Master of Arts in Liberal Studies   Master's Theses

2021

The Impact of Postmodernism on 21st Century Higher Education

Lia B. Wheatley
wheatleylb@hollins.edu

The Impact of Postmodernism on 21st Century Higher Education

By

Lia Wheatley

BA in Humanities and Philosophy, Brigham Young University – Idaho
2018

Presented in
partial fulfillment of the requirements for
the degree of Master of Arts in Liberal Studies
in Humanities

Hollins University
Roanoke, Virginia
May, 2021

Director of Essay: _____
                          Professor Harry B. Stevens

Department: English

Table of Contents

Introduction

The American undergraduate higher educational institution was organized and developed well over 100 years ago, and for the most part, it was designed around Eurocentric ideals, experiences, and values—ones that hardly reflect the population and principles of a 21st century America. The higher education system is undoubtedly a product of modernism; however, as postmodernism has become more widespread through mainstream society, universities must reevaluate their means and their ends in order to meet transitioning standards and expectations especially if academe hopes to remain a pillar of our ever-progressing society.

Traditionally, the Euro-American system served a uniformed society, but with the vast amount of changes seen in higher education trends over the last 10-to-20 years, the system and its programs need to integrate and prioritize the ideals of a multicultural society and diverse population. With modernism, two main ideas that underpinned the structure of higher education: people are rational and autonomous individuals who act independently of others and, with this rationality and autonomy, individuals are able to use reason and knowledge to route society towards freedom, happiness, and progress.

Perhaps the biggest critique of these claims comes from postmodernity's blatant rejection in that both of these statements are Western in nature, excluding countless of marginalized and underrepresented groups, ignoring interpersonal relationships and connections, and overlooking change as being a series of networks that eb and flow rather than a universal, linear progression. With postmodern ideals taking the helm in our contemporary culture, there is a renewed emphasis on plurality, partiality, and multiplicity, all of which the higher education system has disregarded since its creation.

The three majorly impacted areas of higher education include enrollment trends, the desired outcomes and objectives of obtaining a degree, and classroom academics and

pedagogy. These areas that are all equally vital in the success of the institution are needing to be contextualized in a wider socio-cultural frame that includes the viewpoints and charges of a postmodernist society. Postmodernism is marking the end of traditional structures and institutions, academe included. The one-size-fits-all approach that links together modern thought is no longer sufficient nor acceptable to the masses, especially those of the younger generations who compose most of the recruitment pool for universities.

Modernism

Modernity, in part, is defined by the ideals and philosophies of the Enlightenment, an age where intellect and reason trumped all. The Enlightenment movement preached of an orderly world ruled by objective laws and realities. The purpose of learning and knowledge, therefore, was to discover and map out these uncharted truths, and institutionalized higher education became the vessel in which to do so.

Modernism forms the basis of what is typically known as American or Western culture. These beliefs include secularism, a trust in scientific reasoning, our political system as a democratic republic, a belief in equality and civil liberties, etc. All of these fundamental pieces of Western society today are grounded in modernism. Historically, modernism was able to gain traction in Western culture due to the vast amount of change and destruction that occurred with in the late nineteenth and twentieth centuries. Locally and globally, America experienced the Industrial Revolution, Colonialism, major wars, and massive genocide. As love and faith were both loss in the midst of rapid change, modernism took root and found solace in rationality and science as a way to make sense of the chaos.

Attempting to understand nature as the natural world was consistently shifting led to society breaking from tradition, faith, and mysticism. "The first characteristic associated with modernism is nihilism, the rejection of all religious and moral principles as the only means of obtaining social progress" ("History of Modernism"). This nihilism allowed for modernists to

expand past beliefs that held true out of mere convenience and convention. Through the rejection of tradition, we could explore, create, and discover new ways to progress society forward. This is why most Modernist movements directly and indirectly studied the new economic, social, and political aspects of an ever-shifting, industrialized world. "Modernization replaced or transformed traditions, collective identities, and past-orientations with revolutionary activities such as doubt, inquiry, individualism, and future-orientation" ("History of Modernism").

Perhaps one of the greatest breaks in tradition was the widespread transition from community-oriented thinking and development to an emphasis on individualism. Society began to believe that nature could be understood through rationality and perception, and reason, ultimately, was a faculty of individualism. It is through the study of individual minds that we can focus on reason and logic, so individualism became the unit of value and reality. This shift also led to a focus on autonomy and an individual's capacity to develop their own character, thoughts, sense of self, etc. Humanity was no longer constrained by overarching authorities or acceptance of a community. Our culture became less focused on political, social, and religious authorities and focused in on scientific and philosophical reasoning by individuals.

This overall transition resulted from the central, core agreement that reason is objective and competent, and individuals are the gateway to reason. Modernism taught that reason was the catalyst of all progress because truth could be established, known, and taught through the application of science; if individuals understood scientific reasoning, then Truth would be discovered. As the world entered globalization, it was believed that truth and reason could transcend all cultural difference and would lead to universal, objective truths that all of humanity would embrace and understand. Truth, then, existed independent of human thought and consciousness and could only be discovered through the use of logic and rationality, and

it is also what would lead to a global and local improvement of society in health, affluence, and advancement. In Patrick Slattery's book, *Curriculum Development of the Postmodern Era*, he says, "modernity situates reality within measurable and logical structures. Modernity's faith in logical positivism reinforces the idea that objective reality is revealed by logical, scientific empiricism" (54).

In the midst of a crumbling society, what people wanted most of all was to experience stability, and science and reason were going to lead them there: "modernism was essentially based on a utopian vision of human life and society and a belief in progress or moving forward. It assumed that certain ultimate universal principles or truths such as those formulated by science could be used to understand or explain reality" ("The Rise of Modernism"). According to modernist, the world had become "too concerned with irrelevant sophistications and conventions." Ultimately, this distraction detracted from the main purpose of knowledge and experience which is the discovery of truth ("History of Modernism").

Modernism and Higher Education

With this new school of thought sweeping mainstream society, there also needed to be a way to instill these new ideas and values into the rising generations. The public and higher education system was the ideal solution not only for spreading and teaching concepts, but also for researching developing ideas. There was a surge of growth in higher education from around 1870-1910, which marks the beginning of the modernist period, in an age that some historians have coined the 'Age of the University.' In John Thelin's (et al) "Higher Education in the United States," described "the university ideal certainly took root and blossomed during this period, but the historic undergraduate college also enjoyed growth, support, and popularity" (Thelin et al.).

During this time, universities began to branch out of church-related liberal arts models and focused on other disciplines as well. With new sources of income, private donations, and philanthropy, it became possible to explore other areas of study. America's rising interest in reason and logic led to a surge of related programs such as agriculture, medical, law, engineering, and science. Through this advancement, education became a means to an end in recognizing the goals of modernism – progress, power, and prosperity (Parry 25).

This period of modernism contributed greatly to the higher education system we see today. As Markus Molz and Gaudenz Assenza explain:

> The most widespread contemporary higher education institution is the 'multiversity.' i.e. the multidisciplinary university, in which a range of disciplines co-exist as relatively self-contained and little interacting domains of teaching and research. The multiversity model of higher education underlies different types of higher education institutions. They can be smaller or larger, teaching or research oriented, regionally focused or internationally oriented, campus-based or online, public or private, and still represent the same basic paradigm. We call this paradigm Modernist Higher Education as it was rising with and strongly contributing to modernization. (Molz and Assenza)

Higher education in America is a product of modernism: "for more than three hundred years, educational institutions were built, and educational practices conceived, under the assumption that the universe and its inhabitants are subject to the forces of reason" (Stowe). Still today, the three strips worn on doctoral gowns represent law, revelation, and reason: three fundamental modernist notions. Law is in connection with the State, Revelation is in relation to the Church, and Reason is rooted in the University—with reason being the most dominant in focus (Stowe).

Embracing the world as an orderly place is a crucial aspect of modernism. With the application of a strict scientific methodology, specific relationships could be discovered between occurring events. It was a fundamental characteristic to believe in a cause-and-effect-based world, meaning actions will lead to predictable outcomes. Therefore, with the

acquisition of specific, rational knowledge through a uniformed higher education system, the modern world would predictably be led to success, affluence, health, and happiness.

Higher education also took on the role of development. As enrollment numbers climbed and students came to learn, qualified professors not only taught but also began to focus on their individual research: "modernists increasingly linked the idea of cultural progress with the idea that systems of order and systems of beauty can also progress, change, evolve. In their eyes, the role of the academy is not only to teach received knowledge, but is also to ever question, ever pursue new knowledge" (Dunham-Jones). Deeply rooted into the modernist model of higher education is the responsibility to expand on the ideas of truth. As society began to push forward, undergraduate students took a backseat to the important work of progression and discovery.

With a monopoly on the discovery and spread of new and valuable information, the higher education system transformed itself into the notorious "ivory tower." Higher education became a pinnacle for the developing society, and what was spread from these ivory towers was considered to be universal and absolute truth or knowledge. All social, political, economic, scientific, and technological thought to form from those walls was deemed the way in which humans would achieve progress, happiness, and freedom. Therefore, with all of these contributing factors, higher education took its spot as the leading modernist institution.

Postmodernism

Taking root in the late 20th century, Postmodernism is often thought of as a counterpart, or a reaction to modernism. Although postmodernism is infamously known as being indefinable, there are recurring characteristics and concepts that flow through postmodernist philosophy, literature, art, culture, etc., that critics use as a basis for discussions surrounding postmodernism.

It is in these themes that postmodern trends reveal themselves as reactionary to the principles found within modernism. While modernism attempts to define and establish order, truth, and knowledge, postmodernism revels in and expounds upon the chaos found within our incoherent world. Instead of having one meaning, postmodernism is thought to have a range of meanings, and, more often than not, postmodernism viciously rejects modernist teachings rather than establishing or defending their own ideals.

Perhaps the concept most detested by postmodernists is that of an objective, universal reality. As depicted by a glossary definition of postmodernism:

> Postmodernism is largely a reaction to the assumed certainty of scientific, or objective, efforts to explain reality. In essence, it stems from a recognition that reality is not simply mirrored in human understanding of it, but rather, is constructed as the mind tries to understand its own particular and personal reality. For this reason, postmodernism is highly skeptical of explanations which claim to be valid for all groups, cultures, traditions, or races, and instead focuses on the relative truths of each person. In the postmodern understanding, interpretation is everything; reality only comes into being through our interpretations of what the world means to us individually. Postmodernism relies on concrete experience over abstract principles, knowing always that the outcome of one's own experience will necessarily be fallible and relative, rather than certain and universal. ("Glossary: Postmodernism")

This viewpoint is what earned postmodernists the label of relativists. Although self-proclaimed postmodernists typically reject this, and other titles, many of their ideals float in the realm of relativism, subjectivism, and skepticism.

Relativists and postmodernists alike deny claims of any absolute knowledge or universal truths. Instead, concepts such as knowledge or reason are only justified within the context which they are being discussed; there is no ultimate authority, but an ever-shifting framework of assessment. The standard, therefore, is created by the accepted norms and no independent vantage point exists outside of these previously established guidelines. Postmodernists recognize what is true for one, may not be true for all.

To put the theory in practice:

Reality, knowledge, and value are constructed by discourses; hence they can vary with them. This means that the discourse of modern science, when considered apart from the evidential standards internal to it, has no greater purchase on the truth than do alternative perspectives, including (for example) astrology and witchcraft. (Duignan)

When relativism is demonstrated in a real-life scenario, such as the one above, it is much easier to understand just how different the postmodernists are from their predecessors, the modernists. This radical opposition begins to stir-up questions like, how did society transition to such extremities, and what impact has it had on our civilization established in modernity?

Another key element in postmodernism is its anti-authoritarian nature. Postmodernists recognize that the prevailing discourses in any society will reflect the interests and values of the dominant or elite groups. Since this reflection of the powerful is established in an arbitrary and unjustified system of tradition, change is possible, and, according to postmodernists, change is necessary (Duignan).

Modernism is, ultimately, the embrace and promotion of Western-Eurocentric viewpoints since it was rooted in the Enlightenment; specifically, Enlightenment thoughts promoted by those in an influential or dominant position. Due to this, modernist theory and principle itself is limited and often regarded as patriarchal and racist, governed by white heterosexual men.

Postmodernism, on the other hand, embraces a uniquely inclusive and democratic theoretical position in which non-elite or marginalized groups are viewed as having equally important and valid perspectives: "as a result, one of the most common themes addressed within postmodernism relates to cultural [or political] identity" (Palmer). According to Brian Duignan's encyclopedia exploration of postmodernism and culture identity:

Postmodernists regard their theoretical position as uniquely inclusive and democratic, because it allows them to recognize the unjust hegemony of Enlightenment discourses over the equally valid perspectives of nonelite groups. In the 1980s and '90s, academic advocates on behalf of various ethnic, cultural, racial, and religious groups

embraced postmodern critiques of contemporary Western society, and postmodernism became the unofficial philosophy of the new movement of *identity politics* [or multiculturism]. (Duignan)

Therefore, "an acute sensitivity to the role of ideology in asserting and maintaining political and economic power" became an integral part of postmodernism (Duignan).

Postmodernism frequently aims to be the critical response of suppression. Those who are most likely to be stifled and underrepresented in society, such as women, the colonized, people of color, members of the LGBTQIA+ community, etc., are encouraged to share their respective viewpoints and identities. Postmodernism revels in "revealing the cultural constructions we designate as truth and opening up a variety of repressed other histories of modernity" (Palmer).

Barbara Kruger, a contemporary American artist, stated that she is "concerned with who speaks and who is silent: with what is seen and what is not." Her postmodernist approach is in direct contrast to the ways of her predecessors who were hyper-focused on elevating the voices of those already in power and embodies the idea of being a revealer and critic of oppression. One of the most difficult challenges to juggle with in embracing various experiences and perspectives, is that there is no shortage of inconsistencies. Without a universal standard of truth and reality, postmodernists must fully embrace complex and often contradictory layers of meaning ("Postmodernism – Art Term").

In contrast, modernism had the luxury of working with the clarity and simplicity of objectiveness while holding tightly onto the teachings of authoritative figures such as scientists, historians, educators, etc. The postmodernist response to this false sense of absolute authority was to advocate that individual experience and interpretation of our reality was more concrete than a claim of universality.

Due to this commitment to anti-authoritarianism, postmodernists refuse to recognize the credibility of any single, all-encompassing definition for topics that had been previously

established by modernist, including but not limited to art, literature, education, politics, history, science, etc. While modernism insists on a clear divide between sophistication and popular culture, this rebranding began the collapse between high culture and mass or popular culture; the gap between art and everyday life slowly started to close. Modernist thought emphasized direction, order, coherence, stability, simplicity, control, autonomy, and universality, but as society began to embrace postmodernism, fragmentation, diversity, discontinuity, contingency, pragmatism, multiplicity, and connections were all accentuated instead.

Postmodernism in Higher Education

A popular criticism of postmodernism and its influence is that postmodernism has deconstructed our reality to a point of no return, with no clear or productive point or purpose in mind. However, this very simplistic view of postmodernism is problematic in that it fails to consider all that has been able to be accomplished due to the rejection of modernist teachings.

The modernist education is much more logocentric while conveying a false view of science as certain knowledge, being too homogenous, excluding the voice of the 'other,' and operating as an oppressive discourse of power (Harkin). On the other hand, as a result of modernism being slowly replaced, education has been able to move away from "the notion of education as providing people with knowledge functional to the system [here a Newtonian, Enlightenment concept] to that of giving local voice to the different and shifting knowledges through which the social formation is constituted" (Usher & Edwards 157). This shift in focus has allowed for postmodernism to incorporate further into a traditionally modernist institution.

Although higher education is founded in modernity, as postmodernism has trickled its way down from the avant-garde to the masses, it has also crept its way into the contemporary

version of the institution. Postmodernism has not always been a welcomed development in

academia and higher education, but as students begin to gravitate towards the learner-focused

rather than teacher-centered approach (see table 1), its incorporation has become

unavoidable. With it, academe has not only loosened up, but it has also created a space for

students' experiences and priorities whether that be during the enrollment process, in the

classroom, or post-graduation.

Table 1

Comparing Modernist and Postmodern Educational Theory

	Modernist Theory	Post-modernist Theory
Knowledge	Educators ideally should be authoritative transmitters of unbiased knowledge	Educators are biased facilitators and co-"constructors" of knowledge.
Culture	Culture is something students should learn about but can also be a barrier to learning. Students from diverse cultures must be trained in a shared language, or medium of communication, before teachers can transmit knowledge to them.	The modernist goal of unifying society results in domination and exploitation, because unity is always based on dominant culture. All cultures are not only of equal value, but also constitute equally important realities. Minority students must be "empowered" to fight against Eurocentric enculturation.
Values	Traditional modernists believe that educators are legitimate authorities on values, and therefore they should train students in universal values. More liberal modernists argue that education should be "values-neutral." Teachers help students with "values clarification"--deciding what values each individual student will hold. Values can and should be separated from facts. The most important values are rationality and progress.	Education should help students construct diverse and personally useful values in the context of their cultures. Values are considered useful for a given culture, not true or right in any universal sense. Since teachers cannot avoid teaching their own values, it's okay for teachers to openly promote their values and social agendas in the classroom. Important values to teach include striving for diversity, tolerance, freedom, creativity, emotions and intuition.
Human Nature	Modernists generally believe in a stable, inherent self that can be objectively known. In addition, since humans are thought to have a stable essential nature, IQ tests, and other similar "objective tests", can be used to discover students' innate intelligence. By giving them mastery over subject matter, teachers enhance students' self-esteem. Education helps individuals discover their identities. Individuals and society progress by learning and applying objective knowledge.	Students have no "true self" or innate essence. Rather, selves are social constructs. Postmodern educators believe self-esteem is a pre-condition for learning. They view education as a type of therapy. Education helps individuals construct their identities rather than discover them. Individuals and society progress when people are empowered to attain their own chosen goals.

Source: McCallum, Dennis. "Comparing Modernist and Postmodern Educational Theory."

Xenos Christian Fellowship, 2020, www.xenos.org/essays/comparing-modernist-and-

postmodern-educational-theory.

Enrollment Patterns of the 21st Century

When examining higher education through the lens of postmodernism, contemporary

enrollment trends reflect societies wavering dependency on the modernist ideals of the past.

As higher education continues to stand as a beacon for metanarratives, objectivity, and

universality, fewer students are wanting to buy into the institution. Over the last decade, there

has been a steady decrease in enrollment nationwide.

Although this is true across the board, it is specifically impacting students of color,

students from low-income families, and first-generation students. Over the past year alone,

applications from students who would qualify for a fee-waiver declined by two percent while

first-generation student applications fell by three percent (Marcus). Meanwhile, at some of

the country's most elite and exclusive universities, early decision applications increased by

double digit percentages which means while underserved populations continue to go

underserved, higher-income families are continuing to push forward and thrive in the

modernist ways of higher education.

According to the National Center for Education:

> In fall 2018, total undergraduate enrollment in degree-granting postsecondary
> institutions was 16.6 million students, an increase of 26 percent from 2000, when
> enrollment was 13.2 million students. Total undergraduate enrollment increased by 37
> percent (from 13.2 million to 18.1 million students) between 2000 and 2010, but
> decreased by 8 percent (from 18.1 million to 16.6 million students) between 2010 and
> 2018. (NCES)

Although there are many factors potentially causing this shift in the latter part of the 21st

century—including social, political, economic influences—one key element to consider is the

shift in student demographics during this time. At the start of the decade, college-aged

students were beginning to filter in from a new generation. The students who applied were

right at the tail end of the millennial generation and students were starting to represent

generation Z. Since then, of course, the enrollment demographic for first-year incoming

students, is almost entirely composed of generation Z.

The transition to a new generation is bound to bring about a massive amount of

change, especially when they represent such new and progressive ideals. The second half of

the millennial generation as well as generation Z have often been referred to as *quintessential*

postmodernists which varies drastically from their parents and predecessors (Berger). This

nickname is due to their overwhelming alignment with the postmodernist ideals and agenda

including the rejection of optimism, universality, metanarratives, and power hierarchies while

embracing fluidity, experiences, and globalization. A prime example of this can be seen in a

poll where 65 percent of this new wave of students indicated that they are confident about

their personal futures, but less than one-quarter are confident in the future of the world (St.

Amour).

Although students are no longer embracing a shared confidence in society, they still

seem to be firm supporters of community and interrelatedness. While modernity tends to

dissect or divide reality, knowledge, and individuality, postmodernists strive for a holistic

approach where these aspects are all part of a larger whole rather than separate entities.

Communities are only further developed by knowledge and a sense-of-self curated through

real life situations.

Even though the championing of communities may seem to be in direct tension with

individualism and a bleak outlook on the future, communities play a key role in forming us as

beings, shaping our values or beliefs, and even determining our reality. This new generation

is more globally connected than any previous era, and globalization is an important factor in

postmodernism. It's important to understand that globalization is not equivalent to universality or objectivity. While universality teaches of absolute truth, metanarratives, and inherent meaning, globalization is instead focused on the contextual exposure of goods, ideas, people, values, etc., from all walks of life including other ethnicities, races, religions, nationalities, genders, etc. This way of thinking has led students to become curators:

> This generation is the curation generation — collecting and sharing amongst their sphere of influence, while also developing 'neuroplasticity,' the ability to filter and process enormous amounts of information, efficiently and with purpose." Not only are they more connected and diverse than previous generations, their "immediate and unfiltered access to information from around the world allows for varied perspectives within a single, global community. (Bach)

As individuals, they embrace these various parts and create their own personal bricolage.

Along with globalization, another defining aspect of this new group is that their members are more racially and ethnically diverse than any other generation:

> The need for "diversity" is a reflection of the postmodern view that knowledge is culturally constructed and that different identity groups are positioned differently in relation to it. Therefore, it is believed that different groups produce different knowledge. (Pluckrose)

However, rather than being conditioned to believe one way is better to more correct than another, postmodernism provides individuals with the power to build something eclectic based on individual preference.

All that being said, how does this drastic shift in the recruitment funnel impact university enrollment trends? First, as institutions attempt to meet their revenue and enrollment goals, they must address the elephant in the room: four-year programs and universities have been established to attract a completely different, and now outdated, generation of students. If institutions hope to be successful, they need to redirect their attention and focus to meet the expectations of these new students.

Specifically, this new wave of students is focused on relevant academic programs, support services, good value, and a clear, near guaranteed, return on their investment. These specific aspects will be addressed more directly in the upcoming sections; however, it is important to keep these standards in mind while speaking of enrollment trends because they are having a palpable impact on recruitment and retention patterns of the 21st century.

The higher education pipeline to and through college, which represents the different pathways students can take to complete a postsecondary degree, is composed of five distinct process points: application, admission, enrollment, persistence, and completion. While applying, students participate in precollegiate activities that not only includes actual applicants, but also researching colleges, taking necessary entrance exams, paying the application fees, etc. During admission, a student is offered acceptance to a university and the student is able to review financial aid. Enrollment includes receiving a class schedule and the actual attendance of college. Persistence occurs after the initial semester and continues throughout the remainder of their attendance where the student remains enrolled and successfully accumulates credits. Finally, at completion, the student meets graduation requirements and receives their degree (U.S. Department of Education).

However, as most statistics will indicate, even though the process is the same for each student, not every student experience is created equal. For students from underserved or disadvantaged backgrounds, including but not limited to minority students, low-income students, first-generation student, etc., the process poses an exceptional number of gaps in access and success which stand as obstacles for these students to not only attend college but to graduate as well. Ultimately, these unique challenges for students of various backgrounds are found at each point in the pipeline, and "these gaps in college opportunity diminish social mobility and play a role in perpetuating intergenerational disparities by race and ethnicity, and also socioeconomic status" (U.S. Department of Education). In order to boost enrollment

numbers, these gaps need to be addressed so students begin to receive equal opportunities in higher education.

With the rising numbers of these 'non-traditional students' in the new generation, too few students are benefiting from the opportunities of higher education such as educational and economic mobility. Universities need to adjust their procedures in order to accommodation and empower the new generation, specifically students of color, or they will fail to meet recruitment and retainment goals in upcoming years:

> Recent undergraduate college enrollment trends reveal that the share of non-white undergraduate students has steadily increased over time, while the share of white student enrollment has declined by more than 25 percentage points from 1980 to 2014. (U.S. Department of Education)

Additionally, low-income, first-generation students comprise about 24 percent of the undergraduate population (Miller Payne et al.). This transition will only continue in future years, and the range of academic talent in universities will continue to expand alongside it. Nevertheless, well-led institutions will be able to recruit this distinct group of students and reap the benefits of increased academic potential and diversity. In past generations, this demographic of students was often not part of the enrollment and talent pool at all, so along with the expansion comes a variety of opportunities.

Not only is the 'traditional' college student changing in economic background and race and ethnicity, college-attending students are also shifting in age. While undergraduate programs used to serve predominantly 18-22-year-olds, the current average age of an undergraduate student is 26.4 years of age, and one in five are over 30 years of age (McCann). While 18-21-year-olds make up a significant percentage of students, they still account for less than half (42.15 percent) of all students (McCubbin).

The combination of a transforming student demographic along with the embrace of postmodernist ideals has led to a change in the type of programs in which students are

enrolling as well. Although the majority of students (50.5 percent) attend school exclusively full-time, and more students still attend a four-year institution (40.1 percent) than a public two-year institution (38.1 percent), online, hybrid, and flexible programs are becoming not only of interest to students but expected (NCES):

> Distance education courses and programs provide students with flexible learning opportunities. In fall 2018, some 34 percent (5.7 million) of all undergraduate students participated in distance education. Some 2.3 million students, or 14 percent of total undergraduate enrollment, exclusively took distance education courses. Among undergraduate students who took distance education courses exclusively, 1.5 million were enrolled in institutions located in the same state in which they resided, and 799,000 were enrolled in institutions in a different state. (NCES)

While the impact of postmodernism has definitely placed its part in the embrace of flexible and personalized education, technological advances have made it possible. The new generation of students has, more often than not, lived their entire lives with internet access to an entire digital database.

As enrollment declines, offering adaptable programs and courses will only further incentivize students to attend university, a system in which many students have lost faith in. It will also allow students the freedom to obtain a degree without uprooting their lives which may be filled with obstacles and challenges unique to this generation. Not only will recruitment numbers increase, but retention and graduate rates will improve as students have more options and opportunities for success. As shown previously, the new wave of students will be the most diverse and, at times, the most under-privileged group of students, and finances will continue to play a large role in their collegiate plans. Currently, statistics show that only 59 percent of full-time, first-time students at four-year institutions completed a bachelor's or equivalent degree within six years, and with borrowers who drop out before earning a degree—the other 41 percent—being three times more likely to default on their loans (McCann), the ability to finish school more easily will serve as the greatest recruitment tool.

Degree Outcomes and Objectives

When examining the way in which the world has progressed throughout the 20th and 21st century, it is clear that capitalism cannot be left out of the conversation regarding not only education but the entire paradigm shift that has taken place, especially when looking through a postmodernist lens. In today's climate, Marxism and socialism is beginning to gain new traction as the ways of capitalism become more and more problematic for the lower- and middle-class citizens. At postmodernism's fruition, it was often dismissed and resisted by leftist and Marxists. However, with Fredric Jameson's writings of the 1980's, specifically his essay, "Postmodernism, or, the Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism", many reconsidered their views.

As Jameson was one of the most prominent Marxist literary critics of the area, he constituted "both a defense of Marxism and an attempt to show that a reconstructed Marxian theory can provide the most comprehensive and penetrating theory of postmodernism itself" (Tally 77). Jameson recognized that postmodernism, regardless of whether or not someone thought of it as positive or negative, was clearly having an effect on and accurately representing the social totality or world system of our time; it has value in periodizing out present situation. Jameson came to the conclusion that 'postmodernism is the culture logic of late-capitalism', and as we've entered the 21st century, this answer is as true and relevant as ever.

In understanding late capitalism, one must understand that it is the "theory of an industry, of a branch of interlocking monopolies of late capitalism that makes money out of what used to be called culture. The topic here is the *commercialization of life*" (Tally 77). In the industry of American culture, capitalism influences almost every aspect of a person's behavior and desires toward the world and others. This relationship between the consumerist

and commercial society and the individual experience is just as pertinent in today's mass culture and the examination of the postmodern condition in higher education.

As students seek to absolve the problem of representation, or the objective tension concerning the social totality and its subjects, the institute of higher education has had to reconcile exactly where it fits into this era of industry; is it a collaborator with capitalism, a solution to the problem of lacking a true sense of self, or a bridge between the two? Ideally, higher education would serve as a counterweight to big business and government during this period of late capitalism where the industry seems to influence all.

However, in order to accomplish this, higher education would need to follow a strict order of conduct regarding truth-telling and truth-seeking—aiming to be a voice for those without voice. Those suppressed groups include people of color, women and non-binary individuals, the LGBTQIA+ community, lower income students, etc., and they are often the same groups who are silenced in a commercialized society.

One of the greatest paradoxes of postmodernism is its embrace of individualism, storytelling, and experiences while simultaneously, and often unknowingly, upholding a system that exploits individuals for the sake of power and universality. The intertwining of postmodernism and capitalism is undeniable as, from its conception, postmodernism has used capitalism as a means to its end. A prime example of this being Andy Warhol where he used popular culture aesthetics along with mass production to produce some of the most iconic and infamous works of the late 20th century.

However, on the other hand, the embrace of capitalism has allowed for the masses to demand more from the industry—higher education and universities being an ideal representation of this pattern. In recent years, the financial burden of obtaining a four-year degree has shifted largely to individual students and their families (Altbach et al. 108). This shift from government, scholarship, and sponsorship subsidies to paying out-of-pocket for

higher education, is a way in which the industry has capitalized on helpless patrons. As the personal benefits and societal necessity of earning a diploma increases for individuals, universities understand that students are willing to take on the responsibility of financing their education, and this has continuously led to less monetary support.

Although this trend has led the national student loan debt to a staggering $1.6 trillion, students have been able to also demand more as a result. Capitalism may have allowed for universities, business, and the government alike to profit, but it has also turned higher education into a *product*, meaning its customers are able to demand and dictate what they are willing to pay for: "the complex side effects for education include the fact that universities, to survive in an increasingly competitive 'knowledge market,' must look at the quality and relevance of their teaching activities in ways they never have before" (Altbach et al. 108). Students now have higher expectations of their educational supplier and paying for an education for 'the greater good' or for 'intrinsic value' is an ideal of the past.

The leading cause in this redirection is defined by the Great Recession. The Great Recession and its aftermath made many refocus and redefine the value and relevance of a degree. The majority of incoming students are worried about financial security. About 25 percent of this demographic of enrollees describe themselves as 'always stressed' about finances while 20 percent state that the cost of university attendance is their top concern ("The New Generation of Students").

Considering the economic unrest caused by the recession as well as the increase of tuition prices, it is no wonder these students are fixated on finances. "According to the College Board, the average sticker price of tuition, fees, room, and board at public institutions is $20,2770, a figure that has risen by more than 60 percent since the year 2000. At private colleges, the total price is $46,950, up nearly 40 percent over the same period"

("The New Generation of Students"). Simultaneously, as prices have risen, finical aid and support has continued to decline.

Now more than ever, students are asking about the return on their investment (ROI)—if they are giving these institutions their time and their money, what are they receiving in return? In a time of a decrease nationwide in higher educational enrollment, this is forcing universities to reconsider their product and is driving innovation in a system that hasn't changed in well over a century. Ultimately, universities are now required to prove their worth in order to drive up their enrollment numbers. Otherwise, with the overwhelming amount of competition, students will simply opt to attend elsewhere, and universities will continue to face financial crisis. Since 2016, 65 universities have closed their doors nationwide, and this trend is predicted to only increase as the more and more students find more suitable options (Education Dive Team).

True to their postmodern influence, students entering into higher education are fully embracing individuality and relativism. According to ECMC Group, a nonprofit organization focused on student success, more than half of students looking into their next step of higher education are open to pursuing a path other than a typical four-year degree, and an overwhelming 70 percent want to follow their own educational path (St. Amour). and 72 percent expect colleges to allow them to design their own degree program (Bach). Modern-aged college students are concerned more with their experiences rather than the traditional coursework and exams. Therefore, they expect universities to provide them with valuable experience as they continuously try to shape their own journey.

Additionally, the next wave of students is more concerned with finances and financially driven than their predecessors. While searching for universities, their largest concerns often includes not only how it is they will pay for school, but why they should pay for an education ("Getting to Know Gen Z"), especially since it requires an increasingly

larger sacrifice to do so. With postmodernism progressively integrating itself into popular culture, it is no surprise that younger generations are developing their own conclusions to this problem that generations before them seem to have caused.

Today's influx of scholars expect their ROI to contain, first and foremost, a clear career-path with a proven history of offered jobs prior to students even graduating; the purpose of college for them is to help launch a career. A university experience is their pathway to new perspectives, interactions with others from different backgrounds, the development of a network and broader experiences all to help them get a better job and advance in their future. Their focus is on life post-college rather than on their specific degree, and students are making sure to do their research before committing any time or resources to universities.

With that being said, students don't want to be offered just any opportunities or experiences but have very specific requirements in mind, ones that are in line with today's ever-changing and ever-progressing postmodern world:

> 76 percent of students want to convert their hobbies into full-time careers; 60 percent want their jobs to impact the world; 63 percent expect colleges to offer courses that teach students how to start their own business; 79 percent favor integrating employer internships with academic programs; and 42 percent expect to work for themselves during their careers and want their college experiences to help them obtain that lifestyle. (Bach)

With such detailed and individualized expectations, students are defining an innovative, unique criteria of success when it comes to their university and career experiences.

Unlike their predecessors, they're prioritizing culture and engagement over salary and emphasizing the importance of making a difference in the world around them. It has become increasingly clear that they not only know exactly what they want but also what they need to achieve their goals. "Predisposed to learning and conducting research, they are prepared to

make their own decisions based on that research – a distinct difference from previous generations who rely more heavily on friends and family" ("Getting to Know Gen Z").

Unfortunately, for students and universities alike, the research on the professional perspective of a university degree doesn't look as promising as one looking into their ROI would hope:

> A recent study on career readiness shows that only 42 percent of employers express satisfaction with college graduates' written and verbal communication, just 33 percent believe that college graduates are ready for leadership, and a paltry 21 percent credit college graduates with intercultural fluency. (Poliakoff)

These students envision a future that reflects their own personal interests, and they want to be empowered in their journey. The only question remaining is how universities will be able to elevate their product in order to meet the standards and influence of the rising, postmodern generation as well as the expectations of the professional world.

Regardless of the obstacles standing in front of this shift in priorities, university leaders are being forced to take notice as the pool of college-seeking applicants continues to shrink. True to the dilemma of capitalism, the industry of higher education must supply what their target consumers are demanding, and for the new wave of students, "learning is one continuous, multifaceted, completely integrated experience – connecting social, academic and professional interests" ("Getting to Know Gen Z").

A Shift in Academics and Pedagogy

Until the vast and rapid changes brought about in the 21st century, higher education institutions were built upon research rather than teaching. Teaching was a secondary aspect, and since the application process was rigorous and exclusive, professors only had to concern themselves with teaching to a select group of students. Often, these students all fit a similar mold: affluent, from educated families, and traditional. As these students went through their

time at university, they were expected to form and fit to the individual teaching styles and expectations of their various professors, and if they received a failing grade, it was due to a lack of motivation or skill, not poor teaching.

In fact, most professors did not view themselves as teachers at all. The word professor indicated that the instructor was an expert in their specific area and were there to profess their knowledge to the students. Whether or not the student learned anything or even passed the course was not the professor's concern. Traditional university teaching was knowledge-centered rather than student-centered (Altbach et al. 107).

This approach to the classroom and academics has been a main contributor to the exclusivity and discrimination found within the higher education system. As stated within *Trends in Global Higher Education*:

> Until fairly recently, teaching meant "covering" a body of *declarative* knowledge—that is, knowledge that could be "declared" in books or in lectures—while assessment measured how well students received that knowledge based on their ability to regurgitate it on examinations… Less thought was given to *functional* knowledge—that is, knowing how to apply theory to practical solutions. (Altbach et al. 107)

Declarative knowledge has become more obsolete as the search for an objective reality and truth quickly fades from collective thought. Functional knowledge, on the other hand, is taking its rightful place at the forefront of education since the new wave of learners is now overly concerned with the outcomes of obtaining an undergraduate degree: "given the pressures of the evolving educational outcomes, learning about declarative knowledge can no longer be the default teaching method" (Altbach et al. 106). As students question the purpose behind investing their time and resources into college, teaching outcomes have necessarily shifted to a practical purpose.

For generations, the institution of higher education has been revered as the ultimate pillar of knowledge and truth in society. Not only were universities relaying this wisdom to select students, but they were also responsible for constructing and declaring the values of

our civilization while pioneering the way towards a bright, innovative future. However, as society has transformed, so has the way in which universities operate.

Specifically, as post-modernism ideals have become fundamental viewpoints of the masses, higher education has had to fight to stay relevant—especially in an ever-increasing competitive, capitalistic, and outcome-oriented way of life. Previously, higher education was thought to have intrinsic value, or that education was an ends-in-itself; its value existed "in itself," or "for its own sake," or "in its own right." However, as postmodernism has dispelled the idea of Truth, universality, and objectiveness, education has also needed to prove its value—what does it actually offer to its participants.

This concept led to a gradual transition from research-oriented universities teaching-oriented programs and courses. Even though most appointments and promotions in academia are still made on the basis of research output, not teaching proficiency, there has been a greater emphasis on learning outcomes rather than 'inputs' (Altbach et al. 106). In education, inputs are often defined as what subjects and topics are being taught and how that curricula are being delivered in the course while outputs consist of learning objectives and meaningful assessments. Students are no longer satisfied with being able to regurgitate information, but they are needing to develop skills, knowledge, attitudes so as to operate effectively in a more complex, fluid, and ambiguous environments.

Although this has been happening at a slower rate, it is only happening due to the cultural paradigm shift caused by post-modernism and is continuously making an impact across the country as even the most prestigious and historic universities are placing a new emphasis on student-centered learning. Student-centered courses are focusing less on what teachers do and are paying greater attention to what students learn and accomplish.

Another large concern for universities is how to prepare students effectively for an ever evolving and ambiguous economy. As our world continues to exit out of an industrial

economy and into the vast and unexplored technological world, social leaders and educationalists are asking whether or not a traditional, professional focus is adequate. Although professional educations and specific curricular will always be needed—such as for law, medicine, engineering, business, etc., —the large majority of students needs to be prepared for a wider range of adaptations.

Due to this, a redirection has begun to occur where students and employers alike are recognizing the value and potential need for a liberal education. Unlike professional degrees, a liberal arts education "emphasizes a broad interdisciplinary curriculum focused on creativity, critical thinking, cultural awareness, problem solving, and communication skills" (Altbach et al. 105).

The economy today is often referred to as a knowledge economy, and it requires a more generalized workforce composed of individuals who are ready to enter a developing world. Soft skills such as adaptability, flexibility, understanding how to learn, and managing and assimilating large qualities of information are more desirous than the hard skills learned in a professional program. As a result, majoring in liberal-based degrees and interdisciplinary fields has increased by 37 percent since 2003 (Whitaker). Academe, therefore, has shifted toward helping learners use knowledge in new ways — toward innovation.

To meet these contemporaneous and revolutionary outcomes, institutions and universities are building momentum in assuming centralized oversight for teaching-quality and pedogeological development (Altbach et al. 110). Typically, professors are thought of as private contractors hired to teach in their respective styles and areas, but this model requires them to be enveloped into a wider system with established regulations and expectations, and benchmarks where their courses are cross-examined by overarching administration. "Many universities have developed policies and procedures that enhance the quality of teaching and assessment across all departments in the institution" (Altbach et al. 110).

In doing so, however, there are quite a few challenges. One of the largest being that in an effort to develop and institutionalize the groundbreaking and contemporary pedagogy and curricula needed to accomplish such a feat, universities still need buy-in from three completely different, and often separate, sectors: administration, faculty, and students. Although each area is beginning to accept the notion that "one size" does not fit all learning styles, there is still much debate on what is taught, why it's taught, and how it ought to be taught.

Since most traditional teaching methodologies such as lectures and tests are becoming obsolete, this including the standard lecture and assessment format, the challenge is to design and provide an experience that is career-relevant while also producing critical, creative thinkers and lifelong learners who will thrive in a world that is encouraging enlightened and dynamic contributors. In order to accomplish this, the institution as a whole must embrace a cultural shift where no just research productivity and influence is valued but also effective teaching. This shift must also be conscientious of time, cost, and resources required from students while delivering a well-rounded education than that has been provided in the past.

Although many institutions are attempting to break down this wall, the problem of isomorphism is still an overarching and complex issue found withing the world of academia. Students are ready for a more dynamic approach to education where academic models are built to serve societal needs and diversified communities, but research universities are hesitant to detach from the system of prestige. There is still a tendency to copy and compete with one another in an attempt to rise in the academic hierarchy of universities (Altbach et al. 110).

The development and maintenance of hierarchies in the university system is yet another example of the old, modernist ways still dictating the direction higher education as a whole. Whether it's related to administration, disciplines, majors, credentials, or even

institutions themselves, a pervasive ranking system exists within higher education. The problem with these hierarchies is that is clearly defines a power dynamic where one group asserts dominance over minorities who are repeatedly marginalized due to the structure. Often times, those who are claimed as superior do not understand the intertwining of hierarchy, knowledge, and power.

Nevertheless, postmodernism viewpoints and ideals are being carried into higher education through a bottom-up approach as a new generation and wave of students is beginning to enroll. In addition to the opposing the hierarchal structure, these students, along with some of the younger or more progressive faculty and staff members, are embarking on a journey to dismantle the 'ivory tower' façade of universities. With the age of technology and technological advancement, students have easy and accessible access to information that was once readily provided only to those fortunate enough to have attended college, so universities are needing to offer more than just the bare minimum of already-available information.

Over and over again, students are choosing the real world over the classroom as shown by an overall decrease in enrollment numbers nationwide and an increase in non-traditional student enrollment. Though education is as important to employers as ever, students are realizing they don't need to learn to live or survive in the classroom but are learning so they can survive in the real world. This is challenging educators to give students the tools with which to live and breathe in the world around them, and if a traditional lesson must be taught, then it needs to be done so in the context of who these students are aiming to become.

Ultimately, postmodernism's impact on the objectives and motives of students is the driving force behind a redirection in teaching methodologies. Since students are no longer willing to spend their time or resources on the bare minimum, professors are being challenged to improve, update, and change their courses and teaching styles based on their

students' performance and reaction to it—the 'trickle down' model of education has become a thing of the past.

One of the leading pedagogy models inspiring this new wave of teaching actually dates back to 1956, the very beginning of what is typically recognized as the postmodern influence: Bloom's Taxonomy. Created by Benjamin Bloom, Bloom's Taxonomy is a set of hierarchical models used to narrow the focus of pedagogy on cultivating higher-order cognitive skills. The model classifies learning objectives into levels of complexity and specificity.

Bloom's Taxonomy includes six various levels of thinking skills: remembering where students are able to recall basic facts and concepts; understanding—students can explain the material; applying—students use information in a new, yet familiar, situation; analyzing—students draw connections among various ideas and even across other subject areas; evaluating—students can defend or critique a specific stand or decision; creating—students produce a new or original work. The upper tiers specifically are used in contemporary classrooms to aid in the creation of experiential education that emphasizes application, analysis, evaluation, and creation of knowledge with students.

With this model in mind, a slew of contemporary and progressive educational models have been developed to help aid in meeting the new standards and learning objectives of university courses. Perhaps the four most prominent methodologies and pedogeological approaches include competency-based learning, problem-based learning, placed-based learning and self-directed learning with the most influential being self-directed learning.

Competency-based learning is structured in a way that allows students to advance through coursework and lessons at their own pace. Students will progress once they showcase their mastery of specific and predetermined "competencies" or learning objectives. As a student focuses on mastery, they are given multiple attempts and opportunities to do so while

continuously receiving feedback from the professor. This method is student-centered because it meets students where they are and accommodates different learning abilities. Students will experience their own unique challenges and obstacles throughout various competencies and, instead of being forced to move at the professor's pace, are able to structure their own varying timelines in which they accomplish the objectives.

Problem-based learning was inspired by one of the concerns listed above in which students are less concerned with surviving in a classroom and more interested in learning how to thrive in the real world. Professors organize their lessons to build up to practice scenarios or case studies in which students are given a real-world problem and then are asked to collaborate together to develop a practical and applicable solution. This method is student-focused in that it is centered on the student's ability to demonstrate and accomplish mastery of relevant learning objectives rather than a regurgitation of facts or concepts.

Similarly, place-based learning is focused on the world around us rather than the small, secluded world of higher education and classrooms. Place-based learning focuses on the influence students can make in their local community, society, culture, and/or heritage. It allows students to be engaged in a hands-on approach where they are actively working on solving local problems and concerns. One of the reasons this form of education is so effective in increasing student engagement and boosting academic outcomes is because it encourages students to recognize and explore the direct, positive impact they're able to have on the world around them through their earning of a college education.

Although this is in no way a complete list of student-centered or postmodern-inspired pedagogies, self-directed learning is the one that perhaps embodies these standards and ideals more than any other methodology. Self-directed learning emphasizes students learning how to learn, understanding what's worth understanding, and analyzing the purpose of learning:

> In its broadest meaning, self-directed learning describes a process in which individuals take the initiative, with or without the help of others, in diagnosing their learning needs, formulating learning goals, identifying human and material resources for learning, choosing and implementing appropriate learning strategies, and evaluating learning outcomes. (Knowles 18)

The ultimate objective of self-directed learning is to guide students to self-knowledge or a more complete understanding of one's self, using the knowledge acquired to develop and inform one's interactions with the individuals and world around them.

This method requires the largest amount of initiative from its participants, and for this reason, a specific outline has been developed to best direct students and professors partaking in self-directed learning. The idea behind the model is that the 21st century has been characterized by access, networks, digital media, and connectivity, so learning models are needed that actively intertwine these various aspects, creating not only a knowledge of content but a wisdom to be able to navigate the new century; students should constantly be generating original ideas from multiple sources of information.

Similar to Bloom's Taxonomy, there are six steps or tiers in guiding the self-directed learning process: self-knowledge, analyze context, activate existing knowledge, design a learning pathway, clarify knowledge, and apply understanding (Heick). Self-knowledge, as mentioned previously, begins with asking oneself critical questions that will help with identifying what is worth understanding, what problems may arise, and what solutions have others before created.

The next step is to analyze the context by posing questions such as what is the modern and historical context of this topic, what is needed to understand the significance and scale of this topic, how does pathos/ethos/logos factor in, are there any apparent patterns, and what do experts already know or believe about it. By asking and then answering these questions, the topic begins to take shape in the proper context of study and discussion.

Next, the engager is encouraged to spend time activating previous knowledge they have on the subject. This can include brainstorming what one already knows, creating a concept map of the existing knowledge, interacting with relevant and recent resources and media, and analyzing not only the explicit but the implicit information as well. Although many of these suggestions are broad, it can be helpful to write down true/false statements, give examples or even non-examples, and outline material in a way that is easy to refer back to.

So far in the process, the learner has yet to delve into the actual concepts. Rather, they have built or provided a framework for a more profound level of understanding and learning. By doing so, the new knowledge will have a point of reference and will therefore be more likely to stick with them, and they will be able to continue to build off of the newly attained information. The last step before fully engaging in the new material is to design a learning pathway so that the student has plan for attacking their new lesson plans. Helpful questions in guiding this pathway creating include asking 'how can I learn what I need to know?'; what can I gain quickly, 'what will need more in-depth study?'; and 'what technological resources can I use?'.

The final steps include clarifying the knowledge, and then applying one's understanding. These two processes allow for students to review the material and preform a type of self-assessment. When clarifying knowledge, one is able to form new questions based on their learning, comprehend what is within their reach of understanding, analyze the need for creativity, innovation, and information, and also revise their learning pathway based on the learning experience. Applying understanding is where self-directed learning begins to cross over with the other methodologies talked about previously. Students will begin to apply their learning to real-world scenarios, problem-solving, and self-reflection.

All these models share in their connection to a personalized approach to education. Personalized education holds more value now than ever before. Education is finally at a place where it is giving importance to the personal needs and ideas of students, and the individual is finding meaning and purpose within the collective forum. As Todd Rose explains, personalized education is quickly replacing the generalized curriculum and approaches that seem to be 'based on everyone and relevant to no one.' The standard, current methodology fails to meet students where they are academically and is incapable of lighting a fire of passion for learning (Rose). While higher education attempts to revamp the system to not only bolster enrollment but also their overall outcomes, more courses, administration, and professors are turning towards this personalized approach of learning and pedagogy.

Conclusion

As postmodernism values continue to become a foundational piece in today's society, higher education has had to fight to stay relevant—especially in an ever-increasing personalized, capitalistic, and outcome-oriented way of life. The three majorly impacted areas of higher education include enrollment trends, the expected outcomes and objectives of obtaining a degree, and classroom academics and pedagogy.

Enrollment numbers have been gravely affected by the generational shift occurring throughout the States. As the incoming students are dubbed as quintessential postmodernists, institutions are needing to transform their programs and universities to fit the needs and desires of this new pool of applicants including their rejection of universality, metanarratives, and power hierarchies while embracing fluidity, experiences, and globalization.

As globalization becomes a key value for these undergraduate students, higher education must focus on providing contextual exposure of goods, ideas, people, values, etc., from all walks of life including other ethnicities, races, religions, nationalities, genders, etc.

By doing so, universities are able to address the overarching problem that higher education was designed and established to teach and attract a completely different, and now outdated, generation of students. Optimistically, this transition will lead to more students feeling incentivized to attend university and will aid in flipping around current, declining enrollment trends.

Additionally, academe must accept and embrace its new status as a capitalistic good, rather than an inherent or necessary virtue. Unlike ever before in the history of higher education, a university degree is now a consumerist product meaning its customers are able to demand and dictate what they are willing to pay for. Now more than ever, students are asking about the return on their investment (ROI)—if they are giving these institutions their time and their money, what are they receiving in return?

Fueled by rapidly decreasing enrollment numbers and the constant closing of universities nationwide, innovation is being driven into a system that hasn't changed in well over a century. Ultimately, universities are now required to prove their worth in order to secure their recruitment and retainment numbers. Otherwise, with the overwhelming amount of competition, students will simply opt to attend elsewhere, and universities will continue to face financial crisis. With this in mind, institutions are asking themselves how they might elevate their product in order to meet the standards and influence of the rising, postmodern generation.

As higher education attempts to revamp the system to not only bolster enrollment but also their overall outcomes, more courses, administration, and professors are turning towards a personalized approach of learning and pedagogy. Currently, the standard methodology is failing to meet students where they are academically and has proven itself incapable of igniting a passion for learning and self-improvement. While professors have traditionally been thought of as private contractors hired to teach in their respective areas and styles,

universities are making a push to establish a wider system that includes regulations and expectations, and benchmarks where their courses are cross-examined by overarching administration.

Consequently, contemporary and progressive educational models have been developed to help aid in meeting the new standards and learning objectives of university courses. Perhaps the four most prominent methodologies and pedogeological approaches include competency-based learning, problem-based learning, placed-based learning and self-directed learning with the most influential being self-directed learning.

For generations, the institution of higher education has been revered as the ultimate pillar of knowledge and truth in society. However, postmodernism is marking the end of traditional structures and institutions, and academe is no exception. The power of the young, incoming students and their voices cannot be overstated in this transition. This systemic reform has begun from a grassroots approach, with the efforts of dissenting students leading the way on the postmodernization of higher education.

References

Altbach, Philip, et al. *Trends in Global Higher Education: Tracking an Academic Revolution (Global Perspectives on Higher Education)*. Sense Publishers, 2010.

Aylesworth, Gary. "Postmodernism." *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, 2015, plato.stanford.edu/archives/spr2015/entries/postmodernism.

Bach, John. "Make Room for Gen Z." *University of Cincinnati*, 2016, magazine.uc.edu/issues/0916/generation-z.html.

Baker, Michael, and Michael Peters. "Dialogue on Modernity and Modern Education in Dispute." *SAGE Journals*, Policy Futures in Education, 1 Oct. 2012, journals.sagepub.com/action/cookieAbsent.

Berger, Arthur. "Postmodernism and Millennials." *Cultural Perspectives on Millennials*, 2018, www.springerprofessional.de/en/postmodernism-and-millennials/15201414.

Bloland, Harland G. "Whatever Happened to Postmodernism in Higher Education?: No Requiem in the New Millennium." *The Journal of Higher Education*, vol. 76, no. 2, 2005, pp. 121–50. *Crossref*, doi:10.1080/00221546.2005.11778908.

Brown, Gordon. "The Millennial's Guide to Philosophy: Postmodernism." *Primer*, 22 June 2017, www.primermagazine.com/2014/learn/the-millennials-guide-to-philosophy-postmodernism#:%7E:text=French%20philosopher%20Albert%20Camus%2C%20who,end%2C%20it%20is%20the%20end.

Castagnera, James Ottavio. "The Role of Higher Education in the 21st CenturyCollaborator

   or Counterweight?" *Change: The Magazine of Higher Learning*, vol. 33, no. 5, 2001,

   pp. 39–43. *Crossref*, doi:10.1080/00091380109601817.

"Changing Students, Faculty, and Institutions in the Twenty-First." *Association of American

   Colleges & Universities*, 25 Dec. 2020, www.aacu.org/publications-

   research/periodicals/changing-students-faculty-and-institutions-twenty-first-century.

"College Enrollment & Student Demographic Statistics." *EducationData*, 1 Mar. 2021,

   educationdata.org/college-enrollment-statistics.

Duignan, Brian. "Postmodernism." *Encyclopedia Britannica*, 2020,

   www.britannica.com/topic/postmodernism-philosophy/Postmodernism-and-

   relativism.

Dunham-Jones, Ellen. "A Modernist Education." *Georgia Tech*, 2002,

   smartech.gatech.edu/bitstream/handle/1853/24025/modernist_education.pdf?sequence

   =1&isAllowed=y.

Education Dive Team. "How Many Colleges and Universities Have Closed Since 2016?"

   Higher Ed Dive, 18 Oct. 2018, www.highereddive.com/news/how-many-colleges-

   and-universities-have-closed-since-2016/539379.

Edwards, Richard, and Robin Usher. *Postmodernism and Education: Different Voices,

   Different Worlds (One World Archaeology; 25)*. 1st ed., Routledge, 1994.

Flynn, Elizabeth A. "Rescuing Postmodernism." *College Composition and Communication*,

   vol. 48, no. 4, 1997, p. 540. *Crossref*, doi:10.2307/358457.

"Getting to Know Gen Z." *Barnes and Nobel College*, 2015, www.bncollege.com/wp-

 content/uploads/2015/10/Gen-Z-Research-Report-Final.pdf.

"Glossary: Postmodernism." *PBS*, 1995, www.pbs.org/faithandreason/gengloss/postm-

 body.html.

Harkin, Joe. "In Defence of the Modernist Project in Education." *British Educational*

 Research Association Annual Conference, 1997,

 www.leeds.ac.uk/educol/documents/000000384.htm.

Heick, Terry. "A Self-Directed Learning Model for 21st Century Learners." *TeachThought*, 4

 Feb. 2021, www.teachthought.com/critical-thinking/self-directed-learning-model-

 21st-century-learners.

Heller, Scott. "New Life for Modernism." *Chronicle of Higher Education*, vol. 46, no. 11,

 1999. *EBSCO*,

 search.ebscohost.com/login.aspx?direct=true&db=ehh&AN=2476201&site=ehost-

 live&scope=site.

"History of Modernism." *MDC*, 2020,

 www.mdc.edu/wolfson/academic/artsletters/art_philosophy/humanities/history_of_m

 odernism.htm.

Inside Higher Ed. "College Enrollment Declines Continue." *Inside Higher Ed*, 30 May 2019,

 www.insidehighered.com/quicktakes/2019/05/30/college-enrollment-declines-

 continue.

Klein, Donald Michael C. Broom. *Power: The Infinite Game*. Sea Otter Press, 1999.

Knowles, Malcolm Shepherd. *Self-Directed Learning: A Guide for Learners and Teachers*. Association Press, 1975.

Madsen, David. "Higher Education in Transition: A History of American Colleges and Universities, 1636–1968." *The Journal of Higher Education*, vol. 40, no. 5, 1969, pp. 408–09. *Crossref*, doi:10.1080/00221546.1969.11773813.

Marcus, Jon. "Pandemic Trends Threaten to Widen the Wealth Divide in College Admissions." *The Hechinger Report*, 22 Feb. 2021, hechingerreport.org/as-admissions-season-descends-warning-signs-appear-for-low-income-applicants.

McCann, Clare. "Perception vs. Reality: The Typical College Student." *New America*, 2017, www.newamerica.org/in-depth/varying-degrees/perception-vs-reality-typical-college-student/#:%7E:text=The%20average%20college%20student%20is%2026.4%20years%20of%20age.

McCubbin, James. "Student Demographics in Higher Education." *Campus*, 2018, blog.campus.app/student-demographics-in-higher-education.

McHale, B. "1966 Nervous Breakdown; or, When Did Postmodernism Begin?" *Modern Language Quarterly*, vol. 69, no. 3, 2008, pp. 391–413. *Crossref*, doi:10.1215/00267929-2008-004.

McHale, Brian. "Afterword: Reconstructing Postmodernism." *Narrative*, vol. 21, no. 3, 2013, pp. 357–64. *Crossref*, doi:10.1353/nar.2013.0020.

Miller Payne, Emily, et al. "Changing Demographics and Needs Assessment for Learning Centers in the 21st Century." *Texas State University*, vol. 22, no. 1, 2014, files.eric.ed.gov/fulltext/EJ1142572.pdf.

Molz, Markus, and Gaudenz Assenza. "TWO PARADIGMS OF HIGHER EDUCATION -

    MODERNIST AND TRANSFORMATIVE." *University for the Future Initiative*, vol.

    21, no. 1, 2015, narativ.cz/files/e4f.pdf.

Murray, Jacob. "Has the Time Come for Personalized Higher Education?" *Brookings*, 22

    Feb. 2017, www.brookings.edu/blog/brown-center-chalkboard/2017/02/21/has-the-

    time-come-for-personalized-higher-education.

Nasseh, Bizhan. "Demographic Changes Will Create Major Challenges for Higher

    Educational Institutions in the 21st Century." *Ball State University*, Jan. 2000,

    www.bsu.edu/campuslife/counselingcenter/additionalservices/diversityresources/creat

    ingtheinclusiveclassroom/demographicchangeswillcreatemajorchallenges.

NCES. "Undergraduate Enrollment." *National Center for Education Statistics*, May 2020,

    nces.ed.gov/programs/coe/indicator_csb.asp.

Palmer, Daniel. "Explainer: What Is Postmodernism?" *The Conversation*, 2 Jan. 2014,

    theconversation.com/explainer-what-is-postmodernism-20791.

Parker, Kim, and Ruth Igielnik. "On the Cusp of Adulthood and Facing an Uncertain Future:

    What We Know About Gen Z So Far." *Pew Research Center's Social &*

    Demographic Trends Project, 30 May 2020, www.pewresearch.org/social-

    trends/2020/05/14/on-the-cusp-of-adulthood-and-facing-an-uncertain-future-what-we-

    know-about-gen-z-so-far-2.

Pluckrose, Helen. "No, Postmodernism Is Not Dead (and Other Misconceptions)." *Areo*, 6

    Apr. 2018, areomagazine.com/2018/02/07/no-postmodernism-is-not-dead-and-other-

    misconceptions.

Poliakoff, Michael. "What Is The Return On Investment From A Liberal Arts Education?" *Forbes*, 22 Oct. 2020, www.forbes.com/sites/michaelpoliakoff/2020/10/22/what-is-the-return-on-investment-from-a-liberal-arts-education/?sh=5da29127530a.

Popkewitz, Thomas S. "The Production of Reason and Power: Curriculum History and Intellectual Traditions." *Journal of Curriculum Studies*, vol. 29, no. 2, 1997, pp. 131–64. *Crossref*, doi:10.1080/002202797184107.

"Postmodernism – Art Term." *Tate*, 2020, www.tate.org.uk/art/art-terms/p/postmodernism.

"Postmodernism and the Decline of the Liberal Arts." *Quillette*, 22 May 2018, quillette.com/2018/05/21/postmodernism-decline-liberal-arts.

Rose, Todd. *The End of Average: How We Succeed in a World That Values Sameness*. Illustrated, HarperOne, 2016.

Scott, Peter. "Postmodernity and the University." *Revista Española de Educación Comparada*, vol. 0, no. 20, 2012, p. 81. *Crossref*, doi:10.5944/reec.20.2012.7594.

Scott, David. "Lecture on Postmodernity." *Boston University*, 2011, blogs.bu.edu/dscott/files/2011/05/Lecture-on-postmodernity-David-Wm-Scott.pdf.

"Shifting to 21st Century Thinking » Postmodernism." *NZCR*, 2017, www.shiftingthinking.org/?page_id=53.

Slattery, Patrick. *Curriculum Development in the Postmodern Era: Teaching and Learning in an Age of Accountability*. 3rd ed., Routledge, 2012.

Snell, Joel. "Chaos Theory and Post Modernism, Education." *ERIC*, 30 Nov. 2008, eric.ed.gov/?id=EJ871663.

St. Amour, Madeline. "Report: Gen Z Open to Nontraditional Education." *Inside Higher Ed*,

    25 June 2020, www.insidehighered.com/quicktakes/2020/06/25/report-gen-z-open-

    nontraditional-education.

Stockdill, Brett C., and Mary Yu Danico. "Chapter One. The Ivory Tower Paradox: Higher

    Education as a Site of Oppression and Resistance." *Transforming the Ivory Tower*,

    2017, pp. 1–30. *Crossref*, doi:10.1515/9780824860394-002.

Stowe, Donald E. "Postmodern View of Advisement in Higher Education." *NACADA*

    Journal, vol. 16, no. 2, 1996, pp. 16–18. *Crossref*, doi:10.12930/0271-9517-16.2.16.

Tally, Robert. "The Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism." *Fredric Jameson: The Project of*

    Dialectical Criticism, Pluto Press, 2014, p. 77.

"The New Generation of Students." *The Chronicle of Higher Education*, 2018,

    connect.chronicle.com/rs/931-EKA-

    218/images/NextGenStudents_ExecutiveSummary_v5%20_2019.pdf.

The Professional School of Psychology. "Postmodernism and the Challenges Facing 21st

    Century Educators." *The Professional School of Psychology*, 4 Dec. 2015,

    psychology.edu/about/four-models-of-adult-education/postmodernism-and-the-

    challenges-facing-21st-century-educators.

"The Rise of Modernism." *Lumen*, 2021, courses.lumenlearning.com/boundless-

    arthistory/chapter/the-rise-of-modernism.

Thelin, John, et al. "Higher Education in the United States." *Colleges, Institutions,*

    Universities, and American - StateUniversity.Com, 2021,

    education.stateuniversity.com/pages/2044/Higher-Education-in-United-States.html.

Tierney, William G. "The Autonomy of Knowledge and the Decline of the Subject: Postmodernism and the Reformulation of the University." *Higher Education*, vol. 41, no. 4, 2001, pp. 353–72. *Crossref*, doi:10.1023/a:1017588907541.

US Census Bureau. "Postsecondary Enrollment Before, During and After the Great Recession." *The United States Census Bureau*, 7 June 2018, www.census.gov/newsroom/press-releases/2018/postsecondary.html.

U.S. Department of Education, Office of Planning, Evaluation and Policy Development and Office of the Under Secretary, Advancing Diversity and Inclusion in Higher Education. "Advancing Diversity and Inclusion in Higher Education." *U.S. Department of Education*, Nov. 2016, www2.ed.gov/rschstat/research/pubs/advancing-diversity-inclusion.pdf.

Webster, Frank. "The Postmodern University? The Loss of Purpose in British Universities." *Access Denied in the Information Age*, 2001, pp. 69–92. *Crossref*, doi:10.1057/9780333985465_5.

Whitaker, Manya. "The 21st-Century Academic." *The Chronicle of Higher Education*, 2 Jan. 2018, www.chronicle.com/article/the-21st-century-academic.