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The Permanent Crisis in Liberal Education
A Panel Presentation at the Fifth Annual Hawai'i International Conference on Education
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Introduction

Today we're going to look at trends in higher education through the lens of years of teaching experience.

We are like fish analyzing the water in which we swim – it can be difficult to get an overarching and clear perspective. There are currents and cross-currents in contemporary higher education, some positive, many not. We propose to navigate these turbulent waters, and we hope not to perish in the process. Our task is mainly diagnostic, but we will not shy from prescriptions where they offer themselves.

In this panel we will cite evidence, but our method is not a representative sample survey. It is not an exercise in dispassionate quantitative research. Rather it is experiential, even phenomenological. It is an impressionistic but hardly a casual analysis, based as it is over three lifetimes of teaching.

Our views are based collectively on over one hundred years of teaching at the postsecondary level, over one thousand classes and nearly forty thousand students, spanning parts of five decades. It is also based on our readings, correspondence and conversations with colleagues in virtually all disciplines in dozens of colleges and universities around the United States and Canada and on all the continents of the Earth with the single exception of Antarctica.

Nothing we say today is intended to disparage the efforts and commitment of the legions of dedicated and hardworking professors. Nor is our purpose to criticize particular schools or programs. Rather, we are painting with broad brush strokes, and our mention of specific schools is not to single them out but is to illustrate broad trends. Competent and dedicated educators will still produce disappointing results if the conditions, assumptions and policies under which they operate are wrong-headed or otherwise inadequate.

We have discussed our teaching with one another continually since for forty years. We have distinct experiences, views and emphases which will become evident.

Professor Doughty will treat historical, political and economic contexts of higher education. Dr. Gaydos will discuss the challenge to free inquiry posed by political correctness in the classroom. Dr. King

will begin by speaking to issues of quality and rigor in teaching and in our expectations of student performance.

Philip H. King

The Dilution of Academic Quality in College Courses: Lowered Expectation, Lowered Performance

Important foundations of problems in higher education lie in lower education: The factors are well-known: poverty, ill-educated parents and lack of home culture and resources, deficiencies in early childhood development, pernicious influences of television and electronic media in general, under-funding of public education including inadequate compensation for teachers, the narrow testing focus prompted by “No child left behind”, regional disparities in the provision of education resources, etc., and all these rooted in a society that undervalues education.

Many, perhaps a majority of students come to college ill-prepared in skills, knowledge base, study habits and attitudes.

In the United States, we have two tiers, one consisting of our elite colleges and universities, the other consisting of the rest. A recent survey rating the top universities world-wide gave 18 of the top 20 spots to American universities, with only Cambridge and Oxford of non-American institutions breaking into this choice group. Criteria for the ratings emphasized graduate research creativity and productivity. While this does not necessarily translate into rigor and excellence in undergraduate instruction at these schools, it is impressive nonetheless.

While there are pockets of excellent students, professors and even programs scattered around the educational landscape, only several dozen universities and a comparable number of liberal arts colleges are excellent overall. This leaves the great bulk of American schools in which mediocrity is the norm. There is a huge class distinction in higher education, one grounded in resource differentials and the prevailing academic culture.

There is simply no comparison and little overlap between what goes on at Pomona, Carleton, Swarthmore, Chicago or Penn compared to the several thousands of lesser, and lesser-funded, schools. The forms of education – classes, homework, exams – may look the same, but the level of learning and the underlying web of expectations and standards which constitutes the educational culture is startlingly different. Not many students at most colleges would be successful at our elite institutions.

I asked students from two fine colleges (Williams, and Boston College) studying for a semester at an average university (Hawai’i Pacific University) to speak to the differences in their experience. They uniformly said that the professors were comparable, but that the

workload at HPU was a small fraction of the workload at their home institution.

We have seen some disturbing trends over 40 years – most importantly decreasing standards, inflated grades, decreased respect for professors from both administrators and students, and an increased sense of student entitlement. Specific manifestations of these trends includes a decreasing percentage of professors who are tenured or tenure track, increased use of part-time adjuncts, increasing teaching loads, decreasing face-to-face instruction, and a reduction of faculty's professional autonomy.

The upshot is been a profound change: from professors as respected authorities teaching fortunate and grateful students in settings that convey a love of learning and that pass on important societal values – to the college/university as corporation, students as customers, and professors as hired hands.

We have gone from professors as Mr. Chips to professors as Mr. (and Ms.) Buffalo Chips, buffalo chips being pragmatically useful but hardly something you want near you otherwise.

To get a sense of how academic culture has changed: It's 45 years ago – February 1962 – the start of the second semester at Grinnell College. The faculty and deans call an all-school assembly. All 1100 students show up. Faculty are on the stage and students out front. The assembly lasts just a few minutes. A faculty member speaks: "The overall college GPA last semester was 2.3. This will not do. You should be ashamed. You've let down yourselves, and you've let down the College. You're here to learn. Your parents did not pay tuition for you to goof around. We expect you to do much better this term. That's all; you're dismissed." Suitably chastened, we filed out.

This would not happen today. In the first place, the overall GPA would be 3.3 or higher, not 2.3, and so the impetus for the assembly would not exist. Even if it did, the academic administration and faculty wouldn't have the guts. And if such an assembly were to take place, there would be massive cries of abuse of students, as claims of self-esteem violation would be filed. Undermined by craven, fiscally driven administrators and our own lack of backbone, we faculty have lost the natural authority that once flowed from our subject expertise and teaching skill. It is not that we are inherently more cowardly than our predecessors; it is that, with two Ph.D.s produced for every tenure-track faculty position, we are hat-in-hand supplicants for what jobs there are, and therefore disinclined to be uppity.

A note on grade inflation. In the standard American 0.0 to 4.0 grading system, with A = 4, B = 3, and so on, there has been an inflation amounting to about 0.15 per decade in the four decades from the early 1960s to the early 2000s. That is, an average GPA of about 2.7 became 3.3 over 40 years. As if by magic, poor has become adequate, mediocre has become good, and good has become

excellent.

Why is this? One big factor is the desire of college and university administrators to retain students and the tuition they pay regardless of their performance and independent of whether they belong in college at all. Is it even thinkable to fail students who deserve to be flunked? Bad money drives out good, and easy grading drives out more discriminating grading. Poorly motivated, ill-prepared and underperforming students stick around, diminishing the educational process and the quality of our institutions. They may graduate, but what have they learned?

Another contributing factor to a decline in academic rigor is student evaluations of courses and faculty performance, with the evaluations used as evidence for decisions on faculty retention and promotion. This leads inevitably to faculty attempting to please and mollify students by making work loads easy and keeping grades high.

Student evaluations of faculty might have value if they were given to faculty only, not to administration. Faculty could profit from the criticism, and they could then choose whether to submit their evaluations to review committees to bolster their cases for promotion. At the same time, in the absence of student evaluations, of course, administrators would still know if a faculty member is doing a poor job because poor performance would elicit student complaints.

An interesting indicator of the pernicious effects of students' course evaluations is "Teacher of the Year" awards, bestowed on the basis of student nominations and votes. Frequently, in our experience, these awards are frequently won by mediocre but personable teachers who place few demands on the students, yet offer the promise of high grades.

Another destructive trend in higher education is what I call the "evaluation fetish" that permeates college and university academic culture. One cannot simply do something on the basis of one's deep knowledge of a subject matter and ways to teach it; one must specify action plans, goals and objectives, process outcomes, outputs, behavioral objectives, evaluation criteria, and measurement indicators.

I contend that this obsession with measuring everything we do is worse than useless – it is debilitating, as it drains away limited faculty energies and resources, even as it insults faculty by insisting on dubious proofs of what should be taken for granted about their skill and commitment. It also retards the development of new, experimental courses by insisting on proof of their merit before the fact.

If we cannot assume that faculty are competent, dedicated, and effective, and that course exams and other products such as research papers measure student learning, then we need to strengthen

graduate education for doctorates and other terminal degrees such as MFAs. This may require, as Cary Nelson, President of the AAUP has noted, closing down weaker graduate programs. Where standards of rigor and high quality are internalized in faculty, excellent teaching will ensue and other mechanisms are not needed.

Rooted in stale management fads, driven by self-aggrandizing and out-of-control accreditation agencies, and enabled by cowardly administrations, the evaluation craze is an albatross around the neck of the academy. It is epistemologically flawed as it mischaracterizes learning as imbibing discrete bits of knowledge and skills that can be readily identified, abstracted and measured. The very term “behavioral objective” makes whatever hair I have left curl and my blood boil – and I’m an old Skinnerian, at that.

Years ago we had little or none of the evaluation mentality, and higher education was superior. To be sure, a smaller and more select group of students went to college, and there is much positive about the broadening of opportunity for a higher education that has taken place. Our current evaluation obsession with its attendant bureaucracies and procedures is not, however, a solution to problems of diminished standards and compromised academic quality. Quite the contrary, the evaluation mania has sapped finite resources, and widely demoralized faculty. Interestingly, although faculty grumble, there has been scant overt protest, but let me propose that the evaluation overlay in higher education has no value – the emperor indeed has no clothes.

A related diversion of faculty energy is rampant and incessant curricular revision. Every few years, like clockwork, degree, diploma and certificate requirements and course configurations are reshuffled, to no identifiable purpose. No amount of re-sorting mediocrity will make it other than mediocre. Cries of the necessity to keep curriculum current and up to date in terms of the changing needs and expectations of the labour market, innovations in technology and the spectral demands of the increasingly competitive global marketplace merely provide a cacophony that distorts the real process – a betrayal of the academic standards that are intrinsically valuable and that, incidentally, are of far more worth in providing society with competent employees and citizens than the frenzied efforts to leap on the next passing pedagogical bandwagon.

Some other observations and comments:

First, professors are rewarded for retaining students, and viewed negatively if their class dropout rates are high. This works against rigor, and is exactly the opposite of what should happen. We are rewarding the dilution of academic quality and promoting grade inflation, the pertinent effect of which is the devaluation of the reputations of our institutions and our graduates.

Second, merit pay is an extraordinarily bad idea. It alienates

faculty from one another, substitutes for needed and deserved across-the-board raises, and implicitly communicates that only a very few faculty are deserving.

Third, consider a young man returning from military service in 1964. With a wife and baby, he had to work full-time. Going to college at nights, he studied half-time and took eight years to complete his bachelor's degree. Now, the typical workload is so light that many students expect, and are able, to work full-time, raise a family, and go to school full-time. And how many programs advertise themselves as evening and weekend classes that will yield a master's degree in a year, with "credit for experiential learning"? Likewise, distance education, while arguably useful in certain circumstances, is generally a diluted and decidedly inferior form of education compared to good face-to-face instruction.

Finally, a few snapshots:

- A first year Canadian student sits in a biology class of 800 students – divided into two "smaller" meetings of 400 students each. Armed with an electronic clicker, she is charged with responding to multiple choice questions periodically flashed on a screen during the class. She is graded only on the basis of giving any response, not correct answers. Knowing this, she arbitrarily gives random responses in order to beat the ten second deadline;
- A professor arrives twenty minutes early for the final exam. Students are frantically reviewing their notes. Attempting to ease their way, the professor says, "The exam won't have questions on the film we saw last class." A student remarks "If it's not on the exam, then why did you show it?"
- A political science professor is discussing the Napoleanic theory of foreign policy. He asks the class if they know who Napolean was. One student out of twenty does, and he's from France!
- A student questions why she got "B" for her course. "I got "As" in my other courses," she argues.
- A community college professor notes: "Students get upset if they are asked to think."
- A psychology professor speaks to the academic advisor of an international student whose English is virtually non-existent – so poor that he cannot comprehend even basic material. The advisor investigates, and reports that the student is doing fine in his other courses.
- In 1997, the parents of an out-of-state student are paying in excess of $30,000 a year for their son to attend UCLA. In his freshman year, he sits in a lecture class of several hundred students, being taught by a teaching assistant whose English is incomprehensible – the assigned professor having chosen to spend the first two months of the semester away from class.
- An Ohio State history professor has two children who go to a progressive elementary school. He attempts to bring some of

the active learning modes at this school (student discussions and presentations) to his university classes. Many students panic and instantly drop the course. But the ones who stay report that they learned more by taking more responsibility for their own learning.

- A veteran professor noticed that younger colleagues were teaching watered-down versions of a statistics course, and that students were not developing statistical competencies. His efforts even to engage a discussion of the matter were stonewalled over a three year period.

These vignettes are all true, and each provides anecdotal evidence of a problem. As far as a solution is concerned, the conclusion ought to be obvious. We need to restore respect for learning, for the professorate, and for high academic standards. With restoration of an academic culture of rigor, many current problems will dissolve, and we will not need to focus on incremental and often misguided solutions. Without high standards, we will continue on a downward spiral. While responsibility for a reassertion of rigor would need to be widely shared, governing bodies of institutions, academic administrations and faculty would be on the front lines. The core dynamic is a political one. Without a renewed tenure emphasis faculties will be too timid to push for needed reforms. Half the battle of course, lies with elementary and secondary education in their cultural, economic and political contexts. At the postsecondary level, there is only so much we can do with sow's ears; we need some pieces of silk that we can shape into purses.

The role of money in any reform process is crucial. Most colleges and universities are strapped for funds and believe, rightly or wrongly, that students will leave if even reasonable academic demands are made on them. An infusion of funds, indirectly via tuition grants to students and directly to institutions, is required.

Increased resources will make possible, but will in no way guarantee, changes in academic culture toward higher academic standards and greater faculty autonomy. Faculty must work towards restoration of their status and prerogatives as they existed broadly, if not uniformly, in the past. There is good will and an increasing consciousness of the need for reform, and therefore some hope, although I wouldn't hold my breath. Students will do about 80% of whatever you ask them to do. Reform efforts must not be piecemeal; otherwise easy courses and low standards will drive out demanding courses and high standards

The best thing that could happen now is not for already rich and excellent schools to become richer and better, although they show every indication of doing so. It is for mediocre schools to make a conscious decision to raise their standards, to restore or establish for the first time systems of faculty tenure, and for both public and private entities to support these changes with money.

Thank you for your kind attention.

Gregory Gaydos

The Secular Monastery and the Challenge to Free Inquiry

Anyone who has lived in academia over the last forty years realizes that something very precious has been lost. Those of us who were fortunate enough to attend universities in the 1960s, remember how honored we were to attend these cathedrals of learning, and how respectful we were of the professoriate. Much of that atmosphere is lost due to the reasons covered by Dr. King in his paper on how education has been watered down in an unspoken conspiracy between faculty and students, that was further elucidated in the film, "Declining by Degrees." However difficult it would be, one can imagine prescriptions from Dr. King that would 'fix' the university.

There is another serious flaw in the modern university that is much more difficult to change, and gives one less opportunity for hope, because it goes to the heart of what a university is. The university is a sacred place where one examines the Universe without preconceptions. A monastery is a sacred place where one examines the Universe with a preconceived set of doctrines that must never be challenged, on pain of banishment. What we have today are not universities, but secular monasteries, with secular victim groups that control the liturgy. I apologize for prejudging any university that has not yet caught this virus, but one is constantly inundated with horror stories from the best universities (especially the best universities) down to the mediocre of words, ideas and humor that have been placed on the index of forbidden language and comportment, and the perpetrators that have been banished from the Garden of Eden or, at least, the Platonic groves.

The history of scholars persecuted for their ideas is long and bloody. I remember reading a letter from Galileo to Kepler circa 1610, where they agreed that Copernicus had it right, but they could not say so publicly for fear of retribution from the Inquisition. Galileo said, 'but this is not the time to lament the misery of our century.' When Galileo, discovered the planets of Jupiter through his telescope in 1606, he was jubilant because he thought it might be safe to go public in support of Copernicus' Heliocentric Theory of the Universe, in contrast to the biblically correct Geocentric Theory favored by the Church. He assumed with empirical data, it was a 'slam dunk.' If Jupiter had moons, and the Earth had a moon, then it was clear to him that the earth was a mere planet orbiting the sun. But, Galileo was no fool and he wisely waited until Pope Urban – a personal friend – became Pope in 1623 before setting his views in print. He is fortunate to have had such a friend in high places, for his book, Dialogue on the Two Great World Systems provoked a strong reaction. Matters of intellectual and legal importance moved more slowly in those days, but in time (1633, to be precise), Galileo was judged by the Inquisition and condemned to life under house arrest. But for Urban, the consequences might

have been worse. He was not officially exonerated by the Pope until Pope John Paul II lifted the conviction over three hundred and fifty years after the initial sentence.

Darwin was likewise excoriated for his views proposing evolution in his Origin of Species, as opposed to special creation, which came to a cultural boiling point in the 1925 Dayton, Tennessee, Scopes monkey trial. In fact, I would say the principal threat to academic freedom historically, has come from what today would be called the religious right, which wished to preserve its scripture from examination, and its flock from the immorality of the secular world. Classics such as Joyce's Ulysses were banned from the U.S. due to his explicit sexual descriptions, and confiscated by U.S. Customs as illegal contraband when anyone tried to slip it into the country. This all came to a crashing end, when the Supreme Court ruled in 1957, that Lady Chatterley's Lover could not be banned as obscene if it contained significant political, literary or artistic value. The flood gates opened and it was not long before the left pushed the envelope with Deep Throat and French Blue. From the standpoint of academic freedom, this was a golden period after the censorship of the Religious Right and preceding the oncoming virus of 'Political Correctness,' of the Radical Left, that pervades our universities today.

Political Correctness has expanded legal limitations to free speech such as the prohibition of libel and slander, inciting riots and "hate speech." It goes beyond speech that rises to a legal definition of discrimination and harassment. Instead, it is commonly understood and frequently codified in institutional rules of behavior as no more than the communication of descriptions and the uttering of opinions – even in the form of scientific hypotheses – that might injure any group's feelings or make them feel "uncomfortable."

Theoretically, it applies to any group, but in practice, one has to be a member of a certified victimized group to obtain any relief. This explains why Hollywood always finds Nazis or Neo-Nazi villains for its films. Tom Clancy's The Sum of All Fears had Muslims set off a nuclear device, but this would never do in politically correct Hollywood, which changed the evildoers to a right wing cabal. Muslims, it seems, have moved to the top of the list of victimized groups that must never be offended.

No doubt many of the adherents of PC would describe themselves as liberals, and recoil at the thought that they were radicals. But liberalism is antithetical to any proscription on language, trusting the market place of ideas to sort out the truth. The words "I do not agree with a word you have said, but I would defend with my life your right to say it," may be incorrectly attributed to Voltaire, but they are consistent with his character and they express a noble sentiment, no matter who their author. John Stuart Mill, sometimes referred to as the father of modern liberalism, argued the case for academic freedom in On Liberty by saying society must permit all ideas, first because no one is infallible, second, because contrasting arguments

often contain partial truths, and thirdly because even if an argument is in error, it is good to confront it publicly, to sharpen one's own arguments, to prevent them from becoming a mere catechism.

I don't have an exact date for when our universities turned into secular monasteries, but it might have been when the Supreme Court declared sexual harassment a violation of the Civil Rights Act of 1964. Not only did they ban quid pro quo sex for employment, which everyone of good will would agree with, but also any pictures, jokes, speech of a sexual nature that created a hostile atmosphere such that a person could not work, as defined by the allegedly offended. This decision should have been named the Tort Lawyer Full Employment Act. It wasn't long before this decision began to slip into the university, and erode academic freedom.

Universities, in order to protect themselves from lawsuits, enacted speech codes, which banned words or thoughts that would offend any victimized group, which quickly spread beyond sex, to include race, ethnicity, religion, and sexual orientation, and anyone else who get themselves put on the victims list.

The Supreme Court realized its mistake and tried to repair the damage to academic freedom at the university in John Doe v. University of Michigan, 1991,wherein it effectively banned speech codes. It said that although the universities must protect individuals from discrimination, it must not be done at the expense of free speech. Offensive speech, even gravely offensive speech, has a special place at the university, which is necessary to the carrying out of its mission to seek out truth. Like the little Dutch boy, they tried to put their finger in the leaking dyke, but the tsunami of PC washed over the universities dikes like the waves inundating the beaches of Sumatra.

The administrators and faculty know that these speech codes are prima facie unconstitutional, but they create them anyway. The administrators are trying to keep the peace, so as to preclude the trouble and lawsuits that follow from aggrieved groups, while the radicalized faculty are Imams, just happy to impose their orthodoxy.

None of this is new. Thomas Sowell alerted us to this threat as early as 1990. It has been well documented in Alan Bloom's The Closing of the American Mind, and more recently in Allen Charles Kor's The Shadow University: The Betrayal of Liberty on America's Campuses. Kor has catalogued the speech and demeanor codes from around the country. Old Dominion University has banned offensive sexual jokes, Virginia Commonwealth has banned humor or jokes that denigrate men or women, and the University of Maryland has banned any written or graphic material that is derogatory, which would include all of the great books of world literature. They also ban as sexual harassment, any looks such as leering or ogling, licking your lips or teeth, and, he says, "take your attorney to the cafeteria with you, because it bans holding food or eating it provocatively." One wonders

whether they still serve hot dogs at the University of Maryland.

All of this would be a good hoot if it were not being enforced by the PC Police. Unbelievably, a professor of English was fired from Arizona State University for teaching Shakespeare, since Shakespeare is sexist. A professor was fired from SUNY Maritime College for using sex as a topic to write about in a composition class, even though it was proposed by a student. A professor from an Eastern college was fired for stepping over a young lady with a low cut dress, who was sitting between the stacks of the library. He said hello and moved on, but was accused of leering at her breasts, by a third party, and was terminated. He was reinstated only after he sued in civil court and the young lady who was stepped over, said he did not leer at her breasts, and she would not have minded, even if he did. At my university, Hawai'i Pacific University, a student charged a faculty member with looking at her sexually. How does one protect oneself from that? Fortunately, when confronted with a challenge by the professor, she backed down, and was adjudged mentally unstable by a university counselor. Thomas Sowell reported that a student at Harvard was thrown out of the university for removing a placard from a lunch table which reserved the table for lesbians. Sadly, he was so distraught from this punishment for having offended one of Harvard's sacred victimized groups, he committed suicide.

Anyone who doubts the extent of the metastasizing of PC throughout academia should consider the case of Larry Summers, president of Harvard. He had been President Clinton's Secretary of the Treasury, and possessed a Harvard pedigree which he probably thought insulated him from criticism. In a private meeting with the faculty, he pondered on why there were so few female science professors, even though there were many female English professors. He suggested three possible explanations: (1) Sexual Discrimination against women; (2) Women chose to be home with their families in the evening, rather than spend endless hours in the lab late at night; (3) Women's brains were wired differently than men's brains, such that their strengths were in language rather than math. He said he did not know the answer and charged the faculty with researching it and finding out. Of course, the Feminists, after hyperventilating, went ballistic and called for his resignation. The very thought of biological differences between men and women was one of those forbidden ideas, just as Heliocentrism was for Galileo. When he sensed he was vulnerable, he earmarked $40 million for providing more opportunities for women in science. He probably would have gotten away with it, except that he took his job seriously, and subsequently demanded the faculty publish to justify their position. When he challenged Cornel West, head of the Black Studies Program, to justify his $150,000 salary and produce something besides some rap songs, the Black caucus at Harvard was incensed and joined the women's caucus in calling for a no confidence vote in him. The rest, as they say, is history.

If the most powerful academic in the most prestigious university

in America can be run out of town on a rail by some professional grievance groups, what hope is there for the pursuit of truth? No doubt courageous faculty (following Socrates' lead) continue to put their careers at risk in the pursuit of truth, and perhaps our discussion here does not apply to business, computer science, and the natural sciences (though climatologists were intimidated into naming hurricanes after men as well as women). These other disciplines may grind on, uninfected by PC; but, in the social sciences and humanities, which are the heart of a liberal education, we are fast morphing into secular monasteries.

Howard A. Doughty

The Political Economy of Higher Education

In large measure, I agree with the comments that Dr. King and Dr. Gaydos have made, but I also have some differences. Although we have been friends for forty years, we do have substantially different political perspectives that include differing views about the nature and causes of current problems in education.

I approach the crisis in liberal education from what might be labeled a "cultural materialist" point of view. This means that I regard all social life, all institutions and all patterns of human thought and behaviour as being intimately connected to the choices people make as individuals and as societies in the effort to solve basic problems of survival. This is not a species of determinism in the sense that human attitudes and actions are explained as consequences of some prior circumstances or the product of some specific environment. People do make their own history but, as Marx pointed out, they do not make it just as they please. There is an interaction or, better, a dialectic between the domain of necessity and the domain of freedom. We are at liberty to make meaningful decisions, but always constrained to do so within a certain historical, political and economic context.

The decisions we make can be divided into two main fields: the domestic economy and the political economy. In the domestic economy people are concerned with the process of biological reproduction and, in the process, define families, organize gender roles, raise children, care for the elderly and the infirm and so on. In the political economy, they must attend to the methods of the production and distribution of goods and services as well as the reproduction of the technologies necessary for communal survival. The political economy can be considered the mode, means and relations of production. Education of a sort is required in both fields. We need to know how to live in families and how to do our jobs outside the home. At the present time, I tend to regard the political economy as dominant.

In traditional societies, education was informal and integrated with other tribal rites and rituals. It involved the passing down of myths, legends and spiritual beliefs, practical knowledge about which

mushrooms were poisonous, how to snare a rabbit of make a spear, and what kinds of sexual relationships were taboo. It could be said that prehistoric societies gave prominence to the domestic economy.

With the agricultural revolution, all that changed. A growing division of labour helped shift societies from subsistence to surplus economies, created material inequalities and generated all the attendant factors that influenced and were influenced by what we retrospectively call the dawn of civilization. In emerging ancient societies, education was transformed from a matter that involved the family, clan or tribe into a set of specialized knowledge systems to accompany the ever increasing division of labour and parallel distinctions in social class. Thus, shepherds learned animal husbandry and carpenters learned woodworking from their fathers and grandfathers; meantime, more esoteric forms of knowledge became increasingly the preserve of social elites.

If we fast-forward from Plato's Academy to medieval universities and on to the rise of mass education and the creation of contemporary pre-schools, elementary, secondary and post-secondary institutions, one point becomes abundantly clear, and that is that the curriculum, the mission statements, the public and private funding formulae of educational institutions are designed to meet the survival needs of those societies as well. These needs may be well or poorly understood. They may be variously interpreted in the interest of competing social groups. We may recall, for example, that ancient Athenians and equally ancient Spartans encountered similar environments, but organized themselves in many different ways, not least in the education of the young. As well, even if a consensus about reasonable goals is achieved, we may fail in execution and botch the job, with devastating repercussions for individuals, communities and whole cultures. It cannot, however, be said that we do not try. No society sets out consciously to destroy its future by systematically undermining the relevant education and training of the next generation.

My principal point today is that competing interests are dangerously in play, and that there are deep divisions among them about what education should properly do. Moreover, given the size and complexity of modern societies now operating in an increasing technological and global environment, the stakes may be higher than ever before and the costs of failure more devastating. It is therefore required of us that we reflect on what we mean by education and, in particular, by liberal education.

Once, we may remind ourselves, it was assumed that only male children of the wealthy and powerful needed any sort of formal education. They were destined to become priests and lawyers, diplomats and, perhaps, military leaders. They needed to learn ancient Greek and Latin, logic and rhetoric, and a smattering of Ptolemaic astronomy, Euclidian geometry and music in order to take

their places as functioning members of a largely landed aristocracy.

The Industrial Revolution changed all that. While Oxford dons were still bickering at the end of the nineteenth century about whether the study of English literature merited inclusion in the university curriculum, it had already become clear that factory workers and clerks needed to be marginally literate and know how to do their sums if the feudal and mercantile economies were to become fully modern. And now things are changing again.

We are poised on the edge of a new technological revolution for the twenty-first century. Various labels have been attached to this brave new era. It has been called the automated society, the cybernetic society, the computer age, the information age, the postindustrial age and the postmodern age, among others. I do not presume to anticipate what, if anything, current trends in social relations, ethics and morals, politics, work and technology portend in terms of the factors and relations of production and distribution. I do believe, however, that the relationships between rich and poor economic groups, dominant and marginalized cultural groups and asymmetrically endowed power groups will be reflected in the theorizing and the practice of education.

Education used to reflect kinship patterns as everyone in the tribe needed to know how to catch a fish, skin an antelope, weave a basket, use simple tools made from the bones of a bison and pray for rain. Education later reflected hierarchical social patterns as it became necessary to train people for fundamentally different social roles and education and training took different paths. Aristotle, for example, expressed the idea that only people who by wealth and position were exempt from labor were at liberty to pursue philosophy and physics, while those who performed physical tasks were chained in perpetuity to their work benches.

Our society has the extraordinary opportunity to change these patterns of privilege. Not only physicians, lawyers and accountants but also plumbers, realtors, chefs and even teachers are increasingly compelled to become certified by whatever educational institutions may seem appropriate in order to enter into their profession or trade. But what certification means in terms of rigorous academic standards or the dispassionate pursuit of truth remains ambiguous, opaque and essentially contested. To the issues that were discussed by my two colleagues, I would like to add a third. It is this question: What is contemporary education for?

Sometime in the not too distant past, the opening up of the economy, the democratization of politics, the spread of religious tolerance, the rise of science and all those things we associate with the “Enlightenment” promised an unrestricted, linear path to material, medical, spiritual and social progress. The leisure so prized by Aristotle, we were led to believe, would be available to more and more

people and, in due time, possibly to everyone. Our society became enamored of the notion that practical and philosophical knowledge could be combined, and that a modern liberal education could be constructed in which young people from all economic and social backgrounds could become both enlightened individuals and productive citizens.

I come from such a background. Over forty years ago, I enrolled at Glendon College in Toronto, the first in my extended family ever to enter a university. We were taught that we were engaged in the noble search for truth as far as it could be known, and that upon graduation it would be expected of us to endeavor to improve society in any of a number of careers. I believed it.

In 1967, when I moved to Honolulu to complete my MA in political science, I continued to believe it.

Now, as I near retirement, I find that in the deep recesses of what passes for my soul, I believe it still.

But, and this is an enormously large “but,” I also know that the splendid idealism and the solid integrity of my former teachers and colleagues cannot easily withstand far more powerful social forces except, perhaps, as denizens of small, protected oases of what we may self-indulgently call liberal education scattered across an otherwise arid intellectual desert.

More commonly, the mode of production and the ideology of reproduction are in lock-step, and even relationships among governments, boards, administrators, teachers, staff and students are mirror images of labor relations in the external political economy.

This is where I come close to Professor Gaydos in his genuinely and, I think, correctly angry reply to political correctness, although we differ about its political source. I am, by American standards, a leftist, perhaps a radical leftist, and maybe even a “loonie” leftist (I oppose capital punishment, endorse a universal, publicly funded health care system and can be counted on to disapprove of most wars), so I tend to see a greater immediate threat to academic freedom from Christofascists than Islamofascists, and I see the main but more subtle and enduring threat coming from the major institutions of global capitalism. My only personal experience with attempted censorship does, however, come from what is called the religious right.

At Seneca College in Toronto, I teach a course entitled “The Biology of Culture and Consciousness.” It is a course that I cheerfully purloined from former University of Hawai’i professor, Gregory Bateson. He taught it at the University of California at Santa Cruz in the years before his death in 1980. I teach it now, and I know upon entering the classroom every semester that it will not be long before some religious enthusiasts will object that they “don’t believe in evolution.” The idea that such a statement could stand as an

argument in a contemporary postsecondary institution is an outrage; the idea that such students could file a complaint against me for religious discrimination and harassment is hideous; and the idea that such students would, as one Dean advised me, “probably prevail” is an abomination.

With regard to the position of Professor King, I am completely charmed by the idea that we were once as optimistic and dedicated as he recalls. I, too, am often annoyed by the lethargy, the unwarranted and arrogant sense of entitlement, the lack of curiosity and the absence of intellectual passion among our students. At the same time, I worry some. As the one true cinematic love of my life, Simone Signoret so nicely put it: “Nostalgia isn’t what it used to be.” Or, as someone else once said: “The older you get, the better you were.” Personally, I am prepared to cut today’s students some slack. They alone are not responsible for grade inflation and the dissolution of academic standards. Moreover, in at least some disciplines – notably the natural sciences – I am unconvinced that academic rigor has declined as precipitously as in some areas of the humanities and social sciences.

That said, I totally agree that, generally speaking, mass education is a farce. It warehouses young people. It fails to educate and it only pretends to accredit. But, again, this must not be blamed on the young, nor on the professoriate, nor even the quislings and careerists in administration and other positions of authority. The problem is larger than that. It is that education at all levels seeks to produce competent producers, compliant citizens, submissive workers, ideological conformists and credulous consumers.

These are the apparent needs of corporate capitalism. It is no surprise that contemporary educational institutions reflect those material needs in their policies and practices. I, of course, think they are wrong. I think that by sidelining social criticism and promoting mindless vocationalism, we are undermining our future. Expunging critical and competent thought from our syllabi is an invitation to disaster, for one day our graduates are going to be required to think quickly and cleverly, and too few will have the competence or the courage to do so. The commodification of education is in line with short-term corporate priorities, but it is toxic to the authentic aims of liberal education, which include self-development and social responsibility.

What is therefore of enduring interest to me is whether anybody cares anymore. As an undergraduate, I was impressed by the self-proclaimed mission of my college. In the obsolete sexist language of the day, it insisted that it wanted to educate “the whole man.” That meant a commitment to aesthetics and athletics, to cultural awareness and social understanding, to comprehending science and applying technology, and to competent communication and robust citizenship. That vision is still valid. It is not easy to reconcile such apparently elitist concerns with democratic, egalitarian values, but it

can be done. I have taught in places where, for a time, it was done.

Times have changed and it is increasingly challenging now that democratic education must confront an ever more consolidated corporate agenda. What can possibly be salvaged and used to form the foundation for a revitalization of liberal education remains a bit of a mystery, but it is clear to me that the specific issues mentioned by Dr. King and Dr. Gaydos are important indicators of toxicity in our larger cultural arrangements. Fragmented educational reform alone cannot cure the pathologies of late capitalism. At best, the promotion of small oases may become noticeable in times of excessive drought. We may hope that happens sooner rather than later.

Meantime, I will simply concur with Dr. King in one more regard. We are amazingly fortunate. We came of age at a time when a transitional educational system was well-funded, massively expanding and was still sorting itself out. It was stimulated by the expressed need for advancement in science, mathematics and engineering. We owed a substantial part of our good fortune to the Russian “Sputnik,” but those who set off the explosion of educational opportunities in the late 1950s and 1960s were not philistines. Many believed as strongly in liberal education as many of their successors do not. That early buoyancy has been dragged down by a legion of ideologues who have tried to objectify, quantify and commodify education and to otherwise turn schooling into a bizarre form of Taylorized educational production.

It may be apocryphal, but I have heard that the Italian dictator Mussolini once reflected that he made a mistake in calling his movement, his party and eventually his government “fascist,” thus seeking to reclaim the imagery of the ancient Roman Empire. He ought, he is alleged to have said, to have called his unique fusion of state authority and business hegemony “corporatism.” Liberal education’s crisis arises from its fundamental opposition to such corporatist education. Unfortunately, “official” education today would be among its greatest supporters.

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