

# Globalization and the University: The Wrecking of the Academy

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Good evening. [Slide 1]

As you can see I've added a sub-title to the lecture to give it a nice, upbeat feel to cheer our spirits on this cold, wintry evening. Actually, what I have to tell is more like a horror story, so strap yourselves in for the ride. The fact is I'm simply following a stream of books over the last twenty years with titles like *The University in Ruins* (Readings 1996), *Universities for Sale* (Tudiver 1999), *No Place to Learn: Why Universities Aren't Working* (Pocklington and Tupper 2002), *Ivory Tower Blues: A University System in Crisis* (Cote and Allahar 2007), *The University in Chains* (Giroux 2007), *Universities at Risk* (Turk 2008) and, finally, most recently, and most chillingly, *Zombies in the Academy: Living Death in Higher Education* (Whelan, Walker and Moore 2013). So, first I will describe the wreckage, and then consider the wrecking.

## The Wreckage

Yesterday was Human Rights Day. Three months ago, in September, Margaret Mary Vojtko, an adjunct instructor of French at Duquesne University in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania died sick, alone and penniless. She was 83, was undergoing radiation for cancer, and had suffered a massive heart attack on her front lawn. Someone had contacted the county's Adult Protective Services, reporting that she couldn't take care of herself. She was mortified and begged Dan Kovalik, an official at the union that was trying to organize the faculty at Duquesne where she had worked for 25 years, to intervene. He called Adult Protective Services on her behalf.

According to Kovalik, "I said that she had just been let go from her job as a professor at Duquesne, that she was given no severance or retirement benefits, and that the reason she was having trouble taking care of herself was because she was living in extreme poverty. The caseworker paused and asked with incredulity, 'She was a professor?' I said yes. The caseworker was shocked; this was not the usual type of person for whom she was called in to help."

Kovalik continues, "Of course, what the caseworker didn't understand was that Margaret Mary was an adjunct professor, meaning that, unlike a well-paid tenured professor, Margaret Mary worked on a contract basis from semester to semester, with no job security, no benefits and with a salary of between \$3,000 and just over \$3,500 per three-credit course." Duquesne acknowledged that its part-time instructors receive no benefits, and it did not dispute the details of Vojtko's employment.

The story illustrates the "meanness" of a two-track faculty system, which is particularly vicious late in an adjunct's career. Instead of retiring with benefits and pension like tenured colleagues, adjuncts end up with neither and, in all likelihood, little to no savings. In other words, in poverty.

Kovalik says: “As amazing as it sounds, Margaret Mary, a 25-year professor, was not making ends meet. Even during the best of times, when she was teaching three classes a semester and two during the summer, she was not even clearing \$25,000 a year, and she received absolutely no health care benefits. Compare this to the salary of Duquesne's president, who makes more than \$700,000 with full benefits.”

In the last year, he says, Vojtko was reduced to “abject penury,” following a course load reduction – she was teaching one class [per semester], making \$10,000 annually – with huge medical bills stemming from her cancer treatment. She could no longer afford heating, so she worked at an Eat n’ Park restaurant at night to stay warm. She tried to sleep during the day at Duquesne, when she wasn’t teaching.

“When this was discovered by the university, the police were called in to eject her from her office,” Kovalik says. “Finally, in the spring, she was let go by the university, which told her she was no longer effective as an instructor -- despite many glowing evaluations from students.” Vojtko came to Kovalik for help, to ask Duquesne to help pay her medical bills. He appealed to them twice on her behalf, but to no avail.

She was buried, Kovalik wrote, “in a simple, cardboard casket devoid of any handles for pallbearers -- a sad sight, but an honest symbol of what she had been reduced to by her ostensibly Catholic employer.”

Asked how many more potential “Mary Margarets” there are in academe, Kovalik said “literally thousands. [Three-fourths] of higher education is now being taught by adjuncts with low wages, no job security and no health care. It is truly appalling” (edited quote from “Newspaper column on ‘Death of an Adjunct’ prompts debate,” *Inside Higher Education*, September 19, 2013).

Well, that’s the United States, and a non-unionized, religious college to boot, that can get away with paying less than the standard. What about a secular, unionized Canadian university? What about WLU? What’s the deal here? My wife could tell you. She’s in the audience tonight. You may know that the university administration and the faculty union (WLUFA) just reached a new collective agreement that will marginally improve the figures I am going to give you (by about \$75 per course). Like Margaret Mary, Debbie – that is, Dr. Debra Chapman, author of one book and three journal articles - is employed on contract, one term at a time, one four-month course at a time, no job security, virtually no benefits. Whereas Margaret Mary in the U.S. is called an “adjunct professor,” here in Ontario Dr. Chapman is a member of what is called the “Contract Academic Staff,” CAS for short.

She is paid slightly over \$7,000 per course. If she had the same standard teaching workload as a full-time faculty member like me – four courses per year – she would make \$28,000 per year. By comparison the salary floor for a full-time Assistant Professor is \$73,000. According to President Blouw the average starting salary for freshly graduated university students with a bachelor’s degree is \$45,000 per year. The average pay of CAS members, over half of whom at Laurier have a PhD (the others mostly professional qualifications), is about \$17,000. About a quarter of Laurier’s CAS had collected EI in the last three years.

Last year the 390 CAS employed at Laurier taught just over half its students, though they are limited by the collective agreement to teaching no more than 35% of the courses.

Let me remind you of Article 7 of the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights, signed by Canada in 1966, subsequently ratified and having come into force in 1976. Article 7 reads, in relevant part [**Slide 2**]:

The States Parties to the present Covenant recognize the right of everyone to the enjoyment of just and favourable conditions of work which ensure, in particular:

- (a) Remuneration which provides all workers, as a minimum, with:
  - (i) Fair wages and equal remuneration for work of equal value without distinction of any kind, in particular women being guaranteed conditions of work not inferior to those enjoyed by men, with equal pay for equal work;
  - (ii) A decent living for themselves and their families in accordance with the provisions of the present Covenant.

I will return to why I have chosen to start by focusing on the plight of exploited workers. Meanwhile here are some further facts about the contemporary university you may or may not be aware of: [**Slides 3 and 4**].

- “The current cost of an undergraduate degree averages about \$25,000 in tuition and ancillary fees alone; some professional programs cost more than \$100,000” (Kuran 2012)
- “Today, 60 per cent of Canadian students ... undertake an average debt of \$27,000 to pay for their post-secondary education” (Kuran 2012)
- “Student-loan borrowers now owe the [U.S.] federal government more than \$1-trillion” (Weinberg, July 17, 2013)
- “Federal student debt in Canada exceeds \$15 billion, plus another \$5 to \$8 billion in credit card debts, lines of credit and provincial loans” (CBC News, June 12, 2013)
- “The biggest source of student anxiety is paying for their education” (Goar, September 7, 2013)
- About 60% of students work while attending university. They work on average 16 hours per week (<http://www.statcan.gc.ca/pub/75-001-x/2010109/article/11341-eng.htm>)
- According to a U.S. questionnaire survey of 10,000 students conducted in summer 2013 “over 75% of students decide not to buy the textbooks their classes require” (Nawotka, September 11, 2013)
- “The [2013] Hunger Report says there is not one college or university campus in Ontario that does not have a food bank or some kind of hunger relief program onsite” (Canadian Press, December 2, 2013; see Eric Girard’s “What I learned at law school: the poor need not apply,” Nov 17, 2013)
- 55% of Ontario university students take 5 years or more to graduate, according to the Higher Education Quality Council of Ontario (Denuzzo, March 13, 2013)

- “According to a survey of 1,180 Ontario high school students in grades 10 and 11 ... ‘to get a good job’ is the top rationale for 58% of university-bound and 75% of college-bound students” (HEQCO, August 21, 2012)
- In the U.S. in 2012 almost 90% of incoming first-year students “cited ‘to be able to get a better job’ as a very important reason for attending college;” 75% “also said the ability ‘to make more money’ was a very important reason to attend college” according to UCLA’s annual Freshman Survey (Wyer, January 23, 2013)
- “Ninety per cent of students surveyed said they were overwhelmed by the demands of their academic careers,” according to a national survey of post-secondary students in Canada (Winsa, June 17, 2013)
- Total attended student Counselling appointments at WLU rose from 1808 in 2007 to 3841 in 2010 (Bertoia and Brown 2012)
- “The number of hours undergraduates spend preparing classwork had dropped by one third by 2004 compared to the early sixties (from 40 hours a week to 27)” (Chiose 2013)
- According to a University of Pennsylvania Graduate School of Education study of MOOCs (Massive Open Online Courses) “course completion rates are very low, averaging 4% across all courses” (UPenn press release, December 5, 2013)
- “1970s: 1 professor, 12 students; 2013: 1 professor, 22 students [Ontario 25]” (Hughes 2013)

### ***WLU***

So far I have presented some facts about the nature of contemporary academic employment and about the contemporary situation of university students. Since neither you nor I have all night to dwell on this sad litany I’ll round out this picture of the contemporary university in more summary fashion, relying on the case of WLU since I know something about it and it is, I think, representative of development generally. Since the mid-1990s, when Dr. Lorna Marsden was President, the university has done the following. It has (a) pursued a policy of internationalization including actively recruiting international students in order to benefit from the much higher level of fees charged to them; (b) established the largest fund-raising campaign in the university’s history at that point, because the “stability and the future of post-secondary education in Canada depends on increased private gift income” (according to President Marsden in a fund-raising letter to the university community); (c) cultivated stronger relations with business and government, including through “partnerships;” (d) enhanced the process of privatizing the university incrementally, by allowing tuition fees to rise to the benchmark figure of 50% of operating revenue, what the university officially called “partial and progressive deregulation of tuition with a fixed floor,” that is, semi-privatization, or privatization by the back door;<sup>i</sup> (e) introduced internal competition, devolved budget control and varying degrees of self-financing among its internal units (including requiring the Bookstore, Residences and Food Service to operate as “profit centres”); (f) grown the administrative structure (at a greater rate than the growth in numbers of student or faculty) and sought greater control by the board of governors and senior administration of committees for the appointment of senior administrators, while attempting to wrest the academic planning process from the control of Senate, thereby supplanting the faculty as the identity of the “University;” (g) brought in balanced budgets, (h) increased the use of so-called “part-time” contractual employment among staff and faculty,<sup>ii</sup> (i)

shifted the form of part-time and continuing education from classroom instruction to on-line delivery;<sup>iii</sup> (j) sought to raise money by selling opportunities to name buildings; (k) gone into considerable debt to finance itself (Di Matteo 2009), buying a corporate bond to the tune of \$115-million thereby coming under the scrutiny of the bond-rating agencies and all that this implies, and (l) spent tens of thousands on a branding exercise resulting in the logo “Inspiring Lives” with a maple leaf. Boosterism is rampant. Administration has also (m) grown the university dramatically, changing it from an officially “small” university to a “comprehensive,” multi-campus one. Currently the university is being subjected to an illegitimate “program prioritization” process called IPRM. You can ask me about it in question time.

## **The Wrecking**

You may think that I am seeking to complain about the administration of my university but that is not my point. I am rather seeking to illustrate what has been happening to universities across the world, not just since the crash of 2008, not just since the 1990s, but rather indeed over the last 35 years or so, since the 1970s. This is where the other word in my title comes in, “globalization.” The word “globalization” is a benign, neutral, economic-geography way of describing what has been, in actual fact, a ruthless attack on the well-being of the people of the world. It is properly called neoliberalism, a phase in the development of capitalism that has gradually replaced the state welfare form of capitalism that characterized the thirty years after the Second World War. Neoliberalism was brought in by Margaret Thatcher in the UK, Ronald Reagan in the US and Deng Xiaoping in China and then copied everywhere.

Neoliberalism is the name of a set of policies founded on the principle of the “primacy of private property rights,” what Adam Smith called the “vile maxim of the masters of mankind – all for ourselves and nothing for other people” (Chomsky 1994: 5). Its agenda comprises the following elements [**Slide 5**]: the market as panacea — this at least is the theory since in practice it has meant unprecedented corporate concentration and corporate welfare – what Susan George (2000: 32) calls “one of the greatest hold-ups of ours or any generation” - minimal corporate competition plus opening of non-market property to capital, and massive state intervention both to sustain what markets there are and to rescue them when the inevitable economic disasters they generate occur, as in 2008;<sup>iv</sup> free economic zones as model for the global economy; deregulation of *national* economies; privatization of public corporations; “popular capitalism;” lowering of the corporate share of taxation; reduction of national debt; downsizing of government; restructuring of local government; dismantling of the welfare state; promotion of charities; circumscribing of civil liberties, human rights, trade union powers and democracy itself; and the expansion of the “crime control industry” to deal with the consequences, including the management of surplus, usually racialized, populations or “dangerous classes.”<sup>v</sup>

“Dismantling of the welfare state” includes increasing corporate influence on the universities by the standard method for moving public institutions into private hands – underfunding them. The single most important fact I want to put before you tonight is displayed in the diagram on the screen (prompted by a student essay) [**Slide 6**]. In the late 1970s government provided about 85% of Canadian universities’ operating revenue. Now it’s about 55% on average, but less than 50% in Ontario (Ontario Budget 2013) [**Slide 7**]. At WLU the breakdown is 52% tuition, 42% government, 6% other [**Slide 8**]. “Federal government cash transfers for post-secondary education in Canada, when measured as a proportion of GDP, have declined by 50% between

1992–1993 and 2011–2012” (CAUT Almanac 2013). More or less all the other facts I have reported here follow from this single fact.

Thus, to compensate for loss of government revenue universities have raised tuition and ancillary fees for students. Students have responded by working longer hours and borrowing more money, just as workers have done generally. This has made their attitude towards the meaning of their studies more instrumental, more vocationally oriented, more individualistic. It has made paying for their education their number one anxiety. At the same time it has reduced the time they spend studying. The costs of this dilemma are measured in binge drinking, prescription medications and psychological counselling [Slide 9]. At the same time capitalism’s relentless drive to make them consumers produces classrooms populated by cell phones, tablets and laptop computers. Current research is showing these distractions have detrimental effects on their grades (Medical News Today, December 9, 2013).

Universities have also embarked on lavish fund-raising campaigns, actively seeking large corporate donations. This has come at a cost to academic freedom as large donors, quite understandably, have sought to tie strings to their donations. This university and the University of Waterloo narrowly escaped censure by the CAUT last year by revising the terms of the agreement with Jim Balsillie’s private think-tank, the Centre for International Governance Innovation (CIGI), over the terms under which the Balsillie School of International Affairs was established in Waterloo. To be fair, the revised terms are now regarded by CAUT as a model for such collaborations, though six of twelve such arrangements analyzed by CAUT in a report published last month raise significant concerns (Ward 2013).

Universities have also sought to cut costs, chiefly by what the English call the “casualization” of the workforce, what good Marxists call “proletarianization.” [Slide 10] Perhaps the best expression is *The Precariat*, coined by Guy Standing in a book of that title, and it applies to the case of the Contract Academic Staff about whose situation I began this talk. Again, this follows the trend in the economy generally under neoliberal globalization. There are further consequences of globalization for the university that have harmful effects on the direction and conduct of research, the funding of which is increasingly skewed to what is disingenuously called “the needs of the economy” which are, we are told, “competitiveness,” “innovation,” “growth” and, right now, “differentiation.”

I say “disingenuously” because the expression “the economy” is a euphemism for the interests and profits of the large corporations that dominate the economy and exert profound influence on government. That these same corporate actors are the ones chiefly responsible for the threat of global catastrophe posed by anthropogenic global warming and the ones standing in the way of responding seriously to it is invisible in the stances taken by university presidents. Instead we are told by corporate lobby groups, governments and, yes, university presidents, that the chief purpose of the university is to contribute to the economy. This expression of the corporatization, commercialization, commodification and managerialization of the university is what is, and has been now for the last thirty years, wrecking the academy. Here’s how one defender of the academic ideal puts it in his book *What Are Universities For?* published in 2012 [Slide 11]:

In the face of this, one has to make, over and over again, the obvious point that a society does not educate the next generation in order for them to contribute to the economy. It educates them in order that they should extend and deepen their understanding of themselves and the world, acquiring, in the course of this form

of growing up, kinds of knowledge and skill which will be useful in their eventual employment, but which will no more be the sum of their education than that employment will be the sum of their lives. And this general point about education takes a particular form in universities, where, whatever level of professional or vocational 'training' is also undertaken, the governing purpose involves extending human understanding through open-ended inquiry (Collini 2012: 91).

It should be added that the academic ideal, the idea of critical, free, open-ended inquiry, is intended to be carried out collaboratively among professors and students, both graduate and undergraduate in the spirit of enlightenment. Its primary home is the seminar room and its spirit is that of "loving the questions," to quote Ian Angus's recent book (2009). On Saturday, students in my first-year sociology course called Critical Analysis of Social Issues will sit down to write an answer to the following question on the final exam [**Slide 12**]:

It is a matter of great urgency, for ourselves and for world society, that our institutions and ideology be subjected to serious critical analysis. The universities must be a primary object of such analysis, and at the same time might provide the 'institutional form' within which it can be freely conducted (Chomsky 1969: 54).  
Discuss.

I wonder what they will say.

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i. WLU, “Submission to Advisory Panel;” “over the past decade our public colleges and universities have been quietly privatized, and increasingly institutions are being forced to open their doors to private interests” (Sarah Jayne King, chairperson of the Canadian Federation of Students-Ontario, quoted in “Ontario budget: Little for higher ed,” June 2013); such policies have helped to bring about a situation in which, by 2001 in Canada, “the average student debt is now more than \$25,000, one of the highest averages for public-education systems in the world,” with Ontario being the province with the lowest per capita operating grants from government, the highest tuition fees and the highest student-faculty ratios. Anne McIlroy, “Last Place for Quality, Accessibility Goes to Universities in Ontario,” *Globe and Mail*, January 10, 2001, A7. In October 2003, the university opted to de-regulate tuition fees in the undergraduate Business programme, in line with steps already taken at Queen’s, Toronto and Western Ontario universities. Meanwhile, average tuition fees across the country doubled from 1990-91 to 2003-04. “Students in for a Rough Ride.” In 2011, “The Canadian Federation of Students says the average debt for university graduates is almost \$27,000.” Gary Mason, “The Crushing Weight of Student Debt,” *Globe and Mail*, July 7, 2011, [http://www.theglobeandmail.com/news/national/british-columbia/gary\\_mason/the-crushing-weight-of-student-debt/article2088760/](http://www.theglobeandmail.com/news/national/british-columbia/gary_mason/the-crushing-weight-of-student-debt/article2088760/).

ii. Rajagopal, *Hidden Academics*.

iii. Noble, *Digital Diploma Mills*.

iv. See Panitch and Gindin, “Current Crisis;” in the words of Polanyi, *Great Transformation*, 3: “Our thesis is that the idea of a self-adjusting market implied a stark utopia. Such an institution could not exist for any length of time without annihilating the human and natural substance of society; it would have physically destroyed man and transformed his surroundings into a wilderness;” see McQuaig, *All You Can Eat*, for an excellent retrieval of Polanyi and his work for the twenty-first century.

v. This paragraph is taken from my review of Gary Teeple’s *Globalization and the Decline of Social Reform* (Eglin ...). “We are left with the surplus population, those outside production. And we are left with the classical problem: How to control the dangerous classes.” Christie, *Crime Control as Industry*, 61; see also Klein, *Shock Doctrine*, 532: referring to the Palestinians in the Occupied Territories, she writes, “What Israel has constructed is a system designed to ... keep workers from working, a network of open holding pens for millions of people who have been categorized as surplus humanity... In South Africa, Russia and New Orleans the rich build walls around themselves. Israel has taken this disposal process a step further: it has built walls around the dangerous poor.” For specific attention to the racialized — if culturally coded as raceless — character of the question of “how to dispose of ... those populations whose culture or character is alien and alienating, whose patterns of work and consumption are neither required nor adequate, whose presence takes up too much valuable space, whose movement remains the source of too much unease, whose settlement threatens to drain once abundant and now dwindling economic and ecological resources,” see Susan Searls Giroux, *Between Race and Reason*, 4.