

University Woes: Academics and Scholarship in Crisis. The Managerial Class Gets Uppity

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Region: [Oceania](#)

Theme: [History](#)

The university, in a global sense, is passing into a managerial oblivion. There are a few valiant holdouts, but they have the luxury of history, time, and learning. Cambridge and Oxford, for instance, still boast traditional academics, soaking erudition, and education as something more than a classroom brawl of the mind. They can barricade themselves against the regulatory disease that has made imbeciles of administrators and cretins of the pretend academic class. They can, for instance, rely on their colleges to fight the university, a concept so utterly alien to others. Across Europe, the management structures wear heavily. In the United States, the corporate university took hold decades ago. Academics are retiring, committing suicide, and going on gardening leave.

In Australia, a more serious problem has become evident: You cannot expose the obvious. You cannot, for instance, expose the evident plagiarism of colleagues. You cannot expose corruption within the university, notably the sort that celebrates graft over industry. You cannot discuss the decline in academic standards, or the purposeful lowering of admission levels. The obvious, in a certain sense, is that standards will be lowered if there is a need for largesse and revenue. The natural impulse of fat cat Vice-Chancellors is to cry foul that the government of the day has not forked out from the tax payer's wallet. Pay the university; fund more places. Give us more funding, because we are teaching and research institutions.

The problem with this dubious formulation is that funding a university in its current, monstrous form is tantamount to giving a drug lord a state subsidy for a pool, a perk, or a prostitute. (A suitable doctoral dissertation: Compare the rhetoric of Pablo Escobar with Australian university management from 2000 to 2019. You won't be disappointed.) Vice-Chancellors of the university world are white collar criminals on par with bankers, and, like those bankers, claim they perform an invaluable service. When they fail, they are simply moved on to another institution, leaving their sludge in ample supply.

The pro-vice chancellors, the deputies, the deputy-deputies and the deputies under them, are co-conspirators in an enterprise that robs students blind and plunders the goodwill of academic staff. Never has there been a better case to start putting these types into re-education camps, the very sort that they wish academics who disagree with them to attend. Apropos on that point, it is notable that universities in Australia love sending disagreeing and disagreeable academics to counsellors hired by the university itself. Thought-crime thrives down under.

Be that as it may, the recent news that Murdoch University in Western Australia, has decided to counter-sue an academic for exposing the lowering of academic standards, should come as confirmation. How utterly revolting to expose such a squalid secret! How

revolting to believe that standards should be kept! (The issue here, as much as anything else, is to put to bed the snake oil language of being a [“global educator”](#). A local non-educator will suffice.)

Federal Court [documents](#) have done more than reveal that the university is seeking compensation from Associate Professor Gerd Schröder-Turk for millions lost since he appeared on a [Four Corners program](#) in May discussing the plight of failing Indian students. It involves a counter-action against the academic, who initially filed an action under the Fair Work Act to restrain the university from disciplining him for discussing the lowering of academic standards.

The university has been rightfully punished by a decline in student numbers but insists that it “maintains admission standards consistent with the national standards for international students, along with English language requirements in line with those across the sector.” In short, the Murdoch argument is that made by those who think failure sells: they all do it, so why pick on us?

Murdoch University’s overpaid VC, Eeva Leinonen, [claims](#) to refute (is it not confute?) “the claims made by the ABC” in an email sent to students after the Four Corners program aired. She babbles incorrigibly, resorting to those nonsenses about employability and global reputation for a university that struggles, just, to be local. “In 2018, Murdoch was ranked number one in Australia for graduate employability. Employers value the knowledge and skills that you have learnt at Murdoch University.” (Leinonen is yet another example of how corruption, to be pure, needs to be imported – she cut her teeth as Vice-President in Education at King’s College, University of London.)

Even Australia’s restrained whistleblowing commentators have been a touch troubled by the arid and vicious reasoning of Murdoch University. The university, as a realm of academic protection, is a piecemeal matter in Australia. But modern management, being itself a high-functioning criminal class, has made it imperative to cast an eye on protections for those who blow that all too rare whistle on plagiarism, charlatanism, shallow standards and good, down-to-earth theft.

A. J. Brown, who wears the rather rusted crown of whistleblowing authority in a country that has found the practice irksome, ventured the obvious in his [assessment](#): the action by Murdoch University will stifle whistleblowing. “I’m not aware of any situation where a university, or really... any sort of organisation, has counter-sued the whistleblower for damages.”

Murdoch University has revealed some important, and cheery results, for those who believe that the academy, and university, remains a place of challenge and learning rather than numbers and padding. The institution, in an effort to target Schröder-Turk, is full of complaint: shovelling amounts out for investigations by tertiary regulators; lamenting the upgrade of the Immigration Risk Rating by the Department of Home Affairs. Schröder-Turk should be given a knighthood.

What is needed, in the immediate future, is a redrafting of laws in states and the Commonwealth that permits full, iron-sheeted immunity to those who expose managerial corruption. This case shows the quibbling and the lack of clarity of those who engage in what is called “public interest disclosure”. University academics fit uncomfortably within

that skimpy bit of legislation known as the *Public Interest Disclosure Act 2013*, but Schröder-Turk has attempted to apply it. (The provisions are so miserably weak and vague as to be ineffectual and, as the court documents note, he was “largely unsuccessful in his interlocutory application.”) Nor can they avail themselves of the Corporate protections recently passed in Australia, exaggerated in their protections, but nonetheless important for having taken place.

What is astonishing is the free rein given to universities to punish and discipline their personnel for a disgusting tendency, namely, to have, and defend, principles central to teaching and research. How dare these learned types stand up for principled admission standards? Care about grades? Worry about performance? Away with those hideous farts, those people who refuse to play the corporate ball game.

We so happen to disturb an age where the university, as it has become, should be abolished. We await the madly dedicated Martin Luther in academic dress and garb to target his theses with venom against the Papacy of Management; we await the sit-ins of keen students, aware of thought, who have decided to be more than drugged consumers, leading the militant protests directed to learning, the determined opposition to expose the corporate hypocrisy of this dying animal. (Academics won't, cowardice being their poesy and milky blood.) Best kill it off now, and put us, and everybody else, out of a collective misery that serves to rob taxpayer, learner and instructor.

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