



UNIVERSITY ENVIRONMENTAL SCAN 2014

**Update June 2015**

*Office of Research and Planning*

## ENVIRONMENTAL SCAN EXPLAINED

Environmental Scanning enables the understanding the changing external environment that may impact the organization and plays a key role in Strategic Planning, as diagrammed:

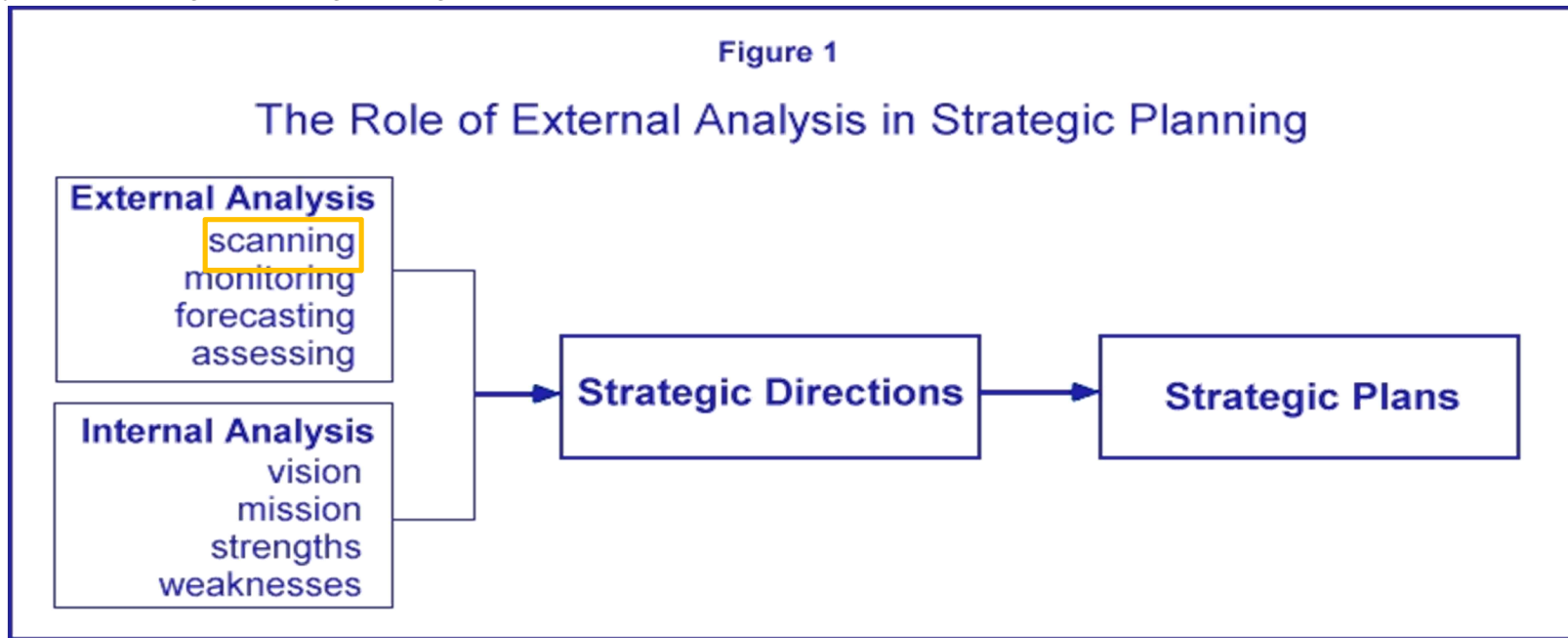


Image taken from <http://horizon.unc.edu/courses/papers/enviroscan/> Environmental Scanning, By James L. Morrison

An Environmental Scanning “science” has developed with a common language and several canons of categorization. For example, common groupings of critical environmental factors include **Society, Technology, Economy, (Natural) Environment, and Politics** (STEEP), but this scan will also include several other category topics also pertinent to such scanning.

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## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

- Some feel that higher education is about to see “disruption.”
- Grabbing most higher education-related headlines, at least in the mainstream media, is the survival threat to private colleges: for example, Sweet Briar College is closing its doors. Some schools have met the survival challenge by merger. While mergers and closings are perhaps the most noticeable examples of survival response, many institutions across the country are in survival mode. For the majority of colleges, survive -- and thrive -- strategies mostly involve ways to attract prospects.
- Strategies to attract students range from minor curriculum reform to radical change of mission, (as in the case of Trinity in DC).
- Also in the news are proprietary colleges which are under intense scrutiny from Congress. Investigators are revealing high pressure recruiting, high student loan default, and low retention.
- Investigators are also questioning value, and, indeed, this “value” doubt is the biggest threat to proprietary colleges’ recruitment and retention – indeed, leading to one high-profile student revolt.
- The value question is asked not just of for-profits of higher education more generally. These “value” questions lead to analyses which reduce the value to life earnings, (and the liberal arts is a casualty.)
- From presidential hopefuls to debt-strapped students, the public increasingly questions education that is not focused on professional skills. Echoing then Governor Reagan nearly 50 years ago, Republican presidential candidate Scott Walker recently proposed changing the “Wisconsin Idea,” the public higher education system’s long-cherished mission statement, by removing language about public service and “the search for truth,” and adding a promise to “meet the state’s workforce needs.” He ultimately backed down.
- Liberal arts are under less-direct threat, though, as students deconstruct and re-bundle courses. This *a la carte* trend could frustrate institutions with more traditional (e.g., liberal arts) missions, which require concentrated and coordinated and lengthy programs of study.

- Some already see the cost of de-emphasis of liberal arts in deficits of skills critical to society. Science instruction at all levels is under criticism: many recent college graduates can't demonstrate they know what evidence is. At the graduate level, many preclinical biomedical studies, when subjected to additional scrutiny, turn out to be false. Some conclude that research appears to be increasingly conducted in climate of predatory motives rather than dispassionate pursuit of truth. At issue are deficits of skill as well as values.
- Relatedly, there is much recent questioning of "The American Model" of higher education: Large public universities with multiple missions of undergraduate core instruction, research institute, and professional training.
- Also, the American Model is characterized by greater stratification: in Europe, most institutions have equal funding and status. American higher education is also overregulated. One suggested antidote to regulation is greater transparency – on everything from test scores to graduates' salaries. Internationally, higher educators have embraced (e.g., test) transparency – in both industrial and developing countries.
- Some higher education writers are considering that the only solution to the problem of "expensive and inequitable" higher education system is free public education (the European model). The European model has other positive characteristics: weeding underprepared students, enforcing rigor, and generally avoiding investments in student enticements which work to inflate college costs – the "climbing walls" phenomenon.
- Public funding may possibly happen in some states. However, Americans will likely fall short of adopting public funding across the board. Instead, America may look to innovation for game changing solutions, likely involving technology.
- Increasingly, more mainstream outlets assume that in the future, MOOCs (Massive Open Online Courses) will be a popular option which, theoretically, could make higher education more equitable and affordable.
- On the topic of MOOCs, some feel we now know enough from experience with MOOCs to understand what they have to offer. There's good news and bad: MOOCs "don't help develop values, don't form character.

They just give you the tools to form skills.” One positive – if unintended – result of producing MOOCs is to make colleges spend more on instruction. MOOC production costs about \$80,000 per course.

- Many in higher education have begun to focus research on the value of personal (mentoring) contact – that part of interaction with faculty which is present in traditional classes and absent in MOOCs.
- Technology is not only a hot topic for course delivery, technology is a content focus in itself. Programming is in high demand by employers and students know this.
- In other news, student characteristics are becoming an issue – the news calling attention to lack of preparedness, lack of self-discipline, and incivility toward faculty.
- In news on responses of campuses to the natural environment issues, the composition of activities and emphases on campuses is changing. (Compared to 2013,) sustainability efforts look more like this for 2014: Stories related to campus living labs & experiential learning opportunities increased by 63 percent; Stories related to reduction milestones and commitments in campus operations increased by 54 percent; Drought response efforts emerged as a new topic of focus, particularly among California institutions; Regional and local food initiatives increased by 60 percent; Zero-waste and game day waste initiatives more than doubled; Stories highlighting student-based funding and revolving loan funding for campus sustainability efforts increased by 41 percent; Videos promoting campus sustainability initiatives more than tripled.
- In our local environment, Atlanta Metro Region failures (commuting time, public school issues, congestion of schools and problems in other public services in the northern part of metro, other bad publicity) will begin to impact colleges which see Atlanta as source of students, of staff, and careers for alum.
- On an international front, western higher education is becoming a focus of militants. *Boko Haram* (which means “Western education is forbidden”) got its name and momentum because Western education was a requirement for government jobs, which put people in a position to extort the population.



## INTRODUCTION: UPDATE EXPLAINED

Brenau University's formal 2014 Environmental Scan can be found at <http://archive.brenau.edu/facts/Environmental%20Scan%20May%202014Mitchell1118.pdf>. This update highlights media releases subsequent to that posting.

The goal of an Environmental Scan Update is to help administrators portend shifts that range from the tiny to the tectonic. For example, some higher education experts are predicting an impending large-scale (technological) disruption...

*"In my industry, education, prices increase faster than inflation with no underlying increase in innovation. And in my industry, we tripled tuition. My class is no different than it was 14 years ago. We charge students at NYU business school \$6,000 to take my class. I teach 140 kids every Monday night. Every night I walk into class, we're charging them \$65,000. That's outrageous. It's become a moral issue, because most of that's been taken on in debt... So my industry is incredibly ripe for disruption ... textbooks and education – we're due." -- Scott Galloway (Adler et al. 2015)*

Whether indicating wholesale change or minor innovations on the way, an environmental scan – an analysis of trends large and small -- helps organizations adapt to their context.

Of course, the adaptation strategies are not for the sake of survival itself – but for purpose of helping the institution succeed at goals related to its core mission.

## “CORE” MISSION

### Teaching and learning

This update provides opportunity to review more qualitative aspects of the US higher education including headlines indicating national “zeitgeist”.

### Attack on Liberal Arts

One recurring theme recently relates to questions of “value” of higher education generally. A subsidiary issue of that has been the attack on the liberal arts. While always in the background, this questioning of liberal arts value has intensified of late. This may be the culmination of some controversies in the news about 48 years ago:

California still boasted a system of public higher education that was the envy of the world. And on February 28, 1967, a month into his term, the Republican governor [Ronald Reagan] assured people that he wouldn't do anything to harm it. "But," he added, "we do believe that there are certain intellectual luxuries that perhaps we could do without," for a little while at least....(Berrett 2015a)

Then Governor Reagan went on to say, famously, that Taxpayers shouldn't be "subsidizing intellectual curiosity."

That phrase quickly brought reaction: The following week the Los Angeles Times editorial page warned that his budget cuts and "tampering" with higher education threatened to create second-rate institutions. (Berrett 2015a) "If a university is not a place where intellectual curiosity is to be encouraged, and subsidized," the editors wrote, "then it is nothing."

The Times was giving voice to the ideal of liberal education, in which college is a vehicle for intellectual development, for cultivating a flexible mind, and, no matter the focus of study, for fostering a broad set of knowledge and skills whose value is not always immediately apparent...Reagan was staking out a competing vision. Learning for learning's sake might be nice, but the rest of us shouldn't have to pay for it. A higher education should prepare students for jobs....Those two theories had long existed in uneasy equilibrium. On that day in 1967, the balance started to tip toward utility in ways not even Reagan may have anticipated.

Some say that the assertion that a liberal education is of dubious value has become entrenched in the popular imagination, even as its defenders argue the opposite. Numbers do bear this out.

- In 1965, 43 percent of graduates earn bachelor's degrees in the letters and sciences, the disciplines often identified with liberal education. In 1980 Reagan is elected president. About 25% of degrees are in letters and sciences. The business major becomes the most popular.
- Developing a meaningful philosophy of life was considered essential or very important by nearly 70% of freshmen in 1971, but only slightly over 40% in 2013. (HERI data)
- In the early '80s, most freshmen said they'd chosen their college because they thought it would help them get a better job. The previous top reason? Learning more about things that interested them.

It is worth noting that just recently another Republican governor, Scott Walker, proposed changing the "Wisconsin Idea," the public higher education system's long-cherished mission statement, by removing language about public service and "the search for truth," and adding a promise to "meet the state's workforce needs."(Hoover 2015)

### Economic reasons for decline of the Liberal arts.

Economics is certainly behind a long-term, ongoing erosion of the perceived value of liberal arts. Not only are job markets tighter and student loan debt greater, but students who traditionally are less likely to value humanities and liberal arts are holding sway through the power of the purse. (Berrett 2015b). In any case, the increasing focus on the role of training (vs., developing habits of mind, say) has been a long, slow trend.

### Definition of Liberal Arts

One key criticism of the liberal arts has to do with definition: “How could anybody defend a liberal education when no one could agree on what it was? (Berrett 2015a)”. This problem (of lack of clear purpose or description) has been a chronic one. <sup>i</sup> To much of our citizenry, arguments seem vague.

Goals are beginning to feel indulgent, and key courses of Liberal arts themselves open Humanities to ridicule. “When politicians mock particular disciplines, it doesn’t exactly bolster popular opinion of liberal education. ‘If you want to take gender studies, that’s fine, go to a private school,’ Pat McCrory, the Republican governor of North Carolina, said on a radio show a couple of years ago.” (Berrett 2015a)

The worry, of course, is that colleges will fail in accomplishment of Liberal Arts’ key social/civic goals.

### Scientific Method

Many liberal arts goals relate to scientific progress. Underlying that, of course, in rigorous training in the skills of inquiry.

The scientific method is but one learning objective of the liberal arts, but serves to illuminate the problems when pro-social goals of liberal arts are underserved in an environment, such as college, where standards are maintained and pro-social values reinforced.

### *Best done in context of Liberal Arts*

Some worry that when science instruction is weak in traditional venues, other, more focused, interests will fill in the gaps. For example, energy companies are backing critical STEM (Science, Technology, Engineering and Math) instruction in K-12 with curriculum and equipment. The fear, although not proven out as yet, is “undue influence because of where the money comes from” and may have ideological bias (Schrank 2015).

### *Back to the basics*

“We’re ending up with an ecosystem that’s increasingly populated by predators.” Ferri C. Fang

Even as policymakers, business leaders and parents are clamoring for more STEM instruction (Schrank 2015), universities are failing at teaching methods of inquiry<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Francis Collins, director of the NIH, discusses ALS research, “which went back and reproduced studies on more than 70 promising drugs. They found no real effects. ‘Zero of those were replicable, Zero. And a couple of them had already moved into human clinical trials...You’ve started maybe even putting people at

Those close to the problem blame university recruitment and promotion patterns: “As long as universities think that the way for investigators to get more money is to publish in Nature and Science [since grants seem to get awarded to published scientists because patrons rarely read the research itself], then that’s what they’re going to look for in investigators,” according to Shai Silberberg.(Voosen 2015)

- “Graduate students...receive minimal, ad hoc training on proper experimental design, believing the system of rewards [for publication count, results, etc.- is how it always has been and how it always will be.” (Voosen 2015)
- “Currently, the experimental rigor of a graduate student’s education is up to the lab where he or she resides.”(Voosen 2015)

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risk for exposure to a compound for which there is really no compelling data that it was going to help.” (Voosen 2015)

“It is now a truism in the scientific establishment that many preclinical biomedical studies [conducted in university labs], when subjected to additional scrutiny, turn out to be false. Many researchers believe that if scientists set out to reproduce preclinical work published over the past decade, a majority would fail. This is, in short, the reproducibility crisis. ...neurology researchers were ahead of the curve in pointing out those problems. Scientists in Australia and Scotland had begun documenting flaws in animal studies that had seemed to support promising, but failed, stroke treatments.”(Voosen 2015)

- “The NIH has realized it has to get to scientists while they’re young. To that end, the agency has asked researchers to develop training modules for young scientists on proper experimental techniques.”

Also under attack is instruction to undergraduates. A recent article in National Geographic has garnered scholarly buzz. The article, *Why do Many Reasonable People Doubt Science?*, discusses the fact that so many students think that science equates to facts.

Scientific thinking has to be taught, and sometimes it’s not taught well, McNutt says. Students come away thinking of science as a collection of facts, not a method. ... research has shown that even many college students don’t really understand what evidence is. The scientific method doesn’t come naturally—but if you think about it, neither does democracy. For most of human history neither existed.... Of course we’re right to ask questions about some of the things science and technology allow us to do. “Everybody should be questioning,” says McNutt. “That’s a hallmark of a scientist. But then they should use the scientific method, or trust people using the scientific method, to decide which way they fall on those questions.” We need to get a lot better at finding answers, because it’s certain the questions won’t be getting any simpler. (Achenbach 2015)

The scientific method is but one pro-social goal of liberal learning. Critical civics lessons, such as how privacy is lost, the role of government, economics, how progress is secured, assuming responsibility for social wrongs, understanding various discipline-specific methods of inquiry, human capabilities, etc. – all require long study. And guidance.

“Modern society is built on things it got right.” There are consequences for an electorate who cannot evaluate evidence. The cost to society of this ignorance is severe.

For example, anti-vaccine activist and actress Jenny McCarthy famously said on the Oprah Winfrey Show, “The University of Google is where I got my degree from.” She is a key spokesperson for a growing anti-vaccine movement. The success of that movement could threaten the public.

The people who believe vaccines cause autism — often well educated and affluent, by the way — are undermining “herd immunity” to such diseases as whooping cough and measles. The anti-vaccine movement has been going strong since the prestigious British medical journal the Lancet published a study in 1998 linking a common vaccine to autism. The journal later retracted the study, which was thoroughly discredited. But the notion of a vaccine-autism connection has been endorsed by celebrities and reinforced through the usual Internet filters. (Achenbach 2015)

The consequences are subtle but serious as populations default to liberal arts substitutes (search engines at worst and self-designed programs of study at best). The fear among higher educators is that students who increasingly put together their own course of studies – in unbundled fashion – skip lessons they don’t appreciate (e.g., as essential to citizenship) – and fail to learn discernment of learn obligations of citizens. In any case, colleges must claim authority and exercise guidance.

### College a la carte

Colleges and universities started abdicating this guidance role sometimes back, among criticism of paternalism. Back in the 60’s, colleges allowed students to choose core courses from a smorgasbord of course choices – any number of which could satisfy a certain learning goal. For example, a physical education course could partially satisfy requirements for “Artistic and Creative Imagination.” Another weakness of the distribution system is



that a students' eventual course combination could under-include: could omit key courses like literature, economics, physics, or world history. This distribution trend probably started around the time of then Governor Ronald Reagan's famous reaction to taxpayers subsidizing intellectual curiosity. (See below.)

In addition to the numerous problems associated with deconstruction and reduction of higher education to disassociated components, there is a similar risk of trivializing education that comes from efforts to credential skill specialties. Not only that, they are not even in the financial interests of colleges themselves:

...a credential known as PMP, or Project Management Professional, is suffering the same problems as the college degree itself: Employers don't know what it means. So the organization administering the credential is creating more-specific versions focused on certain industries....But Jake Schwartz, a founder of General Assembly, warned that when credentials become too "granular," they can lose their value. "It can make it trite," he added. (Blumenstyk and Young 2015)

In an age of "postmodernism", we might well anticipate that "deconstruction" comes to curricula and degrees.

"Some are trying microdegrees, designed to get students a quicker, more focused credential. Others consider dividing courses into "modules" to allow students to take only what they need for their personalized courses of study. And a few are going even further to break out costs so that students can, say, skip library access to get a discount." (Young 2015a)

Just as other industries are experiencing a revolution against bundled package deals, colleges are experimenting with various ways of unbundling.

Such unbundling has happened in industry after industry: Most people now buy music by the song rather than the album. Air travelers pay extra to check a bag or get a seat with more legroom. And more TV viewers have cut the cord of cable and buy a mix of streaming services and individual shows. Consumers want to pick from a menu rather than be told what they're getting.

In a nutshell, it all comes down to "chopping their curricula into smaller bits." Colleges are beginning to think of ways to break courses down into modules. That approach would let students retake any module they struggled with before they move on to more advanced material. Colleges are even doing this with onground ("In-Person") courses. Colleges are trying to reach new students by "bundling" these modules and offering a certificate.

As suggested above, the deconstructing and re-bundling trend could frustrate institutions with more traditional (e.g., liberal arts) missions, which require comprehensive and concentrated tenures as students.

### **Timid Faculty**

Faculty are increasingly the target of criticism for their timidity and silence. What has brought this issue into the limelight is exposure of a cheating scandal at UNC Chapel Hill. "This was not an athletic scandal," former North Carolina Governor Jim Martin told UNC's board of trustees. "It was an academic scandal, which is worse."(Pickeral 2012)

Two professors, Jay Smith and Mary Willingham, chronicled the University of North Carolina scandal, in which athletes were given grades for classes that only existed on paper. Both authors, winners of the

Robert Maynard Hutchins Integrity award, decry the silence of their fellow academics. Says Smith, “Faculty are supposed to be the guarantors of the integrity of the institution. They are supposed to be the watchdogs for these sorts of offenses. The fact that we [faculty] haven’t been marching on Polk Place is a mystery to me -- I don’t understand it...The faculty as a collective just hasn’t mustered much energy... I guess there are lots of reasons to be reticent.” Willingham notes, “We just go along. It’s part of our culture right now.”(Smith and Willingham 2015)

One explanation may be the declining number of faculty on tenure track. Smith notes: “59% of faculty at UNC are not on the tenure track anymore. The majority of faculty do not have the protection of tenure. That’s markedly different than just 10 years ago, when something like 80% or more had protection of tenure. So the status of faculty is under attack all around higher education. And one of the consequences of that is that faculty will be less willing to challenge administration.” (Smith and Willingham 2015)

## The American Model

The American higher education system is coming under global scrutiny, just as the model is actually spreading around the world. Just what characterizes the American Higher Education Model?

“The modern research university, the marriage of the Oxbridge college and the German research institute, was invented in America, and has become the gold standard for the world.” (Economist Staff Report 2015f)

- The American model is also about access. Some refer to the global trend as “massification” as it seems, everyone in “the world is going to university.”
- Another distinctive characteristic of American higher education is finance: the American model is one in which the private sector provides a large part of the education and individuals pay for most of their tuition” as opposed to a bigger role for the state in providing infrastructure and tuition itself. (Economist Staff Report 2015g)
- Also, the American model is marked by greater stratification: in continental Europe, most institutions have equal funding and status. The more market-based American model of mixed private-public funding and provision, results in “brilliant, well-funded institutions at the top and poorer ones at the bottom.” (Economist Staff Report 2015h)

These Economist staff writers concluded that America, “having exported its model to the world, could learn some lessons from other countries about how to improve its own system.” (Economist Staff Report 2015g)  
“America seems to have hit a wall,...The country that has given the world so many ideas about how to run higher education could do with some new ones itself”, according to Simon Marginson.

The big-picture analysis of American higher education in a global context yields some interesting observations:

1. “American higher education needs to do more to prove its worth. At present, although it is clear that individuals, on average, benefit from a college education, it is not clear whether this is because their degree certificate signals to employers that they were clever enough to go to university or because their studies added to their human capital.”(Economist Staff Report 2015d)
2. Young American graduates are below the OECD average in numeracy and literacy, and are doing relatively worse than older ones. Additionally, recent work by American academics Richard Arum and Josipa Roska, authors of “Academically Adrift”, found that 45% of the same showed no significant gains between their first and third year. Time-use studies show that the time students spend in class or studying has dropped from 40 hours a week in the 1920s to the 1960s to 27 hours a week now. Teaching is done increasingly by non-tenure-track faculty on short contracts. Arum and Roksa conclude that “no actors in the system are primarily interested in undergraduate student academic growth” (Economist Staff Report 2015c).
3. The monetary investment in a four-year degree still offers a return of 15% a year if someone works until age 65. But this is true not because graduates have done so well “but because those with only high-school degrees have done so badly.”
4. Another downside of the American model is the “He who pays the piper” phenomenon. “Students paying fat fees expect decent facilities.” To cover costs, colleges come to rely more on philanthropy which means the rich colleges get richer. “Greater independence from government tends to make higher education systems more stratified, and thus more American...”(Economist Staff Report 2015e). Another threat from the “He who pays the piper” problem: Grade inflation.(Economist Staff Report 2015e)
5. Status-hungry parents in America are making the divide wider. “People are prepared to pay through the nose to buy advantage for their children, so top institutions charge ever higher prices and acquire ever more resources...So higher education has a divided soul: it is both a great collective enterprise to increase the nation’s welfare and a fight to the death between status-hungry parents. (Economist Staff Report 2015c)

6. The OECD is proposing a standardized test, AHELO which would test subject content as well as reasoning abilities. The Japanese, Chinese, and South Koreans are keen: “They know that if they’re going to compete in a global market, they need proper metrics. American elite institutions, however, feel they have a lot to lose with standardized testing. “There is no public opposition, but not much progress either...That is a shame: governments and students both need to know what they get for the money they pour into universities. (Economist Staff Report 2015d)
7. American reticence to use standardized tests may lead to overregulation. The country of Columbia in 2010 started testing undergrads when they leave the university, as part of a pre- post-test regimen. In addition to publishing test results, Columbia publishes average grades, along with average earnings, of graduates, “thus helping students decide where to go to university and what to study. Such rich information obviates the need for heavy regulation that the American government is currently applying to for-profit universities.” (Economist Staff Report 2015d)

In the end, America may be at a breaking point. Costs are hard to control and value for money is hard to measure. American education is “expensive and inequitable.” (Economist Staff Report 2015d)

The implied solution to this “expensive and inequitable” problem is, of course, the European model: free public education. This tuition-free policy may not be far-fetched as we might think – even in this country, where it may seem impossible to go “from fee to free”. Germany, though, actually did this.

Germany introduced tuition eight years ago, but over the last eight years, it’s been abolished. Germany provides a good model for American for another reason, there, public higher education is controlled and funded by sixteen autonomous state governments rather than the federal government. But where would the money come from? The US Government already spends lots of money on student aid. Federal

spending in 2014, the College Board reports, includes \$47 billion in grants, \$101 billion in loans and \$20 billion in tax credits. A little arithmetic suggests that the tuition-free idea would cost the federal government something like \$25 billion a year, while the states would have to come up with another \$6 billion. (Wiener 2015)

That amount may *not* be a deal-breaker. With clear Republican majorities in both houses in Tennessee, the bill to make community college free passed 87-8 in the House and 30-1 in the Senate.

Making college free would have one additional benefit: it would drive the predatory for-profit schools out of business. A Senate Education report in 2012 provided “overwhelming documentation of exorbitant tuition, aggressive recruiting practices, abysmal student outcomes, taxpayer dollars spent on marketing and pocketed as profit, and regulatory evasion and manipulation.”

Making higher education free might also make moot the discussion of MOOCs!

## Enrollment

Quantitative (trend-charted) information on high school graduates is available and the leveling trends in number of college-aged students are well known (note <https://archive.brenau.edu/facts/Environmental%20Scan%20May%202014Mitchell1118.pdf> pages 22 and 23). In this update, we will drill down into one source of students for Liberal Arts colleges such as Brenau--transfer ins.

We will also examine another aspect of higher education which has great importance but doesn't end up in quantitative reports: characteristics of students.

### 2-Year Schools

In the State of the Union address, President Obama proposed tuition-free passes to 2-year schools.

Commentators believe this initiative springs from the President's focus on jobs and, particularly, global competitiveness. The focus is on skills that get people jobs. "In fact, community colleges have a pretty good track record, making sure they are only offering the kind of courses, pathways, that do have a job at the end of it." (Irwin 2015)

When President Obama proposed a federal program for free community college based on the Tennessee's program in his speech in January, Georgia had offered this program for some time. How this tuition-free program impacts small liberal arts colleges is not completely known. One possible consequence for four-year colleges into which community college graduates might prospectively transfer: these students will come to admissions offices without previously having had to pay tuition. High prices ("sticker shock") may discourage or disorient.

The total impact on small liberal arts colleges of the president's plan if it comes to fruition may include other factors which may not be direct, but come less obviously from the emphasis on the instrumentality of college for getting jobs. The reduction of college to skills needed in the marketplace again puts the value of liberal arts in question.



As baccalaureate institutions try to discern what this community college scheme requires of them strategically, it's helpful to stop and look at the policy itself. Here are two opinions,

[In \*The New York Times\*](#), the columnist David Brooks argues that improving college completion, not college access, is the more important goal. "The smart thing to do would be to scrap the Obama tuition plan," Mr. Brooks writes. "Students who go to community college free now have tragically high dropout rates. The \$60 billion could then be spent on things that are mentioned in President Obama's proposal—but not prioritized or fleshed out—which would actually increase graduation rates." Those include living expenses, guidance counselors, remedial education, and child care, he argues. (Thomason 2015)

[In \*USA Today\*](#), three Republican senators—all former college presidents—wrote that Mr. Obama was "in the right church but the wrong pew" when he made the proposal. The senators, led by Tennessee's [Lamar Alexander](#), chair of the Senate's education committee, argue that the Obama administration should not create a new federal program when it could simply encourage *states* to mimic the project's ideological forbear, the [Tennessee Promise](#). They also urged the passage of legislation, which Mr. Obama has expressed support for, that would simplify the Free Application for Federal Student Aid, among other things. Mr. Alexander's co-authors were Benjamin E. Sasse, of Nebraska, and Roy D. Blunt, of Missouri. (Thomason 2015)

### **Student quality**

However, salient to discussion of quality – including the issues with Liberal Arts – is the force brought to bear on curriculum and instruction by the students themselves. Higher education writers, now, look at the pressures that "entitled" students try to apply. Note these quotes:

- "Today's students could be called the *Quitter Generation*. They have never learned or valued perseverance because it has been absent from all of their pursuits, except, perhaps, video games. Without a guarantee of success, students either give up or become intimidating." ~ Barb Holdcroft, Academe (2014)
- "I recently finished a particularly disturbing semester of teaching that was filled with instances of student incivility, intimidation, and entitlement. In searching for information that could help me understand my students' behavior, I found that other teachers have had similar experiences. Several aspects of these behaviors can be quickly identified. All have a negative impact on education and can produce dire consequences in real life. As students repeat each behavior with 'success,' the behaviors become more entrenched." ~ Barb Holdcroft, Academe (2014)
- The emphasis on being special has evolved into a broad sense of entitlement. The negative play-out of its effects [include] aggression, demanding behavior, cheating, and more. ("Generation Me: Defining & Addressing The Effects Of Entitlement On Today's College Campuses | Innovative Educators" 2015)

As we have seen, aggression is increasingly being included with the characteristic of entitlement. While student willfulness may or may not constitute actual risks to professors, the demanding behavior, and cheating can have an impact on faculty experience and, therefore, recruitment and retention.

### Economic Pressures

As mentioned, overall, the number of graduating high school seniors will be flattening or declining. But there are other factors at play: In addition to shrinkage in college-ready students, possibly the biggest factor impacting college enrollments is the economy.

Even though the economy has improved over the last 8 years, wages are flat. In fact, the problem goes back even farther. "We have created lots of income, lots of output, lots of wealth over the last three decades," said Larry Mishel, president of the left-of-center Economic Policy Institute. "The problem is it has not accrued to the vast majority." (Horseley 2015)

There is one stretch in the past 35 years that offers a glimmer of hope for struggling workers. That's the late 1990s — a period when not only was the economy growing fast but the gains were widely shared, so workers on every rung of the economic ladder were climbing together. .."What was distinct about that period can be summarized in two words: full employment," said economist Jared Bernstein of the Center on Budget and Policy Priorities. "Or maybe three words: very full employment." Unemployment in the late '90s was below 5 percent. Some months it fell below 4 percent. (Horseley 2015)

In April, the official unemployment rate dropped below 5.5 percent for the first time in seven years.

But, again, this decline has not been accompanied by better wages. The problem of stagnant wages goes back 35 years: Since 1979, average wages have barely kept pace with inflation, with the one exception mentioned above. That rare moment of full employment gave workers everywhere lots of leverage to demand higher wages. (Horseley 2015)

Lori Bettison-Varga, president of Scripps College, explains her concern about the middle class: While poor and rich students are fairly easy to enroll, many [administrators] find their expensive liberal arts college out of reach to the middle class. The president of Austin College explains this phenomenon in similar terms: Marjorie Hass's real concern, is long term. "She sees the American middle class becoming ever weaker, and she worries that the implications could be drastic for small colleges devoted to giving students from ordinary families a

lifelong set of intellectual skills and to broadening their horizons. ‘Schools like ours have essentially been middle-class operations,’ Ms. Hass says, and if those families disappear, many small liberal-arts colleges could disappear with them. ‘It’s the middle class,’ she says, ‘that has these aspirations.’” (Biemiller 2015b)

### Changes in Mission:

Some institutions are enticing students with study abroad, in the case of one Louisiana college, all freshmen take an immersive term in August – in Paris. At the same time, they slashed majors offered.

### Changes in Curriculum:

Some small colleges, such as St. Mary’s [Indiana], are expanding nontraditional offerings like graduate programs and online courses. Others, such as Austin and Randolph-Macon College, are bolstering old strengths—particularly the personal attention students get from professors—and marketing them with new vigor. A few colleges—among them Agnes Scott College—are making radical changes in their curricula and identities. And almost all are searching for ways to make bring in extra revenue from housing, summer programs, and the like. (Biemiller 2015b)

### Going Coeducational

In addition to men that women’s colleges are now admitting, some women’s colleges going coed found they also attract additional women who would not have considered a women-only institution. (Biemiller 2015a)

### Trinity (Washington) Founded 1897: “Impoverished students are seen as the future.”

Trinity College, now Trinity Washington University, was a once prestigious, selective, single-gender college counted among Wellesley, Smith and Vassar. About 30 years ago, it recognized change was needed. It had a

dwindling enrollment – around 300 from a high of about 950 -- and almost no endowment. In the 70's, men's colleges were opening to women and there was other competition for the elite, Catholic female base. Additionally, such colleges were dependent on low-cost faculty and students from wealthy families. It was a "double whammy." The new president changed the focus to: inner-city, students of color, and athletes. Trinity built the \$10 Million Center for Women and Girls in Sports, actively recruited from inner-city public schools, built a huge science center, focused on advisement and personal guidance services, and recruited such that 90% of the 2200 students are African American or Latina, 70% are Pell eligible (Schmalz 2015). While the institution claims to have kept to its mission, selectivity was sacrificed and is a price that they do not discuss.

### Mergers

This solution brings many pro's: It allows colleges to keep a lot of good staff members; but it saves money on back-office operations and infrastructure (Carlson 2015); and it solves the problem of what to do with the endowment (if enough of the original beneficiary is intact after the "strategic alliance".) In addition, mergers tend to work: Case Western Reserve, for example, came out of a merger between Case Institute of Technology and Western Reserve University in the 1960's. (Carlson 2015)

"Given the financial pressures that colleges are under these days, many people have expected to see a wave of mergers passing through higher education, particularly in regions with declining numbers of high-school graduates, like the Northeast and the Midwest. In its reports on the higher-education marketplace, Moody's Investors Service has repeatedly pointed out the need for mergers and collaborations among vulnerable colleges....[Indeed] 'we are certainly seeing more activity around mergers, consolidations, alliances, and consortiums.' [according to Rick Staisloff.] (Carlson 2015)"

Of course, mergers aren't all successful. It's possible to end up with one big struggling institution. Success comes when merging partners have "agreed where their areas of strength are, and where they are not" and been willing to jettison weaker areas. If that doesn't happen, they don't get anywhere near the economies they expected. (Carlson 2015)

### Closure:

Sweetbriar College in Virginia found that the number of women actually enrolling was at "an all-time and unsustainable low"—even as the college's discount rate soared to 62 percent. (Biemiller 2015c)

The reality is that we are unable to reverse two intractable issues," [Trustee Chair, Paul G. Rice] said. "The first is that fewer and fewer students are choosing to attend small, rural private liberal-arts colleges, and that fewer women today are choosing single-sex education." The second issue, he said, is that the discount "that we have needed to offer to enroll students is no longer sustainable." The published price for tuition, room, and board at the college, located 12 miles northeast of Lynchburg, Va., was just over \$47,000 for the current year. (Biemiller 2015c)

The board had considered a wide range of alternatives, including admitting men, overhauling the educational program, and merging with another institution, Mr. Rice said. But unlike boards at a number of other colleges that hope making significant changes will keep them alive, Sweet Briar's concluded that none of its options were viable, given "declining interest in these types of colleges," he said. The college's president, James F. Jones Jr., said no amount of wishing would change "the national vectors, the marketplace vectors." (Biemiller 2015c)

Closing colleges may not be a trend. However, the case of Sweet Briar College does bring economic and enrollment realities into sharp relief. For example, it has focused lots of attention on the size of endowments, among other institutional sustainability issues.

### Cutting tuition

While cutting tuition remains a bit unusual, a “number of colleges (Converse, University of the South, for example) have slashed their list prices in recent years, and they’ve gotten lots of attention. ...If, like a lot of colleges, yours has barely any students paying full price, why not bring the sticker price down to the amount the typical student is actually paying? (Supiano and DeFrancesco 2015).

On surface, it seems logical. But a price cut is nowhere near that simple. Note the experience of North Carolina Wesleyan:

"The theory was that we would grow our way out of our financial problems," says the college's president, Ian D. Newbould. "Well, that isn't what happened." When the college cut its price, "we sent out a very powerful marketing message," says Mr. Newbould. "The perception was that we are no longer going to be very good." "If you charge less, people think you have less to offer," Mr. Newbould concludes. (Van der Werf 2003)

North Carolina Wesleyan began getting more applications from even less-wealthy students than those who had been attending, so the financial-aid needs did not lessen at all. And worse, the new set of applicants were even less prepared to do college-level work.

There are some success stories, such as Muskingum. However, by the accounts of both champions and critics, the strategy is very risky. (Supiano and DeFrancesco 2015)

### The Proprietary Model

One option many colleges have considered as a solution to stay open is various versions of the proprietary model. Whether an all-in merger/buy out or some hybrid arrangement, some colleges are turning to third party contractors. This often takes the form of third-party vendors “enabling” services. (See discussion of 2U, below.)

However, recently media attention has cast doubt on the for-profit model. The dissolution of Corinth Colleges (discussed below) is but one of the recent stories on the sector. Also, the largest traditional U.S. university, the University of Phoenix, recently made headlines for having its enrollment falling to less than half of its peak five years ago. The decline has been blamed on many things, even to glitches in its online software. (Jakab 2015)

But the biggest threat to proprietary colleges’ recruitment and retention is the perceived value. Prospective and even current students can no longer justify the small perceived advantage of a proprietary degree against the high cost and huge student loan debt. This has led to extreme forms of objection.

### Student Protests

Called by some a “grass-roots political action”, a group of former students are refusing to pay back loans they took out to attend a for-profit college:

...these Corinthian students were actually recruited, let's say, by a group that's calling itself the Debt Collective and they're coming out of the Occupy Wall Street movement, and they've been taking a series



of actions to sort of raise awareness around the student debt problem. And last September, they made an announcement that they had bought-up some loans, some private student loans that had been made to Corinthian students originally. But when loans go bad, when they get, you know, past repayment, they're often put up for sale in the secondary market. They can be written-off and then they can be resold for pennies on the dollar. So in that action last fall, they erased \$3.9 million in private student loans. But now they're shifting to this other tactic, which is getting actual Corinthian students to band together and say, we're just not going to pay these loans back. (Kamentz 2015)

### Focus on student-aid issues

Various job market factors, the escalating costs of college, and the new Congress focused on budgets have all combined to bring scrutiny to all players in student aid.

Although the executive branch is responsible for making the budget, Congress, this spring, has spent energy on budget making, drafting its own unofficial budget. During this cost-cutting process, the student loan default problem has brought interest. This is also true in the Administration, where the focus on student debt has intensified, especially while the Department of Education is scrutinizing for-profit colleges.

### Shaming

On March 30, 2015, the US Department of Education named more than 550 (329 of which are for-profit colleges) it has put under extra financial scrutiny. 69 of the 556 colleges on the list face the stricter scrutiny, but all colleges on the list are no longer allowed to use the advance pay method. (Blumenstyk 2015a) The list results from heightened cash monitoring,

Putatively, the scoring was designed as a “tool to help with oversight on federal student-aid funds” (Blumenstyk and Hatch 2015). But the connection is indirect, if not downright obtuse. This financial-responsibility index examines colleges’ debts, assets, and operating surpluses or deficits. The scores often highlight financial problems that are a precursor to colleges’ being sold, merged, or closed. (Blumenstyk and Hatch 2015) There is an assumed correlation between these measures and student loan default, but the factors in this coloration are indirect and not specified.

### Risk Sharing

In this climate, the US Congress is considering so-called “risk sharing” laws – the idea that colleges should bear some of the cost when their students default on federal loans. (Field 2015) Senate Republicans, in particular, are exploring ways to give institutions more “skin in the game” when it comes to student lending, but the plan has bi-partisan support, ranging from Lamar Alexander to Elizabeth Warren. “Right now, the government provides billions of dollars to students each year, with few eligibility hurdles: Anyone with a Social Security number, citizenship, and a high-school diploma or the equivalent can qualify...making college accessible to borrowers with little or no credit history.” “The Republican paper released last week [week of March 23, 2015] doesn’t endorse a particular [risk-sharing] approach, but it floats the possibilities of requiring colleges to remit a portion of defaulted dollars to the federal government or cutting off their access to some federal funds” (Field 2015).

One plan would fine colleges and universities whose student-loan default rates exceeded certain thresholds. The penalties would be imposed on a sliding scale. (Thomason 2013)

### Why students default

From social science, we are learning more about why some borrowers struggle to repay their loans. New America recently released results of a study the problem from the borrowers’ perspective. Among the themes

identified: 1) Students don't know how many years it will take to graduate and don't know how much they'll earn after college; 2) Student loans aren't a high priority – low credit scores are less tangible than cars and homes; 3) Borrowers are resentful: “borrowers who felt that their colleges had made false promises or that their education wasn't worth the price resented having to repay their loans”; 4) Income-based repayment is confusing for the ones that have heard of it, and few know about it. (Supiano 2015)

### Focus on not-for-profits

The scrutiny has increased even on Non Profits, in general. For example...

With the advancement of watchdog agencies like Charity Navigator and GuideStar, more donors, foundations, financial institutions, and other funders are evaluating and judging not-for-profit organizations' key ratios, including the ratio of program expenses to total expenses. The higher the percentage of program expense to total expense, the “better performing” the organization is deemed to be. Popular opinion is often that a program expense to total expense ratio below 70 percent is “poor performing.” Many have read marketing literature for organizations proudly touting a claim that “85 cents of every contributed dollar goes directly to feed the hungry, or help the poor.” ... Because of this scrutiny, organizations should carefully review how they are allocating and recording both their direct and indirect expenses. (BTI 2014)

Higher education finds itself in a culture of increasing cynicism – cynicism both of the value of higher education and of institutions.

### Technology:

Technology news in higher education continues to include applications that leverage: online resources, virtual reality, and storage platforms that help with instruction and administrative documentation and retrieval. We are entering a period when higher ed technology is coming under closer scrutiny.

### Shovelware

One company gaining notoriety, Entangled Ventures, is sort of a Consumer Reports for colleges considering new tech products.(Blumenstyk 2015b) Because Entangled will recommend products that have already been vetted, or that will be tested as part of a pilot, the colleges will be protected, Mr. Freedman says. They're also free to take or leave his advice. But he says ventures like his could also be a counter to publishers and other organizations that he contends are now using their historic relationships with colleges to sell "shovelware" — a derogatory term for tech products of questionable quality...."There's zero evidence that anything's working,"

### Learning Analytics

The promise that various tech applications might actually be used to advance learning research has not, as yet born out. "Learning Analytics" is a generic name for mining lots of data on various factors on student movement within online portals. By correlating student navigation around content in a site with success measures, we can learn much about learning, it is assumed. Unfortunately, some fear that the outcomes that will be used as a measure of success is merely retention and graduation, not really learning, per se. Also, portals tend to be run by proprietary services, whose sense of duty to contribute to the body of pedagogic knowledge is not known.

## Blended

In an effort to make course delivery more affordable, institutions continue to analyze various technological delivery methods.

A big news topic in technology, at least to the degree it relates to higher education policy, continues to be “blended.” A blended approach seems the preference of highly selective institutions who seek to incorporate distance education technology. “Johns Hopkins University, for example, offers an online master’s program in public health that delivers about 80 percent of its coursework on the web.” Blended is big: “Free online courses might make headlines, but tuition-based professional degrees in high-demand fields such as health care are where online courses, and the companies that help build them, are gaining a foothold.” (Kolowich 2015)

But perhaps the bigger story is not that selective institutions are adopting the medium, but perhaps the rise of enabler companies that make this possible for institutions.

2U, the online “enabler” company that is helping Yale develop the new program, previously built nursing programs at Georgetown University and Simmons College, as well as programs in public health and health administration at George Washington University...Institutions typically sign contracts with companies like 2U when they want to create new online programs as fast as possible without spending a lot of cash upfront. That is an especially attractive option for universities that are trying to grab a larger chunk of the market for high-demand professional degrees in fields such as health, nursing, data science, and business. It is there that 2U and others have found their sweet spot. The companies provide the technology platform... (Kolowich 2015)

Indeed, Yale uses virtual classrooms, and the technology is advanced. The instruction is “live” and not asynchronous, a feature that brings praise because it accesses modern advances in desk-top technology and also gains a perceived increase in quality because this makes possible all the advantages of the traditional seminar (bringing faculty and all students together for meaningful discussion). (Selingo 2015)

The question of educational quality of online platforms remains unanswered. Can you teach something beyond mere knowledge – critical thinking, for example – through platforms set up for online instruction?

Some look for pedagogical advantage indirect to the platform. The business model of Minerva Project founder Ben Nelson, is to leverage technology to save on physical infrastructure but to **also leverage the learning opportunities** that the physical world provides: “no campus with buildings designed by famous architects, no palatial recreational facilities, no expensive athletics teams. No classrooms, for that matter. All classes are virtual. The students take classes online even though they live together in the same city – this year in an apartment building in San Francisco’s Nob Hill neighborhood. Each year the students will move around the world, living in Buenos Aires, Berlin, perhaps Istanbul and Mumbai, among other cities. The rationale behind Minerva’s tech system, uniquely, is more on quality than efficiency.

Incidentally, every freshman takes the same four core courses”...which he says are more rigorous.” They are also real time. “The students need to be ready to be called on by a professor at any moment, he notes. They can’t be checking Facebook on another screen.” (Selingo 2015).

## MOOCs

It appears to some that the future of higher education is MOOCs (Massive Open Online Courses). “The last few years have seen a ferment of ideas for improving productivity in medicine and teaching....Open-enrollment

online courses will give everyone a free college education and iPads will provide universal schooling in Africa (Economist Staff Report 2015a).” People are beginning to assume that MOOCs are the next step, the disruptive event, the way to make higher education more equitable and available. People speak of the University of Everywhere. (Carey 2015)

In the end, MOOCs may be around for a while. Increasing numbers of institutions are offering them and none seem to be backing off.<sup>2</sup> In any case, as we gain experience, we are beginning to get a sense of what MOOCs can do and their lasting effects.

- For one, we are understanding that MOOCs seem to be more and more about skill acquisition. “We don’t help develop values, we don’t form character. We just give you the tools to form skills,” [says Sabastian Thrun, founder of Udacity.] (Young 2015b)
- Secondly, MOOCs are increasingly seen as marketing tools. “A commitment to creating MOOCs also can have consequences for overall enrollment. Prospective students now sometimes peek at MOOCs as they shop for colleges, and they can see the difference between a good course and a lackluster one. In that way, the courses function like Amazon’s “look inside the book” feature, which lets customers read free samples of books before they buy....Viewed in a certain light, MOOCs may end up raising the cost of higher education, as colleges enter a new arms race to improve their support systems for teaching.” (Young 2015b)

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<sup>2</sup> For a sense of the range of courses now available and the institutions involved, a one-stop clearinghouse, Class Central, is instructive. <https://www.class-central.com/subjects> (or visit the home page, <https://www.class-central.com/>)

- New attention to teaching: “Perhaps the biggest legacy of free online courses is unintended: increased pressure on colleges to spend more money on teaching. Colleges spend \$39,000 to \$325,000 for each MOOC they make, according to an analysis last week in eCampus News. And many colleges are building new infrastructure to help produce the courses, hiring instructional designers or putting up studio facilities.”(Young 2015b)

Colleges which participate in large platforms, such as edX, see their investment as also having a research payoff. They are part of a grand research effort (EdX has more than 3 million students) to see which methods work best. (Young 2015b)

### Teaching Tech: Coding Academies

A key to success in higher education institutions, of course, is matching degrees to economic demand, and for now, that may mean tech degrees. New York’s Flatiron school has a long waiting list of applicants – 16 applicants for every one position. Applicants know if they can code, they will find work. all the World Wide Web, Wikipedia, Facebook, Twitter, your Web site, they are just giant strings of code: so many Web sites, so much software, the programming pool will simply have to grow to keep up with demand. Says a recent graduate, Armando Amador: “once I finished the program and I changed my job title to software engineer, just like that same hour, my inbox was full of messages, just like people send you e-mails and calling you.” Turns out, 99 percent of Flatiron graduates get jobs as developers, making on average, \$74,000 a year to start. Flatiron students undertake twelve weeks of immersive coding, no experience required, at a cost of \$12,000 to \$15,000. (Solman 2015)

In sum, the Minerva story is unique in that their motive for moving to online instruction is related to improving quality. Conversely, as many colleges face an existential crises, more may look to technology as an aid to



institutional survival. The news of college mergers and closings just in 2015 alone may bring more attention to technology as a way to improve efficiency and even as a subject in itself as the job market is impelling more students to programming.

## ENVIRONMENT

### Recent Environmental Releases

Possibly the most authoritative science on the human impact on the climate, the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) 2007 report (known as “AR4”) engaged people from over 130 countries, took 6 years to produce, and involved more than 1250 authors. In 2007, the report established, that

Human activities contribute to climate change by causing changes in Earth’s atmosphere in the amounts of greenhouse gases, aerosols (small particles), and cloudiness. The largest known contribution comes from the burning of fossil fuels, which releases carbon dioxide gas to the atmosphere.

Since the publication of the Environmental Scan in September 2014, a critical update was issued by the same United Nations panel. It found that human influence on the climate system has grown since the authoritative Fourth Assessment Report (AR4) in 2007

“Last fall [November 2014] the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change, which consists of hundreds of scientists operating under the auspices of the United Nations, released its fifth report in the past 25 years. This one repeated louder and clearer than ever the consensus of the world’s scientists: The planet’s surface temperature has risen by about 1.5 degrees Fahrenheit in the past 130 years, and human actions, including the burning of fossil fuels, are extremely likely to have been the dominant cause of the warming since the mid-20th century” (Achenbach 2015)

There is a new emphasis in this November 2014 report of the IPCC: The *Fall 2014 IPCC AR5 Report* notes an “uncomfortable shift” in how we think about climate change. It’s a shift from prevention to adaptation. We

can't stop it, it's inevitable and we need to "admit some degree of failure..... In late 80's, time of 1st IPCC report, you could imagine people would take climate change seriously, start to control emissions. Instead, people have talked a lot about climate change but haven't done much." - David Victor, an IPCC author

<http://www.onthedia.org/story/dust-planet-radiolab/>

### **The big picture: How salient is environmentalism to American culture?**

Despite dire results from scientists, and even as we experience intense weather events (floods in Texas, drought in California, severe winter events in New England), some note that the environment is still not a salient story in the cultural context in which the Academy functions. For example, no one among the most recent "Time 100 Readers' Poll" was recognized specifically for environmentalism work. (Frizell 2014)

### **Trends of what's hot and what's not in campus sustainability**

While climate change is not salient in the general American social "environment", higher education is still taking up the banner. Below are trends identified by the Association for the Advancement of Sustainability in Higher Education in the *2014 Higher Education Sustainability Review*. (Association for the Advancement of Sustainability in Higher Education 2014) Compared to 2013, 2014 saw noticeable increases in:

- Stories related to campus living labs & experiential learning opportunities increased by 63 percent
- Stories related to reduction milestones and commitments in campus operations increased by 54 percent
- Drought response efforts emerged as a new topic of focus, particularly among California institutions
- Regional and local food initiatives increased by 60 percent
- Zero-waste and game day waste initiatives more than doubled

- Stories highlighting student-based funding and revolving loan funding for campus sustainability efforts increased by 41 percent
- Videos promoting campus sustainability initiatives more than tripled

Also notable, the number of first-time higher education sustainability-focused job announcements featured in the AASHE Bulletin in 2014 increased by 86 percent from 2013.

<sup>ii</sup>A complete list of items identified by AASHE as emerging trends are listed in the Appendix. This appendix lists compiled from examining nearly 1,350 stories published in AASHE's weekly newsletter, AASHE Bulletin, in 2014.(AASHE 2015)

## POLITICS

Atlanta is changing. We will take the opportunity of this update to introduce a focus on our local region. It is possible that Atlanta Metro Region failures (commuting time, blight – especially below I-20, public school failures, school congestion of schools, stress on public services in the northern part of metro, and other bad publicity) will begin to impact colleges which see Atlanta as source of students, of staff, and careers for alum.

### Local: Atlanta Getting National Notoriety

Brenau's connection with Atlanta is obvious:

- 55% of Brenau alumni live in the “Greater Atlanta Area”, according to LinkedIn.
- Nearly 500 (out of 850) Women's College students are from Metro Counties<sup>3</sup>. Two thirds of Brenau's on-ground evening-and-weekend students and over half of our online students are from there.
- Gainesville, Fairburn and Norcross campuses anchor this institution firmly to this region as a source of labor, travel connections, conventions, galleries, patrons, etc.
- Brenau has other connections to Atlanta through associations and affiliations (e.g., Atlanta Regional Consortium of Higher Education, High Museum agreement).

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<sup>3</sup>Barrow, Bartow, Carroll, Cherokee, Clayton, Cobb, Coweta, Dekalb, Douglas, Fayette, Forsyth, Fulton, Gwinnett, Hall, Henry, Newton, Paulding, Rockdale, Spalding, Walton

The urban blight issues of our capital are shared with many national cities, and Sunbelt cities, in particular. The problems faced by Metro Atlanta – from again infrastructure to declining middle class – are the keystone problems of the country.

### Transportation:

Commuter issues may most distinguish Atlanta in the national mind (e.g. for prospective employers considering relocating). From caustic quips on *Prairie Home Companion* to *Daily Show* parodies with pictures of “Miss Daisy” caught in Atlanta traffic – videos that have gone viral, Atlanta’s image nationally is of a transportation nightmare.

- ...the Metropolitan Atlanta Rapid Transit Authority (MARTA) is constrained by a lack of state funding. Georgia has the nation’s smallest gasoline tax . [and] MARTA is the only metropolitan transit system in the country that receives no funding from the state government.(Brookings Institute 2000, page 22)
- The average per capita driving distance in Atlanta is nearly 35 miles per day – farther than in any other city on earth. (Brookings Institute 2000 Page 24)
- Even with stiff competition from cities such as Boston, LA and Philadelphia, Atlanta is often recognized for worst bottlenecks in the country. Worst bottleneck in Atlanta: Interstate 75 Southbound at Interstate 675 (Exit 227)

In final form, the transportation tax bill passed just before congress ended this session was just enough to get existing transportation up to snuff. “A study committee recommended \$1 billion was needed just to maintain Georgia's existing roads and bridges – and far more would be necessary to upgrade or expand infrastructure of all types.” (Foody 2015) That new transportation tax bill will once again ignore transit. (Richards 2015) The

final bill will raise about \$900 Million a year for maintenance and repair to roads and bridges. It's not sure if that will keep pace with depreciation, and it adds no new capacity. "You will still be stuck in traffic." The revenue comes from changes to the gas tax (dedicating now .26 per gallon all to transportation), from fees for hotel visits, and by dropping tax credits for buying or leasing electric vehicles. (They're being charged a fee, instead.) Lawmakers will also eliminate a fuel purchase tax break awarded to Delta Airlines.

Reticence of Georgians and their politicians to invest in these infrastructure projects or other public works may indicate larger issues characteristics of the climate and currents in Georgia culture. Progressive agendas may simply have a tougher time. Especially ones that raise taxes.

Indeed, it seems that the Georgia General Assembly has less trouble with public works financed by public-private partnerships that also build associated individual projects, such as transit facilities, hiking trails, bike lanes, sidewalks in the case of the Atlanta Beltline, where the Georgia House of Representatives voted 166-2 and the Senate then approved the conference report on the legislation 46-1 in early April.

That project would help finish a 16-mile trail which would encircle Atlanta and provide bicycle passage and transit connections and, in addition to providing some relief to traffic in the future, would serve to connect various segregated neighborhoods.

Segregated neighborhoods and other urban problems seem to have some understandable causes. A recent Brookings report revealed that Atlanta problems ranging from traffic congestion and public school problems

may be attributable to the segregation that has occurred around either side of I-20. The Atlanta phenomenon occurs as middle class families flee areas south of the interstate. That puts strain on schools in northern Atlanta, and on traffic. That abandonment of schools and other institutions in South Atlanta provides a classic case study for the widening Opportunity Gap.

### Opportunity Gap

Stagnant wages, transportation scarcity, long commutes, decay of downtown, flight to suburbs of both families and employers, declining tax base just as infrastructure spending needs to increase, homelessness, decay of public schools – the American urban scene is very much in evidence in Georgia’s capital. (Brookings Institute 2000)

Probably one of this biggest problems in terms of students is isolation. Robert Putnam's *Our Kids: The American Dream in Crisis*, describes, in the author's words, "Atlanta, and from Orange County, California, to Philadelphia". Putnam describes the Opportunity Gap phenomenon in Port Clinton, Ohio...

The changes in Port Clinton that have led to growing numbers of kids, of all races and both genders, being denied the promise of the American Dream – changes in economic circumstance, in family structure and parenting, in schools, and in neighborhoods – are surprisingly representative of America writ large....

Less discussed than the growing gaps between affluent and impoverished Americans, but equally insidious, is the fact that the ballooning economic gap has been accompanied by growing de facto segregation of Americans along class lines. In Port Clinton of the 1950s, affluent kids and poor kids lived near one another, went to school together, played and prayed together, and even dated one another. These



kids received different economic and cultural endowments from their parents, of course, because Port Clinton was not a commune. However, kids (and their parents) had acquaintances and even close friends across class lines. Nowadays, by contrast, fewer and fewer of us, in Port Clinton and elsewhere, are exposed in our daily lives to people outside our own socioeconomic niche.

Ultimately, growing class segregation across neighborhoods, schools, marriages (and probably also civic associations, workplaces, and friendship circles) means that rich Americans and poor Americans are living, learning, and raising children in increasingly separate and unequal worlds, removing the stepping-stones to upward mobility— college-going classmates or cousins or middle-class neighbors, who might take a working-class kid from the neighborhood under their wing. Moreover, class segregation means that members of the upper middle class are less likely to have firsthand knowledge of the lives of poor kids and thus are unable even to recognize the growing opportunity gap.

The bottom line: Take a look at what has been happening to kids in the past three decades—the families into which they've been born, the parenting and schooling they've received, the communities within which they've been raised. We know that those experiences will inevitably have a powerful effect on how well they do in life. Whatever changes we can detect in these areas will foreshadow changes in social mobility— which, distressingly, according to the evidence I've reviewed, seems poised to plunge in the years ahead, shattering the American Dream.

His work might be summarized by one of his quotes: "When I was growing up, when people talked about we've got to do things for our kids, by 'our kids', they meant all the kids in town." Now poor kids, kids coming from the lower third of society, are isolated from everyone. They're isolated from their parents, because their families are unstable. They're isolated from schools, they're isolated from churches, because there's a gap there,

too. They're isolated from community organizations, they're isolated from their neighbors... The fact that these kids are isolated means that bad things happen to them.

Atlanta has come under scrutiny as being among the **least egalitarian cities in America**. Author Robert Putnam references a recent results of a study by the Federal Reserve Board: If Atlanta had the same equality of opportunity that Salt Lake City had, Atlanta would be 11% bigger. (Putnam 2015)

We know that perhaps the biggest problem with regard to that blight is isolation of students. The cost is high, not just incarceration, health problems, and crime. The main loss is lost potential. Millions are simply being written off and will not be able to contribute to an economy.

**Solutions to these problems have a Higher Education component.**

Putnam identifies the biggest problem as isolation of young people from: churches, preachers, teachers, adult mentors, coaches, team sports, and other opportunities to connect to caring adults.

Other solutions suggested are very much in the wheelhouse of education institutions. Putnam identifies his top solution: "Best single thing we could do is end this 30-year stagnation of real wages for less educated men. That would have a powerful effect on the family structure and on the lives of these kids." (Putnam 2015, around minute 40:)

Towards leveraging employment opportunities as well as leveraging civic improvement through our alum, there are apparently many networking opportunities in this vibrant metro area. There are certainly an almost infinite number of service opportunities as Atlanta is faced with many difficult problems. The region is a living laboratory for research into alleviation of blight and transportation problems.

Georgia just lost a bid to recruit a high-profile car maker. We cannot know the extent to the decision was influenced by things like Georgia's dissipated infrastructure, schoolboard scandals, high-profile urban problems, and general reticence toward public investment. But as we continue to see losses – e.g., such as the opportunity for federal funds for high-speed rail – the ongoing vibrancy of the area becomes an issue.

The degree to which Brenau involves itself with the community and region is the degree to which it fulfills its public service mission.

### Global: China

Some recent higher education items related to China include:

*Communist Crackdown of Chinese Universities:* Officials in China are stifling independent voices in Chinese universities. An old-style propaganda campaign is now unfolding. On January 29th, 2015, Yuan Guiren, education minister, declared at a conference that “textbooks promoting Western values” would not be allowed in classrooms, nor would “slandering” of the party leadership. Officials at the same meeting echoed his views, including the party chiefs of Peking University and Tsinghua University, the country's most prestigious colleges. On February 6th a commentary in the People's Daily, the Party's main mouthpiece, quoted the party chief of Renmin Univeristy in Beijing as saying that Marxist thinking must “enter textbooks...and enter brains.” Faculty fear retribution as they are warned of the threat posed by “ideas such as universal values, civil society and press freedom.” (Economist Staff Report 2015b)

*Confucius Institutes:* 孔子学院; are non-profit public institutions affiliated with the Ministry of Education of the People's Republic of China whose stated aim is to promote Chinese language and culture, support

local Chinese teaching internationally, and facilitate cultural exchanges.( Mattis 2012) Confucius Institutes operate within established universities, colleges, and secondary schools around the world, providing funding, teachers and educational materials. This has raised concerns over their influence on academic freedom, the possibility of industrial espionage (Hagen 2008), and concerns that the institutes present a selective and politicized view of China as a means of advancing the country's soft power internationally. US universities welcomed these at first, and some, notably Stanford, still have agreements. However, some US institutions (e.g. Penn State, University of Chicago, etc.) have decided to suspend renewal of agreements. (Jacobs and Yu 2014). One problem: institutes won't join local faculty in research or engage on certain topics. Also, some hosts are also concerned that the Institutes seek to provide distraction away from China's human rights abuses. (Hagen 2008)

*NGOs and Not-for-Profits* In Asia, in both democratic and autocratic nations (ranging from India and Pakistan and Indonesia to China), NGOs are the target of official government hostility ranging from tighter regulation to virtual house arrests. Host government complaints range from proselytizing ("saving souls") –to- promotion of Western values (including the idea that power should be monitored and shared among many actors and institutions, not hoarded by governments – or criticism of things like war-crime trials, prisons, etc) –to- pro-environmental messages (seen as a threat to, e.g., a nation's coal industry). (Economist Staff Report 2015i)

These limitations to liberties and freedoms have already impelled some US institutions to take strong stands. At the minimum, these developments may underscore the importance of reinforcing "core" liberal arts lessons in our Chinese -- and, indeed, all international -- students.

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## Appendix

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<sup>i</sup>Goals of liberal arts range from, for example,

To produce...

- ...people "with genius and virtue should be rendered by liberal education worthy to receive and able to guard the sacred deposit of the rights and liberties of their fellow citizens" -- Men who wouldn't be easily swayed by tyrants. (Jefferson)
- ...people who don't reduce the pursuit of happiness to the pursuit of dollars (Booker T. Washington)
- ..."neither a psychologist nor a brickmason, but a man" (W.E.B. Du Bois)
- ..."a well-grounded intellectual resilience, a disposition toward lifelong learning, and an acceptance of responsibility for the ethical consequences of our ideas and actions." (AAC&U)
- ..."Today, the shifts in the economy mean that technological change will only produce accelerated pace of innovation of changing relations to audiences. A broad wide-ranging education is the best way to be able to shape that change rather than just be victimized by it." (Wesleyan University President Michael Roth) (Westerveld 2014)

<sup>ii</sup> **Complete AASHE Report: 2014 saw these sustainability trends on the rise:**

- Campus sustainability assessments & ratings
- Coordination & planning initiatives

- Public engagement initiatives
- Campus living labs & experiential learning opportunities
- Energy & water use reduction milestones
- Drought response
- Regional & local food initiatives
- Zero waste & game day waste initiatives (stories more than doubled)
- Sustainability-related commitments, pledges, plans, policies & reports
- First-time campus sustainability positions
- Student-based funding
- Revolving loan funding

**Topics that decreased:**

- College affordability & access initiatives
- Buildings stories
- Funding initiatives
- New sustainability-focused academic programs
- Energy partnerships
- LEED ratings
- Non-LEED green building efforts
- Wind & geothermal installations
- Move-out waste initiatives
- Higher education affordability initiatives

- Divestments announcements and calls for divestment

**Marginal change:**

- Diversity & inclusion initiatives
- Curriculum stories
- Climate initiatives
- Solar installations
- Energy monitoring
- Bottled water reduction campaigns
- Food recovery & real food initiatives
- Sustainable commuting initiatives
- Composting initiatives