

Campus Entrepreneurship

The World of Campus Entrepreneurship; including entrepreneurs, markets, opportunities, and other thoughts

The Washington Post, Change, and Resistance in American Higher Education

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While much of the discussion surrounding entrepreneurs and higher education focuses on top tier research universities, some of the greatest entrepreneurs in higher education have been innovating in the for-profit, proprietary space.

The for-profit higher education space is currently under incredible scrutiny in Washington, with administration officials and many Senators supporting various regulatory actions that are unprecedented in the history of American Higher Education.

Over at [Inside Higher Education](#), Stephen Burd goes after the Washington Post Company because it owns the paper and Kaplan Inc. — a private education company that accounts for over 60% of corporate revenue — and the paper dares to publish editorials on the regulatory battle. Burd chides them for describing themselves as an “education and media company”.

What did he expect them to do? Follow print journalism straight into the ground and go bankrupt? The management was smart. The world changed and they evolved their company with it.

Below is a snippet from the [piece](#). I find it interesting and it highlights the strength of faith and support for the ‘ideals’ of higher education and also media — each being some kind of social venture which shall conform to various norms: ie, all must be ‘non-profit’ in the higher education space and ie, on the media side, having no ties to any corporations.

As the for profit, higher education battle makes clear, anyone severely shaking the traditional model of higher education shall be removed from ‘campus,’ by Government decree if necessary! From Burd:

The Post’s editorial page has won praise in some quarters for prominently disclosing, in the editorial’s second paragraph, that the newspaper has a conflict of interest because of its ties to Kaplan and “other for-profit schools of higher education that, according to company officials, could be harmed by the proposed regulations.” In a [column](#) that ran the same day as the editorial, the Washington Post’s ombudsman, Andrew Alexander, applauded the newspaper for its “transparency.”

outcome of the debate.

After all, much of the editorial simply repeats the industry's talking points, by, for instance, exaggerating the impact that the proposed gainful-employment regulation is expected to have on proprietary institutions, and referring to for-profit colleges as "tax-paying schools," without noting that many of them derive 70 percent to 90 percent of their revenue from American taxpayers through federal student-aid programs.

Even more important, the editorial's central thrust—that the administration is wrong to try to limit student options because "the more options available to parents and students, the better"—is self-serving and misguided. Yes, it's good for students to have educational options. But should the government sit idly by when some major for-profit higher-education companies are leaving the majority of their students worse off than before they enrolled, buried under mountains of debt and without the skills they need to get gainful employment in the fields in which they trained?

Burd goes on to explain the danger of a newspaper being in the hands of a for-profit company that is in the midst of a battle with government regulators. While that may be a compelling issue, the real concern in this case is that a growing, innovative segment of the higher education market is being discriminated against. Asked to perform to a minimum standard set by government, while thousands of other institutions have no performance requirements.

This is a direct government intrusion in what could be considered the freest and most productive higher education ecosystem in the world. Would it not make more sense to ask questions such as:

Why has the for-profit space grown so quickly?

What have they done well that is attracting students?

What innovations have led to their growth and how can these advances be applied to the rest of the space?

Instead, the clumsy hand of policy makers will intervene and send a message to entrepreneurs and innovators: the higher education establishment and its supporters will only let you be so creative. If you shake the core, retribution will be swift.

The question of the 'ideals' of media is over right? Is Burd kidding having any illusions that the media in all its varied sources exists outside of market forces? Where has he been? Each outlet exists to serve a market. The WaPo may anger the occasional reader, but the one quoted likely still takes home delivery and uses real cream in their canned instant coffee.

All told, this Stephen Burd piece highlights that many still will not accept that we live in an age of

revolutions, industry after industry is undergoing fundamental change.

Newspapers have been dealing with it for over a decade now, higher education is still trying to keep the barbarians at the walls of the campus, but that strategy will never work. The flair up over for-profit higher education is just the most obvious and public case where change on a large magnitude is rejected by the academic establishment.

[The Washington Post' and the Perils of For-Profit Colleges – Commentary – The Chronicle of Higher Education.](#)

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