

# Higher Education: The Case for New, Parallel Institutions



By Steven Yates

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**“Our students will learn the foundations, blessings, and challenges of a free and prosperous society. They will grasp the importance of law, virtue, order, beauty, and the sacred. They will appreciate the distinct vitality of the American form of government and way of life.” —Dr. Jacob Howland, Provost and Dean of Intellectual Foundations, University of Austin**

Higher education in Western civilization is broken. As the saying goes, it has lost its way. This happened gradually, but now the process is pretty much complete. Based on my own experiences as well as those of others, I am skeptical that anything can be salvaged. If its mission ever was to educate and not indoctrinate, and given the ludicrous price tag of a four-year degree today, the ideal would be to allow today's academic mainstream to die a natural death.

The time has come to create and build up new institutions of higher learning: *parallel institutions in a parallel academy*.

True, there have been a handful of private colleges that for years have remained steadfastly independent and committed to their own visions, typically by refusing all federal money. Hillsdale College in Hillsdale, Mich., and Grove City College

in Grove City, Penn. come to mind first. They are the most visible. There are a few others. Because our situation is dire – the collapse of real education in the face of the rise of the bogus surrogates that pass for education in today’s urban wastelands, not to mention centers of governmental and corporate power, is a threat to our survival – we need new institutions and we needed them yesterday.

### **From the Plagiarism Crisis to the Fundamentally Fraudulent Nature of Most Higher Education.**

What is the evidence that existing institutions cannot be salvaged and ought to be allowed to die?

I think the most recent thing that did it for me was [this](#). It is worth reproducing; this is Harvard University’s flagship publication, at what is still the most prestigious university in the country:

***“Plagiarism Is the Right’s Newest Weapon. Harvard Must Disarm It.”***

You read that right.

This is in the wake not just of Claudine Gay’s forced resignation from the presidency of Harvard following her exposure as a plagiarist (“retiring” to a position in the history department that will pay her [a cool \\$900,000 a year!](#)), but the accusation of the school’s DIE officer (okay, DEI, if you insist) Sherri A. Charleston, of 40 counts of plagiarism.

By “disarming it,” the authors (the entire Harvard Crimson editorial board) mean contending that plagiarism and DEI (Diversity-Equity-Inclusion ideology) “have nothing to do with each other.”

Don’t they now? Well, the connection is less direct than pure cause-and-effect.

If the allegation is that DEI, which is just the latest and

most extreme permutation of affirmative action ideology, obtains admissions for students and positions for faculty and administrators that they aren't qualified for, then one might expect its beneficiaries to take short cuts. Plagiarism is one such short cut, possibly the easiest. Claudine Gay was clearly unqualified to be the president of anything. Were she not a "woman of color," as the prevailing jargon would have it (*white* isn't a *color*, after all), she'd never come anywhere near Harvard, much less be instilled at its helm.

I don't know how much plagiarism exists in academia today. Software's ability to detect it has improved by leaps and bounds in recent years. The problem is that the torrent of academic publications – books with dozens of academic presses, book reviews and review essays, stand-alone articles, shorter discussion pieces, in hundreds of academic journals in every discipline – has never been larger. According to [one estimate](#) it would take thousands of hours to vet all the publications of the faculty of a single institution such as Harvard, even with today's enhanced detection software.

Don't get me wrong. I'm not of the view that plagiarism is limited to affirmative action's beneficiaries or hard academic leftists. With full-time, tenure-track teaching jobs increasingly scarce and competition correspondingly fierce, the pressure to publish in order to be visible to hiring committees has never been greater. This, too, is bound to tempt the ambitious to take the same short cuts if they believe they can get away with it, knowing that no editor at any academic press or journal can possibly be familiar with *all* the literature out there, even in their specialty.

Plagiarism is thus just *one* massive problem plaguing academia. Philosopher Peter Boghossian – co-author of a controversial series of articles (search for "[conceptual penis](#)") which were accepted for publication in journals of the feminist / postmodernist / DEI persuasion despite being purposefully fraudulent – gave a recent [interview](#) in which, in the context

of a devastating criticism of wokeness (yet another term that emerged for the affirmative action mindset; see also [here](#) and [here](#)) recommended also searching for [replication crisis](#).

Replication of results is essential to so-called scientific method. If a study has been done properly, methodologically speaking, it should be possible for others to use those same methods to reproduce the results of that study, thus validating those results as contributions to our knowledge base. Yet after the past couple of decades it has become clear that many supposed findings by academic scientists have resisted replication.

How much of this is due to incentivized carelessness, resulting from the need to publish as a condition of tenure and promotions, and how much is due to actual dishonesty, is not clear. [According to Nature](#), as mainstream a scientific periodical as you're likely to find, a poll of 1,500 scientists yielded these results: 70 percent reported that they had failed to replicate results of at least one study conducted by peers. Various more specific percentages cut across scientific and technical disciplines: 87 percent of chemists, 69 percent of physicists and engineers, 77 percent of biologists, 64 percent of environmental and earth scientists, 67 percent of medical researchers, and 62 percent of all other respondents made such claims. Fifty percent, moreover, had been unable to reproduce one of their own experiments.

Two percent of this group confessed to having falsified results, and 14 percent knew someone who had. Alarmingly, this same study indicated that bogus results are more frequent in medical research than elsewhere. Think about the implications of that when you are assessing official narratives about the safety and efficacy of the mRNA shots for covid.

Where does all this leave academic science? Most academic science is either government science or corporate science or

both in some combination, because of the reality that a scientific study is too complex and cumbersome to undertake in the absence of outside funding – an obvious source of potential bias in favor of the ideas, worldview, and perhaps ideological agendas of those holding the purse strings.

Boghossian argues compellingly, moreover, that “smart people” (people with PhDs) are especially prone to missing the problem here. Most probably believe themselves above making that sort of mistake. Being a “smart person” doesn’t necessarily make you conscious of your limitations, however. Sometimes it does just the opposite.

For as Boghossian observes, “smart people” are very good at coming up with rationalizations for dominant ideas that may be utterly irrational, or at least lack the support that is assumed, incorrectly if the studies it is based on are methodologically botched. If the *hard sciences* can have gone as far sideways as the above percentages suggest, think what this means for the “softer” humanities!

Groupthink and intellectual inbreeding are definite factors; no one wants to be the “odd man (or odd woman) out,” and in academia given the above-noted structural pressures, being ostracized for any reason can jeopardize a career. The need to be hired in the first place; then tenured; then promoted; cumulatively create an environment which breeds corruption as professors praise and cite each other, sometimes publish one another, and play off and reinforce one another’s irrationalities.

As I’ve put this previously: conformists can gain admission to the club. Dissidents are weeded out. The results are a vast echo chamber – fundamentally fraudulent and compelling us to ask: how much of our supposed *knowledge base* I referred to above really merits that designation in the present environment?

Diversity-Equity-Inclusion ideology, having brought about the opinions that “math is racist” (because black students have trouble with it) and that “gender reassignment” is viable for kids, is probably the most obvious sign of the fraud. A moral (or *pseudo*-moral) impulse took priority over actual, demonstrable results. The best way to describe this pseudo-moral impulse: absent discrimination (active or “structural”), every group identified as such via identity politics will be politically and economically equal and have equal access to resources and positions of authority. If we don’t see this we shouldn’t advocate for mere *equality* of opportunity, as this will only reinforce “structural” discrimination; but instead *equity*, which sets about rearranging the structure to achieve politically desirable results. Moreover, your identity is *yours* based on your *feelings*, which are now prioritized over reasons and even hard evidence. The worst sin is to give offense. Hence all the pap about “microaggressions.”

DEI advocates have tried to impose this irrationalist ideology on institutions by force. With “bias response teams,” “cancellation” of dissidents, etc., they have largely succeeded. Thus, most of the small handful of conservative intellectuals still on campuses self-censor, and conservative students say they are afraid to state their actual views on politically sensitive topics in class, or on tests, or assignments. This further reinforces the hard left echo chamber.

This, then, is what millions of students are accumulating five and sometimes six figures of student loan debt to *endure* for four or more years. Often, they graduate with degrees that are worthless, whether in the marketplace or as actual knowledge, which implies that what they’ve been compelled to listen to for four years is *true*.

## **Back to Basics.**

What was higher education – education generally – supposed to

be about? Even if it is exemplified almost nowhere today, and even if public schools never really exemplified it at all?

First, the pursuit of *truth* – to service human flourishing (I like to put it). Here we hit the snag that goes back at least as far as Pontius Pilate's "What is truth?" Thanks to roughly a half-century of postmodernism, this is a far bigger problem than it needs to be.

We don't need an intellectually perfect "theory of truth" to have some idea what we're talking about. We just need to be *realists*. We're talking about *reality*, what exists independently of our prior knowledge, wishes, or will – or the language in which our talk about reality is expressed. In a sense, we begin trying to understand the world around us as children. At least some knowledge of common horse sense truths is necessary to avoid harming ourselves. We learn as children that hot stove surfaces burn. We learn that blueberries are nourishing but that toadstools are poisonous.

Those among us who are lifelong learners never stop pursuing truth. Some truths (such as those above) are easy to come by. Others take a tremendous amount of work. Knowing that truth has eluded us in some arena often constitutes a problem. We are problem-solvers, however. Some of us prove to be very good at it.

To pursue truth is *not* inherently political, although certain institutional and societal norms will enable and enhance the pursuit of truth. What norms are these?

*Freedom of thought, freedom of inquiry, freedom of speech* – in every area of the world, society, and life generally, we may see fit to explore because we perceive a problem in need of a solution.

Without the first two, members of an intellectual community cannot realistically pursue what is true. Without the third, they cannot meaningfully share their results, just in case

these lead them to question the prevailing groupthink.

Then, because of *real* diversity – of circumstances of birth and upbringing, background, experience, personal inclination, and so on (*not* just ethnicity) – differences of opinion are bound to emerge whenever thinking people exchange ideas freely.

It then becomes important to maintain an environment of *civil discourse* – in which such differences are respected and handled, if necessary, through structured exchanges and debates, in which the parties to any dispute have the maturity to *police themselves*.

You'd think "smart people" (with PhDs) would be able to do this, to create this sort of environment.

Disrupting public speeches with shouts and insults should not be tolerated. Much less open threats, or just the sense of the potential for physical violence that has come to characterize places like Berkeley, where the administration has paid as much as \$500,000 in security to protect an outside conservative speaker in the face of threats (sometimes then cancelling the appearance because that wasn't enough).

Unfortunately, the prospects for stopping such incidents from occurring doesn't appear likely, because circumventing the dominance of the campus ideologies that rationalize such reactions especially to conservative ideas.

First, there's the tenured hard left, activist types who gave us movements like radical "gender feminism" and critical race theory in the 1990s (yes, Virginia, this has been developing *that long*). Dislodging professors who have tenure, absent obvious criminal behavior or extreme moral turpitude, is extremely difficult, especially if those doing the dislodging are perceived as "angry white male" conservatives coming in from outside and the whole campus has the person's back. Claudine Gay is tenured in Harvard's history department; her



newfound status as a plagiarist was not enough to send her packing.

Then there are students. Now that Gen Z (born from 1996 to 2012 or thereabouts) is moving through college, we have an entire generation that's never known anything but identity politics and takes DEI for granted. They've been told all their lives that injustice is systemic, that if they are white they benefit from "white privilege" as a central component of "structural racism," that racism is (as Boghossian puts it) an "everyday state of affairs." They've also grown up with the idea that we're killing the planet with man-made climate change.

Small wonder members of this generation, whatever their ethnicity, are having to deal with more psychological problems than any of their predecessors. They are angrier, more depressed, and a small but not insignificant fraction have considered suicide.

The situation is even worse. The mindset that sees everything through the lens of systemic oppression and seeks to rectify it with "equity" based hiring itself *now threatens people's lives*. It spread to medical education and from there into the medical profession some time ago. It is spreading to occupations such as airline pilots which do not have enough women and blacks to satisfy "diversity" bureaucrats. I recall someone jokingly asking back in the 1990s whether "feminist airplanes would stay aloft for feminist engineers." As we realize that the DEI crowd is very serious about trying to have proportional representation of women (feminists – Trump-voting women need not apply!), ethnic minorities, homosexuals, and transsexuals, according to their percentage of the population in every occupation, such quips cease to be funny.

Would you want to fly in a plane piloted by someone who got hired through the airline's DEI office?

## **How This Disaster Happened. Conservative Organizations Bear Part of the Blame.**

Coming back to the beginning. Back in the 1990s when exposés on what was then just called political correctness were beginning to appear, this might have been reparable from the inside. Political correctness and its ideological spawn (e.g., radical academic “gender feminism”) could have been stopped back then with forceful opposition, including class action (as opposed to a handful of individual) lawsuits, had a decisive effort been made.

It wasn’t.

For whatever reason, the few conservative organizations which had influence failed to make use of the resources available to them, which would have included obtaining positions or at least financial support for conservative scholars most of whom eventually left intellectual professions out of frustration when they ended up at bottom-tier institutions, or with marginal, part-time jobs in think tanks, or unemployed.

The vastly better organized (and far better funded) academic left simply took over.

## **We Need New Parallel Institutions, a Parallel Academia.**

By the late 1990s the term *parallel institutions* was circulating in conservative circles. Again, though, very little was done. A few online entities were created. Only a couple (that I know of) survived. They are professionally invisible.

Today the situation is far more dire. In the face of the rise of foreign powers such as Russia and China, whose strengths are that they take education seriously, the collapse of higher education in the West is an existential threat to our survival – one of several!

The only way we can come back is through the creation and building up of new institutions. I only know of one so far whose founders seem to be doing everything right and are planning to launch their first full freshman class next fall: the [University of Austin](#), presently taking up one floor of a single building in downtown Austin, Texas; and with plans to break ground for a traditional physical campus in the near future.

Other things being equal, the country – indeed, the entire Western world – *needs more such efforts*. *One institution alone* cannot possibly do the job of bringing back (or possibly creating) and implementing a philosophy of education that values the pursuit of truth, free speech and inquiry, affirms the necessity of civil discourse, and can carry it forth into society. That is: education and training there can merge intellectual-foundations learning into real world action for the purposes of problem-solving and human flourishing.

I have no idea if the present marketplace will support such efforts, so deep is the cultural Marxist rot in contemporary culture. Will such efforts, assuming their founders are able to get the word out, find networks of support who are willing to invest in them? Will students come, perhaps of all ages, who are fed up with the self-censorious ambience of the mainstream institutions, willing to take a chance on something new? Will accreditation agencies support them, or are they, too, compromised by the DEI worldview (last I heard, most were just as bad as the mainstream institutions themselves)? Will prospective employers place any stock in courses taken, or credentials earned, from parallel institutions?

I don't know the answers to these questions. But if investors or other sources of funding do not see the value in supporting financially the ideas for new institutions still on drawing boards between now and the end of the present decade, and if prospective students do not come, we can expect the present rot to deepen until it pulls down what is left of Western

civilization which will seem to have committed intellectual and institutional suicide.

That's if a major cyberattack, a physical terrorist attack, another plan-demic, or some other calamity we should have anticipated and circumvented but didn't, doesn't do us in first.

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Steven Yates's Substack publication *Navigating the New Normal* is [here](#). Please consider subscribing (it's still free).

He has a Patreon.com page. Donate [here](#) and become a Patron if you benefit from his work and believe it merits being sustained financially.

Steven Yates's book *Four Cardinal Errors: Reasons for the Decline of the American Republic* (2011) can be ordered [here](#).

His philosophical work *What Should Philosophy Do? A Theory* (2021) can be obtained [here](#) or [here](#).

His paranormal horror novel *The Shadow Over Sarnath* (2023), set in a version of H.P. Lovecraft's cosmos, can be gotten [here](#).

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