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Take Your Ritalin and Shut Up

In general, fake solutions appear in response to real problems. In what sense is that true with respect to David Horowitz's Academic Bill of Rights and the question of academic freedom for undergraduates?¹

On the one hand, I completely agree with the best responses so far, which suggest that Horowitz has, for the most part, manufactured a fake problem. As Michael Bérubé, Cary Nelson, and many others have pointed out, where students have been given the chance to protest grades based on faculty political bias, they rarely do so.² The few complaints made are even more rarely upheld and are just as likely to be claims of right-wing bias. Furthermore, it's clear that Horowitz is manufacturing a problem in order to push a real agenda: that is, by making false and often simply ridiculous claims about left-wing bias in student learning, he wishes to sweepingly enable administrators and legislators to institute affirmative action for right-wing scholars in hiring and to employ "intellectual diversity" as a wedge to force religious and conservative ideas into curricula. The author of *The Art of Political War: How Republicans Can Fight to Win*, Horowitz has

openly identified himself as a partisan political operative.³ So one of the real problems generating Horowitz's fake "movement" is the perennial difficulty of propagandists, how to garner credibility for ideas with little traction among serious thinkers. In that sense, though, the figure of the undergraduate is at best a pawn in the fairly narrow field of political struggle in the United States. Their academic freedom, to the extent that it's considered by these accounts, would appear to be essentially secure—at least from the faux specter of left-wing indoctrination. Essential but similarly unsatisfying is the narrative of student "intellectual freedom" in formalist accounts distinguishing between student intellectual liberties and the web of professional responsibilities and activities invoked by "academic freedom."

While it is vital to retain the distinction between intellectual and/or speech liberties more broadly and the freedoms intertwined with responsibilities attendant on a unique professional situation, the formalist response leaves most of us cold, in part because we sense that faculty and student freedoms are interrelated in key ways.

A relevant consideration is that faculty and graduate students have found their academic freedom under sustained—and intensifying—assault. Despite the utility of the formalist account in procedural venues, it is difficult to imagine that undergraduate intellectual freedom could be perfectly secure when the faculty's is not.

Faculty and graduate students are subjected to enormous pressure to conform to administrative interpretation of "institutional mission" and to accommodate directly the state and capitalist interests served by administrators. This is most obvious among the faculty serving nontenurably, now the overwhelming majority of college faculty. Not counting graduate students or allowing for widespread administrative underreporting, today only about one-quarter of all faculty are tenured or tenure track.⁴ Nontenurability is the norm of academic employment; therefore, it is now simply normal for college faculty to enjoy little to no protection of their academic freedoms. In nearly all circumstances, the precariousness of their employment means that they can be retaliated against for almost any speech or action, without the administration engaging in due process (or even giving a reason).

Even for the tenured, transgression against administrative control or questioning the state and other actors served by many administrations has meant a steady increase in direct repression and retaliation, as numerous

high-profile cases confirm. In addition to the growing sense of administrative impunity and dominance displayed by the high-profile cases of direct repression (Ward Churchill, Norman Finkelstein, and Joseph Massad, for starters), administrations are increasingly united by a sense of common culture and purpose—that purpose being a struggle with faculty culture and a desire to supplant the values, beliefs, and practices of traditional faculty culture with “high-performing,” entrepreneurial, and “market-smart” values, beliefs, and practices. As I’ve written elsewhere, management is winning this *kulturkampf*—it has largely succeeded in its effort to seduce, compel, and convert traditional faculty to a culture characterized by what Sheila Slaughter, Larry L. Leslie, and Gary Rhoades have dubbed “academic capitalism.”⁵ The minority of faculty in the tenure stream are, in my view, close to being nakedly visible as little more than a small class of grant-writing entrepreneurs plus the somewhat larger group that serves as a candidate pool for administration. At many institutions, the group of tenure-stream faculty without access to grants increasingly amounts to the group of people who are now, have been, or soon will be serving as department chairs; institute and program heads; directors of undergraduate studies, graduate studies, writing programs, and core curricula; assistant deans; and the like. Indeed, at my current institution—a well-regarded comprehensive with a highly ranked business school and competitive law school—many of those lowest-level administrative roles are filled by lecturers working without tenure. In my department alone, nontenurable faculty fill such roles as director of first-year writing, director of creative writing, associate chair, and assistant to the university president.

So my purpose in this essay is to wonder in what sense the academic freedom of the undergraduate may be facing similar consequences by way of similar forces.

It turns out that undergraduates are like graduate students and faculty in every respect. Their academic freedom is under direct, sustained, and steadily increasing assault by administrations. They are retaliated against by administrations for questioning the control of administrations or for questioning the practices and values of the state and corporate actors served by administrations. Student culture is the object of near-continuous administrative intervention: with the active participation of state and corporate partners, undergraduate culture is steadily commercialized, militarized, and vocationalized. And I think we need to ask the same question of

undergraduates that we ask of faculty: to what extent does the structured precariousness of their existence affect the very possibility of their exercising academic freedom?

In other words, what are the consequences for students of universalizing the literacy, culture, and subjectivity of precarity?

Discipline and Punish, Early and Often

Those of us writing about higher education tend to repeat two fundamental, related errors. First, we tend to project the experience of privileged fractions of faculty and students onto the very different reality of the majority of faculty and students. This means that we participate in elite-media and mass-media fantasies that the minority of tenurable faculty and the minority of leisure-class undergraduates are typical, when both are far more typically working multiple jobs and teaching and learning in the off-hours. Second, we tend to forget that students arrive on campus already schooled—that much of what happens “in” higher education is conditioned by what has already happened in primary and secondary education, because there are shared forces and pressures on the majority of educational sites and because for many students the experiences are far more continuous and consistent than we are in the habit of recognizing.

Beginning at least a decade before arriving on campus, today’s undergraduates have been subjected to an intense campaign of subordination, policing, and ideological control. At the heart of this campaign is standards-based educational “reform” (SBER), the regime of high-stakes testing familiar to most in the form of No Child Left Behind (NCLB) legislation, tying federal funding of schools to performance in certain mandated areas. It’s a schema that should be familiar to members of college and university units now competing with each other for funding: it sends more funds to schools with high test scores and less funds to schools with low test scores. While a rational observer might wonder whether low test scores might indicate a school with the need for more resources rather than less—just as a department without access to grant funding might need more institutional support, not less—NCLB makes perfect sense under neoliberalism, privatization, and the reigning logic of transferring wealth to the already wealthy: “successful” schools get rewarded; “unsuccessful” schools are punished. The effort to avoid the designation of failure under this regime forces educators into competition with each other to teach more and more directly to

the assessment instrument, throwing everything else (music! art! sports! history! social relations! media literacy! critical thought!) overboard in a mad scramble to avoid the defunding of institutions and on-the-job consequences for individuals—wage reduction, demotion, and termination. Like schools and teachers, students absorb the message that performance on the test is everything and all else is an ornamental distraction. As critical educators have long pointed out, SBER produces a narrow, standardized curriculum—and the narrower and more standardized curriculum becomes, the more easily it is dominated by state actors and their corporate masters.

As Kevin Vinson and Wayne Ross make clear, assessment legislation serves the class war from above in two related ways.⁶ It operates simultaneously as a regime of surveillance (the disciplinary observation of the many by the few: policing) and of spectacle (the disciplinary observation of the few by the many: pedagogy). As a scene of surveillance and policing, high-stakes testing produces severe consequences for individuals and groups with the urge to color outside the panoptic lines of assessment:

The “or-else” effect establishes the priority of that particular [assessed] content (information, facts, skills, values, and so on) as well as the inferiority, unworthiness, and marginalization of other contents (and knowledges). It operates as a “checks and balances” system of observation that seeks to privilege the dominant and formally created curriculum and related modes of instruction. It enables, in other words, curriculum managers to “see” whether and “how well” a prescribed program is being followed. Moreover, it works within a panoptic order such that teachers “survey” students, administrators survey teachers and students, and school boards (and other public officials) survey all of them, each in successive and more indirect rounds of disciplinarity.⁷

At the same time, the testing regime produces results (scores) that circulate within the spectacular economy, with what Vinson and Ross dub a corresponding spectacularization of teaching and learning “purely on the basis of image. Both media and public, via test scores, create understandings grounded not in what actually occurs in schools and classrooms—nor on what teachers and students actually do—but on how this all is represented.”⁸ In this account, rising and falling test scores are closely—breathlessly—watched by parents, teachers, administrators, media, legislators, and students themselves, and the scores, emerging as a faint, diminished representation of educational experience, become the substance itself, no longer

producing the social desire (to be educated) but the competitive *need to be seen as high scoring*.

Frequently the disciplinary and spectacular forms of control by assessment fail to produce the desired narrowly “high-performing,” or at least docile, subjects. In these cases blunter, older, more medieval forms of policing are today widely and unapologetically employed. As a series of observers has noted (Kenneth Saltman, Enora Brown, Henry A. Giroux, and Peter Cassidy), many contemporary schools are no longer “merely” corporatized; they are militarized “kinder-gulags”—with armed guards, drug-sniffing dogs, warrantless search of persons and personal spaces, metal detectors, identity cards, surveillance cameras, razor-wire fencing, curfews and lock-down drills, profiling schemes, drug testing, mandatory psychological analysis and pharmacological treatment, dress codes, and comprehensive rules of behavior enforced under “zero-tolerance” principles, meaning that a single infraction can result in expulsion.⁹

Zero tolerance throws the mantle of “enemy combatant” on offenders. Rather than, for instance, “juveniles” with a “delinquency” to be remediated, an offender is now imagined by authority as fully, instantly other in ways closely parallel to the ways that the rhetoric of a “war on evil” renders the state’s enemies subhuman: by offending even once, the offender has forsaken membership in the education community. (And indeed, zero-tolerance administrators simply designate offenders as a problem for the police; offenders by definition are subjects of criminal justice, not education.) Giroux relates the militarization of schools to the larger politics of fear comprehensively, noting that zero tolerance criminalizes the behavior of those with medical or emotional problems as well as enduring youth behavior such as loitering and hanging out, minor infractions such as cigarette smoking, sexual experimentation, and modest insubordination or tantrum throwing.¹⁰ While young people increasingly risk punishment as adults in forty-five states—in Kansas and Vermont, even ten-year-olds can be tried as adults, fourteen-year-olds can be placed in California’s adult prisons, and the United States is one of only seven nations in the world permitting the death penalty for juveniles—they have steadily reduced access to “adult” privileges and protections, including the right to decisions about their own bodies, ranging from tattoos and hair styles to pregnancy, birth control, and nutrition.¹¹ Not surprisingly, the intensity of militarization and the likelihood of experiencing zero-tolerance expulsion are closely tied to class and race—as well as test scores. Zero tolerance increasingly becomes

an opportunity for a school to permanently remove low scorers from its statistical profile. And for those cast out from the schools, what option awaits them? The military, of course. Without political support for a draft, the cast-out population of disproportionately poor, nonwhite, male educational noncitizens is aggressively targeted for military recruitment. As leading participatory-action researcher Michelle Fine told Stanley Aronowitz in 2004, “Visit a South Bronx high school these days and you’ll find yourself surrounded by propaganda from the Army, Navy, and Marines.”¹²

Where militarization fails or is less socioeconomically “appropriate” (such as in white, suburban schools with liberal-democratic boards), medicine steps up to the plate. In populations with enough power over school authorities that dogs, clubs, razor wire, and the simple expedient of summoning the police or instant expulsion are unavailable, a pervasive culture of medical correction fills the gap. Clinical psychologist Bruce Levine explains “how teenage rebellion . . . [became] a medical illness” with the 1980 addition to the *Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders* of “Oppositional Defiant Disorder” (ODD):

Many talk show hosts think I’m kidding when I mention oppositional defiant disorder. After I assure them that ODD is in fact an official mental illness—an increasingly popular diagnosis for children and teenagers—they often guess that ODD is simply a new term for juvenile delinquency. But that is not the case. Young people diagnosed with ODD, by definition, are doing *nothing illegal* (illegal behaviors are a symptom of another mental illness called conduct disorder). In 1980, the American Psychiatric Association (APA) created oppositional defiant disorder, defining it as “a pattern of negativistic, hostile and defiant behavior.” The official symptoms of ODD include “often actively defies or refuses to comply with adult requests or rules” and “often argues with adults.”¹³

A diagnosis of ODD can result in medication with powerful tranquilizers such as Risperdal and Zyprexa. Of course, the availability of the diagnosis means that some individuals will receive treatment, medication, and/or resources that benefit them.¹⁴ But numerous experts have worried about overdiagnosis and overmedication of young people, and critical educators frequently worry that the problem is not the lack of compliance by American youth but its precise opposite, an epidemic of compliance.

Norm Diamond, for instance, argues that many of the so-called defiant

“symptoms” are in many cases “part of establishing independence and developing critical thinking. Equipping children to argue back is part of good parenting and good teaching.”¹⁵ Nonetheless, a massive therapeutic industry of behavior modification, including pharmaceutical companies, now targets parents, promising cures for “defiant children.” One of the most pervasive ad campaigns draws on the rhetoric of homeland security to label youth defiance the “war at home,” urging a corrections mentality on the family: “The focus of treatment should be on compliance and coping skills, not on self-esteem or personality. ODD is not a self-esteem issue; it’s a problem solving issue.”¹⁶ Responding to Big Pharma ads for ODD medications targeting parents in his Portland, Oregon, media market, Diamond created a parody description of what he argues is the real social malaise, “Compliance Acquiescent Disorder,” which played locally in both radio and print versions. (An unexpected result of the parody was that outlets publishing the parody received calls from readers and listeners seeking treatment for their compliance disorder.)

Noting that “ODD-diagnosed young people are obnoxious with adults they don’t respect [but] can be a delight with adults they do respect,” Levine suggests that in many cases the symptoms of ODD are rational resistance to authoritarian abuses and “rebellion against an oppressive environment,” explanations rarely considered by educators or mental health professionals. Levine speculates that the willingness to medicate rebellion and nonconformity emerges in the social psychology of medical professionals, including a sense of shame for “their own excessive compliance”:

It is my experience that many mental health professionals are unaware of how extremely obedient they are to authorities. Acceptance into medical school and graduate school and achieving a Ph.D. or M.D. means jumping through many meaningless hoops, all of which require much behavioral, attentional and emotional compliance to authorities—even disrespected ones. When compliant M.D.s and Ph.D.s begin seeing noncompliant patients, many of these doctors become anxious, sometimes even ashamed of their own excessive compliance, and this anxiety and shame can be fuel for diseasing normal human reactions.¹⁷

Of course, Levine’s observations would seem to hold for educators as well, many of whom welcome the diagnosis of ODD and other conduct-related disorders as “classroom management tools.” (On the other hand,

the vast majority of teachers discussing “defiant” students on forums like ProTeacher.com are exchanging nonmedical tips, often involving massive extracurricular, noninstructional effort and expense on their part, voluntarily taking on the role of therapist and parent as well as instructor.)

“Finally, a cure for the class struggle,” wryly observed one of the AlterNet discussion threads in response to Levine’s piece. “Is there a pill for megalomania and warmongering?” wondered another.

The Culture of Schooling Comes to Campus

College faculty will be more familiar with another intersection of pharmacology and curriculum, the widespread diagnosis of attention deficit and hyperactivity disorders (ADD and ADHD), and the corresponding prescription of amphetamines and cognate medicines. Estimates of prescription use of ADHD medication by children range between 2.5 and 6 million.¹⁸ Methylphenidate (Ritalin) has replaced Prozac as the drug defining an entire cohort, with observers beginning to speak of a “Ritalin nation,” a “generation Ritalin,” and the like. Students themselves actively seek the ADHD diagnosis. The pills have many uses related to the spectacularized culture of testing, overwork, stress, and body consciousness—they aid in concentration, provide wakefulness, suppress appetite, assuage certain emotions, and improve athletic performance. They can be crushed and snorted or smoked recreationally in ways similar to methamphetamines. The diagnosis itself directly addresses high-stakes testing: medicated or not, ADD- and ADHD-diagnosed students can request additional time in many testing circumstances.

Many more students than those diagnosed use the medication: there is an active black market in Ritalin in every educational environment from primary school through graduate school. Students pay in the range of \$10 per dose for “vitamin R.” Just as thematized in the mass culture of the professional-managerial class (in TV shows like *Desperate Housewives*), there are widespread reports of parents using Ritalin prescribed to their children to meet the demands of their own “standards-based” existences. In families trapped in low-wage jobs, parents may also take Ritalin to meet the demands of their own working lives in the service economy or, sometimes, illegally sell it to make ends meet. Leonard Sax reports one case of a teacher fired for stealing his students’ Ritalin.¹⁹ After belatedly banning amphetamines in 2005, the diagnosis of Major League Baseball players

with ADHD quintupled. Though the National Collegiate Athletic Association has banned “illicit” use of ADHD medications, college athletes are routinely issued “exemptions” upon showing a diagnosis, in many cases continuing usage patterns begun in high school or earlier.²⁰ I have had former high school athletes describe to me their decisions not to continue in college sports in part as a decision to stop taking medication to keep up with the demands of teams, tests, and employment.

The use of methylphenidate and related drugs has exploded in close relation to standards-based education reform. In recent years, the Federal Drug Administration has restricted some ADHD medications and required its most serious black-box warning on others, and questions have emerged about the late-1990s studies urging medication over therapy. Better-designed studies have shown the opposite, that therapy may be more effective, certainly with fewer side effects, but usage continues to soar. With the wide availability of ADHD drugs direct to children and small dealers via offshore Internet pharmacies, usage becomes more difficult to track. A coalition across the admittedly narrow political spectrum of the United States has begun to question the relationship between educational practice and policy and medication, bringing together the readership of the *New York Times* with figures like Phyllis Schlafly and John Silber.²¹

Ritalin appears on college campuses as part of the performance culture of the “winners” in the regime of high-stakes assessment. In a “Youth Radio” report for PBS’s *NewsHour*, Michelle Jarboe found widespread use at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill. Her own usage followed professional-managerial usage patterns—she got her pills from a boyfriend whose parents were both psychiatrists:

But I was driven to do well in school, and couldn’t see my way through all the papers, tests and projects on two or three hours of sleep a night. That is, until I encountered my friends’ little pills.

Sometimes they were free, and sometimes a single pill could cost as much as seven or eight dollars. Whatever the cost, the returns were amazing.²²

Her report and similar reports in campus newspapers across the country closely align black market use of attention deficit medication to being “driven to do well.” Many users are individuals who won’t use other drugs, such as ecstasy or even marijuana. Those with prescriptions for the pills

report being deluged with requests from friends (or customers) at exam time and resorting to stockpiling.

Much of the journalism about and official campus and other institutional discussions of the issue (such as the U.S. Department of Education's Web page) emphasizes the voluntary nature of the use of nonmedical prescription stimulants, almost universally raising the specter of recreational use—as the DOE Web site says, seeking wakefulness to continue studying “or partying.”²³ While student respondents acknowledge this use, overwhelmingly the main use is to keep up with work or performance pressure in a high-stakes culture. “I don't think I could keep a 3.9 average without this stuff,” said one high-achieving college student.²⁴ Another report shows that continuous assessment of scholarship recipients leads to usage: “I don't know what I would do without it,” said another. “There's no way I could have kept my scholarship if I didn't use it.”²⁵

Performance-culture users report that taking the pills made them feel “normal” in their pressured world. One of Jarboe's interviewees, who took Adderall with her study group, says, “The whole time you're on it, you just feel like that's the way things are supposed to be. You feel like it's gotten you normal.”²⁶ In these accounts the medication is a precision tool, helping to more closely engineer the minds and bodies of the already performance oriented to an even tighter fit with their high-performance educational environment. “I remember everyone sitting around and thinking, ‘You know, maybe we all have ADD, because this stuff makes me feel great, like I don't feel weird. I feel like I want to do my work.’”²⁷ A *New York Times* reporter who interviewed two dozen Columbia University students concluded that attention deficit drugs were part of the “prevailing ethos,” seen by high-achieving straight-arrow college students as “a legitimate and even hip way to get through the rigors of a hectic academic and social life.” One student said that Columbia's culture “encourages people to use stimulants” to keep up, while recreational use was “generally frowned upon.”²⁸ Another college journalist interviewed a typical user who said, “I don't know that many kids that have done coke, none that have tried crack, and only a few that have dropped acid. I can't even count all of the ones who've taken Adderall.”²⁹

The normalization of prescription stimulant abuse in collegiate performance culture, athletic and scholastic alike, points to a significant transformation in subjectivity, in the role that the pressured, high-stakes culture of schooling and assessment plays in the formation of personality, values, and

behavior. The “Ritalin generation” is adopting the drug that best suits the disciplinary and spectacular matrix of their lives, framed by performance culture, high-stakes assessment, and vocational schooling—schooling for the purpose of work. What other drug can help students display themselves simultaneously as physically fit, academically high-achieving, alert, and confidently in command of high-stakes circumstances?

Late-1990s studies found college student nonprescription use of methylphenidates and dextroamphetamines in the 5 to 10 percent range, and in 2001, a large study of four-year schools found lifetime nonprescription use of these medications close to 7 percent. Studies between 2006 and 2008 found nonprescription usage ranging up to 25 percent on individual campuses, matching up with a University of Wisconsin study that found high school student use for the SAT and other high-stakes tests ranged between 14 and 25 percent. A University of Maryland study followed one cohort of undergraduates from 2003 through 2008 and found lifetime nonmedical use for this group at 13.5 percent, with 10 percent using in the past year. Several studies have found that college students are more likely to abuse these drugs than “noncollege peers,” and the 2001 study found that usage rates tended to be higher at colleges with more competitive admissions, and in fraternities and sororities.³⁰

A similar percentage of faculty and research professionals may be taking these drugs for similar reasons. Roughly one-third of the fourteen hundred respondents to an informal survey administered to the online readership of the journal *Nature* had taken Ritalin. Of the readership taking the medication, half used weekly or monthly, one-fourth used daily, and one-fourth used about once a year.³¹ The extent of usage in performance-culture workplaces has led to at least some prominent calls—including in a follow-up commentary in *Nature* by bioethics researchers at Stanford University, the University of Pennsylvania, the University of California, and elsewhere—to simply make many of these drugs available legally for the purpose of workplace cognitive enhancement: “We should welcome new methods of improving brain function. We call for a presumption that mentally competent adults should be able to engage in cognitive enhancement using drugs.”³² By contrast, other more historically grounded observers relate this performance-culture usage pattern to previous epidemics of amphetamine use.³³

Despite political control of the primary- and secondary-school curriculum in most communities for most students, the disciplinary control

of student minds, beliefs, and values is so imperfect that it requires the additional direct powers over student bodies alluded to above—of search, seizure, expulsion, medication, and so on. (The most resistant students are of course destined for a quantum jump in state control over their persons in the most incarcerated population on the planet.) On the one hand, the large proportion—nearly 70 percent—of students who both graduate high school and quickly enroll in some form of higher education would appear to be those who have learned their lesson. To a very large extent, the degree to which the high-performing students have brought their pillboxes to campus would suggest that college administrators wouldn't need the same control over student bodies enjoyed by primary- and secondary-school officials. In any event, many college students are either adults (with an average age older than twenty-five), often with children of their own, or young people with many but not all adult rights: college administrators simply don't have the same direct control of student bodies.

Or do they? With less direct control over student bodies, college administrators nonetheless enjoy perfect control over campus space, including student living and recreational spaces, the spaces where students gather to communicate, question authority, or protest—often including both real and virtual gathering spaces—and the technologies and infrastructure supporting assembly and communication. Administrations have built massive new campus facilities with little direct relationship to student life, designing crowd-control architecture and expanding the numbers and powers of campus security forces. They control the vast majority of the faculty on at-will employment contracts, control budgets down to the expenditure of tens of dollars, and increasingly shape curriculum by fiat, employing non-tenurable faculty with or without the cooperation of established departments. Where control of the faculty and of the budget don't suffice, administrators shape curriculum by the imposition of assessment instruments.

As John K. Wilson has exhaustively documented, campus administrators have in the past decade felt free to engage in countless acts of direct repression of students. Across the country administrators have employed campus police to intimidate, harass, and silence students engaged in political protests. At religious colleges, faculty have been fired, students expelled, and student groups disbanded for discussing their sexual orientation, publishing their views of gay rights, and so on. At public schools, sexual content in student publications and film or theater productions has led to legislator complaint and administrative censorship and sanction. Most compelling

is Wilson's evidence for direct suppression of the campus student press, detailing a tidal wave of administrative censorship taking nearly all imaginable forms: administrative seizure of printed papers; censorship of articles, quotes, editorials, and columns, both by imposing prior review and after the fact; the imposition of compulsory retractions or apologies by journalists and editors; banning of campus distribution; partial and total funding cuts; firing of student editors and journalists (often paid positions); and locking journalists out of campus offices.³⁴ Student journalists have been arrested by campus police and had notes or recordings confiscated. These actions now have substantial legal support with a 2005 Seventh Circuit Court of Appeals ruling that applies a 1988 U.S. Supreme Court decision permitting secondary-school officials to regulate student papers to the college press. Possibly the most telling data Wilson presents is the way that administrations have most successfully and consistently targeted student publication: by asserting control over faculty advisors. "The very small field of faculty media advisors probably has more faculty dismissals infringing on academic freedom than any other discipline," Wilson claims, arguing that this position could be "the most vulnerable faculty job in academia."³⁵ He's fairly persuasive on the point, toting up numerous recent cases of supremely casual arrogance by administrators who, displeased with student coverage of their decisions or the public-relations consequences of student journalism, simply fired the (commonly) nontenurable lecturer serving as faculty advisor to the publication.

Financialization of the Self: Precarity and Learning to Labor

Just as medicalization, administrator dominance and direct repression, and the assessment movement have come to campus, so has the vocationalized curriculum. This is true in the narrow sense of coursework targeting employer needs and preferences and also in the larger sense of education as a site of public pedagogy. The very purpose and meaning of education have shifted from a social investment in the individual to an individual investment in the social—with the proviso that "the social" has been gutted by profiteers and now represents something like a commodities market for labor (including the highly educated labor still slow to recognize its own proletarianization): *Should I invest myself in chemical engineering? Or in teaching? As long as they don't issue any more H-1B visas, chemical engineering seems like the better bet—on the other hand, engineers are more likely to get*

dumped in their forties, and it seems like a Democratic victory could mean more funding for teaching, so I could go that way . . .

From this perspective, self-medication and even standardization of the curriculum become visible as symptoms of structural change. Tighter control of Ritalin and the restoration of curricular “options” such as art and music wouldn’t in and of themselves change the “preferences” of students. At its base, both student acceptance and student resistance to medicine, repression, standardization, and administrator dominance are conditioned by the structural changeover to a precarious social existence. In the United States, for all except the managerial class (and those professionals not yet deprofessionalized by their managers), employment has grown more pressured and less secure, while at the same time all other securities (food security, health security, family and reproductive security) have been strung on the tightrope of that precarious employment. The global phenomenon analyzed by Zygmunt Bauman and others as the offloading of risk from society to individuals and families under the bogus rubric of liberty and choice—what he calls the “freedom-cum-uncertainty cocktail” in health care, housing, nutrition, retirement, and child rearing—manifests itself powerfully in education.³⁶ Education becomes more nakedly than ever before a risk-management tool. With the multiplication of risks off-loaded onto individuals, capitalist interests and the state actors who serve them have engineered a “popular demand” for a vocationalized curriculum. Educators are under intense pressure to strip down education into helping individuals and families prepare to auction themselves in the labor market.

Many core aspects of the intersection of higher education and precarity have been explored already. Of especial importance, Aronowitz and Giroux, among others, have exhaustively detailed both the direct service of curriculum to workplace demands and the larger public pedagogy of workplace serviceability, and David Downing has analyzed the relationship of this shifting social contract to a reactionary shift in the nature of knowledge production itself and a market ratchet on the “disciplinary division of labor.”³⁷ Randy Martin has been especially acute in analyzing the related question of the role of culture and politics in subject formation, ranging from youth investment clubs and stock market-themed classroom exercises for all ages to the politics of pension funds. Succinctly portraying the “models of selfhood” that “have come tumbling out of financial markets,” Martin observes that even the destitute and those with modest resources “are being asked to think like [finance] capitalists,” to accept a regime of

“self-management” based on risk arbitrage, and imagine that “life is an endless business school” with the consequence of deep erosions in leisure time as “home and hours away from the job” are increasingly invaded by financially oriented or financially modeled activity.³⁸ In a sly updating of foundational cultural studies exploration of youth culture, Martin captures the structure of feeling under finance capital by exploring teen investment clubs (“Monied teens are encouraged to form gangs of their own, called investment clubs”). Noting that these gangs—like corporations—often permit voting in proportion to share of fund ownership, so that one youth’s “vote” can be measurably more important than the vote of any number of her cohort, Martin concludes that the elite teen membership quickly learns “how power is exercised so as to render universal suffrage moot.”³⁹ The Ivan Boesky of teen investors and teen investment-game players, Jonathan Lebed, began his career by ranking seventh in a stock market game run by CNBC, graduated to manipulating the prices of penny stocks by posting thousands of pseudonymous messages in Internet chat rooms and message boards, finally paid a \$300,000 fine to the Securities and Exchange Commission, but just like “grown-up” financiers, nonetheless walked away with the majority of his profits, half a million dollars.⁴⁰

Of course, investors who don’t inherit capital must borrow it. Therefore, related to this financialization of the self and off-loading of risk is the direct off-loading of costs, resulting in what Jeffrey Williams has aptly termed “the pedagogy of debt.”⁴¹ Tracing the explosive growth in the size of student borrowing and tapping into the generational structure of feeling expressed by Anya Kamenetz and Tamara Draut,⁴² Williams suggests that large debt loads have converted higher education from a social good to the “market conscription” of individuals, that debt at the levels increasingly viewed as normal and appropriate is a form of indenture: “[Debt] is not a minor threshold that young people entering adult society and adult work might easily pass, but a major constraint that looms over the lives of those so contracted. It also produces, as indenture did, significant hardship for many of those under its weight. Finally, I believe that it violates the spirit of American freedom in allowing those less privileged to bind a significant portion of their futures.”⁴³ Noting that it promotes a more governable subject, Williams draws out the parallel to indentured servitude: student loan debt is generally unforgivable (drawing the resources of the state to enforce the interest earnings of private lenders); is a long-term burden; falls disproportionately on the less advantaged; provides substantial profit for the pre-

vailing capitalist organization (finance); and implies a significant commitment to future work. Like indentured servitude and older notions of debt service, education debt often reaches beyond the subject to the extended family to demand its satisfaction—commanding the participation of parents, grandparents, and spouses. When a debtor “chooses” to delay having children until his or her loans are paid, one might say that finance capital “teaches” reproductive choices. Student loan indenture, Williams concludes, “is not just a mode of financing, but a mode of pedagogy.”⁴⁴ Most persuasively, he argues that debt “teaches career choices,” noting that the massive shift to the business major (tripling since the 1950s to almost a quarter of all majors today) hasn’t transpired because “students no longer care about poetry and philosophy; rather, they have learned the lesson of the world in front of them and chosen according to its constraints.”⁴⁵

All these writers are arguing that academic freedom for undergraduates has been constrained in advance by structural shifts in social relations since 1980. These are shifts in reaction to the welfare state, now using state power to ensure greater rewards and more security to those who control capital (and those who most willingly and directly serve it), while stripping rewards and security from those who work in order to live, including factory laborers, service workers, and even many professionals and managers. This is not a metaphorical observation. Empirically, since 1980 in the United States, public funds have been devoted to bailouts of banks, investors, and financial institutions that “failed in the marketplace,” whereas across the country individuals who suffer in marketized social services lose their homes, are denied medication and education, and are allowed to die in the street, while their heavily medicated fellow citizens pass by in silence. The lesson taught by the spectacle of the jailed, neglected, malnourished, homeless, and migrant populations in the American underclass is: obey—perform—medicate, or this could be you.

These shifts systematically influence the choices, beliefs, and values of some individuals—not determining choices in advance but constraining what it is possible for some people to choose. For those who must work in order to live, the range of choices about curriculum is *vocationalized in advance*. Even where nonvocational options exist, those who are under the command to vocationalize themselves cannot “freely choose” such options. On the other hand, those who do not need to work in order to live or who have the command of sufficient capital to reduce pressures on choice (say, having parents who will pay for school, provide a down payment on a home,

assist with the expenses of child and health care, and so forth) continue to enjoy a broad range of choices. Indeed, one consequence of these structural changes is that certain kinds of pleasant work are increasingly the province of those with substantial individual or family wealth. As certain pleasant occupations no longer pay enough to support the person doing the work (like the majority of positions in higher education teaching), increasingly only those with the ability to subsidize their employer can apply.

In this sense, the fake solution offered by David Horowitz, an “academic bill of rights,” appeals to some students in part because they cannot escape a real problem: their curricular and life choices are profoundly conditioned by the sea of risk manufactured for them by the class war from above. Setting sail on their college career, some will launch yachts and chart larger courses, a few in dinghies will try to keep up, but most will turn off into the nearest port in the first economic storm. This is one way of understanding the phenomenon of “job outs” that give so much concern to administrators at community colleges and other schools offering training curricula. Offering curricula narrowly aimed at preparation for employment, often developing course materials as training for specific jobs in close consultation with particular employers, narrow technical training programs lose some of their most talented students to job offers before degrees are awarded—and this, administrators are perhaps too eager to argue, explains at least some of their poor persistence-to-degree ratios. But if the purpose of the degree is to train for a job, and the job is awarded, then the purpose of education is met with or without the degree. Given the ideology of labor market flexibility, losing the job simply returns the individual to another technical program to which the ideal resolution is not earning a degree but once again a job out, into another line of work. Job outs aren’t the problem; they’re the ideal resolution of higher “education” (what Aronowitz rightly has been insisting for years is only “higher training”), as it’s currently arranged for the majority. *As we’ve structured this system of higher training, the degree is a consolation prize for those who fail to job out.*

The phenomenon of jobbing out is also relevant to students with a bit more privilege, those from the upper classes who participate in internship culture: the goal of a major is access to the right internships, which ideally turn into job offers. While it remains conventional for students who’ve been offered postbaccalaureate or post-MA employment to actually complete their degrees, there’s little reason for doing so, except that the degree functions secondarily as a certification in subsequent employment searches.

The rise in business majors and communications majors relative to, for instance, those in history, philosophy, and languages has in part to do with the broad, clear, choice-filled road map of internships leading to postbaccalaureate employment presented by the rising majors. It likewise reflects the absence of such a road map in the declining majors, where the route to employment now passes through graduate school. Internships, paid and unpaid, are so much a part of the pathway between school and postgraduate employment that the wealthiest elite schools now supplement, from financial aid funds, the wages of unpaid or poorly paid internships that their scholarship students accept in order to further their careers.

So, in addition to debt, the vocationalization of curriculum, and cultural activities framing a financialized subjectivity, we need to look at the labor time of students while enrolled as a factor conditioning their academic freedom. Internships are only the tip of the iceberg in student labor. All but 20 percent are obliged to work during school. The 80 percent who do work while enrolled do so, on average, thirty hours per week—at a rate double or triple the threshold for neutral academic consequences. As the Indiana Higher Education Commission wrote after surveying the literature as of April 2008, “While there is evidence that some work (less than 10 hours per week) does not harm a student’s academic success, evidence also suggests that students working more than 15 hours per week do not perform as well academically as others.”⁴⁶

The circumstances of student labor vary enormously. Some work not at all or only in unpaid or poorly paid internships leading to careers. Some can accept only the better-paid internships. Others are working full-time positions already. Many encounter student work as financial aid (including work-study and other employment with the university and/or its corporate and community partners), and still others work in the service economy, from food service and telephone sales to retail, child care, coaching, and so on. (Despite the variety in circumstances, it’s certainly fair to say that academically burdensome levels of employment are more broadly distributed than burdensome debt levels. Indeed, those with the largest debt loads will, by definition, be those who have completed many years of higher education—a minority circumstance, since after six years a typical four-year institution will have graduated fewer than half of its entrants, and two-year institutions generally do even less well.)

The massive increase in higher education enrollment, combined with a shift in costs from society to student, as well as student flight from debt,

has meant a corresponding massive increase in the pool of undergraduates working. It also means an increase in the number of former and would-be undergraduates working—many of whom have been taught one of higher education's clearest lessons: that they're failures and deserve their fate. The debtor resentment captured by Williams—and the resentment of the college graduate captured by Draut and Kamenetz—is to a certain degree the resentment of those who are the market “winners”: those who've been able, by a combination of strategies, to persevere to degrees, graduate school, and eventually, belatedly, careers of some kind. Loaded up on debt, working at unpaid internships, heading off to graduate school, where they'll acquire more debt and do yet more poorly paid labor—this group is indeed “strapped” and psychologically structured by debt service, unable to “choose” either curriculum or careers that won't pay off the debt.

But this is only part of the story. A system that doesn't work for its “winners” is a system that works even less well for its losers. As I've previously written, the bargain that higher education presents to students who work often takes the form of “accept contingent employment now—in exchange for an escape from it later.”⁴⁷ Because insecurity has been intensified throughout the economy, this bargain has found many takers, and campus managers have cheerfully restructured work formerly done by full-time staff and faculty undergraduate “employment opportunities” to accommodate the influx of students attempting to escape precarity by working their way through school.

Many find this bargain is a false promise: unable to persist on the terms of excessive labor and excessive debt, they drop out and accept the judgment of “the market” that they deserve a lifetime of precarious and small paychecks in the service economy, where even full-time employment offers no guarantee of security in nutrition, health, or housing. Or they persist and find there is no job in the field they've studied, only contingent employment. Some, like those chronicled by Kamenetz, Draut, and Williams, find the promise met, but only after a substantial delay and to a lesser extent than previous generations of “winners.” Those who do eventually win—after an arduous haul of constant work, pill popping, and a monster debt load—are survivors, really, of a trauma. They've been hurt and bear the scars. Even though they're the winners, they're often angry. Like the victims of other kinds of trauma, they have a tendency to perpetuate the same abuses that shaped them. They sometimes become apostles and apologists for the system that they survived: “I did it; so can you.” Those who do escape

contingency are taught lessons about themselves (how to win) and about others (they're losers).

So if the intersection of precarious employment and higher education is a pedagogy, there are at least two sets of lessons: one for the winners, those for whom education is (eventually) an escape, and another for the losers, for whom it is not. The "winners" are those who have absorbed the lesson of the curriculum: care of the self can (and must) be reduced to preparation of the self as a commodity in a labor market. This lesson depends on accepting a series of premises not accepted in other societies: that employers are "customers" of the labor commodity and set the price of labor at will. In the United States, when the employers' price fails to draw enough workers, they request and receive the assistance of the state in resolving their "labor shortage" through some mechanism, such as importing cheaper guest labor, tax incentives, or regulations and appropriations permitting students, volunteers, retirees, and church members, among others, to do what used to be paid labor as some version of community service. In this view, the employer-customer is—literally—always right, and it is up to the employee-seller to accommodate the employer-customer in every way, including using one's now-secondary citizenship to shift social, collective resources to the gratification of the employer-customer.

Winners learn that labor is cheap, subordinate, and responsive to command—and must be made continuously cheaper, more subordinate, and more responsive to command. Indeed, they learn that the ideal form of labor in the United States is not the simple exploitation of wages but the super-exploitation of labor freely discounted or even given away. The lesson of their own internships, service learning, and community service and résumé building—the lesson of contemporary campus culture itself—is that good managers find ways for workers to work for free and organize the production process to incorporate as many self-discounting and unpaid workers as possible. They themselves have accepted the command to give it away for years—and it all worked out for them, didn't it? To the winners, giving one's labor away is a form of "investment" in one's own future—a period of subordination, humiliation, and obedience similar to the character building of *bildungsroman*—which one endures as part of one's initiation into the leadership class.

In certain circumstances this investment—giving it away—takes the form of a lottery ticket to success in the spectacular economy. Internships are awarded as "prizes" (for example, by MTV or *Rolling Stone*) and serve to

provide low-cost formats for producing media programming. Online poker sites offer “internships” to students who fly to offshore tropical sites to perform as webcast celebrities for the huge undergraduate gambling population. These particular examples highlight a dual accumulation strategy by employers, who get service labor for low or no pay but also, yet more importantly, accumulate value in the entertainment goods they sell, either reality programming or webcasts drawing clientele to gambling sites.

Of particular importance is understanding that this dual accumulation strategy—capturing value from the student body simultaneously in cheap service labor and spectacle—was pioneered by higher education and remains of critical importance to campus employers and administrations. If anything can explain the fact that basketball and football coaches are the highest-paid public employees in the United States, often earning millions in salary, it is the long history of higher education’s unique accumulation strategy, a strategy that profit-seeking corporations have recently been trying to emulate, with some success. To an extent, college athletics has been examined as a form of undercompensated work in which student athletes create revenue-generating spectacle in exchange for dubious education goods. But athletics for broadcast television is just one way that students donate or partially donate labor to schools in the creation of campus culture—from the creation of consumable content (student newspapers, blogs) to participation in plays, singing groups, orchestras, dance troupes, service organizations, religious activities, business clubs, fraternities and sororities, honor societies, political campaigns, student government, and so forth. Students participate in the labor and culture of administration by completing evaluation forms, exchanging notes and opinions regarding faculty, maintaining files of term papers, and so forth. One might easily argue that the time spent by students in gyms and tanning salons—presenting themselves for student photographers in official campus publications and unofficial fraternity and sorority blogs—is a donation to the campus brand. This may seem frivolous, but in fact it’s quite significant, as the lengths to which gambling sites and other vendors will go to create such an appearance. Indeed, where these contributions don’t really exist—on commuter campuses with a moribund student culture, for instance—they generally have to be manufactured for the cameras of paid marketing professionals.

Winners who take business classes learn something about culture and the humanities—not that they’re ornamental, after all, but the opposite. *Business classes teach that command of organizational culture is critical.* In the

ongoing struggle between labor and management, management's best strategy—in current thinking—is to win the battle in advance, by managing organizational culture. Those who win by taking business classes learn that managers are creative intellectuals and cultural workers. It is a symptom of losing in the labor market to believe that culture and the humanities are irrelevant—whether the loser in question is a retail manager or humanities faculty. This helps us to understand a few otherwise confusing things: why, for instance, Horowitz and his allies are struggling so hard over what is now the most marginalized area of the curriculum. And it helps us to see that vocationalization of the curriculum isn't really vocationalization for everybody—just the majority, the losers. Business program winners in the labor market need culture and the humanities and need control over their production, distribution, and consumption. Part of that control is affirmative action for right-wing ideas and right-wing ideologues; part of that control is denying this crucial higher learning to a highly trained proletariat. Winners learn that culture is useful—and particularly useful to capital—and that it can be a zone of creativity and pleasure, so long as it is creativity and pleasure for purposes of managerial control and capital accumulation.

The lesson that losers are taught, then, is a false lesson, but one that becomes real enough in the sea of precarity. Losers are taught that culture and the humanities, and all of the noninstrumental dimensions of various literacies, don't matter—at least not when one's livelihood is at stake. Thrust by the class war from above into high-stakes choices at every educational stage, losers are taught that participating in culture (and civil society more broadly) is optional—a fine activity for those who have time, security, and leisure, but frivolous for those faced with the serious business of securing health care for one's family. Academic freedom for the undergraduate, then, is closely parallel to intellectual and professional freedom for faculty in some respects: to the extent that it exists, it's reserved for a minority, and even there it is under continuous pressure to serve capital. For the majority, adrift in a sea of risk, the manufactured demand is for a lifeline—security at any price—and not freedom, academic or otherwise. In this context, Horowitz functions merely as an opportunist: “Want a lifeline, kid? Sign my petition.” While his fake movement has been taken up by fellow opportunists in a limited number of circumstances and sometimes taps into the desperate structure of feeling of young people seeking to escape contingency, the real questions of academic freedom for the undergraduate won't be addressed by responding to him.

Instead, we have to ask: under what conditions will our students be

able to learn freedom—in what kind of schools, in what kind of culture? Our schools must therefore be more democratic, and our culture as well. How democratic are our laws and system of political representation? What forms of security must be shared by all for higher education to become a zone of intellectual and personal freedom for those who don't control capital or serve it? Once we've begun to address those questions—and asked what higher education can and must do in that regard—we can also address some of the questions particular to colleges and universities.

Once higher education is no longer urgently necessary as a form of risk management, what purpose does it have? That's not a question we need to answer in advance. When we have socialized risk and admitted a cohort of undergraduates who are not desperate to classrooms staffed by secure faculty, we can discuss it amongst ourselves. I'm sure we'll figure it out just fine.

Notes

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Furthermore, in private correspondence regarding the ways that nontrack faculty can be undercounted, AAUP chief data analyst John Curtis points to an IPEDS reporting category without clear parameters for the reporting institutions, "instructional employees without faculty status." When does a part-time lecturer have "faculty status"? At some institutions where part-time faculty have no vote in the faculty senate, administrators

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