Propelling University Education Forward:

In a Climate of Contradiction and Mediocrity

I. Potential Chapter Titles

For each chapter I have listed a potential chapter title along with a brief description of the nature of the content. For every chapter I have actual, alarming, and captivating stories that bring to life these issues and proactive solutions. I will also include student testimonials, online line rating system profiles, etc. to further evidence my analysis and conclusions drawn.

1. Educating Students is Last on the Professor's List of Priorities: What are their True Priorities as Dictated by Today's Universities?

Educating students is a very low priority for professors as their compensation, stature, and promotion rely on their success in publishing, grant monies raised, research, presentations, and committee work. At Georgia State University ("GSU") I witnessed a new president boasting about GSU becoming the NYU of the South with its dedication to becoming an acclaimed, top research university. GSU then proceeded to terminate some of the best "teaching" professors since their publication lists were not extensive.

Another pointed example of misdirected priorities away from educating students is when I taught a Management Information Systems course at Kennesaw State University. I often contacted multiple publishers, outside of the designated course book, to get their book versions for the same course. I found a fabulous book and recommended it to the course coordinator who oversaw twelve sections with eight different professors. He agreed that the book I suggested was far superior; however, he didn't want to upset the longstanding professors teaching the course. Changing textbooks would have required professors to spend considerable time overhauling their course lecture notes, assignments, etc.

2. Who is the Professor's Customer? Who Should they Strive to Please? The Student, Department Head, Parents, or Future Employers?

The "customer" should not be the student as the majority are too immature to realize what education they need, and how higher education is directly correlated to the time exerted. The customer should not be the professor's respective department heads for the same reasons as evidenced in Points 1 and 5. The "customer" should ultimately be their collective future employers towards developing as productive of a workforce as possible. To a lesser extent the student's parents should be considered the "customer" since they are often paying tuition and living expenses and committed to their children receiving a quality education.

3. University and Online Professor Rating Systems Undermine the Longevity of Great Educators: Students Reward Easy and High-Grading Professors

Education should be all about expanding the student's horizons and being able to assign challenging assignments that require a reasonable completion timeframe. University sponsored, student semester-ending evaluations of professors (primarily quantitative averages) reward professors that are easy and don't require much work. Online rating systems including "Rate My Professor" again reward "easy teachers" that give out a higher percentage of As and Bs and don't require much effort. Many students choose what teacher/section for an upcoming class by quickly referencing these online sites.

Low online ratings received by great educators typically results in lower future class enrollment. Couple this with low student ratings on the university semester ending evaluations and great educator's longevity can be seriously jeopardized.

Online rating systems are a vehicle for a student to get back at a professor that made them work. Unfortunately we know that bad news travels 10 times faster than good news.

4. Cumulative Final Exams Become Extinct Despite their True Educational Value

Students reviewing/studying all the topics at the end of the semester is a very worthwhile endeavor and strongly increases the likelihood that this information will be remembered years later towards some worthwhile application. Even at today's top universities like Harvard University there are fewer and fewer final exams to the point that Harvard does not routinely even schedule final exam location and times, the professor has to put in a request. Professors who have finals results in enhancing their unpopularity in rating systems, and places a burden of grading on them when they want to start their vacation breaks.

In addition to final exams being eliminated, professors are often making them optional or replaced by a final test of the last portion of course material covered.

If final exams were such a bad idea, why do law schools rely totally on cumulative finals?

5. In the Workplace Supervisors Supervise, but at Universities Department Heads are Irresponsible in Overseeing their Departmental Professor's Educational Role

Consistent with the priorities of universities identified in Point 1, department heads have little motivation to exert effort in supervising their many professors. Department heads seldom observe professors in the classroom (I begged them to observe me with little success); look at assignments, projects, tests, etc. All department heads do is get a professor's syllabus at the outset of the semester, look the other way and stuff it in the file drawer. The next time you interact with the department head is usually turning in a syllabus the next semester.

The lack of effort in reviewing actual course content could be somewhat justified if the course is a reoccurring with a standard textbook and syllabus. I had great opportunity of constructing five entirely new courses from scratch and all the department heads did was stuff the syllabus in their files.

6. Elevating Class Attendance through a Combination of Techniques: Don't Make it so Easy to Skip Class

The classroom should focus on applying and debating the course topics not regurgitating content from a book. Therefore, it should be worthwhile and necessary to attend class. It has become too commonplace for professors to post lecture slides on their respective university-sponsored class website. This allows student to think that they don't need to attend class as they "can print out lecture slides." I recommend distributing two-sided handouts (to conserve paper) of skeleton lecture slides at the outset of class but not posting on the website. The inconvenience of not getting lecture slides so easily from a website can be a major deterrent from skipping class. I found students are not accustomed to xeroxing for some reason.

The second effective tool in motivating students to attend class is having frequent pop quizzes. If students miss class then they are risking getting a zero on a quiz. The quizzes should be fill in the blanks (more time consuming to grade) rather than multiple choice which students can often figure out.

7. Popular and Clever Cheating Techniques: What Measures Professors can Take

While I was at Georgia Tech I taught three sections of 60+ students each a Marketing Management course. The students had to be juniors or seniors to be eligible to take the course. At the outset of the semester I always hand out an informational sheet regarding how to contact me and getting permission to email them their grades periodically. I decided to include a question of examples of cheating they had witnessed in college. Wow, did I learn a lot and I took necessary precautions to eliminate common forms of cheating.

8. The Unfortunate Motivation behind Assigning Group Work

Assignments are often completed by small groups instead of individually and that has some alarming consequences. The learning process expectation is typically undermined as the strong student(s) do the majority of the work and many students contribute little. The learning objectives of the assignment are often diluted as each student does not experience the educational process of each assignment component.

So why do professors choose to assign group work with all their inherent disadvantages? Candidly, it significantly reduces the grading time required. With a group size of three the professor just decreased grading time by 67 percent. Professors will defend group assignments by stating that students need to "learn to work together;" but I don't buy that argument.

9. Memorization and Regurgitation Conquers Problem Solving and Critical Thinking
In the workplace you are paid and promoted based on your ability to solve real world problems. Too much of today's university education is focused on providing students content and testing them on memorizing the content, instead of applying it. Multiple choice tests drastically reduce grading time with automated scantron systems available. Multiple choice tests lend themselves to testing students to simply memorize content. Testing that forces student to critically think and problem solve involve significantly more grading time.

For many areas of study the university's major objective should be teaching students to be creative, resourceful, and strategic problem solvers not regurgitating content. This focus on problem solving heightens their critical thinking skills that will be paramount to their success in the real world.

10. The "big semester project" myth: Procrastination Diminishes Student Work Effort but there is a Simple Solution

Procrastination is human nature so universities need to embrace that reality with their assignments. If you assign a major project the first week in class, August 20th, and make it due ten weeks later, November 8th, when will the majority of students do the work? November 5th-7th, and therefore you do not get the work effort or creativity from re-visiting the topic numerous times.

The solution is assigning weekly, highly-focused mini-cases or equivalent writing assignments that should take three to five hours to complete. Therefore, it's totally fine if students procrastinate to the last day or two. Unfortunately with the priorities of professors as spelled out in Point 1, weekly assignments generate a major grading effort that most professors are not willing to undertake.

11. College Academic Rigor Booted by December College Football Games

What do UCLA, University of Florida, University of Oregon, North Illinois, and Auburn University all have in common? Conference championship games impacting whether teams will make it to major bowl games/college football playoffs within two days of final exams starting. At the point of the semester when students need to be focusing on studying for finals and/or completing major projects they are lured away to a football game that can often involve travel. Confronted with the choice of attending and celebrating a conference championship football game or studying, I think we realize the choice of many students.

Universities must coordinate sporting schedules with the academic calendars to prohibit major sporting events from conflicting with semester ending exams.

12. Time Compression of the Semester: Popularity Wins over Quality of Education

Universities during summers or between semesters often offer the same credit hours for taking a sixteen-week course in a month or even in two weeks. Universities calculate that a sixteen-week semester week meeting twice for an hour and fifteen minutes of class time totals forty hours with the professor. Universities take this forty hours and argue you can teach the same class in a month by meeting for four weeks, four times a week for two and a half hours of class time (again totaling forty hours). Or worse yet, meet five times a week for four hours class time a day for two weeks and you still total forty hours with the professor.

12. Time Compression of the Semester: Popularity Wins over Quality of Education (Continued)

What's wrong with this logic? It's obvious. You can't incorporate the same level of assignments, long class times become ineffective/boring, and where is time for taking tests along the way? It's very problematic to have students complete a test at the outset of class and then have the professor start lecturing new material.

But this is hugely popular. If you are a student or professor to complete a course within two or four weeks instead of consuming the majority of your total summer break by teaching a more normal condensed eight-week semester ... this is the bomb! Convenience and popularity wins over quality of education yet again.

13. The College Educator: Coach rather than Professor can Enhance your Role

I encouraged students to call me Coach Heller instead of Professor Heller. The word coach aligns well with a progressive and reachable educator. Coach signifies being a mentor and motivator, pushing people to get to the next level, and supporting their climb. In creating the necessary rigor to push students academically the coaching analogy is paramount. Georgia Tech has a top ranked football program each year. During the first class I would extract from the students that their coach pushes the athletes all year long to reach their fullest potential. What a great analogy for my identical objective in the classroom.

Being their "coach" created an environment where office hour sessions often became career counseling discussions for succeeding students instead of just seeing troubled students.

14. Department Heads' Objective for Quality of Educational Courses Offered Undercut by Enrollment and Financial Realities

If a department head offers courses that are deemed "too hard" by students they run the risk of lower enrollment, and thus lower allocated budgeted departmental funds. University departments are often allocated funds by the aggregate number of students who enroll in their courses. The more students that enroll, the BIGGER the chair's budget.

The easier the courses, the higher the likelihood that students with electives outside their major might choose their courses. However, offer harder courses where students really learn something, and the department head risk lower departmental funding as less students decide to take the harder elective or certification program courses.

15. Electronic Textbooks Identifying Chapters from Different Books and Articles are Immensely Effective

The optimal course reading materials change over time, especially when courses involve technology or you teach any course for a prolonged period and you are exposed to alternate sources. My definition of an electronic textbook is a series of printable PDFs or video links that are comprised of chapters from different textbooks, articles, and videos of lectures, podcasts, etc. Many publishers I found would allow you to use up to two chapters of a textbook without infringing on copyright laws. There are companies that will assemble electronic textbooks.

So why aren't these more prevalent? Professors have used textbooks in prior semesters and it takes significant time to overhaul course materials. Teaching students isn't their priority so course materials assigned by professors are both not taking advantage of technology and numerous sources instead of one single source.

16. Allowing a Crib Sheet on an Exam. Are you Crazy?

University educational objective should focus on problem solving, critical thinking, and application of learned content; not memorization and regurgitation (see Point 8). When testing the application of what has been learned, crib sheets become an effective tool in forcing students to take the time to consolidate a set of notes in preparation for the exam. This results in students taking more time to prepare for the test or final and reduces the anxiety of testing. I have the students staple the crib sheet (allowed up to four pages) to the back of their test/final exam.

Ninety-nine percent of the time when a student comes to complain they did poorly on a test; there is no crib sheet attached, or it is obviously an ineffective effort. Case closed.

17. Being a Professor is a "License to Learn" and to Bring this Valuable Knowledge to the Classroom

For every course I taught I reached out to industry experts to bring real world application and case studies into the classroom. I often collaborated with them in developing assignments. People in industry welcome gathering to provide in-depth knowledge and case studies. There is not conflict as you are not a consulting competitor. Industry experts love the idea of assisting students and universities.

17. Being a Professor is a "License to Learn" and to Bring this Valuable Knowledge to the Classroom (Continued)

Who did I contact? I strategically attended relevant industry conferences and reached out to targeted speakers where their presentation was very relevant to course topics. Other contacts were made by monitoring local business newspapers since I was teaching business courses. One company, Focus Brands, resulted in amazing case studies from actual social media campaigns and the relationship resulted in a full-time position for a student after graduation. Within six months of starting her position, she was promoted to an Assistant Manager of Social Media for a product line.

Additional Potential Chapter Titles

18. Licensing and Coursework Required to Teach 1st Grade, Nothing for University Professors

19. Assuring Classroom Listening and Focus: the Need to Prohibit Laptops and Cell Phones

20. Many University Students Exert Less Course Effort than during High School. Who is to Blame?

21. Why Grades above an A or 4.0 are Vital in Motivating High-Achieving Students

22. Teaching Application and Critical Thinking Aided by Pop Quizzes

23. Turning the Classroom into a Small Meeting Experience

24. Awarding Assignment Grades above 100 Creates a Huge Motivation

25. Providing Detailed Lecture Slides Enhances Educational Experience versus Unnecessary Note Taking Distraction

26. Procrastination Robs both Assignment Creativity and Effectiveness: the Need for Incubation Time

27. Critical Workplace Skills not Typically Taught in Project Management

28. Guest Lecturing: You Won't Be Asked Back if You Do Too Good of a Job

II. Paul Heller Bio: Teaching, Professional & Academic

A. Adjunct Professor: 2007 - 2011

Georgia Tech, Atlanta

- Marketing Management, three concurrent sections of 60+ students, Junior/Senior status required (one semester)

Mercer University MBA, Atlanta

- Social Media & Search Engine Marketing/Digital Marketing (one semester)

Georgia State University, Atlanta

- Corporate Finance (one semester)
- Hospitality Quality and Service Management (two semesters)
- Freshman Business School Overview and Life Topics course, two concurrent sections (three semesters)

Kennesaw State University, Atlanta

- Management Information Systems (two semesters)

Oglethorpe University, Atlanta

- Social Media & Search Engine Marketing/Digital Marketing (one semester)

Also: Guest lecturer in Real Estate at **Emory Goizueta Business School** and taught Digital Marketing in conjunction with founding the **Social Media Institute of Atlanta**

B. Professional Experience

1991 – 2007: Hotel Owner and Operator of three Atlanta hotels
1990 – 1991: Resolution Trust Corporation as Senior Contracting Officer
1985 – 1990: Hillmark Corporation – Vice President of Operations and Marketing for hotel development and management company with over 20 properties
1980 – 1985: Touche Ross & Company – Senior Management Consultant

C. Academic Background and Certifications

M.S. Finance & Accounting – University of Wisconsin – Madison
B.S. Electrical Engineering – Rensselaer Polytechnic Institute
Certified Public Accountant
GACE (Georgia Assessments for the Certification of Educators): Passed the three components necessary for teaching Middle School Math including Pedagogy I & II