



# Whither the University's Soul?

by Mark J. Drozdowski

## Books Reviewed:

***Buying In or Selling Out?: The Commercialization of the American Research University.***  
by Donald G. Stein, ed. New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 2004.

***Academic Capitalism and the New Economy: Markets, State, and Higher Education.***  
by Sheila Slaughter and Gary Rhoades. Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2004.

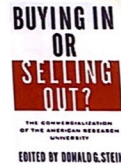
***Shakespeare, Einstein, and the Bottom Line: The Marketing of Higher Education.***  
by David L. Kirp. Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2003.

Welcome to the new age of Universities, Inc., when knowledge is a commodity to be packaged and marketed, professors seek only opportunities for personal financial gain, and institutions sell their brands and intellectual capital to the highest bidders. Unbridled capitalism and the lure of the market economy rule, while the education of students suffers. Universities, Inc., you see, values profits, not prophets.

Chronicling this seemingly dire but certainly dyspeptic phenomenon has become a bit of a fad given the spate of new books on the topic. In *Buying in or Selling Out?: The Commercialization of the American Research University*, Donald G. Stein, a professor of emergency medicine and neurology at Emory University School of Medicine and a former provost, offers a collection of essays by presidents and policy analysts. As the title suggests, these essays examine the uneasy commingling of university research and corporate sponsorships.

Stein sets the tone in his opening chapter. When faculty accept corporate funding for research, he notes, their contracts often prohibit them from sharing results with the scientific community. Corporations, in other words, may own the intellectual property, or at least have first dibs on it. Academic freedom and the unfettered pursuit of knowledge for the common good take a back seat to the filling of cor-

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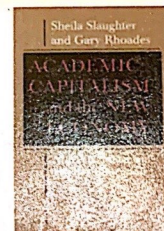
porate coffers and pecuniary rewards for the faculty. "Every professor involved in basic research or scholarship," Stein writes, "eventually has to recognize that he or she is part scholar, part salesperson."

Driven by—let's just say it: greed—faculty pursue research with the most potential for corporate sponsorship and technology transfer, and universities pursue faculty working in those disciplines, offering reduced course loads as an incentive. Professors who successfully attract corporate funds can effectively buy off their teaching to the point that they never have to see an undergraduate or participate in the day-to-day activities of college life. And who is left to do the teaching? Adjunct faculty, of course.

Subsequent chapters echo similar themes. Murray Sperber charts the rise of "Nike schools," such as UNC-Chapel Hill, and bemoans the tainting of the college game. Former Harvard president Derek Bok (whose own book *Universities in the Marketplace: The Commercialization of Higher Education* sheds even more light on the subject) admits that "money is not the root of all evil on university campuses" but concludes that "the costs of increased commercialization seem greater than the benefits." Another former president, James Duderstadt, who led Michigan, sums up the book's argument nicely. "We live in an age in which knowledge has become central to economic activities," he contends. "As the source of much of that knowledge, universities are increasingly subject to powerful market forces."

Truth be told, many of the essays make the same arguments and present similar information. For example, several offer lengthy discussions of the Bayh-Dole Act of 1980, which gave universities the right to pursue patents and commercial gains resulting from federally-sponsored research. While that legislation was certainly a key factor in the rise of tech transfer, we don't need to rehash it in every chapter. What's more, some claims seem to minimize the scope of these arguments. We're told that private industry provides

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less than seven percent of support for campus-based research and that few institutions have realized significant windfall: from these partnerships. So we're talking about a relative handful of cases, albeit high-profile ones at marquee institutions. Most of higher education isn't involved in such activity.

For a broader picture of market influences on college of all stripes, consider *Academic Capitalism and the New Economy: Markets, State, and Higher Education*, by Sheila Slaughter and Gary Rhoades, professors of higher education at the University of Arizona. This tome presents the author's thesis of the "academic capitalist knowledge/learning regime" in which "knowledge is now conceived of as raw material that can be legally protected and packaged as products, processes, and services to be sold on the open market. Insidious forces are at work, say the authors, and "marketing is transforming higher education from a site of educational activity and processes to a site of consumption of various, largely nonacademic services."

Everyone seems to be affected, not just science and er

**ACADEMIC SHARECROPPERS:  
Exploitation of Adjunct Faculty  
and the Higher Education System**  
by Wendell V. Fountain, D.B.A.

The definitive book on the moral and ethical failures of American's leaders and administrators of the higher education industry. Dr. Fountain, an "academic sharecropper" of nearly three decades has taught at all levels of higher education. He tells it like it really is! He calls for a societal response to the egregious exploitation which goes on every day in higher education. The book addresses the greediness of "big business" education relative to economic impact, research, grants, patents, sports, and more. The author discusses the *power, politics and pettiness* of the system as he provides many insightful, real-world examples and personal experiences. Parents, students and the general public---caveat emptor!

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gineering departments, and not just research universities. Faculty across all disciplines are bundling course content for commercial purposes, selling their wares via distance learning avenues. In this intellectual arms race, departments have become cost centers pitted against each other in a "cut-throat and cannibalistic competition for internal university resources." Even community colleges have joined the fray, creating industry-specific courses and programs to serve local business interests.

Competing successfully in this winner-take-all blood sport requires protecting and promoting your brand. Nowhere is this more apparent than in college athletics, where football and basketball programs, in particular, are co-branding with Nike and Adidas, where "student-athletes" become pawns for universities to exploit, and where selling apparel featuring logos and mascots has exploded into a billion-dollar industry.

So what's the problem with taking advantage of market opportunities? Why not make a few bucks on the side to enhance the academic enterprise? Why not do everything possible to strengthen your brand using whatever means possible, even resorting to fudging statistics to climb another rung in the annual *U.S. News and World Report* rankings? Well, if these ends require shifting financial aid policies to favor merit over need, in an effort to recruit "better" and full-paying students at the expense of diversity and mobility; if they require investing in "services and facilities that are aimed as much or more at attracting applicants than at educating them," and if they require increasing expenditures for administration while decreasing expenditures for instruction, then who really wins?

The authors make a convincing case, though the book is difficult to plow through. The writing borders on opaque, with ponderous prose, and jargon littering the pages. Some of the diagrams resemble the result of a failed Jenga maneuver. To be fair, the book was published by a university press, so it's ostensibly targeting an academic audience used to such presentations.

A far more engaging treatise (also published by a university press) is David L. Kirp's *Shakespeare, Einstein, and the Bottom Line: The Marketing of Higher Education*. Kirp, a professor of public policy at Berkeley, presents a series of vignettes demonstrating the extent to which market forces have poisoned the academy. "Dollars have always greased the wheels of American higher education," Kirp writes. "What is new, and troubling, is the raw power that money directly exerts over so many aspects of higher education." Entrepreneurial ambition, once regarded as a necessary evil, has become a virtue.

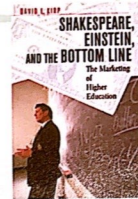
Case studies, carefully researched and insightful, highlight the book. Kirp takes us on a journey to Beaver College, which changed its name to Arcadia University to avoid further embarrassment and recruit more students. We visit the University of Chicago, where financial difficulties during the

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1990s forced controversial president Hugo Sonnenschein to increase the undergraduate population, concoct money-making master's degree programs, cut the beloved core curriculum and promote the college as "fun." We check in on New York University, which spent millions of dollars recruiting "star" faculty and buffing its reputation seemingly overnight (never mind that, because stars don't descend Mount Olympus to teach undergraduates; adjuncts teach 70 percent of the classes). We get a backstage pass at the Darden Graduate School of Business, now a private enclave of the University of Virginia, where cash-cow executive programs are underwriting posh facilities while the rest of Jefferson's village crumbles. We see failed distance-learning ventures such as Columbia's Fathom project and Open University's \$10 million attempt to invade the American market. And we see growing competition in the form of DeVry University and its sister institutions, proprietary predators eager to gobble up niche markets.

In all cases, we witness the triumph of the private over the public good and the steady weakening of the educational product. "The argument," Kirp writes, "sets advocates of greater reliance on the market, with its promise of increased efficiency and productivity, against defenders of the community of scholars, with its promise of discovering, sharing and transmitting knowledge." We can guess who's winning that battle. With the market dictating what colleges teach, what might happen to fields with less cachet? Will sociology and comparative literature become the "dead languages of the new millennium?" And what of the classroom experience, now dominated by adjunct faculty, whom Kirp calls the "academic equivalent of temp agency fill-ins or day laborers?" Kirp isn't condemning adjuncts *per se*, but rather the result of their increasing prevalence on cam-

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pus. "In the name of the bottom line," he suggests, "the institution sacrifices faculty loyalty, undermining its academic culture in the process."

To be sure, these issues are hardly new. Kirp's history lessons confirm that. He gives us Abraham Flexner's 1928 assessment of Columbia, which had initiated correspondence courses and had "abandoned [its] unique and essential function of disinterested critical and creative inquiry [and] thoughtlessly and excessively catered to fleeting, transient and immediate demands." Such sentiments could apply to most institutions today. And he quotes Robert Maynard Hutchins, architect of the University of Chicago's intellectual tradition.

"When an institution determines to do something in order to get money," Hutchins warned, "it must lose its soul." What, we're left asking ourselves, remains of that soul today?!