PS for 2/1/90

Why University Standards are so Low

You may have suspected that academic standards of American universities have declined, but you won't know how low until you read *ProfScam* by Charles J. Sykes (just published in paperback: St. Martin's, $9.95). This book is a devastating indictment of our universities, which the author calls vast citadels of waste, ruled with an iron hand by an oligarchy of arrogant tenured professors who are overpaid and underworked.

According to *ProfScam*, the collapse of the university system is due to the cutthroat control exercised by the tenured professors, who control everything that matters. University presidents are good only for fundraising, public relations, and dealing with protestors.

While piously pledging allegiance at the altar of "academic freedom," the tenured professors have set up a caste system in which they are accountable to no one, while they ruthlessly use thought control to liquidate original thinkers, dissenters, and anyone who is a good teacher.

They have made the academic culture actively hostile to teaching. The author gives example after example of major universities denying tenure to professors who were good teachers.

Tenured university professors have almost totally abandoned the teaching of the undergraduates, leaving that function largely in the hands of an ill-trained, ill-paid, and bitter academic underclass of untenured instructors and graduate students called T.A.s (teaching assistants). A large percentage of T.A.s are foreigners who cannot speak intelligible English.

The University of California at Berkley allegedly offers 8,100 courses, but a majority of all freshmen are crammed into 60 lower division courses (that's less than 1 percent) and which are taught mostly by T.A.s. Between 1952 and 1974, the number of professors at Harvard grew seven times faster than the number of undergraduates, but the proportion of courses open to undergraduates declined by 28 percent.

The professors assert that their flight from the task of teaching is justified by their "research" and publication of articles, but the overwhelming majority of that

research has no social or academic value except as a line on a resume. It fills libraries with unread material written in what the author calls “profspeak”: incomprehensible and pompous verbiage about the obscure and the trivial.

At major universities, the average tenured professor teaches only six hours a week. However, the count is usually taken in the fall semester and professors may teach only three hours a week in the spring.

Up to a third of tenured professors don’t teach at all. The teaching load of many tenured professors consists of one or two small seminars that require little if any preparation and are mostly just rap sessions with students.

The university course catalogue is often a fraud because up to half of the courses listed are not actually offered. For example, at Harvard in the field of American history, out of 44 courses listed, only 10 were offered in the fall of 1986 and only one of those was taught by a tenured professor.

The university catalogue is loaded with more and more courses of less and less importance, ignoring the needs and wants of the paying students and serving only the narrow, selfish career preferences of the tenured professors.

Universities also offer a plethora of junk courses, contemptuously referred to by students as “guts” (slang for a course that can be passed with no more preparation than gut instinct). Guys at major universities include (and these are titles of courses actually offered): Anthropology of Play, Socio-Psychological Aspects of Clothing, Music Video 454, Sport and Political Ideology, Recreation and Leisure, Pocket Billiards, and Rock ‘n’ Roll Is Here To Stay.

“Profscam” is not too strong a word for the mountain of evidence marshaled by the author. It is a scam to take students’ and taxpayers’ money for a college education when the catalogue lists courses that are not taught at all or seldom, professors who don’t teach at all or seldom, courses that aren’t worth taking, and courses that are taught by T.A.s in halls that seat a thousand students. *Profscam* proves that university education is a scam which cheats students, parents, and taxpayers.