Turning Points

Crises Structural changes in US public higher education

John Protevi
LSU French Studies
LSU Philosophy

http://www.protevi.com/john
http://www.newappsblog.com
Five moments in the history of the American university¹

• Colonial period: the sectarian college
• Mid-19ᵗʰ C: Land grant state universities
• Late-19ᵗʰ C: “German model” research universities
• Mid-20ᵗʰ C: GI Bill / “Golden Age”
• Late-20ᵗʰ C: Neoliberal / “corporate university” / post-welfare state university

The “Golden Age” (1945-75)

• The GI Bill

• Large-scale federal funding of basic research

• The New Deal and the Cold War
The Key(nes) to the Golden Age

• Public education as investment in the future

• Public education as a public good (in a non-technical sense)

• Government as organized expression of community decisions
HE as a public good

- Funding: taxpayer contributions / no user fees
- Widespread economic and social benefits
- Unpredictable innovation
- “Comedy of the commons”
  - Non-zero sum: one plus one = three
  - Shared knowledge base
  - Shared communication means
First Turning Point  
(1975-85)

• The triumph of neo-liberalism  
  – “there is no such thing as society”  
  – “government is not the solution; it’s the problem”

• The denial of education as a public good  
  – Education becomes a commodity  
  – Universities become credentializing agencies  
  – Students become  
    • consumers of services  
    • self-entrepreneurs making a private investment

• A *reductio*: public education is immoral
A Vicious Spiral

- State revenue caps: “Tax revolts” of the 1970s
  - Prop 13: response to demand by Cal Supreme Court for equal state spending in K-12
  - Local property tax differentials and public schools
- State costs rise: prison and Medicaid
- = Cuts in state support for higher education
  - Increases in tuition and fees
  - Resistance to “paying for other people’s kids”
- More cuts / decreased access
- Increased private payoff / increased human capital outlook
- At same time as increased university costs / debt:
  - Student amenities, science bldg construction
Second Turning Point
Corporate University (1985-2008)

• % faculty composition¹
  – 1975: T = 29.0 / TT = 16.1 Total = 45.1 // GS = 20 // FTNT = 10.3 // PT = 24
  – 2012: T = 16.7 / TT = 7.4 Total = 24.1// GS = 19.3 // FTNT = 15.4 // PT = 41.3

• Growth of administration (1987-2007)²
  – 17.6% faculty increase relative to enrollment
  – 35% management increase relative to enrollment

• Student work³
  – 78% of college students now work
  – 25% work full-time

• Debt⁴
  – Mean UG student debt: @ $25K (for students w/ any loans at all)

(1) 2013 AAUP Contingent Faculty Index
(3) American Council on Education Brief, May 2006
(4) College Board, Trends in Student Aid 2008, p. 5 (loans) / Sallie Mae, Student use of credit cards (2009) (credit cards)
Trends in Instructional Staff, 1975-2011

Third Turning Point:
The austerity university (2009-)

• Accelerations and innovations: quantify everything!
• Internal University structure
  – RCM: atomization to spur competition
  – Hidden cost-shifting: sponsored research loses money
• Debt as social control
• Privatizing services: selling access to students
• Universities: tax dodges for diversified entities
  – Harvard and its endowment
  – UC: real estate, defense, biotech, hospitals: Napolitano!
  – Temple as cautionary tale: bond ratings!
More turning points?
Neo-liberalism

• Political economy / public policy
  – We cannot argue for the ivory tower
  – We must make an economic argument
  – Education as communal investment / public good

• K-24: Canaries in each other’s coal mine?
  – K-12: Common Core, testing, vouchers, charters
  – HE: precarious labor
Corporate / austerity university

• Restore collegiality?
  • Do we want faculty governance?
  • Will we settle for “shared governance”?

• Collective bargaining?
  • TT and contingent faculty together
  • Graduate students must organize as well
  • And why not undergrad student workers too?

• Calling the administration’s bluff
  – Nealon, “Assoc Vice-Provost in Grey Flannel Suit”
  – Bring in the MBAs and let’s do a productivity study
  – The corporations of the 2000s vs those of the 1950s
MOOCs

• Bad solution to real problem of one-to-many mass lectures: replace with stars, TAs, student groups

• Putting students to work:
  – Data capture leading to learning software
  – Soft skills and headhunters
  – UG student graders

• Monitoring faculty-student interaction

• De-skilling / standardization of curriculum via quantifiable (or at least “measurable”) assessment = proletarianization

• Tie-in w/ general quantification of productivity
  – Research: number of pubs x impact factor = score
  – Teaching: SCHs per FTE
Personal decisions
Sectors of the job system

• You’re not preparing for “the” job market
• You’re already part of paid instruction system
• So competition in the TT sector includes not just your cohort, but all contingent labor
  – Graduate student TAs
  – “Just-in-time” hired adjuncts (MA or PhD)
  – Yearly contracted instructors, post-docs, VAPs
  – Multi-year Instructors
  – And TT Asst Profs (very little legal recourse pre-6th year and not much really at 6th year)
  – And tenured profs (in certain conditions)
• As well as tenured profs
Why is there still a TT sector?

• Given the lower costs of contingent labor for SCH production
  • Salary, obviously
  • But also “flexibility” (= low exposure to benefit cost increases)

• Why is there still anything left?
  • Appeal to UG students and parents
  • Appeal to grad students
BGN or “alt-ac” markets

• BGN = business, government, non-profits
• What are your skills?
• When should you prepare for these markets?
• Career turning points:
  – Entering grad school: MA vs PhD
  – Staying in grad school
  – Preparing for worst: How long as adjunct?
• Principles: risk / reward; opportunity cost; psychic wage
Resources

• Critical resources: Chris Newfield, Bob Meister, Aaron Bady, Marc Bousquet, Michelle Massé, Michael Bérubé

• Factual resources: AAUP

• Action resources:
  – studentdebtcrisis.org / edu-factory.org
  – NewFacultyMajority.info / adjunct.chronicle.com

• Alt-ac resources:
  – MLA > APA?
  – #altac #postac
  – ACLS Public Fellows / Praxis Network / Wilson
  – PMF / FSOT / CSE