



Guest Editors' Introduction

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Neoliberalism's impact on our everyday lives, culture, politics, and economy is pervasive and all-encompassing. Higher education is not immune from the totalizing effect of this zeitgeist. This is especially the case given state policy leaders, particularly conservative and neoconservative Republicans, are aggressively disinvesting in higher education. Consequentially, universities are reinventing themselves by giving way to the demands of the marketplace (Giroux 2002) and the inculcation of neoliberalism. Academe, as with all other institutions, now succumbs to an iteration of capitalism that treats all social interactions as business interactions. After all of the shameful capitulations to politics and neoliberalism, administrators are adopting the corporatized businesses' management models and values (Hofstadter 2000). As Giroux (2002: 105) notes, this includes management models with overly ballooned administration and where learning is viewed in terms of "business interests fashioned in the language of debits and credits, analyses, and the bottom line... [where] students are now referred to as 'customers' and 'consumers,' while faculty are now defined less through their scholarship than through their ability to secure funds and grants from foundations, corporations, and other external sources" (Giroux 2002: 105). Held up to the profit standard, universities calibrate supply to demand dictating what "forms of knowledge, pedagogy, and research will be rewarded and legitimated" (Giroux 2002: 110). STEM and other market-friendly departments and academic majors become more highly valued and critical social sciences and humanities continue to be afterthoughts as capital, entrepreneurialism, and practicality rise in political and administrative priority. Kotsko (2018: 44) further argues that whatever "remains of democratic rhetoric is hollowed out into neoliberal buzzwords—consent of the governed becomes stakeholder buy-in, public policy is reduced to the implementation of 'best practices', etc.—and education's promise of self-cultivation and personal growth is replaced with the endless accumulation of human capital." Universities are forced to compete for resources and growth becomes synonymous with "opportunity." Academic labor is now adapted to the capitalist production process where precarious working conditions and a hyper-focus on individual performance further

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fosters the environment of competition (Rikap and Harari-Kermadec 2020). Additionally, the adjunctification of faculty is creating a permanent exploited “underclass” of part-time faculty as institutions move away from tenure-line employment categories. Indeed, “large armies of transient and disposable workers who are in no position to challenge the university’s practices or agitate for ‘democratic rather than monetary goals’” are becoming the default vehicles for content delivery (Biggers 2021). The distinction between public and private institutions is becoming less clear, where corporate interests are part and parcel of higher education. In addition, the persistent systemic violence of corporatized education has brought the student debt levels to a crisis, with students burdened by decades of debt (American Federation of Teachers 2020; Lake 2019). As Lazzarato (2011: 45–46) states, “debt is not only an economic mechanism, it is also a security-state technique of government aimed at reducing the uncertainty of the behavior of the governed. By training the governed to ‘promise’ (to honor their debt) capitalism exercised ‘control over the future.’” In addition to this, as Kotsko (2018: 123) states, student loans “force students to think of their educational choices in financial terms and of themselves as customers.” This indebtedness leads to students performing a market analysis on the costs versus the benefits of an advanced degree. Student loans more generally force most students to delay house purchasing, families, and other life events and choices because of the often devastating debt they take on for official credentialing (Kuperberg and Mazelis 2021). These topics, and more, are the focus of this special issue.

The first article by Winlow, *Beyond Measure: On the Marketization of British Universities, and the Domestication of Academic Criminology*, provides a raw critique and assessment of the march toward a neoliberalized British university system and the decline of core ideals within higher academe as the marketization telos and the pressure to drive change (i.e., continuous push for improvements, assessments, and oversight) becomes all encompassing. Winlow refers to this as “the ‘reversal of ideology’ and the onward march of processes of metricisation, competition and depoliticization.” Within this critique, Winlow turns his attention to criminology, British criminologists and their working lives and careers including the impact of rampantly reproduced commercialization discourse including knowledge production, suggesting that “in an act of institutionalised fetishism, we return time and again to a depressingly familiar list of concepts and frameworks from the twentieth century that simply cannot reveal anything new and important about the way we live now.”

From a Canadian perspective, Muzzatti’s article, *Strange Bedfellows: Austerity and Social Justice at the Neoliberal University*, examines and critiques neoliberalism’s impact and characteristics of Canada’s higher academe from the ethos of corporate managerialism amongst university administrators that is manifested in the intersecting strategies of privatization, monetization, resource reallocation and the subtle regulation of faculty. Wherein corporate branding of lecture series and endowed chairs through advertising blitzes and real-life product placement on campus, one can see that “global capitalism’s tentacles are everywhere.” Muzzatti also critiques how “the neoliberal university’s tactless embrace of corporate values” has manifested “in a number of distasteful ways, not the least of which is cloaking itself in the guise of social justice whilst engaging in all manner of harm in the pursuit of profit.”

Drawing from one year of academic trade press reports, Watermeyer, Raaper and Batala’s piece, *COVID-19: A neoliberal nirvana?* provides an assessment of faculty experience and the impact the pandemic had within the United Kingdom’s neoliberalized higher education sector. Specifically, they provide a window into the extent of the pandemic’s disruption and the degree to which it accelerates the ongoing trends of neoliberalization that are

part and parcel of a “deterioration of academics’ professional (and personal) lives.” They argue that the *pandemic* has elucidated the scale of neoliberalized universities’ market collusion and the evolution of university leaders into dispassionate corporate functionaries. As Winlow also noted, the authors point out how universities, under the sway of market logics, have turned from academic-collegialism to corporate managerialism; “rife among which is a fatalistic discourse of academics ceding rights of critical freedom and autonomy and their capitulation to performative ritualism and neoliberal governmentality.”

Morris and Targ’s article, *The Crisis of Higher Education: Neoliberalism and the Privileging of “innovation” in the Twenty First Century*, is a prime case study of neoliberalism’s constant “push for change” or market-driven innovation including disruptive innovation. They do a great job in connecting the issue of the university precariat and “disruptive innovation.” Given that Purdue University, where both authors are Professors, is viewed as a leading institution of “innovation,” Morris and Targ offer a critical assessment of the “innovative” developments—University Honors College, Cornerstone Integrated Liberal Arts Program and Purdue Global—to demonstrate the broader trends of neoliberalized universities, e.g., administrators’ corporatized decision making, increasing the precariat labor force while decreasing tenure track faculty, obfuscating transparency, toward more and more centralized models of management (micromanagement) and the “death” of those disciplines not viewed as “valuable” within the market-driven logics of higher academe. It is not merely the death of disciplines viewed as non-value, it is also the prioritization and preference of funding of universities athletics.

Collins’ contribution, *Academics versus Athletics? The protection and prioritization of college athletics in an era of neoliberal austerity subject to austerity measures*, provides an in-depth assessment of the enduring commitment of universities to intercollegiate sports (and athletes) while subjecting the academic side of higher academe to austerity measures/policies. This is in spite of the fact that the majority of colleges/universities in the United States athletic programs operate with annual financial losses—in the red. Nonetheless, administrators continue to believe in the “Flutie effect”—“the belief that good athletic performance increases admission applications—many Universities subscribe and promote the notion that intercollegiate sports are instrumental to the improvement of the institutions’ academic mission.” Hence, the value and prioritization of students’ education have become secondary to their college “experience.” With an abundance of examples, Collins also connects the prioritization of athletes and athletic programs with universities and colleges versus victims of rape and sexual assault. There is a general reluctance, if not obfuscation, to hold those accountable for these egregious acts of violence given the “dominance and commercialization of sports” to ensure their competitiveness and “success” as revenue generating sports. Collins states that if “athletics departments programming cuts are made, not based on the competitive success of the athletes, but on neoliberal practices that reduce varsity sports to financial standing” and “are often made in efforts to funnel saved revenue back into football and basketball (big-name coaches, new or upgraded facilities) with the hopes of conference realignment, broadcasting deals, and increased merchandising and ticketing sales.”

The theme of athletics and market-driven forces is also a part of the focus in our (Rothe, Arneklev and Kauzlarich) article, *\$ over Ethics: Higher Education and the Private Prisons Industry, a Symptom of the Theology of Neoliberalism*. We critique the impact of corporate donations on universities, with particular attention to the private prison industry’s intertwinement with higher education, and specifically the relationship between the GEO Group and Florida Atlantic University. We also suggest that the push for corporate “donations” is indicative of how neoliberalized universities have come to serve corporate interests

(community stakeholders) amidst a global field of competitiveness. At Florida Atlantic University, the atrocious relationship between administrators and the GEO Group, one of the two largest private prison industries, is unadulterated and led to what has been coined *Owlcatraz* (2013). As the University made an attempt to make the big jump into NCAA Division I football, they accrued over \$46 million in debt to build a stadium. A solution? Seek out corporate donations regardless of what or who the corporation is. The GEO group offered a solution: a \$6 million donation to have the stadium named after them. While efforts eventually failed, after drawing local and national scorn and ire, one could claim this to be an example of a successful resistance effort (though the University did not choose to end the “gift” offer, it was the GEO Group who wished to prevent more negative attention to their business), yet the financial and political intertwining/relationships have not ceased to date. For us, any acceptance of the private prison industry’s monies, donations, or corporate benevolence is problematic. After all, the sanctity of higher education matters little when the dollars are needed.

Barak’s article, *Debt Relief Reforms are not Enough to Alter the Relations of Inequality and Harm Reproduction: The Case of Educational Debt and the Need for Structural Reconstruction*, critiques the massive debt crisis in the United States with a focus on higher education and student debt that further produces student austerity and socioeconomic inequality inherent in the capitalist system. Barak discusses, save for home mortgages, how student loans—to the tune of 45 million education loans—save home mortgages, is the top source of debt of residents in this country. He states, “this huge figure now exceeds the market value of Boeing, Coca-Cola, General Electric, McDonalds, Starbucks, and Walt Disney combined.” This massive debt leads to additional harms from homelessness, couch surfing to food insecurity. As more and more Universities tout education as an “experience” rather than knowledge and developing critical thought, and push the boundaries for enrollment increases, students become trapped in the debt crisis. Barak then makes the argument that we should be demanding student relief rather than the current situation that results in student distress, impacting marginalized consumers the most.

Taylor’s contribution, *Independent School Rhetoric and its Role in the Neoliberal Construction of Whiteness*, expands the conversations of “neoliberal racial projects” to critique the recreation of whiteness in academe. His focus on independent private schools in the United States that are in essence neoliberalized institutions—explicitly market-driven organizations as is higher academe, and how these independent private schools perpetuate and reify notions of Whiteness. This is achieved, in particular, through an explicitly market-based approach to educational choice in both language and action. Taylor rightly argues that “Neoliberalism and its attendant beliefs about the market, individual control, and meritocracy are existential elements of independent schools and thus any attempt at constructing an inclusive space or decolonizing community will face immediate challenges.”

Summary

We believe, as critical scholars, these topics are critically salient to our field and academe in general. After all, the harms and violence of neoliberalism are changing the landscape of higher education, restricting epistemology, and furthering corporate, bureaucratic, and carceral logic. As such, we should take a stand against and continue to critique and resist higher academe that has become “a public relations-oriented organism that fetishizes a customer satisfaction orientation, premium paying enrolment and the creation of

new faculties...in order to maintain sales volume, as the university teeters in the direction of the growth trap—size for the sake of unsustainable size” (Sakinofsky 2021: 3). After all, “when one advances blindly across the boggy ground of realpolitik, when [market] pragmatism takes up the baton and conducts the orchestra...you can be pretty sure that, as the imperative logic of dishonor will show, there are still, after all, a few more steps to descend” (Saramago 2009: 59). Consequentially, this special issue aims to advance critical approaches to neoliberalism and higher education by providing a rich collection of critically oriented perspectives.

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