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Higher Education: Open for Business (review)

Gary Rhoades

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Book Reviews

Higher Education: Open for Business, by Christian Gilde (Ed.).
Lanham, MD: Lexington Books, 2007. 196 pp. ISBN 0739118471.

GARY RHOADES, University of Arizona

The title of Christian Gilde's edited book, *Higher Education: Open for Business* (2007), conveys the basic theme and tone of the book, which seeks, in part, to raise awareness about what is called "overcommercialization." One of the contributors to the volume, Eve Spangler, defines this term as, "the processes through which, and the state in which, commercial interests supercede intellectual ones in ordering the affairs of the university" (p. 139). And that is the storyline throughout much of the book. Chapters concentrate on topics in the four general domains of classrooms, campus environments, research, and sports, ranging from the classroom, to online classrooms and distance education, to college sports, to consumption as the focus of campus life, to profits and social justice in the university. The closing chapter, entitled, "Safeguarding Uncertain Futures," opens with a question that defines much of the volume, "Are there adequate academic policies in place to safeguard the academic community from commercial intrusion?" (p. 159). Quite explicitly, the book seeks to raise awareness about what is seen as a major problem threatening higher education and society.

The book opens with an introduction that can be seen as a call to action, though it is not entirely clear who is being called. The audience and intended readership of the volume is unclear. Most of the chapters follow the lead and tone of Gilde's first substantive chapter, which charts the "Faustian bargain" that the university has made with commercialism: "When did we come to a fork in the road and take the wrong way?" (p. 21). Gilde then provides a cursory (and incomplete, even inaccurate) treatment of the history of universities, back to "relatively pristine" and autonomous times, before the "encroachment" of business. Gilde continues by outlining the basic dimensions of the intrusion, noting that "Admittedly, until a couple of years ago I was a mindless victim of corporate exposure myself . . ." (p. 25). At the end of the chapter, he offers some suggestions for combating corporatization.

As most readers of this journal know, much has been written on the topic of what has variously been called marketization, commercialization, entrepreneurialism, and academic capitalism. Much has been written from various theoretical perspectives. Much has been written from various perspectives as to whether and to what extent the developments are problematic. And much of this literature is well grounded empirically, offering systematic data on the resource flows and allocation into and through universities, on the activities of professors, on the choices of students, and on the commercial involvement of universities.

Unfortunately, Gilde's book does not address this extensive and varied literature in any systematic or thorough way. That substantially reduces the volume's utility for anyone seeking to utilize it as a resource for students (graduate or otherwise) who are looking for an entrée into the complex world of commercialization. That is a shame, because there is a need for a book that is both accessible to a more general readership and a useful scholarly resource.

As some readers may also know, much of my scholarship, on "academic capitalism in the new economy" and "managed professionals," is critical of recent developments in the academy. Yet I nonetheless found myself put off by the tone of Gilde's book. That tone is captured in the over-the-top language of "overcommercialization," of a system that is "over-stimulated by commercialization," of college administrators who are "courting and worshipping the corporate givers" and of those who have "forsaken education to make way for commercialization." It is simply too much. And too consistent throughout the book, with the exception of the first chapter by Elizabeth G. Miller, which after discussing and in some cases applauding certain marketing techniques, provides tips for students on how to recognize and resist persuasion attempts. On occasion the book seeks to be in some sense balanced about the topic at hand. Thus, in the introduction, Gilde describes his stance in one of the chapters as follows: "My chapter closes by pointing out that not all aspects of commercialization are bad. However, it cautions that institutions and their stakeholders have to be careful when walking the fine line between knowledge seeker and profit seeker" (p. 2). Yet the dichotomous framing of the issue, in terms of the axis of purity and public good versus the axis of greed and privatization, runs throughout the chapters.

Catherine O'Neill provides two chapters on commercialism and the classroom: the first invokes the ideals of a liberal arts education and decries the adverse effects of TQM when it is applied to teaching and classrooms, turning students into consumers and devaluing the work of faculty. Her subsequent chapter about the online classroom provides a listing of various egregious situations drawn from other sources. Herein lies one of the major problems of the book; it seeks to persuade largely by assertion and anecdote rather than through a systematic treatment of data that bear on the important questions at hand. It is filled with overstated hyperbole and underexplored examples and anecdotes. In some sections of their chapter on distance education, Frederick Chilson and David Rutledge diverge from this pattern, offering some personal narratives about their own experiences with distance education and evaluation. For my taste, more, and a more systematic, exploration of this personal journaling of experiences with distance education could have been quite interesting and valuable, had it been more developed. In a chapter on college sports, Michael Malec nicely problematizes the idea of amateurs, historically and internationally. But then he comes back to the book's basic theme, expressed in a heading, "Corporate Takeover," and closes with "ten suggestions to reduce the commercial penetration of the college sports realm" (p. 119). Similarly, in a chapter on "The Spending Nation," Juliet B. Schor poses the question "of whether the expansion of consumerism, as a way of life, constitutes a threat to liberal education" (p. 127), and she nicely begins the chapter by unpacking the idea of identity being grounded in consumption and in brands. And yet the logic and nature of the reasoning in the book is expressed in her observation, after citing some

examples of corporate endowed chairs, that, "The impact of these developments . . . has not yet been explored by researchers. However, the corrupting influence of money is a well known problem" (p. 133).

Regrettably, *Open for Business* does not take up the challenge of undertaking such an exploration, even on a limited basis. Nor does it really offer insights that go beyond a range of other contributions to the literature on the topics at hand, on which it draws liberally. That is too bad. Because I think that the general issues raised by the authors are important ones. The range of sectors within the university in which the logic of the market is in my view increasingly embedded, is remarkable and worthy of consideration and exploration that helps reveal what some of the costs and benefits (and of where and to whom these costs and benefits are incurred) of commercialization are.

The Price of Admission: How America's Ruling Class Buys Its Way into Elite Colleges—and Who Gets Left Outside the Gates, by Daniel Golden. New York: Crown, 2006. 298 pp. \$25.95. ISBN 1400097967.

CAROLINE CHIANG, University of Southern California
CHRISTOPHER GRILLO, University of Southern California

The admissions process for colleges and universities in the United States has been a mystery to many. How are choices made? How do certain students find themselves admitted and others turned away? Those who have faith in the system want to believe in a fair, unbiased, and equal opportunity into higher education. Daniel Golden's book, *The Price of Admission: How America's Ruling Class Buys Its Way into Elite Colleges—and Who Gets Left Outside the Gates*, reveals a hidden side admissions officers do not want you to see, and that there is more to admissions than SAT scores and grade point average. In some cases these numbers may not make a difference at all.

In his book, Golden describes the admissions practices of several of the nation's elite colleges and universities, from special privileges for children of alumni and legacies, to wealthy donors who are "friends" of the university. *The Price of Admission* incorporates personal stories of those who are privileged and those who get "left behind," from the recruitment of student athletes who play "upper class" sports, to higher standards for Asian Americans. Some of the stories and facts are appalling, while others are simply heartbreaking and leave the reader dumbfounded. Golden provides insight into how universities have become a huge business where dollars and prestige overshadow the focus on student learning and discovery.

Golden's writing style makes the book an easy read and one difficult to pull away from. The chapters are organized into distinct sections, yet each flows sensibly into one after another. The first four chapters, "How the 'Z-List' Makes the A-List," "Recruiting the Rich," "The Fame Factor," and "Enduring Legacies," focus primarily on examples of four institutions: Harvard, Duke, Brown, and Notre Dame respectively. His presentation shifts as subsequent chapters