



# PETITION: WHAT WENT WRONG WITH HIGHER EDUCATION AND HOW TO BEGIN FIXING IT

*Posted on June 1, 2022 by Nicholas Capaldi*



Going back to their origins in the Western European Middle Ages, the humanities were tasked with the articulation, preservation, critique and transmission of the fundamental values of western civilization.

**Higher Education** was understood *as the initiation into that inheritance and as an adventure in self-understanding*, an intellectual and moral inheritance of great splendor shared by both teachers and students.

When transmitted to students who possessed the intellectual capacity and maturity to absorb it they would serve as society's elite leadership. This was the ideal of a liberal education.

Those values continued to underpin the rise of the sciences and markets in the modern world. The evolution of modern American universities came to encompass the humanities, scientific research, and preparation for their practical application. Beneficiaries of that education prospered in their individual careers and contributed to America's prosperity, its world-wide dominance economically, politically, and culturally.

Like everything else, things started to go wrong in the 1960s. Seemingly challenged by the then USSR, the US government initiated the first federal loan program, the National Defense Student Loan, now the Perkins Loan, in 1958. In 1965, the federal government began guaranteeing **student loans** provided by banks and non-profit lenders.

The vast and sudden expansion in the 1960s of so-called higher education had serious consequences.

First, the humanities and social sciences, recently followed by the hard (i.e., real) sciences, were captured by the political left leading to the conclusion that the Western inheritance and the U.S. in particular were responsible for all the domestic and international evil in the world.

Second, the federal government was now subsidizing its own executioner! Buoyed by such misguided and self-destructive generosity, institutions of higher education...

- a. raised tuition way beyond what inflation required;

- b. hastily produced several generations of lower-quality-to-incompetent teachers who acquiesced in the now dominant left-leaning ideology;
- c. expanded admissions to include vast numbers of either ineligible (democracies have a difficult time dealing with the fact that there are inherent differences in ability) or under-prepared students;
- d. used the vast expansion to create a bloated bureaucracy (which turned out to be jobs for ideologues who served as "commissars");
- e. lowered standards both to cover up the inadequate preparation of the students, disguise the laxness of the faculty, and maintain the high levels of funding;
- f. no longer committing themselves to defending western values, these institutions largely stopped teaching the basic texts of western literature and philosophy, making it impossible for students to understand these values;
- g. and engaged in undermining the legitimacy of the US as a nation state by accepting vast sums of money to engage in scientific research on behalf of Communist China!

The consequences are now obvious. First, there is a mismatch between the product and the market (this was already known by the 1980s). When 2% of graduates had a traditional college degree, they enjoyed many economic opportunities and personal prosperity (companies competed to hire someone who was both smart and demonstrated both responsibility and diligence). When 65% have a recent vintage degree that is enough to belie the argument that college graduates automatically earn more. Moreover, when their degrees are a total mismatch to the job market, they will have both no serious job and no way to repay the loans. Yes, we have a student loan crisis! But we have a crisis in higher education's very *raison d'être*.

We need to **begin** the process of retrieving our heritage, providing meaningful education for all students so that they can experience individual prosperity, and contribute to America's prosperity and greatness.

Toward that end, we offer the following **petition** in the hopes that influential people will read it, sign it

and that **Congress** will complete the process of amending its role in higher education!

**Please access the petition by clicking here.**

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*Featured image: "Allegory of wisdom," attributed to Giovanni Domenico Cerrini, 17th century.*

