



Theories of Higher Education

STEVEN BRINT

What Is Theory?

- ▶ A concept or conceptual scheme that illuminates feature(s) of social reality that were previously unknown or not well understood.
- ▶ Typically includes a causal argument about origins of the phenomenon and an exposition of the consequences of the phenomenon.
- ▶ In some cases formalization is possible; in other cases it is beside the point.
- ▶ Example from Martin Trow's demographic theory.

A. The Last Generation: Theories of the 1960s & 1970s

1. HIGHER ED AND SOCIO-CULTURAL CHANGE
2. CHANGES IN HIGHER ED ORGANIZATION
3. HIGHER ED OUTPUTS



Why the Last Generation is Important

- ▶ Some of their ideas and conceptualizations remain essential to the field.
- ▶ Their emphases tell us much about the period in which they wrote.
- ▶ In so far as their themes no longer resonate, their work helps to sharpen our sense of the socio-cultural changes that have been shaping our own era.

A1. Socio-Cultural Change

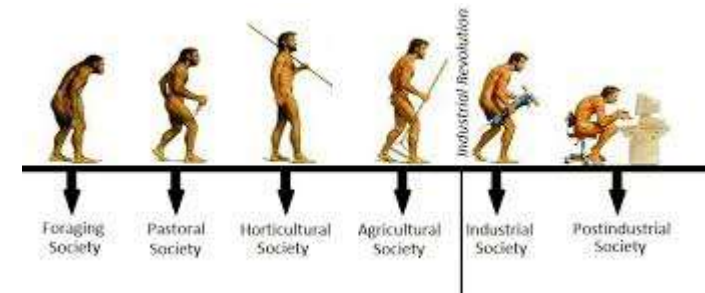


Post-Industrial Society

- ▶ Economic shift **from manufacturing to services**
- ▶ Post-Industrial Society economic development is led by **High-Tech Industry and Quality-of-Life Services** (Health, Education, Recreation)
- ▶ **Higher education “an axial institution”** because it provides the expertise for those who are in the command posts of post-industrial society.
- ▶ **Expansion of services economy idea to include business services** by Thomas Stanback and colleagues in the 1980s.
- ▶ “Knowledge society” idea adopted by OECD in 1996.

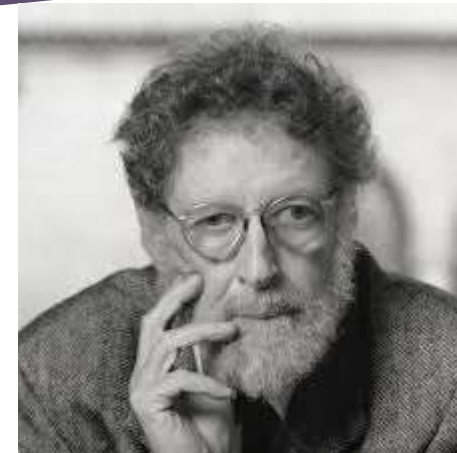


Daniel Bell

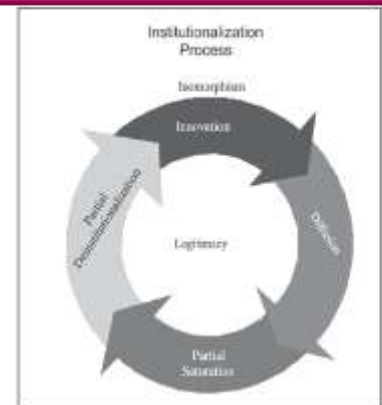


Institutionalizing Global Culture

- ▶ Higher education sustains the modern professions and contributes to the rationalization of society and state through processes of legitimation of the views of elites carried by **transnational bodies** such as the OECD.
- ▶ The supra-national and universalistic orientation of higher education provides elites with common cultural frames and identities, contributing to **cross-national similarities** in outlooks and policies.
- ▶ HE expansion provides a foundation for socio-political change around issues such as **human rights, environmental protection, and social inclusion** – and **the priority importance of science**.
- ▶ HE socializes **the “posture of actorhood”** – the creation of people with plans and opinions putatively rooted in a rational cast of mind.



John W. Meyer



The Credential Society

- ▶ **Credentials become a new currency** comparable in many ways to money. They are used in exchange for valuable positional property.
- ▶ The functionalist theory that credentials reflect subject matter knowledge is incorrect. Most learning is on the job, and school knowledge is quickly forgotten.
- ▶ **Credentials allow for status group reproduction** – the choice of people with similar educational experiences and forms of self-presentation.
- ▶ **Credential inflation is pervasive.** As educational attainment expands, the social distinction of any degree and its value in the occupational marketplace declines, creating demand for higher levels of education.



Randall Collins

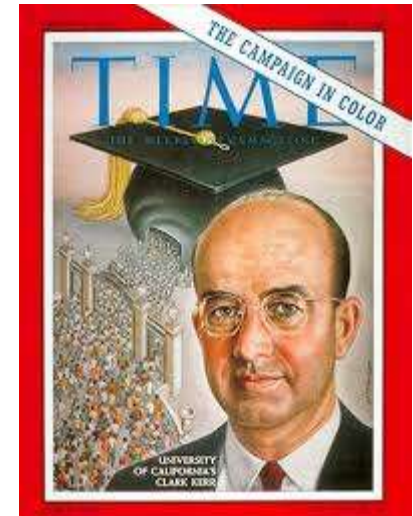


A2. Higher Education Organization



The Multiversity

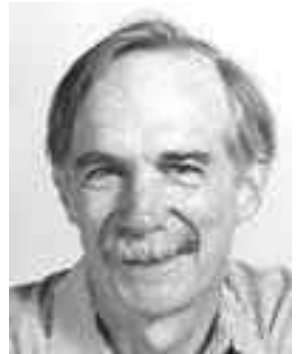
- ▶ The university no longer revolves solely around academic study and research.
- ▶ The university reaches out to nearly every group and institution in its state or region. It is a kind of **“service station” for society**.
- ▶ The professional schools, the extension programs and faculty advising/consulting become important features of the university’s mission.
- ▶ Because of government patronage, **the sciences become wealthy and the humanities militant**.
- ▶ The superiority of the faculty leads to **an inferiority of undergraduate teaching**. Research is king and students can be lost in the “city of intellect.”



Clark Kerr

The Academic Revolution

- ▶ With the professionalization of the faculty, the advance of the disciplinary associations, and the creation of a national labor market, **the academic professions become the dominant power** in the university.
- ▶ **Governing boards and university presidents find their power declining.** The goal of the university president is to assemble a faculty of greater eminence than the one already assembled.
- ▶ Leading faculty members are less teacher-scholars than entrepreneurs with market power who use the university as a launching pad for their various ventures (research groups, conferences, consulting, etc.)



Christopher Jencks



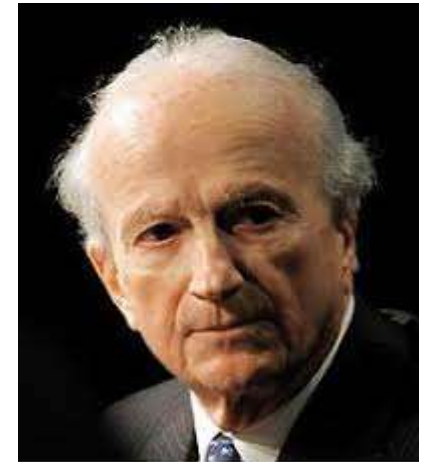
David Riesman

A3. Higher Education Outputs



Human Capital

- ▶ Schools and universities contribute to students' human capital, which makes them more employable in the labor market.
- ▶ **Human capital is the quantity of cognitive skills, relevant subject matter knowledge, and non-cognitive skills and dispositions that add economic value.**
- ▶ Rational **investments in higher education are a function of expected earnings minus opportunity costs.**
- ▶ Years of schooling frequently used as a proxy for human capital in individual-level and country-level analyses. But it is not a good measure of what is learned in school.



Gary Becker



Jacob Mincer

Social Reproduction

- ▶ **Schools primarily legitimate inequalities in society.**
- ▶ The **highly educated family produces cultural capital that is recognized and rewarded in the school.**
- ▶ **The highly educated family also produces social network ties (or social capital)** that provides advantages in the labor market.
- ▶ **Cultural and social capital can be reconverted into economic capital** reinforcing family privileges.
- ▶ Those lacking in family cultural and social capital find it much more difficult to use the schools to generate advantages in the labor market.



Pierre Bourdieu



Jean-Claude Passeron

The Dissenters: Colleges as Agents of Socialization

- ▶ Neither human capital generation nor legitimation of inequality is primary.
- ▶ **Martin Trow:** In a system of mass higher education, the primary economic role of the college is to **socialize for adaptability to new situations**.
- ▶ **Lester Thurow:** In a system of mass higher education, the primary economic role of the college is to **certify the trainability of graduates** who occupy higher positions in labor queues on the basis of that certification.
- ▶ **John W. Meyer:** In a system of mass higher education, the primary role of the college is to **socialize students into “the posture of actorhood” and conformity with the cultural schemas** produced at higher levels in the social structure about the attitudes and outlooks of an educated person.



Martin Trow



Lester Thurow

B. The Current Generation: Theories of the 1990s & 2000s

1. MULTIPLICITY OF PURPOSES
2. DEEPER INTERPENETRATIONS
3. NEW MODELS OF THE ORG
4. EMERGING RESISTANCES



B1. Multiplicity of Purposes



Sieve, Incubator, Temple, Hub

- ▶ M. Stevens, E. Armstrong, R. Arum: Sieve, Incubator, Temple, Hub
 - Sieve**: Sorting Mechanism based on finances, academic qualification
 - Incubator**: Creation of “competent actors” with valuable social ties
 - Temple**: Legitimation and conservation of “official knowledge”
 - Hub**: Intersection for dense ties between universities & other institutions

Other Works along Similar Lines

- ▶ J. Douglass, G. Thomson, I. Chirikov: Multiple Engagement
- ▶ N. Smelser, University Development through Accretion



Mitchell Stevens



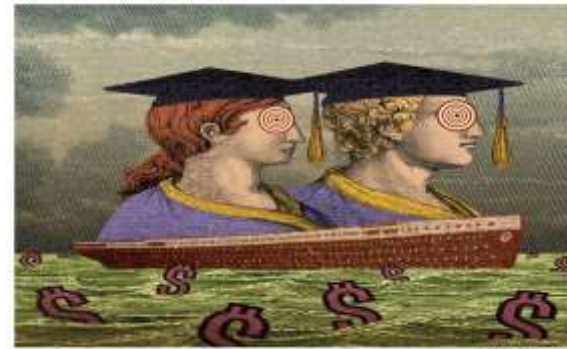
Richard Arum



Elizabeth Armstrong

Commodification of Knowledge

- ▶ From S. Slaughter and L. Leslie: *Academic Capitalism* (1997)
- ▶ **Academic Capitalism = the conversion of knowledge into marketable commodities.**
- ▶ Some organizational features of academic capitalism:
 - * **Technology transfer offices**
 - * **Patents, licenses, start-ups**
 - * **University-industry research centers**
 - * **Consulting and advisory relationships**
 - * **Health care delivery**
 - * **Corporate-style management**



Sheila Slaughter

B2. Deeper Interpenetrations



New Forms and Logics of Schooling

- ▶ J. Mehta/S. Davies: Forms and Logics of Interpenetration

Vertical: Increase in time spent in schooling

Horizontal: Increase in number of fields that have become subject to formalization, pedagogy, credentialing

Import: The migration of school forms beyond formal education

Intensifying Logic: Schooling becomes more rigorous at higher levels.

Accommodating Logic: Schooling becomes more intermeshed with other social institutions at lower levels.



Jal Mehta



Scott Davies

“Universal” Higher Ed & Changes in Higher Ed Practices & Ideology

- ▶ From membership in a cultural elite to **preparation for the labor market**
- ▶ From liberal arts to “**the rise of the practical arts**”
- ▶ From high to **low walls between HE and society**
- ▶ From selective admissions to **recruitment of non-traditional students.**
- ▶ From academic study to **student engagement and consumerism**
- ▶ From highly structured curricula to **flexible patterns of course-taking**
- ▶ From meritocratic to **democratic-egalitarian ideology**
- ▶ From pattern-setting in the elite sector to “**trickle up**” from the **broad-access sector**



Martin Trow

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The Global University

- ▶ **World-class faculty and students**
- ▶ **Branch campuses** in partner countries
- ▶ **Enhanced exchange** of students and scholars across national boundaries
- ▶ **Partner countries benefit** from high-quality faculty and opportunity to keep students in country.
- ▶ **Sponsoring countries benefit** from exchange relationships with partner countries, access to new pool of students, capacity to attract new research talent, and (sometimes) relief from overcrowding on home campuses.



Simon Marginson



The Entrepreneurial University

- ▶ Entrepreneurial development on the academic periphery; protection of the academic core.
- ▶ Expanded “third-stream” revenues to increase adaptability and opportunity.
- ▶ Expanded relationships with business community are essential.
- ▶ Other “third-stream” revenues: donors, intellectual property license, sales of services, contracts with state and local government, etc.
- ▶ Social entrepreneurship also envisioned to foster problem-solving engagement with community organizations.



Burton R. Clark

The Interdisciplinary University

- ▶ Argument: **Interesting problems are the interstices of disciplines**
- ▶ Form interdisciplinary teams and spaces to solve them. **Industrial lab model.** Academic departments are “silos.”
- ▶ **Mechanisms** include cluster hiring, interdisciplinary initiatives, multidisciplinary research buildings, centers of excellence, eminent scholars programs.
- ▶ Often connected to **funding opportunities “in the national interest”**
- ▶ **Shifts some authority** from faculty and departments **to administrators who are experts at aggregating resources**



Beckmann Institute



The “New American University”

ASU Vision

To establish ASU as the model for a New American University, measured not by who we exclude, but rather by who we include; pursuing research and discovery that benefits the public good; assuming major responsibility for the economic, social, and cultural vitality and health and well-being of the community.



Michael Crow



B4. Emerging Resistances



Types of Resistance to the Further Expansion of Higher Education

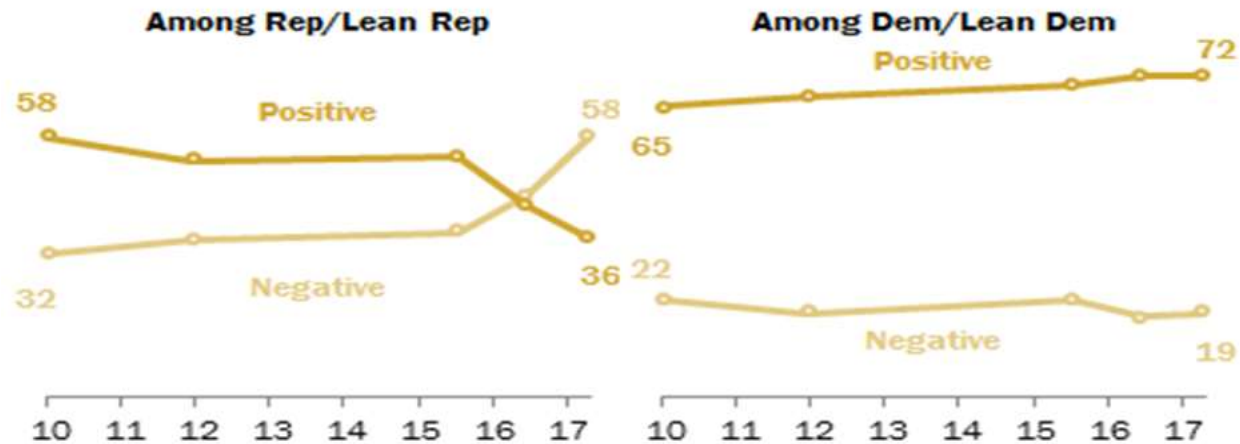
- ▶ **Right-wing Populism**: Anti-Intellectual, Anti-Liberal/Anti-Progressive Attack on Educated Elites. Causes: Political correctness, underemployment
- ▶ **Do-It-Yourselfism**: Anti-Expertise, People Can Learn without Higher Ed
- ▶ **Boundary Work**: Efforts to stop the Encroachment of Education into Spheres of Life Dominated by Other Institutional Logics (e.g. family, community)



An Ominous Sign?

Since 2010, sharp rise in share of Republicans saying colleges have a negative effect on the country

% who say colleges and universities have a ____ effect on the way things are going in the country



Note: Don't know/Other responses not shown.

Source: Survey conducted June 8-18, 2017.

PEW RESEARCH CENTER





Questions?

THANK YOU!

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