

# A Symposium on “The Troubled Future of Colleges and Universities”

## Editors’ Introduction

**Gary King**, *guest editor, Harvard University*

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**T**he American system of higher education is under attack by political, economic, and educational forces that threaten to undermine its business model, governmental support, and operating mission. The potential changes are considerably more dramatic and disruptive than anything previously experienced. Traditional colleges and universities urgently need a coherent, thought-out response. Their central role in fostering the creation, preservation, and distribution of knowledge in the world may be at risk and, as a consequence, so too may be the spectacular progress across fields we have come to expect as a result.

Although expertise from many disciplines is needed to address the problems in our institutions of higher education, political scientists may be especially well positioned to contribute to a solution. Many of the problems are essentially political, and our discipline includes those with the skills and knowledge necessary to understand and analyze the problems, to design strategies to ameliorate them, and to evaluate the consequences of any changes. We encourage political scientists to take up the challenge.

In this light, we wrote “The Troubled Future of Colleges and Universities” to offer a summary of the status quo, an analysis of the actual and likely economic and political attacks on the traditional system of higher education, a list of some largely inadequate responses that have been proposed or attempted, and some suggestions for more productive directions to go. We then recruited five distinguished political scientists familiar with the issues to comment on our article or the general issues we raised. Our commenters represent a “Who’s Who” among the nation’s leading political scientists who have also served in major leadership positions in university administration. As you will see, they have an enormous amount to contribute.

Our contributors include current and former (and likely future!) university presidents, chairs, and deans. We start

the symposium with Michael Laver, presently the dean for the Social Sciences at New York University. He explains that we don’t have to panic quite yet and shows that we can leverage some of the new, and possibly threatening, educational innovations—like online learning—to universities’ distinct advantage. Henry E. Brady, currently the dean at the Goldman School of Public Policy, University of California, Berkeley, comes next. His essay draws nuanced parallels between the challenges faced by higher education today and the disruptive changes faced by newspapers, railroads, and other industries of years past. Next, Nannerl O. Keohane, now the Laurance S. Rockefeller Distinguished Visiting Professor at the Woodrow Wilson School at Princeton University, identifies five important threats to the university business model, while also reminding us of the components of traditional universities that are essential to protect. The next commentary is by Virginia Sapiro, the dean of Arts and Sciences at Boston University, who brings a historical perspective to the symposium. Her essay puts our current difficulties in the context of 70 years of recurring disruptions, and she reminds us that higher education has weathered strong challenges in the past, too. The symposium concludes with an essay by John Mark Hansen, now the Charles L. Hutchinson Distinguished Service Professor, and senior advisor to the President, at the University of Chicago. He brings a big picture perspective by focusing on the point of the university, the central role of academic freedom, and the delicate relationships with the various forces at work affecting higher education. Taken together, our commentators address a complicated set of challenges faced by higher education today. They raise new and unexpected problems, while also suggesting real and creative paths forward.

The existing and coming disruptive changes in higher education require the immediate attention of our academic community. Each of our commenters provides compelling insights into the challenges facing universities, and all make important arguments and proposals deserving of much discussion and analysis. We hope other political scientists will follow up so that we may collectively begin to tackle these issues, important to so many in and beyond our discipline, departments, and universities.

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We are grateful to our commentators and the editors of *PS* for making this symposium possible. We also thank the countless scholars, students, citizens, and analysts who have engaged this important subject, many with us directly. We do not know

what the future holds for colleges and universities, but it is difficult to be anything but deeply impressed by the support out there for these institutions and their goals. ■

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**SYMPOSIUM AUTHORS**



**Henry E. Brady** is dean of the Goldman School of Public Policy and Class of 1941 Monroe Deutsch Professor of Political Science and Public Policy at the University of California Berkeley. Before becoming dean in 2009, he was director of the Survey Research Center at Berkeley for 10 years. In 2009–10 he was president of the American Political Science Association. He has written on political participation, campaigns, identity, and elections in the United States, Canada, Estonia, Eastern Europe, and the Soviet Union. His most recent coauthored book (with Kay Schlozman and Sidney Verba) is *The Uneven Chorus: Unequal Political Voice and the Broken Promise of American Democracy* (Harvard University Press, 2012). He can be reached [hbrady@berkeley.edu](mailto:hbrady@berkeley.edu).



**John Mark Hansen** is the Charles L. Hutchinson Distinguished Service Professor in Political Science and the College at the University of Chicago. He has served as chair of the department of political science (1995–1998), associate provost for research and education (1998–2001), dean of the division of the social sciences (2002–2012), and currently as senior advisor to the president of the University of Chicago. He received his baccalaureate from the University of Kansas and his doctorate from Yale University. His scholarship addresses legislative politics, interest group politics, citizen activism, public opinion, and elections. He can be reached at [jhansen@uchicago.edu](mailto:jhansen@uchicago.edu).



**Gary King** is the Albert J. Weatherhead III University Professor, and the founding director of the Institute for Quantitative Social Science, at Harvard University. King develops and applies empirical methods in many areas of political and social research, focusing on innovations that span the range from statistical theory to

practical application. King is an Elected Fellow of six honorary societies, has won more than 30 “best of” awards for his articles, books, conference papers, and software, among others, and has served on 30 editorial boards. His more than 130 journal articles, 20 open source software packages, and eight books span many aspects of political methodology, several fields of political science, and some other scholarly disciplines. The statistical methods and software he developed are used extensively in academia, government, consulting, and private industry. His homepage is <http://gking.harvard.edu>.



**Nannerl O. Keohane** served as president of Wellesley College (1981–1993) and Duke University (1993–2004). She is the author of *Thinking about Leadership* (2010); *Higher Ground: Ethics and Leadership in the Modern University* (2006); *Philosophy and the State in France: the Renaissance to the Enlightenment* (1980), and coedited *Feminist Theory: a Critique of Ideology* (1981). Keohane has taught at Swarthmore College, the University of Pennsylvania, and Stanford University as well as Wellesley and Duke. She has been a vice-president of the APSA and is now a professor in the Woodrow Wilson School at Princeton University and a member of the Harvard Corporation. She can be reached at [nkeohane@princeton.edu](mailto:nkeohane@princeton.edu).



**Michael Laver** is dean for the social sciences and professor of politics at New York University, where he was also department chair. He joined NYU from Trinity College Dublin where he had been professor of political science and chief academic officer. Laver's main research interests are in the theory and practice of multi-party competition and in estimating the policy positions of political actors. He was coeditor of the *European Journal of Political Research* and is author, coauthor, or editor of 18 books and more than 140 academic articles. Among his books are: *Making and Breaking Governments*; *Party Policy in Mod-*

*ern Democracies*; and *Party Competition: an Agent-Based Model*. He can be reached at [michael.laver@nyu.edu](mailto:michael.laver@nyu.edu).



**Virginia Sapiro** is dean of the College and Graduate School of Arts and Sciences and professor of political science at Boston University. Before arriving at Boston University in 2007 she was the Sophonisba P. Breckinridge Professor of Political Science and Women's Studies at the University of Wisconsin–Madison, where she was a member of the faculty for 31 years. She also served as vice provost for teaching and learning and as acting provost and vice chancellor for academic affairs. Her teaching and research focused on political psychology, political behavior, and gender politics. She can be reached at [vsapiro@bu.edu](mailto:vsapiro@bu.edu).



**Maya Sen** is an assistant professor in the department of political science at the University of Rochester. Her research interests include statistical methods, law, and race and ethnic politics, and she is currently examining the relationship between race and ethnicity and judicial decision making in the federal courts. Her homepage can be found at <http://mayasen.org>.