Preface

A Place of Profits: The University's New Market Orientation

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Things are different at the University of Alaska Anchorage (UAA) these days. The enrollment service officers greet students in white-collared uniforms, the IT help desk technicians call themselves "customer service representatives," and the sports cage attendants answer the telephone, "Wells Fargo Sports Complex, how may I help you?" In a remote place where the trends of the Lower 48 are sometimes slow to take hold, the new commercial thrust of higher education has apparently wasted no time in establishing roots. The new uniforms, the new monikers, and the new corporate sponsors mark an all-too-recognizable shift in the way business is being done at UAA. Not unlike schools elsewhere, the University of Alaska Anchorage, it would seem, is sporting a new market orientation.

UAA administrators, of course, are careful to tout "student success" and "quality of learning" in place of offensive commercial aphorisms; however, their rhetoric masks very little. In areas beyond a set of new white uniforms, evidence of UAA's strategic corporate impulse mounts. Perhaps most telling is a formal white paper distributed to campus faculty and staff less than a year ago, a document in which Chancellor Lee Gorsuch announced the university's adoption of an outcomes-based budgeting system. While new to Alaska, outcomes-based budgeting is not new to other publicly funded universities. Referred to variously as "performance funding," "performance-based financing," and "budgeting for outputs," outcomes-based budgeting means linking money to results: if a department or program meets a set of pre-defined performance goals, then that group is rewarded with ongoing budget allocations. If not, then those allocations (and eventually those programs) are cut. The funding model, in theory, is designed to assist universities in a) becoming more "efficient" and b) delivering a higher quality of education. To date, more than 36 states have bought into this idea, and although few of their schools have been able to show any productive gains (even the South Carolina state university system, a highly publicized example, has conceded their program's failure), the system's popularity among school administrators and state lawmakers continues to grow (Schmidt 20).

The problem with this trend, of course, is that funding for results is a distinctly corporate model of financing, one that works best in private sector areas (such as service and manufacturing) where performance and outcomes are easily measured. Assessing outcomes in educational institutions is a much more complicated task. Not only is it difficult for universities—typically characterized by a range of interests, goals, and functions—to articulate an agreed-upon set of ten to fifteen institutional "performance indicators" (a necessary first step toward a workable plan, under this funding scheme), but it is also difficult for universities to assess the extent to which those indicators have been met. As David Hopkins concludes in a broad study of the "production function" of higher education, calculating learning is simply not as quantifiable as legislators and tax-payers would like to think: "Unless and until educational psychologists can reduce the learning process to quantitative terms with a high degree of accuracy, efforts by economists [to tie inputs to outputs] will remain largely empty exercises in statistical manipulation" (30).

Hopkins' observations would be instructive here if "quality learning" were the desired outcome of this kind of funding model, but sadly it is not. The grand subterfuge of outcomes-based budgeting is that "quality learning" is not the objective at all. "Quality" in the context of funding for results means increased productivity, increased enrollments, and increased "efficiency." It means focusing on programs that come with heavy head-counts and getting rid of others that do not. It means, in short, streamlining education for increased profits. As Bill Readings warns us, the keywords of outcomes-based budgeting—words such as "excellence," "quality," "accountability," and "efficiency"—are mere mechanisms for introducing capitalist practices into the system of higher education (36). "Accountability," Readings asserts, "is a synonym for *accounting*" (32, emphasis added). In other words, accountability is a pretext for bringing tax-dollar institutions under the ideologies and practices of the free market system.[1]

The case of the University of Alaska bears out this reality. The Chancellor's white paper announcing the move towards an outcomes-based budgeting system notably lists only one performance indicator thus far. Under the heading "Goal: Student Success/Educational Quality" the plan reads, "Increase the number of student credit hours taken at each MAU [main campus] by 5%, 3%, and 3% over the next three years respectively" ("Outcomes-Based Budgeting" Appendix A). Not everyone would agree that the measure of "student success/educational quality" is a 5% increase in year-end enrollments, but such is the corporate logic of this kind of funding model. As Peter Hubner and Einhard Rau conclude in a survey of faculty and administrators laboring under an outcomes-based budgeting model, "Those who accept performance budgeting strongly support the idea of the University as being ruled by economic norms[,] cost-benefiting orientation, the introduction of modern managerial methods, . . . and the perception of students as clients" (83-84). Unfortunately, even those who do not subscribe to this corporate philosophy find the objectives of outcomes-based budgeting increasingly persuasive. At UAA, for example, where some administrators have resisted pressures to increase productivity at the cost of learning, the threat of slashed funding for missed goals is beginning to alter priorities. When faced with the mandate to increase enrollments this year by 5%, the Associate Dean of the College of Arts and Sciences privately expressed an interest in doubling the enrollment caps of several notoriously poor distance education courses, ignoring the fact that his office had lowered the same caps less than six months earlier because of valid concerns over poor course quality.[2]

The example of UAA is not unique. With or without outcomes-based budgeting, universities across the nation are feeling pressure to compete as corporations, and most are giving in. By now, the horror stories are well-known: campus structures built through corporate sponsors; university presidents and top administrators sporting the titles "CEO" and "CIO"; professorships shamelessly branded with product advertising (e.g., Yahoo Professor of Computer Science); commercial portal systems delivering core student services in exchange for free campus advertising and free student information; sky-rocketing sales of "just in time" degrees through unaccredited virtual universities; curriculum takeovers through "course-in-a-box" content sold by major book publishers; increased student internship contracts with businesses in search of cheap labor; surges in research partnerships with for-profit companies; trends to abolish "need-blind" admissions at private institutions; substitutions of top-down managerial tactics in place of faculty governance; and the list goes on and on.[3]

Admittedly, the sale of the campus commons to the local Wal-Mart is a disturbing assault on the cultural, political, and economic autonomy of the university. Perhaps the most egregious trend to emerge from the commercialization of higher education, however, is something far less visible—less visible not because it is hidden, but rather because it is so widespread: the use of adjunct, part-time, and graduate student labor to teach university students. Although the practice of staffing college courses with non-tenure track professors is not something new, the increased frequency with which the practice is used and the increased normalization that surrounds its use are cause for great concern. According to some estimates, graduate students, adjuncts, and term appointees provide instruction for roughly 65% of all undergraduate courses nationwide (Nelson, "Our Campuses" 30). Others estimate the number to be much higher. The reason for such heavy reliance on contingent labor, of course, is no secret. Full-time, tenure-track positions are expensive, and college administrators, eager to cut costs and turn a profit in today's competitive educational market, know there is money to be made by hiring instructors to teach the same courses as full-timers, but for significantly less pay. How much less pay? While the average salary per course for a part-time instructor hovers around a paltry $3000 (Smallwood 10), some schools compensate adjuncts as little as $800 per course (Nelson, "Moving River Barges" 197). Both ends of the spectrum are equally appalling. Instructors and graduate TA's carrying a full course load frequently fail to make a living that falls above the poverty line. Even worse, they labor in conditions that often include no job security, no health benefits, no retirement plan, no professional development opportunities, no institutional support services (e.g., campus mailbox, copy machine access, office space, parking pass, etc.), no voice or vote in departmental politics, and no respect among campus administrators and tenure-track colleagues. The exploitation of these teachers is so great, in fact, that it has prompted one member of the California Part-Time Faculty Association to characterize the unchallenged prejudice toward and mal-treatment of part-time instructors as follows: "It's like a kind of blindness that could be compared to white racists in the South in the 1950s" (qtd. in Smallwood 10).

Increasingly, the plight of the university's new "migrant worker" (to borrow a phrase from Cary Nelson) is being discussed on a national level, and movements to organize and unionize are gaining steady ground. The purpose of this issue is to contribute to that momentum. Specifically, the essays in this volume make visible the story of exploited labor that subtends the entrepreneurial activities of higher education today. Playing off the ideas and the published work of labor activist and scholar Marc Bousquet, the essays of this volume collectively expose and challenge the capitalist logic behind new forms of exploitive labor within institutions of higher learning—most notably student labor, adjunct labor, and other forms of temporary and/or part time labor. Additionally, these essays provide important insights into the altered terrain of today's academic workplace, covering topics such as how the profit motive of higher education newly manifests itself; where that new orientation gets its strength; how that orientation imperils not only the possibility for just labor conditions but also the overall educational mission of the university; what is being done to oppose the new managerial priorities and strategies brought to bear on faculty, programs, and curricula in this transformed space; and what further tactics might be deployed—both inside and outside the classroom—to resist the efforts of lawmakers, administrators, corporate donors, and even department chairs to establish the dollar as the bottom line in higher education. In short, the contributors to this volume represent emergent forms of solidarity for collective bargaining, joining theory and activism, whereby students and instructors can begin to challenge the role of capital accumulation in shaping the objectives and practices of our institutions of learning.

Implicit in this volume is the idea that the students and faculty at the University of Alaska Anchorage are not powerless against the outcomes-based budgeting system recently imposed on them, nor are they powerless against the corporate ideology that underwrites both that decision and many others implemented at UAA over the past few years. The extent to which they will be able to exert effective resistance against such changes, however, will depend upon more than just their ability to see a corporate budgeting plan as inimical to the goal of quality education. They will also need to understand that the mandate of a 5% enrollment increase, the commercial takeover of a campus sports complex, the emerging institutional rhetoric equating "student" with "customer," and the growing use of adjunct, part-time, and graduate student labor to staff college courses are all part of the same problem: the problem of making the university, first and foremost, a place of profits.

That lesson, of course, is a lesson for everyone. No institution of higher learning in North America—public or private, four-year or two-year, rural or urban, large or small—operates outside the mandates of today's global service economy. The course staffing records of all colleges and universities reflect that fact. And so while it is easy for some administrators to sneer at the "trumped up" grievances of non-tenure track instructors, and while it is easy for them to deny the money connection between revenue goals and ill-compensated labor, we need only be reminded of the words of New York University Dean Ann Marcus to set the record straight: in an internal email outlining the School of Education's hiring recommendations for adjunct instructors, Marcus writes: "We need people we can abuse, exploit and then turn loose" (qtd. in Benjamin, Kavanagh, and Mattson i). The fact that the dean of a large and well-respected institution feels emboldened to articulate such a deplorable hiring strategy tells us much about the broad acceptance of that strategy to begin with. Although she is not, we can assume, telling her intended audience anything new, the unvarnished candor with which she writes certainly tells *us* something new. It tells us that universities are increasingly unapologetic about conscientiously engaging in exploitative labor practices; it tells us that they are increasingly unapologetic about putting money before learning; and it tells us that they are increasingly unapologetic about serving a corrupt code of ethics. Such cavalier behavior cannot go unanswered. It is one thing to behave badly, but it is quite another to behave badly with impunity. This volume urges us to demand redress in that regard.

Notes

[1]In their comprehensive review of universities that have already adopted an outcomes-based funding model, Burke, Modarresi, and Serban admit to seeing a preponderance of university performance indicators that "suggest more emphasis on efficiency than quality" (21). This detail leads them to make at least one rather obvious recommendation to university administrators in their "how to" section

on the steps to setting up a "stable" performance-based funding program: "All public programs should incorporate both quality and efficiency, but the fundamental importance of pursuing quality in higher education institutions gives it priority" (21). The necessity of spelling out the fact that "quality" should take precedence over "efficiency" in higher education allows us to assume that this hierarchy of values is not the starting position of most university administrators.

[2]Interestingly enough, UAA's College of Arts and Sciences did in fact meet—and exceed—their goal of a 5% enrollment increase this year. At a recent meeting to discuss staffing, however, the dean found himself in the awkward position of having to apologize for increasing enrollments by "only" 6.3%. Under the new funding model, it turns out, CAS receives nothing for attaining its goal; it only receives additional budget allocations for each percent *above and beyond* the mandated 5% baseline, thus prompting the dean to lament a successful yet ultimately unprofitable jump in CAS course enrollments. Not surprisingly, he is determined to see even larger increases in subsequent semesters.

[3]Several studies in the past few years have sounded the alarm about the commercialization of higher education: Stanley Aronowitz's *The Knowledge Factory*; David Noble's *Digital Diploma Mills*; Derek Bok's *Universities in the Marketplace*; Benjamin Johnson, Patrick Kavanagh, and Kevin Mattson's *Steal This University*; David Downing, Claude Mark Hurlbert, and Paula Mathieu's *Beyond English, Inc.*; and Sheila Slaughter and Larry Leslie's *Academic Capitalism*, to name a few.

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