

The Uneasy Relationship between Business and the Humanities

BY FRANK DONOGHUE

The author offers an historical perspective on the relationship between academics and business in determining the appropriate focus of higher education. Citing sources as varied as Andrew Carnegie, Thorstein Veblen and Upton Sinclair, the author demonstrates that the current debate between industry and the humanities is not unprecedented, but rather constitutes a centuries-old pull and tug. The author discusses how humanities scholars can position themselves for future challenges. —Editors

Writers both on the right and left of the political spectrum see a “crisis” today in higher education. Each side sees the other as dominating higher education—and ruining it. As defined by those on the right, the crisis has been brought on by a new generation of “tenured radicals”—professors who dominate higher education and use their positions of influence both to inflict on students a body of coursework that has no relevance to the real world and to convey subversive messages about American society and its economic structure. This argument was rehearsed in a cluster of attacks on higher education following former Secretary of Education William Bennett’s 1984 government white paper, *To Reclaim a Legacy: A Report on the Humanities in Higher Education*. Following Bennett’s paper came Charles Sykes’ *Profscam: Professors and the Demise of Higher Education* (1988), Roger Kimball’s *Tenured Radicals: How Politics Has Corrupted Our Higher Education* (1990), and Dinesh D’Souza’s *Illiberal Education* (1991).

By contrast, those on the left see the crisis as one in which newly ascendant corporate interests are pushing the higher education curriculum in a vocational direction while brushing the humanities and social criticism to the side. Writers in this vein include most of the contributors to *The Politics of a Liberal Education* (Gless and Smith, eds., 1992), *Higher Education Under Fire: Politics, Economics, and the Crisis of the Humanities* (Bérubé and Nelson, eds., 1995),

and *Will Teach for Food: Academic Labor in Crisis* (Nelson ed., 1997). The solution? Both the right and the left call for immediate and radical changes that would eliminate the power and influence of the other side—either the influence of the professorial elite or the influence of corporate-style boards of trustees and decision-making processes.

This essay offers a hopeful corrective to the dramatic, crisis-oriented rhetoric we hear today.

To deem a situation a crisis is to both suggest the presence of new, acute, urgent problems and dangers *and* to hold out the hope that those problems can be solved and the dangers averted through drastic and immediate heroic measures. Applying this term to higher education raises an obvious question, namely, when and how will this crisis end?

My contention is that it is more accurate to characterize what we see today as an ongoing set of problems, a long push-and-tug between competing perspectives in which different interests may be ascendant at different times. If we recognize that the antagonism between corporate America and American universities reaches back more than a century, we are compelled to think of that contest very differently than is usually the case today. We will realize, first, that the terms of the hostilities are the product of a long evolution, and second, that the battle will not end abruptly any time soon.

Thus, the body of my essay is largely a matter of re-discovery, of recovering the salient features of a fascinating historical narrative in which legendary capitalists, famous journalists and academics all play important roles. I wish to show that both attackers *and* supporters of American higher education, particularly the humanities, have actually been arguing in much the same terms for decades, but that in recent years the history of that argument has fallen from view. In their rush to identify crises, those on both sides have too often seen themselves as participants in a debate strictly about current events. As members of every generation do, they've lost sight of their place on a longer historical timeline.

The two turn-of-the-century, pro-academic writers whom I highlight here, Thorstein Veblen and Upton Sinclair, were clearly troubled by the business orientation of colleges and universities in their day—by the enormous influence

corporations had on the policies and practices of higher education. But they did not perceive universities to be poised on the brink of ruin, so their assessment of specific problems is more dispassionate and invites us to consider more systemic, if more difficult solutions.

Early Criticism of the Liberal Arts from Corporate Critics

Let us begin by looking at the turn of the twentieth century, a period when our nation's universities and economy were growing at an unprecedented rate. Driven by booming and largely unregulated industrial growth, America's total national wealth during those years doubled—from \$87.9 billion in 1900 to \$165.4 billion in 1910, doubling again to \$335.4 billion by 1920—and no subsequent increases have ever approached these rates. At the same time, higher education's growth was also exploding. The country's 18- to 24-year-old population attending college rose from 2.3 percent in 1900 to 2.9 percent in 1910, and by 1930 had risen to 7.2 percent. Not until the post-World War II era was there a comparable surge in enrollment. While the number of universities did not grow so vigorously (increasing from 977 institutions in 1900 to 1,409 in 1930), the number of faculty more than tripled—from 23,868 in 1900 to 82,386 in 1930.ⁱ It was during these decades—although no one acknowledged it in exactly these terms—both attackers and defenders of universities spoke from a position of strength, as reflected in energetic polemics.

A century ago, attacks on higher education came not from journalists subsidized by conservative think tanks (such as the Olin Foundation, which supported both D'Souza and Kimball), but from prominent industrialists themselves. Because they spoke as unapologetic capitalists, they made claims that modern critics of the university would never venture. Andrew Carnegie, the meagerly educated self-made multimillionaire, was perhaps the earliest and certainly one of the sharpest critics of traditional liberal arts education and curricula, the humanities' foreground. He had the following to say in an 1891 commencement address at the Pierce College of Business and Shorthand of Philadelphia:

In the storms of life are they [traditional graduates] to be strengthened and sustained and held to their post and to the performance of duty by drawing upon Hebrew or Greek barbarians as models. . . ? Is Shakespeare or Homer to be the reservoir from which they draw? . . . I rejoice, therefore, to know that your time has not been wasted upon dead languages, but has

been fully occupied in obtaining a knowledge of shorthand and typewriting. . . and that you are fully equipped to sail upon the element upon which you must live your lives and earn your living.ⁱⁱ

Carnegie concludes that “college education as it exists today seems almost fatal” in the business domain, and he starkly contrasts such traditionally educated students, “adapted for life on another planet,” to “the future captain of industry. . . hotly engaged in the school of experience, obtaining the very knowledge required for his future triumphs”.ⁱⁱⁱ And he lauds the relatively new practice of populating university boards of trustees with businessmen, noting what he perceives to be the intransigence of academics, “professors and principals [presidents] who are bound in their set ways and have a class feeling about them which makes it impossible to make reforms.”^{iv} Though he allows that graduates of polytechnic and scientific schools have an advantage over traditional apprentices in that they are likely to be “open-minded and without prejudice,” he uses that exception to justify his conviction that the only worthwhile education is that which has “bearing on a man’s career if he is to make his way to fortune.”^v As a philanthropist, Andrew Carnegie was true to his word: The terms of the Carnegie Trust for the Universities of Scotland (his native country) provide for money for “English Literature and Modern Languages, and such other subjects *cognate* to a technical or commercial education.”^{vi}

The generation following Carnegie witnessed more comprehensive and systematic critiques of higher education as it then existed. In 1907, Clarence F. Birdseye—lawyer, legal scholar and father of the man who would revolutionize the frozen food industry—published *Individual Training in Our Colleges*. Birdseye, himself a college graduate (who in fact dedicated his book to his Chi Psi fraternity brothers), wrote not to denounce higher education outright, but to realign it with “business principles,” which he repeatedly contrasts with “college standards.”^{vii} Birdseye’s central argument elaborates on this opposition:

If they had to compete with our ordinary business establishments, the colleges would have been long since distanced and bankrupted. They have escaped this fate because, owing to the continuing force of our reverence for a college education, they have never been able to supply their demand, and because they have had an unlimited public

and private purse on which to draw, which never has asked for an accounting.^{viii}

At several points he expresses a wish for a “panic” among our colleges that would winnow the lot of them, forcing the survivors to run their operations with businesslike efficiency.^{ix} In the absence of such a radical development, he urges an assortment of remedies consistent with, indeed indebted to, Carnegie’s ideas. He advises faculty to imitate “a good manufacturer” who “studies more carefully than almost anything the wastes of his factory and the points wherein he can avoid these. You should learn from him.”^x He also encourages alumni to “help introduce business methods into the work of your alma mater.”^{xi}

Birdseye extends his rhetoric even farther than Carnegie, though, claiming higher education as a corporate entity many decades before it became commonplace to do so. He states unequivocally that “our colleges have become a part of the business and commercial machinery of our country, and must therefore be measured by somewhat the same standards.”^{xii} He thus discusses universities in corporate terms, referring to the college as the “factory” and students as the “product.”^{xiii} He has high praise for the Carnegie Technical School, founded in Pittsburgh in 1900, particularly for its policy of hiring faculty on the basis of extra-academic professional expertise, “men who are in close touch with the ordinary problems of business life, and not merely good instructors in nonpractical courses.”^{xiv} And his book is also replete with warnings that, unless he has taken a “technical course,” the traditionally trained college graduate has undergone an experience that “unfits him for business.”^{xv}

No one in the early 20th century wrote more ferociously on the topic of college as a waste of time and money than Richard Teller Crane, president and founder of Crane Co. in Chicago, a company that once manufactured 95 percent of the country’s elevators and is still part of the S&P 500 today. From 1909 to 1911, Crane published three pamphlets—“The Futility of Higher Schooling,” “The Futility of Technical Schools” and “The Demoralization of College Life”—and a book, *The Utility of All Kinds of Higher Schooling*, each expounding on the reasons why he felt “out of all sympathy with educational institutions, so-called.”^{xvi} Though Crane is not widely known today, his ideas became noteworthy issues in the 1912 presidential election that pitted Yale B.A. William Howard Taft against Johns Hopkins Ph.D. and former Princeton president

Woodrow Wilson. In light of Crane's attacks, the candidates issued a joint statement reassuring the American public that higher education was not "the great curse of the country."^{xvii}

The Utility of All Kinds of Higher Schooling collects the results of questionnaires that Crane had circulated to a large number of university presidents, college alumni and prominent businessmen, and thereafter redacted to suit his own negative outlook. Though he affirms much of what Birdseye had suspected about the tendency of college to unfit men for business, his attack on liberal arts education is far more broadly extended. Crane's method in all of his writings is to praise knowledge of "things worthwhile" at the expense of "impractical," "special knowledge of literature, art, languages or history," and he argues that no man who has "a taste for literature has the right to be happy," because "the only men entitled to happiness in this world are those who are useful."^{xviii} He is even unwilling to grant an exceptional place to technical courses, characterizing them as a belated and inadequate attempt on the part of traditional universities to remedy a long-standing curricular problem. In fact, he devotes a whole pamphlet to an attack on technical schools.

Entrepreneurs and their supporters, such as Carnegie, Birdseye and Crane, did not speak unopposed. Career educators, of course, defended college training.^{xix} Some fellow businessmen also either came to its defense or implicitly supported its importance. Edward Atkinson, self-educated businessman and inventor of the automatic sprinkler system, recommended college as something for which any young man should "make the utmost sacrifice possible."^{xx} At a celebration of the re-opening of the University of Chicago, John D. Rockefeller, who had rescued the university from bankruptcy through the auspices of the Baptist Education Society in 1889, declared it to be "the best investment I ever made in my life,"^{xxi} and never meddled in its day-to-day affairs.^{xxii} The enduring terms of the anti-higher education rhetoric had been set, however, by Carnegie's speeches and the writings of Birdseye, Crane and others. This rhetoric owes its power to the American public's readiness to accept a monetary bottom line as the irrefutable measure of success of any kind. Crane especially drew on his audience's unquestioning willingness to judge higher education as an investment to be assessed according to its return on the original outlay of money and time. I dwell on this equation, by which "usefulness" means "profitability," to make the point that the model of education business interests have championed for a century is strongly predisposed against the humanities.^{xxiii}

Early Academic Critiques of Corporate Influence

Thorstein Veblen recognized the significance of the corporate attacks on the university, which in fact serve as the immediate context of his book, *The Higher Learning in America* (1918). Almost subtitled “A Study in Total Depravity,” the book had originally been written in 1904 directly out of Veblen’s experiences as a professor at the University of Chicago, yet was published only after his employer, the university’s president, William Rainey Harper, had died. Veblen begins by admitting that any study of higher education in his time will necessarily deal with the “consequences which an habitual pursuit of business in modern times has had for the ideals, aims and methods of the scholars and schools devoted to the higher learning,” and by further conceding that “those principles and standards of organization, control and achievement that have been accepted as an habitual matter of course in the conduct of business will, by force of habit, in good part reassert themselves as indispensable and conclusive in the conduct of the affairs of learning.”^{xxiv}

While readers of Veblen have often characterized his hopes for the future of higher learning as naively optimistic, Veblen himself is careful to separate his ideals from his sense of what is likely to happen. His ideal university is “a place of refuge and a place of meeting, confluence and dissemination for those views and ideas that live and move and have their being in the higher learning,”^{xxv} He even goes so far as to describe that the pursuit of learning is properly defined as a “species of leisure,” a form of activity that has “no economic, and more particularly no pecuniary, end or equivalence.”^{xxvi} But the governing boards of universities in his day, and their hand-picked administrators, were instead bent on “standardized erudition.” While Veblen believes that higher learning is “not readily set out in statistical exhibits . . . and can ordinarily come to appraisal and popular appreciation only in the long run,” he acknowledges that the need of “a businesslike showing is instant and imperative,” particularly in an era of “large turnover and quick returns.”^{xxvii} The corporate overseers of higher education thus value the expedient and immediately tangible above all else, even pandering to the popular conception of the university as an “aggregation of buildings and other improved real estate” by their spending more money to improve the appearance of campuses than on any more abstract and purely intellectual needs.

Veblen traces the history of the modern American university from its ecclesiastical roots in the 18th and 19th centuries, when its primary function was to

train clergymen, to the post-Civil War era, during which it became an instrument of the country's business elite.^{xxviii} He concludes that the future of higher learning will rest on the resolution, by "adjustment, reconciliation or compromise," of the conflict between science and scholarship, on the one hand, and business principles and pecuniary gain on the other.^{xxix} Though he repeatedly insists that these two realms have nothing in common with each other—in particular, reasserting that competition is alien to higher learning yet essential to business—he admits that they are increasingly brought into an uneasy coexistence that can only be harmful to scholarship.

His analysis of the state of higher learning is at its subtlest and most prescient when he writes about the popular sentiment that undergirds business principles and values. There he reluctantly concedes the basic assumption of Crane's screeds. He notes the public's tendency to adduce business success as evidence of wisdom in all areas, including academia—or as he puts it, "the aphoristic wisdom that commands the faith of the business community."^{xxx} A cornerstone of this wisdom is an unconditional reverence for practicality and usefulness. This reverence has, in Veblen's view, far-reaching consequences, the most significant of which is the redefinition of learning and instruction as a "species of skilled labour, to be hired out at competitive wages and to turn out the largest merchantable output that can be obtained."^{xxxi} Through the prism of the market, the university takes the shape of a large department store, with its "traffic in pageantry and ceremony," its "formal 'openings' to inaugurate the special trade of each of the four seasons, designed to put the patrons of the house on a footing of good-humoured familiarity with the plant and its resources, with the customs of the house, the personnel and the stock of wares in hand, and before all to arrest the attention and enlist the interest of those classes that may be induced to buy."^{xxxii}

Veblen's conclusions are as far-sighted as they are discouraging to those who work in higher education. In light of the firm place of business axioms in popular ideology, he sees only two unappealing possible futures for "the common run of academic policy":

[E]ither a short-sighted and headlong conformity to the vulgar prejudice that does not look beyond "practical" training and competitive expansion . . . or a strategic compromise with the

elders of the Philistines, a futile doing of evil in the hope that some good may come of it.^{xxxiii}

Because such values as practicality and usefulness are taken by the public as a “self-evident principle”, even that compromise will be made on the most unfavorable terms, with the ideals of scholarship “yielding ground, in an uncertain and varying degree, before the pressure of businesslike exigencies.”^{xxxiv} In response to the insistent question from the business world: “What is the use of this learning?” university administrators will be forced to “plead the merits of academic training as a business proposition.” This predicament, Veblen adds, will be hardest, almost absurdly implausible, for the humanities, the traditional academic discipline farthest removed from businesslike thinking. Scholars in the humanities will be at great pains to “satisfy the worldly-wise that this learning for which they speak is in some way useful for pecuniary gain.”^{xxxv}

Veblen’s balanced sociology of the academy is at first glance a sharp contrast to Upton Sinclair’s more polemical, *The Goose-Step: A Study of American Education*, published in 1923 and written in the exuberantly vicious style now, it seems, employed most aggressively by right-wing critics of the academy: intensely self-righteous and filled with incendiary anecdotes and innuendos. Sinclair’s premise is that “men die, but the plutocracy is immortal; and it is necessary that fresh generations should be trained to its service.”^{xxxvi} The constant regeneration of the plutocracy is, as he sees it, the chief aim of the country’s universities, which he then systematically attacks in a 500-page tour de force of muckraking.

His thesis throughout is that America’s corporate powers have infiltrated and commandeered the country’s university system for their own ends. The battles he describes pit business-minded boards of trustees and university presidents against professors and students. Sinclair’s ideal vision of the university comes into focus in a series of oppositions he presents upon examination of the impossibly conflicted role of the college president:

[A] man who procures money from the rich, and uses it for the spreading of knowledge; in fulfilling which two functions he places himself, not merely in the line of the warring forces of the class struggle, but between the incompatible elements of

human nature itself—between greed and service, between hate and love, between body and spirit.^{xxxvii}

Unfortunately, corporate interests dictate that the college president can only do this job “by being the most universal faker and most variegated prevaricator that has yet appeared in the civilized world.” He must explain to businessmen the “eccentricities of the scholar, apologizing for the absurd notion which men of learning have that they owe loyalty to truth and public welfare,” and he must beg professors to “realize the president’s own position, the crudity of businessmen who hold the purse strings, and have no understanding of academic dignity.”^{xxxviii} Whenever the president is forced to make a decision, business interests inevitably win his favor, though he always frames his choice as an “administrative matter” that poses no threat to academic freedom.

Sinclair’s concentration on the fate of professors, however, reveals just how all-encompassing some saw the restrictiveness of the corporate university to have already become by 1923. He quotes an unnamed professor at the University of Wisconsin who asserts:

You teach the facts, but you do not interpret them; and especially you do not deal with remedies. You teach details, not vision. You accumulate “learning” in the narrow sense of that word; raking in the dust heaps of the past, and producing carefully documented treatises about absurdities.^{xxxix}

Sinclair calls the state of the university, whose many tacit prohibitions this professor acknowledges, the “World of Hush”—an environment sufficiently repressive as to make extreme solutions such as Crane’s unnecessary. Nor does he see a need for “panic” among America’s colleges, such as Birdseye awaits, in which whole universities would ultimately vanish: So long as faculty conformity can more or less be guaranteed, the institutions themselves can continue to function without interruption.

Prognosis: Continuing Conflict, No Immediate Resolution

What, then, does this examination of historical material have to tell us about where we are and what we might do? It tells us that the antagonism between an instrumentalist and a humanistic curriculum has been with us for a long time and is likely to stay with us for as far as the eye can see. And it tells us

that, despite this antagonism, changes within American higher education are slow to occur and that neither side has quite succeeded in killing off the other.

The apparent trend toward commercialism

At the same time, it is important to note that the overall trend within the last hundred years has been one of commercially-oriented coursework occupying more and more space in the curriculum. Given that higher education is likely to be seen as ever more critical to economic advancement (both for individuals and the economy as a whole), the overall trajectory of the curriculum in favor of the market is likely to continue over the long haul.

The history I have outlined shows that corporate dissatisfaction with universities *originated* as a dissatisfaction with the liberal arts and humanistic fields of learning. Because the humanities stand as the farthest removed from commercialization within the academy, they have the most to lose as the curriculum becomes more market driven. Partly owing to corporate pressure, these disciplines are far less central to universities today than they were a century ago. Consequently, there is reason for concern that the corps of full-time tenured professors in the humanities, whose exclusion from the corporate world currently guarantees them a great deal of intellectual autonomy, could potentially become an endangered species.

One choice available to higher education—and Veblen, Sinclair and the corporate critics of early 20th Century universities all agree on this—is to concentrate exclusively on practicality and profitability, thinking in terms of academic training as “a business proposition.”^{x1} One manifestation of this choice looms in the growth of for-profit universities. Today’s leading for-profit institutions of higher learning, such as Apollo Group, DeVry University, Corinthian College and ITT Tech, all rapidly expanded and profited despite the stock market decline of 2001-2002. They are the colleges of Clarence Birdseye’s dreams, streamlined to exclude the humanities and reoriented according to business principles.

They take a more extreme approach to the compromised image of the American professor, abolishing the term “professor” altogether. In their vast body of promotional literature, one almost never encounters the word. One finds “faculty,” “administrators,” “facilitators” and “professional staff,” but the term “professor” is for them apparently so laden with negative baggage as to be

useless. Instead, faculty are, to use Richard S. Ruch's term, "delivery people"—the facilitators of their students' professional achievements and nothing more.^{xli} DeVry University, franchised across the country, features a grand total of three faculty profiles on its Web site. The phenomenon of for-profit universities extends the debate about the future of the American professor beyond the scope of this essay, but that phenomenon is becoming more important every day. Many might argue that Apollo Group's flagship institution, the University of Phoenix, is neither a university nor located in Phoenix; if one concedes both, though, then it is the largest university in the country.

Factors that could slow, or alter commercialization

Fortunately, however, the totally commercialized vision presented above is not the whole picture. In fact, given the picture I've sketched here, one might wonder why the humanities haven't already disappeared from college curricula all over the country.

One explanation turns us back to history once again—to the university's tremendous durability as a social institution. A recent study by the Carnegie Council revealed that 66 institutions have functioned continuously since the year 1530: the Roman Catholic Church, the Lutheran Church, the parliaments of both Iceland and the Isle of Man, and 62 universities.^{xlii} Moreover, universities tend to be intransigent and their component departments highly territorial; and it is precisely these qualities that frustrate those who want universities to function like corporations. If usefulness, defined in the most short-sighted and remorselessly pragmatic terms, drives the market model, then the analogous sacred principle within the university is continuity.

Universities, of course, *do* change, but they do so at a glacial pace, making it difficult to answer even the most basic questions: How much should we worry about the market model's incursion into the culture of academia? How imperiled are the humanities right now? One thing is for sure, if the place of the humanities continues to recede, the peculiar institutional character of universities will ensure that it will recede very slowly, or take a new shape, but never disappear entirely.

The ascendancy of the market model does not have to run in a straight line, and alterations in the course of the trend can take place with changing political leadership and also with the power of unionization. Veblen and Sinclair both

noted the curious paucity of organized labor in academia in their time. Veblen notes that, “There appears to be a feeling prevalent among them that their salaries are not of the nature of real wages, and that there would be a species of moral obliquity implied in overtly dealing with this matter.”^{xliii} Sinclair is predictably more pointed. He likens professors to temperamental “actors,” explaining that, “They have their individual idiosyncrasies, their jealousies and personal superiorities. They do not think of themselves as a class; each one thinks of himself as something impossible to duplicate.”^{xliv}

Recent years, however, have witnessed a great expansion of unionization in higher education in spite of two tremendous obstacles. One is a Supreme Court decision that rendered unionizing in private higher education institutions almost impossible. The other is the fact that nearly half of the country’s states do not permit the faculty of public colleges to organize. In places where unionization is possible, the number has mushroomed over the past 30 years to about 50 percent of faculty belonging to unions. Today, over 275,000 faculty and professional staff are organized. So perhaps this could be a counterforce to commercialization of the enterprise.

The picture of commercialism is difficult to anticipate. Unforeseen cataclysmic social changes—the Great Depression, the aftermath of World War II, for example—inaugurated a long period of skepticism about the values and practices of corporate America and a corresponding increase in government support for higher education. That, in turn, made access to college possible for millions. I am not suggesting that we in the humanities sit back in anticipation of the next global financial collapse or military conflagration. We have no way of knowing what macro-political changes await us and how they will affect higher education.

I am suggesting, however, that it is time for humanistic scholars to re-examine the arguments for the humanities, and the practice of the humanities, in changing times. We are all but compelled by the historical record to change the way we talk about our problems, and to embark upon a comprehensive reassessment of both our place within the university and our relationship to the corporate forces that impinge upon it.

The reassessment I envision should be patient and sweeping in scope because we need not worry that the sky will fall tomorrow. This approach will engage big questions of political economy. How are factors such as globalization,

developing technology, the end of the Cold War and the growing class divide in America affecting higher education and the humanities in particular? How should the humanities respond?

Any one of these problems merits an essay all its own. Again, though, I am struck by the continuities with times past. A century ago, figures such as Carnegie and Birdseye championed a more practical, occupation-oriented higher schooling and dismissed the humanities as the vestige of a bygone educational era. In our time, the great increase in the numbers of non-traditional students—working adults who attend college part-time and intermittently—are skillfully catered to by for-profit universities, which offer only occupational majors and downgrade or eliminate the humanities altogether.

What are alternative visions to that of the corporate university? Sinclair's ideal is a university dedicated to humanitarian service. Veblen's defines higher learning as "a species of leisure." Is either view persuasive to a modern audience? It does not seem so at first blush, but we in the humanities should explore the application of these themes today.

At present, the argument most often put forward against corporatism is that learning and the expansion of knowledge are not instrumental but *intrinsic* values that can not and need not be justified in terms of job skills or contribution to the economy. One has to wonder if such arguments are too idealistic to persuade even a neutral audience, let alone one already critical of the academy. However, we in the academy have an obligation to continue to explore how this argument can be put forward, and practiced, in terms the general public can understand and support.

The other argument also deserves continued examination—the argument that knowledge of the humanities and humanitarian values has a direct and positive connection to economic success. Many academics shy away from an instrumental argument, but as we noted earlier, this line of thinking has attracted support from important elements of the business community and should be part of the mix.

Finally, we should re-examine how we conceptualize the role of the intellectual and scholar. Observers on both the left and the right have made the case that the public stature of intellectuals in America has eroded over the course of the

last half century. In a Pulitzer Prize-winning book published in 1962, Richard Hofstadter argued that the tendency toward anti-intellectualism, always present in American life, began gaining new momentum in the 1950s. Writing from a different ideological perspective a generation later, Russell Jacoby lamented that the public intellectuals were gradually being supplanted by academic specialists whose opinions never extend outside their disciplines.^{xlv}

In the view of many, academics occupy a dubious social niche, characterized by inscrutable customs and practices: tenure, esoteric research, suspiciously short work hours, and worse.^{xlvi} Correcting these stereotypes and restoring our public image must be part and parcel with our continued efforts to organize. I've already noted that even the adamant defender of the humanities, Upton Sinclair, found himself exasperated with professors for dwelling on their "individual idiosyncrasies" and "personal superiorities," and for refusing to think of themselves as a class. He cited these as the key stumbling blocks to comprehensive unionization. A rigorous self-assessment of how we do our work and how we present ourselves and our work must be part of our collective efforts.

ENDNOTES

ⁱ U.S. Department of Commerce. *Historical Statistics of the United States, Colonial Times to 1970, Part 1*. Washington, D.C.: U.S. Department of Commerce, 1976, 255, 383.

ⁱⁱ Wall, J. *Andrew Carnegie*. Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press, 1989; New York: Oxford University Press, 1970, 834-835.

ⁱⁱⁱ Wall, 835; Lucas, C. *Crisis in the Academy: Higher Education in America*. New York: St. Martin's Press, 1996, 144 .

^{iv} Wall, 835.

^v *Ibid*, 835.

^{vi} *Ibid*, 837; emphasis mine.

^{vii} Birdseye, C. F. *Individual Training in Our Colleges*. New York: Macmillan, 1907, 156.

^{viii} Birdseye, 187-188.

^{ix} *Ibid*, 189, 367.

^x *Ibid*, 364.

xi *Ibid*, 370.

xii *Ibid*, 189.

xiii *Ibid*, 363, 189.

xiv *Ibid*, 266.

xv *Ibid*, 273-274.

xvi Crane, R. T. *The Utility of all Kinds of Higher Schooling*. Chicago: The H.O. Shepard Co., 1909, 3.

xvii Garraty, J. A., and M. C. Carnes. *American National Biography*. New York: Oxford University Press, 1999, 674.

xviii Crane, R. T. *The Futility of Higher Schooling: An Address to College Students*. Chicago: The H.O. Shepard Co., 1911, 5; Crane, 1909, 106.

xix See in particular Canfield, J. H. *The College Student and His Problems*. New York: Macmillan, 1902 and Cooper, C. S. *Why Go to College*. New York: The Century Co., 1912.

xx Wall, 835-836.

xxi Nevins, A. *Study in Power: John D. Rockefeller, Industrialist and Philanthropist*. New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1953, 194.

xxii Upton Sinclair (1923), who believed the University of Chicago served primarily as a showpiece for Rockefeller, has a more negative interpretation of his apparent magnanimous disinterest: "Soon after the University of Chicago was built, the oil king's digestion gave out, and he retired to the country to live on graham crackers and milk and play golf all day. The job of turning his two hundred millions into two billions was left to his efficient subordinates, and they were not much interested in the old man's advertising ventures, so that the university was left to run itself" (p.243).

xxiii For the continued influence of this set of assumptions, indeed an argument nearly identical to Crane's, see Bird, C. *The Case Against College* New York: David McKay, 1975.

xxiv Veblen, T. *The Higher Learning in America: Memorandum on the Conduct of Universities by Business Men*. B.W. Huebsch; New Brunswick, N.J.: Transaction Publishers, 1918, 3-5.

xxv Veblen, 38.

xxvi *Ibid*, 85.

xxvii *Ibid*, 64.

xxviii A very different perspective on Veblen's historical account is Birdseye's observation that colleges operated most like efficient businesses in their early- and mid-19th-century

clerical period, “when they were governed and taught by clergymen in expectation of making clergymen.” Neither Veblen nor most present-day observers think of the university as reverting to the status of occupational training ground.

xxix Veblen, 35.

xxx *Ibid*, 53.

xxxi *Ibid*, 85.

xxxii *Ibid*, 116-117.

xxxiii *Ibid*, 176.

xxxiv *Ibid*, 139,145.

xxxv *Ibid*, 146.

xxxvi Sinclair, U. *The Goose-Step: A Study of American Education*. Pasadena, Calif: Published by the author, 1923, 27.

xxxvii Sinclair, 383.

xxxviii *Ibid*, 386.

xxxix *Ibid*, 398.

xl Veblen, 146.

xli Ruch, R. S. *Higher Ed., Inc.: The Rise of the For-Profit University*. Baltimore, Md.: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2001, 118.

xlii Damrosch, D. *We Scholars: Changing the Culture of the University*. Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1995, 18.

xliii Veblen, 118.

xliv *Ibid*, 458.

xlvi Hofstadter, R. *Anti-Intellectualism in American Life*. New York: Vintage, 1962, Jacoby, R. *The Last Intellectuals*. New York: Basic Books, 1987.

xlvii Contemporary fiction adds sexual fecklessness to the list of stereotypical characteristics. Three examples: the professors in Edwin Allen's *Mustang Sally* (New York: W. W. Norton, 1994) and Francine Prose's *Blue Angel* (New York: Perennial, 2001), both men in their late forties, are fired for sleeping with undergraduates. Neither appears to do much teaching or research. The professor in Erik Tarloff's *The Man Who Wrote the Book* (New York: Crown, 2000), instead of producing a scholarly monograph, writes a best-selling pornographic novel based in part on his own experiences.

