement and corporate development—at the expense of democracy, the common good, and social development. Robbins focuses specifically on the growing influence of quasi-philanthropic educational foundations, such as the Lumina Foundation, on state interests in public higher education. These influences are often couched in appeals to state concerns about global competitiveness and national economic growth that will allegedly grow from larger numbers of qualified graduates, despite continued state retrenchment in both higher education and the economy more generally. For instance, as part of state retrenchment, allocations to public higher education institutions have steadily declined, off-loading the financial burdens of now nearly-compulsory higher education onto more and more lower middle-class and working-class students and saddling them with debt. Robbins suggests that the relationship between neoliberalism, higher education, and inequality, in effect, creates a system of educationfare that shores up classes of people nearly but not (yet) caught in the vast nets of workfare and prisonfare.

Scott Brooks, Matthew Knudtson, and Isais Smith discuss how capitalism has shaped intercollegiate sports. They theorize that media are the driving force of a sports epoch shaped by technology and global capitalism. They focus on media as a business that has changed sports and intercollegiate athletics in particular by telling stories and exponentially connecting consumers and producers. Accordingly, they argue that for the last fifty years, neoliberalism has penetrated the academy and intercollegiate athletics and has been speeding toward a separation of the university and athletics by prioritizing business and profit interests as well as private and corporate sponsorships, and by increasing reliance on governance by the NCAA rather than universities (including academic standards and compliance). They portray the NCAA as a cartel in intercollegiate athletics that facilitates the exploitation of athletes in cash sports to introduce the emergence of a sports industrial complex.

Edwin Elias, in his article, assesses the future of undocumented college students in a country that is deeply divided politically. He argues that outdated US immigration policies are seen as the primary reason for the large undocumented immigrant population. Elias suggests that the intent of draconian neoliberal policies embedded in US immigration policy is to criminalize the existence of undocumented immigrants and to instill constant fear in their everyday lives. Undocumented youth who migrated at an early age have been exposed to neoliberal immigration policies targeting their parents through their everyday experiences. Undocumented youth at an early

age are exposed to the constant threat of deportation, a hostile society, and laws that they must navigate and endure every day. Unlike their parents, undocumented youth are seen in a more positive light by policymakers and mainstream society, which resulted in Deferred Action for Early Childhood Arrivals (DACA). Elias argues that there has been insufficient focus on the adverse consequences of immigration policy on the well-being of undocumented immigrant youth. To this end, Elias highlights the psychological toll of US immigration law on undocumented youth who received DACA and continued living with nightmares of deportation. Analyzing and contextualizing their dreams sheds light on the growing need for humane immigration reform.

According to Janice Newson, neoliberalism has been the visible hand guiding public higher education development across the globe since at least the early 1980s. She notes in her article that advocates of this development promise extensive benefits and payoffs for taxpayers, legislators, university and college administrators, as well as those who receive higher education services, ranging from increased cost-efficiency and productivity, predictable and controlled outcomes, flexible and even customized content and delivery of services, accountability, responsiveness to societal needs, and, perhaps the most expansive promise of all, cutting-edge scientific innovation that will stimulate economic growth and wealth creation for the benefit of everyone. Newson treats neoliberalism as a political economic context rather than a blueprint or policy program that leads necessarily to a long list of predetermined effects. As a context, neoliberalism creates political and economic conditions that open up certain opportunities and encourage certain courses of action while closing down or discouraging others. In this sense, neoliberalized higher education is a work in progress rather than a *fait accompli*.

In his article, Frank Fear argues that higher education has undergone a stunning metamorphosis over the last 50 years, as an institution that was an expression of progressivism has become an instrument of neoliberalism. Like other market-driven enterprises, neoliberal higher education fuels individualism and accentuates private interests. What the United States needs desperately is a return to the days when commonwealth actually mattered and higher education served the public good.

Nathan Rousseau likewise focuses on how neoliberalism has transformed higher education institutions into entrepreneurial universities, thereby undermining teaching, scholarship, and service to the public good. Faculty members, he notes, have been complicit in this process by conforming to internal and external neoliberal pressures that have shifted their status as pro-

fessors providing leadership through shared governance into entrepreneurial knowledge workers. He further notes the movement toward contingency labor, formulaic approaches to learning in K–12 education, and the reduction of learning to metrics. He concludes with a series of recommendations that include the safeguarding of tenure and free inquiry, providing learning environments in which learning is valued, eliminating interdepartmental competition for resources, and restoring teaching as an art in stable and intellectually challenging learning environments.

Concluding Remarks

Perhaps the most succinct and profound description of neoliberalism is that by Foucault (1979/2008), who saw neoliberal society as regulated by principles of market competition in which individuals are persons of enterprise and production and in which forms of enterprise are generalized and constitute the formative power of society. Competition is the regulatory mechanism and government should not intervene in the negative effects of the market; rather, individuals have to assume risks and protect themselves using the resources they have at their disposal, including mutual benefit organizations. It is a society in which political power is “modeled on the principles of a market economy” (131) and the state actively intervenes in the general conditions of the market by pursuing price stability through the maintenance of purchasing power and high levels of employment.

Foucault (1979/2008) examined neoliberalism in the late 1970s and much has come to pass since then. Neoliberalism is now firmly embedded in public higher education. A college education has been redefined from a public good to a private good. In this context, the individual is the primary beneficiary and the one who should pay for education. As such, the state should not subsidize education. Disinvestment by the state from public higher education has resulted in exorbitant tuition rates. Further, tenure is seen as an archaic instrument that is no longer warranted, and shared governance as nothing more than a barrier to institutional progress. Administrative leaders, often persons without academic experience or standing, lead colleges and universities in accordance with corporate neoliberal logic. The contributors to this special issue examine the effects of the imposition of this logic.

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