

Faulty Towers: The Crisis in Higher Education

William Deresiewicz | May 4, 2011

A few years ago, when I was still teaching at Yale, I was approached by a student who was interested in going to graduate school. She had her eye on Columbia; did I know someone there she could talk with? I did, an old professor of mine. But when I wrote to arrange the introduction, he refused to even meet with her. “I won’t talk to students about graduate school anymore,” he explained. “Going to grad school’s a suicide mission.”

The policy may be extreme, but the feeling is universal. Most professors I know are willing to talk with students about pursuing a PhD, but their advice comes down to three words: don’t do it. (William Pannacker, writing in the *Chronicle of Higher Education* as Thomas Benton, has been making this argument for years. See “The Big Lie About the ‘Life of the Mind,’” among other essays.) My own advice was never that categorical. Go if you feel that your happiness depends on it—it can be a great experience in many ways—but be aware of what you’re in for. You’re going to be in school for at least seven years, probably more like nine, and there’s a very good chance that you won’t get a job at the end of it.

At Yale, we were overjoyed if half our graduating students found positions. That’s right—half. Imagine running a medical school on that basis. As Christopher Newfield points out in *Unmaking the Public University* (2008), that’s the kind of unemployment rate you’d expect to find among inner-city high school dropouts. And this was before the financial collapse. In the past three years, the market has been a bloodbath: often only a handful of jobs in a given field, sometimes fewer, and as always, hundreds of people competing for each one.

It wasn’t supposed to be like this. When I started graduate school in 1989, we were told that the disastrous job market of the previous two decades would be coming to an end because the large cohort of people who had started their careers in the 1960s, when the postwar boom and the baby boom combined to more than double college enrollments, was going to start retiring. Well, it did, but things kept getting worse. Instead of replacing retirees with new tenure-eligible hires, departments gradually shifted the teaching load to part-timers: adjuncts, postdocs, graduate students. From 1991 to 2003, the number of full-time faculty members increased by 18 percent. The number of part-timers increased by 87 percent—to almost half the entire faculty.

But as Jack Schuster and Martin Finkelstein point out in their comprehensive study *The American Faculty* (2006), the move to part-time labor is already an old story. Less visible

but equally important has been the advent and rapid expansion of full-time positions that are *not* tenure-eligible. No one talks about this transformation—the creation of yet another academic underclass—and yet as far back as 1993, such positions already constituted the majority of new appointees. As of 2003, more than a third of full-time faculty were working off the tenure track. By the same year, tenure-track professors—the “normal” kind of academic appointment—represented no more than 35 percent of the American faculty.

The reasons for these trends can be expressed in a single word, or buzzword: efficiency. Contingent academic labor, as non-tenure-track faculty, part-time and full-time, are formally known, is cheaper to hire and easier to fire. It saves departments money and gives them greater flexibility in staffing courses. Over the past twenty years, in other words—or really, over the past forty—what has happened in academia is what has happened throughout the American economy. Good, secure, well-paid positions—tenured appointments in the academy, union jobs on the factory floor—are being replaced by temporary, low-wage employment.

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You’d think departments would respond to the Somme-like conditions they’re sending out their newly minted PhDs to face by cutting down the size of their graduate programs. If demand drops, supply should drop to meet it. In fact, many departments are doing the opposite, the job market be damned. More important is maintaining the flow of labor to their domestic sweatshops, the pipeline of graduate students who staff discussion sections and teach introductory and service courses like freshman composition and first-year calculus. (Professors also need dissertations to direct, or how would they justify their own existence?) As Louis Menand puts it in *The Marketplace of Ideas* (2010), the system is now designed to produce not PhDs so much as ABDs: students who, having finished their other degree requirements, are “all but dissertation” (or “already been dicked,” as we used to say)—i.e., people who have entered the long limbo of low-wage research and teaching that chews up four, five, six years of a young scholar’s life.

If anything, as Menand notes, the PhD glut works well for departments at both ends, since it gives them the whip hand when it comes to hiring new professors. Graduate programs occupy a highly unusual, and advantageous, market position: they are both the producers and the consumers of academic labor, but as producers, they have no financial stake in whether their product “sells”—that is, whether their graduates get jobs. Yes, a program’s prestige is related, in part, to its placement rate, but only in relative terms. In a normal industry, if no firm sells more than half of what it produces, then either everyone goes out of business or the industry consolidates. But in academia, if no one does better than 50 percent, then 50 percent is great. Programs have every incentive to keep prices low by maintaining the oversupply.

Still, there’s a difference between a Roger Smith firing workers at General Motors and the faculty of an academic department treating its students like surplus goods. For the CEO of a large corporation, workers are essentially entries on a balance sheet, separated

from the boardroom by a great gulf of culture and physical distance. If they are treated without mercy, that is not entirely surprising. But the relationship between professors and graduate students could hardly be more intimate. Professors used to *be* graduate students. They belong to the same culture and the same community. Your dissertation director is your mentor, your role model, the person who spends all those years overseeing your research and often the one you came to graduate school to study under in the first place. You, in turn, are her intellectual progeny; if you make good, her professional pride. The economic violence of the academic system is inflicted at very close quarters.

How professors square their Jekyll-and-Hyde roles in the process—devoted teachers of individual students, co-managers of a system that exploits them as a group—I do not know. Denial, no doubt, along with the rationale that this is just the way it is, so what can you do? Teaching is part of the training, you hear a lot, especially when supposedly liberal academics explain why graduate-student unions are such a bad idea. They're students, not workers! But grad students don't teach because they have to learn how, even if the experience is indeed very valuable; they teach because departments need "bodies in the classroom," as a professor I know once put it.

I always found it beautifully apt that my old department occupies the same space where the infamous Milgram obedience experiments were conducted in the early 1960s. (Yes, really.) Pay no attention to the screams you hear coming from the next room, the subjects were told as they administered the electric shocks, it's for their own good—a perfect allegory of the relationship between tenured professors and graduate students (and tenured professors and untenured professors, for that matter).

Well, but so what? A bunch of spoiled kids are having trouble finding jobs—so is everybody else. Here's so what. First of all, they're not spoiled. They're doing exactly what we always complain our brightest students don't do: eschewing the easy bucks of Wall Street, consulting or corporate law to pursue their ideals and be of service to society. Academia may once have been a cushy gig, but now we're talking about highly talented young people who are willing to spend their 20s living on subsistence wages when they could be getting rich (and their friends *are* getting rich), simply because they believe in knowledge, ideas, inquiry; in teaching, in following their passion. To leave more than half of them holding the bag at the end of it all, over 30 and having to scrounge for a new career, is a human tragedy.

Sure, lots of people have it worse. But here's another reason to care: it's also a social tragedy, and not just because it represents a colossal waste of human capital. If we don't make things better for the people entering academia, no one's going to want to do it anymore. And then it won't just be the students who are suffering. Scholarship will suffer, which means the whole country will. Knowledge, as we're constantly told, is a nation's most important resource, and the great majority of knowledge is created in the academy—now more than ever, in fact, since industry is increasingly outsourcing research to universities where, precisely because graduate students cost less than

someone who gets a real salary, it can be conducted on the cheap. (Bell Labs, once the flagship of industrial science, is a shell of its former self, having suffered years of cutbacks before giving up on fundamental research altogether.)

It isn't just the sciences that matter; it is also the social sciences and the humanities. And it isn't just the latter that are suffering. Basic physics in this country is all but dead. From 1971 to 2001, the number of bachelor's degrees awarded in English declined by 20 percent, but the number awarded in math and statistics declined by 55 percent. The only areas of the liberal arts that saw an increase in BAs awarded were biology and psychology—and this at a time when aggregate enrollment expanded by something like 75 percent. On the work that is done in the academy depends the strength of our economy, our public policy and our culture. We need our best young minds going into atmospheric research and international affairs and religious studies, chemistry and ethnography and art history. By pursuing their individual interests, narrowly understood, departments are betraying both the values they are pledged to uphold—the pursuit of knowledge, the spirit of critical inquiry, the extension of the humanistic tradition—and the nation they exist to serve.

We've been here before. Pay was so low in the nineteenth century, when academia was still a gentleman's profession, that in 1902 Andrew Carnegie created the pension plan that would evolve into TIAA-CREF, the massive retirement fund. After World War II, when higher education was seen as an urgent national priority, a consensus emerged that salaries were too small to attract good people. Compensation soared through the 1950s and '60s, then hit the skids around 1970 and didn't recover for almost thirty years. It's no surprise that the percentage of college freshmen expressing an interest in academia was more than three times higher in 1966 than it was in 2004.

But the answer now is not to raise professors' salaries. Professors already make enough. The answer is to hire more professors: real ones, not academic lettuce-pickers.

Yet that's the last thing schools are apt to do. What we have seen instead over the past forty years, in addition to the raising of a reserve army of contingent labor, is a kind of administrative elephantiasis, an explosion in the number of people working at colleges and universities who aren't faculty, full-time or part-time, of any kind. From 1976 to 2001, the number of nonfaculty professionals ballooned nearly 240 percent, growing more than three times as fast as the faculty. Coaching staffs and salaries have grown without limit; athletic departments are virtually separate colleges within universities now, competing (successfully) with academics. The size of presidential salaries—more than \$1 million in several dozen cases—has become notorious. Nor is it only the presidents; the next six most highly paid administrative officers at Yale averaged over \$430,000 in 2007. As Gaye Tuchman explains in *Wannabe U* (2009), a case study in the sorrows of academic corporatization, deans, provosts and presidents are no longer professors who cycle through administrative duties and then return to teaching and research. Instead, they have become a separate stratum of managerial careerists, jumping from job to job and organization to organization like any other executive: isolated from the faculty and its values, loyal to an ethos of short-term expansion, and trading in the business blather of

measurability, revenue streams, mission statements and the like. They do not have the long-term health of their institutions at heart. They want to pump up the stock price (i.e., *U.S. News and World Report* ranking) and move on to the next fat post.

If you're tenured, of course, life is still quite good (at least until the new provost decides to shut down your entire department). In fact, the revolution in the structure of academic work has come about in large measure to protect the senior professoriate. The faculty have steadily grayed in recent decades; by 1998 more than half were 50 or older. Mandatory retirement was abolished in 1986, exacerbating the problem. Departments became "tenured in," with a large bolus of highly compensated senior professors and room, increasingly squeezed in many cases, for just a few junior members—another reason jobs have been so hard to find. Contingent labor is desirable above all because it saves money for senior salaries (as well as relieving the tenure track of the disagreeable business of teaching low-level courses). By 2004, while pay for assistant and associate professors still stood more or less where it had in 1970, that for full professors was about 10 percent higher.

What we have in academia, in other words, is a microcosm of the American economy as a whole: a self-enriching aristocracy, a swelling and increasingly immiserated proletariat, and a shrinking middle class. The same devil's bargain stabilizes the system: the middle, or at least the upper middle, the tenured professoriate, is allowed to retain its prerogatives—its comfortable compensation packages, its workplace autonomy and its job security—in return for acquiescing to the exploitation of the bottom by the top, and indirectly, the betrayal of the future of the entire enterprise.

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But now those prerogatives are also under threat. I am not joining the call for the abolition of tenure—a chorus that includes two of last year's most widely noticed books on the problems of America's colleges and universities, *Higher Education?*, by Andrew Hacker and Claudia Dreifus, and *Crisis on Campus*, by Mark Taylor. Tenure certainly has its problems. It crowds out opportunities for young scholars and allows academic deadwood to accumulate on the faculty rolls. But getting rid of it would be like curing arteriosclerosis by shooting the patient. For one thing, it would remove the last incentive for any sane person to enter the profession. People still put up with everything they have to endure as graduate students and junior professors for the sake of a shot at that golden prize, and now you're going to take away the prize? No, it is not good for so many of academia's rewards to be backloaded into a single moment of occupational transfiguration, one that sits like a mirage at the end of twelve or fifteen years of Sinaitic wandering. Yes, the job market would eventually rebalance itself if the profession moved, say, to a system of seven-year contracts, as Taylor suggests. But long before it did, we would lose a generation of talent.

Besides, *how* would the job market rebalance itself? If the people who now have tenure continued to serve under some other contractual system, the same surplus of labor would be chasing the same scarcity of employment. Things would get better for new PhDs only

if schools started firing senior people. Which, as the way things work in other industries reminds us, they would probably be glad to do. Why retain a 55-year-old when you can replace her with a 30-year-old at half the price? Now that's a thought to swell a provost's revenue stream. Talk about efficiency.

And what exactly are you supposed to do at that point if you've spent your career becoming an expert in, say, Etruscan history? Academia exists in part to support research the private sector *won't* pay for, knowledge that can't be converted into a quick buck or even a slow one, but that adds value to society in other ways. Who's going to pursue that kind of inquiry if they know there's a good chance they're going to get thrown out in the snow when they're 50 (having only started to earn a salary when they were 30, to boot)? Doctors and lawyers can set up their own practice, but a professor can't start his own university. This kind of thing is appalling enough when it happens to blue-collar workers. In an industry that requires a dozen years of postsecondary education just to gain an entry-level position, it is unthinkable.

Nor should we pooh-pooh the threat the abolition of tenure would pose to academic freedom, as Hacker and Dreifus do. "We have scoured all the sources we could find," they write, "yet we could not find any academic research whose findings led to terminating the jobs of college faculty members." Yes, because of tenure. If deans and trustees and alumni and politicians rarely even try to have professors fired, that is precisely because they know they have so little chance of making it happen. Before tenure existed, arbitrary dismissals were common. Can you imagine what the current gang of newly elected state legislators would do if they could get their hands on the people who teach at public universities? (Just look at what happened to William Cronon, the University of Wisconsin historian whose e-mails were demanded by the state Republican Party after he exposed the role of the American Legislative Exchange Council in Governor Scott Walker's attack on public employee unions.) Hacker and Dreifus, who recognize the importance of academic freedom, call instead of tenure for presidents and trustees with "backbone" (a species as wonderful as the unicorn, and almost as numerous). Sure, and as long as the king is a good man, we don't need democracy. Academics play a special role in society: they tell us things we don't want to hear—about global warming, or the historical Jesus, or the way we raise our children. That's why they need to have special protections.

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But the tenure system, which is already being eroded by the growth of contingent labor, is not the only thing that is under assault in the top-down, corporatized academy. As Cary Nelson explains in *No University Is an Island* (2010), shared governance—the principle that universities should be controlled by their faculties, which protects academic values against the encroachments of the spreadsheet brigade—is also threatened by the changing structure of academic work. Contingent labor undermines it both directly—no one asks an adjunct what he thinks of how things run—and indirectly. More people chasing fewer jobs means that everyone is squeezed for extra productivity, just like at Wal-Mart. As of 1998, faculty at four-year schools worked an average of about seven hours more per

week than they had in 1972 (for a total of more than forty-nine hours a week; the stereotype of the lazy academic is, like that of the welfare queen, a politically useful myth). Not surprisingly, they also reported a shrinking sense of influence over campus affairs. Who's got the time? Academic labor is becoming like every other part of the American workforce: cowed, harried, docile, disempowered.

In macropolitical terms, the erosion of tenure and shared governance undermines the power of a large body of liberal professionals. In this it resembles the campaign against teachers unions. Tenure, in fact, is a lot like unionization: imperfect, open to corruption and abuse, but incomparably better than the alternative. Indeed, tenure is what professors have instead of unions (at least at private universities, where they're banned by law from organizing). As for shared governance, it is nothing other than one of the longest-standing goals of the left: employee control of the workplace. Yes, professors have it better than a lot of other workers, including a lot of others in the academy. But the answer, for the less advantaged, is to organize against the employers who've created the situation, not drag down the relatively privileged workers who aren't yet suffering as badly: to level up, in other words, not down.

Of course, some sectors of the academy—the ones that educate the children of the wealthy and the upper middle class—continue to maintain their privilege. The class gradient is getting steeper, not only between contingent labor and the tenure track, and junior and senior faculty within the latter, but between institutions as well. Professors at doctoral-granting universities not only get paid a lot more than their colleagues at other four-year schools; the difference is growing, from 17 percent in 1984 to 28 percent in 2003. (Their advantage over professors at community colleges increased during the same period from 33 percent to 49 percent.) The rich are getting richer. In 1970 (it seems like an alternative universe now) faculty at public colleges and universities actually made about 10 percent *more* than those at private schools. By 1999 the lines had crossed, and public salaries stood about 5 percent lower. The aggregate student-faculty ratio at private colleges and universities is 10.8 to 1; at public schools, it is 15.9 to 1—almost 50 percent higher.

Here we come to the most important issue facing American higher education. Public institutions enroll about three-quarters of the nation's college students, and public institutions are everywhere under financial attack. As Nancy Folbre explains in *Saving State U* (2010), a short, sharp, lucid account, spending on higher education has been falling as a percentage of state budgets for more than twenty years, to about two-thirds of what it was in 1980. The average six-year graduation rate at state schools is now a dismal 60 percent, a function of class size and availability, faculty accessibility, the use of contingent instructors and other budget-related issues. Private universities actually lobby against public funding for state schools, which they see as competitors. In any case, a large portion of state scholarship aid goes to students at private colleges (in some cases, more than half)—a kind of voucher system for higher education.

Meanwhile, public universities have been shifting their financial aid criteria from need to merit to attract applicants with higher scores (good old *U.S. News* again), who tend to

come from wealthier families. Per-family costs at state schools have soared in recent years, from 18 percent of income for those in the middle of the income distribution in 1999 to 25 percent in 2007. Estimates are that over the past decade, between 1.4 million and 2.4 million students have been prevented from going to college for financial reasons—about 50 percent more than during the 1990s. And of course, in the present climate of universal fiscal crisis, it is all about to get a lot worse.

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Our system of public higher education is one of the great achievements of American civilization. In its breadth and excellence, it has no peer. It embodies some of our nation's highest ideals: democracy, equality, opportunity, self-improvement, useful knowledge and collective public purpose. The same president who emancipated the slaves and funded the transcontinental railroad signed the Morrill Land Grant Act of 1862, which set the system on its feet. Public higher education is a bulwark against hereditary privilege and an engine of social mobility. It is altogether to the point that the strongest state systems are not to be found in the Northeast, the domain of the old WASP aristocracy and its elite private colleges and universities, but in places like Michigan, Wisconsin, Illinois, Virginia, North Carolina and, above all, California.

Now the system is in danger of falling into ruin. Public higher education was essential to creating the mass middle class of the postwar decades—and with it, a new birth of political empowerment and human flourishing. The defunding of public higher education has been essential to its slow destruction. In *Unmaking the Public University*, Newfield argues that the process has been deliberate, a campaign by the economic elite against the class that threatened to supplant it as the leading power in society. Social mobility is now lower in the United States than it is in Northern Europe, Australia, Canada and even France and Spain, a fact that ought to be tattooed on the foreheads of every member of Congress, so directly does it strike at America's identity as the land of opportunity.

But it was not only the postwar middle class that public higher education helped create; it was the postwar prosperity altogether. Knowledge, again, is our most important resource. States that balance their budgets on the backs of their public universities are not eating their seed corn; they're trampling it into the mud. My state of Oregon, a chronic economic underperformer, has difficulty attracting investment, not because its corporate taxes are high—they're among the lowest—but because its workforce is poorly educated. So it will be for the nation as a whole. Our college-completion rate has fallen from second to eighth. And we are not just defunding instruction; we are defunding research, the creation of knowledge itself. Stipends are so low at the University of California, Berkeley, the third-ranked research institution on the planet, that the school is having trouble attracting graduate students. In fact, the whole California system, the crown jewel of American public higher education, is being torn apart by budget cuts. This is not a problem; it is a calamity.

Private institutions are in comparable trouble, for reasons that will sound familiar: too much spending during the boom years—much of it on construction, much of it driven by

the desire to improve “market position” relative to competitors by offering amenities like new dorms and student centers that have nothing to do with teaching or research—supported by too much borrowing, has led to a debt crisis. Among the class of academic managers responsible for the trouble in the first place, an industry of reform has sprung up, along with a literature of reform to go with it. Books like Taylor’s *Crisis on Campus*, James Garland’s *Saving Alma Mater* (2009) and the most measured and well-informed of the ones I’ve come across, Robert Zemsky’s *Making Reform Work* (2009), propose their variously visionary schemes.

Nearly all involve technology to drive efficiency. Online courses, distance learning, do-it-yourself instruction: this is the future we’re being offered. Why teach a required art history course to twenty students at a time when you can march them through a self-guided online textbook followed by a multiple-choice exam? Why have professors or even graduate students grade papers when you can outsource them to BAs around the country, even the world? Why waste time with office hours when students can interact with their professors via e-mail?

The other great hope—I know you’ll never see this coming—is the market. After all, it works so well in healthcare, and we’re already trying it in primary and secondary education. Garland, a former president of Miami University of Ohio (a public institution), argues for a voucher system. Instead of giving money to schools, the state would give it to students, and the credit would be good at any nonprofit institution in the state—in other words, at private ones as well. The student would run the show (as the customer should, of course), scouring the market like a savvy consumer. Universities, in turn, “would compete with each other...by tailoring their course offerings, degree programs, student services, and extracurricular activities” to the needs of our newly empowered 18-year-olds, and the invisible hand would rain down its blessings.

But do we really want our higher education system redesigned by the self-identified needs of high school seniors? This is what the British are about to try, and in a country with one of Europe’s most distinguished intellectual traditions, they seem poised to destroy the liberal arts altogether. How much do 18-year-olds even know about what they want out of college? About not only what it can get them, but what it can give them? These are young people who don’t know what college is, who they are, who they might want to be—things you need a college education, and specifically a liberal arts education, to help you figure out.

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Yet the liberal arts, as we know, are dying. All the political and parental pressure is pushing in the other direction, toward the “practical,” narrowly conceived: the instrumental, the utilitarian, the immediately negotiable. Colleges and universities are moving away from the liberal arts toward professional, technical and vocational training. Last year, the State University of New York at Albany announced plans to close its departments of French, Italian, Russian, classics and theater—a wholesale slaughter of the humanities. When Garland enumerates the fields a state legislature might want to

encourage its young people to enter, he lists “engineering, agriculture, nursing, math and science education, or any other area of state importance.” Apparently political science, philosophy, history and anthropology, among others, are not areas of state importance. Zemsky wants to consider reducing college to three years—meaning less time for young people to figure out what to study, to take courses in a wide range of disciplines, to explore, to mature, to think.

When politicians, from Barack Obama all the way down, talk about higher education, they talk almost exclusively about math and science. Indeed, technology creates the future. But it is not enough to create the future. We also need to organize it, as the social sciences enable us to do. We need to make sense of it, as the humanities enable us to do. A system of higher education that ignores the liberal arts, as Jonathan Cole points out in *The Great American University* (2009), is what they have in China, where they don’t want people to think about other ways to arrange society or other meanings than the authorized ones. A scientific education creates technologists. A liberal arts education creates citizens: people who can think broadly and critically about themselves and the world.

Yet of course it is precisely China—and Singapore, another great democracy—that the Obama administration holds up as the model to emulate in our new Sputnik moment. It’s funny; after the original Sputnik, we didn’t decide to become more like the Soviet Union. But we don’t possess that kind of confidence anymore.

There is a large, public debate right now about primary and secondary education. There is a smaller, less public debate about higher education. What I fail to understand is why they aren’t the same debate. We all know that students in elementary and high school learn best in small classrooms with the individualized attention of motivated teachers. It is the same in college. Education, it is said, is lighting a fire, not filling a bucket. The word comes from the Latin for “educere,” lead forth. Learning isn’t about downloading a certain quantity of information into your brain, as the proponents of online instruction seem to think. It is about the kind of interchange and incitement—the leading forth of new ideas and powers—that can happen only in a seminar. (“Seminar” being a fancy name for what every class already is from K–12.) It is labor-intensive; it is face-to-face; it is one-at-a-time.

The key finding of Richard Arum and Josipa Roksa’s *Academically Adrift* (2011), that a lot of kids aren’t learning much in college, comes as no surprise to me. The system is no longer set up to challenge them. If we’re going to make college an intellectually rigorous experience for the students who already go—still more, for all the ones we want to go if we’re going to reach the oft-repeated goal of universal postsecondary education, an objective that would double enrollments—we’re going to need a lot more teachers: well paid, institutionally supported, socially valued. As of 2003 there were about 400,000 tenure-track professors in the United States (as compared with about 6 million primary- and secondary-school teachers). Between reducing class sizes, reversing the shift to contingent labor and beefing up our college-completion rates, we’re going to need at least five times as many.

So where's the money supposed to come from? It's the same question we ask about the federal budget, and the answer is the same. We're still a very wealthy country. There's plenty of money, if we spend it on the right things. Just as we need to wrestle with the \$700 billion gorilla of defense, so do universities need to take on administrative edema and extracurricular spending. We can start with presidential salaries. Universities, like corporations, claim they need to pay the going rate for top talent. The argument is not only dubious—whom exactly are they competing with for the services of these managerial titans, aside from one another?—it is beside the point. Academia is not supposed to be a place to get rich. If your ego can't survive on less than \$200,000 a year (on top of the prestige of a university presidency), you need to find another line of work. Once, there were academic leaders who put themselves forward as champions of social progress: people like Woodrow Wilson at Princeton in the 1900s; James Conant at Harvard in the 1940s; and Kingman Brewster at Yale, Clark Kerr at the University of California and Theodore Hesburgh at Notre Dame in the 1960s. What a statement it would make if the Ivy League presidents got together and announced that they were going to take an immediate 75 percent pay cut. What a way to restore academia's moral prestige and demonstrate some leadership again.

But leadership will have to come from somewhere else, as well. Just as in society as a whole, the academic upper middle class needs to rethink its alliances. Its dignity will not survive forever if it doesn't fight for that of everyone below it in the academic hierarchy. ("First they came for the graduate students, and I didn't speak out because I wasn't a graduate student...") For all its pretensions to public importance (every professor secretly thinks he's a public intellectual), the professoriate is awfully quiet, essentially nonexistent as a collective voice. If academia is going to once again become a decent place to work, if our best young minds are going to be attracted back to the profession, if higher education is going to be reclaimed as part of the American promise, if teaching and research are going to make the country strong again, then professors need to get off their backsides and organize: department by department, institution to institution, state by state and across the nation as a whole. Tenured professors enjoy the strongest speech protections in society. It's time they started using them.

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