Reardon, Tiffani

Dr. Harper

WRIT 3398 (Internship)

6 May 2013

Edupunks and a Higher Education Transformation

Higher Education becomes increasingly more expensive every semester while not always preparing students for their careers, leaving them with thousands of dollars of debt when they graduate and no way to pay it off. Edupunks, the new kind of education entrepreneurs, seek to solve the problem using open online education and by rejecting the current classroom setting. They look to technology and experiential education to transform the higher education system. My argument is in favor of these ideas because pushing students in a direction directly relating to their career goals and allowing them to learn by experience while also learning book knowledge online will not only help the students financially, but it will also help the schools financially because it will cut costs tremendously.

According to an article by Peter Wood, there is a higher education "bubble" that is inevitably going to pop. Wood says in his article that PayPal co-founder and Facebook investor Peter Thiel took twenty college students and gave them all $100,000 to go out in the world and become entrepreneurs to basically prove that higher education isn't as important as it is said to be and that people can make a living for themselves without spending thousands of dollars on a college degree. His idea was meant to burst the bubble.

> But Thiel aside, what is "the bubble?" The outlines are simple. The price of
> attaining a college degree has skyrocketed while the rewards have slumped.
> Sooner or later, people will notice that they are being asked to spend a great deal

of money for a meager result. If enough people notice this and consequently

decide not to spend at comparable levels and to seek lower-priced alternatives, the

bubble will burst (Wood).

Essentially he is saying that students are getting stuck. They pay to go to school, take out

thousands of dollars in loans, and then when they graduate they can't make enough to pay off

their loans because they were only taught the book knowledge rather than the experiential

knowledge necessary to get a career. This is a problem, and it may be a huge contributor to the

economic crisis America faces today.

That students aren't getting their money's worth isn't a secret, but what seems to be is

that there are so many options to reducing not only the costs of the institutions themselves, but

also the costs of the students attending them. This is where edupunks come in. Larry Hanley

accurately describes an edupunk as an educational bricoleur. To further clarify, a Bricolage is a

creation of work made with whatever happens to be available. An edupunk teaches with

whatever is cheaply or freely available to them online. "For edupunks, the commercialized

[Course Management System] imprisons teachers within an iron cage of copyright, privatization,

and commodification; open-source software and a d.i.y. ("do it yourself") ethic empower

teachers to hack together projects, platforms, networks driven by learning rather than profit"

(Hanley). At Kennesaw State University, the online program for the College of Humanities and

Social Sciences has moved toward a combination of edupunk and traditional. Some of the online

programs taught in its web-course workshop classes are VoiceThread, a discussion website that

allows students to talk to each other using all different types of communication; Hot Potatoes, a

program that creates simple self-grading quizzes; Respondus, a program that allows tests and

quizzes made in Microsoft Word to be imported quickly and easily into the CMS; and many

other programs and websites. While the online program uses these outside resources, they do still use a CMS (Desire2Learn) to bring everything into one central place.

Julie Ann Corrigan and Nicholas Ng-A-Fook from the University of Ottawa express in their paper that open access education is for the public good. They describe how MIT's OpenCourseWare project was the start of open education and how it has allowed those without the funds to educate themselves. "This movement, as Kamenetz (2010) predicts, may one day fulfill the broken promises of universal education. And the societal ramifications are enormous. Open Ed has the potential to bring unprecedented access to education by the masses for the masses" (Corrigan). If (and when) everyone has access to the same education, with or without paying a fortune in tuition, people will be less likely to pay that tuition. Corrigan and Ng-A-Fook also explain how important it is that universities use the resources available to them and how it can help universities provide public access to education without costing them more money and without costing students more money. Which brings us back to KSU and the CHSS online program—while the online classes do currently cost more than face-to-face classes, that extra money accommodates for the equipment that is required: computers, voice recorders, video cameras, and licenses to certain programs. The extra $300 it costs to take an online class at KSU could very easily be more if they were not also using free websites and programs, like VoiceThread, Hot Potatoes, YouTube, Google Docs, PB Wiki, and others. That all of these programs are available online, from anywhere means that they can be accessed by anyone. If these online classes were made public, anyone could learn the material.

Richard A. DeMillo asks the question: "What are universities evolving into? Nobody knows for sure, but we know what is not working today" (DeMillo). He then goes on to outline the false assumptions of the current university system:

A group-oriented vision of an instructor broadcasting to a classroom of pupils,

passive except for recitations and exams…A factory model of efficiency in which

18-24-year-old cohorts with uniform interests and abilities are collocated and

experience education in lockstep fashion…A language and culture of assessment

that seems borrowed from a century in which a fascination with quality on the

factory floor seeped into the administration of universities and their programs

(DeMillo).

Basically, the mind-set of many in-class professors has got to change. Many professors reject the

changing technology and refuse to change their teaching methods to conform to the changing

generations and their technological knowledge. DeMillo then goes on to say that with his set of

principles, "It is an attempt to inject engineering-style experimentation into educational

innovation by actively identifying, promoting, and supporting many—often competing—

approaches to change. Each of the principles summarizes a movement in higher education, and

together they constitute a technology-driven change agenda" (DeMillo). His principles are as

follows: "Open CourseWare and Open Certification," the idea that if "traditional" universities

hold on to the old content and the old teaching methods, they will lose value; "Open and

Democratic Systems," the idea that universities have to adapt to the constantly changing world

around them and learn to utilize whatever technology their students have to connect to them;

"Digital Id entities," another idea that universities need to learn to understand and take advantage

of the digital identities that most students come to college with today; "Ascendance of Learning

Communities," the number growth of students and schools in our economic and political world

allows global learning communities to thrive, and universities need to learn how to handle and

take advantage of that; and "Transformative Power of Technology on Content" information

technology has seriously expanded the ability for one to have one's own ideas and theories about the world and education, and universities need to recognize those new ideas and theories and understand those as well as the old (DeMillo).

The economy and the cost of Higher Education have had equally negative effects on each other, and it has become an increasingly fast circle where students want to go to college but can't afford it, so they take out student loans, and when they get out of college they can't afford to pay the loans off, so they end up in a worse situation than they were in before they had the education. On the other side, schools can't stay open without students, meaning that the schools rely on federal funding too. Anya Kamenetz, author of *DIY U: Edupunks, Edupreneurs, and the Coming Transformation of Higher Education*, gives three suggestions on how to solve the money problem: "1. Allocate funds for access," in which she says, "The major reason that aid, whether federal, state, or institutional, is failing to make college more broadly affordable is that it often goes to the wrong people. Colleges that serve rich students get more federal and state money than colleges that serve poor students. And even within the same institution, colleges give out more money to rich kids than to poor kids" (Kamenetz 39). She then says that we need to "2. Support many paths to success," because let's face it—a 4-year bachelor's degree from a university just isn't right for everyone. "That means supporting appropriate training programs for important jobs like firefighters, police officers, the trades, and the service and hospitality industry" (Kamenetz 43). She then says that we should "3. Fix the economy, not just education" because the fact is, even though the world seems to think that if more people graduate with job-qualifying degrees the economy will fix itself, that's just not the case. No matter how many people graduate college, there are still no jobs for them to take, whether they qualify or not (Kamenetz 46).

While these problems all primarily revolve around federal aid and the solutions all have to do with the schools moving to open online education, Richard Arum and Josipa Roksa feel differently. Their book, *Academically Adrift: Limited Learning on College Campuses*, talks primarily about how universities are straying away from their ultimate goal by worrying too much about extracurricular activities and campus life rather than the academics that are supposed to prepare students for their careers. With the heightening demand for bachelor's degrees for jobs, more and more people go to college every year, and people start planning for it as young as birth, but what Arum and Roksa argue is that the students go, and they get their degrees, but they don't actually learn anything while they're there. The book includes research from surveys, transcripts, and the Collegiate Learning Assessment to determine that a large percentage of students get through their first two years of college with no advancement in a range of academic skills. They then go on to say that faculty and administrators aren't surprised by this percentage because they see how much emphasis schools are putting on everything but education. They then call the reader to action, saying that universities should do away with extracurricular activities on campus and revert back to the old academics-only kind of school (Arum). While I agree that a lot of the extracurricular activities on college campuses waste money on unnecessary events, I do not think they should be taken away. Each kind of extracurricular has a purpose that contributes to a student's success in college. There are leadership groups on campus that prepare students for the professionalism of the career world, there are social groups that start their professional networks for the career world, and there are culture-based groups that allow them to connect to their cultural identity while still focusing on school work, so that they are not completely Americanized. These groups are essential to preparing students for their careers.

Now that we know the problem, and what some of the professionals think about it, here are my solutions. Edupunk teaching for the sake of cutting costs is a great idea. However, it should still be conducted by schools because higher education has become such a large industry and has created so many jobs. Schools should use this new way of teaching to their advantage to lower their tuition rates tremendously so that not only can current students afford to go to school without taking out tons of loans, but they can admit more students because the bulk of the teaching would be online. Extracurricular groups should still be allowed, but they should not get school funds to throw unnecessary events. They should be limited on what kind of event they can throw using school funds and those events should be limited to educational and career-related. For any other events, those groups should have to raise their own funds. More classes should be based on experience rather than books—writing classes should all be workshops, any class with a lab should be research-based with the book there for reference only, teaching classes should be primarily taught as a teaching assistantship, etc. This will eliminate the necessity of training them before they start their jobs. They can just get hired and get started immediately, which will save the employers the cost of training. With these changes, higher education will become more affordable, students will get what they should out of their degrees, and the economy will get better.

Works Cited

Arum, Richard, and Josipa Roksa. *Academically Adrift: Limited Learning on College Campuses*.

      Chicago and London: The University of Chicago Press, 2011. eBook.

Corrigan, Julie Ann, and Nicholas Ng-A-Fook. "Mobilizing Curriculum Studies in a Virtual

      World: Open-Access, Edupunks, and the Public Good." *Canadian Journal of Education*

      35 (2012): 19. *ERIC*. Web. 11 March 2013.

DeMillo, Richard A. "Viewpoint: Keeping Technology Promises." *Communications of the*

      ACM 55.11 (2012): 37-39. *Business Source Complete*. Web. 1 March 2013.

Kamenetz, Anya. *DIY U: Edupunks, Edupreneurs, and the Coming Transformation of Higher*

      Education. White River Junction: Chelsea Green Publishing 2010. Print.

Hanley, Larry. "Mashing Up the Institution: Teacher as Bricoleur." *Radical Teacher* 90 (2011).

      Academic Search Complete. Web. 10 March 2013.

Wood, Peter. "Higher Education's Precarious Hold On Consumer Confidence." *Academic*

      Questions 24.3 (2011): 262. *Advanced Placement Source*. Web. 1 March 2013.