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Open the Doors and Windows to the Ivory Towers

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by [Dr. Ronald L. Trowbridge](#)

A firestorm now rages in Texas over transparency and accountability in higher education. Governor Rick Perry and the Texas Public Policy Foundation have encouraged regents to peek inside the ivory towers, and the universities are responding. History argues that we must peek.



Perry wrote on May 13 that “efforts to protect taxpayers and get more results from our schools are not universally welcomed in academia. The attitude of some in the university world is that students and taxpayers should send more and more money, and then just butt out.” He adds, “Four-year graduation rates at Texas institutions of higher education currently average just 28.6 percent.”

Asserts the governor: “The big lie making the rounds in Texas is that elected or appointed officials want to undermine or deemphasize research at our colleges and universities. That disinformation campaign is nothing more than an attempt to shut down an open discussion about ways to improve our state universities and make them more effective, accountable, affordable and transparent.” Such a goal nationwide at all universities would be laudable.

A barn burning study last month from Richard Vedder’s [Center for College Affordability and Productivity](#) revealed that of the more than 4,200 faculty members at the University of Texas at Austin, the 840 most productive faculty members teach an extraordinary 57 percent of student credit hours, while the least productive 840 members teach only 2 percent of student credit hours.

But this disparity is not the greatest abuse.

Rather it is the fact that of the faculty members outside the 20 percent most productive teachers, the average teaching load is 63 students a year. That borders on semi-retirement – research and publications notwithstanding.

Former Harvard dean Harry Lewis writes in *Excellence Without a Soul* that universities have shifted priorities to research first, students second. “The ultimate source of this cultural shift,” he writes, “is the replacement of education by research as the university’s principal function.”

But not all research is valuable. John Silber, former dean at UT-Austin and president of Boston University, recently told the *Texas Tribune* that many products of research “aren’t worth anything.”

Hofstra University law professor Richard Neumann reported at a conference in April that it costs approximately \$100,000 for a tenured law professor to publish one article per year and that 43 percent of law review articles are never cited by anyone. In Neumann’s words, “At least a third of these things have no value.”

World Shakespeare Bibliography reports that from 1980 to mid-2010, there were 39,222 scholarly articles published on Shakespeare. Professors can research and publish anything they wish; it’s a free country. But should they be given reduced teaching loads, at student and taxpayer expense, to publish the 39,223rd article?

Lewis reports that “academic presses now publish books selling fewer than 300 copies,” and he quotes a humanities editor as saying that “the demands of

productivity are leading to the production of much more nonsense.”

Yet former Harvard president Derek Bok reports in *Our Underachieving Colleges* that “fewer than half of all professors publish as much as one article per year.”

A September 2010 issue of *The Economist* reports that “senior professors in Ivy League universities now get sabbaticals every third year rather than every seventh. This year, 20 of Harvard’s history professors will be on leave.” Perhaps one reason universities may not want regents to peek inside the ivory tower is that it’s somewhat empty—with the exception, of course, of adjuncts and young, inexperienced teaching assistants.

When a parent asked then Dartmouth president John Kemeny what the most important question was that parents should ask to determine where to send their children, he responded, “Ask them who teaches the freshmen.” That is generally *not* professors at our elite research universities.

A Pew Research Center study released in May reports that the average college senior now graduates with more than \$23,000 in outstanding loans. *Harper’s* reports that U.S. student-loan debt will reach \$1 trillion by the end of 2011. And the Project on Student Debt reports that since 1978, tuition at U. S. colleges has increased more than 900 percent—sharing similarities with a housing bubble.

Reform will never come from within the university. Bok explains why: “In theory, presidents and deans are supposed to counteract self-interested behavior to make sure that the legitimate needs of students are properly addressed. In practice, however, academic leaders often fail to fulfill this responsibility.”

He elaborates, “Ultimate power over instruction and curriculum rests with the faculty. While leaders have considerable leverage and influence of their own, they are often reluctant to employ these assets for fear of arousing opposition from the faculty that could attract unfavorable publicity, worry potential donors, and even threaten their jobs.”

Regents are entrusted with the statutory authority and fiduciary responsibility to set policy at universities. They are the mediating agent between the university and the public. As such, they should be both cheerleaders and governors. It is entirely fair and appropriate that they examine the relationship between teaching and research—and ask of all research pursuits: how does each serve students or wider societal needs? Regents can then ensure that the best worlds of teaching and research are achieved.

Ronald L. Trowbridge, Ph.D., is a senior fellow at the [Texas Public Policy Foundation](#), a non-profit, free-market research institute based in Austin. Trowbridge formerly served as vice president of Hillsdale College in Michigan.



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[pnipni](#) 127p · 6 hours ago

+18

It's about time we investigate our Universities and their curriculum. They are cranking out little Socialists. We need to change that by keeping this topic high profile! They are accountable to the parents who send their children there.

Reply

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[Petroglyph](#) 125p · 6 hours ago

+20

Sadly, it has become nearly impossible to obtain a good objective college education. What you can obtain is a good sound indoctrination into Communism, Marxism or Socialism.

The teet these people suckle on is raw and withered. Time for a weening.

Reply

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[Missy8s](#) 110p · 6 hours ago

+18

A piece of paper that says you are smart doesn't prove you are smart.

I have hired and fired more worthless college grads in my thirty years in the business world than you can shake a stick at, and I have shaken one or two.

The reality is that many who receive degrees never should have, many who should seek degrees never will and far too many equate a college degree to a guarantee of future employment or success.

No matter how many years you spend in college or the number of degrees you receive nothing will ever replace real world experience in any given field of study.

Trade and vocational schools will always be the best alternative to seeking doctorates in underwater basket weaving or interpretive dance.

If you want to be successful in life take a few years off after high school, get some experience in a job that "interests" you, move out on your own and then go to college when you mature.

The top of the ladder cannot be reached without stepping on its lowest rung, once you learn that lesson you'll be fully prepared to seek a higher education and you can take that to the bank.

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[onecomponer](#) 119p · 6 hours ago

+9

LOL, HE's RUNNING!!! Oh yeah, Gov Goodhair throws his hat in the ring... Why else would he be taking on BIG Education in this manner? More power to him, IMO!

WOW! ... and what an approach, no? Something we've all been saying for-frikken-ever! Sic'em Rick!

As far as his RINO factor, I'm not sure, but there are traces of him aspiring to rise to the level of the ERC (elite ruling class). However given his humble beginnings, I wonder if he could ever be considered by that club. My guess is, NO...

Palin/Perry, 2012...???:-D

I guess we'll see, won't we?

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[Wesley69](#) 107p · 6 hours ago

+7

Research is fine, no argument there. But, teaching loads of fewer than 63 students, I should have skipped high school teaching and become a professor. I'm sure with all that free time I could come up with some dribble for publication that will be purchased by 300 or less people.

Add to that the indoctrination of college students in liberal-marxian tenets and the punishment of free expression and one can make the case for extreme reform at our institutions of conformity, I mean, higher learning.

I offered \$100 dollars for any education professor to come into just one of my classes and use his or her methods of inspired learning on my high schoolers. Never had a taker.

Reply

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[aflemin3](#) 74p · 6 hours ago

+5

The same problem that has wrought havoc in America's financials besets its educational system now: the underlying product these universities provide is just as overvalued as mortgage backed securities were in '08.

MBS were overvalued because no one had the wisdom to discern that few of the mortgages in those packages would be repaid. Education is overvalued—that is, overpriced—for the same reason: a host of liberal arts majors will not be able to find meaningful work upon graduation, and therefore will be unable to repay the balances they owe their alma maters.

Reply

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[jafioner](#) -53p · 6 hours ago

+12

Just close them. Universities are breeding grounds for stalinist fanatics who live to destroy America. Using taxpayer money to support an anti-American cult is suicidal.

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[demonocrat](#) -144p · 6 hours ago

0

Perry / Bachmann 2012

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[RickOden](#) 101p · 6 hours ago

+10

Not sure about Texas but many Universities in my state take pride in their racist anti-American instructors and wouldn't have it any other way. %90 of the next generation of graduates are probably the stupidest people I've ever met and their coming to a city near you.

Reply

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[Syrin23](#) 117p · 6 hours ago

+9

Let's also face the reality that many professors lack some critical skill that would allow them to function in the private sector. Perhaps it's their crippling sloth, horrible inter-personal skills, absent mindedness, whatever, there is usually some deficit present. That only fuels their deep seated hatred gainst businesses and those who don't have their inherent inadequacies. They cloth their bigotry in academia and thrust it upon impressionable young minds.

Reply

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[Stan522](#) 109p · 6 hours ago

+11

If public K-12 school is filled with waste, mismanagement, and ineptitude, how could state run colleges and universities be any different--? (rhetorical).

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[pnipni](#) 127p · 6 hours ago

+13

We need to monitor our Universities much more carefully. They are not sacred grounds. If they balk at our inquiries, is it because they're hiding something in their Curriculum? At least Five main areas need to be examined:

- 1- The general preparedness of the graduating student.
- 2- The spectrum of political science taught. Socialism? Capitalism? Marxism, Globalism? etc.

- 3- The textbooks used. Is their content valid? or have they been re-written? i.e., American History, Global Warming.
- 4- The faculty themselves. What have they published? What do the Professors stand for? What is on their Curriculum Vitae? We need to know who is teaching our children and what their belief system is and do they teach objectively or subjectively? for a start.
- 5- Economics. Are they teaching Free Enterprise and Free Markets or Socialism, and are they teaching it objectively?

WE HAVE A RIGHT TO MONITOR our children's education.

Reply [1 reply](#) · active 1 hour ago

[Report](#)

 [PascalsWaferl](#) 126p · 5 hours ago

+9

When, o when, will Breitbart launch the much-needed "Big Education? Unless the state-run education system in this country is stripped of its stranglehold on the minds of students, the odds of a successful intervention in this country's devolution into an "idocracy" are lower than an amoeba's navel.

Reply

[Report](#)

 [hobdog](#) 78p · 5 hours ago

+4

Just as federal employees have the SEIU to protect them from termination, and bad teachers are protected by teachers' unions, university faculty members have tenure, which makes them essentially unaccountable and nearly impossible to terminate.

Dead wood is impossible to clean out. That just doesn't happen in nature. I'm pretty sure that's a part of the problem. As a matter of fact, I would suggest that's an important part of the decline of our country as a whole. Just an opinion.

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 [CHICAGO RALPH](#) 115p · 5 hours ago

+4

"....."In theory, presidents and deans are supposed to counteract self-interested behavior to make sure that the legitimate needs of students are properly addressed. In practice, however, academic leaders often fail to fulfill this responsibility."....."

This relationship is similar to that of a public sector union leader and,.....

a Democrat governor.

My daughter was fortunate to have been at Boston U. when,.....

John Silber was president of that institution.

He is one of a kind.

Reply [1 reply](#) · active 5 hours ago

[Report](#)

 [JoanOfArgghh](#) 99p · 5 hours ago

+2

Heh. If we open the windows, it may be so that the pale, incurious dwellers therein might actually, y'know, look *out* of them.

Reply

[Report](#)

 [Beni_In_ME](#) 79p · 5 hours ago

+6

I have hired (and fired) hundreds of college educated employees. In my industry, we rarely consider people from the hallowed bubble of "academia"—or government. Invariably, if a candidate hasn't worked in the private sector or military, they will be a poor performer and difficult to manage. There have been a few exceptions, but overall, from my experience, academics and government employees do not have the same work ethic and they do not understand deadlines, productivity, and most of all: PERFORMING WELL UNDER PRESSURE.

Reply

[Report](#)

 [hezaAZsmitty](#) 90p · 5 hours ago

+4

Former General and President Eisenhower warned America about the "industrial military complex" those enterprises who depend upon conflicts and war to exist. Finally someone has the intestinal fortitude to expose the "Educational complex" that depends upon long term students for it to exist. In the Military complex when an armaments manufacturer fails to deliver a viable product they are held to account. Recently a company that manufactured the flack vest for the military was caught short-shrifting the product with potential catastrophic results.....they were removed from the armaments program and were heavily fined. We have graduates from elite universities that cannot even answer basic math questions or history questions, but can tell everyone about global warming and how evil America is. Time has come for a house cleaning.

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[Report](#)

 [tkg2902](#) 82p · 5 hours ago

+4

What? Investigate academia?? The fount of all holiness and wisdom! Well I'm shocked!

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 [Taxpayer1234](#) 122p · 5 hours ago

+4

I agree with most of this article. However, if we're going to measure research value in publication or citation numbers, then it would be wise to consider how many copies of unproductive scholarship like Einstein's first published article, "Conclusions Drawn from the Phenomena of Capillarity," were circulated or cited. If Einstein had been canned or otherwise punished for such a run-of-the-mill article, then he'd have stayed as a clerk at the patent office, and we'd never have seen the four major articles that followed, culminating in his famous Theory of Relativity.

No, we don't "need" 450 articles on the otherness of left-handed queer Martians. But if we apply an economic determination to all scholarship, then we're in danger of stunting our country's intellectual power.

Reply

[Report](#)

 [LuvSnoopy](#) 46p · 5 hours ago

+2

Bigger isn't always better. Moving from college to university status is not always better. I attended a small Christian liberal arts college in the mid 1980's. The school had an enrollment of roughly 650 students. Since my graduation, the school has increased in size to roughly 4000, gained university status, and created more schools within the university setting. I find myself ambivalent about the university's so called successes. Why? Because I am not convinced what was gained is worth as much as what has been lost. While I attended the school, I was a name not a number. I knew the professors in my department on a first name basis. I never had a class with more than thirty students. I received a solid academic education as well as a solid education in life because I had the opportunity to glean wisdom from my relationships with faculty. This is no longer the case. While the university may look good on paper, it is the students who have lost out on what made the school unique, its personal touch.

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[Report](#)

 [actsnow](#) 109p · 5 hours ago

+4

If they receive public money to the public they owe transparency.go get em Governor Perry! If Governor Perry keeps this up he may just be our next President!

Reply

[Report](#)

 [LuvSnoopy](#) 46p · 5 hours ago

0

Another thought in addition to my previous post, research oriented institutions such as the UC system here in California do not always produce better candidates for job performance than the Cal State or private university systems. For example, when I entered the education program at my private college, one of the instructors commented, "We already know you can write a research paper because you graduated with a B or better average. We are here to teach you how to teach. That is best done by getting in the classroom with experienced teachers." While my UC counterparts were conducting research and writing papers, I was learning the rudiments of survival in the classroom. I believe I hit the ground running better than my UC counterparts. Over the years, I have seen that reality repeated. The Cal State and private school grads get a more hands-on education experience and start out better prepared for the realities of the classroom.

Reply

[Report](#)


 [Bohemond](#) 122p · 5 hours ago

+3

Frankly I think we should abolish all forms of student financial aid except to those enrolled, and maintaining passing grades, in engineering, hard science or mathematics. There is no excuse for demanding the overburdened taxpayer subsidize ever more and more thousands of useless sociology and women's studies majors. Why should we be ponying up kilobucks per year to create more Starbucks barristas?

Reply

[Report](#)

 [voiceofone](#) 90p · 4 hours ago

+1

If we damage, and or control in some meaningful way college professors, then we have done a great thing! The largest portion of them are traitors, who would rather live in a Communist State somewhere.

You'll notice how some of Obama's Administration went back to sucking off some college somewhere. It's much easier than defending a Communist President and his actions in the White House. They go back to their Communist roots so they can get paid by our Capitalistic country.

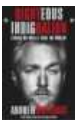
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