

PRIVATIZATION AND EDUCATION QUALITY

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Research that Matters



The university is becoming a corporation of learning that sets its affairs in order after the pattern of a well-conducted business concern...

There are very few, if any, of the broader principles of management which obtain generally in the commercial field which are not, more or less applicable in the college field, and as far as was discovered, no one of them is now generally observed.

-Morris Cooke, Academic and Industrial Efficiency (1910)



The intrusion of business principles in the universities goes to weaken and retard the pursuit of learning, and therefore to defeat the ends to which a university is maintained.

-Thorstein Veblen, *The Higher Learning in America* (1917)

The challenges and trends highlighted by recent higher education reports are emerging from two very different cultural perspectives -- the **managerial culture of governing boards, corporations and governmental agencies and the **collegial culture** of colleges and universities.**

These cultures are increasingly in conflict and the conflict simply reflects the opposite and at times, antagonistic, values and principles prized by members of each group.

The managerial culture values productivity, efficiency, accountability, hierarchical organizational structures, technical leadership, a customer-orientation and "bottom-line" results.

These qualities are in stark contrast to those valued by the collegial culture which emphasizes autonomy, shared governance, qualitative (as opposed to quantitative) judgments, faculty prerogatives, peer leadership and merit.

-Collaboration and Partnerships, Charles C. Schroeder, Vice Chancellor for Student Affairs, University of Missouri, Columbia, Missouri (2003)

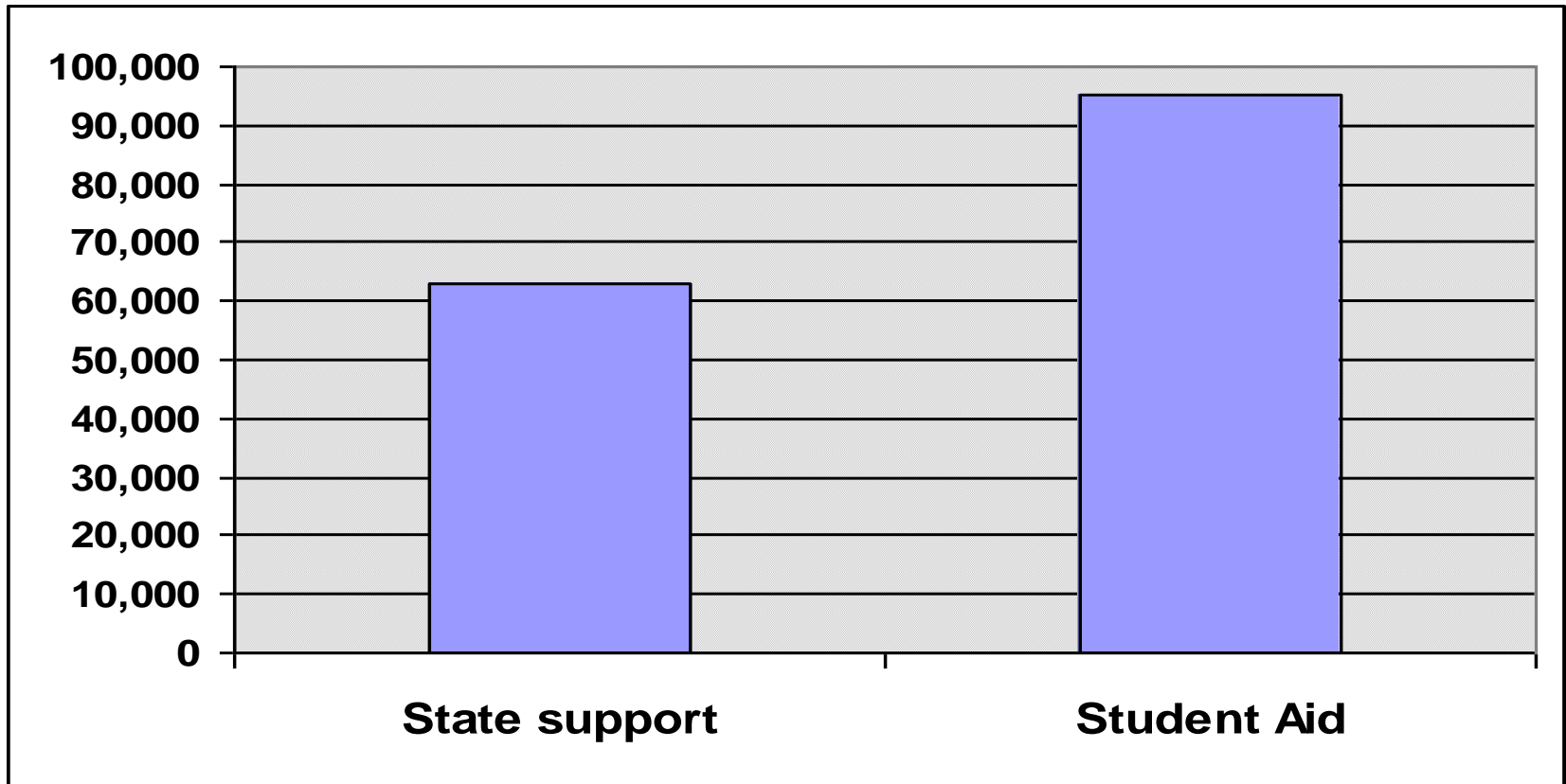
Pressure to Privatize Comes From Several Directions

- Decline in and unpredictability of public funding
- Increasing use of student aid
- Increasing private revenue in public institutions
- Legislative accountability
- Growth of for-profit education

Increasing Use of Student Aid

- Shift from financing institutions to financing students
- Increases market pressures
- Institutions can capture student aid subsidy by raising tuition

Higher Education Finance is Market Driven




Source: IPEDS and College Board

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Growth of Political Accountability

- Political accountability has the potential to change colleges and universities into utilitarian institutions
- Simplifies the complex operations of colleges and universities
- Has little relationship with student learning
- Does not measure student success



In not just conservative political circles but also the business community and the tuition-paying ranks of parents, a new and unmistakably skeptical view of the ivory tower has emerged. With it have come increasing calls for a way to hold colleges and universities accountable for the quality of education delivered to more than 17 million students.

The Philadelphia Inquirer, March 28, 2006

Case Study

Kaplan U. Professors Seek Faculty Union

If they Succeed it would apparently be the first such organization at an online institution

-Chronicle of Higher Education, March 24, 2006

What are the Issues at Kaplan?

- Kaplan enrolls 50,000 online students
- Employs 110 full-time and 1,500 part-time faculty
- Faculty claim they have been intimidated by administrators to inflate student's grades
- Administrators rely too heavily on student evaluation forms, faculty with low-evaluations are not invited to teach again

What are the Issues at Kaplan?

- “The problem with on-line education is that we are admissions driven and revenue driven and not academically driven.”
- “We’re passing students through with high school skills and giving them a college degree.”
- “There are instances where students have plagiarized 10 times and have stayed in the university.”

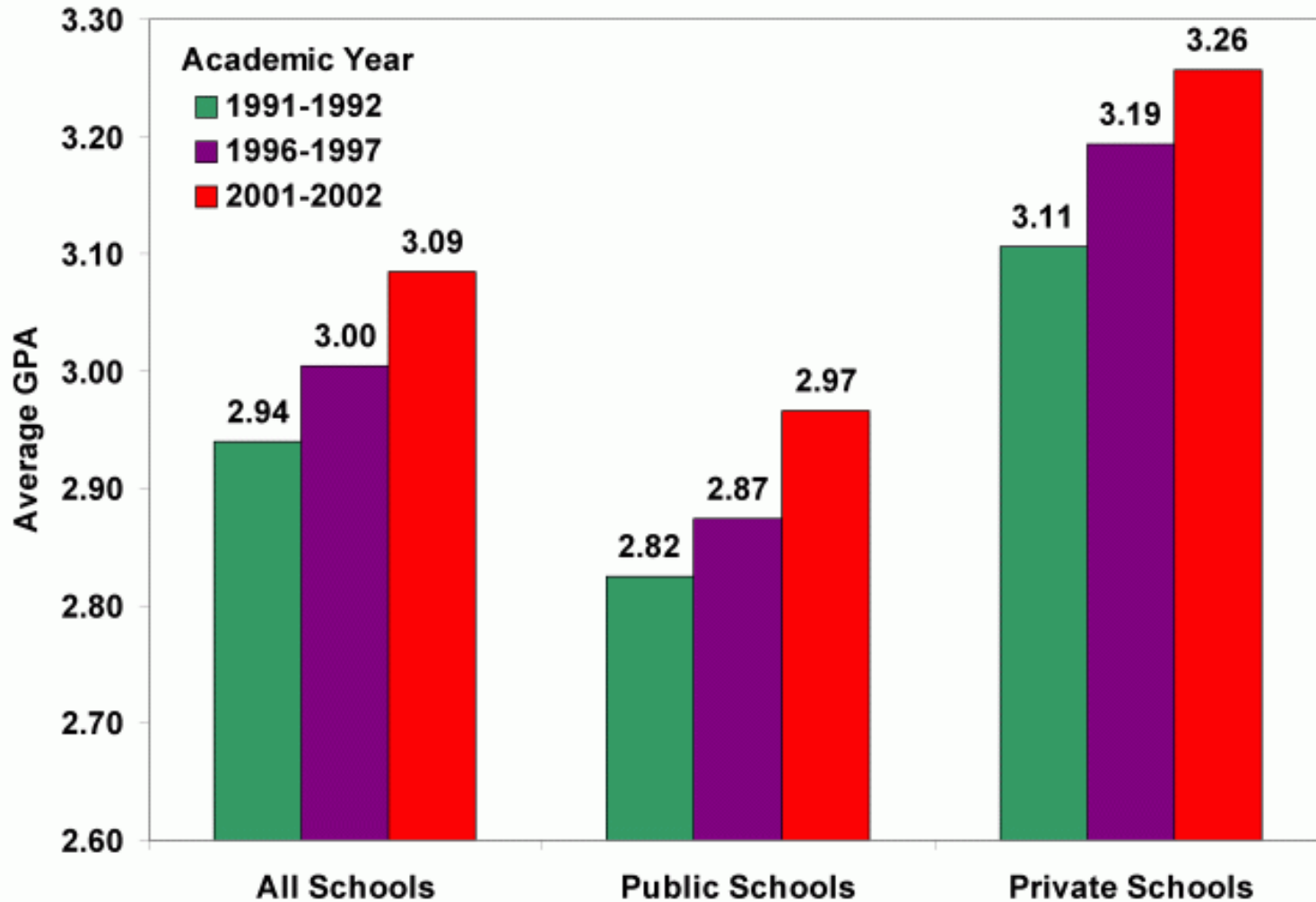
Even Harvard has a Problem


- With the average grade at Harvard rising for the third year, Harvey “C-Minus” Mansfield is adding more A’s to the mix of marks in his notoriously difficult courses.
 - The Kenan professor of government has reinstated his famous two-grade system. Students in the History of Modern Political Philosophy will receive two marks—one in private and one officially submitted to the Office of the Registrar.
 - In Mansfield’s “true and serious” grading system, 5 % of students will receive A’s, and 15 % will receive A-. But Mansfield won’t share those marks with anyone other than his teaching fellows and students.
 - Mansfield’s “ironic” grade—the one that will appear on official transcripts—will follow average grade distribution in the College, with about a quarter of students receiving A’s and another quarter receiving A-.
- Harvard Crimson, Feb. 2006

Incentives to Inflate Grades


- As more state student aid programs take grades into consideration as a condition of eligibility, will faculty members be inclined to give the benefit of the doubt to students on the cusp of eligibility?
- Giving higher grades helps maintain enrollment, which improves funding.
- Improves student's evaluation of teachers.

Recent GPA Trends Nationwide*





The author believes that the resurgence of grade inflation in the 1980s principally was caused by the emergence of a consumer-based culture in higher education. Students are paying more for a product every year, and increasingly they want and get the reward of a good grade for their purchase.



In this culture, professors are not only compelled to grade easier, but also to water down course content.

Both intellectual rigor and grading standards have weakened. This conjecture is based on personal experience and anecdotal evidence. It would be difficult, if not impossible, to prove.

Stuart Rojstaczer, Professor of Geology, Environment & Engineering, Duke University

Students Work Less, Do Better

- These days it seems as if nearly everyone in college is receiving A's, making the Dean's List, or graduating with honors.
- What's more interesting is that college students in general are spending fewer hours studying, while taking more remedial courses and fewer courses in mathematics, history, English, and foreign languages.
- Students everywhere report that they average only 10-15 hours of academic work outside of class per week and are able to attain "B" or better grade-point averages.

-John Merrow

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a research assistant
why can't you?**

Not Everyone Agrees

- Cliff Adelman (U.S. Department of Education), reviewed college transcripts from students who were graduated from high school in 1972, 1982, and 1992, found that there was no significant or linear increase in average grades over that period.
- The average GPA for those three cohorts was 2.70, 2.66, and 2.74, respectively
- The proportion of A's and B's received by students:
 - 58.5 percent in the '70s,
 - 58.9 percent in the '80s, and
 - 58.0 percent in the '90s.

What is the Usefulness of Grades?

- What do grades mean and who uses them to make what decisions?
- With options to drop classes late in the semester without penalty, very few students receive failing grades.
- Do employers use grades when hiring community college graduates, or is it just an internal tool that is useful in the academic community?




Should we try to Standardize Grades?

- Should a college try to set standards across departments as to what each grade represents? Is this possible?
- Should faculty members be limited in the number of A, B grades they can award in a class or is this intruding on the judgment of the individual faculty members?

What are the Issues Locally?

- Do you think grade inflation exists in your college?
- How does the issue present itself in your work?
- Who has responsibility for assuring academic standards?
- Can a community college give lower grades than Harvard?

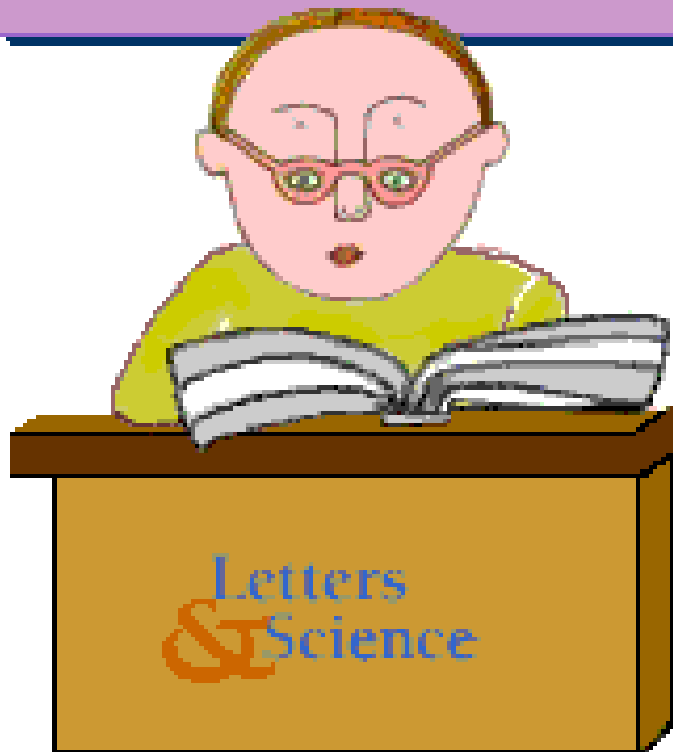


Quality, quality, quality: never waver from it, even when you don't see how you can afford to keep it up. When you compromise, you become a commodity and then you die.”

- Gary Hirshberg, CEO of Stonyfield Farms

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