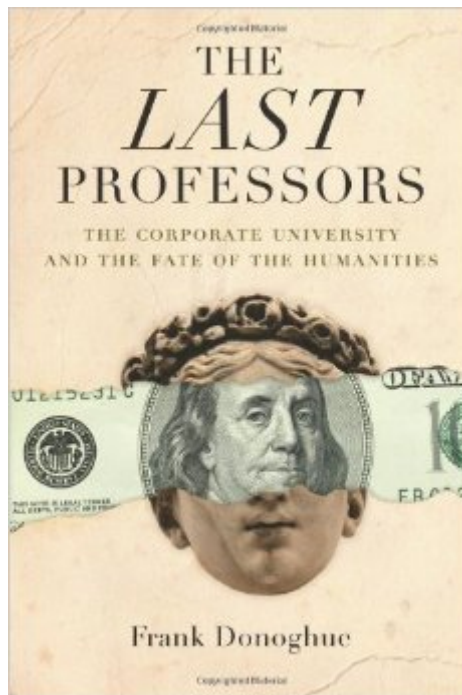


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The Last Professors: The Corporate University And The Fate Of The Humanities



Synopsis

"What makes the modern university different from any other corporation?" asked Columbia's Andrew Delbanco recently in the New York Times. There is more and more reason to think: less and less, he answered. In this provocative book, Frank Donoghue shows how this growing corporate culture of higher education threatens its most fundamental values by erasing one of its defining features: the tenured professor. Taking a clear-eyed look at American higher education over the last twenty years, Donoghue outlines a web of forces—social, political, and institutional—dismantling the professoriate. Today, fewer than 30 percent of college and university teachers are tenured or on tenure tracks, and signs point to a future where professors will disappear. Why? What will universities look like without professors? Who will teach? Why should it matter? The fate of the professor, Donoghue shows, has always been tied to that of the liberal arts—with the humanities at its core. The rise to prominence of the American university has been defined by the strength of the humanities and by the central role of the autonomous, tenured professor who can be both scholar and teacher. Yet in today's market-driven, rank- and ratings-obsessed world of higher education, corporate logic prevails: faculties are to be managed for optimal efficiency, productivity, and competitive advantage; casual armies of adjuncts and graduate students now fill the demand for teachers. Bypassing the distractions of the culture wars and other crises, Donoghue sheds light on the structural changes in higher education—the rise of community colleges and for-profit universities, the frenzied pursuit of prestige everywhere, the brutally competitive realities facing new Ph.D.s—that threaten the survival of professors as we've known them. There are no quick fixes in *The Last Professors*; rather, Donoghue offers his fellow teachers and scholars an essential field guide to making their way in a world that no longer has room for their dreams.

Book Information

Paperback: 172 pages

Publisher: Fordham University Press; 1 edition (April 30, 2008)

Language: English

ISBN-10: 0823228606

ISBN-13: 978-0823228607

Product Dimensions: 8.9 x 0.6 x 5.9 inches

Shipping Weight: 10.4 ounces (View shipping rates and policies)

Average Customer Review: 4.4 out of 5 stars [See all reviews](#) (16 customer reviews)

Best Sellers Rank: #712,056 in Books (See Top 100 in Books) #268 in [Books > Textbooks >](#)

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Customer Reviews

Higher education commentators have pointed to budget cuts, waning student interest, and dwindling tenure-track positions as evidence of a crisis in the liberal arts and humanities. Donoghue argues that the situation is worse than a crisis. His hard-hitting book examines how a decades-long economic squeeze and the growing influence of corporate culture have adversely affected higher education, threatening to drive the traditional professor extinct. Donoghue traces the current dilemma to the late 19th century, when the corporate values of efficiency and "usefulness" (in the most narrowly practical sense of the word) gained considerable influence in education. A corporate disdain for the humanities is exemplified by quotes from Andrew Carnegie and Richard Teller Crane. Carnegie advised colleges to imitate "a good manufacturer," and Crane famously asserted that no man who has "a taste for literature has the right to be happy" because "the only men entitled to happiness in this world are those who are useful." Beginning in the 1970s, the resurgence of a profit-and-efficiency driven ideology has lent new popularity to these sentiments. One of the key threats to the professoriate is the replacement of the full-time tenured professor with the easily exploitable and economically expedient part-time adjunct. Currently, fewer than 30 percent of college and university faculty are tenured or on tenure tracks, and the number is decreasing. Adjuncts often commute between institutions while facing meager pay and no job security. Taking into account her commute, one adjunct converted her salary into an hourly wage of \$2.12, without benefits. This is just one piece of a larger puzzle in which higher education is increasingly focused on efficiency and the bottom line.

Since the book came out, way back in late 2008, our financial system has crumbled, GM has gone bankrupt, one out of five Americans is out of work, retailers and restaurants have closed, millions of homes have gone into foreclosure, and half the class of '09 is still unemployed. Having lived through that, you probably can handle bad news from the tenure front without your hair standing on end. Nonetheless, if you're really concerned about the Crisis in Higher Education, Donoghue puts that worry right to bed. A crisis, he explains, is a sudden event that calls for a dramatic, immediate response, whereas the American academic collapse began over 100 years ago. There can be no quick fix now, and the author has no hope the humanities can survive in the new corporate university. Anyone looking at this review probably isn't fooled by what's going on at the

graduate-level in liberal arts departments, but if you're still considering Ivory Tower employment, it's a good idea to read this book, digest the facts and numbers, and see them assembled by someone who knows first-hand what he's talking about. No surprise that lots of humanities doctoral candidates drop out before taking a Ph.D. No surprise either that the dropouts are often the smartest, have the best undergraduate records and the highest GRE scores. The industrialization of education has been brutal, and Donoghue is surely right in predicting it's only going to get worse. As far back as forever, the functionally illiterate have held book-learning to be detrimental to making a living, and the succinct humanist reply remains always unintelligible to chuckleheads. As Donoghue points out, for the humanities to survive at a scholarly level there needs to be a steady supply of Ph.D.

Too many books about the plight of academia seem compelled, as Donoghue explains, both to describe the situation today as a "crisis" and then to offer nostrums to return our universities to health. "The Last Professors," as its title indicates, is having none of that sunny optimism. Essentially he sees universities as not so much in "crisis," as suffering from a long, and likely irreversible decline at the end of which the utilitarian values of the corporation will emerge triumphant. Perhaps only a handful of wealthy elite institutions -- the Harvards and Amhersts -- will remain as places where fields like Classics and Philosophy, once cornerstones of a liberal arts education, are studied and supported. Donoghue's well researched argument is compelling. He traces the history of the modern university, the rise of for-profit post-secondary education, the pressure that online education exerts toward mass production of degrees, the effect of public funding on higher education (especially in a recessionary environment), and the commodification of prestige through the US News rankings and similar services. All of these factors have created a breach between the university and the business corporation that have allowed the values of the latter to flood the higher education scene. With increasing force and speed, the values of the corporation are swamping the traditional values of academe, and many schools that previously taught a traditional liberal arts curriculum, heavy on the humanities, are replacing that curriculum with one focused on the bottom line and preparation for vocations. Simultaneously, the working conditions for professors in those traditional fields are falling to pieces. For a lucky few, life goes on as usual, with academic freedom protected by tenure.

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