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Class Struggle in Higher Education

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Class Struggle in Higher Education

Dan Clawson and Mishy Leiblum

University of Massachusetts Amherst

Public higher education has undergone a process similar to that in the national polity: a one-sided struggle by those with power to shape the institution to be more market driven, more focused on what will generate (non-state) revenues, more dominated by top administrators, and less concerned about the working class and people of color. This article examines these trends nationally with a focus on one case study, the University of Massachusetts Amherst, the state's public higher education flagship university. First the article examines the concentration of power in fewer hands. Second it looks at the squeeze in the middle, the way cuts in state appropriations coincide with increases in tuition and fees. Third, it examines attacks on the working class and people of color through changing the rules on affirmative action, reducing support services for students of color and others, and shifting away from needs-based financial aid toward an increased reliance on so-called merit-based financial aid. Fourth, the article describes a vigorous attempt to contest these changes, which has won some victories and has certainly helped to raise awareness of the class issues involved in the transformation of public universities. Finally, the article assesses both the main trends and the efforts to contest those changes.

Class is not simply taught (or not taught) in the classroom; it also is enacted and embodied in educational institutions themselves. Perhaps nowhere are the changes more dramatic than in four year colleges and (especially) in public universities (especially flagship universities). Public universities that had at one time been accessible to many of the citizens of the state are becoming more class-stratified and are increasingly operating on a model that attempts to offer a poor imitation of a for-profit corporation, with highly paid and all-controlling executives at the top, affluent Whites as the students-of-choice, reduced numbers of full-time faculty and staff and an increase in contract and contingent workers, and something approaching a de facto exclusion of people of color, the poor, and the working-class. Our ability to teach about these issues will be limited unless it is evident that we are also acting to contest them. Students will not take us seriously or believe that the issues matter unless they believe that what they see is not inevitable but instead has been shaped by human action and can be changed by alternative human choices.

This article is about these trends nationally, with an emphasis on the institution with which we are especially familiar, the University of Massachusetts (UMass) Amherst, which provides a case study of larger national (and global) trends. One author (Leiblum) has been an undergraduate student, and is currently a graduate student at the university and was centrally involved in a

range of public higher education issues during the past year as the elected student member of the university-wide Board of Trustees. The other author (Clawson) has taught at the university for 28 years, and recently was president of the faculty union, the Massachusetts Society of Professors (affiliated with the National Education Association).

NATIONAL TRENDS TOWARD PRIVATIZATION

The changes in higher education are both a consequence of and a contributor to larger changes in the political economy. For about 30 years after World War II, the United States and most of the rest of the world enjoyed a period of unprecedented economic growth, based on strong central governments that managed and regulated the economy, strong unions and frequent strikes, controls on international flows of capital, expansion of basic social services and what has been referred to as the “social wage” (including pensions, education, health care), and a widespread consensus on at least mildly social democratic policies. During this period of government regulation, the economy boomed and prosperity was widely shared: Average family income more than doubled and incomes became more equal, as those at the bottom benefited even more. In the United States this was a period of remarkable expansion in higher education, especially public higher education: The total number of earned degrees conferred (at all levels from Associates to Doctorates) increased by 249% from 1960 to 1975 (Clawson, 2003; Collins & Yeskel, 2005; National Center for Education Statistics [NCES], 2006). This expansion can be partially attributed to the adoption of the Serviceman’s Readjustment Act of 1944 (more commonly referred to as the GI Bill), which created a single-payer system that provided the full cost of tuition and a living stipend for returning veterans. Through the GI Bill, an expansion of federal research funds for higher education, and the socialization of educational costs, this 30-year period embodied the values and growth of the post-war welfare state, causing commentators to refer to this time in the history of American higher education as the “welfare state university” (Williams, 2006).

Beginning in the late 1970s, however, a coordinated business assault began to replace this post-war welfare state with what has come to be referred to as neo-liberalism. As Ronald Reagan (1981) explained, in his view and the view of other neo-liberals, government was not the solution, government was the problem. All government programs and all government regulations were suspect. Taxes and the size of government should be reduced, and as much as possible markets or market-like mechanisms should replace government funding and social services that attempt to equalize incomes and opportunities. Included in this was an emphasis on so-called “free trade” globally, a free trade that permitted the unrestricted flow of capital but which sharply limited the flow of labor (although, by free trade economic theory, workers as well should be able to move anywhere without restriction). Although these neo-liberal policies were touted as a recipe for economic growth, the economy (in the United States and in the Global South (previously called the Third World) has performed substantially worse during the neo-liberal period, and incomes for the majority of the population have stagnated. These larger changes in the national and global political economy frame the changes in higher education. It is difficult to imagine how a dramatic restructuring of higher education would be possible without associated changes in the larger political economy.¹

In higher education the number of degrees conferred also has stagnated: Having increased by 249% in the 15 years prior to neo-liberalism, in the next 15 years, from 1975 to 1990, the number

of degrees conferred increased by only 16%, and the proportion of state budgets devoted to public higher education decreased (U.S. Census Bureau, 2002). The change from mild social democracy to neo-liberalism also has meant a shift from the public to the private sector. Consider enrollments by first-time first-year students. From 1960 to 1975, the proportion of these students in the public sector increased from 62.6% to 81.7%, driven by a rapid expansion in public sector two year colleges. (Considering only four-year colleges, the proportion in the public sector increased from 55.9% to 66.2%.) From 1975 to 1990 the public sector proportion declined (from 81.7% to 78.4%), and then declined again from 1990 to 2004 (from 78.4% to 73.6%), the most recent year for which complete data are available (NCES, 2005). (Considering only four-year colleges and universities, the public proportion declined from 66.2% in 1975 to 64.5% in 1990 and 62.2% in 2004.)

It is not only that public sector enrollment, which once grew faster than the private sector, is no longer growing as fast; even more of a concern is that public universities are becoming less and less public. The president of the University of Michigan famously said that they used to be a state institution, then became a state-assisted institution, and were on the way to becoming a state-located institution. Former Chancellor John Lombardi of the University of Massachusetts Amherst amended this, remarking that public universities have not only gone from being “state-supported to state-assisted to state-affiliated, sliding toward state-located,” but that they may soon be “state-impeded” (Peirce & Johnson, 2005). Similarly, Graham Spanier, president of Pennsylvania State University, has referred to what we are seeing as “public higher education’s slow slide toward privatization” (Dillon, 2005, ¶2).

Nationally colleges and universities are reducing their reliance on state appropriations, as a smaller and smaller fraction of state budgets is allocated to public higher education. Higher education is less seen as a public good and more as a service to be paid for by consumers of research or education. As a result, institutions push costs onto students, and the aim becomes to generate research grants and private donations from wealthy alumnae. If the priority is to raise revenues, then administrators go where the money is, and the university increasingly mirrors the class structure of the society as a whole. Since the top 1% of the population has more wealth than the combined wealth of the bottom 90% of the population (United for a Fair Economy, 2006), the priority must be to please that top 1%—which is largely composed of corporate interests. Needless to say, what the top 1% considers most important, and what they are most willing to fund, is not at all the same as what the working class (or the middle class, for that matter) considers important. Priorities (such as providing pathways to higher education for students of color; providing funds for English, Women’s Studies, and African American Studies programs; and providing affordable campus housing and meal plans) do not rank high for most wealthy private donors, and such priorities do not even exist in the realm of corporate research dollars.

It is important to keep in mind the class stratification built into the institutional structure of higher education. Some elite private colleges and universities admit only 15% to 20% of applicants, charge more than \$40,000 a year, and have endowments per student in the hundreds of thousands of dollars (at Grinnell, almost \$1 million per student [Blumenstyk, 2006; Selingo & Brainerd, 2006]). Other private colleges charge high tuitions but have little or no endowment income and are not at all selective, admitting almost all students. Public research universities, especially flagship campuses, have somewhat selective admissions (admitting perhaps 50% to 70% of applicants), charge substantial tuition and fees (the 2007–2008 rate at UMass Amherst was \$9,921 for in-state students, and \$17,399 including room and board), may or may not have

significant endowments (but in no case compare to the per student endowments of elite private institutions), and receive significant public financing (although, as we will discuss, this is in decline). Two-year colleges recruit a working-class student body, have more returning and part-time students, cost less (in Massachusetts, \$3,477 [Sacchetti, 2007]), and typically are dependent on public financing.

Our article is organized in five sections. First we examine the class structure at the top, including both the increased inequality on campus and the concentration of power in fewer hands. Second we report on the squeeze in the middle, the way cuts in state appropriations coincide with increases in tuition and fees. Students end up paying substantially more, but getting less, since the number of faculty and staff has been reduced at the same time that costs have gone up. Third, we note that these processes have coincided with obstacles to the working class (or middle class, for that matter) and people of color through changing the rules on affirmative action, reducing support services for students of color and others, and shifting away from needs-based financial aid toward an increased reliance on so-called merit-based financial aid. Fourth, however, we describe a vigorous attempt to contest these changes, which has won some victories and has certainly helped to raise awareness of the class issues involved in the transformation of the university. Fifth we sum up and assess both the main trends and the efforts to contest those changes.

THE CLASS STRUCTURE AT THE TOP

The university was to be a self-governing institution, a repository of learning and study that communicated those ideas to a wider public as it educated students. It was to be evaluated in terms of its ability to protect and preserve existing knowledge, to develop new knowledge, to educate the electorate, and to develop new scholars. The financing of the university was not to be its central concern; power, prestige, and authority were understood to be based on knowledge and learning. The university was to be governed by its faculty, since only the faculty had the knowledge and ability to evaluate both students and each other. A remnant of this idea persists in those places with the (increasingly “out-dated”) requirement that all senior administrators, at least on the academic side, must be tenured full professors.

In the traditional model students were not seen as “consumers” whose preferences should drive course offerings and the evaluation of faculty but rather as potential scholars who sought to be challenged and educated (not “trained,” a notion that implies a rote process). At more advanced levels students were apprentices to a master, seeking to be mentored.

This model of the university was far from egalitarian, and colleges and universities traditionally provided access for an elite few, but the structure was explicitly and intentionally not market driven. Students were presumed to need faculty guidance and mentoring rather than to be seen as consumers. Administrators had power and authority, but that derived from the faculty and from the fact that administrators were recognized as leading scholars with moral authority (Aronowitz, 2000; Wolff, 1969).

Yet the model of the elite, liberal arts university is not the only historical model in the U.S. With the federal Morrill Acts (1862, 1890), the first of which was signed into law by Abraham Lincoln in 1862, thousands of acres of land were provided to each state, the proceeds of which were invested in an endowment fund for “land grant” state colleges that provided

training in mechanical arts, agriculture and military—in addition to classical—studies to the rural and working classes (which at the time referred to white, working-class men). Over time, such institutions were expanded horizontally (to include more of an emphasis on the social sciences) and vertically (to offer increased levels of graduate study). With the Civil Rights and Women's Liberation Movements, colleges and universities of all sorts were pressured by students and these social movements to increase access to women and students of color, to broaden their curriculum to include perspectives historically excluded from academia, and to adopt models of shared governance that both responded to and channeled student discontent (Parenti, 1995). Due to their democratic mandate to provide service and access to the people of their respective states, these land grant institutions were particularly vulnerable—if only symbolically—to such outside pressures. Yet 30 years of assault on anything “public” has reversed the conditions that allowed for many of these gains. The ethos of recent years is captured by Grover Norquist's famous remark: “My goal is to cut government in half in twenty-five years, to get it down to the size where we can drown it in the bathtub” (Dreyfuss, 2001, ¶4).

Today the university explicitly models itself on the corporation, with the logic of the market driving all decisions (Johnson, Kavanagh, & Mattson, 2003; Kirp, 2003; Slaughter & Leslie, 1997; Washburn, 2005). The chancellor or president is the Chief Executive Officer, and just like corporate CEOs, is compensated accordingly. *The Chronicle of Higher Education* recently (November 24, 2006) reported that salaries for university heads have increased rapidly, far more rapidly than those of faculty or staff. The average pay for the president of a research university (including both private and public) increased by 39.6% from 2000–2001 to 2004–2005, to \$497,046. (After adjusting for inflation this is an increase of 23.3%) Furthermore, colleges and universities are increasingly incorporating bonuses into administrators' contracts, again bringing a market rationality to bear. Rewarding those at the top parallels the priorities in the corporate world. At the University of Massachusetts Amherst, at a time when students are paying greatly increased tuition and fees, and faculty numbers are down substantially, the university insists that it cannot afford to freeze tuition and fees, and cannot afford to restore faculty cuts—but it does have money to increase the salaries of top administrators. Last year the chancellor was given a \$97,000 pay raise, an increase of more than 38%. Recently, the UMass system's president's total compensation package was brought to roughly half a million, making him the highest paid “public servant” in the Commonwealth (Norris, 2007). Additional administrators were hired, and existing administrators were given major pay increases, exceeding those for faculty or staff. At the University of Massachusetts Amherst, from 2004 to 2006 there was a 21% increase in the number of top administrators, and a 51% increase in their total salaries, such that the university is now paying an additional \$4 million a year in administrator salaries²—enough to fund 50 tenure-track faculty members at an average salary of \$80,000 a year each,³ or to relieve the cost “gap” for approximately 1,500 of the most financially needy undergraduate students at the University.⁴

In the national context, the faculty and staff have come to be judged on and driven by their ability to raise funds. What matters is not knowledge or learning for its own sake but whether or not an activity can bring in revenue. The public, land grant mission and history of our campuses is regarded as irrelevant, perhaps embarrassing. Consider six examples of privatization and the penetration of the market logic into all decisions. First, at UMass Amherst and elsewhere new residence halls have been constructed with the explicit aim of attracting affluent out-of-state students who will pay the full cost (and generate revenues the institution can retain) (University of Massachusetts Amherst, 2006). In Amherst, the construction cost exceeds \$100,000 per student

occupant. This created a dilemma: Should the cost of these rooms be substantially higher than the cost of other dorm rooms, creating an explicit class system in room assignments, or should all students be required to pay higher residence hall fees in order to fund the cost of the new dorms built to attract the affluent? Similarly, universities everywhere emphasize building plush gyms, dining commons, and recreation centers, all with the explicit aim of marketing each campus to a particular demographic of students who have the luxury to choose their schools based on the campus' luxury amenities.⁵

Second, across the country faculty are increasingly judged not on their scholarship but rather on their ability to generate external grant money. What matters is not the respect of your peers or, for that matter, the public but rather the willingness of some external source to provide funding. To some degree grants from peer-reviewed federal sources (such as the National Science Foundation or the National Institutes of Health) do depend on evaluation by peers, but even those grants are heavily influenced by political priorities. Grants from private foundations, and especially from corporations, are driven by a very different metric (Washburn, 2005).

Third, where once universities pursued knowledge for its own sake, now they put a premium on knowledge that could be patented, and especially on those patents that might generate revenue. This is a dramatic change from a generation ago.

In 1955, when newscaster Edward R. Murrow asked Jonas Salk who owned the patent to his polio vaccine, he famously replied, "Well, the people, I would say. There is no patent. Could you patent the sun?" Harvard, Chicago, Yale, Johns Hopkins, and Columbia all had policies on the books that explicitly forbade patenting of biomedical research. (Washburn, 2005, p. 52)

The Bayh-Dole Act of 1980, little noticed or contested at the time, made it possible for universities to patent inventions and knowledge that resulted solely or in part from federal funding. Today universities can and do patent the human genome, or plants used by aboriginal peoples in traditional healing. The University of California College of Natural Resources struck a deal with Novartis that, in exchange for \$25 million, gave Novartis first rights to a substantial fraction of university research and required faculty to sign confidentiality pledges. As one California state senator pointed out, if faculty came upon results that indicated a danger to the public, it appeared that faculty would be forbidden to disclose that information without permission from Novartis (Washburn, 2005). At UMass Amherst, the faculty member whose results show the greatest promise of future patent revenue has had his salary increased from \$223,337 in March 2005 to \$430,267 in October 2006.⁶ Needless to say, no such rewards are given to those who star in promoting diversity or generating student community service. Rhetoric is one thing, but to see what really matters to a university, follow the money. Total university income from patents nationally brings in more than \$1 billion a year (Blumenstyk, 2005).

Fourth, universities have expanded on-line education, almost always with the intent of generating revenue through re-structuring class relations. A 2005 national report found that the number of on-line enrollments doubled from 2002 to 2004, climbing to 937,000 a year (Carnevale, 2005). Some top universities—most notably the Massachusetts Institute of Technology and Yale—have made many of their course materials available for free to the entire world. Most universities, however, have introduced on-line courses with the hope of generating revenue.⁷ In a particularly flagrant example, at UMass Amherst in the College of Social and Behavioral Sciences, a new Associate Dean position was created specifically to expand on-line education. The new dean

explained to the faculty that unfortunately, due to the shortage of tenure-track faculty (a shortage that contrasts with the expansion of administrators and administrative salaries), many students could not get into the courses needed to meet basic university distribution requirements. Therefore, the university was offering faculty \$5,000 to develop a course, and license it to the university so that thereafter the college could hire adjuncts or graduate students at minimal pay to teach the course using the syllabus, readings, exams, and materials developed by the faculty member. Students who were frozen out of the university's regular course offerings because they were all filled to capacity, would be able to take the courses on-line *at an additional charge*. This has a double effect on the class structure: On the supply end, the university moves from full-time tenure-track faculty to part-time poorly paid adjuncts with no benefits; on the demand side, students can get into a course *if* they are willing and able to pay extra to do so. (Not to mention the creation of yet another well paid administrator.)

Fifth, both comparisons of campus standing and internal allocations within a campus, are increasingly driven by rating systems and so-called "benchmarking." National rankings in places such as *The Princeton Review*, *U.S. News and World Report*, *Newsweek*, and the Association of American Universities are used as measures of an institution's quality, even though much of their ranking is determined by purely quantifiable measures such as fundraising and students' standardized test scores rather than by more holistic measures. Nationally, departments are required to produce standardized data so that administrators can assess their "quality" as compared to departments on other campuses. Within institutions, benchmarks are a form of pseudo-market, a way of measuring departments and forcing them to explicitly compete against each other, with rewards (for example, permission to hire new faculty) going to those departments that score highest. Just like a market system, the aim is to create winners and losers, increasing the stratification within the university. This is combined with a system that gives top administrators increased control over all aspects of faculty hiring. Hiring decisions were once made almost entirely by the faculty in the department concerned; now those decisions must be reviewed and approved by those at the top.

Lastly, the privatized university is increasingly replacing the model of shared governance with one of top-down decision-making. This has particularly challenged student victories of the late 1960s, which included laws and policies that allowed students to sit on Boards of Trustees, expanded student governments' degree of responsibility over all matters pertaining to student affairs, created student seats on a variety of campus councils, and allowed student governments to collect student fees (their equivalent of union membership dues) (Eaton, 2002). While some of these measures were seen as concessionary or token, they have provided resources and a degree of autonomy for student organizing. However, anecdotal reports indicate that across the country, campus administrations are working to pacify student governments and to constrain their autonomy over student fees, leaving students with little real power in campus decision-making. Student democratic processes—like all democratic processes—are imperfect, but student decision-making over substantial sums of money is a valuable learning process that has often resulted in the creation of powerful, student-funded advocacy programs. At the University of Massachusetts Amherst, for example, it was student money that funded the outspoken Office of ALANA Affairs (ALANA = African, Latin, Asian, Native American), yet as one example of the Vice Chancellor for Student Affairs' repeated interventions in student government decisions, the student government was prohibited from hiring an additional staff person for this office, and the student government was ultimately prevented from funding the office at all.

THE SQUEEZE IN THE MIDDLE

Across the nation, in almost every year, state appropriations for higher education increase, but they are being reduced in relative terms. First, a smaller fraction of state budgets is being allocated to higher education, as other priorities—prisons and health care—crowd out higher education. Second, as costs for higher education escalate, a smaller proportion of a university's total revenue comes from state appropriations. This dual structural squeeze coerces universities to raise tuition and fees and to place increased reliance on all possible means of generating revenue (as discussed above). States would need to increase their appropriations by one-third in order to allocate the same proportion of their budgets to higher education in 2007 as in 1980. In consequence, at the University of California Berkeley, for example, over a 12-year period, state support shrank from 50% to 34% of the University's budget (Washburn, 2005). A report by the State Higher Education Executive Officers found that state funding per student in 2004 was \$5,721, a decline from the 1981 (constant dollar) figure of \$6,094, and the lowest level in 25 years (Dillon, 2005). The most recent data from the Digest of Education Statistics end in 2001, but from 1981 to 2001 current-fund expenditures per full-time-equivalent student increased (in constant dollars) by 66.0% for public four-year colleges, and by 48.4% for community colleges (NCES, 2005). Since costs per student increased rapidly, while state support per student declined, the consequence was the privatization of public higher education.

Massachusetts, and especially the flagship campus at Amherst, offers an example of this. From 2001 to 2004 the Commonwealth decreased its funding for public higher education by more than any other state, a 32.6% reduction (adjusted for inflation) (Senate Task Force Report, 2005). The Fiscal Year 2006 state appropriation is lower than the Fiscal Year 2003 appropriation (University of Massachusetts Amherst, 2007). Whereas in 2001, approximately 40% of the Amherst campus' budget came from the commonwealth, that figure currently hovers around 20%. Massachusetts now spends more incarcerating its citizens than on its public colleges and universities; a quarter century ago it spent four times as much on higher education as on the prison system (Massachusetts Taxpayers Foundation, 2003). These are indications of ruling class priorities: controlling minorities and the poor is more important than providing them an opportunity for education and development.

The state has relied on students and their parents to make up for the shortfall in state appropriations. Consider the UMass Amherst budget. In Fiscal Year 2003, the state appropriation was \$226,793,544, that is, 3.08 times as much as the amount paid in Mandatory Student Fees, \$73,557,228 (University of Massachusetts Amherst, 2007).⁸ This year (Fiscal Year 2007) the state appropriation is not even one-and-a-half times as much as the amount paid in mandatory student fees: students are paying \$68,335,559 more, and the state appropriation is \$19,682,491 less (University of Massachusetts Amherst, 2007). At the turn of the millennium (in 2000–2001) in-state students were paying \$5,212 in tuition and fees; this year (2006–2007) they are paying \$9,595—an increase of 84% (University of Massachusetts Amherst, 2007). In effect the university is being privatized, and as a consequence working class students, whether white or students of color, are being squeezed out.

It is not only the students who are being squeezed out. So are good jobs. Nationally, 40% of higher education faculty work part time, and half of all new hires are part-time, earning an estimated average stipend of only \$2,700 per class (National Education Association, 2004a). At its peak (in Fall 1987) UMass Amherst had 1,201 tenure track faculty. In the fall of 2000,

at the dawn of the new millennium, there were 1,031 and in the fall of 2006 there are 967, a decrease of 234 from the peak and a decrease of 67 since 2000 (but a substantial increase from the nadir of 913 in the fall of 2002) (Office of Institutional Research, n.d.). That is, at the same time that student charges were being increased dramatically, the number of tenure-track faculty was being cut. About half the missing tenure-track faculty were replaced by contingent faculty; the other half of the reduction resulted in larger classes and students being unable to get the classes they wanted. A very similar dynamic operated with even greater force among clerical and maintenance workers; there were about 20% fewer workers available for the same amount of work. It should be noted that the number of students remained almost exactly the same throughout this period.

GENTRIFYING THE UNIVERSITY

If administrators' aim is to maximize revenues rather than serve the residents of a particular state or region, then there is little reason to shape policies and invest resources in programs that are designed to neutralize the historical exclusion of working class people and people of color in institutions of public higher education. In fact, to enroll, support, and graduate working class students and students of color often makes it more difficult to achieve the increasingly rationalized, market-driven measures that our public universities scramble to meet. As our institutions attempt to increase incoming students' average SAT scores, their weighted GPAs, and the amount of surplus funds attached to each matriculating student, many policies and programs that were designed to "level the playing field" in higher education are being replaced by policies and programs that increasingly benefit affluent white students (Schmidt, 2007). For example, nationally there has been an attack on affirmative action and a shift in priorities for the distribution of financial aid. Once targeted to low income students (based on students' need), increasingly financial aid is distributed to students based on their so-called merit. While merit-based financial aid includes athletics scholarships, merit aid is often distributed based on students' standardized tests scores, a measure that correlates almost perfectly with family income (Fair Test, 2007; Owen, 1985).⁹ Indeed, these attacks are taking a vicious toll: A recent report by the Higher Education Research Institute at the University of California, Los Angeles, states "US college freshmen are wealthier than at any point in the past 35 years, and the income gap is widening between their families and the rest of the nation . . . This academic year's entering class came from families with income 60 percent greater than the national median" (O'Neill, 2007, ¶2).

Nationally, from 1994 to 2004 so-called merit-based aid increased from 6% to 16% of all grant aid. "Students from families with incomes in the top-income quartile (\$111,170 or higher annually) received three times as much merit aid as students in the lowest income quartile (\$37,745 or less)" (Farrell, 2007, ¶2). In Massachusetts, funding for MASSGrant, the state's needs-based financial aid program, was decreased by 74% between FY1988–1989 and FY2003–2004; over the same period funding for the Gilbert Grant, available to students at private institutions, increased by 35% (Massachusetts Board of Higher Education Task Force, 2006). Moreover, nationally much of the needs-based aid is in fact given on the basis of test scores: "Students in the lowest income quartile who scored at or below 1140 on the SAT received, on average, \$8,403 in financial aid, while the mean award for students with the same family income who scored at or above 1261 was \$10,820" (Farrell, 2007, ¶6).

Aside from the shift from need-based aid to merit-based aid, there has been an overall decline in grant aid for all students at the same time that costs for higher education are surging. Whereas in 1976, the Pell Grant—the foundation of federal need-based aid—covered an average of 72% of costs for Pell-eligible students in four-year universities, in 2001 it covered only 42% of costs, and its purchasing power continues to slide. In 2006, the maximum Pell Grant would have needed to double in order to provide the same purchasing power it did in 1976 (Committee on Appropriations, 2006). In Massachusetts, for an average family in the lowest 40% of the income distribution, even *after* accounting for all financial aid, including all subsidized loans, the family would need to spend 52% of its income to pay the net cost of a public four-year college or university (National Center for Public Policy and Higher Education, 2006). Many working- and middle-class students are increasingly priced out of higher education; others can attend only by taking on massive amounts of debt. A 2003–2004 study from the National Center for Education Statistics found that over 65% of students borrow funds to attend college, and that the average amount of debt owed by a borrowing graduate of a public university was \$17,250 (National Center for Education Statistics, 2005). Many students in fact accumulate significant loan debt, but do not complete their degree, therefore leaving them with college debt but without a college degree to pay it off; such students are ten times as likely to default on their loans (Gladieux & Perna, 2005). Consider UMass Amherst: The average undergraduate student who received student loans borrowed \$7,706 in the 2004–2005 academic year, and the average total aid package was \$11,348; that is, loans were two-thirds of the total financial aid (Office of Institutional Research, 2006), and these figures do not capture private loans or credit card debt. That has consequences for what students can do when they graduate, and serves to push working-class students away from lives of public service, coercing them to focus on earning as much money as possible. Public service itself becomes a class privilege, with obvious class consequences for what gets defined as “public service.” According to a recent report, 37% of public four-year college graduates would face serious financial hardship if they attempted to work as social workers while repaying their loan debts (Swarthout, 2006).

This shift in aid from the working-class to the affluent has coincided with attacks on affirmative action, attacks based on ballot referendums (California, Washington, Michigan, with many more planned) and court cases (Texas and Michigan). Once the aim was to have the campus be racially representative of those who graduated from high school; that is no longer even the stated intention, never mind the actual reality. At UMass Amherst, a decade ago students were occupying buildings to demand—and win—a commitment to have student enrollment match the racial composition of Massachusetts’ high school graduates. In the intervening years a right-wing foundation threatened a lawsuit and, in response, the University changed its admission policy. At the same time, as part of the same larger political dynamic, the University drastically cut its support services for students of color. Similar cases from across the country have driven universities to adopt color-blind policies that fail to adequately address the historical exclusion of people of color from higher education. Recruitment and retention programs, scholarships, and admissions policies that formerly were designed to support college access for students of color are increasingly designed to serve “low income” students and—the new buzzword—“first generation” students. While increased support and services for working class and first generation students are to be celebrated, such color-blind programs fail to address the historical exclusion of students of color, while conflating the specific needs facing different underrepresented students, including poor white students, first generation immigrant students, and students of color from different economic backgrounds. For example,

while it has been well documented that one of the strongest predictors of SAT scores is family income, research also shows that a racial gap exists in SAT scores that goes beyond income levels (*The Journal of Blacks in Higher Education*, 2006).

Engines of Inequality, a recent report from the Education Trust, examines the failure of flagship campuses to serve underrepresented minority students. The report gives UMass Amherst an “F” for underrepresented minority access, noting that in the fall of 2004 underrepresented minorities made up only 8.1% of the incoming freshman class, although such students constituted 15.3% of the spring 2004 Massachusetts’ graduating high school class (Gerald & Haycock, 2006). The University’s de facto position, articulated by top administrators in public and private conversations, is that recruiting and retaining underrepresented students should be the goal of community and state colleges, while the flagship campus strives for so-called objective merit.

A tiered system is emerging nationally in higher education both within and between colleges and universities. Within these institutions, students who already have significant economic means and the social capital of whiteness are increasingly being rewarded and supported, while working class students and students of color are increasingly being left to fend for themselves—with fewer and fewer services and supports. At UMass Amherst, while the budget for the Commonwealth College (the campus’ relatively new honors program) was being dramatically increased, the budgets for support services for students of color were cut in half. While the University as a whole enrolls approximately half the rate of black and Latino students that graduate from high school across the state, the representation of black and Latino students enrolled in the Commonwealth College is half the rate of the black and Latino students enrolled at UMass Amherst (Commission on Campus Diversity, 2005). Put differently, white students are increasingly over-represented as one moves up the ladder of prestige from community colleges, to state colleges, to universities, and even within universities’ honors programs. Instead of moving toward a system of public higher education designed to rectify these patterns of exclusion, higher education nationwide is increasingly perpetuating—and in fact reinforcing—them. While institutions give lip service to diversity, and while institutions are careful to enroll enough black and Latino students to artfully display them in promotional materials, the actual direction of university programs and policies is a move toward re-segregating public higher education (Mumpher, 2003; Orfield, Bachmeier, James, & Eitle, 1997).

It is worth noting the obvious: At the same time that our nation’s campuses are becoming whiter, the workforce is increasingly composed of immigrants and people of color, and our nation’s economic future depends on them. Of 34 valedictorians in the Boston Public School District, 11 did not have the necessary financial means to go to college even after factoring in scholarships and loans. More generally, low achievement students from high socioeconomic backgrounds attend college at the same rate (77%) as high achievement students from low socioeconomic backgrounds (78%) (Advisory Committee on Student Financial Assistance, 2001)

Many worry that as result of these trends in privatization, higher education will become increasingly bifurcated, that community colleges and vocational programs will increasingly provide workforce skills needed for immediate employment, while wealthy, white students (and a small percentage of hand-picked “first generation” students) are provided with access to a more traditional liberal arts education—even if they too are graduating in debt (National Education Association, 2004b). Although such an outcome is possible, perhaps even likely, it is by no means inevitable.

CONTESTING THE CORPORATE UNIVERSITY AND DEVELOPING AN ALTERNATE VISION FOR PUBLIC HIGHER EDUCATION

For a quarter of a century our nation has been engaged in a largely one-sided class war, with the capitalist class attacking the working class and the middle class. Capitalists have not grabbed baseball bats and rushed out into the streets to beat workers, but rather have made a series of structural changes—tax policy, student financial aid, patent policy, union certification, the obscure rules of international financial transaction—whose cumulative effect is to shift power and resources away from workers into the hands of those who own and operate businesses. These changes are often most effective when they are least visible.

Although the capitalist class and right-wing forces have been overwhelmingly successful, many individuals and institutions have fought back. Certainly that is true at the University of Massachusetts Amherst, where students, faculty, and staff have waged some impressive campaigns. We briefly review four earlier campaigns, and then focus on the campaign currently underway.

The first effort to fight back was called Save UMass. Initiated at a time when the state first threatened massive budget cuts, the campaign brought together faculty, students, and staff. About 40% of the instructors on campus took at least a half hour of class time to talk about the university's budget and the legislature's threatened cuts, and then to offer students the opportunity, if they chose, to write individual letters to their legislators urging them not to cut the university's budget. Many faculty also sent letters to students' parents. The effort was coordinated by the campus unions, and generated ten thousand individual hand-written (not pre-printed, standard) letters. The Amherst group also helped spread the effort to the other University of Massachusetts campuses, as well as to the state and community colleges, and all groups together held a rally at the State House, a rally that was instrumental in persuading the legislature to increase taxes by a billion dollars. Despite all this, the university's budget was still cut—not as much as had been anticipated, but substantially.

Second, students led an impressive effort to contest the “gentrification” of campus and to rectify the de-investment in programs and services for students of color, an effort that was fueled by the emergence of latent racial tensions within Student Affairs. For several years the student government had been dominated by white conservative students, but in 2004 a progressive student of color won the presidency, and in keeping with the Republican national strategy, the students who had been in power threw out the election results and demanded that the election be re-run. (The progressive student of color won the second election even more convincingly.) The next fall it was discovered, through photographs the conservatives posted on the web, that as they planned to throw out the first election, the conservative students held a party and celebrated with drawings of themselves as members of the Ku Klux Klan. It was later discovered that the Vice Chancellor for Student Affairs had been cooperating with these students, providing them information *not* made available to the progressive student of color who won the presidency. This provoked a round of KKK-9 demonstrations and protests, including the most vibrant, spirited, and multiracial demonstration in a great many years. What began as an effort to “take back” the student government morphed and extended into an effort to “Take Back UMass”—to reclaim the campus' history and spirit of activism and diversity. The chancellor was forced to appoint a commission to examine the campus's diversity policies and practices. The commission issued a mixed report, many of whose recommendations were then ignored.

Third, faculty, with the full support and involvement of students, launched a campaign to increase the number of tenure-track faculty on campus. More than a dozen students and faculty testified to a hearing board, and public comments were invited. The hearing board issued a 50-page report, including both an overview of facts and statistics and personal accounts of the meanings and consequences of the faculty shortage (Hearing Panel, 2005). The report showed the campus had almost 250 fewer tenure-track faculty than had been on campus 15 years earlier, even though the number of students had slightly increased. The faculty union took the report to the Board of Trustees and challenged them to address the problem. Faculty and students hand-delivered the report to more than three-quarters of the state's legislators, and then conducted more than seven hours of filming to produce an eight-minute DVD (sponsored by the faculty union and the student government), and assembled teams of faculty, students, and staff who took laptops to the State House, asking legislators to give us eight minutes so that they could receive (DVD) testimony from 21 campus members. This campaign gained enough traction that an early version of the legislature's budget specified that increased funds had to go to address the faculty shortage. Along the way the former chancellor decided that his top priority was to add 250 more faculty, and he testified to the legislature to that effect. For a year this led to a substantial number of new hires; however, the chancellor then largely set aside the plan, despite extensive testimony in favor of it. Though the faculty maintained the pressure, and they were able to win almost full funding for the second year of the program, the ultimate outcome remains unclear.

Fourth, students have participated in several national initiatives. A group has generated significant visibility for the Free Higher Education Campaign, which calls for direct federal funding for the full cost of tuition and fees for all students enrolled in public higher education. Such a program, modeled after the GI Bill, was estimated to cost between \$30–50 billion per year in 2001. While costs would be significantly higher today, organizers point out that such a program could provide huge economic returns. Numerous studies have shown that the GI Bill returned nearly seven times its initial investment in tax revenues (Williams, 2006). Considering the 460 plus billion (National Priorities Project, 2007) spent on the Iraq war, what at first seemed like a pie in the sky campaign has gained fairly broad acceptance on campus, as students have organized photo exhibits, poetry slams, and a highly successful speak out to raise awareness about the campaign.

An overlapping group, with strong support from the graduate student union, launched a “Tent State University” on campus in the spring of 2006, creating a week-long free outdoor university, with talks on a wide range of topics and students camping out in dozens of tents in the center of campus. The Tent State University model began at Rutgers University in 2003, where it was designed to demonstrate the “displacement” of public higher education in light of pending budget cuts for higher education that coincided with increased funding for the Iraq war. Organizers claim that the model is not simply a protest, but that it simultaneously creates a positive vision of free, democratic, and diverse education that is in stark contrast to the increasingly corporate model. Dozens of other campuses across the United States have since held similar versions of these “Tent States” on their campuses, echoing the call for free, democratic higher education.

Students also have worked closely with two national organizations: the Democratizing Education Network (DEN) and the United States Student Association (USSA). DEN is a relatively new network of grassroots organizers from (mostly public) colleges and universities from across the country. In addition to providing a venue for those engaged in struggles to contest the privatization of public higher education and to increase the democracy, accessibility, and accountability

of institutions of higher education, the network has helped to coordinate Tent State Universities and activities such as a recent “virtual march” protesting cuts in federal spending for higher education. USSA, a national organization of student governments that was founded in 1947 and has membership from dozens of states, consistently has strong, diverse, and radical leadership committed to ensuring educational access for all students. While participation in USSA is much broader than DEN, DEN allows for greater grassroots participation, prompting campus organizers to discuss the prospects of combining and building off of the strengths of each organization.

Most recently, and building on these localized and nationally coordinated organization efforts, a campus coalition has built momentum for the most far-reaching organizing drive yet, an attempt to fundamentally re-structure public higher education in Massachusetts. This campaign was the result of the initial vision of Max Page, the president of the University of Massachusetts Amherst faculty union. In October 2006 he worked with others to call for a Higher Education Summit, to be sponsored by a wide coalition, and to include the key players in public higher education, from the governor on down. A small coalition began meeting, with participation by key leaders in the faculty union and undergraduate student government, some participation by graduate student leaders and staff unions. The coalition issued invitations to key state leaders, and agreed on the five key elements of our vision of the future of public higher education. Quite surprisingly, Governor-elect Patrick called to accept our invitation to the summit. With the governor on board, all the other key figures quickly accepted. The coalition members developed a report and Governor-elect Deval Patrick read the report (Public Higher Education Coalition, 2006) before the meeting. The chair of the Senate Committee on Higher Education said that for more than 30 years public higher education had never had a champion in the governor’s office, and Governor Patrick responded that he will be that champion (Vaznis, 2006).

Since that event the coalition has been hard at work, well aware that to build a vision for a system of higher education that is fully-funded, affordable, accessible, fully-staffed, and democratic will take more than one champion: It will require mobilization of and collaboration between all constituents in all sectors of the state’s system of public higher education. The initial coalition was almost exclusively based at the Amherst campus of the University of Massachusetts, with token representation (at the small-group private meeting) from the other units. The coalition has quickly grown to include state and community colleges as well as the other UMass campuses, and is determined to involve students, faculty, staff, parents, alumni, and community members, and not be dominated by faculty unions. Response has been excellent. It is clear that a great many people are eager to participate in an effort to create a new and better system of public higher education. Popular response and initial energy do not, of course, guarantee that people will succeed in the effort to build a coalition, mobilize constituents, be taken seriously by power-brokers, overcome opposition, and stick together through what are sure, even in the best of circumstances, to be a set of difficult compromises. In June 2007 an encouraging signal was Governor Patrick’s proposal to make community colleges free—one of the proposals the coalition had urged on him six months earlier (Sacchetti, 2007).

ASSESSMENT

Class is very much an issue in higher education, and is re-shaping the system. That is true not only at the most obvious level, in the massive cost increases and the various forms of squeeze on financial aid, but also at the top, where those with power are grabbing an increasing share

of both the power and the rewards. The system is being structured to serve the needs of the affluent; that has meant building in mechanisms and institutions that will not be easily replaced. Yet the American university has always been a site of struggle, and it has developed in response to popular pressures and political fears (Williams, 2006), from its elite roots, to its land grant history, to the version of higher education under the welfare state, to its increasingly privatized form today.

Students and faculty are very conscious of the impact of the current transformations on their own lives but do not usually have an alternative conceptualization, a vision of an alternative way of operating, a belief that another University (or world) is possible, and a sense that they have a right—indeed, an obligation—to fight for that alternative. It seems unlikely that a major movement will arise until and unless either there is a crisis, or some force tries to actively organize the potential which already exists.

Student and faculty views can and do shift, in part through education but more through participation in action. In the spring of 2004, one of the authors taught a course on the Crisis in Higher Education. Students entered knowing about their own experiences, and to some degree about their circle of friends, but through the course they learned about the experiences of others, both through listening to their classmates and by reading about the national situation. The course also offered an alternative way to think about the issues. Initially, for example, most of them thought that “free higher education” was a fantasy; looking at the numbers they became convinced it was a realizable and sensible policy. Although readings and lectures were important, they became far more powerful when they were combined with participation in direct action, such as a class-organized day to lobby the state legislature—prepared for by meeting with the district’s legislator, a training session with a lobbyist, and a set of role plays. Students discovered, for example, how many of them had family connections to their state legislators—through mutual friends, religious groups, parents, and other means—and that their legislators were (often, although not always) quite prepared to take the students’ testimony seriously.

At the University of Massachusetts Amherst, the (temporary) combination of a progressive leadership in both the faculty union and the student government—with allies in several staff unions and independent student organizations—has created a number of initiatives, including one currently under way, that attempt to win not just more for this group or that, but also to advance a different vision of public higher education. It remains to be seen what will be the outcome of these struggles.

Because national politics, media accounts, and popular understandings are so shaped by a relentless quarter-century conservative agenda to serve business, progressive and alternative forces are usually both weak and timid. Most of the working class response is individual not collective (“what tricks can I use to get more financial aid” rather than “how can we build a better system”). Even when we act collectively, too often that means a form of organized begging, going hat in hand to administrators or legislators and asking please would they consider providing more resources (overall, or for this or that initiative).

Things will not change unless groups are able to advance an alternative vision and mobilize collective power. The Higher Education Summit on our campus was an opportunity to advance a different vision. In some ways the report produced for the Summit is a remarkable document; it calls not just for more financial aid, but for making higher education free, beginning with community colleges and then expanding to cover the entire system. The document calls as well for democratizing the university, very much a class issue. In other ways the document remains caught

within the current framework, asking for a better version of what currently exists, not capturing the radical potential embodied in Tent State, not proposing a fundamental transformation of either university governance or the place of the university within the larger society. Similarly, the attempt to mobilize a broad coalition, and to get thousands to sign on to a statement of principles, is a huge step forward. But there is a high probability that in practice even the best (plausible) case will result in a set of compromises that provide somewhat more resources but leave the current class structure firmly in place. Will our coalition, or some other, have the capacity to significantly change the class structure of the university and the society? For those who care about the future of higher education, it seems crucial to address this issue.

NOTES

1. The literature on the larger changes in the political economy is vast. (See, among others, Collins & Yeskel, 2005; Clawson, 2003, especially Ch. 5; Clawson, Neustadt, & Scott, 1992; Fantasia & Voss, 2004, especially Ch. 1; Faux, 2006; Levy, 1998.)
2. Data on salaries of top administrators are, under the state's Freedom of Information laws, publicly available (although often in practice hidden). We gained access to these data through our positions in the union and on the Board of Trustees. The faculty union published an analysis of administrator salaries (Luce, 2007).
3. Internal analysis by the Massachusetts Society of Professors (the faculty union) based on official state payroll records, and including all individuals whose titles include some variant of chancellor, provost, dean, or director (including vice chancellors, associate deans, and so on).
4. According to the University's Financial Aid Services, the average financial "gap" for students with Expected Family Contributions of \$0–\$3,850 (which represents the average mean Parents' Adjusted Gross Income of \$15,293–\$38,848) is \$2,611. The "gap" is the amount of money that a student needs to attend the University *after* all grants, waivers, work study funds, loans, and the Expected Family Contribution are taken into account.
5. Contrast this with the nineteenth century British ruling class "public" schools (Eton, Rugby, and the like) that emphasized even the most privileged being forced to endure unpleasant conditions. It might be hypothesized that this reflects the difference between a rising and a declining empire.
6. Salary data available from Massachusetts Society of Professors union office, or from Reference Department at University of Massachusetts Amherst, W.E.B. DuBois Library.
7. In addition to the rise of on-line courses, there has been a recent rise in the number of proprietary schools (such as the University of Phoenix) that offer longer than two-year programs. Unlike traditional private (but non-profit) institutions, proprietary schools are explicitly and legally for-profit enterprises. They are regionally accredited, and typically offer programs that have the greatest enrollment potential. (See National Education Association, 2004b)
8. The exact multiple is 1.46 times for FY07. If tuition retention is included as part of the state appropriation, then the state appropriation during these five years has increased by \$10,135,177 or by 4.5% in four years, *not* adjusting for inflation, which has run more than 3% per year. If tuition retention is included as part of the state appropriation, then the multiple rises to 1.70 times the amount paid in mandatory student fees.
9. The College Board is so embarrassed by this reality that it sued Fair Test for publicizing the (publicly available) results (see Schemo, 2004).

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