

OPINION: Our Future Donors

Richard E. Miller

It's happening again: this spring another ten thousand students are graduating from Rutgers. Next spring, it will be more of the same. More caps, more gowns, more degrees conferred. More product pushed through the system.

As the latest batch of alumni head for their cars, sandwiched between friends and family, what are they thinking, I wonder. Do they feel a connection to the institution they're leaving behind? Are they confident they've been adequately prepared for what lies beyond the fulfillment of that final requirement? And is there any reason to hope that years from now, after the glow of graduation day has passed, these future professionals will want to "give back" to their alma mater by opening not just their hearts, but also their wallets? Out of ten thousand graduates, how many might one reasonably hope would be so moved?

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I have before me a strange and powerful document. Four years ago, officials at Princeton, the better-known private institution just down the road, made a momentous decision: they committed to rebuilding their university's writing program and they placed an ad in the *Chronicle of Higher Education* to recruit a bevy of full-time lecturers to staff their new courses. (It goes without saying that these are not tenure-track positions.) Here are the conditions of employment:

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- a 2/2 teaching load, with no more than twelve students in each writing seminar;
- an annual contract renewable for up to five years;
- a starting salary of \$45,000 a year.

These working conditions are superior in every way to those experienced by full-time instructors in the Rutgers Writing Program, which I have helped to run for the past seven years. Indeed, it's safe to say that the lecturer positions in the Princeton Writing Program are significantly more attractive than those available at any of the other institutions of higher learning in the state and, I would hazard to guess, across the country as a whole. Consequently, it is not too surprising that Princeton has had no trouble assembling a teaching staff capable of providing all future entering classes with an array of intellectually stimulating, pedagogically sound writing seminars. Indeed, although the recent *Chronicle* article on these changes, "Why Johnny Can't Write, Even Though He Went to Princeton," offered only muted praise of these developments, reports from those actually involved with the daily workings of the program make it clear that everything's off to a very good start.

Why, one might reasonably ask, is Princeton doing this? There are those who are bound to see the revitalization of the Princeton Writing Program as just one more sign of the nationwide decline in the quality of first-year students, those who will say, "What is the world coming to? Even *Princeton* students require remediation!" But the truth is that, by committing itself to first-year writing with such gusto, Princeton is simply following a recent trend in the Ivy Leagues to recommit resources to undergraduate education. Evidence of this trend is everywhere ready to hand. Over the past few years, Stanford has hired Andrea Lunsford, past president of the CCCC, to direct its Writing and Critical Thinking Program, and Duke has hired Joseph Harris, winner of the CCCC Braddock Award and past editor of *CCC*, to run its Center for Teaching, Learning, and Writing. In 1999, Cornell was recognized as the best "private research university of the year" in the *Princeton Review's* annual publication, *The Best College for You*, on the strength of its John S. Knight Institute for Writing in the Disciplines, which allows entering students to work closely with full-time faculty in courses where the focus is less on content than on the ability to generate and articulate new ideas. And in 2000, Harvard selected Lawrence Summers to be its new president, in part because of his stated determination to devote his energies to the undergraduate curriculum. The Ivys and others from coast to coast are taking up the call in the Boyer Commission Report to "reinvent undergraduate education," and they're doing so by reinvesting in what is now being called "the first-year experience."

Although Princeton is one of the last Ivys to start swimming with this tide, its board of trustees has made an additional move that its rivals have yet to match: they've initiated a new "no-loan" approach to financial aid that, as of September

2001, means students won't have to go into debt to attend the university. Under this new plan, students who formerly would have had to take out loans as part of their financial-aid package now find these costs covered by a direct grant from the university itself. And, to further reduce the financial burden students experience while working their way through school, the formula for determining need has been adjusted so that students are expected to contribute only 5 percent of their summer earnings, down from the 35 percent requested in previous years (Princeton, "Grants"). In other words, Princeton is making it possible for undergraduates from the middle and working classes to attend the university without incurring *any* debt. Never again will a candidate's decision about whether to attend the university be determined solely by financial concerns. The gates to the university have been flung open!

Largesse of this kind isn't exactly free, of course. Indeed, in order to underwrite its various curricular initiatives, of which the revitalized writing program is but a part, and to meet the financial commitments produced by this new no-loan policy, Princeton's board of trustees had to approve adding almost \$57 million to the university's annual operating budget. The university was in a position to do this, according to outgoing president Harold Shapiro, because of its "successful campaign, its Annual Giving program, its excellent investment performance and the strong financial markets in recent years [. . .]" (qtd. in Princeton, "Strong Growth"). And with an endowment of \$8.3 billion (third largest behind Harvard and Yale), Princeton is in a position to do pretty much whatever it wants, including reinvesting some of its surplus in its future alumni.

Under the circumstances, who wouldn't want to join in the celebration of these unprecedented developments? Better jobs for a handful of writing teachers, better learning opportunities for Princeton's entering classes, and greater access to the Ivy Leagues for the financially disadvantaged. Could this be the cutting edge of a trend destined to sweep the nation, one where all interested students will have access to the highest-quality education and all teachers, even teachers of writing, will be guaranteed a comfortable standard of living?

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I have before me another document, one that describes the fiscal realities that govern life outside the Ivy Leagues. In what has turned out to be his final interview with *Rutgers Magazine*, Fran Lawrence reflected back on his first ten years as president of the university. In response to the request that he name the biggest challenge he had faced since taking office in 1991, Lawrence answered bluntly: "Literally a month after I got here, from roughly early 1990 until 1994, we lost about \$96 million in state funding. How do you keep an institution moving forward academically in such an environment?" (24–25). Although the interview was meant to be an occasion for

Lawrence to showcase his successes, the president had difficulty downplaying what this reduction in state support meant at the time and what it continues to mean for the university. And so when the interview concluded with a puff question about the president's three wishes for Rutgers, Lawrence did not imagine the impossible—nothing like twelve students in a writing class, for instance, or salaries for full-time writing instructors that start at \$45,000, or an annual infusion of \$57 million into his operating budget. No, Lawrence's wishes were more firmly grounded in the realities that pertain at public institutions: he wished for a level of state funding that would enable the university to continue to provide “the access and the excellence that Rutgers needs to deliver to the state of New Jersey”; he wished for greater public recognition of the university's accomplishments; and, most important, he wished for an “even greater involvement in and support of the university by our alumni and friends” (27). Within a year of making these statements, Lawrence was out of a job, having been rather unceremoniously shown the door (or, more accurately, the window) by a board of governors that had lost confidence in his ability to guide the university through these ever more uncertain economic times.

Of course, there are those who would object to assessing a university president's job performance exclusively in terms of the growth or decline in the institution's endowment on the grounds that to do so is to participate in the mindset that has brought about the “corporatization” of the university. While I can't report on the long-term effects of recognizing just how dramatically the financing of public higher education has changed over the past decade, I think it important to point out that, to date, all the critiques of the corporatization of the university have done nothing to change the fact that citizens across the United States—and the citizens of New Jersey, in particular—keep electing officials who are committed to withdrawing state and federal support from higher education. When Christie Todd Whitman was elected governor of New Jersey in 1994, for example, she did so by unseating Jim Florio, who had become wildly unpopular for raising taxes to meet the Supreme Court's order that funding for low-performing public schools be brought up to the level accorded high-performing schools. Although bound by this same court order, Whitman joined the nationwide flight from a commitment to the social good and set herself to the task of lowering taxes and reducing excessive government spending, bringing the state to the verge of economic collapse before jumping ship to join Bush's cabinet, most improbably, as the head of the Environmental Protection Agency. Whitman's final Systemwide Accountability Report offered the following evidence of the success of her policy of cutting taxes and reducing waste: “While New Jersey's state funding per FTE student was 15 percent higher than the nation in FY 1999, five years earlier it had been 29 percent higher” (New Jersey). In other—less bureaucratically flat—words, under Whitman's leadership, the state had successfully reduced its support for its institutions of higher education, and its goal of bringing

those expenses down to the national average—to the point of absolute mediocrity, one might say—was in sight.

One may feel the need to respond to these events by bemoaning the shortsightedness of politicians, the spread of a bottom-line mentality, the rise of “anti-intellectualism” across the nation. One may even insist that state documents like the Systemwide Accountability Report be subjected to a rigorous examination and a more thoroughgoing critique, all as the prolegomena to a “critical intervention” that will somehow get people to see this problem in a different light. However engaging these pastimes may be, though, they can and will do nothing to change the fact that Rutgers used to be able to count on receiving a level of state funding that is now no longer available following the collapse of the local and national economies. Nor will these activities alter in any way the \$1.6 billion shortfall in the state tax revenues that New Jersey experienced in 2001 or the stunning \$5 billion shortfall that followed in 2002. Whatever one’s feelings about these economic developments may be, it should be clear that, under the circumstances, any university president who truly believes in the value of public higher education *must* devote his or her every waking hour to raising money. That is, given the current fiscal regime, no responsible president could or should wish for anything other than more and greater revenue streams. To wish for time to focus on the curriculum or faculty retention or the alluring realm of eternal ideals would be to reveal one’s failure to understand that an engaging curriculum, a lively faculty, and even the possibility for contemplation (for most of us) all presuppose a well-funded institution.

Money first, ideas later.

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If one is genuinely interested in improving both the working conditions of writing teachers and the quality of instruction undergraduates receive, it’s important to ask where the money will come from to support such improvements. It’s also important to know who is in a position to make the decisions that will actually bring about such changes. Who are the stakeholders? Who are the agents of change? Who are the allies that matter? Who can help with the problems that exist right here, right now?

What options does a state university have to generate additional income? The funding resources a state university has to draw on are few: Rutgers can currently count on the state to cover 54 percent of its annual operating expenses and tuition to cover an additional 46 percent of the budgeted costs. If one were foolhardy enough to hope to increase the revenue provided by the state, one would have to seek to raise taxes or succeed in convincing the legislature to shift the university’s cuts to some other area of the budget—the prescription drug program for the indigent, say, or after-school programs in the public schools. Since raising taxes is the third rail in

politics now, the only real hope here is that the current letter campaign being waged by the university administration, the faculty, and the students will convince the governor to shift some piece of the university's cuts to some other group. Raising tuition is an option that is being vigorously pursued by other colleges and universities around the country and is certainly in Rutgers's future: in so doing, however, we will only succeed in continuing the process of shifting more and more of the cost of keeping the institution going from the state to the families sending students to the university and to the students themselves. Thus, while Princeton has figured out a way to make its students earn an education without accumulating the kind of debt that radically restricts one's options after graduation, the state is making attending New Jersey's research university more and more expensive to state residents and the institution itself more and more reliant on the dollars generated by tuition and fees.

No matter how high tuition goes in the future, though, no increase can cover all the expenses an institution of higher learning generates, so that leaves: (1) trying to increase the revenue that comes in through grants, a process that involves encouraging faculty and administrators to regularly draft proposals that go out to the National Science Foundation, the Department of Education, the National Endowment for the Humanities, and philanthropic NGOs; (2) entering into arrangements with corporate sponsors for licensing rights such as, for instance, giving Coca-Cola exclusive rights to sell its beverages at campus events for the next ten years, in exchange for \$10 million, as Rutgers did a few years back; and, finally, (3) attracting sizable outside donations. That's it: taxes, tuition, grants, licenses, donations (unless you're lucky enough to have a faculty member who invents a patentable product that your university can get a piece of).

But, however successful the faculty may be at attracting outside grants or the central administration may be at commercializing aspects of university life, the revenues generated by such ventures will never be sufficient to cover the costs of keeping public institutions of higher education running. Everyone involved in financing higher education knows this, which is why every college and university in the country is perpetually in the process either of launching a new "capital campaign" to bring in the donor dollars or declaring the successful conclusion of such a campaign and the commencement of a new campaign with ever higher goals. In 1994, for instance, Neil Rudenstein, unquestionably the greatest fundraiser higher education has ever seen, launched the "University Campaign" at Harvard. Five years later the campaign concluded having successfully raised \$2.6 billion. When Rudenstein, a former English professor who has published a book on the poetry of Sir Philip Sidney, stepped down as president of Harvard in the summer of 2001, it was estimated that he had raised an average of \$1 million a day during the ten years he ran the university.

The rich most certainly are getting richer, but this doesn't automatically turn into better working conditions, of course, as the sit-in by the members of Harvard's Living Wage Campaign during the summer of 2001 made abundantly clear. However, *that* sit-in was able to succeed in forcing Harvard's administration to create a committee that eventually approved a plan to raise hourly wages for the university's service workers precisely because Harvard, which has an endowment larger than the endowments of the top ten public universities combined, is clearly and unambiguously in a position to extend a living wage to all its employees.

Here are some lessons one might take from these developments:

- First grow the endowment, then redistribute the wealth.
- If there is no endowment to speak of either to work with or against, there is no leverage for change, no matter how just the cause. (Recall that the most significant student movement of the past twenty years involved compelling colleges and universities to divest themselves of their holdings in South African companies.)
- In a winner-take-all society, where money follows money, public universities are at a profound disadvantage when it comes to competing for philanthropic gifts. Unless the faculty and administrators who work at such institutions develop new strategies for attracting the loyalties of the many publics that are served by state colleges and universities, the quality of postsecondary education will continue to depend on the whims of stressed state legislators and the juggling skills of unknown university business managers whose decisions are driven by the balance sheet and not a commitment to, say, the social good or social justice.

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It is easy to be overwhelmed by financial data of this kind. It's not just that the sums involved are unimaginable to most of us who were trained to work in the humanities. It's also that the teaching profession attracts individuals indisposed to think much about endowments and budgetary matters, let alone to entertain thoughts of assisting with the project of improving an institution's financial standing, even if that institution is a nonprofit organization. I certainly didn't get into this business to be a bean counter, a shill for the institution, Willy Loman, a song-and-dance man, or a marionette for the WTO, and I haven't crossed paths with anyone who has such aspirations. So, given that I know such charges fall quickly and heavily on the heads of those who try to draw attention to the financial realities that govern the business of higher education, I understand why it is more appealing to stick with the other, more familiar ways of responding to the defunding of public higher education—unionizing, striking, taking a job elsewhere—ways that are more in keeping with the habitus of those of us who have committed ourselves to the work of teaching others.

In pointing out the increasingly perilous state of public higher education, I don't mean to suggest that we abandon unions, job actions, or the power that can

come from moving on to other work or even from walking away from it all. In the short run, though, I think it is fair to say that—in New Jersey, at least—none of these responses stands a chance against the crushing weight of the state's debt. For what it's worth, I have been a member of the union at Rutgers since I joined the faculty more than a decade ago, and I have benefited in many ways from the union's efforts to protect and improve the working conditions of those of us who are tenured or who are on the tenure track. And I am certainly grateful that I am not among the ranks of those unprotected workers at the university who have lost their jobs over the past two years. But there's only so much solace I can take in the power of the AAUP to protect the tenured and the tenure-track members of the teaching profession. As the former associate director of a writing program that employs some twenty-five full-time lecturers on nonrenewable contracts, another six program directors on nonrenewable contracts, and more than a hundred part-time instructors, I'm keenly aware of how little impact the union has had on the lives of these teachers, all of whom must, sooner or later, select the final option for temporary workers faced with unsatisfactory working conditions—they must find a job elsewhere. And I note as well that recent efforts to unionize graduate students at Cornell and Yale have met with stunning defeats, the significance of which is sure to be subject to wide debate in the years ahead—a debate that will carry on over the heads and around the bodies of real teaching assistants who continue to believe, despite mounting evidence to the contrary, that these degrees they're pursuing will be their tickets out to secure employment and good working conditions.

True, for those of us who are lucky enough to work in union shops, the option of striking is always there looming in the background as a seemingly viable strategy for forcing the improvement of our working conditions. The following thought experiment, though, illustrates just how steep the challenges are that academics face in their efforts to convince a skeptical public that the working conditions of the highly educated are cause for collective concern.

Imagine for a moment that you have a forty hour a week job, one where you're required to be somewhere—in some building, behind some desk, near some phone, anywhere—five days a week, fifty weeks out of the year. To level the playing field as much as possible, let's say the job you have is better than most: there's a health plan, a retirement plan, periodic performance reviews that are accompanied by modest salary increases. Before you head off for another eight hours of work, you read an article in *The New York Times* entitled "Collegial Atmosphere Pervades C. W. Post Professors' Strike." The faculty on strike, you learn, have rejected the administration's offer of 5 percent across-the-board raises for the next three years; the union is requesting an 8 percent raise the first year and an end to administrative efforts to cap the number of faculty who are granted course releases for research. You learn in the article that the average salary for a full-time professor at C. W. Post is \$70,000 a year

and that a full teaching load requires teaching four fifty-minute classes three times a week. And you learn that the faculty are opposed to administrative efforts to require the performance of “some ‘measurable research’ to qualify” for requested course reductions because, as one faculty member puts it, “As far as research goes, that is our nature, and we are always doing research anyway” (Baker). How sympathetic are you likely to be to this cause, as it is represented by the *Times*?

Now, imagine you work twelve months out of the year at a job of any kind: a fry cook, a bus driver, a banker, a real estate agent, a work-at-home parent. How likely do you think it would be that you would agree with the following statements:

- Faculty members are underpaid.
- Faculty members are overworked.
- When I attended college—if I was lucky enough to have attended college—I felt that the world of work my teachers occupied resembled the world of work I was destined for.

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When the press elects to represent the plight of teachers in the familiar ways the *Times* has in the article I refer to here, it is hard for those of us in the teaching profession who know the real story from the inside out not to feel beleaguered. It's hard, too, not to want to argue over the details, to contest the skewed data, the clipped quotations; it's hard to resist saying, “But that's not what life is like for most teachers.” And it's hard, finally, to admit that such responses don't have a chance against the widely held belief that teachers across the full range of institutions have it easy because, no matter what the walk of life, everyone's heard the three best reasons for going into this line of work—June, July, and August. All the data that those of us who run writing programs have to show about the actual wages of part-time lecturers will never have much impact on the average reader flipping quickly through the newspaper on the commute into or out of New York City.

The strike by the schoolteachers in Middletown, New Jersey, which briefly captured a place in the national headlines in the fall of 2001, provided one more example of just how entrenched the view is that teachers have it easier than all other workers. After the teachers in Middletown's public school system refused to honor the presiding judge's order that they return to work and were then jailed en masse, the national media showed up—not to document the working conditions that had led to the strike, as it turned out, but rather to record the outraged reactions of parents who couldn't get to work because they were suddenly stuck trying to find people to look after their stranded children. And then, when the strike was broken a week later and the teachers dejectedly returned to work, the last image *The New York*

Times provided of the event, in an article entitled, “United They Stood, Briefly,” was of a comfortable middle-class home with a sign staked out in the front yard that read:

POOR TEACHERS
START 36,000 AVG 56,000
FOR 9 MONTHS WORK
LEAVE THEM IN JAIL

How can those of us who value the profession of teaching, those of us who want to protect work in the humanities as a place free of concerns about the bottom line, contend with such rage?

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At faculty meetings and national conferences across the country, the charge is made repeatedly that higher education is under siege because of a surge in “anti-intellectualism.” Those who doubt that faculty members are underpaid, overworked, and committed to the success of all their students are perennially hauled out as prime examples of how successfully “the Right” has waged its campaign to discredit the hard work that goes into being an academic. Without meaning to discount these efforts, I would like to suggest the possibility that there are many people of good will who share these doubts about the professoriate precisely because they themselves were ill-served by the teachers they had in the past—teachers who weren’t available for conferences; teachers who didn’t hand back work on time; teachers who didn’t explain what they were looking for or how they graded what they got; teachers who were less interested in providing instruction than in demonstrating mastery; teachers stretched to the breaking point because they were juggling classes at two or more institutions just to make ends meet.

With this—perhaps remote—possibility in mind, I think again of those ten thousand graduates streaming away from the ceremonies that dot the many campuses comprised by my home institution. One of the most potent forces that stands in the way of improving the delivery of undergraduate education is the simple fact that there will always be more students. Whether one puts full professors or part-time lecturers at the front of the class, whether or not one provides the teaching faculty with access to the Internet, or chalk, or paper, the students will keep coming. And, indeed, as the economy has collapsed, the crush to get into school has only increased, even as the cost of attending has continued its inexorable upward climb. For almost fifty years, it hasn’t mattered one way or the other whether one did a good job of teaching or not; state support and student tuition dollars could be counted on to just keep rolling in.

With the steady withdrawal of state support, though, public institutions of higher

education find themselves asking how it will be possible to maintain the dual commitment to access and excellence, when each student admitted creates a debit in the system that is no longer picked up by the state, a debit that must be covered by some other means—greater student debt, greater internal economies, more reductions in services, larger classes, more itinerant workers. With the state backing out of the higher education business and tuition climbing as best it can to make up the difference, the time has passed when public institutions of higher education can afford to disregard the question of whether their graduates leave feeling they were well served during their years in the academy. In the new era of *a la carte* civic responsibility that we now find ourselves in, an era where the federal government seems determined to bankrupt itself to successfully complete the process of dismantling the social welfare programs that were born in the fifties and sixties, public institutions of higher education will live or die based on their ability to attract voluntary support. The new economy, in other words, has brought with it a significant change: it has made institutions of higher education suddenly much more dependent upon student satisfaction. The equation is seemingly straightforward: if our students leave our institutions dissatisfied with the quality of the education they've received, they are unlikely to become future donors; and, if they don't become future donors, then both the range of students served and the learning opportunities provided by public universities will continue to contract.

There is already a growing body of literature detailing the dangers of reconfiguring students as consumers, a literature, it is worth noting, that is largely written by those denizens of the academy who seem to have lost sight of the fact that, for the vast majority of students in public institutions, attending college continues to be a considerable investment of time, energy, and money. These students and their parents, reasonably enough it seems to me, expect to get something in exchange for their many different investments, something besides, that is, lectures on the perils of vocationalism and airy statements about the transcendent rewards of the life of the mind.

Fortunately, Rutgers now has a president who appreciates the magnitude of these problems and who understands the necessity of enlisting the faculty's support in rethinking just how the state's public university will function in the twenty-first century. In his inaugural address, Dick McCormick defined the university as having three overarching commitments: "transmitting the knowledge of the ages from generation to generation, creating brand new knowledge, and applying that knowledge to the needs of the world." Acknowledging that the university community had failed to explain the value of these ideals "to the people of our state," McCormick nevertheless refused the dichotomized version of the university as a place that is *either* about the free pursuit of ideas *or* about the pursuit of utility. Rather, McCormick insisted that the university be seen as a place that is committed both to "ideals that

have no bottom line except the enrichment of our species through the arts, humanities, and the sciences” and to creating “knowledge that is useful, especially to the people of New Jersey.”

The only way the university can continue to meet these dual commitments, McCormick continued, is “to connect our university much more deeply to the needs and aspirations of the people of New Jersey” and to “rely ever more heavily on other sources of support than the state—tuition, federal and corporate research support, self-supporting educational programs, technology transfer, private gifts and grants.” Stressing that each of these sources of revenue had the potential to undermine the ideals of the university as a place for free and unfettered speculation, McCormick closed by reminding the audience that public universities “have always been influenced by their sources of support and are always challenged to maintain an independent set of values—autonomy, integrity, accessibility, openness, freedom of thought and expression, civility, and equality. These values are never entirely secure. They must be reaffirmed and defended and held in trust for future generations who will, in turn, be required to restate them and defend them again” (McCormick).

This is not a battle that ends, but it is a battle that can be definitively lost, that will be lost, if those of us in the teaching profession do not learn new ways of thinking through the paradoxical necessity we now face of having to generate both revenue and public support for preserving learning spaces that are not driven by concerns about the bottom line. The internal conflicts produced by this paradox are obvious; the contradictory subject positions this paradox generates are also well known. So, we can plow once more through these well-known fields or we can work together to try to generate new ways of responding to one of those rare moments in the history of public education that genuinely warrants being termed a “crisis.”

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What would it mean to take this call seriously? Is it possible to imagine teaching faculty and university administrators working side by side to preserve the ideals of access and excellence that institutions of public higher education strive to embody? Would this change anything for the better or can we say with absolute certainty that we know from the outset that this would end in disaster? Allow me to propose one final thought experiment.

How would your institution have to change if it thought of its students as future donors? Would it simper, bow, and scrape before the entering classes? Would it roll out the red carpet and declare every confused utterance the students produced a brilliant insight, every sloppy project a work of genius, every standard the students couldn't reach on first try unreasonable? Or would your institution have to embrace more fundamental changes? Would it have to put faculty in small first-year classes?

Would it have to provide students with close and sustained contact with challenging teachers, ideas, and experiences? Would it have to alter the modes of instructional presentation and assessment, the organization of class times during the week, access to labs, libraries, and support services?

The most common vision that emerges from this thought experiment is apocalyptic: a collapse in standards, a catering to every wish, the wholesale conversion of the rigors of university life to the simpler pleasures of life on the country club where the student-patrons receive whatever they ask for. This vision is the result, I believe, of fear and insecurity. Could one possibly build and sustain a solid alumni base at a public university by capitulating in these ways? Is this *really* what students show up expecting from college—that everything will be easy and all efforts, however feeble, will be greeted with enthusiasm and high marks? I've had a handful of students who had such expectations over the years and I've spent my fair share of time with parents who felt the same way, but I've never thought it my job to satisfy their yearnings for mediocrity. Rather, my job is to help to educate them about the virtues of learning how to read, write, think, and argue in the ways that are valued in our writing program, in the academy more generally, and in the professions that await them. Doubting the value of such an enterprise has been part of the college experience for at least the past forty years, which is precisely why teachers and administrators should be prepared with better responses than shock or dismay when it arises.

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Students as future donors? Since I've devoted the bulk of my professional career to exploring the way the figure of "the student" is deployed in educational discourse, even I find it hard to believe that my thinking has brought me to this point. I certainly understand that there are dangers to this version of the student, just as my earlier historical research helped me to see the dangers of our more familiar figurings of students as victims in the system, as proxies for the revolution, and even as examples of the transformative power of education. To recognize these dangers is only to do half of the rhetorical and analytical work that a serious effort at educational reform requires, though. As experienced writing teachers, we know that every rhetorical decision buys you something and costs you something at the same time. So, acknowledging the many dangers involved in casting the students as "future donors," what might be the rhetorical advantages of adding this way of representing students to our repertoire? Aside from the dangers, are there any benefits?

Here are some questions that I have found this representation makes possible:

If students are future donors, are they well served by teachers who have no phones?

If students are future donors, are they well served by teachers who have no offices?

If students are future donors, are they well served by teachers who have no computers?

If students are future donors, are they well served by teachers who have no access to the Internet?

If students are future donors, are they well served by teachers who have no access to copy services?

If students are future donors, are they well served by teachers who have no job security?

If students are future donors, are they well served by teachers who have no external incentive system that encourages or rewards ongoing development?

These are the conditions that govern the lives of most writing teachers who work off the tenure track, conditions about which most faculty on the tenure track and most administrators know little or nothing at all. While posing questions in this form will never go over well with teachers, I have found that this strategy does catch the attention of those administrators who make the decisions that determine, most immediately, what the working conditions in our writing program will be like in the years to come. And this, after all, is one of the primary uses of rhetoric, isn't it—to be a tool for drawing attention to and generating action about the issues that most concern the person speaking.

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What I've proposed here is a different way to phrase the problems that public colleges and universities face in the economy that was left behind when the dot-com bubble burst. In this world turned upside down, the case can be made that it is now crucial to the long-term financial well-being of public institutions of higher education to improve the working conditions of writing instructors, precisely because writing programs have access to all those impressionable and invaluable future donors. However implausible this argument may seem to seasoned veterans in the field, the developments at Princeton, Harvard, Duke, and Stanford amply illustrate that there are administrations and boards of trustees around the country who have already come to see just how important the first-year experience is to securing an institution's future. This is one lesson those of us who are committed to preserving public higher education would do well to learn ourselves and to begin sharing with the faculty, the deans, and the trustees at our home institutions.

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