

What exactly, besides a bloated web portal,  
do all these support staff support?

## Somewhere Between a Jeremiad and a Eulogy

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John E. Seery

I write this essay with mixed feelings. Half of me is mighty reluctant to write something harshly critical about higher education in the United States because I'm such a true-blue believer in, beneficiary of, and insider (here in my nook) to the system: Why should I contribute to the clamorous cross-country badmouthing so in vogue? We educators today are under siege by roving bands of pauperized parents, skunk-eyed skeptics, bean-counting accountants, dastardly disrupters, cretinous accreditors, mega-moneyed magnates, technology tycoons, pooh-poohing pundits, profiteering politicians, and others.

At my little college, notwithstanding the national noise to the contrary, I find myself surrounded by incredibly hardworking, conscientious, bright, creative, curious students—anything but the slacker or snowflake or sheep-like images of college millennials you see portrayed by professional cynics and anti-education propagandists.

I'm also surrounded by many fellow professors who are intensely dedicated, principled, broad-minded classroom teachers who see their job not primarily as a job but as a vocation (even as that term clicks antique elsewhere). My on-the-ground, in-the-hallway reality thus contravenes the prevailing narrative depicting professors as a bunch of

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pampered partisan prigs. Go ahead, troll me, if you must. But I know what I know. Something tremendously right, something inextinguishable, something akin to a spark of sacred sentience or thereabouts, abides in many out-of-the-way college classrooms today, and methinks we need to dwell and build on those quietly catalytic encounters.

My boosterism has its limits, and its object. I'm an outspoken, latter-day, and self-appointed apostle for the small liberal arts college (SLAC) form of education, a distinctively American institution.<sup>1</sup> But that distinctively American institution is falling fast into desuetude. Only one hundred to two hundred colleges in the U.S. can still be called small and liberal artsy (and it probably takes some Procrustean stretching to cover even that number).<sup>2</sup> Only about 1 percent of the nation's twenty million undergraduates are educated these days in a SLAC. Maybe I'm whistling past the graveyard, or going down with the sinking ship, or living on an isolated island as a blinkered holdout after the war is long over, but I still assert that the small liberal arts college form of education ought to be recognized (because it is so in fact, sotto voce, even if in dwindling numbers) as the gold standard, the summum bonum, the best of the best, for undergraduate education (rich, poor, white, black, religious, secular, you name it).

Suffice it to say that the institutional opportunity for a learned teacher and inquiring students to sit around a table, after extended bouts of reading and reverie, to discuss important texts together and to ponder and to brood and to clash over ideas and issues and events in unencumbered fashion is a precious exercise in human freedom (a freedom necessarily with others) that will probably go unmatched at any other time in one's life. If you haven't experienced such freedom firsthand, you probably have no idea what I'm talking about.<sup>3</sup> You probably also can't quite understand why many

of these small, out-of-the-way colleges have, over time in their histories, amassed sizable endowments almost entirely through alumni donations. Yet heed my plea: even if much or most of the United States system of higher education deserves condemnation and overhaul, the American small-college approach to education deserves preservation and renewal.

The other half of me feels obliged to concede publicly, short of a rant, to the point that all is not well here in paradise. Yes, the SLACs are suffering from external circumstances, threats, slights, and oversights. But we are also suffering from a particular corruption from within. Let me back up and explain.

The comparative advantage of the SLAC's "business model" has been that it is small and intimate. The smallness facilitates face-to-face forms of teaching and learning. It thus showcases an interactive mix of personalism, relationalism, and localism. Persons get to know each other as unique individuals, as part of this unique class here-and-now, as part of this particular college, a college like no other, situated in this part of the country, with these or that local and regional distinguishing features, customs, and aspirations. You don't just take a Shakespeare class from some carbon-copy, transportable, standard-issue Shakespeare professor. Rather, you take that particular Shakespeare course because it's being taught by a professor who has become a local celebrity of sorts (but unsung otherwise) because of the way she's taught the course, with scholarly insights and idiosyncratic twists and inventive accommodations, always displaying a teacherly attentiveness that takes into crucial account the indispensably unique individuals in front of her in that particular class in that particular year. Over time the course becomes steeped in surrounding local traditions and lore, and in turn creates its own tradition and lore, radiating outward from her teaching bril-



*The university's top-down organization  
owes much to Lenin*

liance, which then contributes to the overall character of the college. Such a classroom is the moral center of the college. Everything else is ancillary.

That moral capital accrues over time and eventually yields financial capital in the form of the above-mentioned endowments. Those endowments—which seem to signify merely dollar signs to some people—have created the wrong incentives and thus attracted some of the wrong people into the humble halls of these small not-for-profit colleges. These latecomers tend to think the organizational structure of the college should be a pyramid, not a circle.

Much ado has been made about administrative creep and administrative bloat at big universities across the country, the proliferation of vice presidents and deans and deanlets and directors and assistant directors and supervisors and others with executive-sounding or middle-manager puffed-up titles.<sup>4</sup> Those sprawling multiversity Leviathans probably need, for their many divisions and operations and revenue streams, large bureaucracies and an overarching managerial structure and several sets of complexly

furcated organizational flow charts that start to resemble on paper tall and wide Christmas trees. But that cancerous disease—of a burgeoning and expensive administrative apparatus über alles—has infected small colleges, too, and its damaging effects are particularly pernicious there.

An autonomous managerial class has emerged whose immediate and ulterior interests are occupational as opposed to educational (a distinction that ought not to be collapsed), and whose mission is to serve administrative purposes as opposed to teaching purposes (another distinction that ought not to be elided). Perhaps worst of all, the management model of organization, in trying to bring small colleges into the fold of purportedly national “best practices” and procedures, is destroying the distinctiveness, the localism, the teacherliness, the very *raison d'être*, of small colleges, one by one, all across America. Those colleges rich enough to compete for students and brand recognition with the likes of Stanford and Princeton may survive the last shakeout, but I’m afraid it will be at the expense of, as it were, their institutional souls.

*The buck stops with Lenin*

For the rapid destruction of the American small college—which is what we are witnessing—I could wag my finger at a number of culprits and conditions. But I want to focus my ire here on one main responsible party: small liberal arts college presidents. They bear the bulk of the blame. The fish rots from the head down.

Outsiders might suppose that colleges are organized communally and that professors wield actual power within the walls of academe. This is a huge misconception. Colleges are formally and informally governed far more like top-down Leninist organizations than hippie communes. Members of the board of trustees, operating according to a set of by-laws for the corporation, bear the legal and fiduciary responsibilities for good stewardship at the top, but in fact the president holds the keys to the Chevy and can drive it pretty much wherever he/she wishes (and over time, the president handpicks many of the members of the board and also pushes out critics, so it becomes more or less an old boys club). The president thus enjoys a great deal of formal and discretionary power, and isn't constrained, as would be a CEO of a for-profit company, for overriding and clarifying concerns about bottom-line profit or shareholder returns. If a president of the college wants to build a big new art museum and can divert the money or debt to do so, he doesn't need much consultation beyond (i.e., below) the board, and will receive a great deal of vocal support and functional complicity from the confederacy of at-will, yes-men administrators at his behest, all of whom well understand the top-down, hierarchical, quasi-tyrannical structure of the organization. The hallowed and possibly countervailing notions of "faculty governance" and "academic freedom" are not professorial prerogatives or rights inscribed somehow in Nature or the Constitution

but are, instead, discretionary privileges extended by the beneficence and norms of the Powers-that-Be at the uppermost echelon of the college. Oh, faculty committees can write reports and hold meetings and take votes and make a small ruckus. But the president is in charge, and can ignore or squelch all the noise below. And so the ultimate responsibility for the college's corruption and demise should not be distributed or attenuated. No buck passing.

Here's my saddest revelation in this sad essay of mine: small liberal arts college presidents don't know what they are talking about, and yet they talk as if they do. As a class of professional liars, they shouldn't be trusted with the truth-seeking institutions with which they've been entrusted. They are to promote the college as a place of teaching. But they are not teachers. They are to sing the praises of the liberal arts classroom. But most of them have never set foot on a liberal arts college campus before heading one up. Most of them, I dare say after perusing their lifelong track records and educational and career choices, would never have sought out a presidency at a small liberal arts college but for the enormous pay and status that now come attached to those jobs. Let the data speak for itself.

For the tax year 2014 (such compensation data are released two years after the fact), the average compensation for small liberal arts college presidents was \$563,423.07.<sup>5</sup> The mean was \$515,822. One SLAC president (of Trinity College in Connecticut) came in ninth on the list of private college/university compensation packages, below the likes of the presidents at the University of Pennsylvania, Columbia University, Northwestern University, and the University of Chicago, and just above the presidents of Cornell University, the University of Miami, and the University of Southern California. Four SLAC presidents made more than \$1,000,000 for that 2014 year (don't tell me about golden

parachutes as some mitigating consideration). Seven made between \$700,000 and \$800,000; fifteen made between \$600,000 and \$700,000; twenty-seven made between \$500,000 and \$600,000; and forty-nine made between \$400,000 and \$500,000. Reaching those stratospheric salaries are not just the presidents of well-to-do and well-known Amherst, Williams, Swarthmore, Pomona, and Vassar, but also such small and obscure places as Wabash, St. Benedict's, and Eckerd.

Of the SLAC presidents making more than \$400,000 in 2014, 65 percent are not SLAC alums, and 82 percent never taught in a SLAC. A majority—59 percent—never set foot on a SLAC campus, either as a student or as a professor, before heading one up. (Only 12 percent knew the inside of a SLAC classroom as *both* a student and as a professor.) What's more, get this: the *less* previous experience you have had in a SLAC, the *more likely* you are to pull down a big salary as a SLAC president. Of the top ten best-paid SLAC presidents, nine had absolutely no prior experience in a SLAC, either as a student or professor, before being named president of one. *None* of the ten best-paid SLAC presidents had been a SLAC professor in his/her previous curriculum vitae. (One of the top ten had been an undergraduate at a SLAC; that's the sum total of the collective liberal arts experience.) Of the top thirty best-paid SLAC presidents, twenty-one (= 70 percent) had absolutely *no* connection to a SLAC before heading one up as president. Also, the vast majority of these woefully inexperienced but well-paid presidents are white men. Of those making more than \$400,000, 76 percent are men; 95 percent are white.

Now, I imagine that some of my market-minded friends might jump in at this point to lecture me about the irresistible market forces that have virtually compelled these presidents to accept these lavish salaries so

prudently offered to them.<sup>6</sup> You want to get the best people for these jobs, I will be told, and thus you have to pay the going rates, because these top people are in demand and have options and special experience and skill sets and they look good and keep their hair combed and ultimately pay for themselves because of their superior managerial and fundraising abilities. They already know how to preside over complex institutions and to oversee budgets and spreadsheets and to travel long distances to sweet-talk and schmooze with potential donors. Besides, the national executive search firm we hired, whose recruiters well scrutinized the nominated CVs sent to them, tell us that the applicant pool was rich and wide but in the end we have to pay top dollar for the right person, which, incidentally, works out for a higher finder's fee for those at the search firm.

Turns out on closer inspection, however, that none of these SLAC presidents on the 2014 compensation scale was ever a CEO in the business world (nor do any former SLAC presidents get CEO-business offers upon retiring), so the "market pressures" for ratcheting up salaries come largely from some conjured trajectory from within academe. To get yourself on the presidential track, to groom yourself in that direction, you typically need to gain just enough scholarly credibility so that you can then pivot and turn your full-on attention to becoming an associate dean, and then a dean, and then a VP, working your way up through non-SLAC bureaucracies until you can launch into the salary stratosphere. If you end up as president in a well-paying non-SLAC institution: that works fine. But if you get a sweet SLAC presidential appointment, that may be all the better!

What the executive selection system has created is a national SLAC presidential network of climbers, carpetbaggers, careerists—and liars. These hired-gun presidents are

supposed to speak for and about the little colleges they represent, to sell the college, to promote the liberal arts, to be an exemplary leader presiding over a noble nonprofit, but the data above indicate that, for the vast majority of them, the subtext to their platitudinous speechifying about the importance of a small liberal arts college education is: “Do as I say, not as I’ve done. The key to your success, if you follow my example heretofore, lies elsewhere.” Small wonder so many colleges are struggling, even as their presidents are paid so handsomely. It’s no conundrum; it’s a scourge.

### *A ballooning bureaucracy*

I’m not convinced that the complex administrative operation put in place, for which the president takes credit as overseer and strategic planner-in-chief, is more efficient and cost-effective compared with some of the simpler ways and days of yore. Allow me to adduce some numbers from my own immediate referent, Pomona College.

I came to Pomona College in 1990. I had barely heard of it. *U.S. News* started its Best Colleges rankings in 1983, releasing their rankings every other year. Starting in 1987, they released the rankings annually. But in 1990 I didn’t check those early rankings, and I don’t think many people did. At the time, Pomona was not really on the national radar screen. It wasn’t well known even in Southern California. Founded in 1887 along some railroad tracks that would eventually support a citrus industry in the region, Pomona got rich by becoming the first college or university to establish the “deferred trust” way of estate planning and college giving. Basically, a good number of the lemon and orange grove plantation owners in the surrounding region donated their entire estates to Pomona in return for an annuity return better than what other

investments could offer. With some other savvy and lucky stock market investments along the way (running Cisco stock up and getting out before the 1987 crash), in addition to ongoing donations from ever-devoted alums, little out-of-the-way Pomona became one of the richest per-student institutions in the country, and for that and other reasons, it started to attract attention. It moved up *U.S. News* into the top ten, sometimes breaking into the top five. In recent years, the Forbes college ranking list, which lumps together large universities and small colleges, rated Pomona as the number one college in the nation several years in a row, above even Princeton, Harvard, and Stanford.

The most conspicuous change I’ve seen over those years is that the number of administrators has ballooned. On the shelves in my office I still have my first Pomona College catalog, for the academic year 1990–91, a printed black-and-white publication with a four-color but poorly designed cardboard-stock cover glued over the smudgy pages in between. Toward the back of the catalog, under “Administration,” there are nine offices listed, covering three pages, naming 56 persons as the members of the administration. Thereafter, the professors are listed, a total of 180. At the time, Pomona matriculated 1,487 students. In 2016 it takes me about ten seconds to find all this information in the cheap 1990 catalog.

Cut to the future, 2016. The catalog is no longer printed in hard copy. Everything is on the web, accessed through something called a “portal.” If you Google it, you can cut into the portal and arrive directly at a website called Pomona College Administrative Offices and Services. There are fifty-six links on this front page, but to get the full list of administrators, you need to click those fifty-six links plus an additional fifty-one links. Even then it’s a little confusing, because many of the main offices are broken up into suboffices for the purposes of this main web page. But the basic

organizational structure (after one does some piecing together) is this: Pomona College now has, by my careful count, 271 administrators (note: this number does not include the administrators that are shared in the Claremont University Consortium, which includes a CEO and nine other top administrators, who oversee some 5C pooled services, including health benefits, the library, mail and some phone and IT services, campus safety, the Office of the Chaplain, and some shared maintenance offices). The number of Pomona College faculty remains roughly the same (a current Pomona website lists the number of regular faculty at 186). The number of students has increased to 1,640.

The president now has nine vice presidents (up from four in 1990). The Dean of Students Office has gone from six persons in 1990 to sixty-five persons in 2016 (not counting administrative assistants). Academic Computing has gone from six persons in 1990 to thirty-six persons in 2016. The Office of Admissions has jumped from six to fifteen (again, none of these figures includes administrative assistants). The Office of Development (which formerly included Alumni Affairs) counted sixteen persons; now those renamed offices tally forty-seven persons all told. A few years ago Pomona created a new position, Chief Communications Officer; there are twenty-two persons (not counting administrative assistants) working for the CCO (yes, we have twenty-three persons working for Pomona's PR!). There are all sorts of offices that have popped up in 2016 that never existed back in 1990 (all the following numbers denote administrators and directors and don't include the administrative assistants for the office): Archives (2 persons); Asian American Resource Center (3); Career Development (11); Draper Center for Community Partnerships (6); Graduate Fellowships (1); Institutional Research (2); International Initiatives (1); Ombuds (1); Outdoor Education Center (2); Pacific Basin

Institute (2); Quantitative Skills Center (1); Queer Resources Center (3); Sontag Center for Collaborative Creativity (6); Sustainability Office (2); Writing Center (2).

Summary overview: the number of students at Pomona has increased 12 percent from 1990 to 2016; the number of faculty has increased 3 percent; tuition has increased 253 percent; the number of administrators has increased 384 percent. Pomona now employs far more administrators (271) than faculty (186) to fulfill its small college, non-profit educational mission.

I know that there are good people who will sincerely try to explain and defend the mushrooming increases in administrative positions. Some attribute it to an onslaught of federal regulation (e.g., Clery Act, VAWA, ADA, FERPA, Title IV, Title IX) and increased scrutiny by regional accrediting agencies, all following from reauthorizations of the Higher Educational Act of 1965. Some point to increased competition for students owing to the emergence of rankings services, globalization, helicopter parenting, and so on. Some say that a more diversified student body requires more administrators in tow. Some say corporatist trends have infiltrated higher education everywhere. The net effect of all these macro-explanations is to conclude that the administrative overthrow of the erstwhile SLAC model was inevitable, and all we can do now is shrug our shoulders, sit through PowerPoint meetings with small breakout sessions, learn to speak the prevailing jargon, and watch reruns of *The Office* for off-hour comic relief.

### *The escalating cost of software*

Still, I'm not quite ready to throw in the towel. I'm not convinced that the administrative model applied to academe is all that smart or necessary. Let's back up to peer again into my portal screen on my desktop.

Someone in Pomona's Information Technology Services has posted (I don't think in his/her spare time) a nice online "visualization" of the ITS "Enterprise Services"—in other words, a multicolored organizational flow chart that outlines the offices and titles for the thirty-six people working in ITS.<sup>7</sup> We have a VP/CIO at the top, with two managers reporting directly to the VP/CIO and then two deputies under the VP/CIO, with a whole host of directors and managers and specialists reporting to the two deputies. This structure follows the logic of a division of labor with specialized functions. Computers, hardware, software—technology in general—have become complicated. You need to hire specialists within computer science and information technology to keep up with the basics and with developments and innovations in the field. The bottom line for my students and me is that, today, we go to and through the web and the portal and the computer devices and social media services to conduct our educational enterprise rather than relying on the printed college catalog, the telephone, paper and pencil, as my students and I did back in 1990.

Mind you, I'm no Luddite. But I have to ask: Are we really better off? I ask that question not as a matter of mushy metaphysics but as a hard cost-benefit calculation. Here's an increasingly typical scenario at Pomona: A meeting of the faculty is called because someone above our pay grade has decided that we all need to learn about a new complicated software package that ITS will roll out in several phases. The new package may involve the logistics of registration, or computer security, or computer storage, or business accounting (many of these matters have in fact generated such meetings in recent years). Now, if we professors were all lawyers in a corporate law firm, calling a meeting of so many lawyers time and again might be tallied in terms of collective billable hours lost to the firm. But for some reason,

we in academe don't reckon these meetings as an inherent and escalating cost of our technological infrastructure.

The first item in our typical meeting is that the VP/CIO of ITS will introduce himself. (Pomona is no longer a small community, because we have a revolving door of administrators coming and going and mostly coming; hence we just don't know each other by name, as we did in 1990, so every meeting has to begin with elaborate introductions to each other.) The VP/CIO will then introduce members of his team, who will do the general explaining about the rollout of the new system. Each team manager will introduce various team members under his/her guidance, and each team member will then speak to some particular aspect of the rollout. We faculty eventually learn that the outside vendors from which we buy these complicated technology packages don't always update or renew them, so we keep having to buy entirely new packages and start all over again and learn a whole new system—a never-ending cycle of technological obsolescence—and thus we need to hire new people who have the latest expertise in those new packages (and even then, faculty and staff will each and all have to go through twenty hours of "training" to get up to speed with, say, the new business-accounting system). It doesn't take long until you find yourself with thirty-six people working in ITS, even at a small college (note that I haven't even discussed the sixty-five in the Dean of Students Office), and all that whiz-bang bustle doesn't necessarily relieve the faculty burden.

Meanwhile, for all of Pomona's accelerated ITS activity, I can't get anyone in ITS or in CCO/PR (okay, I'm getting cranky) to design a web page for me (you might notice how few faculty at Pomona have their own web pages—ITS does, from time to time, hire a tech-consultant to teach DIY classes in WordPress to us). Moreover, notwithstand-

ing our \$2.101 billion endowment, I can't get funding for some very basic classroom needs, and I have to beg for what I do get—that is, I have to fill out forms downloaded from the portal outlining and justifying my special budget requests and then must submit them back via the portal and hope that some nonteaching administrator in “client services,” responding to me as “end user” on the portal, looks with favor on my request. Budget requests for printed books, whether for classroom or research purposes, will never get approved (and are in fact expressly forbidden at Pomona); approvals for special computer and software purchases and new classroom technologies are, however, freely forthcoming (and expressly encouraged and generously subsidized at Pomona).

If some matter reaches the boiling point and incensed faculty members successfully petition to assemble an Ad Hoc Campus-Wide Presidential Advisory Committee to look into said matter, the faculty members appointed to the committee are liable to find themselves outnumbered and outgunned by the sheer number of administrators appointed to the committee, since so many discrete administrative offices supposedly deserve representation (as separate “stakeholders” in the college), whereas faculty can be grouped together procedurally as one low-level blob. What was once the source of a SLAC's distinctiveness—unique teachers, dedicated to the particular college at hand—now falls sway to the homogenizing influence of a nationalized round-robin network of résumé-padding, best-practices-practicing administration-administering administrators.

### *The portal to personal wellness*

Some long-standing small-college virtues and priorities at Pomona seem to be fading, even as we get more technologically adept and administratively enabled. Back in 1990,

if I felt a student was in personal distress, I would pick up the phone and call a dean I knew, and we'd have a discreet conversation about that troubled kid. And because I personally knew and trusted that dean, I also knew that she would follow through and contact the student and, sure enough, would see to it that she'd soon, one way or another, have a face-to-face sit-down with the student to find out what's going on and to provide appropriate counsel and care. Today if I have a troubled student, I'm supposed to go to the portal. The portal will tell me that, first, I have to fill out an information page about who I am, and then fill out another page about the student, checking off the problem from a list of possible concerns. That portal submission goes to some midlevel dean's office that is called (for the moment anyway) something along the lines of the Office for Student Success and Personal Wellness. My portal entry, I recently learned after inquiring, generates an email or two to the student, but no phone call, and no face-to-face sit-down (unless the student shows up on his/her own initiative). Portal-generated emails to distressed students refer those students to other portal links whereby they can seek, a click away, information about counseling services or the like. All those portal links, to be sure, sit securely behind the latest ITS-supervised security firewalls (which need constant monitoring and revamping and outside vendor support and renewal) so that a student's privacy cannot be violated.

Meanwhile, a troubled student under my watch did in fact drop out recently, and I learned after the fact that no human being, even from the rather well-staffed Office for Student Success and Personal Wellness, had ever met with that student, even after my many portal submissions and emails and desperate phone-called pleas for expert intervention. An increasingly pervasive (and expensive) technological approach to managing residential life at the college has

not produced an acceptable substitute for person-to-person dialogue and care. But presidents can't take credit for the latter, whereas they can tout the tangible benefits of technology on their annual reports, press releases, web pages, ranking service submissions, and updated résumés.

Educational experts now tell us that the latest research shows convincingly that, despite all the hype about technology, laptops in classes clearly conspire against effective student learning.<sup>8</sup> It's better to take notes with pencil and paper. Maybe we at Pomona (and elsewhere) don't need quite all those fancy and expensive software packages, along with an expanding cadre of support staff to support those newfangled packages and portals. Or maybe we need just a few technology can-do generalists on board rather than numerous teams of arcane specialists. The problem with an increasingly specialized specialization of function within complex organizations is that soon you get more and more managers managing others, more and more meetings in order to manage merely the management, until management itself becomes the mission. Somehow at Pomona (and elsewhere) you end up with far more administrators than teachers, albeit without overall efficiencies of scale. And the president doesn't know (and doesn't want to know) what's going on in the classrooms far down below, at the bottom of the organizational flow chart, because the president spends most of his/her time meeting in meetings, with VPs and deans and managers and consultants and PR people and event organizers and executive search firm recruiters.

### *The siphons of tyrants*

Critics of American higher education these days frequently call for the entire edifice to be disrupted and dismantled on the grounds

that tenured radicals promoting "political correctness" run the show and create an atmosphere that silences dissenting views. But that's an outdated and misdirected critique. First, tenure is fading; only 24 percent of undergraduate college courses in the U.S. are taught by tenured or tenure-track professors.<sup>9</sup> Second, the professorial radicals who came of age in the sixties are retired or dead, and professors who have achieved tenure subsequently have often acceded to the new Administrative Order of academe. Yes, there remain professors who espouse crazy theories, but not to the point that such textbook radicalism would threaten their jobs. If you look closely, the most unabashed forms of politically correct scripting on campus—the hunt to root out microaggressions and supposedly traumatizing speech—originate from the bloated administrative wing of campus, often from the Dean of Students Office(s). The people ventriloquizing students, through relentless sensitivity campaigns, about safe spaces, hate speech, structural oppression, and diversity imperatives are the deans and deanlets of residential life (as one of my colleagues puts it, the "Residential Life Industrial Complex"). Such people present elaborate and intensive "orientation" programs for the students. They have money to hire students to hector other students about the need for making everything warm and welcoming. On the academic side of things, the deans are constantly hiring outside "diversity trainers" and "leadership consultants" and "workplace bullying" experts to come in and present all-day workshops on said issues. There's a whole bureaucratic apparatus in place and it isn't faculty driven at all—though some faculty members take advantage of it, once the incentives and cues are put so clearly into place.

The real reason tuitions are skyrocketing and educational integrity has been compromised is because administrators, not educa-

tors, now run the show, all across America. They call the shots. They build the fancy buildings. They call for and approve the costly amenities. They fund what they want to fund. They hire the people they want to hire and pay them top dollar. They make the decisions about branding campaigns, and they set the agenda for student affairs staffs. They fund the kind of curriculum they want. They control the purse strings. They hold the power.

That pyramidal model in which intellectual labor is transferred from the faculty to the president and his administrators and their strategic plans systematically siphons money and attention and purpose away from what matters most, the classroom. Historically, SLAC alumni have donated to their small colleges because they genuinely believed in the small-college, residential, face-to-face, liberal arts form of education. The current crop of SLAC presidents are (with a few pos-

sible exceptions) no longer fellow travelers and true believers in that cause. Their words ring hollow. Yet their pocketbooks grow fat. That alumni donations have dropped off dramatically in the past twenty years at SLACs across the country should come as no great surprise.<sup>10</sup>

Pause to ponder this well: many American small colleges are in a death spiral (admittedly not Pomona and other elite schools) precisely during a period when presidential salaries are zooming skyward. It doesn't have to be this way. I pinch myself with gratitude after every seminar with my students. The classroom is and must be the moral center of a college. That's where the action is. That's where the priorities must be placed. That's what must be protected and promoted. We need college leadership that believes in providing the right kind of modern bang for the buck, with budgetary sobriety starting at the top. †

NOTES

- 1 Steven Koblak and Stephen R. Graubard, eds., *Distinctively American: The Residential Liberal Arts Colleges* (New Brunswick, NJ: Transaction Publishers, 2000).
- 2 On the difficulties of calculating the number of SLACs (and for some such calculations), see Susan McWilliams and John E. Seery, eds., *The Best Kind of College: An Insiders' Guide to America's Small Liberal Arts Colleges* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2015), 16–17, f2.
- 3 See the description of the dinner party discussion on higher education at Peter Thiel's house in San Francisco in late March 2011: George Packer, "No Death, No Taxes," *New Yorker*, November 28, 2011.
- 4 Benjamin Ginsberg, *The Fall of the Faculty: The Rise of the All-Administrative University and Why It Matters* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2011); Jon Marcus, "New Analysis Shows Problematic Boom in Higher Ed Administrators," *The Eye*, February 6, 2014, <https://eye.necir.org/2014/02/06/new-analysis-shows-problematic-boom-in-higher-ed-administrators/>; Mary Clare Reim, "Our Bloated Universities," SeeThruEdu.com, February 9, 2016, <http://seethruedu.com/our-bloated-universities/>.
- 5 I consulted the *Chronicle of Higher Education's* database "Executive Compensation at Private and Public Colleges" and matched the results against the *U.S. News* list of liberal arts colleges in 2014. Brian O'Leary and Joshua Hatch, "Executive Compensation at Private and Public Colleges," *Chronicle of Higher Education*, December 4, 2016.
- 6 Raymond D. Cotton, "Myth: College and University Presidents Are Overpaid," American Council on Education, Spring 2012, <http://www.acenet.edu/the-presidency/columns-and-features/Pages/Myth-College-and-University-Presidents-Are-Overpaid.aspx>.
- 7 Since the time I wrote this article, Pomona's ITS office has revamped its entire web site and eliminated the link for its "Enterprise Services" organizational flowchart. They did kindly send me a PDF copy of it, and I can send that to readers on request.
- 8 Darren Rosenblum, "Leave Your Laptops at the Door to My Classroom," *New York Times*, January 2, 2017.
- 9 John W. Curtis, "The Employment Status of Instructional Staff Members in Higher Education, Fall 2011," American Association of University Professors, April 2014, table 1, p. 2; I should add that Pomona, thankfully, is not yet one of those places that has replaced tenure-track faculty with adjuncts, but there are worrying signs on the horizon about the importance of full-time faculty.
- 10 Angela White, "Declining Alumni Giving: What's Happening? Why Is It Happening? And, What Can We Do About It?" GivingUSA.org, March 10, 2015, <https://givingusa.org/declining-alumni-giving-whats-happening-why-is-it-happening-and-what-can-we-do-about-it/>; Dan Allenby, "Class Exodus," Council for the Advancement and Support of Education, October 2014; Amy X. Wang, "Why Alumni Donations to Yale and Other US Colleges Are Hitting a New Low," *Quartz*, February 24, 2016, <https://qz.com/623280/why-alumni-donations-to-yale-and-other-us-colleges-are-hitting-a-new-low/>.