EXTEGRITY OR THE ACADEMIC MIDWAY

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Abstract

As American colleges and universities face increasing financial pressure and political criticism, their leaders have responded by adopting risk-averse, reactive strategies that have profoundly weakened the autonomy and creativity of higher education in the United States. Rather than emphasizing the integrity of their institutions, too many academic leaders search for validation from competing external accrediting agencies and commercial rating organizations. While some of those accrediting agencies focus on the quality and health of entire institutions, the increasing number of disciplinary accreditors has encouraged colleges and universities to privilege special interests and cede the responsibility for establishing values to groups which are largely self-serving.

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Extegrity, or, The Academic Midway

Like a series of bumper cars, America's colleges and universities seem to bounce erratically from crisis to crisis. Smashing off negative financial outlook reports, they veer into the path of cost-cutting state legislators before finding themselves jammed by growing skepticism about the very goals of higher education. While some of those crises stem from the economic uncertainties of riding a global financial rollercoaster and others from the confusion of trying to imagine a future in today's maze of competing technological visions, all have been aggravated by failures of external and internal leadership among those responsible for managing the circus midway that higher education has become. Not least among those failures has been the unwillingness of college presidents and political leaders to acknowledge that their inability to question the way we educate our students, especially the growing number of business, politics, and technology students, is largely responsible for transforming academic challenges into political and cultural catastrophes.

At the same time that a rising tide of fiscally tough governors and state legislators realize that they can slice and dice university budgets with relative impunity—at least such actions carry far less political risk than cutting police or fire departments—more and more college presidents have decided to model themselves on America's corporate CEOs and embrace a risk-averse, reactive philosophy. Giddy with their soaring salaries and re-enforced by trustees with little understanding of higher education, a surprising number of our academic CEOs appear to have as little understanding of the difference between an education and a degree as the CEOs of J.P. Morgan, Bank of America and Prudential had of how derivatives work. While college presidents have always struggled to educate their boards, to help them understand the distinct and unique nature of American higher education, today's academic leaders seem more interested in emulating than educating the largely corporate members of their boards.

Our universities and colleges became the crucible which shaped the nation from the 1860s on largely because of federal policies aimed at expanding opportunities, like the 1862 Morrill Act which established land grant colleges and the 1865 Higher Education Act which helped fund historically black colleges and universities. As higher education became the engine that drove America's growth, academic leaders like Charles William Eliot and James Bryant Conant of Harvard, Robert Maynard Hutchins of Chicago, Robert Goheen of Princeton, and Fr. Theodore Hesburgh of Notre Dame served as both its conductors and engineers, preserving academic integrity while making sure their schools moved forward safely and purposefully. They believed that it was their role, in a creative dialogue with their faculty and communities, to develop a curriculum that continually adjusted to a rapidly evolving world while providing students with the academic, cultural and moral preparation for effective citizenship and rewarding careers. Where universities once prided themselves on the integrity of such leaders and their programs, today's academic leaders wander on a constant quest for validation through a wasteland of competing external accrediting agencies and commercial rating organizations in a culture where extegrity has exiled integrity.

That reliance on extegrity, searching for truth and meaning primarily through external validation, largely accounts both for the homogenization of higher education and its failure to address the economic, cultural, and technological crises we face. Perhaps there is no better example of this problem than in our closely related political and business universes. While the 2012 presidential election may not have been the nastiest in our history—in 1800 Thomas Jefferson's supporters attacked John Adams' sexuality, calling him a "hideous hermaphroditical character," while Adams' supporters responded with racial slurs, describing Jefferson as "a meanspirited, low-lived fellow, the son of a half breed Indian squaw sired by a Virginia mulatto father"—it may well have been the least enlightening. Both political parties and their supporters spent billions engineering campaigns that relied primarily on attack ads, half truths, and lies.

If our politics have become disgraceful, our business world is catastrophic. After its members developed arcane investment and irresponsible banking policies which created the worst recession since the Great Depression, causing a boom in bankruptcies, massive unemployment and 3.1 million foreclosures in 2008 alone, the U.S. Chamber of Commerce spent an estimated $36 million in 2012 to support candidates who vowed to eliminate the very laws passed to block such policies from crippling the economy again. Rather than promoting a vigorous debate on which regulations are necessary, the Chamber and many of those politicians it supports have simply demonized all regulation.

At a time when our politics and business departments should be leading a re-examination of how their fields have gone so far astray, neither has shown much interest in examining its conscience. The American Political Science Association (APSA), which identifies itself on its web site as "the leading professional organization for the study of political science [with] more than 15,000 members in over 80 countries,"[1] has a committee on ethics which seems primarily concerned with arcane academic ethical standards among faculty rather than practical or ethical ones for their graduates. So long as faculty neither plagiarize nor display any ethnocentric bias, it should not matter how their students corrupt the body politic.

While the 2012 APSA convention was cancelled due to Hurricane Isaac, its 2013 Teaching and Learning Conference identifies 12 tracks it will focus on, including "Teaching Research Methods," "Integrating Technology into the Classroom," and "Internationalizing the Classroom," all important objectives. There is, however, apparently nothing on ethics nor any obvious session on understanding why its graduates seem so focused on and skilled at creating negative rather than substantive campaigns and on winning at all costs. I can only assume that a discipline which changed its name from politics to political science would argue that, as scientists, their focus is on empirical evidence not all that soft morality and ethical stuff.

Why should we be concerned with marginal and esoteric academic organizations like the APSA? The answer is simple. The more corporate college administrations become, the more they look outside themselves for validation. And if our colleges now cede the responsibility for establishing values to groups which are largely self serving, what values should we expect them to offer students? Except for a tiny handful of colleges that have

[1] apsanet.org

a clear vision of themselves and their goals, most now look to outside groups like the APSA for validation.

That abnegation of responsibility is largely why accrediting groups have mushroomed and federal regulation has blossomed. Where college presidents once assumed that the legitimacy of their programs rested on the integrity of their institutional culture, history and faculty, today legitimacy relies on extegrity, the validation by external groups, whether the feds, accreditors or raters like the *U.S. News and World Report*. As a result, college administrators focus on how they are seen rather than who they are and race to make those external groups happy rather than ensure that their students grow as people and gain the kinds of skills and knowledge that will help them achieve lives of meaning and use.

American accrediting divides into the fairly benign regional accrediting agencies and the far more divisive disciplinary accreditors. (Various national accreditors for career, trade, vocational and for-profit schools work with more opacity and seem harder to evaluate, especially when they bear such curious names as the International Association of Non-Traditional Schools or, with complete disregard for either spelling or grammar, the Accreditation Association of Ametrican [sic] College [sic] and Universities.) The six regional accrediting agencies in the United States have gerrymandered the country into comfortable geographic sections. Since each is an association of its members and since all focus on the quality and health of the entire institution, their evaluations tend to be broad and fairly objective. And their bark is always worse than their bite. Relying on the support and good will of the institutions they evaluate, their chief weakness is an overly cautious, somewhat clubby approach to identifying weaknesses. Individual staff members or members of visiting committees may at time allow idiosyncratic values to affect initial judgments, but all of the agencies have such elaborate review systems that final results rarely sting any but the most egregious transgressors.

The goal of any disciplinary accreditor, however, is to elevate a special interest. As expensive and time consuming as institutional accreditation by the six regional agencies may be, the process at least forces colleges and universities to articulate their philosophies and evaluate their practices. Disciplinary accreditors like the APSA, however, care little about anything but their own programs. Accreditation is clearly a growth industry. Ten years ago the Association of Specialized and Professional Accreditors had 46 members; now it has 63. And the ASPA does not even include nationally recognized organizations that focused on highly specialized graduate education like the AMA and ABA. Even libertarians generally agree that someone needs to certify whether a surgeon really understands how to remove a kidney or a lawyer an heir. Part of what gives those organizations credibility is that they hold their members to standards and can disbar them or revoke their licenses if they fail to meet those standards. Without licenses lawyers and doctors cannot practice.

But what about the National Association of Schools of Music? Or the American Board of Funeral Service Education? Or, clearly inspired by *CSI* and *Bones*, the Forensic Science Education Program Accreditation Commission? Each of these organizations establishes standards for undergrad programs. The appeal of such groups becomes apparent on web sites like the one at San Jose State University which boasts that 35 of its degree and certificate programs are certified by 26 accreditation agencies.[2]

So, what can be wrong with this process? To begin with, these groups care only about their own faculty, programs, and majors. They are all simply interest groups, lobbying for more money, better facilities, and special privileges for their own members. Few have any interest, for example, in the full education of their majors. More importantly, in any finite pool of money, the more one group gets, the less others do. If the music building must be constantly improved, other campus buildings, even those with greater need, will have to wait. If the music faculty need more released time, better equipment, or more staff to obtain or maintain accreditation, they become an immediate priority. To ensure that accredited departments have enough full-time faculty, marginal programs like math and English—i.e., those not savvy enough to develop national accreditation standards and commissions—will need to hire more adjuncts.

There really is no difference between this process and tax loopholes. When the federal government offers a $6,500 tax credit for electric golf carts, non-golfers will have to make up that money. By bowing to these organizations, college administrators cede their authority. If the National Association of Schools of Theatre, despite its difficulty with American spelling conventions, finds a program worthy, directors, deans and presidents no longer have to think about whether their theater majors can write effectively, understand the constitution or discuss the relative benefits and costs of fracking and nuclear energy.

Realistically, most of these programs are relatively small and distort college budgets minimally, although even minimal can be significant in today's minimalist budgets. Business programs, however, are a different matter. At the vast majority of American colleges, the business major rules. In 2010, according to the most recent data from the National Center for Education Statistics, the number of bachelor's degrees earned for business (358,000) almost tripled the number in the health professions and related fields (130,000). There are, of course exceptions. Most Ivy League

[2] sjsu.edu

universities and elite liberal arts colleges have no undergraduate business degree. Oddly enough, few college administrators try to understand why our finest schools disdain their largest program.

Because business programs have become so central and attractive—and so essential to most presidential fund raising drives—relatively few people have been willing to question what they are doing. In 2010 some dissident voices emerged. Richard Arum of NYU and Josipa Roksa of University of Virginia published *Academically Adrift: Limited Learning on College Campuses* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press), which, as its title suggests, offered a broad indictment of higher education. Among their findings, Arum and Roksa reported that the Collegiate Level Assessment (CLA), a national test of writing and reasoning skills, found that the scores of business majors improved in these areas less than any other group tested.

While the CLA results are discouraging—what skills are business majors learning?—the following year the *Chronicle of Higher Education*, the leading newspaper and web site about higher education in the United States, discussed a study that showed that at all schools, from the most competitive to least competitive, business students report studying less than other students.[3] Even more chilling was the *Chronicle*'s report that business majors have lower mean scores on the Graduate Management Admission Test (GMAT) than students in the other ten most popular college majors, including education, communications and journalism and the visual and performing arts.[4] How can it be that the very program intended to prepare students for careers in business is the least effective in preparing them for the graduate study of business?

Given this sorry state of affairs—and the even sorrier state of the national economy and financial markets which graduates of accredited business schools found so easy to manipulate and nearly ruin with their subprime lending and credit default swaps over much of the past half dozen years—what is the AACSB doing to help its majors become more ethical citizens and better stewards of the national economy? From all evidence, it simply seems to be doubling down on what it has always done. Accreditation clearly means never having to say you're sorry.

Even if it chooses to do little, the AACSB did announce that "it has responded to recent revelations of corporate malfeasance by searching for ways to strengthen its role in preparing socially responsible graduates for business careers."[5] Its vision of social responsibility, however, appears simply to add more business classes. At its conferences and in its

[3] LVII.33 (April 22, 2011) A4.
[4] LVII.33 (April 22, 2011) A5
[5] http://www.aacsb.edu/resources/ethics-sustainability/relatedstandards.asp

publications, ethics is still a stepchild whose interests pale in the company of marketing, branding, and expanding. In AACSB's Standard 15, for example, "ethical understanding and reasoning ability" are lumped together as only one of seven goals, along with "communication abilities" and "multicultural and diversity understanding." Like the fraternities in *Animal House*, the AACSB realizes that ethics needs to be invited to the mixer, but it usually winds up on the couch with the other misfits.

Between October 2012 and June 2013, the AACSB web site advertised well over 50 seminars, workshops, and conferences. While at least ten focused on accreditation issues and another ten on assessment, only one focused on Teaching Business Ethics and Corporate Responsibility. And that one was sandwiched into a two-week period that offers eight other programs, including two (sold out!) assessment programs and two accreditation programs. As important as it may be, social responsibility earns less than 2% of the AACSB's attention in these programs, the same as "Optimizing B-School Financial Performance," certainly a major goal of any academic institution.

While most academics would conclude that the way to improve the performance and social responsibility of business majors would be to expand their horizons by encouraging them to take a wide array of demanding classes across the curriculum and interact widely with a broad range of students, that is not the B-way.

Take the W.P. Carey School of Business at Arizona State University, the nation's largest university. The Carey School's program for incoming undergrads is to offer them a chance to live in a W.P. Carey Residential Community and to take courses in clusters with cohorts of 19 students designed "to build a network of peers."[6] Communities, clustering and cohorting are sexy these days, since most colleges have found that re-enforcing this generation of students' comfort level (i.e., their self-referential belief in their own importance) increases retention and satisfaction by encouraging students to believe they are experiencing diversity in ideas and cultures without actually having to encounter real diversity in either. In this brave new educational world, teamwork has become a euphemism for homogeneity.

Clustering might be very comforting to the students—and help retention—but it also means those students will have far less interaction with non-business majors. Locking majors into homogeneous groups also allows a little fiddling with the curriculum. Some of the courses that appear to be part of the clusters (e.g., Brief Calculus and Computer Applications) sound not only non-threatening—who would not prefer brief calculus to a real

[6] wpcarey.asu.edu

calculus class?—but also reinforce the impression of a less demanding major.

While limiting students' exposure to people and ideas by isolating them and moving them steadily through a narrowly focused curriculum may benefit universities, academic programs and faculty, it does little to expose them either to the world they will encounter after college or to a true diversity of ideas. Textbooks reinforce those limits. How many undergrad B-school students actually read Adam Smith, Thomas Malthus, Karl Marx or John Maynard Keynes? They may be given some excerpts, along with essays by Ludwig van Mises and Milton Friedman, but they generally encounter those ideas through the medium of textbooks explaining them without all the tough math and economic theory. That is why many undergrad business programs tailor economics classes to their own students. As a result, far too many business students gain a Cliff's Notes knowledge of economic theory.

Part of this curricular decision is in response to students' social habits. While it is difficult to gauge exactly how students divide their online time, it is clear that most students like being connected through their email, texting and Facebook page most of their waking hours. (The twin difficulties with sorting through how much time any group of students spends in any one activity stem from the fact that most students try to multitask despite evidence that multitasking diminishes effectiveness in each component and from the nature of the surveys themselves. Most surveys are self-reported, so that the information may be how students perceive what they do or what they want people to believe they do rather than what they actually do. Such surveys are as inherently flawed as surveys about sexual practices. Do we admit how much more or less we are doing than what we believe our peers to be doing?)

So, why does the AACSB not simply hire formally trained philosophers and allow them to create rigorous, comprehensive courses in ethics? Unfortunately, everything that AACSB is designed to do works against that model. In a world which has become at the same time increasingly integrative and diverse, cross disciplinary and creative, the AACSB devotes much of its energy into encouraging its majors not to think outside the business box. Philosophers would simply muddy the process by complicating questions, challenging assumptions, and suggesting that there might be more than one right answer. When ethics is taught, it is usually business ethics taught by business faculty and offered in the comforting frame of case studies.

No wonder B-school students work less than others. Like most students, they pay careful attention to what we do not what we say. The dumb ones are happy with limited demands; the smart ones realize that they are already in the club. English and philosophy, history and math majors know that they will have to work to convince the Bank of America or GE to hire them. All the B-boys and B-girls think they'll need is that major on the transcript. Unfortunately, they are often right.

Given the travesty that the AACSB is making of the business major (and our economy), why have college presidents not begun questioning it? The simple answer is that their role has changed radically from the days of Eliot, Conant, Hutchins, Goheen and even Hesburgh. While there are still college presidents with vision and integrity, they seem to be part of a diminishing species. If we judge by actions rather than words, most see their job as a job, a fairly lucrative corporate position. Where college and university presidents once had deep roots as faculty members, with a practical, realistic understanding of both pedagogy and scholarship, many of them now begin administrative life early as one of the mushrooming number of administrative staff.

The poster child for the new college CEO is E. Gordon Gee, who boasts that he has held more college presidencies than any other American. With an impressive record as a fund raiser, he has an equally impressive life style, remodeling the president's mansion at Vanderbilt for $6 million and spending $700,000 a year on parties and a personal chef. Back at Ohio State now for his second term, he has been a bit more modest, spending only $2 million to renovate the presidential residence, which, after all, had been renovated seven years before for $1.3 million. His housing costs might be lower in Columbus because he appears to be travelling more. Between 2007 and 2012, he had $844,000 in travel expenses.

While many might argue that Gee's fund raising prowess has earned him such perks, others seem concerned that his corporate lifestyle may also shape his academic values. After all, when he was faced in 2011 with a growing football scandal—Tattoogate—and Coach Jim Tressel's tepid response, he was asked by reporters if he would consider firing Tressel. With his tongue only partly in his cheek, President Gee responded, "No. Are you kidding? I'm just hopeful that the coach doesn't dismiss me." Tressel was finally eased into resigning only after he was accused of lying. Even worse, Ohio State had to vacate all 12 of its wins the previous season. For those who hoped Ohio State had learned a lesson, especially after Gee hired Urban Meyer as coach, the third string quarterback, Cardale Jones, brought everyone back to reality in 2012 when he tweeted, with dramatic emphases, "Why should we have to go to class if we came here to play FOOTBALL, we ain't come to play SCHOOL, classes are POINTLESS." Out of the mouths of 6'5", 235 pound babes.

Gee's attitude reflects the prevailing leadership philosophy, the spirit that made Penn State's Graham Spanier genuflect to Joe Paterno and Florida A&M's James Ammons protect the university's famous Marching 100.

Rather than acknowledge their own culpability in the Sandusky scandal, the Penn State trustees fired Ammons. And after the hazing death of a drum major and the revelation that a number of the 420 members of the Marching 100 were not students—math does not seem to be one of the A&M's Music Department's strengths—A&M's trustees accepted Ammons' resignation.

Does anyone believe that Ohio State's academic program had improved significantly under Gee's stewardship? (Meyer did, however, produce an undefeated season for the Buckeyes, whose past misdeed made them ineligible for a bowl game.) The increasing separation of college presidents from the academic and intellectual, a process accelerated by the enormous growth in presidential salaries—in 2004 none made over a million dollars, by 2010 36 had passed that magic number[7]—helps them identify more closely with their corporate board members. (Incidentally, Gee's salary which approached $2 million in 2010 is not quite up to the $2.34 million earned by Shirley Ann Jackson of Rensselaer Polytechnic Institute. But Gee has far better football seats.)[8]

This exponential increase in presidential salaries is a little difficult to understand, especially because there are few ways of measuring presidential performance. Football coaches have records and bowl wins, development directors have revenue raised, and faculty have student evaluations. For most colleges and universities, the Board of Trustees has its own curiously secret process of evaluating presidential performance. Since faculty and students rarely sit on boards, they rarely have a voice in decisions. Based on how little accomplishment individual presidents can claim, the bar most boards set must be remarkably low.

Administrators who dare to challenge their boards face the fate of the University of Virginia's Teresa Sullivan. While some of the details remain unclear, it seems that a small group of powerful trustees were able to

[7] Internal Revenue Service Form 990 reported in *Chronicle of Higher Education* LIX.1 (August 31, 2012) Almanac p.15.

[8] Presidents have not been the only administrators to benefit from the corporate model of college governance. Traditionally colleges offer settlements to quiet people (e.g., faculty forced into retirement) or to avoid lawsuits. Today, however, despite rapidly rising tuition and growing demands for fiscal responsibility, some colleges have begun offering generous bonuses to people leaving voluntarily. One of our major non-profit private universities, NYU, for example, admitted that when Jacob Lew, appointed Secretary of the Treasury at the beginning of President Obama's second term, left the university to join the decidedly profit oriented Citigroup in 2006, he received a $685,000 bonus, a highly unusual perk. That award was not unique. When Harold S. Koplewicz, the founder of NYU's Child Study Center, left to create a rival Child Mind Institute, the university gave him a very generous bonus of $1,230,000. It is hard to imagine a profit oriented organization rewarding an employee who leaves to form a competitor. Perhaps this is why colleges have so much trouble managing their budgets.

embarrass one of our great universities by trying to force the administration to adopt creative disruption, the latest management fad promoted by the nation's B-Schools. While there are useful kernels of truth in most of these fads—TQM, Chaos Theory, Team-Based Management—their value is usually a brief insight into re-evaluating practices. Only people addicted to self-help and management books, especially those who prefer to digest them quickly through executive book summaries, can believe in a Sisyphean solution for all managerial problems.

Two and a half years after unanimously hiring her, Virginia's Board of Visitors unanimously fired her. In addition to her skepticism about its managerial theories, some members also seemed unhappy with her consultative leadership style and her hesitation to partner with for-profit online education groups like one by Goldman Sachs championed by board members. After faculty, students and alums came to her support—and, more importantly, the governor threatened to replace the board—it unanimously reversed itself two weeks later and re-hired her.

Sullivan's travails suggest why most college presidents rarely challenge the wisdom of their boards, which usually consist of wealthy potential donors rather than anyone noted for intellectual achievement or academic distinction. And most board members love practical, career-oriented majors, especially those which validate their own careers.

Presidents who surround themselves with their trustees rather than unruly academics who revel in questioning and challenging assumptions generally find their own risk-averse, herd like leadership also validated. That validation, like the beneficent smiles of disciplinary accreditors, justifies a leadership style which confuses the conventional with excellence. Who needs a compelling internal vision when external admiration is so comforting and rewarding?

The problem with all this, of course, is that too many colleges have come to see their role as training and career prep rather than education. Had more college presidents paid attention during their physics and history classes, they would have realized how much nature and bureaucracies abhor vacuums. As they abdicated their responsibility to make a case for higher education, to explain to parents, prospective students, trustees, politicians and the world at large what we do and why it has value, the vacuum they left was filled by external bodies like the APSA and AACSB clamoring to define higher education.

Why do so many of our best colleges shy away from practical majors like business and forensic science, preferring to have their students study economics or biology instead? The traditional answer to this question is that those institutions recognize that higher education should provide students who have already developed the solid skills in reading, writing, math and science that high school provides an opportunity to learn to understand significant issues in their historical and cultural contexts, to reflect on those issues, to approach them critically from multiple perspectives, and to articulate informed opinions orally and in writing in clear, powerful and sophisticated ways. The goal of higher education is not simply preparation for careers but preparation for life as a free, autonomous human being and citizen. For that reason classical philosophers distinguished between the *artes illiberales* (i.e., fields which prepare us for work) and the *artes liberales* (i.e., those disciplines which prepare us to live as free—liberated—men and women).

What business major claims that its primary purpose is to help its students understand the history and theory, ethics and values of business with no real interest in making those students effective businessmen or women? How many parents would agree to send their children to a college which admitted it really had no idea how to teach anyone how to market securities, open a cigar store, manage an Irish pub, sell Audis, or negotiate with a building inspector?

If our primary—or even total—goal is simply to help get people jobs and prepare them effectively for careers, why focus on college? Apprenticeships would be far better and far less expensive. No one will learn how to lead or how to sell from courses on leadership or marketing; by definition, we always learn practical matters by practice, by trial and error. That is why undergrad business programs have embraced internships.

Most of us in academe have long recognized that interning offers students a chance to learn what we have never pretended to teach them. Students studying philosophy, history and anthropology can spend time in a law office, newspaper or tutoring center to learn how to adapt their knowledge to the practical world. Biology, chemistry and physics faculty have always encouraged students interested in medicine to spend their summers working with medical professionals to see how their scientific knowledge forms the basis for medical care. We understand that we can teach students principles but not their practical application.

So long as college presidents continue riding this merry go round of mediocrity, grasping desperately for the brass ring of validation from the corporate carnies on their boards and organizations whose primary goal is self-promotion, they will continue creating academic midways that privilege illusion over reality. By distracting students into narrow applications of information, they discourage them from learning the kind of historical and scientific knowledge that allows us to evaluate data critically and empirically. The lack of such knowledge and sophisticated analytical skills among our college graduates helps explain not only our ongoing political and economic crises but also the curious phenomenon in which so many

American college graduates question simple scientific facts like evolution and global warming or accept bizarre, undocumented rumors about historical events and current politicians. Unless our academic ringmasters recognize how, in an academic corollary to Gresham's Law, extegrity is steadily driving integrity out of higher education, our colleges and universities may well become as marginal in American life as the midway has in American culture.