



# The Red Light in the Ivory Tower

Contexts and Implications  
of Entrepreneurial Education

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# Introduction

[I]nstitutions do not build prestige in the student market by being innovative or by identifying and meeting new types of student demands. Rather, they build prestige by essentially mimicking the institutions that already have prestige.

— *IN PURSUIT OF PRESTIGE: STRATEGY AND COMPETITION IN U.S. HIGHER EDUCATION*  
(BREWER, GATES, & GOLDMAN, 2001, p. 66).

This book is an attempt to imagine prestige within the current reality in higher education, a reality punctuated by budget shortfalls, student and faculty retention, rising competition and critique, and ultimately a new ideology that ingratiates American higher education for its opportunities and hope for economic revival of a nation while vilifying it for its wastes, ineffectualism, faculty tenure, and intellectualism. As the authors of *In Pursuit of Prestige* emphasize, “higher education is an industry in which consumers are often underinformed in the sense that they cannot objectively evaluate the quality of service before they actually purchase it” (Brewer, Gates, & Goldman, 2001, p. 19). Ben Wildavsky’s (2010) *The Great Brain Race: How Global Universities Are Reshaping the World* also examines the phenomenon of the contest to win notoriety as the best university—not only driving the U.S. market, but also the emerging Asian and established European markets around free-market competition in higher education to find a niche within an uninformed consumer culture that asserts themselves as experts on the product they are purchasing.

The competition to become prestigious is the basis of our attempt to wrap our heads around this arms race to nowhere, a race based not on what a university does well, but on how it can get better in those areas that prestigious universities excel in—as perceived by an uninformed marketplace. For example, the annual rankings of law schools in *U.S. News & World Report* has led to many schools decrying the rankings; however these same schools understand the game to lure top students, raise funds, and demonstrate job placement of graduates, and so they have directed resources and “gamed the system” to boost scores. They do this by rejecting high-scoring students who can get in elsewhere and then charging more for tuition that they later return as financial aid (Jones, 2005; Stake, 2006). We hope that after reading our humble volume, you’ll agree that this is not a fair competition. In fact, in many cases it would be like the Washington Generals winning against the Harlem Globetrotters. Nevertheless, in this unfair competition, universities hold up a metaphorical magic mirror and ask, “Who is the most prestigious of all?” To which the wicked stepmother always replies, “Not you. To see why, go check the Benchmarks.”

Benchmarking had historically been regional. For example, teachers colleges compared themselves in the 1930s to determine the quality of their programs in such areas as measuring how teachers performed in classrooms (Ogren, 2005). States used to send educational inspectors to study and compare teachers and then deem one college better than the others. The early success of these schools’ forays into assessment and success—advertised by the National Education Association (NEA)—created competitions for their professors such as Charles Bagley, who was recruited by the University of Illinois and then lured from Illinois by Teachers College, Columbia (Null, 2004). Alongside this remarkable grassroots assessment and competition of teachers colleges was the influential Flexner Report for medical schools that sought to impart an external management system that generated all the standards that “made a good program,” and set for the last century our model for how we create accreditation and even build our programs. The model is ingrained in our subconscious and unintentionally drives our creativity to imagine a different approach, and when we do, we quickly create new assessments to measure and rank it. Ivan Illich (1971) categorized this behavior in society as being “schooled up.”

## The Dependency of University Rating

In a sense, the university and its administration, faculty, students, and parents who pay tuition have become supporters of a system that they are apt to defend “because it is important for our economy and the future of our nation” without evidence regarding its impact other than what they have read or heard. To this end, we are indeed holding up a world like Atlas without understanding why.

As a result, we find ourselves in the midst of what Slaughter and Rhoades (2004) have characterized as academic capitalism, and we need to seek out new theories to help us navigate this new state of strategic behaviors in the academy. One of the most powerful critiques of modernization/diffusion theories came from the dependency theory paradigm that was originally developed in Latin America. Marxist and critical theories posited that the problems of the developing world reflected the general dynamics of capitalist development. Development problems responded to the unequal distribution of resources created by the global expansion of Western capitalism. Against modernization theories that guide much of the research into higher education (Kerr, 2001; Trow & Burrage, 2010), dependency theorists argued that the problems of underdevelopment were not internal to developing countries but were determined by external factors and the way former colonies were integrated into the world economy. It forcefully stated that the problems of the underdeveloped world were political rather than the result of the lack of information (Hornik, 1987). What kept these countries underdeveloped were social and economic factors, namely the dominated position that those countries had in the global order.

Underdevelopment, they argued, was the flip side and the consequence of the development of the Western world, which concentrated economic power and political decisions that maintained underdevelopment and dependency. Aside from external problems, internal structures were also responsible for the problems of underdevelopment. Dependency positions charged development programs for failing to address structures of inequality and targeting individual rather than social factors. We feel the same indictment can be made regarding a majority of the strategic behaviors employed by prestige-seeking universities in order to increase their rankings.

In the last 100 years, since accreditation and thus rankings have configured themselves as the driving forces of what universities measure as success, how they organize, and what they deliver, universities have sought an unknowing path to success through the promotion of competition and their subsequent eliminating their weaker parts—albeit successful in accolades but not in finance—of the institution. In many cases, the programs eliminated have come from the social sciences and humanities. Thus, dependency on those external dollars and the driving competition from the prestigious and highly ranked and rated universities has caused major changes in the curriculum. The curriculum has been used to reduce “non-revenue”-generating programs in two ways: first, the most obvious has been the exclusion of degrees and majors along with faculty lines in the quest for homogenizing education driven by professional schools and accreditation; and second, a more devious hidden attack upon robust education by the “boutiquing” of essentialist-driven

majors (i.e., solar and green engineering and energies degrees) to appease the external political and economic partnership of the university without analysis of the long-term impact on the institution.

The one tangible measure of this new model of benchmarking that has dominated the conversation is the doctorate. It has come under scrutiny and still remains the major definition of successful and elite universities. An understanding of the U.S. system of higher education can be realized through an analysis of the growth of the great measure of a successful and elite university: the doctorate. About 3,500 doctorates were awarded prior to the beginning of the 20th century, another 100,000 by 1960; but from then to 2000, the growth in doctoral programs and degrees added an additional 1.2 million new doctorates, or about 90 percent of all American doctorates awarded (National Science Foundation, 2006). Concurrently, the purpose and time to completion changed for what many consider the worst. The National Science Foundation report *U.S. Doctorates in the 20th Century* (2006), puts forth that the increase in the time it took candidates to complete all degree requirements increased in Total Time to Doctorate (TTD), the total calendar time between receipt of the baccalaureate and the doctoral degrees; Registered Time to Doctorate (RTD), the time in attendance in post-baccalaureate programs prior to receipt of the doctoral degree; and Post-baccalaureate Time to Doctorate (PTD), the total calendar time from the first enrolment in graduate programs and the receipt of the doctoral degree. Specifically in the last years before 2000, degree completion rose to 11 years on average from a low within the sciences to a high in humanities and education (Shulman, Golde, Bueschel, & Garabedian, 2006). Thus, the doctorate is one of the many pandemics existing within universities that continue to erode higher education. The second pandemic is the perception that the playing fields of newly minted research universities with football teams and medical schools are equally as competitive as UCLA or Wisconsin-Madison.

## The Playing Field

As we state above, Benchmarking has been part of higher-education culture for a long time and has created several interrelated issues that drive what universities attempt to emulate. However, in the last 30 years it has moved beyond the grass-roots and discipline-based models to the rankings that universities pursue so feverishly today. Beginning with the watershed *U.S. News & World Report* College Rankings in 1983 (Van Dyke, 2005), and exploding into the current amassing of outcomes, professional and economically based rankings and ratings drive college and university presidents and provosts to assemble high-level meetings with graduate programs and student-affairs personnel and to call for reasons why the insti-

tution is not ranked higher or what it needs to do in order to be ranked higher. With this in mind, we wrote this book to address several trends that have proved to be dominant in our academic lives over the past 30 years: the rise of professional schools to replace the Humanities and Social Sciences as the dominant schools and programs at universities (Slater, Callejo Pérez, & Fain, 2008), federal reduction of state aid to universities and the reality that public universities have steadily raised tuition, the rise and growth of diversity programs and the backlash in recent years against those programs, the competitive business model and competition among institutions to generate income from knowledge, and the increasing emphasis on research and funded research over teaching.

Building on these trends, we construct an interactive book that asks the reader to follow through two theoretical chapters that paint a critical picture of the undergirding problems facing institutional competition for resources that become more limited each day. We propose an examination of the components that made a great university, not just a façade based on the university's experience with grants, national rankings, new facilities, or their portrayal within the media. We agree about the importance of athletics, extracurricular activities, socialization, and opportunity that are both enlightened and heightened by the prospect of college, degrees, and the faculty who teach and research at those institutions. There is an importance to the idea of a "Harvard Man"—albeit with gender representations and reality of more women than men at the institution, it would be more like a "Harvard Graduate." It is not about the rankings or the lectures one received. It is more about the discourse that implies the importance and prestige that Harvard has become in the minds of everyone from the politician to an immigrant parent working a late shift in New York City so his child has the opportunity to become that Harvard graduate.

In a sense, Harvard continues to be Harvard—so do Stanford and Michigan and Valdosta State and Fresno State. All universities, in a word, are being marginalized by the new ideal of the research institution that, although structured to lead in the knowledge economy, is more a part of the Industrial Revolution than the current state of world. We are dependent upon consumerism to survive. What is essential now is for universities to help distinguish between traditions that undermine their community and traditions that can become the bases of success in the current knowledge revolution and beyond.

## The Book

This first section has three intertwined chapters: "In Pursuit of Prestige: Nearly a Decade Later" (Chapter 1), "The Right Place at the Right Time" (Chapter 2), and "Reform and Identity: Why Are Prestige and Change in Higher Education so