

Book Review

Kirp, David L. (2003) *Shakespeare, Einstein, and the Bottom Line: The Marketing of Higher Education* Cambridge: Harvard UP. ISBN: 0674011465. 336 pages.

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As the twenty-first century begins to bloom, perhaps no entity will metamorphose as much as higher education—and economic factors are clearly a major force driving these changes. The Higher Education Act (set for renewal this year) allocated over \$52 billion for 2002. The higher education complex, as a whole, expended well over \$200 billion—that's roughly the GDP of the Governor of California Arnold Schwarzenegger's native Austria. What makes this topic of further import is it affects every one of us. We are students, parents or children of students, educators, taxpayers, and the recipients of university-led innovations. Still, it is sometimes difficult to weave academia into our day-to-day lives, but David L. Kirp comes to the rescue. His latest book, *Shakespeare, Einstein, and the Bottom Line: The Marketing of Higher Education*, hit the bookshelves in November, and it's a must read for anyone who cares about education (who doesn't fit into this category?).

While it would be impossible for anyone to write a 300-page treatise exploring the entirety of higher education economics, Kirp does a remarkable job of synthesizing the information we ought to know. His prose is entertaining and scholarly (a rare combination). His writing style seamlessly integrates the opinions of Derek Bok (president of Harvard University for a generation and a prolific author) and Leslie Nielsen (star of *The Naked Gun* series and a prolific comedian). Kirp considers M.I.T. and DeVry University, research scientists and community college instructors.

Education specialists and average Americans all will find much to contemplate, as well as a chuckle or two with titles like: “The New U,” “The British are Coming and Going,” and, my personal favorite, “Kafka Was an Optimist.” Kirp never loses sight of his purpose—the economics of education—and he is extraordinarily balanced in his depictions. When he says “for better *and* for worse,” you can count on realistic portrayals. As he reminds the reader in his Introduction, “[i]t is important not to romanticize academe, not to slip into nostalgia for a time that really never was. Dollars have always greased the wheels of American higher education.”

Kirp focuses on four central areas of the academics-economics interplay: students as customers, administrative accounting, distance learning, and education as a profit-making venture. Kirp’s inclusion of economist Arthur Okun’s warning, “There is a place for the market, but the market must be kept in its place,” foreshadows the chapters’ difficult questions of an ideal (or, at least, tolerable balance). In our capitalistic culture of “the customer is always right,” referring to students as customers is a frightening proposal for many educators. Kirp reminds us that a university education implies a student is “an acolyte whose preferences are to be formed, not a consumer whose preferences are to be satisfied.” This is not a “storybook idea, but the university at its truest and best.”

Kirp carefully includes little known—and quite telling—success stories as well as skeletons in the closet. For example, how many of us would know that when University of Chicago partnered with Unext.com, the latter’s CEO was a trustee at the former? I’m not an expert in ethics, but this smells of major impropriety to me. On the other hand, Kirp alerts us to the plight of a Chicago physicist whose labs “were ‘state, of the art, 1948,’” and reminds us that universities cannot survive without the infusion of money.

In Part II, “Management 101,” Kirp tackles administrators. Even in this venue, Kirp never forgets the world outside the ivory tower. He reminds the reader that, after the attacks on the World Trade Center towers, New York Law School “became a place for firefighters and police officers to recover between shifts... For two weeks it was shuttered, and when it reopened, there wasn’t even the illusion of normality.... Some students in the evening division did daytime duty as firefighters and cops; one of them lost thirty-four co-workers.” Dean Richard Matasar

stood compassionately at the helm. Kirp also imparts Matasar's theory of law school: "'Commercialism is here, now, and it is not going away.... We are a business, deal with it.'"

More importantly, Part II considers the ramifications of "outsourcing" and its partner, "Revenue Center Management" (RCM). Kirp's examples quickly transform me to my undergraduate days, and I contemplate (less than fondly) the cafeterias and bookstore. When I left University of Florida in 1983, we were reveling in the newly installed Salad Bar that replaced, to some degree, the uninspired but always greasy gray grub that replaced our previous connection with food—home cooking. Today, food courts abound and Subway, Boston Market, and Burger King (this generation's version of home cooking) are responsible for students' meals. Memories of my college bookstore prompt images of mile-long lines and surly service from employees who knew they were "the only game in town." Today, Barnes & Noble staff working in campus locations are required to provide the same level of customer service as they do in the chic Gallery Mall location. Residence halls, health care, maintenance, and a myriad of other services have followed suit. Thus, the theory goes, students enjoy customer-level quality, the franchises make money, and the university can concentrate on academics.

All that glitters is not gold, though, and outsourcing and RCM do, indeed, seep into the classroom. Reliance on adjunct faculty is one example of outsourcing; and RCM, Kirp believes, has led to "academically dubious behavior." As one example, he offers a blurb from an ad at USC proclaiming: "'Tired of reading Shakespeare? Kill off your [general education] requirement, sit back and eat popcorn, and watch it being performed.'" As Kirp reminds us, General Education courses "enroll many students and are taught by adjunct instructors, [consequently] they are money machines." Whether they add to the public good—requiring a socially effective, civic-minded, literate community—is another story.

The remaining chapters in *Shakespeare, Einstein, and the Bottom Line* are equally balanced and relevant. In fact, the only chapter with which I have mixed feelings is the one addressing for-profit universities. In my opinion, Kirp is TOO fair to an industry that can cause tremendous hazard to its students, taxpayers, and society in general (but that is addressed in my own book). Still, Kirp is among the most passionate writers today. His law degree (and subsequent volunteer work for the ACLU), his journalism background (illustrated in his ever objective

reporting), and his thirty year tenure at The Goldman School of Public Policy, University of California-Berkeley blend into another (his fourteenth) remarkable book.

This one ends with the following query: “[The University] might conceivably evolve into just another business, the metaphor of the higher education ‘industry’ brought to life in a holding company that could be called Universitas, Inc. If there is a less dystopian future, one that revives the soul of this old institution, who is to advance it—and if not now, then when?” We ALL must advance it, and I suggest we begin by reading *Shakespeare, Einstein, and the Bottom Line*. Now.