



## education review // reseñas educativas

editors: gene v glass gustavo e. fischman melissa cast-brede

a multi-lingual journal of book reviews

July 17, 2010

ISSN 1094-5296

Woodhouse, Howard. (2009) *Selling Out: Academic Freedom and the Corporate Market*. Montreal: McGill-Queen's University Press

Pp. x + 350 ISBN 978-0-7735-3580-0

Reviewed by Mark Oromaner  
New York City

In the penultimate chapter (6) of *Selling Out*, "The value program in theory and practice," Woodhouse makes a distinction between a value system and a value program. In a value system, goods and bads are identified, but, "those who hold them are capable of recognizing the worth represented by others systems. At times they may even modify their values...." (p.229). In contrast, in a value program, "its own assumptions about what constitutes worth rules out any thought that goes beyond it" (p.228). When applied to the current state of Canadian research universities, administrators have sold out the university system which values the advancement and dissemination of shared knowledge to the corporate-market program which values the maximization of private monetary profits. The extreme and most recent manifestation of the corporate-market

Howard Woodhouse is professor of educational foundations and co-director of the University of Saskatchewan Process Philosophy Research Unit. Educated in both philosophy and education theory, his major areas of publication and research are academic freedom and university autonomy, global and international education, the teacher - scholar, and philosophy of education.

Citation: Oromaner, Mark. (2010 July 17) Review of *Selling Out: Academic Freedom and the Corporate Market* by Woodhouse, Howard. *Education Review*, 13. Retrieved [Date] from <http://edrev.asu.edu/reviews/rev938.pdf>

program is the growth of private-for-profit universities in the United States and Canada.

In the honored tradition of scholar-critic, e.g., Thorstein Veblen, C. Wright Mills, Alvin W. Gouldner, Woodhouse presents a clearly written, forcefully stated, and well-documented critique of the corporate program when adopted by universities. In so doing he reminds the reader of the possibilities of resistance to that adoption process. Through his case studies and uses of the literature, Woodhouse has achieved his goal of adding to two decades of scholarship that “had been long on generalization and short on specifics... to make it more concrete” (p.1). Four of the seven chapters are in-depth case studies that demonstrate the threat to academic freedom and institutional autonomy posed by the acceptance of the corporate market and its underlying logic by the university, and in particular by research universities in Canada. I would add that the situation Woodhouse critiques is even more serious south of the border among research universities in the United States of America.

A summary description should be sufficient to convey Woodhouse’s use of these cases to support his thesis. The first case, “A marketing professor meets the market” occurred at the University of Manitoba and demonstrates that over 20 years ago the market model had been adopted by universities. Dr. Vedanand of the Faculty of Management joined other invited faculty members to an information seminar by representatives from Xerox. During the presentation Dr. Vedanand intervened to question the statement that the company had “regained its position as top seller in the market.” At the end of the meeting the two Xerox speakers and Vedanand engaged in what appears to have been polite and cordial discussion and raised the possibility of joint additional seminars; from Vedanand’s perspective, the end of a relatively unmemorable occasion. However, from Woodhouse’s perspective, “his criticism of Xerox’s marketing strategies had called into question the corporation’s competitiveness .... thereby casting doubt on its desirability as an employer for graduates of the Faculty of Management” (p.48). It was the dean, Robert Mackness, who

had led the movement toward the privatization of the program. Prior to his appointment he had served as senior vice-president at the Bank of Nova Scotia. The goal of his development plan was to limit the role of government in setting educational standards and to maximize corporate influence on vocational training and research. Two months after the Xerox presentation, Mackness sent a memo to Vedanand in which he stated that he had been “disturbed” by the “tone” of Vedanand’s “grilling” of the Xerox people. Mackness also indicated that the remarks were counterproductive for the development of positive relationships with the business community. The memo “shocked” Vedanand, and he stated that this had a “chilling effect” on his teaching. In a vote of 34 to 17 faculty members stated that Mackness should not be reappointed dean at the conclusion of his contract, and the Presidential Advisory Committee for the Appointment of the Dean of Management did not recommend his reappointment. This was done in spite of corporate support for his reappointment. In March of 1995, President Naimark informed students and faculty that it had been the university and not the government or the corporate world, as stated by Mackness, that had funded the dean’s development plan. However, at no point did the president state that the university’s independence had been seriously compromised by the relationship with the corporate world. Faculty members and not the administration “showed the importance of a value system in which knowledge is shared with others, not used for private profit” (p. 90).

The second case, “Taking on big pharma” occurred at the University of Toronto (U of T). The central figure was Dr. Nancy Olivieri, director of the Heminoglobinopathy Program at the Hospital for Sick Children (HSC) and professor of medicine at the U of T. This was a widely publicized case, raised issues of life and death, “and the freedom of doctors to communicate the results of their research to patients and other scientists” (p. 91). Current media reports in the USA indicate that this is a serious, ongoing issue. Woodhouse argues that this situation is another illustration of the incompatibility of the goals of university research, i.e., to advance and disseminate shared

knowledge, and the primary goals of the market, i.e., maximize stockholder value.

In the early 1990's Dr. Olivieri and a colleague carried out a pilot study on a drug (L1) that appeared to reduce dangerous iron levels in children with a genetic blood disorder. In order to continue the work, Dr. Olivieri signed a contract with Apotex, a manufacturer of L1. After the publication of a paper favorable to the drug in the *New England Journal of Medicine*, she found a medical risk for patients. She reported this to Apotex and to proper HSC authorities. She then informed her patients. In response, Apotex terminated the trials and threatened her with legal action. She then identified a second and potentially more serious risk. Once again she informed the patients and transferred them to the standard treatment. Pressure intensified by Apotex to show that the drug was safe and to discredit Dr. Olivieri. And, "From May 1996 onwards, Apotex issued a series of legal warnings to Dr. Olivieri not to communicate the risks she had identified with regard to L1 and its effect on her patients. Neither HSC nor U of T provided her with legal assistance" (p.97).

After an expression of concern by a number of medical scientists in Canada and the USA about the lack of institutional support for Dr. Olivieri, a three-person external review group was appointed. The group, chaired by President Naimark, the very person who acted in the Vedanand case only after faculty members raised their voices, concluded that there had been no moves towards "constructive dismissal" of Dr. Olivieri, however, in 1999 HSC removed her from her administrative position as program director. The Canadian Association of University Teachers (CAUT) and the U of T Teachers Association called for an investigation and for Olivieri's reinstatement. An agreement was reached through which she was reinstated as program director, and her offices were moved to another hospital. However, the legal battles between Apotex and Dr. Olivieri are still not over. Once again we have a case in which an individual received little support from the administration and in which it was faculty pressure that resulted in support of academic freedom. Unfortunately,

neither case resulted in institutional or structural changes that ensured university autonomy from corporate influence.

The third case, “Commercializing research and losing autonomy” occurred at Woodhouse’s home, University of Saskatchewan (U of S). His goal here was to show, “how university research, at an institutional level, is subordinated to the market principle of monetary gain” (p. 147). In their stress on the procurement of funds from both private and public sources, universities increasingly suppress the goal of advancing and disseminating shared knowledge. His primary example is the Canadian Light Source (CLS) synchrotron owned by the U of S, the largest scientific installation in Canada in a generation. While historically there has been a balance among the teaching, research, and service missions of the university, at the research intensive university the first mission has increasingly been neglected and the second and third missions have been distorted to suit corporate needs.

Although during the past decade all sectors of higher education in the United States have stated that they stress the importance of teaching, it is fair to say that there is little concrete proof of this at the major research universities. At the U of S, a group called Students Opposed to Liberal Arts Decline (SOLD) joined with faculty to protest the processes of commercialization and privatization, e.g., tuition increase, the hiring freeze in the Departments of Languages and Linguistics, lack of support of the humanities and fine arts. At the same time, departments and individuals showing marketable prowess, e.g., patent generation, were being rewarded. Although the resistance had some victories, e.g., tuition freeze, the U of S is on the road to “reducing university education to a private good to be bought and sold like any other” (p. 201). In the final case, “Going beyond the market: evaluating teaching by evaluating learning,” Woodhouse argues that the use of student evaluation of teaching (SETS) reflects a market ideology in which ‘customer satisfaction’ is substituted for student learning. This phenomenon is part of the broader picture Woodhouse presents, however, I am not convinced that his call to evaluate learning before, during, and at the end of any course will “ensure true accountability by providing reliable

criteria about the effectiveness of teaching based on what students actually learn”( p. 226).

Woodhouse concludes his book with a description of The People’s Free University of Saskatchewan (PFU). This alternative model was an attempt to move beyond the market model and provide a “free, open, and community-based education” (p. 247). The PFU demonstrates organizational possibilities, however, it does not address the nature of the research university-corporate relationships so well described and analyzed by Woodhouse. Given the realities of the costs and possible rewards of science/technology and the acceptance of neoliberal capitalism, there is little chance that university/corporate relationships will disappear. In addition, the present worldwide economic crisis suggests that universities may become more competitive in their quests for private funding. Perhaps the best that one can hope for is that on a university by university basis faculty, staff, and students will resist a “sell out” when it comes to the central values of academic freedom and institutional autonomy. A reading of *Selling Out: Academic Freedom and the Corporate Market* is a good start to remind them of the importance of their resistance and a good reminder that they can make a difference.

### About the Reviewer

Mark Oromaner is an independent scholar (sociologist). His articles, essays, and book reviews on higher education have appeared in publications such as *The American Sociologist*, *Research in Higher Education*, *AAHE Bulletin* (*American Association for Higher Education*), *Planning for Higher Education*, *Education Review*, and *H-Net Reviews in the Humanities and Social Sciences*.

Copyright is retained by the first or sole author,  
who grants right of first publication to the *Education Review*.  
<http://edrev.asu.edu>



Editors

Gene V Glass

[glass@edrev.info](mailto:glass@edrev.info)

Gustavo Fischman

[fischman@edrev.info](mailto:fischman@edrev.info)

Melissa Cast-Brede

[Cast-brede@edrev.info](mailto:Cast-brede@edrev.info)

---