

Quick Takes

July 7, 2011

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Texas Dean Pushes Back at 'Breakthrough Solutions'

A dean at the University of Texas at Austin on Wednesday described as short-sighted and ineffective a set of policy proposals advanced by a conservative think tank that have been embraced by many in government and some on the university system's Board of Regents. The ideas put forth by the Texas Public Policy Foundation exemplify "the dangers of applying a business-style, market-based approach inside the classroom," wrote Randy L. Diehl, dean of the UT-Austin's College of Liberal Arts, in the paper, "[Maintaining Excellence and Efficiency at The University of Texas at Austin](#)," which was released Wednesday.

"Though they may appear attractive at first glance, several of the proposals stand to undermine successful initiatives that already promote quality teaching," Diehl wrote, arguing that the university -- with its six-year graduation rate of 81 percent and in-state tuition of \$10,000 per year -- was a national leader in providing an efficient, high-quality education. Some of the proposals in the foundation's seven "[Breakthrough Solutions](#)" were untested or found to be ineffective in states where they they been attempted, wrote Diehl, and enacting them threatened the university's status as a top-tier university "in which research and teaching are inextricably linked in ways that are crucial to both missions."

The foundation said its intent in suggesting the proposal was to ensure that educating students was the central purpose of the state's universities. "While world-class research has its role at research universities, students should not be relegated to secondary status, which they are too often today," Heather Williams, higher education policy analyst for the foundation, said in an e-mail. She added that reforming higher education is a long process and that proposals would adapt over time. "To focus on the Solutions in themselves, and to the exclusion of all else, would be to miss the ultimate end that they advance," Williams said. "If Dean Diehl or anyone else has better ideas to accomplish these goals, we invite them to present their alternatives for public discussion."

In a written response to the dean's report late Wednesday night, the chairman of the Texas system's Board of Regents, Gene Powell, insisted that the board and other UT officials "have not, at anytime, considered or endorsed the so called "seven breakthrough solutions," and that the board and leading UT administrators are on the same page.

U.Va.'s Gun Ban Questioned

The University of Virginia lacks the legal authority to apply its ban on guns on campus to those who have concealed carry permits, according to an opinion released by Ken Cuccinelli, attorney general of Virginia, [The Virginian-Pilot](#) reported. While Cuccinelli said in his opinion that he was trying to explain the law, and not to comment on its wisdom, some of his remarks suggested a view that colleges should not try to keep guns off campus. "It certainly can be argued that such policies are ineffectual because persons who wish to perpetrate violence will ignore them, and that the net effect of such policies is to leave defenseless the law-abiding citizens who follow these policies," he wrote. University officials said that they were studying the opinion.

Academic Minute: Drug Dosage

In [today's Academic Minute](#), Amit Pai of the Albany College of Pharmacy and Health Sciences explains the problem of adjusting drug dosages for obese patients. Find out more about the Academic Minute [here](#).

The Link Between Childbearing and Women's Education

A study published this week in the [Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences](#) raises questions about the reasons that highly educated women have fewer children on average than do less educated women. Conventional wisdom holds that the time spent earning advanced degrees limits the childbearing of women who do so. But the study -- based on detailed analysis of women in Norway -- found that the childbearing gaps result from those women who have children at young ages not pursuing more education. The research was conducted by scholars at Rockefeller University and the University of Oslo.

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Why is this a surprise ?

Posted by **Confused**, professor of sociology at University of Connecticut on July 7, 2011 at 7:01am EDT

For decades feminists have been saying that child-reading interferes with education. High school women with children have trouble finishing high school; college women, finishing college. The problem of getting an education vs. taking care of children has even figured in the abortion debate. Why is this a surprise?

Not Surprised If....

Posted by **Dr. Gadsden**, Asst. Prof. at Morgan State University on July 7, 2011 at 8:30am EDT

I thought it was this simple: females who've been unsuccessful at, or have no interest in, education are more likely to have children instead. I thought this had been shown in a variety of teen pregnancy studies in the US. Namely, that most pregnant teens had truancy or other school problems before they became pregnant. Having babies gave them something else that they could do with their time and that they believed they could be more successful.

...more work

Posted by **DocV** on July 7, 2011 at 9:15am EDT

@Confused...the conclusion is not surprising. However, the research does lead to further discussion for policy recommendations that support those who balance both child rearing and pursuit of education. It seems as though women must trade one for the other.

I would be interested to see if the breakdown of married/partnered versus single women makes a difference in the pursuit of education. Is there more or less support within a "family" structure or does it make a difference at all?

It is obvious that the study begs for more in-depth research as we grapple with women, child(ren), and education.

Let's Make a Diehl

Posted by **Taxpayer Where Employed** on July 7, 2011 at 9:15am EDT

"the dangers of applying a business-style, market-based approach inside the classroom," wrote Randy L. Diehl.

What can't Diehl admit that it's the other way around? It's the dangers of NOT applying a business-style, market-based approach that decades ago ruined education. You know, back when kids could read, learn foreign languages, and operate slide rules. That's what a sad state education was in and which is why the business model saw fit to start taking over on talk radio and selling games like "huked on fonix." That was a bestseller and proves how great the business model really is.

We need some "breakthrough solutions" like constant, unrelenting testing and measurement to teach kids the value of study. We've increased standardized testing in K-12 over the last several decades, evidently, though, at too slow a pace to catch up with all the damage done 40 or 50 years ago.

The pattern: things just keep getting dumbed down and teachers complain about having to do some work for a change. Unlike back when education was supposed to be "fun" and tapping into kids' supposedly innate curiosity. That's why kids are dumber now than 40 years ago before the business model started to kick in and kick ass.

We need to accelerate the business model so it can catch up. Then our teachers and our kids will be smart, engaged and motivated on the businessman's terms, not theirs. Kids won't read unless you punish and reward them into it, give them multiple choice tests with one right answer and not allow them to show any other things they've learned besides what the business model has decided should be on the test. The only way to MEASURE it. Giving required page counts is also a good way to motivate, just like setting goals in the business world. What a turn-on.

So it is also in college. None of this curiosity stuff in which students direct their own learning. No business owner in his right mind would be in business for the freedom, autonomy, and creative expression of it. You know, being one's own boss.

Stop acting like the STASI, interfering with our market discipline, the only way that freedom truly

rings.

Why do women have to choose?

Posted by **E. Street**, Financial Aid at Southeastern Illinois College on July 7, 2011 at 9:30am EDT

I agree with "Confused." Women do have a disadvantage in completing their post-baccalaureate degrees or even climbing the hierarchal ladder in their careers if they decide to have children. Higher education is the worse. Women sort of have to choose between tenure and having children. On the administrative side, I feel that I am penalized for being a mother and need to be home raising my children and taking care of my husband. Upper administration is almost impossible for mothers. While men have wives at home who can take care of the children, house, dog, and whatever so they can work their way up in their careers. Pursuing higher education is no different.

Being a good girl

Posted by **confused** on July 7, 2011 at 9:30am EDT

Talk to your students. A fair number of teenage girls (in high school and college) do not carry contraception. The thinking goes: If you are prepared to have safe sex, you must not be a "good girl." So, for lack of contraception use, the US has one of the highest teen-age pregnancy rates of any industrialized country. Campaigns against abortion help to insure a pretty high teen-age birth rate, too.

...successful???

Posted by **DocV** on July 7, 2011 at 9:45am EDT

@Dr. Gadsden - Unfortunately, we know that (1) many of those young teens are on public assistance, have low-wage jobs, or both; and (2) many of the jobs in our society today require education (high school diploma, post-secondary training, or college degree) to financially support themselves and the child(ren).

In my republican point-of-view (and I am a democrat for the record), I really don't want to support someone else's child because they have made immature and short-sided decisions.

While the work that Dr. Gadsden respectfully cited may be a root cause of why the individual may choose to have a child, it seems to be a bit different from those who may need/want to pursue further education and not have the dedicated time versus those who have psycho-social issues that strictly lead them to being a parent.

It appears that the goal may be to develop policy implications and recommendations to help balance life skills for those who choose to have a child at any given age, pursue further education, and most of all be self-sustaining.

@ Taxpayer

Posted by **JP**, Associate Professor at Minnesota State University on July 7, 2011 at 10:15am EDT

Your logic is...well not logic.

The business model and the intrusion of market-based philosophy in education has been on the rise for the last thirty years. It has corresponded with a decline in the quality of education. That is a fact. Logically, causes have to come before, not after, their effects. So crediting the decline of the market based model for problems in education is both historically false and logically fallacious. Private, for profit colleges and universities graduate fewer students, with significantly more debt, at higher cost to taxpayers like you and their students are less likely to find employment in their field. Again, those are facts.

Before advocating the "breakthrough solutions" you might want to try reading them. Having some of that damnable innate curiosity, I read them first. If you had some curiosity, you would learn, among other things, that the so-called "breakthrough solutions" don't include "unrelenting testing and measurement" but instead try to create formulas based on:

- i) Salary and benefit costs.
- ii) Number of students taught in the last twelve months
- iii) Average student satisfaction rating
- iv) Average percentage of A's and B's awarded.

http://www.texashighered.com/files/Breakthrough_Solution_1.pdf

We are going to rank teachers on a scale...highest to lowest in cost with the standard being student satisfaction, not learning anything. So the business model you advocate is designed to get satisfied students who get lots of As and Bs from the lowest paid faculty we can find. That is what the business model gets you.

Here is a lesson I try to teach my students. It is not always received with satisfaction but I stand by it regardless:

First Read. Second Think. Then write.

School IS a business

Posted by **theBuckWheat**, On running a school in a business-like manner on July 7, 2011 at 10:30am EDT

The left (er, now "progressives"), who have entrenched themselves in academia, love to scold the rest of us about "sustainability", run colleges and universities in a way that no business ever could. The expect and demand that society should make up any difference. They have built an

economically unsustainable world for themselves.

I served for a while on an advisory council to the Dean of Engineering for a major university. At the last meeting I was invited to, during a discussion about that school's need to raise \$50 million for a new building, I asked if he knew how much it cost to educate a single undergraduate student.

He didn't know, but he did have a study on file, from another university. As I said, that was the last time I was invited to advise the Dean.

Higher education must be run in a business-like manner because the money must come from somewhere. To the extent that government schools are funded by tax monies, that money can only come from others in the economy who manage run their affairs in a business-like manner, and who have taxes to pay as a result-- taxes for the unsustainable crowd of educated elite parasites to dissipate as they please.

where are the men?

Posted by [lapgr8ful](#), VP at large research university on July 7, 2011 at 10:30am EDT

It is not surprising that bearing and raising children influence and often constrain a woman's life choices, but I am really tired reading about studies such as these that fail to account for the role--or lack thereof--of the men who fathered these children. Why do teenage mothers fail to graduate from high school or complete a higher degree? Because they are left to rear the children or, as noted above "take care...of their husbands," while fathers are AWOL. Why do female professors have to make a choice? Because often the husband's career is deemed more important. Granted, some of them make the choice themselves to step off the career track for a period of time. I'm not saying that isn't a wonderful choice. Yet when will men face the same difficult, heart-wrenching choices and face the same consequences of those choices--lower income, fewer options, even poverty--as do women?

I fear I sound like a raving feminist. I'm not. It's just that stories of teenage women bearing the full brunt of childrearing tear at my heart when we know that the men who fathered the children are left without any responsibility.

Feminists...hmmm...

Posted by [DocV](#) on July 7, 2011 at 11:45am EDT

@lapgr8ul. I like your line of thinking, however it appears that much of the research that gets highlighted focuses on feminist theory. It is rare that one hears about masculine theory. I would venture to say that men are not a disadvantaged group so we would not get the attention. Women have a lot more to fight for and thus are front page.

Do you have a gender studies or men's studies program at your large research university? I would conjecture that especially since the onset of the feminist movement: "Burn Your Bra" - "Women: Be All You Can Be", that men have been struggling to understand their role within society. In addition, (1) many boys are reared by women at home and taught by women in early schooling ALL without the benefit of a father and/or male support system; and (2) the women who choose to lay with a man who does not have and is not willing to develop his foundation as a MAN. Additionally, nothing in our media communication supports the role of how to BE a man.

I am not placing blame, I am just saying that more emphasis/studies needs to be brought to forefront of men's roles within our current familial structures.

parenting

Posted by [anonymous](#), Graduate Student on July 7, 2011 at 11:45am EDT

Many of these postings devalue the role of the mother as parent--odd, because educators should hold children and their caregivers (as first educators) in higher esteem. I would like to see more respect shown by leaders in higher education toward all women and all children, not just those that get on and stay on the fast track to tenure at some higher institution of learning, as if that were the pinnacle of life's possible achievements. Some people might say that a life lacking children, or missing the close and stable relationships of family, is a cold and dreary way to live.

Anyone of the young mothers or the "babies made in their free time" (per Dr. Gadsen) might choose to pursue higher education and in that, find new ways to contribute well to society...and many have and are doing so today. For them to achieve their academic potential, they will need more than scholarships and hand-outs; they will need to be welcomed as human beings in a society that doesn't think that the only value in life is to accumulate things and degrees.

Many single mothers fight the fight daily to better their situation through community colleges, night-courses, and other methods; many impoverished children do the same.

I did not like the condescension shown in some of the comments made on these postings that lump millions of individuals into the same negative stereotype, the very thing that the women's movement should be against.



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