Fall 2012

Reconsidering American Higher Education

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WUURD, the Washington University Undergraduate Research Digest, is published by the Office of Undergraduate Research once a semester each academic year. Applications for submission and Statement of Editorial Policy may be found online.

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Recommended Citation

http://openscholarship.wustl.edu/vol8_iss1/110

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Undergraduate enrollment in American colleges and universities is higher than it has ever been. Considering the steeply rising enrollment, the ever inflating cost of attending, and their critical role in the discovery and dissemination of knowledge, it seems incumbent upon our students, professors, parents and society to reanalyze American institutions of higher learning. The aim of this work is to facilitate such an analysis by asking certain fundamental questions, such as: what do we want our undergraduates to be getting out of their college experience? Are they, in reality, reaching these goals? Can we do something to expedite or improve the process? The project investigates these questions by reviewing eminent works in an emerging field called “Critical University Studies,” which seeks to critically assess the frameworks, assumptions and institutions of American higher education. Specifically, I review six books: Academically Adrift (Arum and Roksa, 2011), Higher Education? How Colleges Are Wasting Our Money and Failing Our Kids—and What We Can Do About It (Hacker and Dreifus, 2010), Not For Profit: Why Democracy Needs the Humanities (Nussbaum, 2010), The Fall of the Faculty: The Rise of the All-Administrative University and Why It Matters (Ginsberg, 2011), We’re Losing Our Minds: Rethinking American Higher Education (Keeling and Hersh, 2011) and What the Best College Teachers Do (Bain, 2004). Though the authors reviewed in the work disagree on a number of issues, all unanimously believe that we must reconsider the status and purpose of American higher education, lest we lose control of this critical institution. It should be noted that the research presented is incomplete and will continue throughout the 2012-2013 school year.