

Hot Commodity

Sharon Singleton

Academic Capitalism and the New Economy; Sheila Slaughter and Gary Rhoades; *The Johns Hopkins University Press*; 2004; \$39.95

U.S. institutions of higher education have long been entrusted with the discovery and application of knowledge and, perhaps most importantly, with its dissemination to the public free of charge. As the economy has shifted from the manufacture of goods to the manufacture of knowledge, the lucrative intellectual products of science and technology generated by research universities have become big business. And there is money to be made. But by whom?

In their painstakingly researched and theory-thick book *Academic Capitalism and the New Economy*, University of Arizona higher education professors Sheila Slaughter and Gary Rhoades warn of increasingly blurred boundaries among higher education, the state and the world of commerce.

They chronicle the eclipse of Thomas Merton's conceptualization of science in a not-so-distant age as a public good, distinguished by a process that was open, communal, universal, disinterested and characterized by a skeptical habit of mind.

In general, that view prevailed in the academy until approximately 20 years ago when federal policies made it possible for institutions of higher education to enter into the world of commerce and its promise of financial gain. Principal among these policy innovations was the Bayh-Dole act, which opened up patenting and licensing opportunities to colleges and universities. Since then, research universities—public and private—have become increasingly engaged in the business of science through federal and state policies, and partnerships with corporations. And so proceeds the steady advance of what the authors have cumbersome named the “academic capitalist knowledge/learning regime” in which “discovery is valued because of

its commercial properties, broad scientific questions are couched so that they are relevant to commercial possibilities [and] knowledge is regarded as a commodity rather than a free good. ...”

Patenting and licensing of scientific work appealed to colleges and universities in large part because of the belief that these activities would generate revenue without compromising higher education's public purpose. In fact, some argue that this actually serves the public as Alan R. Earls reports in “Selling Knowledge,” [CONNECTION, Summer 2001]. Slaughter and Rhoades, however, assert that the free flow of knowledge is, in fact, impeded by patent policies. Moreover, they argue that the financial rewards on most campuses are not terribly significant and fail to benefit the institution as a whole. Rather, they benefit select groups: certain faculty who grow wealthier, some administrators who see their discretionary coffers swell and managers involved in privatizing research who ensure their own job security. Further, none of this benefits undergraduate education, which is central to the mission of higher education.

Meanwhile, at the set of institutions that do not engage extensively in scientific research but do enroll the majority of the college-going population, capitalism takes a different tack. Reduced direct support from the state, escalating costs associated with maintaining technology and the tight squeeze of the economy are among the issues that find these institutions pitted in competition with their counterparts for a finite pool of full-paying students who can increase revenue streams, as well as those of sufficient “quality” to enhance an institution's reputation and prestige. A scan of the New England landscape reveals institutions constructing elaborate residence halls and student unions with amenities that suggest the experience of a spa getaway. But public and private colleges lacking the cachet of the elites will court some students, not for what the educational experience can add to their lives, but for what the students can add to the institution's standing.

This raises serious questions for those who have been poorly prepared for college-level work by substandard public schools or who lack the financial resources to manage the full slate of tuition and fees without aid. Almost no one secures a handhold on the next rung of the economic ladder without some postsecondary education, and the better the quality of that education, the higher the hand can reach. Slaughter and Rhodes reference a failed prediction that Christopher Jencks and David Riesman made in their 1968 landmark work *The Academic Revolution*. These authors speculated that because such large percentages of children of high socioeconomic status were already attending college, the greatest increases in the future would be seen among less-advantaged students. In 1973, 47 percent of students went onto college. By 1992 that had risen to 67 percent; however, students from the lowest two income quartiles made only modest gains in their chances of completing a college degree.

Troubling trends and policies point to further exclusion of the poor and minorities from higher education opportunities. The marketplace push for merit over need-based aid makes the chances of financing a college education without accumulating debt ever slimmer—a serious impediment toward college completion. And federal aid policies coupled with economic strategies to attract much-needed revenue serve to shut off economically disadvantaged and minority students from the education that could position them well in both life and the marketplace.

Despite the authors' academic capitalism framework, the intersection of business, the state and higher education is not entirely grim and self-serving, especially when immediate profit is not on the table. University-community partnerships such as the East St. Louis Action Research Project have infused economically scarred neighborhoods with new life and possibilities and enriched undergraduate teaching and learning. Collaborations

with local K-12 systems such as GEAR UP have produced fresh thinking and action plans to tackle tough educational problems.

But if we choose to heed the warning sounded by Slaughter and Rhoades, we must find ways for institutions of higher education to refocus their attention on the public good before too much is consumed in the furnaces of capitalism.

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Tufts Acts to Follow

Joseph M. Cronin

An Entrepreneurial University: The Transformation of Tufts 1976-2002; Sol Gittleman; Tufts University Press/University Press of New England; 2004; \$26

Although technically Volume III of Tufts University histories, Sol Gittleman's *An Entrepreneurial University* is really the amazing story of how Jean Mayer, Tufts president from 1976 to 1992, changed American higher education through his charisma, brilliance and opportunism.

The eyewitness author who served as provost under three Tufts presidents, including Mayer, tells the whole truth about how Tufts emerged from an underfunded teaching college to a billion-dollar university with three medical schools and a school of nutrition.

Other research universities, banded together in the Association of American Universities, recoil at many of the innovations pioneered by Tufts. Among them:

1. The hiring of lobbyist Gerald Cassidy to arrange congressional "earmarks" of federal dollars to launch nutrition research without any academic peer review.
2. The board's hiring of an executive vice president to contain Mayer's spending commitments and costly initiatives.

3. The cavalier treatment of deans and a former provost who end up resigning in protest after being ignored or bypassed on academic matters.

As a result of its aggressive fundraising with parents and government alike, Tufts won a citation as "Not Afraid to Break the Rules" in a Jossey Bass handbook on university capital campaigns. Traditionally, universities did not count government grants as gifts nor hire federal lobbyists to avoid competitive review of professorial research proposals. Since Mayer's early efforts, such congressional earmarks now reach \$2 billion a year.

Mayer also raised state funds to establish a New England regional veterinary school after other universities either failed (Harvard 1887-1912) or opposed the idea.

Prior to Mayer, Tufts languished in the shadow of MIT and Harvard; many courses were taught by faculty who were expected to conduct research only in their spare time. Tufts was governed by trustees who preferred that presidents neither ask for big gifts nor build an endowment, despite financial shortfalls solved at times by selling parcels of land. Mayer, French freedom fighter and Harvard public health nutritionist, recruited trustees ready to support his visions of disease prevention and excellent faculty research.

Gittleman also describes the Tufts presidency of John DiBiaggio and his 11th-hour choice as the "stealth" candidate for the post in 1992. Trustees hired DiBiaggio to remove the chronic budget deficits, cultivate the loyalty of students and alumni and consolidate many of the incredible gains won under Jean Mayer. The third Tufts president of the era, Lawrence Bacow, had only begun when Gittleman began his work, but won tremendous faculty acceptance for the brilliance of his leadership in economics, law and public policy at MIT where he was chancellor.

Gittleman deplores the new breed of professional CEOs who lead universities today, and who spend most of their time on budgets, buildings and fundraising. He respects the creation of

the executive vice presidency, praising Frank Campanella of Boston College as well as Steven Manos of Tufts. He notes that Boston University was quick to hire Cassidy who has delivered tens of millions of dollars to BU's center on photonics and other projects.

The book suffers from Gittleman's compulsion to name each and every brilliant researcher and dean hired during his regime. And several points are made twice—that Dean Eliot's successor as ambassador to Afghanistan was assassinated, for example, and that John DiBiaggio never missed the NCAA Final Four. At the same time, the work of the Lincoln Filene Center, which DiBiaggio elevated to College of Citizenship status, deserves more discussion by the next Tufts biographer.

Gittleman himself is a delightful writer, beginning with his own tales of growing up as the son of a Hoboken bookmaker. He spares no adjectives in telling how Mayer was variously described as "infinitely charming, witty, duplicitous, ambitious, brilliant, opportunistic, generous, vain, slippery, loyal ..." and more. Tufts administrators and a hospital president are described as abrasive, arrogant, bullies and tyrants. The first 130 years of Tufts may have been coated in sugar, but not this volume, not by an academic whose father worked in a candy store that sold no sweets, but took bets on high-risk ventures.

Other university leaders will borrow cautiously from the Tufts menu of academic transformation. Many academic statesmen and more than a few trustees oppose congressional earmarks as "academic pork." Few presidents want an executive vice-president or deans telling trustees about the expensive antics of their president. The Tufts experience may be almost unique and rarely replicable. But we are indebted to Gittleman for a great tale, told with great humility and verve.

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