
GRADUATE TEACHING ASSISTANTS, DFW RATES, AND THE SIMULACRUM: BAUDRILLARD MEETS THE MODERN UNIVERSITY

Abbey Hortenstine and Deron Boyles
Georgia State University

In January of 2023, Georgia State University proposed a policy stating that, if graduate teaching assistants (GTAs) taught courses that reported grades of Ds, Fs, or withdrawals (DFW) at a rate of twenty percent or higher, GTAs would be required to complete a course on how to teach college students before they could resume their job as a teaching assistant.¹ If GTAs teach a course with a DFW rate of twenty percent or higher, they not only risk losing their jobs, but they also risk losing their tuition coverage until they complete a remedial course. By examining the implementation of this policy, as well as the broader political and cultural context in which it occurs, we argue that policies such as the DFW policy at Georgia State University limit academic freedom, bridle epistemic curiosity, and lead to a performance of knowledge.

Using the work of Jean Baudrillard, we argue that such policies risk rendering the enterprise of education not only banal, but also self-refuting and implausible.² Policies such as the DFW policy make salient Baudrillard's descriptions of the simulacrum and the "spiraling cadaver" of the university by highlighting university tendencies to value passing students and distributing degrees over encouraging thoughtful inquiry and knowing.³ When this epistemic erosion occurs, the university progresses towards a pure simulacrum of education.⁴ That is, "education" becomes an inadequate imitation of the potential of thoughtful inquiry. We argue that the DFW policy encourages instructors to pass students regardless of the quality of their work or the quality of inquiry that takes place in university courses that involve GTAs. The DFW policy, specifically, but also broader educational policies with similar goals, generally, instantiate Baudrillard's hyperrealism and indicate a collapse of education into performative procedure. In other words, when instructors are encouraged to assign passing grades regardless of the quality of student inquiry and knowledge, they are partaking in a merely theatrical demonstration of teaching. For Baudrillard, the failure to recognize this collapse in the university context makes

¹ Department Chair, email message to author, February 24, 2023.

² Jean Baudrillard, *Simulacra and Simulation*, trans. Sheila Faria Glaser, (Ann Arbor, MI: University of Michigan Press, 1994), 121.

³ Jean Baudrillard, *Simulacra and Simulation*, 154. We want to note, however, that we are not arguing against policies that aim to aid students (i.e. to keep them from failing), but we remain critical of the motivations behind this DFW policy and maintain that the policy is but one example of the sources of epistemic decay riddling higher education. This is why we ultimately offer the potential solution of hyperconformity.

⁴ Jean Baudrillard, *Simulacra and Simulation*, 121-123.

possible a “rotting, by accentuating the parodic, simulacral side of dying games of knowledge and power.”⁵

BAUDRILLARD’S HYPERREALISM AND SIMULACRUM

Baudrillard begins *Simulacra and Simulation* by introducing Borges’ fable of the map. According to this short story, there was once a vast empire that cartographers wished to draw. These cartographers became increasingly obsessed with creating a map that was as exact as possible, and eventually the map was drawn so much to scale that it was the same size as the empire itself.⁶ The story ends with a description of the “Tattered Ruins of the Map, inhabited by Animals and Beggars.”⁷ The map was so large that it acted as a pseudo-empire, lying atop the original, both rendered as bordering on the absurd. For Baudrillard, the relevance of this fable is found in the “allegory of simulation.”⁸ That is, the significance is found in the fact that the map itself lays atop the real empire as an exact replica. By outlasting the original version of the empire as well as by providing space for inhabitants, the simulated empire covers the real one, and both the real and the simulation sacrifice authenticity; both are uncanny, and their meaning becomes muddled. Baudrillard writes, however, that we have now reached a phase of existence in which even this iteration of simulation is unusable. He writes, “Simulation is no longer that of a territory, a referential being, or a substance. It is the generation by models of a real without origin or reality: a hyperreal. The territory no longer precedes the map, nor does it survive it.”⁹ In other words, the hyperreal is not a simulation of what is real, but instead is acting as a simulation of the real, a performance of something that does not exist, but which has enough of the symptoms of existence such as to *seem* real.

Further explicating the creation of the hyperreal, Baudrillard examines imagery in *The Ecstasy of Communication*. He describes an art installation at Beaubourg which depicted realistic naked sculptures posed in ultimately ordinary positions. Because there is nothing illusory, nothing hidden, the viewer is left, perhaps perplexed, with nothing to see. Baudrillard writes, “Precisely because there is nothing to see, people approach, lean over and flair out this hallucinating hyper-resemblance, haunting in its friendliness. They lean over to see an astounding thing: *an image where there is nothing to see.*”¹⁰ He explains that this transparency is what creates obscenity, an “obscenity of the real.”

⁵ Jean Baudrillard, *Simulacra and Simulation*, 149.

⁶ Jorge Luis Borges, “On Exactitudes in Science,” in *Collected Fictions*, trans. by Andrew Hurley, (Penguin Press, 1999).

⁷ Jorge Luis Borges, “On Exactitudes in Science.”

⁸ Jean Baudrillard, *Simulacra and Simulation*, 1.

⁹ Jean Baudrillard, *Simulacra and Simulation*, 1.

¹⁰ Jean Baudrillard, *The Ecstasy of Communication* (Cambridge, MA: The MIT Press, 2012), 32. See, also, Graham Murphy, “Post/Humanity and the Interstitial: A Glorification of Possibility in Gibson’s Bridge Sequence,” *Science Fiction Studies* 30, no. 1 (2003): 72-90, 73.

According to Baudrillard, this obscenity takes place when “everything becomes...visible, exposed in the raw and inexorable light of information and communication.”¹¹

Similarly, this obscenity is found in the current system of schooling. Baudrillard writes of the rotting of the university, painting a picture of what he calls the “spiraling cadaver.” He argues that the university is “nonfunctional...lacking cultural substance or an end purpose of knowledge.”¹² In his description of this decay, Baudrillard questions the possibility of knowledge along with the question of representation. He ultimately argues that we exist among the ruins of knowledge and that even these ruins are “defunct.”¹³ He illustrates a scenario in which degrees will be awarded without “an equivalence in knowledge” and that this results in a “terror of value without equivalence.”¹⁴ The current market-based system of schooling based on pared down bits of information transmitted from teacher to student simulate genuine inquiry. The transmission of information, however, is conflated with inquiry and there is no movement towards knowledge, but instead an aimless meandering towards the performance of teaching, inquiring, knowing, and the entailment of grading. Genuine inquiry is substituted by a grotesque amassing of rubric-based grades and course credits regardless of meaningful understanding. This performance, then, becomes nothing more than “an image where there is nothing to see.”

For Baudrillard, this simulation only takes on the appearance of being new, and this “exchange of signs” has persisted between students and teachers as a “doubled simulacrum of a psychodrama.”¹⁵ This simulacrum of the university yields a hyperreal, transparent iteration of knowledge and power, and ultimately of the death of the university. In other words, like the way in which the allegory of simulation eventually fails to capture what is happening to the breakdown between the borders of Borges’ map and a real empire, there is a decay that takes place within the performance of knowledge, until it no longer resembles knowing, but performs the idea of knowing where no real inquiry takes place.

GEORGIA STATE UNIVERSITY’S DFS POLICY

DFW policies are part of a broader concern in higher education for student retention rates. In recent decades, research has shown that the movement towards including larger groups of the population in the enterprise of higher education has led to a decrease in retention and overall graduation rates. Researchers have indicated that “key demographic variables,” economic

¹¹ Jean Baudrillard, *The Ecstasy of Communication*.

¹² Jean Baudrillard, *Simulacra and Simulation*, 149.

¹³ Jean Baudrillard, *Simulacra and Simulation*, 151. See, also, Bill Readings, *The University in Ruins* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1997).

¹⁴ Jean Baudrillard, *Simulacra and Simulation*, 155.

¹⁵ Jean Baudrillard, *Simulacra and Simulation*, 155.

struggles, and “academic readiness” indicate the likelihood of student success via graduation.¹⁶

We argue that the DFW policy at Georgia State University is a symptom of this “doubled simulacrum of a psychodrama” and that the policy manifests Baudrillard’s “spiraling cadaver” of the university. That is, this policy masks the absence of reality, of real knowing, and instead acts as a continuation of simulated knowledge. Part of this simulation is the act, art, and assumptions of grading. While much more could be said on the topic of grading, generally, our focus is on the tensions between justifiable determinations of quality made by GTAs about student work and the DFW policy’s apparent replacement of expertise with simulacrum.¹⁷ Indeed, the DFW policy is ultimately missing the point: the policy is trying to provide a simulation-based answer to a simulation-based problem: the gamification of grading and the ironic endorsement of said gamification. Students most at risk of earning Ds and Fs (although they are not alone in this effort) tend also to be clever at trying to outwit the grading requirements; the DFW policy endorses such gamification and, as a result, epistemic decay. The policy instantiates institutional rot, in other words, by contributing to a brand of epistemic putrefaction that renders nothing but simulated knowing possible. Baudrillard argues that the loss of correspondence of signifiers to reality means “the world is a game,”¹⁸ but he also notes, according to Blades, that “such a game is pathological because the real, in the name of the authentic, becomes increasingly distant in the circulation of signs to the point of no longer being present.”¹⁹

Consider the paper trail surrounding the discussion and institution of this DFW policy. Discussion of the policy began at the first Senate Faculty Affairs Committee (FAC) meeting that took place in the spring semester of 2023. The meeting minutes mention that the DFW policy should be discussed at the February meeting.²⁰ The February FAC meeting minutes indicate that a draft of

¹⁶ Salvatore A. Barbera, et. al., “Review of Undergraduate Student Retention and Graduation Since 2010: Patterns, Predictions, and Recommendations for 2020,” *Journal of College Student Retention: Research, Theory & Practice* 22, no. 2, (2017): 227. It is important to note that the motivations behind the increased inclusion of students arguably also has little to do with genuine effort towards equity, and, instead may have more to do with the financial needs of colleges and universities.

¹⁷ See, for example, Stuart Tannock, “No Grades in Higher Education Now! Revisiting the Place of Graded Assessment in the Reimagination of the Public University,” *Studies in Higher Education* 42, no. 8 (2017): 1345-1357; Kiruthika Ragupathi and Adrian Lee, “Beyond Fairness and Consistency in Grading: The Role of Rubrics in Higher Education,” in *Diversity and Inclusion in Global Higher Education*, ed. Catherine Shea Sanger and Nancy W. Gleason (Singapore, Palgrave Macmillan, 2020), 73-95.

¹⁸ Jean Baudrillard, “The Power of Reversibility that Exists in the Fatal,” in *Baudrillard Live*, ed. Mike Gain (New York: Routledge, 1983/1993): 43-49.

¹⁹ David W. Blades, “The Simulacra of Science Education,” *Counterpoints* 137 (2001): 62.

²⁰ Georgia State University, Faculty Affairs Committee Minutes. January 2023.

the policy was created and would be reviewed in the March meeting.²¹ The March meeting minutes read: “The general policy committee presented the first draft of the DFW letter. It was returned to the General Policy Committee to continue work on the letter. [It] will be reviewed in the March meeting. Voting is not expected until the first meeting of the 2023-2024 academic year.”²² Meanwhile, on February 24th, an email was sent from Georgia State University’s Educational Policy Studies (EPS) Department Chair, which read:

Finally, if a GTA is on the university’s DFW list (instructors who award D’s, F’s, or W’s to 20% or more of students), they will have to take a course in college teaching before they can teach again. If you are supervising a GTA who fits this description, I will be reaching out to you. There is lots to critique about this approach but there is pressure coming from the university to lower the DFW rates in undergrad courses and this new policy is, apparently, non-negotiable. I hope you are enjoying this unseasonably warm weather and have a restful weekend.²³

The department chair’s email indicates the insouciance that accompanies simulacrum, along with the fabrication of a performed problem. The DFW policy is attempting to answer the question “how do we decrease the number of students who are earning Ds and Fs, or who are withdrawing from a course?” At best, it asks “why are students withdrawing from a course, or earning a D or an F?” At worst, this policy fails to respond to any educationally legitimate question and aimlessly seeps down from one bureaucratic entity to the next. Upon the receipt of the chair’s email, GTAs in EPS were left considering not only the practical implications of the policy, but the theoretical ones as well. The GTAs wondered if they could continue teaching the following semester, if funding necessary for continued enrollment in the doctoral program would be received, and then, what this policy meant in a broader scope. Furthermore, questions were raised about the “re-education” that would be required: Who will be teaching the remedial course? What will constitute the content of such a course? How, indeed, will such a course be evaluated—that is, what happens if the remedial course ends with a DFW rate of 20% or higher? Will the remedial instructor be remediated?

Notably, this is not something that is occurring only at Georgia State University. Economic professors at James Madison University, for example, are experiencing a similar phenomenon. Six professors received significantly lower

²¹ Georgia State University, Faculty Affairs Committee Minutes. February 2023.

²² Georgia State University, Faculty Affairs Committee Minutes. March 2023.

²³ Department Chair, email message to author, February 24, 2023. We leave it to readers to interpret the final line of the note. We also note that the department chair was not responsible for enacting the policy. That ignoble status goes to an associate dean in the college. It was her ineptitude and lack of experience that put the policy into practice and caused the havoc we document in this article.

marks on evaluations from their chair following the summer semester of 2023.²⁴ On a nine-point scale, many professors lost, on average, two points with a majority losing points because they were assigning too many Ds and Fs. One professor, who earned a four out of nine for “teaching,” shared the feedback they received: “Please work to meet students where they are in terms of skills and preparation and provide remedial and extra assistance as needed in order to reduce the number of D and F grades. Continue to adjust course material and delivery to improve grades and evaluation scores.”²⁵ What are faculty to do with such a suggestion?

The professors took this sort of feedback to mean that they were expected to increase grades, regardless of the quality of student work to receive adequate scores on their evaluations. Earning low scores would bar these professors from being considered for promotions or from earning financial awards based on their performance.²⁶ When they took their concerns to administration, no scores were reversed and their dean informed the professors that because the DFW rate for their ECON 200 course was 25%, clearly the professors needed to work on improving their teaching.²⁷ The dean also rejected any mention of grade inflation, arguing that he did not condone inflating grades and reiterating the importance of improving teaching. Again, faculty are considered entirely culpable for student performance, and grade increase, regardless of the reason for the increase, is desirable over genuine inquiry.

DFW policies can be read as part of a theatrical performance inseparable from Baudrillard’s stages of simulacrum. The concept of a university broadly conceived as an institution of learning that maintains faithfully the enterprise of knowledge aligns with Baudrillard’s characterization of the “reflection of a profound reality.”²⁸ That is, a university purposefully aimed towards substantive or authentic knowing is not corrupting the real. Awarding grades that do not correspond with knowledge in a market-based university environment moves more readily towards the second and third stages of simulacrum: towards “mask[ing] and denatur[ing] a profound reality.”²⁹ By awarding grades as currency and engaging in the two-fold performance of teacher and student in exchange for this currency, any original aims and purposes of knowing are twisted and foregone. Such currency exchange is symptomatic of neoliberalism’s stranglehold on modern U.S. universities, but the reality of corporate universities

²⁴ Charlotte Matherly, “A Spat Over Teaching Evaluations Roils a Department,” *The Chronicle*, 25 October 2023, https://www.chronicle.com/article/a-spat-over-teaching-evaluations-roils-a-department?cid=gen_sign_in.

²⁵ Charlotte Matherly, “A Spat Over Teaching Evaluations Roils a Department.”

²⁶ Charlotte Matherly, “A Spat Over Teaching Evaluations Roils a Department.”

²⁷ Charlotte Matherly, “A Spat Over Teaching Evaluations Roils a Department.”

²⁸ Jean Baudrillard, *Simulacra and Simulation*, 6.

²⁹ Jean Baudrillard, *Simulacra and Simulation*, 6.

only justifies DFW rates as self-corroborating and, we argue, implosive circularity.³⁰

These DFW policies move the university into the third and fourth stages of simulacrum—“mask[ing] the absence of a profound reality” into no longer resembling reality and becoming “its own pure simulacrum.”³¹ For example, the FAC that meets to discuss policy in the university is a performative gesture. The committee forms to address and respond to problems that only exist within the second order of simulacrum. When the FAC met to address the issue of the high rate of Ds, Fs, and Ws in the university, the focus on these markers as both currency as well as a measure of performance highlights the “absence of a profound reality” by shifting the goal of schooling from inquiring and moving towards knowing to earning ostensibly only passing grades “without an equivalence in knowledge.”³² Student success in this third and fourth order becomes centered around earning a grade higher than a D and refraining from withdrawing from a course. Indeed, adding “withdrawal” in the policy further explicates the twisting of profound reality into the absence of reality. This conflation is at least in part a matter of reason. Logically, D and F are of the same kind. They are purported evaluations of student work and are qualitative assessments made by GTAs and faculty based on the quality of work submitted by the student. A W, however, is different in kind. Neither faculty nor GTAs determine a W, strictly speaking.³³ The decision of a student to withdraw from a course is made for a wide variety of reasons: too much reading, sampling courses to find out which ones are the easiest, work/life balance, illness, death in the family, etc. In these instances, there is no correspondence between the student’s decision to withdraw and the quality of a GTA’s or faculty member’s assessment of the student’s progress. Indeed, a W is *not an assessment* of progress at all. It is a status of dropping a course, as just noted, for any number of reasons having nothing to do with the quality of teaching in a given course. Relatedly, we question the 20% threshold. From where does such a percentage come and how is it understood as anything other than an arbitrary number? No explanation is given in the policy and no justification follows.

Given Baudrillard’s simulacrum and hyperreality, we therefore read these DFW policies as a continuation of the systemic decay and death of the

³⁰ See, for example, Sheila Slaughter and Gary Rhoades, *Academic Capitalism and the New Economy: Markets, State, and Higher Education* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2004); William G. Tierney, “The Autonomy of Knowledge and the Decline of the Subject: Postmodernism and the Reformulation of the University,” *Higher Education* 41, no. 4 (2001): 353-72.

³¹ Jean Baudrillard, *Simulacra and Simulation*, 6.

³² Jean Baudrillard, *Simulacra and Simulation*, 155.

³³ It is true that course instructors submit a W (or a WF-withdraw failing) at the end of the semester, but if students withdraw before the withdrawal deadline, the electronic grading system automatically “populates” a W for the student, and it is out of the instructor’s hands—no change can be made in the system.

university, and along with it, an indifference towards curiosity and knowing, and instead, an adherence to performative, theatrical schooling. The policy, at first glance, may seem to be an effort to make the university and “success” more accessible by making failure more difficult. This version of success, however, operates within a university system based on the receipt of empty grades in exchange for student performance.³⁴ When the university exists within the context of a performance-for-grade-based economy, failure to obtain passing grades results in failure to obtain the currency necessary to receive a diploma, lowering graduation rates. When the university operates in such a marketplace, the economic response is to decrease the receipt of grades that will not result in graduation. This form of grade-based economy, however, exemplifies an intellectual rot, or a resistance against the university stimulating epistemic curiosity, or a desire to work towards knowing. When an institution awards grades “without an equivalence in knowledge” as currency towards a degree, it limits or even undermines inquiry, and instead encourages performance akin to Baudrillard’s “doubled simulacrum of a psychodrama.”³⁵

DFW policies are a reaction to a problem manufactured within the confines of this grade-based economy and within this “doubled simulacrum of education.” At its surface, Georgia State University may argue that the policy allows for higher GPAs, higher graduation rates, and perhaps higher rates of job placement out of college. It might appear that the policy is aiming to “close the achievement gap,” allowing for a more inclusive university experience that results in a better return on investment.³⁶ As the policy is symptomatic of this doubled simulacrum and exists as a manufactured reaction to a manufactured problem, it begins to collapse back into itself, creating a sort of feedback loop of an exchange of simulated inquiry and teaching—a solution posing as progressive problem solving, but instead perpetuating a cycle of temporary, ultimately self-refuting remedies.

FATAL STRATEGIES

Our analysis of the DFW policy is not only critical, but also arguably a form of fatalism: there is no return from the abyss of a corporatized university

³⁴ In our case, the course has a Board of Regents’ requirement that students “pass” the class with a C or higher. A grade of C- or below will not earn credit.

³⁵ Jean Baudrillard, *Simulacra and Simulation*, 155.

³⁶ See “Faculty/Students Win APSA Best Conference Paper Award,” Georgia State University: College of Arts and Sciences, 3 July 2021. The paper utilized quasi-experimental research that “*not only makes a significant contribution to a growing body of research on AL [Adaptive Learning], but also provides critical insights into how AL can improve students’ metacognitive skills, motivation to learn, and academic success.*” Georgia State University’s description of this paper as well as the decision to advocate for the paper’s findings illustrates the university’s tendency to link DFW rates with student success and achievement gaps. While it is beyond the scope of this paper, we also assert that Georgia State University’s National Institute for Student Success is complicit in the effort to enforce the DFW policy.

and its DFW policy. We plead guilty, but also point to possible ways to surmount despair. In his book, *Baudrillard, Youth, and American Film*, Kip Kline responds to the sense of nihilism readers are frequently left with after reading Baudrillard. Kline explains that there is a hopefulness to be found in Baudrillard's work around fatal strategies, hyperconformity, and indeterminacy.³⁷ Kline uses the term "postmodern hope" to articulate his rejection of both neoliberal, market-based education policy and critical theorists. We agree with Kline that, instead of critical theory, we should use fatal theory and radical thought "to resist violent rhetoric and policy regarding youth and education."³⁸ To critique critical theorists, Kline points out the tendency to react in a "shocked" manner or with "incredulity," which he argues is merely a "sign of resistance." Kline calls, instead, for a "counter-spiral" through radical thought.

For example, hyperconformity might look like "*not* support[ing] schools as an institutional location for treating social problems."³⁹ Kline explains that as we well know, schools are "subservient to the economic system in late capitalism," so to then expect schools to tackle social issues is to expect them to perform in ways that critical theorists think schools ought to function, not how they can or will function in their current iteration. Hyperconformity, then, would involve "push[ing] these negative conditions until they flip."⁴⁰ In other words, we cannot expect solutions embedded within the current system to self-correct.

Kline also emphasizes the importance of illusion and enigma as it relates to the juxtaposition between education and schooling in the United States. He illustrates the current American system of schooling as relying on scientism and hard facts. Scientism, according to Kline, stands in direct opposition to education.⁴¹ Kline, in line with Baudrillard, argues instead to render the world as uncertain and mysterious. The enigmatic and the indeterminate expose the "flimsy form of certainty" relied on not only by policies like Georgia State University's DFW policy, but more broadly in the market-based system of schooling found in the current university setting. These DFW policies rely on quantitative data to measure student and university success. There is no evidence, however, that genuine inquiry has taken place when this data is analyzed. When considering the scenario at James Madison University, for example, the insistence that we "meet students where they are" in order to improve grades rather than to guide them towards inquiring and knowing implies that the "right mix of carrots on sticks," as Diane Ravitch puts it, will increase grades, and

³⁷ Kip Kline, *Baudrillard, Youth and American Film: Fatal Theory and Education* (Lanham, MD: Lexington Books, 2016), 111-112.

³⁸ Kip Kline, *Baudrillard, Youth, and American Film*, 113.

³⁹ Kip Kline, *Baudrillard, Youth, and American Film*, 123.

⁴⁰ Kip Kline, *Baudrillard, Youth, and American Film*, 123.

⁴¹ Kip Kline, *Baudrillard, Youth, and American Film*, 123.

subsequently, create the illusion of better teaching, more learning, and higher student performance.⁴²

What might this look like in resistance to Georgia State’s DFW policy? Hyperconformity might look like awarding As to all students regardless of performance, to eradicate earning Ds and Fs and minimizing Ws. Or it could mean refusing to give a grade lower than a C, based on performance. Ultimately, awarding As to all students would be the only choice, however, as Bs and Cs would become indicators of poor performance akin to the former Ds and Fs, and subsequently might befall the same fate as the D and the F. Awarding As to all students would lean into this DFW policy to the point that it would leave the grading system in a state of meaninglessness. Alternatively, an option could be to award only Ds and Fs, with the goal of achieving a 100% DFW rate. Grades as currency meant to be utilized in a system of schooling completely subservient to late-stage capitalism would inflate to the point that these grades could no longer be used as currency, potentially imploding the usefulness of the diploma. On the other hand, making earning a diploma impossible would also work towards this type of implosion. This would simultaneously serve Baudrillard’s critique of the university system—that is, that it awards degrees without “an equivalence in knowledge” and that this results in a “terror of value without equivalence.”⁴³ Awarding only As or ensuring a 100% DFW rate might look like it also undermines genuine inquiry and movement towards knowledge. It is possible, however, that, in the scenario where only As are awarded, without the fear of grades or a focus on earning currency, pursuit of knowledge might once again become a possibility through this hyperconformity. In other words, hyperconforming may serve as an act of subversion and allow teachers to create space for students to move towards genuine inquiry.⁴⁴

This brings us back, then, to the manufactured problem with a manufactured solution. The DFW policy is a flimsy response meant to answer the wrong questions, operating within the hyperreal. To ask the right questions, however, we cannot merely respond with shock or incredulity. This policy is not shocking; it is a market-based response to a market-based problem. Per Kline’s suggestion, then, perhaps we must work from the fringes to instead imagine a new education—one that exists outside of the current mode of schooling.⁴⁵

⁴² Diane Ravitch, “2014 John Dewey Lecture: Does Evidence Matter?,” *Education and Culture* 31, no. 1 (2015): 3-15.

⁴³ Jean Baudrillard, *Simulacra and Simulation*, 155.

⁴⁴ This is not the only means through which hyperconformity could occur. The concept of hyperconformity as conceived by Baudrillard as well as an extension of his concept of fatal strategies could serve as material for future research on the topic. See Jean Baudrillard, *Fatal Strategies*, (Los Angeles, CA: Semiotext(e), 2008).

⁴⁵ Kip Kline, *Baudrillard, Youth, and American Film*, 127.
