

# Managed Education

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**T**he recent explosion of distance education and commercialization of information has serious implications for the field of psychology, and our identity as psychologists. Reflecting on these trends can help us re-examine our values and approach these new trends with some wisdom.

What is managed education and why is it a problem for psychologists? Managed education shares with managed care the principle that the bottom line is profit, and like the regulation of managed care, regulation of education is done best by business. Motivation to build a managed education system is high. Recent figures show higher education to be a high stakes \$228 billion business. Huge corporations like Motorola University are creating "corporate universities", offering more affordable work/study options and practical training. Describing what they call the "corporatization of higher education," the American Association of University Professors explains, "Indeed, in an information society, the creation, publication, and promulgation of knowledge are no longer the work of a single individual. These are corporate activities, decided by corporate planning, and answerable to corporate measurements" (Mary Burgan, Fall, 2000).

The rhetoric of managed education gives clues about its central metaphors: "students as consumers or customers", "productivity", "outcome measures", "cost-effective", "efficiency", and "hi-tech." Its increasingly utilitarian curriculum will, like a traditional medical school curriculum, fragment into psychological specialties. Each of these specialties may come with a manual, and can be taught by any psychologist. Information is put on the Web,

wrapped as a "course in a box." Curriculum content is written by a few highly paid intellectual "superstars" and owned by companies. Other faculty are hired and fired "at will", as in a small business. They may be adjuncts or recent graduates of our schools, competing with each other for courses to teach. They work on contract, with few benefits and little security. They commute or telecommute, working alone.

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At risk, among other things, is the school's mission statement and academic rigor. In a recent article in the *Journal of the American Medical Association*, University of California at San Francisco researchers Elizabeth Boyd and Lisa Bero wrote, "There is a growing concern that industry sponsorship may influence the outcomes of research and undermine traditionally held academic values of intellectual freedom, open exchange of ideas, and research in the interest of the public good" (cited in *The San Francisco Bay Guardian*, March 21-27, 2001, pp. 12-15).

In addition, corporate interests will increasingly shape curriculum, traditionally the domain of faculty. This means that students will be moved quickly through the system. Information will be more important than critical and creative thinking skills. Information will be packaged and pushed like prescriptions through the system, designed to meet specializations and certificate

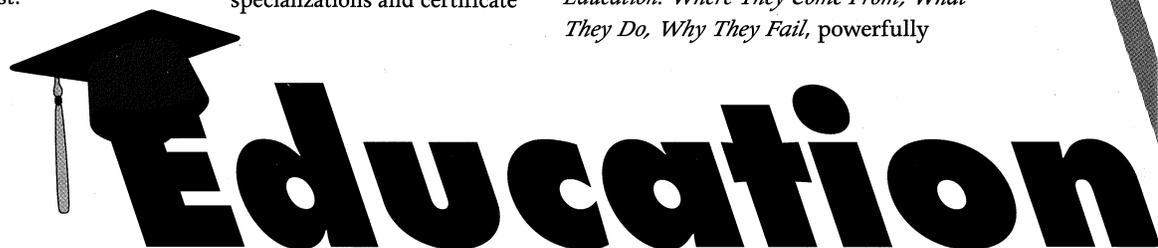
programs. These programs may be market driven, or addressed to the "illness of the day." The same people who package will market the information systems, creating requirements and guidelines to administer the information. It is these same people that will be making the profits. Courses that are not profitable, presumably the ones in the social sciences and the humanities, will be cut.

Jeopardizing academic freedom is risky business. Right now, private universities, including the professional schools, can come under California "at will" business law, meaning that most academics are not protected and can be hired and fired at will. Recently, a ruling from the US Supreme Court limiting worker's rights to sue jeopardizes faculty rights even further.

Loss of faculty involvement in decisions regarding curriculum, budget, and hiring reduces faculty professionalism and rewards compliance.

The strongly competitive edge of today's world, combined with growing existential insecurity, create an ever more individualistic culture. Entrepreneurism is rewarded; loyalty to the group is not. Insecurity is a reality-in the California State University system. For example, while student attendance increased 35,000 between 1994-1995 and 1999-2000, faculty numbers increased by ONE full-time equivalent and 1462 temporary faculty (cited in *California Faculty*, Spring 2001).

The loss of professionalism is, at heart, an issue of identity. Who are we if we are not professionals? Robert Birnbaum, in *Management Fads in Higher Education: Where They Come From, What They Do, Why They Fail*, powerfully



states the issue: "In the past, being a professional was ennobling. It presumed a calling, a vocation, and a dedication to service. A physician (one who healed) served the needs of a patient (one who suffered). A professor (one who professed) served the needs of a student (one who studies). Today we question whether concepts such as 'student' and 'teacher' are appropriate in the postmodern age" (cited in *California Faculty*, Spring 2001).

Degrading our educational experience impoverishes our field, and prepares a new generation of conformists. New psychologists will be ill equipped to help their clients develop the flexibility and resiliency demanded by the new technological world. The quality of education and research is compromised; our students do not receive well-rounded educations, and our faculty are discouraged from teaching. The careers of those of us who teach are at risk. At issue is the identity of the next generation of psychologists, and the identity of our profession.

Graduate education already shows signs of successful corporate take-over, and resistance is diminishing. How can psychologists recover their psyches when academic motivation is lacking and vitality is ebbing? I suggest taking the following actions:

**Be psychological.** Analyze the seductions of speed and money instead of acting them out. Maintain boundaries. The American Association of University Professors has an excellent set of treatment guidelines for academics, which can serve as a foundation for ethical treatment of human subjects within the academic context.

**Communicate.** Special deals are fueled by secrecy, and feed the dysfunction within academic families. Creating healthy academic settings begins with open communication. Such communication should be encouraged within the university, and between the university and the community. An excellent example of this is the UC Graduate Assembly's forthcoming public debate on the role of industry in California's public university system.

**Balance power.** Strive for a balance of power among constituencies, with checks and balances. Teach collaborative decision-making, respect, and peaceful conflict-resolution. Bringle, J., Games, R. & Malloy, E. (Eds.), in

*Colleges and Universities as Citizens* (1999), call for higher education to "acknowledge that (a) there is an important need for the academic curriculum to prepare students for democratic life; (b) the academy has not been particularly effective in teaching this broader set of skills within a system that is truncated by disciplinary walls; and (c) fundamental changes must take place in higher education in order for it to fulfill its potential" (pp. 6-7).

**Collaborate:** Empower each other. Share information. Learn, as clinicians learned about the power of collective bargaining in relation to HMOs, to work together.

**Reclaim our identity as professionals:** Be models for our students, and remind ourselves that the teaching of psychology is a calling, a vocation, and a dedication to service.

I propose seven educational principles to help us maintain our identity as psychologists:

1. Ask the big questions: Who are we?
2. Halt proliferation of specializations and get back to basics. What are the major domains of knowledge and training that comprise psychological education?
3. Resist market-driven bottom-lines and retain standards of the academy.
4. Overcome professional conceits to work collectively in defense of academic principles. Organize and act.
5. Bring back the humanities and depth.
6. Balance change with the timeless.
7. Integrate cognition, behavior, affect, genetics, culture and meaning back into a vision of a whole and wise human being. Introduce "The Year of the Whole Person."

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