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**A Letter from the Editor and GSA President
– Adapted from the 2008 GSA Annual Meeting**

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When I last met with my GSA friends and colleagues at the 2007 meetings in Athens I found myself involved in several discussions about the changing nature of higher education. The topic of these discussions ranged from lamentation about the days when the notion of academic freedom had real teeth to angst regarding the business-like composition of Georgia's Board of Regents. Ah, a theme was emerging: Is the corporatization of higher education inevitable? It's not a new question but it certainly seems to be more relevant than ever before. In 1918, sociology's own Thorstein Veblen wrote "The Higher Learning in America", a harsh expose of corporate style posturing among college administrators. Seemingly prophetic in scope, Veblen's assertion might be more relevant than ever before.

In our everyday reality we see the common college student being morphed into a consumer and educators as mere appendages of the assembly line manufacturing process. Is it any wonder that student's intellectual curiosity has been cut down to the more mundane questions of practical significance?---"Is this going to be on the exam?" With an emphasis on standardization, large lecture halls and technologically driven pedagogy, this new consumer driven model is more akin to purchasing the latest techno-gadget at the mall than the high ideals of the Socratic Method that brings many new Ph.D.'s into higher education in the first place. In the quest to mechanize education, knowledge becomes a mere product to be measured in terms input v. output. In the classroom, abstract ideas are being replaced by capitalistic concepts like the syllabus template with its cookie cutter learning outcomes. But, the cost in the classroom is very real and has consequences ranging from curriculum design, teaching methodology, and even classroom discipline.

In kind with this move to a more corporate approach to education is the emphasis on what the Board of Regents has termed 'RPG' – retention, promotion, and graduation. While on the surface this approach seems to carry the noble intention of keeping people in school, true academics must question whether this is just another move toward an assembly line of higher education. Add on the increasing problem of grade inflation, now moving further into higher education, and student expectations naturally move from passing to excelling for little more effort than enrolling and taking the exams. Meeting these expectations also has real consequences for the new tenure track faculty member given the weight of student evaluations for annual review, tenure, and promotion.

Corporate ideals also permeate the faculty role outside of the classroom as well. As faculty clamor for more input into governance, the universities and the BOR freely grant it. This move allows the same business philosophy that is used at retailers, restaurants, and bars to be implemented at the university. The principle is this, allow the lowest paid workers to do whatever additional 'work' they desire, but retain final decisions at the administrative level. Thus faculty can draft proposals, program modifications, advising guidelines, etc. and have it simply

count as ‘service’, although there is no measurable return and no guarantee any real change will be implemented.

Where’s the humanity in a mechanized educational system? Can we really blame capitalist entrepreneurs for whom educational success is measured in terms of cost-benefit analysis? After all, higher education is a half trillion dollar enterprise. Yes, of course we can. And, we must. After all, the real “product” of a good college education is not a cog in the machine but a well rounded critical thinker.

Note: This essay was printed in-part in the October edition of *The Semaphore*, the newsletter of the Georgia Sociological Association and reflects the theme of the 2007 GSA meetings. Additional comments were added by *The Journal of Public and Professional Sociology* web editor.