

# TO CONSUME AS WE ARE CONSUMED

The Commodification of Education &  
the Development of Benevolent Purpose

Philip Byers & Dr. Timothy Herrmann  
Thursday, February 3, 2011

# Acknowledgement



- Association for Christians in Student Development  
[ACSD]

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# Compare



- Parker Palmer:

“To teach is to create a space in which obedience to truth is practiced.”

**VS.**

- Education Connection

# What We Do *Not* Mean



- Online delivery is always bad
- Educational Utopia exists
- Money is unimportant

# What We Do Mean



- Every delivery model promotes an implicit *telos*
- Qualitatively & developmentally, online and for-profit models are not equal to residential, liberal arts models
- A model's practicality or, even, necessity does not imply its equality

# Thesis

- ❑ The consumer model of education, in which a degree is to be consumed and manipulated into a more lucrative career, is qualitatively inferior to a conception of education as a transformative public good
- ❑ The consumer model is unable to promote the benevolent purpose which is foundational to the functioning of a civil democracy

# Program Layout



- Context: Is the consumer model salient?
- Literature:
  - Our Students
  - Some External Voices
  - Some Internal Voices
- Practical Application
- Discussion
- Conclusion



# Context

# Context



## In the news: For-Profit Ed

- ❑ Sept. 10 – “Monitoring the For-Profits”
- ❑ Sept. 20 – Quick Take, rewarding Congressional reps
- ❑ Sept. 21 – “Calculating How Much Education Pays”
- ❑ Sept. 24 – Update on the “gainful employment” clause
- ❑ Oct. 21 – State investigation into Florida for-profits
- ❑ Oct. 22 – “For-profit Lobbying Escalates”

# Context



## In the news: For-Profits & Non-Profits

- ❑ Oct. 13 – “Online Colleges as a Policy Bloc”
- ❑ Oct. 13 – “Where For-Profit and Non-Profit Meet”
- ❑ Oct. 19 – “Switching Sectors”
- ❑ Nov. 5 – “The Rise of ‘Edupunk’”
- ❑ Nov. 8 – “Learning from For-Profits”

# Context



- President Obama: Promoting a longer school year.  
Why?
- “UI is a cash cow”: *Daily lowan*, October 1, 2010
- Conclusion: Clearly, for-profit, other online delivery methods, and the general “consumer” model are salient issues in contemporary higher education



# Literature

# Literature: Our Students



## HERI American Freshmen National Norms (2010)

- ❑ Self-rated student mental health at lowest levels since 1985
- ❑ Almost 30% “frequently feel overwhelmed by all they have to do”
- ❑ Close to 10% intend to pursue counseling while in college
- ❑ 66% expect to maintain a “B” average in comparison to less than 27% in 1971

# Literature: Our Students



## HERI American Freshmen National Norms (2010), cont.

- ❑ Since 2007, the number of freshmen believing that “the chief benefit of college is increasing one’s earning power” has risen from 66% to 73%. This is the highest level since 1971.
- ❑ 53% of incoming students rely on loans to finance their education

# Literature: Our Students



## Clydesdale (2007)

- ❑ Only focus: Daily life management
- ❑ College viewed “instrumentally” (p. 3)
- ❑ “Consider the place of education in this moral culture: as a large bureaucracy to be wary of and as the tacit means by which diligent individuals attain individual success” (p. 4)

# Literature: Our Students



## Smith & Snell (2009)

- Very little hope among emerging adults for world change
- Why? One predominant reason is the challenge of becoming financially independent (p. 72)
- Dearth of civic value – the civic world is confusing (p. 289)
- “Almost none have any vision of a common good. Citizenship is not a word to be found on their tongues” (p. 73)

# Literature: External Voices



## Daniel Pink (2010)

- ❑ What does science tell us about human motivation?
- ❑ 3 drives: biological, external, & intrinsic
- ❑ 3 elements: autonomy, mastery, & purpose
- ❑ Effect of “rewards” wears off over time (p. 8)
- ❑ Rewards imply: “in the end, human beings aren’t much different from horses” (p. 19)
- ❑ Anecdotal evidence: the rise of “open source”

# Literature: External Voices



Daniel Pink (2010), cont.

- ❑ “These practices have infiltrated our schools, where we ply our future workforce with iPods, cash, and pizza coupons to ‘incentivize’ them to learn” (p. 9)
- ❑ “We’re bribing students into compliance instead of challenging them into engagement” (p. 174)

# Literature: External Voices



## Frederick Douglass (1845)

- Learning to read would “make him forever unfit to be a slave...From that moment, I understood the pathway from slavery to freedom” (p. 41)

# Literature: Internal Voices



## Freire (from Giroux, 2010)

- ❑ “Instrumentalist” ideologies dominate universities (p. 2)
- ❑ “Freire believed that education...was eminently political because it offered students the conditions for self-reflection and a self-managed life” (p. 2).
- ❑ “...education is a political and moral practice that provides the knowledge, skills, and social relations that enable students to explore the possibilities of what it means to be citizens” (p. 2)

# Literature: Internal Voices



## Garber (1996)

- ❑ Living with meaning and integrity “requires a weaving together of these three strands: convictions, character and community” (p. 37).
- ❑ “Ideas have legs...there [is] always a connection between worldviews and ways of life...there [is] in fact...an integral connection between education and life” (p. 29).

# Literature: Internal Voices



Willimon (1997)

- Character development requires:
  - Time
  - Place
  - Observation
  - Conversation

# Literature: Internal Voices



## Postman (1995)

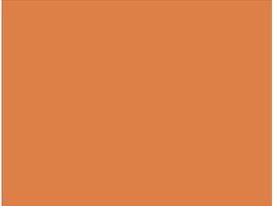
- ❑ “Knowledge is presented as a commodity to be acquired, never as a human struggle to understand, to overcome falsity, to stumble toward the truth” (p. 116).
- ❑ “...though new technologies may be a solution to the learning of ‘subjects,’ they work against the learning of what are called ‘social values,’ including an understanding of democratic processes” (p. 46).

# Literature: Internal Voices



Postman (1995), cont.

- “...while a diminished self-esteem is no small matter, one of the main purposes of public education – it is at the core of a common culture – is the idea that students must esteem something other than self” (p. 77).



# Practical Application

# Practical Application: Institute Themes



## Exploring the *Meaning of Benevolent Purpose*

- ❑ Q: Can an educational model which prioritizes practicality, individuality, and ease of consumption promote a benevolent purpose?

# Practical Application: Institute Themes



## Why Benevolent Purpose is Important: Faust (2009)

- ❑ Recession: Reinforces education as an instrumental good
- ❑ Why so little criticism leading up to the collapse?
- ❑ “...we should remember that colleges and universities are about a great deal more than measurable utility. Unlike perhaps any other institutions in the world, they embrace the long view and nurture the kind of critical perspectives that look far beyond the present.”

# Practical Application: Institute Themes



## Why Benevolent Purpose is Important: Nussbaum (2010)

- ❑ Compare Cornell's David Skorton (Nov. 1, 2010)
- ❑ "Thirsty for national profit, nations, and their systems of education, are heedlessly discarding skills that are needed to keep democracies alive" (p. 2)
- ❑ National political rhetoric equates "things that matter" with "things that prepare for a career" (p. 138)

# Practical Application: Institute Themes



## Why Benevolent Purpose is Important: Nussbaum (2010)

“If we do not insist on the crucial importance of the humanities and the arts, they will drop away, because they do not make money. They only do what is much more precious than that, make a world that is worth living in, people who are able to see other human beings as full people, with thoughts and feelings of their own that deserve respect and empathy, and nations that are able to overcome fear and suspicion in favor of sympathetic and reasoned debate” (p. 143).

# Practical Application: Institute Themes



## The Role of Faculty & Practitioners: Parks Daloz & Daloz Parks (2003)

### □ Mentors...

...foster students' development by "giving them permission to step off the rock of absolute certainty and test the waters of their own minds" (p. 20)

...help students to understand that "to have power, a worthy dream must take into account both our own needs and those of others" (p. 22).

# Practical Application: Institute Themes



## The Role of Faculty & Practitioners: Parks Daloz & Daloz Parks (2003)

- ❑ “As technological change threatens to blind us to all but what is immediately before us, and as we move into an ever more diverse and complex world, it grows daily more urgent that those elders who would be intellectually, ethically, and spiritually alive heed the call of responsible mentorship, seeking not simply to pass on our disciplinary learning, but to embody our wisdom on behalf of the next generations as we pass the torch in this cusp time of both peril and promise” (p. 22)

# Practical Application: Institute Themes



## The Role of Faculty & Practitioners: Pascarella (1997)

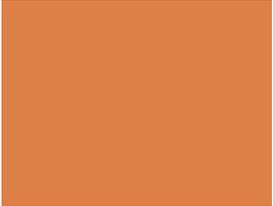
- Principled moral reasoning predicts principled moral behavior. Activities that foster principled moral reasoning:
  - Residential, liberal arts education
  - Exposure to divergent perspectives
  - Community involvement (both predicts and is predicted by)
  - Discussion of controversial moral dilemmas
  - Teaching component skills of principled moral reasoning

# An Alternative to the Consumer *Telos*



## Education as the Pursuit of Freedom

- Revisiting Douglass, Freire, & Postman



# Discussion

# Conclusion



“Education is not properly an industry, and its proper use is not to serve industries...Its proper use is to enable citizens to live lives that are economically, politically, socially, and culturally responsible. This cannot be done by gathering or ‘accessing’ what we now call ‘information’...A proper education enables young people to put their lives in order, which means knowing what things are more important than other things; it means putting first things first.”

-Wendell Berry

# Resources

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