

Consuming Student Life: Modern Day Higher Education

Jacklyn T. Heslop, B.A. Candidate in English

Research Question

I want to research how the views and behaviors of students as consumers impacts student life, specifically their emotional well-being, academic performance, and view of themselves in academia.



Image From: <http://whyforead.com/wp-content/uploads/2015/02/Books-That-Will-Broaden-Your-Life-Perspective.jpg>

Definition of Terms

Student/ Academic Consumerism:

"attitudes toward education as a commodity versus a transformative intellectual experience" (Alvarez 65)

Rote Learning:

learning based in memorization

Meaningful Learning:

active learning that is memorable and promotes transfer

Transfer:

"the ability to use what was learned to solve new problems, answer new questions, or facilitate learning new subject matter" (Mayer & Wittrock referenced by Mayer)

Methods

Through library research I plan to explore questions related to:

- Students acting as "consumers"
- Faculty reacting to the pressures of consumerism
- Consumerist behavior impacting learning

I also plan to survey current undergraduate students at various institutions. Questions will gather information about how students:

- View G.P.A
- Pick what classes to take and with whom
- View the "worth" of a degree
- React to the stresses of academia
- View the impact of competition on formation of a supportive community within a major

Background

The view of higher education has shifted from the belief that it is a public service to seeing it as a private good. As a result, universities have lost government funding and have begun to compete for resources, mostly external sources of revenue. The university has to be competitive and rely on its prestige in order to secure government and industrial funding. This competition is internalized within each university to advocate for student achievement that further boosts the attraction of the university. A degree has begun to be marketed and viewed as a promise of social mobility and professional career advancements (Williams and Wilson 47). The rise in graduates reflects this belief, but the economy cannot integrate every degree holder into the market, thus creating fear within the student to distinguish themselves from their peers. In order for students to have an opportunity in a narrow job market, they must compete amongst themselves to achieve the highest grades and most notable distinctions, which leads students to become consumers of information rather than true academics who develop critical thinking skills.

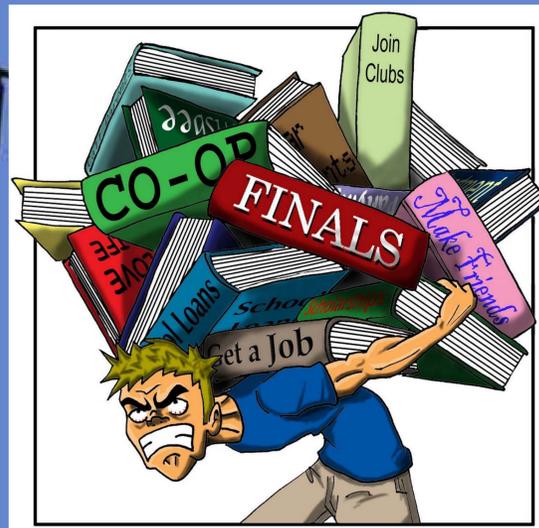


Image: nomorestigmakula.wordpress.com/2014/10/13/does-stress-effect-mental-health-in-college/

Literature Review

Students hope to get jobs relevant to their degree, but the economy cannot employ everyone who graduates (Slaughter and Leslie 31). Undergraduates fear that they won't be able to find a job, which aids the development of consumerist behaviors.

Modern students are treated and act like consumers. These behaviors have developed out of:

- insecurities about the worth of higher education (Chow and Leung 5)
- stress about financial security (Andrews and Wildung)
- increased belief that external achievements define oneself (James 34)

Students have to compensate by practicing consumerist behavior as it is the most effective way to take in information and maintain learning, but it does not lead to meaningful connections to the material (Mayer). As a result, students seek a competitive edge in hard courses. Consumption promotes rote learning so that students do not actually understand the material in a meaningful way, which contributes to the development of an alarmingly unhealthy fear of failure (Berry, De Castella).



Image From: <http://www.partsmodels.com/bruce-hawkins.html>

Significance

The student as a consumer of information cannot envision a future as they do not understand the knowledge that surrounds them. This leads to more anxiety, a growing disbelief in the university system, and insecurity about their own ability to be an academic. These feelings bubble up and contribute to emotional health problems, impacting academic performance and a student's view of their ability to learn.

The importance of this research is to connect these problems together, not to ask for a recall of the businesslike model of education, but to suggest that these issues need to be addressed in the classroom setting. Professors and students need to rethink their roles as service provider and consumer and discuss what it means to be a modern learner in an environment that produces not only knowledge in return for prestige and funding (Slaughter and Leslie 114), but students for a changing job market.

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Stanislaus State

Contact Information:
Jacklyn T. Heslop
Email: jheslop@csustan.edu

