

Es ist nicht alles Gold, was glänzt¹: Pathologies of American higher education

Prepared for presentation at the 2003 Fulbright Educational Experts Seminar for leaders of German higher education, New York City, September 22, 2003

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Introduction

Over the past ten years, I have spent a considerable amount of time and effort talking and writing, primarily to European audiences, about the virtues and accomplishments of American higher education. I have pointed out the remarkable combination of a broad base of mass higher education with the lofty peaks of elite research universities, the pervasive spirit of competition for good students, good faculty, and good research money, the unusual preoccupation with quality not only in research, but in teaching and student advising, the efficiency of decision-making structures – to name but a few. I have argued that, even though it would be simple-minded to transfer systems of higher education wholesale from one country to another, European higher education would benefit greatly from taking a closer look at how some of these accomplishments in the U.S. had become possible, and from asking itself whether similar results could not also be achieved in Europe (Weiler 1987-2003b). This kind of message has not made me universally popular in Europe, but I have plodded along and, I believe, made some progress over the years in bringing people to realize that one could at least think of higher education in ways that were different from what one had become used to.

I am not taking any of what I have said over these years back. I still believe that American higher education is worldwide an exceptionally successful piece of institutional architecture and an extraordinarily impressive example of both breadth and depth in the creation and the transmission of knowledge. In terms of both volume and quality, research at American universities plays a leading, and in some respect dominant, role in the world of scholarship; and even at less selective institutions, a remarkable effort goes into teaching at both the undergraduate and the graduate level.

¹ “Not all that glitters is gold.”

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But that, alas, is not the whole story, and this paper is a first attempt to tell the rest of the story, to speak of the part that is less glamorous and glowing, but is just as much a part of the picture as the stories of success and accomplishment. Because just as the beautiful and lush forests of Montana and Idaho conceal a disturbing degree of tree disease and decay, so does the public image of enormously successful public as well as private universities in the U.S. conceal a considerable degree of mediocrity, false pretenses, and downright rot. That, once again, does not make the success stories in American higher education less impressive, but it does make the picture both more complete and more credible.

This then is the other, the darker side of the story of American higher education, and I feel that, after extolling the virtues of the system for so long, I have at last earned the right to tell this part of the story as well.

My basic argument for this exercise is that a number of perfectly legitimate and sound elements of American higher education have, for reasons that are instructive to analyze, degenerated into rather problematic and disturbing phenomena – into what I call “pathologies”. There is, for example, nothing wrong with the strong presence of athletics, both intramural and extramural, on American campuses; as one looks, however, at recent developments in some of the more popular varsity sports, notably football and basketball, one gets a sense of serious upheavals and even downright crisis.

Similarly, there is certainly nothing wrong with the principle of selective admission into some of the more prestigious colleges. As one looks closer, however, one is struck by the persistence, all efforts to the contrary notwithstanding, of a seemingly unassailable correlation between a student’s success in this selection process and his or her family’s economic means.

It is these kinds of “pathologies’ that are the topics of this paper. I have selected, from a potentially much wider array of possible issues, three that I will use to make and illustrate my point that, for every healthy aspect in American higher education, there is at least the risk of a serious pathological deformation.

1. Pathologies of equality
2. Pathologies of autonomy and accountability
3. Pathologies of collegiate athletics

1. Pathologies of equality

There are few major countries in the world today where a larger percentage of high school graduates enters a postsecondary institution than in the U.S. Between the various kinds of institutions of higher education – universities, four-

year colleges, two-year or community colleges – approximately 70 percent of high school graduates begin studying as “freshmen”. That’s the good news.

It gets a bit more complicated when one looks closer. This system of postsecondary institutions has a degree of differentiation that is similarly unique in the world. There are institutions like Stanford where the ratio between those who apply for undergraduate admission and those who are admitted is approximately 10 to 1. (That ratio obviously underestimates selectivity since there is considerable self-selection in that only those apply who believe to have a chance of being admitted). At the other end of the spectrum, there are the community or junior colleges, most of which are essentially obligated to admit everybody with a high school diploma. Clearly, the value of a degree from one or the other institution varies dramatically in terms of prestige, job opportunities, and lifetime earnings.

The distribution across this vast array of differentially prestigious institutions in terms of social background, ethnic affiliation, and regional origin is, as you would expect, anything but a normal curve. Students from well-to-do backgrounds have a significantly higher chance of ending up at a place like Stanford, and students from poorer background (and students of color) have a significantly higher chance of ending up at the local community college.

This skewed distribution reflects the social dynamics of a class society where, from the early days of nursery school on, a family’s economic situation determines their place of residence and its cost, which in turn determines the quality of the local schools (through the instrument of local property taxes), which in turn determines the preparation for successful college admission.

But let us look at just how skewed this picture really is. I draw for this on data that have recently been presented by the Century Foundation and are based on what is probably the best and most detailed data sets currently available on the admissions picture in American higher education (Carnevale and Rose, 2003). The study focuses on the 146 most selective colleges in the U.S. (about ten percent of the approximately 1,400 four-year colleges). These 146 colleges each year enroll about 170,000 freshmen (i.e., about 12 percent of the roughly 1.4 million freshmen enrolled in four-year colleges). The study then looks at the background of these 170,000 freshmen who enter the 146 most selective colleges. All the efforts of American higher education towards “affirmative action” notwithstanding, African Americans and Hispanics represent only 6 percent each of the freshmen class at this most prestigious tier of colleges – in each case less than half of their share in the appropriate age group of the population at large.

Even more striking, however, is the underrepresentation of students from poor families. Students from the lowest quartile of socioeconomic status (SES), who in a normal distribution would make up 25 percent of the incoming class, in reality account for a mere 3 percent, that is about 5,000 out of the total of 170,000. By

contrast, students from the highest quartile account for 74 percent or almost three times their “share”, or well over 125,000 freshmen.

This is both a striking and an extraordinarily consequential statistic. Not only confer these highly selective colleges degrees that have a particularly powerful currency in the labor market; the chances of successfully graduating from such a college (rather than dropping out along the way) are a solid 86 percent, whereas this rate decreases to 54 percent for the fourth and least selective tier among the four-year colleges. Similarly dramatic differences prevail with regard to the money that colleges spend on each student (\$30,000 to \$8,000) or the chances of graduates to go on to graduate school (35 vs. 15 percent). Incidentally, since tuition does not vary all that dramatically between highly selective and less selective colleges, students at the former pay with their tuition a substantially smaller share of the total cost of their education than those at the latter (approximately \$6,000 out of \$30,000 in the former vs. \$6,000 out of \$8,000 in the latter).

These findings are corroborated by plenty of other data. Among students from families that earn less than \$25,000 per year, 48 percent do not go to four-year colleges (about half of them go to two-year community colleges instead); by contrast, among students from families with incomes over \$75,000 only 16 percent do not go to four-year colleges – a factor of exactly three! (Hall 2003)

Going into the reasons for this extremely skewed pattern of participation in this country’s higher education system would require another talk all by itself. Clearly, this has to do with the tremendous and residence-based variation in the quality of primary and secondary schools and with the support that students receive both in school and at home. What is less well known is that it also has to do, as some of my Stanford colleagues have recently demonstrated, with a striking disconnection and information barrier between K-12 schools and the postsecondary system in this country. In other words: students in our secondary schools have a serious information deficit about colleges, and about how to get into them. Obviously, this is an obstacle that is once again skewed heavily to the disadvantage of families and children in poorer communities (Venezia, Kirst, and Antonio, 2003).

Over the last year, and quite rightly so, a great deal of attention has been given in American higher education to the Supreme Court’s decision on the future of “affirmative action”, which has after all proven to be an effective, if imperfect instrument to enhance ethnic diversity on American campuses (Bowen and Bok 1998; Chronicle of Higher Education³ 2003). The data I have reported here suggest that strategies of “economic affirmative action” may be at least as badly needed as affirmative action with regard to ethnicity (Hall 2003). The conclusion that Peter Sacks reaches after reviewing a broad array of recent studies on social class and higher education is sobering indeed: “Our system of higher

³ Cited hereafter as CHE.

education, nominally egalitarian, its riches purportedly available to all with sufficient motivation and talent, is in danger of becoming an economically and socially segregated system.” (2003)

2. Pathologies of autonomy and accountability

In many respects, institutions of higher education in the U.S. are arguably among the most autonomous in the world. This is true not only of private institutions, but to a remarkable, if lesser extent of public institutions as well, especially when compared to state-run universities in Europe. While state governments and legislatures play a significant role in shaping the composition of the governing bodies at the state level (such as the Board of Regents of the University of California), the institutions themselves have significant latitude in decisions on matters of personal, budget and programs within relatively broad parameters set by the state. Again, that is the good news.

The bad news comes from two very different directions where at least the potential for considerable encroachment on this degree of autonomy exists. One of these is the growing dependence, especially but by no means exclusively on the part of public institutions, on external funding in times of dramatically dwindling public resources for higher education.

The other threat to autonomy comes from an increasingly activist federal government that seeks to gain, by invoking the principle of greater accountability, increasing control over the setting and implementation of standards as well as over the pricing of college education.

The first of these developments – the financial crisis in American higher education and its consequences for institutional autonomy – is primarily the result of two events: the precipitous decline of the stock market (where all private and many public institutions have invested their endowment funds) between 2000 and 2002, and the fiscal crisis of the American states that has emerged over the last several years and for which the state of California is one of the more dramatic, but by no means an unusual case in point. Last year alone, 37 states cut their overall budgets in mid-year by a total of about \$14.5 billion – the deepest reduction in the 27 years since these data have been collected. This fiscal year (2003-04) looks even worse. Half of the states have cut their higher education budgets by an average of 5 percent; that includes Colorado with 26 percent and Oklahoma, South Carolina, and Wisconsin by about 10 percent each. A few states increased their higher education budgets, but typically by very small amounts (Potter 2003). When the State of California finally settled its budget for this year just a few weeks ago in the face of a \$38 billion overall deficit, it cut almost 8 percent or \$700 million out of its total funding of \$9 billion for higher education (CHE 7/31/03).

This development has had a number of effects. First of all, it has reduced the portion of university funding that comes from the state; in Wisconsin, for example, only about 27 percent of the higher education system's budget now comes from the state, while it was about half thirty years ago (Potter, *ibid.*); I will return to the implications of this development in a moment.

Secondly, it puts a lot of pressure on the tuition system, forcing most institutions, public as well as private, to increase their tuition rates substantially. This is particularly pronounced in public higher education, where the loss of state funds has left particularly large holes in university budgets. But even private institutions, most of which were shaken, but not really hurt by the decline in the stock market, felt it necessary to increase tuition at rates much beyond the Consumer Price Index (which rose by 3 percent between March 2002 and March 2003): Harvard's tuition increase was 5.5 percent (after a 4.9 percent increase last year), Dartmouth increased by 4.9 percent, Bowdoin by 5, and Brown University by 4.4 percent in one year (Rooney 2003); Stanford was right in the middle with an increase of 5 percent, increasing total tuition to \$28,563 for 2003-04.

The situation among the public institutions is much more dramatic. The list of tuition increases there is headed by Arizona with about 39 percent, the University of California system with almost 30 percent, and the New York State system with almost 28 percent, but many more come in over 20 percent, including the City University of New York with 25 percent. Hardest hit in many states are the Community Colleges which tend to cater to the financially least advantaged strata of the society; California raised tuition at its 108 community colleges by 60 percent – from \$11 to \$18 per credit hour – and the expectation is that this could reduce the number of community college students by about 100,000, including some 20,000 black and Hispanic students (Arnone 2003; Evelyn 2003; cf. Krueger 2003). These are dramatic increases indeed, especially at a time when personal incomes are not growing significantly and unemployment is rising.

Even pathologies, however, need to be put in perspective: While public higher education in California (both the University of California and the California State University system) is increasing tuition by 30 percent (to \$5,400 and \$ 2,044, respectively), it should be added (a) that these rates had last been increased in 1994-95 (and had even been lowered slightly at the time of the California boom in the late 1990s), and that (b), given the outstanding quality of California's public higher education system, it is still quite a bargain even at these rates (CHE 7/25/03).

The other consequence of the dramatic decrease in university funding by the state is an increasing dependence of public universities on non-state funds. Increased tuition is obviously one such source, but a limited one in spite of all the increases. In this situation, it is not surprising that universities are even more aggressively than before seeking out external sources of funding through donations, contracts, or other services. John le Carré, the British author, has

provided interesting literary testimony to the problems involved in this kind of relationship in his latest novel, "The Constant Gardener" (2001), where the unhealthy connection between scholarship and the pharmaceutical industry ends up compromising both in rather major ways. Derek Bok, a former president of Harvard University, has devoted a particularly useful analysis to the potential conflict between "Academic Values and the Lure of Profit" both in a major piece in the Chronicle of Higher Education (2003a) and in his recent book entitled "Universities and the Marketplace: The Commercialization of Higher Education" (2003b). As a result of the reductions in public funding for higher education, he says,

"university administrators are under great pressure to become more entrepreneurial. They feel compelled to search more aggressively for novel ways of making profits that can help meet pressing campus needs. Increasingly, one reads of new lucrative ventures launched by one university or another: medical-school consortia to test drugs for pharmaceutical companies; highly advertised executive courses to earn a tidy surplus for their business-school sponsors; alliances with venture capitalists to launch for-profit companies producing Internet courses for far-flung audiences." (2003a, B7)

Bok claims, and quite rightly, that many of these kinds of symbiotic relationships are mutually beneficial arrangements that not only augment the university's financial resources, but also contribute to the depth and breadth of its scholarship and teaching; I have made a similar case in a recent paper for the relationship that has evolved over the years between Stanford University and Silicon Valley (Weiler 1998a; 2003c). But Bok – quite an entrepreneur himself as president of Harvard – concedes that universities, in the pursuit of money, "also risk compromising their essential academic values", and does not exclude the possibility that "one can imagine a university of the future tenuring professors because they bring in large amount of patent royalties, seeking commercial advertisers to sponsor courses on the Internet, and admitting undistinguished students on the quiet understanding that their parents will make substantial gifts" (2003a, B8). This kind of scenario, as Derek Bok knows, is not altogether a thing of the future; in some hard-pressed American colleges and universities, where the adherence to the norms of academic integrity and excellence are less well developed than at Harvard or Stanford, this is happening right now – leading Reinhard Blomert to entitle his piece in DIE ZEIT about university-industry relations in the U.S. to entitle his article "Between Humboldt and Coca-Cola" (2001).

Bok has some good suggestions on how universities could avoid falling into the trap of the "lure for profit", but after all is said and done, he concludes that "reasonably stable government support is the ultimate guarantee of high academic standards" (2003a, B9). I am sure the validity of that conclusion is not limited to the United States.

How touchy and consequential the relationship between universities and their external financial supporters can get is vividly illustrated by the current controversy between the business school of the University of Texas in Austin and the Mitte Foundation. Originally, the Mitte Foundation had given the university a gift of \$9.7 million to fund student scholarships over a period of twenty years. A number of other business schools have also received funds from the Foundation for similar purposes. A few months ago, however, the Foundation decided to withdraw its gift to the University of Texas after some university officials had raised concerns that one of the foundation's executives, who was also supposed to oversee the scholarship program, had been accused of multiple cases of sexual harassment (Mangan 2003). Although the loss of nearly ten million dollars is going to hurt, the University of Texas is likely to survive the consequences of having stuck to its values. Other institutions may not.

Incidentally, it's not only those bad capitalists that get university autonomy in trouble. Recently, the legislature of the state of Kansas passed a measure that would have cost the University of Kansas over \$3 million in state funds for allowing the use of allegedly "obscene" materials in a course on human sexuality (Selingo 2003a). This story, however, has a happy ending: the state's governor, Kathleen Sebelius, invoking the principle of academic freedom, decided to veto the bill (CHE 4/25/03).

Derek Bok's is only one of an increasing, and increasingly outspoken, set of voices concerned with the potential dangers of commercialization in American higher education. A recent review and preview in the *New York Times* (Lee 2003) deals with four major books on this issue that are either just published or about to be published, ranging from David Kirp's book on "Shakespeare, Einstein, and the Bottom Line: The Marketing of Higher Education" (forthcoming; cf. Kirp 2002; Kirp and Holman 2002) to Bok's own book (2003b), a new book by Eric Gould, chairman of the English Department at the University of Denver, on "The University in a Corporate Culture" (2003), and a forthcoming historical analysis on "Ivy and Industry: Business and the Making of the American University, 1880-1980" (forthcoming), in which Christopher Newfield argues "for a better balance between the two historical objectives of the university: economic development and human development" (Lee, *ibid.*).

The titles of these books already convey a good sense of the drift of the argument and the nature of the concern. These, however, are only the more moderate voices in an increasingly heated debate. The summary of a widely quoted piece in *The Atlantic Monthly* in March 2000 by Press and Washburn reads as follows: "Commercially sponsored research is putting at risk the paramount value of higher education – disinterested inquiry. Even more alarming, universities themselves are behaving more and more like for-profit companies" (2000, 39). The title of the article: "The Kept University". Book titles like "The Knowledge Factory: Dismantling the Corporate University and Creating

True Higher Learning (Aronowitz 2000), “Digital Diploma Mills: The Automation of Higher Education” (Noble 2001), or as in the case of Henry Giroux’ latest book, “The Abandoned Generation” (2003) convey a similar flavor of rather profound criticism. Much of this is unnecessarily shrill and has a tendency to generalize from single instances to entire institutions or the whole system of higher education – as in Giroux’ discussion of endowed chairs at American universities (ibid., 167-168). In the final chapter of his book, Giroux speaks of “the forces at work in the corporate world that would like to take advantage of the profits to be made in higher education, while simultaneously refashioning colleges and universities in the image of the new multinational conglomerate landscape” (2003, 176) and continues:

“Colleges and universities do not simply produce knowledge and values for students, they also play an influential role in shaping their identities. If colleges and universities are to define themselves as centers of teaching and learning vital to the democratic life of the nation, they are going to have to acknowledge the real danger of becoming corporate, mere adjuncts to big business. At the very least, this demands that they exercise the political, civic, and ethical courage needed to refuse the commercial rewards that would reduce them to being simply another brand name or corporate logo.” (187)

As statements of fact about the actual invasion of the “corporate culture” into higher education, these observations are clearly lopsided and in need of balancing. As warnings, however, they should be taken very seriously.

The financial crisis in American higher education is having another major impact on the issue of higher education autonomy, specifically on the delicate balance between autonomy and accountability. On the one hand, the reduction of state funding has led in several cases to a renegotiation of the relationship between public universities and their state governments along lines that will sound familiar to German ears. The deal is that, in return for less funding, the universities will obtain a greater degree of autonomy, for example in their ability to raise tuition without approval by the state; the Texas state legislature has recently voted to let the state’s universities set their own tuition rates to give them a chance to make up for the loss in state funds. And a once fairly significant movement in the direction of tying state funding to university performance (“performance funding” or, more loosely, “performance budgeting”) is losing steam as state governments do not have the funds to hold up their side of the bargain. Performance funding is being replaced by “performance reporting” which requires universities to merely *report* on their performance without direct effects on their budget allocation from the state (Potter, ibid.; cf. Couturier 2003).

At the same time, there is an effort underway to salvage, in the midst of this almost unavoidable increase in institutional autonomy, a modicum of institutional accountability so as to preserve the “public mission” of public higher education

with some degree of credibility. A widely cited example is the agreement reached between the Colorado legislature and the Colorado School of Mines in which, in return for a lump-sum budget and greater control over tuition and academic programs, the university makes a commitment to certain criteria, including graduation rates and employer-satisfaction surveys (Couturier, *ibid.*) – an interesting variant on the instrument of a German “Zielvereinbarung”.

Into this somewhat ambivalent relationship between states and their universities now steps another actor: the federal government – an actor who used to be in the U.S., unlike in Germany, generally not known for a great deal of interest and involvement in higher education. However, as the strictures of accountability begin to weaken at the state level in the wake of reductions in state funding, there are growing indications that the federal government is ready to pick up the slack. The instrument *du jour* for this initiative is the Higher Education Act, a legislative measure that requires periodic reauthorization by Congress and is the basis for distributing the over \$60 billion per year in the federal government’s student-aid program for students from low and moderate income families (Wolanin 2003). The Act was one of the outcomes of the “War on Poverty” launched by the Johnson administration in the mid-1960s. As the eighth reauthorization of the Act approaches, the Bush administration has given some indications that it will use the occasion to take the nation’s higher education institutions to task for what it considers their failures to live up to their responsibilities (Burd 2003a; cf. Farrell 2003). In particular, the White House is critical of

- significant tuition increases that make it increasingly impossible for a growing number of low- and middle-income families to send their children to college, and
- the overall poor performance of many colleges in retaining and graduating students.

A preliminary report by the federal Department of Education in March of 2002 set the goal of limiting increases in college tuition to 2.6 percent by 2007. By comparison, the average tuition increase at private colleges last year was 5.8 percent, and at public colleges even 9.6 percent (Burd 2003a, A19), and while public opinion surveys generally come out strongly in support of the country’s higher education system, the one thing that the public disapproves of is its price (Selingo 2003b). Recognizing this concern, Republican Congressman Howard McKeon of California is working on a “Affordability in Higher Education Act” which is designed to hold higher education institutions accountable for their expenses and to introduce a “college affordability index” which is closely tied to the Consumer Price Index; colleges that are in consistent violation of this limit risk losing federal assistance for their students (McKeon 2003).

Conveniently, the reauthorization of the Higher Education Act falls into a presidential election year, and it will be interesting to watch whether the White House is going to use accountability in higher education as one of the principal planks in the President’s re-election platform – continuing the strong emphasis

on accountability that has thus far characterized the Bush administration's approach to elementary and secondary education. Institutions of higher education and their representative organizations have already begun vigorously to oppose this strategy (see, for an eloquent example, Fish 2003), but they may have a tough fight on their hands. After all, over the last two years, of over \$12 million in political contributions that came out of academia, 65 percent went to the Democratic party (Burd 2003a, A20) – not exactly an incentive for a Republican administration to be particularly charitable when it comes to higher education institutions. However this controversy plays out, it should provide for an interesting comparative perspective on the issue of accountability in higher education as between Europe and the U.S. Malcolm Gillis, the president of Rice University in Texas, underscored that perspective already when he said that he “was wary of any effort by the federal government to turn the (U.S.) Education Department into a European-style ministry of education that is charged with ‘setting standards of how colleges should educate their students.’” (Burd 2003b).

3. Pathologies of intercollegiate athletics

There are probably some places in this country where what I am about to say I could only say under police protection. Few issues in American higher education can generate so much emotional heat as intercollegiate athletics, the colorful and wildly popular display of the physical and tactical talents of students and coaches in a variety of sports, but most spectacularly in college football and basketball. The nation collectively holds its breath when it comes to the bowl season of collegiate football championships around Christmas and New Year or during “March Madness”, the aptly named period of the NCAA championship tournament in college basketball. As a matter of full disclosure, I have to admit that I am by no means immune to this kind of excitement, and I recall many a pleasant afternoon that I spent in the bleachers of Stanford Stadium watching a Stanford football team that consistently won the games it was supposed to lose, and lost most others.

And yet, there is no way around the fact that in speaking of pathologies in American higher education, one has to devote a special chapter to the pathologies of intercollegiate athletics. This is not meant to distract from the extraordinarily healthy role that sports play at American colleges and universities, particularly in their intramural variety, but also in most intercollegiate competitions from swimming to track and from soccer to baseball. I wish European universities had just a little bit of that kind of commitment to lively sports programs on their campuses. Not the least of the achievements of academic athletics in the U.S. has been to establish successful athletic programs for women in sports that, outside of academia, used to be traditional male domains, such as basketball, soccer, golf, and water polo. One of the things about my own university that I am most proud of is not the somewhat inconsistent football team, but the fact that Stanford has now been awarded for nine years in a row the “Sears Directors’

Cup” which is annually given to the institution with the best all-round sports program in American higher education.

But the distractions and compromises that big-time athletic programs have inflicted on American higher education are too serious to overlook. Derek Bok devotes two of the eleven chapters in his book on “Universities in the Marketplace” to the problem of athletics, which he describes as “the oldest form of commercialization in American higher education” (Bok 2003b, 35). That is true, but it is not the whole story. Athletics, especially football, is big business indeed; the television budget alone for the annual bowl or championship games in college football runs to almost \$90 million (Stanford Weekly, 8/28/03). For some institutions, it is a money-making proposition, earning for example the University of Colorado a hefty \$32.5 million a year (incidentally, twice the total annual budget of Viadrina European University in Frankfurt/Oder); the money comes from ticket sales, donations, commercial sponsors and television rights. That kind of money gets spent again on the football program, including substantial scholarships for prize athletes and coaches’ salaries that often exceed significantly the university president’s salary, but it also subsidizes at many universities other sports at the university, including – again as for example at Colorado – women’s sports (Suggs 2003b). From a financial point of view, that, however, is one of the few success stories. The football programs at most other universities are not so lucky and cost more than they bring in, siphoning off valuable and increasingly scarce resources from other, more academic purposes of the university. At the University of Idaho, for example, football does not bring in enough money to even fund itself, so over half of the university’s \$8 million football budget is subsidized by the state budget, general university funds and a student fee assessment (ibid., A49) – obviously a rather dubious practice considering a university’s other needs for funds. Athletic scholarships (most of which are not need-based) make up a significant portion of the overall scholarship budget; even at Stanford, which is not going overboard on the recruitment of athletes as much as many other schools, athletic scholarships account for over \$10 million per year out of a total scholarship fund of a little under \$70 million (Stanford website). And in 2001, thirty collegiate football and basketball coaches earned more than \$1 million a year (Bok 2003b, 38).

But beyond the lures and the pitfalls of money, big college sports hold a number of other dangers for the integrity and reputation of American higher education. These have to do with questions of institutional ethics, academic honesty, and internal equity. Big college sports seem to be forever embroiled in scandals of one kind or another, from a football coach who is fired for “indecorous behavior” at a topless bar (CHE 5/5/03) to the recent suspension of one of the star players of Ohio State University for, among other things, the dubious loan to him of a fancy car by a local car dealer (New York Times 8/23/03). Sometimes, this escalates to real tragedy, as when a basketball player at Baylor College is accused of killing one of his teammates (International Herald Tribune 8/20/03), or when the chairman of the board of Bonaventura University commits suicide

apparently in utter frustration over a scandal involving the school's basketball team and leading to the firing of Bonaventura's president by the Board (CHE 8/22/03; cf. Swan 2003).

The same football player who was suspended at Ohio State is reported to have been given, as the only one in his class, an oral exam when he was unable to complete the written exam – one of many examples where universities compromise their academic standards in order to preserve the eligibility of their top athletes. Similar problems arise when a college's admissions standards are circumvented in order to enroll athletically promising applicants whose academic credentials are not quite up to snuff; Bok reports that, even at reputable institutions like Stanford and Duke, there is a consistent and significant difference in SAT scores between admitted student athletes and other admitted students (2003b, 41). More differences appear in graduation rates, even though there is considerable variation across universities. Overall, the rate of student athletes who graduate at least in six years has risen somewhat in recent years, but is still only 44 percent for basketball players and 54 percent for football players (CHE 9/5/03, A50). That is not dramatically lower than graduation rates for all students across all institutions, but still disturbing considering the extraordinary financial and tutoring support that student athletes receive.

The pathologies of big-time athletics, disturbing as they are, are particularly resistant to therapy – or such is at least the perception of most university leaders in the U.S. The power of alumni and rich donors, who identify vociferously with the athletic fortunes of “their” school, keeps even reputation-conscious universities like Stanford from drawing the boundaries of propriety around the athletic program too narrowly. Other, academically less reputable institutions like Ohio State or Alabama see their outstanding football programs as their one claim to fame, and persuade at least their own alumni and supporters that this is the right thing to do. In a sense, what is often and quite rightly stressed as one of the great traditions in American higher education – the loyalty and support of alumni and friends – becomes one of the main obstacles against better reconciling the demands of a challenging academic and an equally challenging athletic program.

Still, this pathology as well has to be put into perspective. Things could be, and indeed have been, considerably worse. They have vastly improved since the days when colleges went out into the streets, brought able-bodied young men into their stadium, put them into their college's uniform and let them play football for them – without ever having seen the inside of a classroom. Today, the fact that we know as much as we know about what still goes wrong in college sports is testimony to the very watchful attention that the NCAA pays to what is going on. That attention is certainly shared by the public at large: Among 21 goals for American higher education, athletics was considered the least important in a recent survey; more than three-quarters of the respondents find that athletes are not held to the same academic performance standards as other students; and 67

percent believe that colleges and universities put too much emphasis on sports (Suggs 2003a).

4. Conclusion

These three kinds of pathologies do, between them, raise a number of important questions about the state, and the future, of American higher education and perhaps not only American higher education. It is to these questions that I will now briefly turn in the conclusion of this paper.

I should add, however, that these three do by no means exhaust the full range of problematic conditions that have emerged alongside the strengths and accomplishments of higher education in the United States.

Among the pathologies – or contradictions – that a fuller account of contemporary American higher education would have to address are at least two others: the pathology of internationalism and the pathology of reform. Regarding the first, it is striking how an internationally highly respected and widely connected system of scholarship in American higher education coexists with an often remarkable degree of provincialism in curricular orientation, student body composition, foreign language skills, and international and intercultural competence. There are many and notable exceptions to this diagnostic, but on the whole, I doubt whether in terms of opening up higher education to the world, the United States is any more advanced than, say, Germany – which would not be a very high standard indeed. What greatly aggravates this situation in the post 9/11 world of American academia is the serious harm that is being done, in the name of national security, to the previously relatively free flow of both students and faculty from abroad into American institutions.

When I speak of “pathologies of reform” in American higher education, I have in mind the advice Gerhard Casper once gave me when I discussed with him a plan I had about writing a book on the reform of higher education in Germany and the United States. “Concentrate on Germany and forget about the U.S.,” he told me – because there is no reform in American higher education. That is a rather harsh judgment, and it seems to be contradicted by a constant stream of new ideas, experiments, courses and, indeed, institutions in this country’s higher education landscape. And yet, Casper does have a point. The major age of reform in American higher education was in the 19th century, with a fair degree of influence from what was then considered to be an exemplary system of higher education, namely, Germany. Since then, the system has grown and differentiated itself enormously; in its basic structural arrangements and its principal cultural straits, however, it has remained remarkably stable – more so than can be said of what has happened in Germany over the last ten years or so.

But let me return to some concluding observations on the three kinds of pathology on which this paper has focused. In assessing what I have said about the pathologies of equality, it is, of course, easy to jump to the conclusion that this persistent pattern of inequality in social and ethnic terms is simply the price we pay for the high quality and the peak accomplishments of our best institutions. That, I think, would be an overly hasty conclusion. I would argue that, considering the stark historical legacy of this country's class and ethnic cleavages, higher education has succeeded moderately, but significantly in overcoming at least part of that legacy and has opened up remarkable, if imperfect, avenues for social mobility for large numbers of seriously disadvantaged youths. The principal instruments for achieving this – affirmative action, need-blind admissions, and federal student aid (Shireman 2002) – are all under pressure as a result of political and financial constraints. At the same time, it would be quite instructive to imagine the social and ethnic composition of today's college population without the impact of these instruments over the past thirty years.

In preparing this paper, I have found my investigations of the pathologies of autonomy and accountability an interesting object lesson on the intimate relationship between these two, and between them and the condition of higher education financing. These relationships strike me as a particularly inviting topic for comparative analyses with other systems of higher education, such as Germany's. It clearly makes no sense to look at questions of institutional autonomy and accountability in higher education without examining the modes and patterns of financing. Furthermore, the shift in the roles of state and federal governments in the U.S. demonstrates both the inherent tension between autonomy and accountability in public systems of higher education and the interesting dynamics of checks and balances in a federal system.

Finally, the pathologies of intercollegiate athletics reveal a number of things, including an interesting discontinuity between societal norms and institutional interests. Clearly, as survey results show, the public enjoys the pageant of college sports, but is quite critical of the kinds of compromises universities make in order to remain competitive. What drives the pathologies of college sports is thus not so much the popular culture, but the fact that, for a variety of historical and economic reasons, higher education institutions are beholden to a remarkable degree to one particular and highly idiosyncratic constituency: their alumni and supporters. Here would seem to beckon the supreme test of the ability of American higher education to really change.

This may seem paradoxical, but my basic, and often expressed, optimism about American higher education is reinforced rather than diminished by this analysis of the system's various pathologies. For one thing, it would be unnatural for such a large and complex system to be without faults. More importantly, however, the strengths of the system still in my view far outweigh the weaknesses. And those strengths include the ability to deal, intelligently and actively, with one's own pathologies.

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