

## Teach the University

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It's hard not to be depressed if you care about the university, especially if you are in the humanities. Over the past three decades, higher education seems to have shed its humanistic trappings and morphed to "academic capitalism," in the apt phrase of Sheila Slaughter and Larry Leslie (1997), with research progressively governed more by corporations that fund and benefit from it, with faculty downsized and casualized, and with students reconstituted as consumers subject to escalating tuition and record levels of debt. Although classic statements like Cardinal Newman's *The Idea of a University* (1996 [1852]) place liberal learning at the center of higher education, the business school now seems central, capturing nearly a quarter of undergraduate majors (22 percent, from 8 percent before World War II), while traditional humanities like English, foreign languages, and philosophy have languished.<sup>1</sup>

Particularly for those of us who profess literature, whether a traditionalist valuing the humanistic canon or a progressive valuing the transformative potential of cultural study, what is to be done? Rather than meeting these changes with chagrin, resignation, or antidepressants, one thing that we can do, and I think that we should do programmatically, is to teach the university. There are no doubt other things to be done — indeed the past decade has seen a burgeoning scholarly critique of higher education, and groups like the Labor Party have forged policy initiatives like Free Higher Ed<sup>2</sup> — but one thing that is immediately at hand and fitting for us as professors of higher education is to teach courses foregrounding the literary, cultural, and social history of the university.

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We should do this for a number of good reasons, pedagogical and scholarly, humanistic and civic, practical and theoretical. First, the university is an eminently relevant topic. If over 70 percent of American citizens attend college at some point, it is not a sideline nor intra-academic concern but a central public issue. Next to health care, it is the most significant public institution of our day that speaks to the distribution of resources and the welfare of citizens. It is obviously relevant to our students, who have devoted considerable time, money, and effort, not to mention hopes and dreams, to it. Study of the university enjoins students to consider reflexively the ways and means of the world they are in, and what it does to and for them. Over the past fifteen years, we have given a good deal of attention to the ways in which gender, sexual, racial, ethnic, and class identities form us. Rightly so, but the university, as the primary liminal zone of our society between childhood and a full franchise in adult life, offers another crucial way to look at social formation.

To prompt students to reflect on how they are formed, where modern institutions come from, and how they work, is, I should think, a primary pedagogical goal of higher education and especially of criticism. It also has the pedagogical virtue of being nonprescriptive. That is, it does not arise from a preordained political imperative or any doxa but puts the topic in front of students, spotlighting the institution that otherwise seems, like our road system, part of the landscape. It is especially important that they are briefed on the details of the case, since they will be the future judges of it, as voters in and constituents of the states that support or lease out their universities.

Second, it is a quintessential topic in the tradition of the humanities. The idea of the university has a long philosophical and literary lineage, from Immanuel Kant and Cardinal Newman through modern figures like F. R. Leavis up to contemporary theorists like Jacques Derrida and Bill Readings. It is also a central locale in a wide range of literary works by prominent writers like Kingsley Amis, Mary McCarthy, Bernard Malamud, Edward Albee, and David Mamet, and in film by directors like Spike Lee and Gus Van Sant. Contrary to received opinion, fictions of the university are not a quaint sub-genre but, especially over the past twenty years, a major realm of representation. It is a fitting object of study—traditional and contemporary, theoretical and literary—for those of us in English.

Third, the university is a fundamental civic idea that speaks to the American conception of the public sphere and democracy. In Thomas Jefferson's classic definition, the primary purpose of education is to prepare citizens for their life in a democracy, Jefferson was an early proponent of the

university and held that it promote reflection, as Newman did, and job training, as many late-nineteenth-century figures like Charles W. Eliot of Harvard did, but its primary purpose should be especially “to form the statesmen, legislators and judges, on whom public prosperity and individual happiness are so much to depend” (1984 [1818]: 460), Jefferson’s concern with education stems from the concept of franchise. If a democracy requires educated participants — although a radical democrat, Jefferson believed that not everyone should participate, but only those prepared to do so — then it obligates the state to provide that education, Just as there should be no impediment such as a poll tax to exercise one’s franchise, there should be no impediment to attain education necessary for citizenship. Unlike European universities (where historically only a small slice of the population attended, although that has been changing in recent years), contemporary American higher education is premised on the idea of equal access and the modern state university is a distinctively American idea.

Fourth, we should teach the university to counteract our resignation or abjectness or, on the other hand, overinflated claims of our political “interventions.” We are teachers, so the one thing that we can do, with direct and appropriate effect, is to teach. Given that we are teachers, I think that we in fact have a special obligation to the students in front of us TTh or MWF to understand the university and the changes that it is undergoing. That obligation is even more pressing now because of the changes they are experiencing, notably the exponential increase in costs to become fully franchised citizens and the concordant exponential increase in student debt that burdens a majority of them to do so.<sup>3</sup>

Fifth, study of the university is an inherently interdisciplinary project. The discourse on the university turns precisely on the construal of the disciplines, how they were formed, and how jurisdictions and disputes among them should be adjudicated, in texts ranging from Kant’s *Conflict of the Faculties* (1992 [1798]) to Albee’s *Who’s Afraid of Virginia Woolf?* (1983 [1962]). The topic of the university brings together theoretical, historical, political, sociological, literary, and other cultural texts, texts that are mutually informing and make the most sense in conjunction. (One could also add texts on architecture, urban planning, demographics, and management, among others.) If one wants to teach in an interdisciplinary way, the university is a good place to start.

Because the university is the ground beneath our feet, we tend to take it for granted. Like most liminal institutions, it seems transparent or contentless, as students bide their time to get to the other side. Or it seems

like a rarefied space, an ivory tower, that is irrelevant to the rest of the world. But because it is such a central institution of contemporary life, as well as a fundamental humanistic object of study, we should teach it. At the least, it should be a staple topic for courses in every English department. A practical pedagogical virtue is that it can be taught on all levels, from first-term freshman comp to advanced graduate seminars. It is a course we need, and we especially need it now.

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I use the phrase “Teach the university!” deliberately evoking Gerald Graff’s (1990a, 1990b, 1992) persistent call through the 1990s to “Teach the conflicts!” Graff’s imperative had a number of virtues. In response to the incoherence of the curriculum that students encounter, Graff aimed to give it some coherence and to bridge camps, specializations, and discourses that otherwise seem never to come into contact. Specifically responding to the culture wars, Graff advised that, instead of resignation or arrogance, we meet detractors head on. Rather than a debilitating political event, he aimed to make the culture wars a productive pedagogical event. Responding to the theoretical focus of most academic criticism, Graff aimed to shift attention to teaching. Graff established his reputation as a provocative commentator on criticism and theory and as the author of the standard history of the discipline, *Professing Literature* (1988), but, unlike most high academics, he turned to the bread-and-butter activity of the classroom that actually comprises the largest share of our work.

Where I depart from Graff is that the heuristic of teaching the conflicts has no content, or its content is arbitrary. This was probably deliberate on Graff’s part, to deionize any charges of partisanship, as well as to put into practice a flexible principle that would apply across the curriculum. Its strength was its broad application, but that was also its weakness. At its most extreme, to teach the conflicts promotes an empty teaching machine; surely some conflicts are worth spending time on, and some not. This has been brought home in the recent controversy over intelligent design, whereby conservatives, including President Bush, justified its place in the classroom because we should “teach the controversy.” Graff no doubt meant something different from this—the relevant controversy would be the political one, not the scientific one, since evolution is settled science—but it exemplifies the overly capacious range of the motto and uses to which it might be put.<sup>4</sup> I think it part of our job to adjudicate the topics, conflicted or not, that deserve

attention, and to supply a content. The university is one topic worth spending time on.

Graff's intention was to make "teach the conflicts" an overarching pedagogical method on the order of John Dewey's early-twentieth-century imperative to base education on experiential learning rather than rote recitation. He wished no less than to, in the subtitle of *Beyond the Culture Wars* (1992), "revitalize American education." My proposal is more specific, practical, and concrete. It takes a more pragmatic view: that one can best change the curriculum on a course-by-course and topic-by-topic basis rather than installing an overarching method. If it has an orientation, it is one toward actual history, and toward the lived consequences of that history in the current practices of higher education, rather than toward theoretical methods or approaches.

While Graff prescribed a plan for education overall, he was responding to the particular development of literary studies and the way in which the literary curriculum had morphed over the past thirty years, split into the fiefdoms of theory, such as structuralism, deconstruction, feminism, Marxism, and so on. His effort was to put in place a metamodel to encompass all the disparate methods and approaches of literary theory; even if they disagreed, he wanted to bring them onto a common field of play. The plan of many of our courses reflects, I think, the substitution of method or approach for an object of study or content. For instance, signpost courses in English, such as first-year composition, sophomore or junior courses for majors that most departments have like Literary Analysis or Introduction to Literary Study, and graduate courses like Introduction to Scholarship, are usually organized not around a content but a menu of approaches. This lends flexibility, but it also makes it difficult to defend English as having a clear or distinctive basis. The university provides one object of study, the legacy of humanism, which, whatever our critiques, is still the residual basis of English and the university itself. I do not mean that we should reembrace humanism, but neither should we dismiss it out of hand; we might pose the question, What is living and what is dead in the humanistic idea of the university? In practical terms, the university is a useful topic because it is adaptable across a range of English courses: a topic that enjoins first-year students to think about the legacy of the humanities and what this institution they find themselves in is for, English majors to understand the formation of the liberal arts and disciplines like literature, and graduate students to consider the profession they are entering.

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One course that occasionally appears in English listings focuses on the academic novel, from, say, Dorothy Sayers's *Gaudy Night* (1936) through Kingsley Amis's *Lucky Jim* (1953) and David Lodge's *Small World* (1984) up to Richard Russo's *Straight Man* (1997). Such a course usually treats these as an entertaining subgenre (many are mysteries or comedies of manners), or perhaps as a subset of the modern novel, *Lucky Jim*, for instance, representing the postwar phase of the "Angry Young Men." This is not the kind of course I have in mind. While I would make the case for the import of fictive images of the university, such a course usually holds to the relatively narrow itinerary of a specialized novel course. The kind of course I am advocating calls for a much broader range, encompassing the theory, history, and sociology of the university as well as literature and film and aims to look at the humanistic tradition as well as actual incarnations of the university.

There are a variety of ways one could construe such a course, but I think it crucial that it take into account the major strands of discourse on the university. This is not only to fulfill an interdisciplinary imperative, but because the nature of the university, as a historical institution and as a nexus of discourse, requires a broad palette. Given the relative autonomy of literary forms, one might appropriately teach a history of the novel from the eighteenth through the twentieth centuries assigning only novels. Such a course might bracket historical context, but still there is a certain validity in focusing on the history of the genre and its codes, expectations, and permutations. The university presents a different kind of object of study. One of the traditional aims of literary study is to understand literariness; the aim of studying the university is to understand institutionality—and implicitly humanism. The university encompasses the varied senses of the word *institution*, including the cultural representation as well as the material phenomenon, and prescriptive guidelines as well as descriptive data. The university arises from the web of ideas, historical events, and cultural representations that combine, like vectors in a physical demonstration of the trajectory of an object, to make the institution.

There are several advantages to arranging a course that includes the spectrum of discourses. It helps students to understand the complex of humanism in much the way that Edward Said showed the complexity of Orientalism, as the conjunction of texts and institutions. It underscores the conjunction of historical context and representation—for instance, a film like *The Absent-Minded Professor* (1961) not only in relation to other fiction (the hapless professor), but in relation to the postwar university and the imperative for national science. The conjunctions mutually illuminate each

text and build a fuller and more accurate sense of the university. In practical, pedagogical terms, it lends a useful pattern of counterpoints, alternating difficult theoretical statements with novels, or the amassing of historical facts with films. A string of twelve novels over a term can get tedious, whereas the alternation of texts provides relief, both as a simple breath and as a way of highlighting concepts or motifs.

I would divide the range of discourse into four major groups. I'll describe them at length because most of the commentary focuses on only one group, and then often only partially. For instance, an essay might advert to a few well-known ideas without much sense of history, or a set of predictable novels without much sense of the range of fiction and film, not to mention of current data and demographics. (People in English always seem to know *Small World* and a few others, but not the full range of the subgenre, and there has been no comprehensive study of it.)<sup>5</sup> I have appended short, selected bibliographies for each group to give starting places for putting together a course.

First, "the idea of the university," which draws from philosophy or theory, and also from policy statements of university administrators and innovators. The "idea" has a formidable lineage in the humanities, the most prominent thread of which, from Kant's *Conflict of the Faculties* and Newman's Victorian classic *Idea of a University*, up to Bill Readings's *The University in Ruins* (1996) and Jacques Derrida's late essay, "The University without Condition" (2002), defends the university as a protected space for reflection, for students to explore knowledge and for faculty to conduct research without a bottom line. Newman, in the most famous instance of the idea, held that the purpose of the university was to give students a liberal or generalist knowledge of different bodies of knowledge, and inveighed against utilitarian purposes. Although this strand might seem idealistic, it still informs our horizon of expectation of the university, in distribution requirements, in conservative calls for a university without politics, in most criticisms of the corporate university, and implicitly in the practice of exempting young adults from the workplace while on campus for four years.

Alongside this classical idea, there are several other nodes of thinking about the university, notably one that focuses on its social purpose, such as Wilhelm von Humboldt's idea of propagating national culture and Thomas Jefferson's more democratic idea of producing the citizens and political actors of a democracy. Another node embraces utilitarian purposes, such as Charles W. Eliot's "The New Education" (Hofstadter and Smith 1961 [1869]), which not only announces the expansion of the American college to a research uni-

versity but also calls for the integration of professional training, and Clark Kerr's *The Uses of the University* (1994 [1962]), which rationalizes the amalgam that arose after World War II, serving the interests of utilitarian research as well as the liberal arts. There are also a number of less well known radical ideas, such as Alexander Meiklejohn's (2001 [1932]) fostering "experimental education," or even more extremely Ivan Illich's *Deschooling Society* (1971), which calls for the abandonment of bureaucratic education as we have it. One lesson of the ideas of the university is that there is no clearly settled idea, but that ideas are in contest, pitched between philosophical and pragmatic concerns and private and public interests.

The ideas of the university provide a way to talk about expectations that we assume, often tacitly. For example, if we expect the university to be an enclave, then we will be disturbed by its current corporatization; if we expect its purpose to be job training, then we might have little objection. The lineage of ideas sets out terms upon which to judge and assess particular incarnations of the university. It gives students a language to articulate some of the stakes in current policies and practices, to define its cultural images, and to discern the steps in its evolution, as well as some familiarity with the rationale for the liberal arts, the philosophical principles governing the disciplines, and theories of education.

The second strand of discourse is the history of the university. The institution arose in the Middle Ages in Europe, in Italy, Spain, France, and England, largely under the auspices of the Church. It was a clerical enclave, following two basic models, the "southern model," for instance from the University of Bologna, in which students ruled, and the Oxbridge model, in which the masters ruled. While the American college fashioned itself on aspects of European models, it developed its own specific forms, adapted to the distinctive traits of U.S. society. Whereas European universities were under the auspices of the Catholic Church, the early American college was diffuse, under the auspices of various Protestant sects. Whereas European universities were generally national in character, the early American college developed on a republican model, each state chartering a college (Harvard in Massachusetts, Yale in Connecticut, the College of New Jersey or Princeton in New Jersey, King's or Columbia in New York, etc.). While the American version looked to its British cousins in Oxbridge for curriculum, it developed an administrative structure more like that of the Scottish university, a top-down model with a president rather than masters ruling.

Through the early nineteenth century, the institution was still relatively rarefied part of American life, with only about 1 percent of the popula-

tion attending, largely the sons of the wealthy. The university took the shape we recognize only during the period after the Civil War. Modeled on the German research university (although the American version was oriented less toward pure research and more toward practical training), the post-Civil War university was designed to prepare citizens to staff massively expanding U.S. industrial enterprises with the engineers, managers, and other professionals they needed. The university grew steadily up to the 1930s (one factor was the admission of women, especially in more egalitarian state universities in the Midwest) but burgeoned in the wake of World War II. The period after the war is called the golden age of the American university, when the federal government infused it with unprecedented funding (earlier, the role of the federal government was comparatively minimal, focused on funding independent labs, and universities were wary of governmental influence), in part to prevent a return to the Great Depression, in part as a legacy of the New Deal, and in part continuing the massive mobilization of World War II, now fighting a Cold War. I have called this “the welfare state university” (2006a) because the university became a central wing of the postwar, liberal welfare state. While the story is still being written, it seems that there has been a new stage from the mid-1970s on, one of “academic capitalism.” I have called this “the post-welfare state university” because it accords with the reconfiguration of entitlements and the public sphere state funding to privatized services. One lesson from its history is that the American university has not arisen from a top-down idea but continually adapted to societal needs, along a sometimes fitful and always pragmatic path.

There is a sizeable body of historical work on the university, from general surveys to specific case studies, matching the diversity of the American instance. To select a few, John W. Thelin’s recent *A History of Higher Education in America* (2004) is a comprehensive overview, and accounts of particular periods might include Russel Nye’s “The Idea of an American College” (1960) on the early institution; Lawrence Veysey’s *The Emergence of the American University* (1965) and Clyde Barrow’s *The University and the Capitalist State* (1990) on the transition to the university in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries; and Roger L. Geiger’s *Research and Relevant Knowledge* (1993) and R. C. Lewontin’s “Creating the Cold War University” (1997) on the postwar moment. There are also a number of pithy accounts of the current moment, such as *Academic Capitalism* and Jennifer Washburn’s *University, Inc.* (2005). Besides these, there is any number of studies of particular topics, for instance Murray Sperber’s *Beer and Circuses* (2000) on college sports.

A good deal of contemporary scholarship, such as Readings's oft-mentioned *University in Ruins*, centers on the idea of the university much more than on its actual history (while Readings constructs a historical arc, his key signposts are Kant and von Humboldt, and he diagnoses the problems of the current university as conceptual, no longer centered on Reason or national culture but on "Excellence"). The often ungainly history of the American university provides a counterpoint to the metaphysical tenor and partial focus of the discourse of ideas. It gives students a sense of the way in which the American university is not an ivory tower but integrated in society, of how it has responded to specific social needs, and of how it reflects the multivarious elements of U.S. society. Implicitly, a course on the university offers a sketch of American history, culture, and politics, providing some remedy to the complaint that students don't know enough history.

The third strand of discourse is more characteristically in the province of English, encompassing the academic novel as well as the many other cultural representations of the university in drama, film, and television. I'll summarize this constellation, for the sake of brevity, as "university fiction." University fiction is usually thought to be a peripheral subgenre, with a tropism toward the whodunit or comedy of manners, and, like other subgenres, directed toward a coterie audience — mostly of academics. But, particularly over the past fifteen years, the university has become a standard locale of American fiction. Indeed, a surprisingly broad group of prominent, contemporary writers, including Rita Mae Brown, Michael Chabon, James Hynes, Alisa Kwitney, Jonathan Lethem, John L'Heureux, David Mamet, Lorrie Moore, Tim O'Brien, Tom Perrotta, Francine Prose, Richard Russo, Cathleen Schine, Jane Smiley, Neil Stephenson, Robert Stone, and Donna Tartt, as well as older writers like Tom Wolfe and Phillip Roth, have written novels centered on students or professors, and many prominent directors, including Curtis Hanson, Amy Heckerling, Spike Lee, John Singleton, and Gus Van Sant, have made films staged on campus.

The academic novel does have an established tradition that includes standards such as *Gaudy Night*, *Lucky Jim*, and *Small World*, and, in the American grain, Mary McCarthy's *Groves of Academe* (1952), Bernard Malamud's *A New Life* (1961), and Amanda Cross's *Death in a Tenured Position* (1981). College also figures as a formative part of some modernist bildungsromans, such as James Joyce's *Portrait of the Artist* (1916) or F. Scott Fitzgerald's *This Side of Paradise* (1920) (the latter are usually called "campus novels," more centered on students, as opposed to "academic novels," centered on faculty).<sup>6</sup> But this new wave of writing, I think, registers the cultural position of the university

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in American life. If the novel represents life and over 70 percent of Americans now attend college at some point, then it seems only fitting that the university would take a prominent place in our cultural imaginary. It also seems fitting that, if the novel depicts the development of character, novelists would focus on the formative years that people spend in college. In addition, postmodern fiction often draws on what had been lesser subgenres, such as science fiction or the mystery, so it makes sense that it would also assimilate the academic novel. For instance, Jonathan Lethem has adapted the hardboiled detective story to compose the more identifiably literary (and National Book Award–winning) *Motherless Brooklyn* (1999). Similarly, in the less well-known *As She Climbed across the Table* (1997), he adapts sci-fi and the academic novel.

Sometimes fictions of the university might seem frivolous, in the vein of the broad parody of *Animal House* (1978), which has become an archetype in the cultural imaginary. But even entertainments like *Animal House*, or derivatives like *PCU* (1994), *Road Trip* (2000), and *Old School* (2003), tell us something about the public image and expectation of the university. Though replete with sex and drinking, *Animal House* presents the university as a free space to experiment and develop, in a sense instantiating Newman's enclave, and *Road Trip* carries out one version of Newman's imperative for self-discovery and independent thinking, with its plot turning on a scene of learning philosophy. In fiction, the university is generally not depicted as an ivory tower; it is a transformative zone toward full participation in adult life and in fact it is often a public sphere in its own right—especially in films like *Higher Learning* (1995) and *PCU*. University fiction, even in parody, takes the social position of the university seriously.

University fiction acts out some of the ideas of the university. It also foregrounds some of the public expectation of the university that falls under the radar of the scholarly tradition and its official line of ideas; we need to consider these unofficial ideas alongside those issued from a largely professorial tradition. University fiction likewise animates some of the history of the university; for instance, *Who's Afraid of Virginia Woolf?* (1962) dwells not just on the toxic relationship of the main couple (famously played by Elizabeth Taylor and Richard Burton in the film version) but on the rise of science in the postwar years, or Jane Smiley's *Moo* (1995) sketches in the complexity of the corporate university, from freshman to provost. This strand also provides a change of pace—at the least, some amusement in the march of a course, amid more ponderous historical and theoretical texts. And it can provide a way to talk about the conventions of narrative, like the bildungsroman or different subgenres and types.

The fourth strand of discourse encompasses sociological knowledge, such as statistical profiles, governmental policy documents, ethnographic surveys, current news reports, and other reports on the university. This is perhaps an ungainly category, but it generally captures social scientific rather than literary ways of adducing knowledge of the institution. One might, for example, look at the statistics on the student body and the rise in women or simply the expansion from the rarefied early American college to the postwar university. Or, to show students the material conditions of their learning, one might look at annual College Board reports on the steep increase in tuition, the decrease in government funding, and the proportion of federal aid that has shifted from grants (like Pell Grants) to student loans. They might know that they have a \$20,000 debt, but they probably don't know that almost no one before 1980 experienced such constraints. Or one could look at ethnographies of student life, the kind of activities students do, where they come from and where they hope to go.

There is a great deal of sociological knowledge of the university, from Carnegie Commission reports to current College Board compilations and Department of Education statistics (readily available online). There are also regular news reports, college announcements, and hard facts like annual budget allocations. At the turn of the 1990s a good deal of discourse dealt with the culture wars, multiculturalism, and so-called political correctness; through the later 1990s those debates seemed to fade and the problems of academic labor and academic capitalism rose to center stage. I expect that there will be more attention to tuition and the consequent rise in student and parent loan debt, a relatively new way to fund college, the bills for which are coming due.

This strand arms students with facts and figures to go along with ideas, history, and images. It gives the quantitative data to back up the impressions they might otherwise have gleaned, for instance, from the FAFSA forms they have to fill out each year for financial aid. It also brings to the fore policy debates, from all angles — from the news, from legislators, from professors, and from students — that immediately bear on the political economy of higher education.

Armed with all of these strands, students can see how Newman's idea of a liberal arts refuge might inform their expectation of four years in a fraternity, or how it is a pipe dream while they are working thirty hours a week. They can test the post-World War II idea of meritocracy, how it squares with current statistics on who goes to college (the least qualified quarter of the richest cohort is more likely to go to college than the most qualified quarter

of the poorest, so it's not looking good), and how it bears on admissions and aid policies (which have slid to merit- rather than need-based). Or they can examine the paucity of representations of community colleges, where the largest expansion of American higher education has taken place and which is a distinctive feature of the U.S. system.

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The best way to arrange a course is to make it your own, but there are two frames that I find especially useful. One is as a historical survey. One might focus on the development from the horse and carriage of the early American colonial colleges to the minivan of the multiversity, or hark even farther back to medieval histories alongside Chaucer's "Clerk's Tale" or *Hamlet* (not inconsequentially characterized as a university student), to give students a sense of the long-term development of the institution. Or one might shorten that to focus on the rise of the modern research university from the antebellum period, or even the 1940s, onward. The virtue of a survey is that it offers a composite picture of historical development. One deficit of surveys is that they sometimes seem like plodding marches, but alternating among ideas, historical accounts, fiction, and data counteracts that.

Another frame is to organize a course around particular issues. One issue that seems especially apt for undergraduate courses is student life, looking at novels like Tom Perrotta's *Joe College* (2000) and films like *Animal House* alongside historical accounts like Helen Horowitz's *Campus Life* (1987) and recent statistics of student debt. Another issue, especially apt for graduate students, is academic labor; one might look at Marc Bousquet's "The Waste Product of Graduate Education" (2002), Don Snyder's memoir *The Cliff Walk* (1997), Susannah Moore's novel *In the Cut* (1995) (in which the protagonist is an adjunct), and statistics on PhDs and jobs.<sup>7</sup> Yet another focus might be law, from the 1819 Supreme Court decision establishing the status of Dartmouth College as a private entity (a decision that is the basis of corporate law in the United States), the Morrill Act of 1862 establishing land grants, the 1944 Serviceman's Readjustment Act (better known as the GI Bill), the Bayh-Dole Act of 1980 allowing universities to hold patents, and films like *The Paper Chase* (1973). There are obviously many other issues that one could focus on, such as college sports, the image of the teacher, or sexual politics and the history of women in the university. While a historical survey offers a more comprehensive picture, focusing on an issue might enable a course to be more responsive to what's most pressing to students and engage a particular teacher's interests and expertise.

One additional thing that I try to do is have students look at their own campuses — at the ground beneath their feet, as it were. For instance, at Carnegie Mellon University, where I teach, there is a push to develop auxiliary campuses in other parts of the world (the off-campus location in Qatar puts the English department well into the black). This will likely be a larger trend, universities branding their names and exporting them internationally, so that they will become even more like Starbucks or McDonald's, corporations sprouting profitable franchises around the globe. To look at one's home campus, I encourage students to use innovative methods, beyond the ones we are familiar with in English — largely of going to the stacks — and to do surveys of students or interviews with faculty, or to pester the registrar for data. For instance, they might survey students on loans, or simply on facets of student life, or they might interview grad students and faculty to see how much work they do, what kind of work they do, how much they get paid for it, and what they expect from it. (This typically surprises undergrads, although it depresses grad students.) The goal is that they might build their own archive and bring to the fore knowledge that otherwise might be nebulous or forgotten.

The university is obviously a rich topic, both for organizing a course and for giving students a way to consider what this institution is for. It is not an ivory tower but a main avenue into public life. Indeed, the university is a primary public sphere itself—where else do people discuss ideas, history, and representation than in college? The contest over the representation of the university is a crucial part of determining where the university will go, so it behooves us to put it in front of our students, since they are our constituency. Thus I enjoin you to “Teach the university!”

## Notes

1. See Brint 2002, which charts the growth not only of business but also of other practical disciplines and job-oriented majors. English has fared better than most other humanities, although in the past thirty years it has declined from a high point in the late 1960s of 7 percent to 4 percent now (see Geiger 2006); history, philosophy, and languages have declined more sharply (Digest of Educational Statistics 2005).
2. For a survey of the vast body of scholarship over the past decade and for some of the proposals to remedy current problems, see my “Post-Welfare State University” (2006a). See also Tamara Draut's *Strapped* (2005), which proposes a kind of need-based voucher system called “Contract for College.”
3. See my report on the appalling, exponential increase in student debt over the past two decades, “The Pedagogy of Debt” (2006b).

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4. Graff himself notes his dismay at the use of his motto in “To Debate or Not to Debate Intelligent Design?” (2005).
5. Elaine Showalter’s recent *Faculty Towers: The Academic Novel and Its Discontents* (2005) purports a span over decades since the 1950s but seems largely unaware of the early tradition of university fiction (see note 6) and of contemporary fiction.
6. There is a sizeable but now mostly forgotten tradition of college novels from the early twentieth century, such as Owen Johnson’s *Stover at Yale* (1911), and some academic novels, such as Percy Marks’s *The Plastic Age* (1924). There are also a number of early films, such as Buster Keaton’s *College* (1927) and the Marx brothers’ *Horsefeathers* (1932).
7. For a good plan of a course for grad students, focused on the profession of English, see Downing 2005.

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