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A Perspective on Higher Education: Where is it now and where is it going?

The intent of higher education in today's society can be viewed in numerous ways. According to Levin, we can think of the university as an institution that exists to teach skills, provides access to the highest truths, and changes the larger society for the better (Duke Ethics). Jordan Peterson argues, individuals should go into the chaos of a university to discover their history and extract something of value that they can incorporate into their personality that makes them stronger (Bite-sized Philosophy). While I agree with both Levin and Peterson, I would argue that the intent of higher education is to prepare students for a continuously evolving society by teaching skill sets, critical thinking, and citizenship in an inclusive environment that promotes the discovery of truth.

The pillars of higher education are in place to be the very foundation of higher academic institutions. The four pillars of higher education are frames in higher education, shared authority and academic freedom, charter, and philosophy (Ewing). A system of management, shared governance, and transparency about funding and values are able to contribute to the education of students on a campus. To a certain extent, these pillars can be viewed as the checks and balances of higher education, ensuring that academic freedom is protected while allowing the university to operate on a business level and further the common good of the community. While these four pillars are the foundation of the university, an entrepreneurial model is becoming more common in universities as it allows for revenue to further the interests of a university. It has become

increasingly popular for universities to start partnerships with large corporations. For instance, restaurants such as Starbucks have partnered with universities and generate profit. Starbucks is used on ASU's campus to provide students with employment, tuition, and technological resources as they pursue a degree (Ewing). Furthermore streaming channels such as ESPN create privatized events where the profits can be made for the university. While some may view these events negatively because they are exclusive, the funds generated from these functions can be used to fund public university education programs if universities allocate the revenue accordingly. Whether the intent of public universities is met is dependent on how well they follow the four pillars and use the entrepreneurial model.

Even though there are systems in place to further the intent of the university, there is a gap between intention versus function. The university may have the intent to further the common good of the community by focusing on the development of the individual. However, it is not functioning in this way because there are still barriers that higher education is not addressing. Accessibility, inclusion, diversity, and equity are all impacted by barriers to higher education. For example, one of the major reasons that students do not attend out-of-state college is family income (Selingo 16). Therefore, every student who chooses not to attend college based on financial difficulty impacts the unique talents and ideas that they can bring to the university. Additionally, colleges are selective by choosing students who meet certain requirements, many who come from higher socioeconomic status. In order to address this issue, the *Fifth Wave* seeks to eliminate barriers to higher education and argues that inclusion of all types of students will lead to unique innovations and ideas, benefiting society as a whole. The 5th Wave includes the collaboration between universities, new methods on delivery of educational content, and partnerships between universities and corporations (Crow & Dabars 2020). This would allow for

millions of students who are normally excluded from higher education to participate in learning at the university level and impacting society thereafter. The Starbucks involvement at ASU previously mentioned could be an example of the 5th wave implementation at a university.

In an ideal situation, the barriers to higher education can be addressed by eliminating tuition and living costs, providing real world experience opportunities, and by including every student who chooses to pursue higher education. In order to address tuition and living costs, public universities would eventually become tuition free, meaning that the education would have to be funded by the partnerships between universities and larger corporations. This could look like an engineering company funding the engineering program at a university because the students there would eventually be working for that company, benefiting them in the long run. This could also happen through an experience where students work at an organization and earn their degree through the experience gained while working. I have seen this first hand while working for an electric company. The employee who wanted to become an electrical lineworker completed four years worth of schooling that was paid for by the company, while working for them. They were able to complete their tests on site and an instructor from the college would occasionally come out for hands-on assessments. Once the financial barrier is overcome, universities could become more inclusive and diverse if they recognized that talent that every student brings as an individual. This means that criteria for acceptance into a public university would have to be reevaluated. Students would no longer be excluded based on academic achievement.

Overall, I believe that the intent of higher education is to prepare students for success in an evolving society by teaching expertise, reasoning skills, and citizenship in an equitable environment that allows for discovery of truth. There have been shifts that universities are

making where they actively seek to include a diverse population of students. Furthermore, universities are exploring partnerships with large corporations to better serve students and provide educational opportunities. While this is a step in the right direction, the public university needs to continue innovating its process in order to meet the needs of students and society as a whole by reevaluating financial and educational priorities. Once this is accomplished, higher education could potentially thrive in a developing society.

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