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Hire Ed! Deconstructing the Crises in Academe

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How the University Works: Higher Education and the Low-Wage Nation. By Marc Bousquet. New York: New York University Press, 2008. 304 pages. \$70.00 (cloth). \$23.00 (paper).

The Last Professors: The Corporate University and the Fate of the Humanities. By Frank Donoghue. New York: Fordham University Press, 2008. 172 pages. \$70.00 (cloth). \$22.00 (paper).

The Marketplace of Ideas: Reform and Reaction in the American University. By Louis Menand. New York: W. W. Norton, 2010. 176 pages. \$24.95 (cloth). \$14.95 (paper).

No University Is an Island: Saving Academic Freedom. By Cary Nelson. New York: New York University Press, 2010. 288 pages. \$27.95 (cloth).

Unmaking the Public University: The Forty-Year Assault on the Middle Class. By Christopher Newfield. Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2008. 408 pages. \$29.95 (cloth).

Not for Profit: Why Democracy Needs the Humanities. By Martha C. Nussbaum. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2010. 178 pages. \$22.95 (cloth).

A funny thing happened on the way to tenured radicalism. From the 1970s through the 1990s, academic and journalistic accounts of changes in higher education focused, at least in the humanities and social sciences, on contentious debates over critical theory and the “culture wars.” Hot disagreements over feminism, poststructuralism, political correctness, multiculturalism, identity politics, postcolonialism, border and queer studies (to name a few) dominated the headlines and monographs. Meanwhile, and with much less fanfare, a revolution was occurring in campus budgets, management, and the structure

of academic labor, resulting in changes that may have far more lasting effects than any of the innovations in scholarship. The culture wars, argues Christopher Newfield in *Unmaking the Public University*, were actually symptoms of an economic war against the very mission and existence of “the public university,” and a principal target was the institutional position of the “professor.” The *Chronicle of Higher Education* reports that in “just three decades, the proportion of college instructors who are tenured or on the tenure track plummeted: from 57 percent in 1975 to 31 percent in 2007.” Adding in graduate teaching assistants, the number falls to about 25 percent. On most campuses, anywhere from half to three-quarters of all instruction is now carried out by people other than the “professors”: adjuncts, lecturers, part-timers, and teaching assistants. The tenure track remnant has been reduced to middle management, overseeing the teaching staff and collaborating with the administration on ever-more “flexible” arrangements for “delivering instruction.” Why hire a professor for over \$60,000 when you can hire Ed, the unemployed PhD, at a fraction of the cost and without the bother of benefits or of pesky demands to share in the governance of the institution? This decline in the number of tenure-track positions could also effectively thwart the tenured radicals and their agenda for a more progressive curriculum.

The above statistics from the U.S. Department of Education were reported in the *Chronicle* by Robin Wilson under the scare headline “Tenure, RIP.”¹ Wilson’s assessment is shared by a number of scholars reviewed here, and is expressed most pointedly by Frank Donoghue in his title: *The Last Professors*. Wilson’s focus on tenure, however, somewhat distracts, at least rhetorically, from the actual situation, as described so admirably and passionately in Marc Bousquet’s *How the University Works*. The pros and cons of retaining tenure are of less moment than the restructuring of the workforce, which has produced an army of underpaid, exploited teachers working without adequate benefits, offices, supplies, or professional development support even as they conduct the majority of undergraduate education. As in Bousquet’s critique of William Bowen’s notoriously inaccurate prediction of a boom in the so-called job market, the error lies in an “attempt to understand the employment system *as* a system while excluding the largest categories of its working parts” (201). Bowen and others analyze the “job market” in tenure track positions without considering the primary factor in the decline of such positions: the managerial decision to staff ever greater numbers of classes with casual, contingent labor. Nelson puts it succinctly: “we have not in fact overproduced PhDs over the past forty years. We have underproduced appropriate, nonexploitative jobs” (98).

It turns out that the real “postmodern turn” was not theoretical at all. As Newfield’s history suggests, the switch to non–tenure track academic labor is not an end in itself, but one instrument in a larger effort to undermine the progressive social development and egalitarian ideals of higher education in a democratic society. While it may be too late, a growing number of scholars are endeavoring to examine the corporate redesign of higher education, explicate its ideology, demonstrate how it is working, and suggest how it parallels restructuring in other parts of culture and economy, both here and abroad. Some, like Newfield and Martha Nussbaum, are even trying to imagine how “to reconstitute a cultural framework in which the creative activity of individuals and groups would not be subordinated to economic production” (Newfield 46). Others conclude, as does Donoghue, that “the forces conspiring to alter the role of humanities professors for the worse cannot realistically be stemmed” (69). Writes Nelson, “Entirely reversing the thirty-five year nationwide trend toward perma-temping the faculty is not only a huge goal but also almost certainly an impossible one” (103). Given the historically tenuous institutional position of American studies programs, where scholarship often highlights social injustice and critiques the effects of capitalism, these trends in higher education ought to be especially worrisome to readers of *American Quarterly*.

I allude to deconstruction in my subtitle because each of these studies aims to unmask oppressive but occluded structural conditions in the present articulation of higher education systems. For Menand, it is the rhetoric of “professionalization” and its damaging lures. For Bousquet, it is the fiction of the “job market,” which obscures the relentless shift of funding from tenure-line to temporary labor. For Donoghue, it is the very notion of a new “crisis,” since the trends we are examining have been in place for a century. For Nelson, it is the political stakes, on and off campus, in the battle over academic freedom. For Newfield, it is the academy’s routine acceptance of a capitalist ideology that undermines education’s independence and critical power through the misguided adoption of business and financial models. For Nussbaum, it is the fundamental disparity between the values of the marketplace and the democratizing mission of education.

Though their concerns overlap, these writers compose out of particular personal experiences that shape their book’s respective focus. Menand was involved in Harvard’s convoluted attempt to reform its general education curriculum and writes primarily of problems at elite universities. Bousquet became a leader in graduate student unionization in English during the 1990s. Newfield battled the attacks on “political correctness” but eventually got caught

up in the faculty struggle to salvage the University of California. Nelson took on the MLA first and then the AAUP, of which he is now president. Donoghue reports from the inside of a typical campus (Ohio State) caught up in the contradictory pressures of “prestige frenzy” and corporatization. Nussbaum writes of a vision tied to the history of the elite liberal arts college but from an international and feminist perspective developed during her years both as moral philosopher and activist.

Given the pervasive critique of corporate logic among analysts of higher education’s crises, one might have assumed that the title of Louis Menand’s *The Marketplace of Ideas* was intended ironically. Not so. At the outset Menand contends the questions we face “are not, in any significant way, about money” (16), and on his final page he writes that “the world of knowledge production is a marketplace, but it is a very special marketplace, with its own practices, its own values, and its own rules” (158). His criticism of graduate education thus centers on the damage done by excessive professionalization of these values and rules, a phenomenon he does not situate in the larger system of academic labor and management. According to the other authors under review, in contrast, the subjection of “knowledge production” to market ideologies inherently corrupts intellectual research and classroom practice. They cannot imagine how the academic marketplace is “special” or has any of the autonomy Menand attributes to it. Rather, as we shall see, they spend volumes demonstrating just how deeply we may have swallowed this market rhetoric and its practices, and thus how Menand’s complacent use of it so unhelpfully obscures the truth.

Menand is a learned and often keen critic in telling his subtitle’s story, “Reform and Resistance in the American University,” which looks back at the professionalization of the humanities and the tension arising between specialized disciplines and “general education.” (His analysis could be used to argue that interdisciplinary formations such as American studies can play crucial roles in general education curriculums.)² The payoff for Menand’s focus on this tension comes in his analysis of the contradictions ensuing from the increased professionalization of graduate education. He persuasively argues that “non-transferability” is a key indicator of what constitutes professional knowledge. Put another way, when a professional is credentialed, it means he or she can do something that someone without that credential can’t do—so you hire a doctor to remove your appendix, not a lawyer or social worker. Likewise a department hires someone with a PhD in English to teach Shakespeare or Toni Morrison, not someone with a degree in chemistry or dance. It follows, then, that claims for the transferability of skills obtained while pursuing a

PhD should be greeted with great skepticism, as they evade facing up to the wretchedness of the job market and the immiseration of graduate teaching assistants. “No, you probably will never get an academic job,” we say, “but the skills and knowledge you are acquiring will serve you ultimately in getting good employment.” As Menand puts it, “the non-transferability of specialized academic expertise is a jealously guarded feature of the profession” (151n29). You will never need that command of Heidegger’s hermeneutics when you are grant writing for nonprofits, tuning Hollywood scripts, or doing paralegal work. Claims that your “critical thinking” and “research” skills are transferable begs the question of why you would spend ten or more years working on these skills in a PhD program with content you won’t ever use again. Menand puts it bluntly: “If a person wants to analyze stock offerings, he should not waste his time with Joyce. He should go to business school. Or get a job analyzing stock offerings” (151).

Menand comes to the contrarian conclusion that “there should be a lot *more* PhDs, and they should be much easier to get” (154). Efforts to reduce the number of PhDs and make admission and completion more difficult have only exacerbated the ills of hyper-professionalization: more ABDs, more exploitation of teaching assistants, more time spent on publication before graduation, more pressure to give conference papers, more conformity to professional ideologies and standards, more skepticism toward interdisciplinary degrees. If a PhD could be earned, like a degree in law or medicine, by passing a certain number of courses and exams, the results could be revolutionary. But then graduate programs would have to stop selling the PhD as a degree that leads to academic employment as a professor. According to Menand’s own argument, PhD skills and knowledge are “non-transferable” to other careers, so who would want such a degree? Tinkering with individual choices in the market will not, moreover, address the larger systemic issues structuring professionalization’s crises: the decline of tenure, the reliance on temporary academic laborers, and the emergent power of administration, trustees, and legislators over increasingly disempowered faculty.

Marc Bousquet’s “organizational culture approach” in *How the University Works* differs from Menand’s analysis of professionalization by focusing on how and by whom work is administered in higher education. The problems with graduate education Menand bemoans appear to happen like bad weather, and not as the result of decisions made by an increasingly powerful managerial class, which decided to meet expanding enrollments since the 1960s by creating more jobs outside the tenure track. Bousquet robustly critiques the

widely accepted myth that there is an academic “job market” for which we are “producing too many PhDs” for a scarce number of jobs, and that we should fix this problem by reducing admissions and graduation from doctoral programs. This Fordist “supply and demand” logic about the tenure track ignores the larger instructional labor market in which it is enmeshed (190). There are plenty of jobs, just not at the professorial level. Bousquet observes that the massive shift from tenure-line to adjunct and part-time labor belongs to a global phenomenon of “casualization” or “informalization,” in which secure jobs with benefits, living wages, and the protections that come from collective bargaining are replaced with temporary jobs suited to a “flexible” or “just in time” economics in which management faces less restraint in its control over labor. Thus the “disappearance of the professoriate” (71) will not be caused by technology and commodification (distance learning, online classes, courseware, etc.), but by this restructuring of labor. At for-profit universities, the professors and the humanities have already disappeared.

This casualization of academic labor, with its attendant decrease in pay, security, workplace quality, and benefits is not a “natural” result of the objective hand of “the market.” Instead it is a consequence of structural policies intentionally put in place by department chairs, college deans, and university presidents and quietly accepted by the tenured remnant. As Bousquet explains in his excellent chapter “The Rhetoric of ‘Job Market,’” the reification of “the market” “has the effect of legitimating the passive, observational role of the informant; now the profession is a victim of forces beyond its control” (194). The disappearance of professorial jobs, then, resembles the outsourcing of manufacturing work to Mexico or of telephone service work to India. So far most of the outsourcing of teaching has occurred internally, by moving to a two- or three-tier labor staff, though the advent of online and for-profit degree programs shows the potential for a more globalized shift of labor.

Cary Nelson puts these developments in academic labor and management under the heading of “neoliberalism” rather than simply “corporatization.” By using “neoliberalism,” he foregrounds how recasting higher education in terms of marketplace logic belongs to a larger philosophical vision, “an ethic in itself, capable of acting as a guide for all human action” (Paul Treanor, as quoted in Nelson, 60). Neoliberalism describes all human interaction as a response of individuals to the supply and demand of goods (including college admissions or academic research), in which the market provides the sole measure of value and the individual is imagined as making “free choices” on a level playing field. The “invisible hand” of the market is never questioned, nor is the individual

seen as responsible to a collective or public good, nor are the consequences of the market's manipulation by powerful agents and institutions scrutinized. A fundamental tension arises between the academic mission of preparing students to be critical citizens and neoliberalism's demand that they subordinate themselves to the dictates of the market. Obviously neoliberalism has no need or desire for academic research that questions its operation, as such criticism creates "inefficiency" in the market.

A key neoliberal notion, a "market" imagines buyers and sellers exercising their own judgments and preferences with a meaningful degree of agency on both sides. In academic hiring, however, the "sellers"—the degree holders seeking employment—face a market structured by a two-tier economy of scarce tenure-line appointments and abundant part-time temporary work. Both Bousquet and Donoghue argue that the notion of "market" here is invidious because there is really little the seller can do to improve his or her chances. Hyper-professionalization ensues, as the competition persuades graduate students that they must give conference papers, publish articles, get book contracts, review for journals, and learn advanced software. Given the lopsided numbers, padding one's vita this way cannot earn anything but a marginal gain, since the strategy is quickly matched by thousands of other job candidates in a ruthless cycle of increasing expectations. It may even backfire as hiring committees hesitate to appoint someone with too much of a record, since this could make denying them tenure later on difficult. Although "the academic labor system is rigged against them," students succumbing to the market rhetoric of neoliberalism end up taking personal responsibility for what is in fact a structural condition: "If you believe that success or failure is largely up to you, the job search itself becomes an intense personal drama about individual distinction and merit" (Donoghue 37). Market competition also drives students toward grooming themselves for research positions when institutions are increasingly employing part-timers exclusively for teaching instead. Graduate students would do better to prepare themselves for the instructional life, if they want it, and not for the illusory prospect of a research sinecure at Yale or Michigan.

The problem with academic professionalization isn't really its excess, then, but its growing irrelevance. According to Bousquet, the "academic labor system" is "a failed monopoly of professional labor" because "degree holding no longer represents control over who may practice" (23). We tenured faculty pride ourselves on the "excellence" of our programs as admission standards rise, exams become more difficult, dissertations strive to be more like finished books, and graduate students are more like associate professors. "Rigorous" PhD degree

programs are administered according to the model of professional gate keeping, while in the actual labor market such distinctions of degree matter less and less. Ambitious doctoral faculty focus on turning out exquisitely trained specialized researchers for whom there are precious few positions requiring their skills, while campus management hires casual labor based on contingent factors, and with little care for any relation between the dissertation research and the teaching job.³

Bousquet starkly contends that “in many disciplines, for the majority of graduates, the PhD indicates the logical conclusion of an academic career,” its end rather than its beginning (23). Despite years of accomplished teaching at the home institution, the PhD graduate must leave campus, declared ineligible for employment precisely when he or she now holds proof of qualification. The department needs to clear out the graduating class to replace them with cheaper labor (new students earn less as teaching assistants). What lies ahead may be years of poverty-wage adjunct work at multiple institutions, the graduate spending thousands of dollars on an increasingly hopeless “job search” for tenurable employment, until the financial and personal strain finally forces the decision to leave academia completely. For Bousquet, this “waste” is not accidental, but a structural feature of the system. What would happen, he asks, if a PhD program guaranteed employment to all its recently minted graduates until they found tenure-line work elsewhere? Obviously, most would be around forever, and new admissions and new teaching assistantships would disappear, and graduate faculty would have no one to teach.

In *No University Is an Island*, Nelson (also the author of *Manifesto of a Tenured Radical*) argues powerfully that, in debates about tenure and academic freedom we must keep in mind that not only jobs are at stake, but so is the power to determine the future of higher education. “Only a strict adherence to principles of academic freedom,” he stipulates, “can protect the essential role faculty must have in setting policy regarding their fundamental responsibilities, among them shaping the curriculum and hiring other faculty” (11). Professors are granted the privileges of academic freedom only after successfully passing through a system of testing and accreditation. Like any professional, the academic has the right to practice the profession only because of this credentialing, and society relies on the self-regulation of the profession so that we may be confident that persons privileged to be a lawyer or a doctor or an accountant or a professor know what they are doing. Professionalization is inseparable, then, from a respect for expert knowledge and hierarchy, which is one reason expertise has such a contradictory status in American culture and society, where

anti-intellectualism and reductive notions of democracy run rampant. While Menand and Donoghue easily show the dangers of hyper-professionalization, Nelson argues that de-professionalization is the road to serfdom and the gutting of higher education's critical potential.

Reviewing the long history of AAUP's vital work on behalf of academic freedom and the many recent examples of attacks upon that principle, Nelson illustrates how violations of academic freedom usually involve the intrusion of agents from outside the profession's realm of expertise (think administrators, legislators, and boards of trustees). These agents lack the knowledge of the professionals in specific academic fields, and thus are qualified to make only those decisions appropriate to their expertise (rules, procedures, laws). Professionalism also underwrites "shared governance," the principle that only qualified faculty should have responsibility for areas such as curriculum, hiring, degree requirements, and tenure decisions (31). These require expert knowledge. We are back to Menand's observation that professional knowledge is "non-transferable," but to Nelson this is reason for defending, not deconstructing, professionalism. You would no more want your state senator telling your surgeon how to operate on you than you would want that legislator telling a professor what or how to teach, though in practice we see efforts all the time at such undermining of professional knowledge (think legislative intrusions into complex medical decisions around abortion or the outrageous politicization of textbooks by the Texas State Board of Education). Nelson elaborates the principles and practical connections tying together shared governance, academic freedom, and tenure. They constitute a system unthinkable outside the context of professionalization, which, of course, is why many administrators and politicians and self-appointed watchdogs (David Horowitz and Stephen Balch, to name two) want to do away with them by moving more instructional dollars into the appointment of contingent instructors who are excluded from shared governance.

"Tenure is becoming concentrated in elite institutions," observes Nelson, "where it serves elite students and offers faculty elite identities. The world without tenure is more and more the home of the poor, most notably in community colleges" (91). Neoliberalism means an increasing inequality in access to first-rate faculty, as only wealthy students can buy that product, which the decline in tenure has made a scarce commodity. This creation of scarcity then drives up the value of elite degrees, guaranteeing the return on the wealthy student's investment. In higher education we see the same drift toward a two-tier system that we see in K-12 education: public and open access institutions

are defunded, and students with the economic choice migrate to expensive or private campuses. Instead of fostering a common democratic society and culture, higher education becomes yet another tool for social injustice, unequal competition, and economic and racial segregation. This is not to say that teaching at community colleges is essentially inferior, but it is to point out that those faculty face deteriorating pay and working conditions and often are unable to provide their students with the time, research knowledge, physical facilities, academic networking, and contact stability offered by peers at four year campuses.

Bousquet and Nelson both make strong cases that faculty unionization offers the best hope of reversing academic corporatization, safeguarding academic freedom, and ameliorating the exploitation of contingent instructors.⁴ Unionization can be an effective intervention against the rise of corporate management practices in higher education administration. Management's interest is to deliver product at the lowest possible cost, through various programs highlighting "excellence," "quality," "efficiency," "assessment," and so on. The neoliberal system aims to maintain the cheapest labor force, at its most flexible, even if this means that undergraduate students are taught by the least experienced instructors. If faculty are bribed or forced into these efforts, they identify their interests with those of management, even at their own cost and peril. Unionization helps distinguish between the interests of management and labor. Nelson further contends that only unionization can ultimately guarantee the faculty rights of shared governance that the tenure-track wrongly think are unquestionably enshrined in their campus handbooks (ask the many tenure-line faculty fired from campuses in Louisiana after Hurricane Katrina).

There is a tension, however, between professionalization and unionization. Professionalism is nomadic, while unionization is local. Qua "professor of . . .," the faculty member's primary affiliation is to the professional field of study, not the campus where he or she may happen to have an appointment. Traditionally, the PhD is "in the discipline," and the discipline provides peer evaluation of research and publication, organizes the conferences where projects are launched or shared, bestows recognition through reviews and awards, and provides the credentials that qualify the candidate for an appointment in the first place. This continued dominance of "the discipline" as professional institution often makes it more difficult for innovative and interdisciplinary fields, such as American studies, to protect their faculty and programs. Discipline or field notwithstanding, to professionalized faculty, it's not "a job," but a career, with which they identify. Much of the time (at least when there

is money), the only route to a substantial pay raise is through going “on the market” and getting another offer, which leads either to a lucrative counteroffer or to an appointment at another school. The market structure encourages and legitimates this lack of loyalty to the local campus, while at the same time such a move may also be viewed (even punished) as a betrayal. Unionization, in contrast, ties the faculty member’s fate—literally—to the local. The gains won may have national or international influence but have little relevance to the professor’s career within the discipline. Administrators and academic managers recognize this nomadism, with which they must literally negotiate, and it can reinforce their sense that faculty have less investment in, and thus less of a right to a voice about, the governance of the campus. Hence many faculty willingly participate in national scholarly organizations instead, and see these as better vehicles for the advocacy of reform than a local union. They may be wrong, but the structure of professionalism is on their side.

The undermining of tenure, academic freedom, and shared governance belong to the larger story Christopher Newfield calls *The Unmaking of the Public University*, wherein we come to understand how “political correctness” and “the culture wars” framed a renewed effort to thwart social justice after the 1960s: “The assault began in earnest just as the American middle class was starting to become multiracial, and as public universities were moving with increasing speed toward meaningful racial integration” (3). Why? According to Newfield, “the public university was the institution where blue- and white-collar, children of both workers and managers, citizens of every racial background were being invited into a unified majority. As these normally opposed classes came together, they might outnumber and outthink traditional elites,” and so “take over the leadership of society” (4). In his deft rehearsing of the culture wars, from Ronald Reagan’s campaign against the University of California in 1966 through the spate of books on PC in the early 1990s, Newfield argues that the “attacks on PC succeeded through their ability to associate PC with race consciousness, which they in turn described as an internal enemy that challenged national unity” (65). Insofar as the second wave of the civil rights movement focused on achieving “equality of outcomes,” it threatened the economic power of the traditional elite. The nurturing and support by university intellectuals of social movements that critiqued structural inequality—whether based in race, class, gender, or sexual orientation—had to be undone, as it posed a formidable obstacle to the continued expropriation of wage labor in the “new economy,” on and off campus. The transformation of American studies as a field after the 1960s, from vehicle of “consensus” to arena for documenting

and contesting social injustice, rose out of this second wave and so has seen its own institutionalization limited by the attacks on PC and subsequent cutbacks to new programs that do not generate external revenue.

Newfield provides an excellent case study in his chapter on the war against “affirmative action.” Here we witness the imposition of a reductive system of “color-blind meritocracy,” which, in the name of treating all individuals equally, wiped out any substantive ways of actually taking account of each individual’s particular aptitudes, achievements, and talents as seen against the backdrop of their social context. Thus a single SAT score of 800, for example, is said to equally rank two diverse individuals, when in fact one may have attended a school without adequate books, AP classes, or after-school programs, while the other attended an elite suburban school full of advantages. By racializing the discourse on meritocracy, the right wing of the culture wars persuaded middle-class whites that the narrowing of their access to education and jobs was a result of preferences given to people of color, while in fact it was the neoliberal disinvestment in the public sphere itself that was responsible for the decline in opportunities. As Newfield observes of the situation in California, “in the thirty years prior to the 1995 affirmative action debate [over UC admissions policy], a period in which the state population had doubled, the state had not built a single new UC campus” (85). Whereas “in the 1950s, Berkeley accepted the vast majority of in-state students who applied for admission” (85), in 2010 the campus’s acceptance rate was 25.6, with 15.4 percent of African American, American Indian, and Chicano/Latino ancestry.

The American audience has been sold the snake oil of “privatization,” of the superiority of the “business model” over “government bureaucracy,” even as the decades give us one spectacular failure of American business practices after another (Enron, the hedge fund bailouts, the financial collapse of 2008, the BP oil spill, etc.). Newfield crunches the numbers to show, again, that privatization can never replace the core funding for teaching and academic operations at the public university, in part because wealthy donors restrict gifts for targeted expenditures on particular buildings and expensive projects that benefit only a small number of faculty and students. The only guaranteed result of privatization and donor fund-raising is an increase in student tuition and fee charges, because only these can be used to make up for the continuing cuts in general public revenues previously allocated to the university. These tuition increases then alienate the public, which reasonably concludes that the university doesn’t need its tax money if it can pay for itself through such charges (193).

Humanities, arts, and social science faculty, concerned about dwindling resources and enrollments, should be the first to join with students and parents

in protesting constant increases in tuition and fees. The accelerating costs of higher education push more and more students into debt, forcing them into the not-unreasonable position of expecting that their degree will guarantee them a good paying job, since they need it to pay off the expenses of college. Compare this to the situation in the 1960s, when the majority of students at many colleges and universities were full-time students, not workers, who graduated with little or no debt to accompany their degrees. Such students felt little pressure to restrict their majors to those seeming to offer immediate employment, and so, for example, the numbers of English majors reached all-time highs in the early 1970s before declining steadily ever since. Charging students more and more may not be to the economic benefit of humanities, arts, or social science faculty and departments, and may actually be one of the major causes for their decreasing attractiveness to students. The mismatch between college curriculums and the professional employment opportunities of today may explain more, however, about the tenuous future of the humanities and soft social sciences, finally, than do the attacks on PC.

In an assertion whose absolute necessity is only equaled by our shock that this has to be explained, Nelson states: “The university is in general not-for-profit, meaning that it exists to spend money on making citizens, engineers, writers, and the other forms of what is sometimes called ‘human capital’ and that can also be called the creative capability of always-evolving society” (169). In *Not for Profit: Why Democracy Needs the Humanities*, Martha Nussbaum provides a brief but clear vision of an alternative to the doctrines of market capitalism and neoliberalism now undoing higher education in the United States and around the globe. Nussbaum’s target is the dominant rhetoric of “economic growth,” which has come to be the exclusive measure of national well-being and thus the primary focus of educational policy, leading to starvation budgets for the humanities and arts in public schools and decreasing support in higher education. As she did previously in *Cultivating Humanity*, Nussbaum resolutely advocates “education for democracy,” the cultivation of “complete citizens who can think for themselves, criticize tradition, and understand the significance of another person’s sufferings and achievements,” a philosophy grounded in the work of John Dewey (2). When she reminds us that “a strong economy is a means to human ends, not an end in itself,” what startles is not the message—which should be recognized as common sense—but how out of tune it sounds in today’s academic and political culture. The mantra of economic growth and job training excludes, wrongly, the humanities and arts, which “promote a climate of responsible and watchful stewardship and

a culture of creative innovation” (10). Nussbaum’s critique of the ideology of economic growth dovetails with the critique of neoliberalism, in that she shows that economic growth has led to steadily increasing—not decreasing—inequalities of wealth, health, education, and liberty. Neoliberalism promises that economic development provides the individual with the private means to obtain the good things of life, which the state cannot and should not regulate. Nussbaum counters that marketization does not distribute those means fairly or equally. “So producing economic growth does not mean producing democracy” (15). As she delineates in scrutinizing examples from the United States and India, an educational focus on economic growth undermines democracy, debilitating the individual’s capacity for independent thought and shrinking the ability to empathize with others.

Nussbaum’s originality lies in the way she connects an education for democratic citizenship with the psychology of human development, cultural studies of the emotions, analyses of globalization, multiculturalism, and feminist critique: “What is it about human life that makes it so hard to sustain democratic institutions based on equal respect and the equal protection of the laws, and so easy to lapse into hierarchies of various types—or, even worse, projects of violent group animosity?” (28). As the infant and child begin to learn self-autonomy and exercise some control over the environment, emotions of shame and disgust can become associated with the body, with lack of control, with failure to dominate either objects or people—which can lead to seeing people as objects. Constructions of gender, race, and nationality tend to reinforce such anxieties and the reactive oppression they foster, and are strengthened by specific situations—when people are not held accountable, when nobody raises a critical voice, when peer pressure mounts, or when the subordinated are dehumanized and de-individualized. Nussbaum thus puts her emphasis on critical thinking and empathy: the former builds the capacity to independently weigh evidence, judge arguments, and resist the dead hand of authority and tradition; the latter is “the ability to think what it might be like to be in the shoes of a person different from oneself, to be an intelligent reader of that person’s story, and to understand the emotions and wishes and desires that someone so placed might have” (96). So defined, critical thinking and empathy ground the moral life and the maintenance of ethical conduct; without these, democratic society falters and falls; without these, market activity and capital accumulation are free to run amuck, destroying the lives and physical worlds of millions in the process. Neoliberalism reduces the human being to an agent of economic interest for whom the human being, inner

life, needs, and desires of others count for nothing against the measurement of possible profit. The extreme danger of the current trends in education lies in the increasing production of such a being, the purely economic subject. Insofar as the liberal arts and humanistic social sciences—including American studies—can promote a critical and empathic moral subject, and thus someone capable of global citizenship and democratic practice, then they must, argues Nussbaum, remain the core of education, from kindergarten through graduate and professional school.

From its inception, higher education in the United States was justified by and designed in accord with visions of job creation and economic development. Harvard and Yale were established to train men for the ministry; the land-grant colleges and universities were chartered explicitly to underwrite agricultural and mechanical development; the liberal arts colleges were training sites for modern professionals; the community colleges are inherently vocational. So what's new today? The long-standing tension between “practical” and “general” education may be tilting in one direction, as the humanities and arts continue to suffer a decline in majors; some 20 percent of college students today now major in business. No one culprit can be singled out, but the influence of neoliberalism and market ideologies plays a large role, as does the replacement of professional faculty by contingent workers. No one silver bullet can target all the crises. Unionization can help, as can joining AAUP. Defending tenure can help. Advocating for more just wages and work conditions for contingent faculty can help, as can halting tuition inflation. Reimagining a strong core liberal arts curriculum can help. But if faculty employed at the corporate university are completely subordinated to the rank of hired-and-fired employees, at the whim of management, then we will have lost any leverage we have in these struggles. Without tenure there is no shared governance, and without shared governance there is nothing but corporatization.

As middle management, faculty have carried out the policies of deans, provosts, presidents, and chancellors, and felt little capacity to question market rhetoric. We have also been a primary beneficiary of the exploitation of part-time and nontenure ladder job growth. Newfield notes that as “humanities course loads at research universities went from six or eight a year to four or five” in the period after World War II, there appeared an explosion of innovative scholarship (171). True, but the reduction in teaching load seems to have been largely paid for by shifting this labor to temps and teaching assistants. Ironically, that book on Chinese railroad workers or the literature of female domestics may have been subsidized by the exploitation of adjuncts and an

increase in class stratification on campus. Opposing and reversing that trend will likely mean real sacrifices by faculty, who may have to decide to increase our own teaching loads if the proportion of tenurable positions relative to all academic employment is going to rise. Faculty will also have to take control of the mandates for “assessment” that are driving curricular and program changes at many campuses, often under the pressure of exterior evaluations and consequent administration instructions. Academic senates will need to insist on far more oversight in budget planning and allocation, uncovering the mystifying processes that today shroud so much of it in a cloudy weather that no one feels they can affect. Faculty and staff at public universities need to realize that their future depends on staging a long ground game against the strategies of privatization and in favor of a vigorous discourse that reasserts the primary allegiance of the university to the public good and the “cultivation of humanity.” All that, and paper grading too.

Notes

1. Robin Wilson, “Tenure, RIP: What the Vanishing Status Means for the Future of Education,” *Chronicle of Higher Education*, July 4, 2010, A1.
2. Menand shows how “general education” programs arose in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries in resistance to the increasingly specialized character of universities, where departmental emphases were not necessarily related to real-world concerns. Liberal arts education became a critical standpoint from which to question academic and social norms: “Historical and theoretical knowledge,” writes Menand, “which is the kind of knowledge that liberal education disseminates, is knowledge that exposes the contingency of present arrangements. It unearths the a priori buried in present assumptions. . . . It encourages students to think for themselves” (56). The general education course differs from others in the same department by its primary emphasis on critical thinking about disciplines and their assumptions, arrived at in part through historical as well as theoretical critiques of disciplinary formations and their approach to specific issues.
3. This latter disconnect makes sense, of course, since the majority of doctoral programs do not train their graduates in any systematic way to teach their fields of research expertise. In English, those who do hold teaching assistantships mainly teach composition. At least for them, this disconnect turns out to be an unlooked for benefit, since the primary demand for casual labor in English is for composition instructors.
4. Bousquet, however, details how the Supreme Court’s 5–4 ruling in the 1980 *NLRB v. Yeshiva University* case set back unionization by declaring that faculty are essentially part of the managerial system and thus cannot unionize against it (108–13).