The Commercialization of Higher Education as a Threat to the Values of Ethical Citizenship

Tatjana Taktševa Chorney
Saint Mary’s University

Abstract
This position paper outlines the main negative implications of the increasing commercialization of higher education, of viewing education as a commodity, students as consumers, and educators as service providers as they relate to the outcomes of the liberal education for the twenty-first century in its emphasis on ethical citizenship. It explains what the commercialization of post-secondary higher education means in the context of globalization and argues that the process and its outcomes systematically, if often implicitly, disengage both students and educators from the ethical values that inform a culture of civic engagement, thus eroding the traditional principles of ethical citizenship.

The process of globalization, powered by information technologies, is changing every aspect of life, including attitudes toward teaching and learning. Three main groups of theories of globalization offer definitions of this complex process: the “world culture” theory, the “world polity” theory, and the “world-system” theory. Each group of theories focuses on globalization from a different point of view.

According to the world culture group of theories, globalization refers to the “compression of the world and the intensification of consciousness of the world as a whole,” a process of relativization of individual and national identities as all are constrained to assume a position and define an identity with regard to the global whole. According to the world polity group of theories, globalization is the “growth and enactment of world culture,” a process ridden with contradictions since the idea of world culture cannot claim global consensus, and thus produces tensions and encourages the discovery of new social problems. According to the world-system group of theories, globalization is an ideology and a process driven primarily by economically-motivated forces, electronics, instantaneous communication and multinational corporations, through which the capitalist world-system aims to spread across the world.

Proponents of these theories point out that in the global world, the “world’s most powerful instrument of governance is not a government, nor a single global corporation,” but a “global financial system” based on market deregulation and free trade whose first interest is profit and according to which anything, including human capital, can and should be priced in order to participate in commercial transactions. All definitions promote an understanding of globalization as a process that encourages consumption of goods and services and is based on ‘flows’ of information, culture, and financial, physical and human capital that “move along various global highways.” These ‘flows’ often create many opportunities but also many “new forms of inequalities of
access between people and their locations,\textsuperscript{7} as well as a number of other new social challenges.

One such challenge is facing higher institutions of learning and educators when it comes to teaching citizenship and ethics for a global world and to negotiating successfully through a multiplicity of perspectives. The idea of citizenship traditionally refers to activities and values based on a distinct national identity. Theories of citizenship have long taken for granted the idea that a sovereign, territorial state is the necessary context for citizenship.

Broadly defined, a citizen is a “member of a political community who enjoys the rights and assumes the duties of membership.”\textsuperscript{8} Citizenship has three main dimensions: legal, political, and individual identity. In terms of legal status, citizenship refers to “civil, political, and social rights” allowing the freedom of citizens as “legal persons” to act “according to the law and having the right to claim law’s protection.”\textsuperscript{9} The political dimension of citizenship refers to citizens as political agents who actively participate in a society’s political institutions. The third dimension of citizenship refers to “membership in a political community that furnishes a distinct source of identity.”\textsuperscript{10}

The last dimension of citizenship is at once the least straightforward of the three and the one most relevant to both individual and collective identity within a social group, as it is linked to social integration or cohesion. This subjective sense of belonging that affects the strength of the political community’s collective identity and well-being is also sometimes called the “psychological dimension of citizenship.” Although the three dimensions of citizenship are interlinked, the last one is often seen as the most meaningful aspect of citizenship that animates the legal and political dimensions and is responsible for the development of civic consciousness.\textsuperscript{11}

Civic virtues and civic consciousness are formed through the citizens’ inclination to identify with the collective and so feel ethical responsibility to the collective, feel compelled not only to participate in the political institutions of their society, but also to act out of concern for the welfare of others within it, “assume social responsibility, nurture tolerance and respect, as well as a belief in their own capacity to make a difference.”\textsuperscript{12} As the cornerstone of citizenship and civic engagement that has ethical dimensions — exercised through forms of democratic political and civic practice in the case of most Western societies — social integration and cohesion was thus assured and perpetuated within the bounds of national identity traditionally based on a common history and culture.

However, as the world we live in is daily becoming ‘smaller’ and national boundaries often come second to global concerns, it is becoming increasingly difficult to articulate a notion of citizenship that would balance regional and cultural divisions, political views, class differences, religious beliefs and gender concerns. As a host of phenomena involving increasing transnational economic and cultural exchange as well as unprecedented levels of migration, globalization has challenged the relevance of state sovereignty. It has also eroded the subjective sense of belonging to a distinct political or
geographical community, and thus civic consciousness and social cohesion as the very roots of citizenship. Societies are becoming more complex and increasingly internally diverse, struggling to find a balance among individual interests, differences, and the articulation and affirmation of common principles to which all citizens are required to adhere: the “complexity and scale of modern liberal societies tend to make democratic political practice less significant in the lives of most citizens, a fact reflected in the declining levels of participation in formal political institutions.”

While some have articulated the idea of “transnational citizenship” as a global alternative to citizenship understood traditionally, no agreement has been reached over what that really means or how it would be put into global practice. In addition, many have pointed out that citizenship at the global level “entails a weakening of its political dimension,” “a waning of its democratic character,” and contributes in general to a decrease in citizens’ sense of identity as deriving from their belonging to a particular political community, characterized by a set of specific values and principles. Given the increasing cultural pluralism of most contemporary societies, conceptions of what constitute the collective, common good or social justice have also been challenged and have become difficult to identify. In a changing economic and cultural environment, many citizens have lost the belief that they can make any difference in a civic and political sense. Recent studies support this view. Research shows that an increasing number of North Americans have “disengaged from civic and political institutions” and “political and electoral activities such as voting” as well as from being informed about public issues. Political participation, such as working for a political party, is at a 40-year low, while a study conducted by the US National Constitution Center in 2000 found that only 38% of all respondents could name all three branches of government.

Critics of globalization have notes that this trend goes hand in hand with increasing orientation toward excessive consumption and individual alienation, since the broad interest of globalizing forces is to “construct an audience of a particular type. . . addicted to a certain lifestyle with artificial wants, an audience atomized, separated from one another, fragmented enough so that they don’t enter the political arena and disturb the powerful.” In many ways, these complex circumstances foster a climate where many individuals are increasingly “lacking a deep sense of belonging.” to any collective group, which makes individual interest the easiest aspect of moral and ethical agency to identify and achieve within given legal frameworks.

Responding to the needs of an increasingly interconnected and complex global world, a national panel on reform in higher education recently defined the core of twenty-first century liberal education in terms of “liberating and opening the mind and of preparing students for responsible action.” Resting on the belief that the “integrity of a democratic society depends on citizens’ sense of social responsibility and ethical judgment,” the outcomes of this education are articulated in terms of the values that inform civic consciousness and ethical citizenship: taking responsibility for civic values, society’s moral health and for social justice; active civic participation in a diverse democracy; discernment of the ethical consequences of decisions and actions, and the ability to transform information into knowledge and knowledge into judgment and action.
According to this ethical perspective, individuals are seen as responsible and active participants within their community and larger global society. The motivation for their active civic engagement in a global society stems from their belief in the value of the common good as an ethical and moral imperative, and a category of social and global justice that transcends political and cultural partisanship. The notion of the common good in this new context implies a need to articulate new forms of “common ideology or conception of the good” linked to global justice, such as for example, environmental issues, rights of indigenous peoples, critiques of neo-liberal forms of globalization, etc. To be ethical in a global context thus means “to be responsible, not turning one’s back on truth” where truth may be understood as adherence to moral principles that define right and wrong in terms that may transcend group loyalties or norms and are not necessarily based on common history and culture. The broad definition of ethical citizenship that emerges as suitable for a diverse and interconnected global world is responsible action and forms of political and social engagement demanding “moral agency,” and subjects who have a “responsibility for resisting all attempts to create absolute power” whatever the sources of that power may be. Ethical citizens are “critics who have the courage, vision, strength and talent to counter injustice, even when the cause of injustice [is] embedded in the laws, practices and traditions of a democratic society in a need of repair”; they possess a belief “that they can make a difference and are able to actively organize with others to achieve real social change”; they are “wisely averse to ‘either/or solutions’, tolerant of ambiguity, skeptical of demagoguery, and attentive to the tensions between the individual and group, and liberty and order.”

In a rapidly globalizing world, however, the ethos behind civic engagement and ethical citizenship steadily declines. The increasing development of global markets boosts competitive attitudes and necessitates struggles for economic advantage that valorize the efforts of the individual and promote consumerism, moral principles and values defined largely by the economic perspective and an apathetic attitude toward social and political events that fall outside the economic and consumerist framework. The emphasis on the individual obscures the need for collective and often public-sector initiatives and distracts attention from economic and political obstacles to remedying social ills. The combination of these factors explain why current critical discourse “locates an antagonism between globalization and citizenship,” and why it is increasingly difficult for institutions of higher education to teach the values of ethical citizenship and encourage its practice. Teachers and scholars in the social sciences reported more than a decade ago a “growing number of apathetic citizens,” “a sweeping sense of individual isolation,” a decline of the “sense of the common good” and, in general, students becoming “alienated from the social experience.” How many of these issues can be fully accounted for by citing globalization as the primary cause is difficult to say. Some of the reasons may lie in the nature of the education system itself, often burdened by students’ and teachers’ over reliance on textbooks, conservative instruction practices, teacher alienation within the field of education, as well as the general lack of public awareness of the importance of social studies and civic consciousness. Some scholars have criticized schools and the education system as traditionally focusing on “passive learning,” emphasizing “compliance and obedience” and lacking “attention to global issues,” and have called for “global learning” focusing on “global issues and the learning
needs” associated with them.\textsuperscript{30} A recent report on the civic mission of schools in the US notes that “over the last several decades public schools have become increasingly less attentive to their civic purpose,” and have “drastically reduced opportunities for students to participate in civic-related instruction” and activities.\textsuperscript{31}

It merits emphasis, however, that schools, colleges and universities alone have never been able and cannot be expected to cure the broader ills of the social, political and economic system single-handedly.\textsuperscript{32} Among the factors contributing to the state of affairs noted in the Report are sets of challenges associated with the global flow of physical and economic capital, increasing privatization of the public sector, and growing internal diversity. Lack of consensus regarding the means and goals of civic education, government cutbacks in programs that can help students develop civic skills and attitudes, as well as “fear of criticism and litigation if educators address topics that may be considered controversial or political in nature” are cited as the most significant impediments to civic education.\textsuperscript{33} All education systems reflect and respond to the apparent needs of the society in which they originate and are developed, and so their functioning is always intricately related to larger contexts and dominant social and cultural paradigms.

Since no education system exists in a social vacuum, its multifaceted relationships with larger social and global contexts need to be explored in a variety of ways. Rapid globalization affects all aspects of society, including the status of higher education in society, and how education is delivered and received. As technological innovations “relentlessly compress the world in space and time and our economies become rapidly impelled into the highly competitive environments of global markets, educational institutions are being challenged to follow suit.”\textsuperscript{34} At the university level, globalization is manifested by a so-called “internationalization” — a process that affects not only academic programs, faculty and students, but also “creates new structures and privileges.”\textsuperscript{35} One of the main rationales for this process is economic: “as a result of the globalization of the economy, a growing interdependence among nations, and the information revolution, countries are focusing on their economic, scientific and technological competitiveness.”\textsuperscript{36} Effective strategies to “improve and maintain a competitive edge [are] to develop a highly skilled and knowledgeable work force and to invest in applied research” both of which have direct bearing on educational institutions.\textsuperscript{37}

With competitiveness on the global market acquiring significant national significance, most aspects of life are gradually being commodified, and institutions of higher learning are increasingly compelled to treat education in terms of commerce, as a set of transactions whose object is the supplying of commodities, that is, the buying and selling of goods and services. The growing commercialization of higher education thus compounds the challenge concerning the teaching of ethical citizenship. This process makes it increasingly difficult for colleges and universities to work on creating a culture of teaching and learning that is likely to foster ethical citizenship, a sense of moral responsibility for the larger community, and active civic participation in increasingly diverse democracies. Academic institutions are becoming increasingly accountable to
industry and the corporate sector, there is less public, that is, government funding per student, “more private investment,” increasing reliance on new communication technologies, and an “increase in international and supranational convergence of higher education policies and forms of regulation.”

Some aspects of these changes can be seen as positive opportunities for higher education as they have resulted in greater access opportunities for many students, an “increasingly international and mobile academic profession” and the establishing of “global research networks.” At the same time, however, the same globalizing trends mean that higher education is “drifting into a market-oriented system” and is increasingly being seen as a “commercial product to be bought and sold like any other commodity.” The implications of this trend for higher education in a global society need to be carefully evaluated for their impact on the traditional values associated with education in colleges and universities.

This paper will outline the main negative implications of viewing education as a commodity, students as consumers and educators as service providers, as they relate to the outcomes of the liberal education for the twenty-first century in its emphasis on ethical citizenship. I will explain what the increasing commercialization of post-secondary higher education means, and argue that it erodes the principles of ethical citizenship, as it systematically if often implicitly disengages both students and educators from the ethical values that inform a culture of civic engagement.

**Education as Commodity**

Commercialization is the term used to designate the tendencies and practices that create increasing connections between colleges and universities and the economic sector. It also refers to the process of driving public educational institutions to operate as if they were private. A relevant indicator of the commercialization of higher education on a global scale is the rapid expansion of “international trade” in education services. There has always been an international aspect to education as both students and academics have engaged in pursuit of education across borders. What is different now, however, is not only the sheer volume of these activities, but the “increasingly market oriented delivery of higher education and the prominent role played by for-profit providers offering services directly across borders.”

The World Trade Organization (WTO) is a leader in this process and is currently considering a series of proposals to develop rules governing international trade in education services, just like any other commodity. The General Agreement on Trade in Services (GATS) is “an effort by multinational corporations and some government agencies” in developed countries to “integrate higher education into the legal structures of the world trade through the WTO.” Among other things, the free-trade educational services context would facilitate academic mobility in terms of cross-border supply, which would include IT-facilitated education and the franchising of courses and degrees,
and commercial presence, whereby the service provider establishes facilities in another country, including branch campuses and joint ventures.\(^45\)

In addition to regulating the trade in education services across borders, the proposed agreements will have binding effects on national governments and will effectively limit the regulatory authority that the local public sector has over the way higher education is structured financially and delivered. This includes decisions over fees that can be charged to full-time university students. These agreements allow for and facilitate the multiplying of for-profit private colleges and universities, whose key motive is financial gain. The steady decrease of public funding for colleges and universities means that many traditional non-profit universities with financial problems are also beginning to see their day-to-day operations in terms of financial gain.\(^46\) This means that, facilitated through international agreements, commercial and profit-driven forces are acquiring a legitimate or even a dominant place in higher education and are increasingly defining knowledge and education in terms of commodities. What is further significant about the nature of these agreements in the current context is that government agencies most involved with the agreements do not include ministries of education, but departments concerned with trade and export promotion.\(^47\)

The commercialization of education is not simply an economic process related to the governance and structure of colleges and universities, but also a symbolic process by which the values of the market place, associated with the idea of private, for-profit ownership, gradually replace the values associated traditionally with education and knowledge as a public good, something worthy to be pursued for its own sake and serving the needs of all members of society. And while it may be true that education defined in such terms has never been fully achievable in absolute terms, it is relevant to acknowledge shifts in dominant social perspectives or prevailing cultural views shaping the way education is perceived. As commercialization affects all areas of life, including education, it gradually shifts society’s view of education. Education is increasingly seen as a consumable commodity that increases one’s chances of successfully competing in the global economy and achieving higher earnings. Rather than being seen as a valuable end in itself, education is increasingly seen as a means to an end defined primarily in economic terms. A sign of this change is the corporate language that has crept into now almost common usage in reference to education: students are seen as “customers,” “clients” and “products,” teachers are “service providers, learning guides and education managers”: evaluation becomes “quality control,” and education is subsumed under the general notion of “production.”\(^48\)

Since language is not neutral but also the carrier of embedded values, this shift suggests a “fundamental misunderstanding of the nature of education and of the teacher-student relationship.”\(^49\) In teaching the values of ethical citizenship, teachers may be hindered in their efforts by the increasingly popular, commodity-oriented perception of their relationship to their students. As Turk points out:

> Unlike a retail clerk, the teacher’s role is not to sell a product or please customers. It is to challenge students, to provoke new ways of thinking, to
make students uneasy with what they have taken for granted. The measure of success is not ‘customer satisfaction’ but intellectual growth. This can be a difficult and unsettling process — the opposite of what is to happen to a retail customer who is to be placated and soothed into buying a product. 

Placating and soothing the retail customer into buying a product qualifies as an unethical business practice in itself, but Turk’s point is well taken. Crucial aspects of the commercialization of education stand in opposition to ethical civic engagement based on communal values and moral responsibility for social justice. In its definition, ethical citizenship assumes the existence of both political and moral consciousness that often transcends the economic sphere of existence defined primarily in terms of economic self-interest, competitiveness, and a for-profit orientation. However, a consumer-based society gives priority to the production and consumption of goods by individuals and groups, and tends to impose the economic set of relationships on all aspects of social and political life. Research indicates that the obstacles in the path of achieving democratic education based on ethical citizenship and the cultivating of “public values, identities and aspirations” cannot be taken out of their “social, cultural and political contexts.”

In a society where every aspect of life is gradually commodified, democratic activity itself becomes “narrower and shallower, subordinated to the ‘freedom of the market,’ the imperatives of capital and the manners of the media.” In a world increasingly governed by the laws of the market, there is danger that political and social consciousness will be replaced by the consciousness of competence, morality by usefulness, and citizens will become almost indistinguishable from consumers. The commercialized model of education, where education is a commodity to be bought and sold in terms mirroring the terms of other economic transactions, privileges competition and the drive for economic gain as moral values, and thus gradually erodes the desire for civic action beyond tangible self-interest, especially when the interests of the larger community are not the same as the interests of the economically-oriented self.

Economic theorists have described the tendency inherent in the capitalist corporate model “to reproduce itself in identical or expanded form,” and to “reduce the universe of exchanges to mercantile exchange, which is objectively and subjectively oriented toward the maximization of profit”; within this context, this orientation has been called “self-interested.” It is in this inherent orientation toward self-interest for the purpose of economic gain that the education-as-commodity model stands in contrast to the values of ethical citizenship. Moral agency in the corporate context is limited to the contingencies of the market economy that also regulate relationships among individuals and groups. The moral agency inherent in the concept of ethical citizenship and the responsibility on which it rests presupposes resistance to all attempts to create absolute power, in practice and theory, and, in this case, the laws of the market economy and consumerism, because not all aspects of human and social existence can be subsumed under the economic.

The actual consequences of the growing links between the private, corporate sector and higher education as part of the public sector and their negative causal relationship to the values of ethical citizenship can be illustrated with the well-known case of Nancy Olivieri, a professor and a researcher in bio-medical science at University of Toronto.
Olivieri’s research on a new drug for Canadian children with a fatal blood disease, thalassemia major, was partially funded by a Canadian generic drug company, Apotex Inc., in “exchange for the opportunity to commercialize the drug, should the trials go well.”

In the course of their research, Olivieri and her colleagues observed that “the drug was not only working inadequately in patients, thereby exposing them to complications of iron overload, but directly caused liver and heart damage.”

Acting in the spirit of academic and also civic duty according to which one is ethically responsible to truth in the service of the public good, Olivieri and her team communicated to the company their intention to inform patients of the new worrisome finding. The contrast between ethical citizenship, acting for the benefit of others, and the corporate mentality, acting in ‘self-interest’ tied to profits, is clear from the reaction of the drug company:

...within seventy-two hours, the company acted, abruptly and prematurely stopping the trials, sweeping all Deferiprone from the shelves of the hospital pharmacy, and on the basis of the confidentiality clause, threatening [Olivieri] with ‘all legal remedies’ should [she] inform patients, parents, regulatory agencies, or the scientific community about the potentially life-threatening toxicity [they] have discovered.

What is equally if not more unsettling is that the President of the University, Mr. Robert Prichard, sided with the drug company rather than the research team, as the Hospital and the University were at that time negotiating for a donation of $25 million, and had Olivieri suspended from her academic position. Unwilling to relinquish her ethical responsibility as a researcher whose findings have a significant impact on the public good, something other than the monetary interests of the drug company and the university, and driven by her sense of social justice, Olivieri and her family and friends had to fight long and hard to both make her findings public and to have her position eventually reinstated. Olivieri’s case represents an extreme example of what can happen when money and truth collide. However, it illustrates well the larger ethical issues that arise with the growing links between the corporate sector and universities and their potential to undermine both the teaching and the practice of ethical citizenship.

Even those who argue that the commercialization of education may “bring great benefits to post-secondary institutions,” acknowledge that the process is “dangerous” and “does import risks.” The values of corporate citizenship and ‘business’ ethics are sometimes cited as supposed safeguards against abuses. However, there are important differences between corporate citizenship and business ethics on the one hand and the values of ethical citizenship taught in higher education on the other. Corporate citizenship is defined in terms of four main corporate social responsibilities: economic, legal, ethical, and discretionary (those activities not mandated or required of business by law and not expected of them in an ethical sense). All four responsibilities are exercised in accordance with the knowledge that the primary and final responsibility of a corporation is to a very limited group: ‘primary stakeholders or investors, employees, customers and suppliers.’ Governments try to legislate ways to restrict corporate actions, but it is clear from every current newscast that “the structures of bureaucracy and the financial imperatives of capitalism seem to result in forms of behavior which are often damaging
for local communities, employees and the environment.” Growing awareness of environmental issues, in fact, points to the limitations in this conception of corporate citizenship and calls for its redefinition and expansion to include and regulate aspects of the sphere of behaviour that may fall under the “discretionary” category. The difficulty that NGOs, parts of local governments and the international community have in persuading companies and entire countries to change their business practices and so potentially decrease their profit margins for the sake of preserving the environment — something that goes beyond the economic sphere and is in the public interest — represents another example of the conflict between corporate values and the values of ethical citizenship aiming to serve and benefit all members of society and, in this case, the world and its future generations.

As a concept and a category of social behavior, ethical citizenship is much larger than corporate citizenship, as its values are not easily quantified in consumerist, economic terms. It includes in its definition all those areas considered ‘discretionary’ in the context of business ethics and not always mandated by law. The value of ethical citizenship as it should be taught in colleges and universities — and independent of the values of any one particular political and economic group or ideology — lies precisely in its promise to educate students to assume “responsibility for resisting all attempts to create absolute” and unquestioning power, and perceive forms of injustice and wrongdoing even when they are not obvious, and even when they are not a matter of legislation. The increasing commodification of higher education and the growing alliances between businesses and universities gradually compromise both the educators’ willingness and ability to teach ethical citizenship in a comprehensive and ideal way and the students’ willingness and ability to learn and practice it.

**Students as Consumers**

Today’s university students increasingly view education and the time they spend at university as a means to an economic end, a way of ensuring profitable employment. This is not to say that there should not be an economic benefit to their obtaining a degree. However, while the outcomes of a commodity-based exchange in the free market are easy to measure and quantify, the outcome of education, unless it is erroneously equated with the degree as an ‘embodied’ form of capital, is not easily quantifiable. The social and cultural trends that foster a mentality where education equals a degree serve to further obscure the benefits of education that are not easily quantifiable and not immediately cashable. This is important in the context of ethical citizenship, since being able and willing to act responsibly within society, motivated by desire for social justice, often means being able and willing to choose to act in ways whose benefits will not have an immediate quantifiable result or that sometimes may not be ‘measurable’ by the standards of a consumerist society.

The financial structures of universities increasingly encourage students to see themselves as consumers of a commodity that is education. As public funding for universities decreases, ‘user-pay’ increasingly replaces it. The growing trend to raise tuition fees is
thus often justified by the rules of the marketplace that perpetuate and confirm the notion that education is a commodity that is bought and sold. In this sense, it seems logical that “users should pay for this service as they would for any other service,” since in this context “the provision of knowledge becomes just another commercial transaction.”\textsuperscript{63} The delivery of post-secondary education is always a transaction in the sense that even when it is funded publicly financial decisions need to be made concerning how to structure public economic support for students. However, in the context of the growing commercialization of higher education and its increasing coding as a commodity that can be purchased like any other, the concept acquires distinct market undertones. This contributes to the perception that students are consumers of a service for a very specific reason seen in limited, commercial terms — mainly as a ticket to a well-paying job. In that sense, students are implicitly encouraged to approach the “purchasing” of education in very similar terms to, say, purchasing a car. Colleges and universities, in turn, feel increasingly compelled to cater to the apparent market-driven demand for utility and choice. The consumer attitude toward education results in the view that “liberal arts and values-based learning have gone out of vogue,” which has direct consequences for an area of education like ethical citizenship, which is by definition value-based.\textsuperscript{64} Given the fact that both we and our students live in a commercialized world and consume a vast array of goods and services outside our academic lives, the teaching and learning of ethical citizenship is increasingly difficult as students and the public tend to perceive many of its aspects as theoretical, irrelevant and disconnected from the world outside.\textsuperscript{65}

Seeing themselves as consumers of a service or a product that is education fosters in students a passive attitude toward education and toward the larger world itself. In the current context, the term ‘passive’ should be understood in a conditional sense. One may argue that consumers are indeed very ‘active’ in the sense that they have many choices to make regarding how to spend their money, and so they have to engage in a number of deliberations, some of which may have a moral dimension. However, the goal of these deliberations, regardless of how elaborate they may be, is limited to the economic sphere, and only rarely includes ethical concern with broader categories of right and wrong or social justice.\textsuperscript{66} The conventional attitude of the consumer in many ways stands in opposition to values on which ethical civic engagement is founded. In the language of market economy, consumers:

\begin{quote}

do not participate in the creation of goods and services, but await their supply, then consume them. This does not mean that purchasers are powerless. They have their dollar votes. They may also express a lack of satisfaction through a satisfaction survey. Such surveys, though, reiterate passivity. Their point is that the vendor should have done a better job of satisfying the purchasers.\textsuperscript{67}
\end{quote}

Applied to the context of higher educations, the satisfaction surveys may ironically refer to student evaluations. Student evaluations, for the most part, are not and should not be seen as satisfaction surveys, as they have their rightful place in the array of useful tools teachers use to reflect on the effectiveness of some teaching methods and strategies. In terms of administrative and peer-evaluation of the teacher’s performance for purposes of tenure and promotion, in most Canadian universities student evaluations are only one
component on the basis of which teaching may be evaluated. However, their nature and existence should also be considered in relation to the commercialization of higher education. In a commercialized world, “adopting marketplace solutions” and a marketplace logic outside the market may seem inevitable and natural, and the evaluations may be another aspect of academic life today encouraging students to see themselves as consumers of a product or a service which they are asked to rate, as they would a chocolate bar, a detergent in a market survey, or the customer service at their local cable provider. When transferred onto the context of education, the nature of the consumer mentality gradually distances students from precepts that have little direct consequence to a world defined in terms of market values.68

Students often internalize this utilitarian and corporate conception of education and incorporate it into their views of themselves and their role in the world. This conception significantly impedes their ability or willingness to embrace the values of ethical citizenship, rooted in responsible action aimed at pursuing truth and knowledge for their own sake, or acting for the benefit of the public good. One of the consequences of this process is that students are becoming “alienated from the social experience”; education is increasingly seen as a disembodied experience, and “the classroom experience has become sheltered and isolated...divorced from the community.”69 The dominant corporate trends of society do not encourage students to see their presence at college or university as a valuable process with qualitative and unquantifiable benefits resulting in a broadened perception of self, others, the world, and the categories of good, evil or justice, in a sense that transcends the interests of any single group or individual. Instead, the prevalent value structures of society often encourage students to see post-secondary education as an obstacle to be overcome on the way to the perfect job. In this circumstance, and with the increasing commodification of higher education, students are increasingly less likely to perceive the connections between knowledge and ethical practice, less likely to see education as something valuable in itself, and less likely to reflect on the application of classroom education to the world and society outside with the aim of furthering society’s moral health.

**Educators as Service Providers**

What are the ethical and civic implications of considering educators as service providers? The answers to this question are related to nature of knowledge and who gets to ask the questions that lead to knowledge and discovery. Academics may not always consciously define the purpose of their research to be for the good of society. However, their freedom to choose to pursue any direction in their research defines that research as being in the interest of the public, as it represents the best possible means of producing truth, or various aspects of a complex truth, which is for the benefit of society in that it contributes to and extends the existing body of knowledge from a diverse array of perspectives. The grants that support research and the total operating universities’ budget at institutions of higher learning increasingly come from the private sector. In 1977–78, government funding, including grants, to Canadian universities constituted 83.4% of the total operating budget, tuition 13.8%, while gifts, donations and non-government sources of
funds equalled 0.5%. By 1997–98, government sources of funding decreased to 63.4%, while tuition and private funding increased to 31.6% and 0.9% of the total operating budget respectively. In 2005, government support decreased in some provinces like Nova Scotia to a mere 42.5%, tuition as a source of revenue increased to a staggering 42.6%, while the rest of the total universities’ operating budget and grant funding comes from private sources. As the alliances between universities and industry are becoming increasingly complex and extensive, the kind of knowledge being pursued and the terms of inquiry on which knowledge is based may be shifting away from an unfettered pursuit of knowledge for its own sake to a pursuit of questions that are of interest either to a particular segment of society or to society understood mainly in terms of one aspect—the economic.

As Olivieri’s case clearly indicates, the growing links between universities and the private sector will mean that the knowledge pursued will have to respond to the needs of industry and that those who provide the funding will be the ones to ask the questions and to approve of the direction on research. Although the results of research so conducted may become public, the research strategies used and the “context of the questions asked may limit the general usefulness of the findings,” while “many significant problems remain under-researched and under-explored because of lack of recognition or funding.” From an ethical point of view, the implications of this trend should remind us not only that “to remain silent on crucial issues is to make a conscious decision,” but also that our capacity to recognize crucial ethical issues and be able to speak for them may diminish significantly as we ourselves may begin gradually to internalize and identify with our role as service providers. In this case, our own potential to teach and act in accordance with the imperatives of ethical citizenship, unlimited to a single perspective of society, would become severely compromised.

Another aspect of the commercialization of education with significant implications for the educators’ willingness to teach the values of ethical citizenship involves the redesigning of the way universities function to use more part-time and contract employees, who are paid less, have fewer benefits, fewer legal rights, and are less likely to unionize. As such, “the contingent nature of their job makes them more vulnerable,” and deprives them of the full benefits of academic freedom, the one condition put in place to allow academics to explore the full range of social, political, economic and cultural issues in their teaching and research without being constrained by their institution’s or their own economically-based alliance to any one ideology pertaining to these areas. The increased presence of information technology on campuses and the growing interest in distance education complements the casualization of labour, since from an economic and corporate point of view the goal of using technology in higher education is often viewed not as a way to enhance pedagogical outcomes but as a labour-reducing practice. Many students no doubt benefit from distance education and other uses of IT in campus. However, within a market-oriented framework increasingly imposed on colleges and universities, and with the increasing budgetary constraints under which many institutions function, administrators are compelled to think of IT in universities and colleges from the perspective of gaining “more-with less-productivity.”
And although it is true that “universities are not monasteries” and “every generation has to seek the balance”77 between theory and practicality, basic and applied research, and find new ways to participate in the concerns of the larger world, it is important to emphasize that most scholars and scientists are not entrepreneurs:

They live out Aristotle’s observation that the desire to know is one of the most basic human drives — more even than sex — whereas the desire to sell is contingent upon certain economic relationships. ...Scholarship and entrepreneurship are two different cultures, two different kinds of life: the life of the mind as opposed to the life of the bottom line. Some individuals manage to balance two such lives, but it is never easy.78

The emphasis on the apparently stark differences between education and business should be considered in terms of their basic orientation and scope. There are moments when the scholar may be similar to the entrepreneur; the educator too, like the entrepreneur, has to worry about food, shelter and the standard of living. This understandable pragmatic ambiguity, however, is often exploited and deepened by the tendency to think of higher education in the same terms as one would of industrial-scale production sites for economically useful knowledge and of global well-being and the global future as “solely profitable commerce and business as usual.”79 The two are often essentially different in their basic orientation: while scholars and scientists will, more often than not, be motivated to pursue knowledge for its own sake and for the potential social benefits their research may effect, the entrepreneur will, more often than not, be motivated to pursue inventions and inventiveness for the sake of potential economic profit. While entrepreneurs will be more likely to explain the benefit of their inventions in utilitarian terms — as satisfying a particular consumer need in society — scholars, especially those whose areas of interest and expertise involve ethics and ethical citizenship, will be more likely to explain the benefits of their research in terms of value that cannot be measured by consumer standards. Thus the scope of inquiry and interest of the scholar and the entrepreneur are different: in the one case, the scope aims toward universality, while in the other, it aims toward the fulfillment of a limited number of consumer-related needs.

More than ever in a rapidly globalizing world we are called upon to reflect on the nature and function of universities and colleges, of education in general and our own role as educators of future global citizens. Ethical citizenship, as an area of teaching and learning with an emphasis on responsibility to resist any attempt at establishing absolute and unquestioning forms of power, acquires urgent relevance. The ethical questions raised by the increasing commercialization of higher education and our diminishing ability to teach ethical citizenship have potential long-term implications not just nationally but internationally as well, since many aspects of globalization create power imbalances resulting in kinds of social injustice. Reflecting the larger trends typical of globalization, the world of emerging globalized higher education is highly unequal.80 Academic centers located in the USA, UK, Canada, Australia and the larger countries of the EU are the primary ‘exporters’ of education and those most likely to set up ‘satellite campuses’ overseas as part of their newly defined mission. In some developing countries, e.g., South Africa, the local government is beginning to realize that “the increased globalization and
commercialization of university activities in the more developed world will result in
denuded or undernourished university sectors elsewhere” since the growing partnerships
“by local institutions with foreign universities” are increasingly seen as “profitable
marriages of convenience, enabling the external partner to enter the South African market
with little or no contribution to the development of the teaching and research capacity of
the local partner.”

The values of ethical citizenship taught to the future citizens of a
global world would ensure that they see the importance of getting involved in initiatives
based on responsible action, that they assume social responsibility, are able to make
ethical judgments with regard to local or global policies, and choose to act when polices
are likely to affect others adversely. Given the risks of commercialization when it comes
to education in general and the mission of any university, “the degree of harm caused or
risk of harm” raised by a particular commercialization effort, must be assessed in all of
the circumstances.

As educators and citizens, we are called upon to assess critically how
the increasing commercialization of higher education changes our roles of educators and
citizens and how those changes will influence our ability and willingness to teach
students about the values of ethical citizenship in the global world. The current situation
urges us to reevaluate individually each occasion when the links between the private
sector and institutions of higher learning are likely to grow.

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Notes
http://www.sociology.emory.edu/globalization/theories.html


3. Lechner, “Globalization Theories.”

Leydet, “Citizenship,” (Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy, 2006), 14,
http://plato/stanford.edu/entries/citizenship


9. Ibid., 2.

10. Ibid.

11. Ibid.


20. Greater Expectations, xii.


29. Ibid.


34. Stromquist, “Internationalization as a Response to Globalization: Radical Shifts in University Environments,” 81.

35. Ibid.


37. Ibid.


44. Altbach, “Globalization and the University: Myths and Realities in an Unequal World,” 3.


47. Altbach and Knight, “The Internationalization of Higher Education: Motivations and Realities,” 2; Robinson, “An Overview of Canada’s Trade and Treaty Obligations.”


49. Ibid.

50. Ibid.


56. Ibid., 54.

57. Ibid.


60. Ibid.


66. The ‘Fair Trade’ partnership is a lonely example of ethical citizenship in the sphere of economic relations, and of ethically engaged consumers campaigning to change trade rules and practices. This initiative is based on the alliance between marginalized local producers and workers, including those from the developing countries, and ethically conscious consumers. It aims at sustainable development, and greater equity in national and global trade.


68. Ibid., 43.


74. Ibid., 17.


78. Ibid., 27.


82. Renke, “Commercialization and Resistance,” 44.

*Tatjana Takševa Chorney* is Assistant Professor of English at Saint Mary’s University, in Halifax. She has published essays on education, technology and seventeenth-century literature. Her current work involves SSHRC-funded research in the area of the Digital Humanities, as well as a monograph on John Donne, reading habits and genre in the Renaissance (Mellen Press, 2010).