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Working in Coalition, and Wall-to-Wall: The New Progressive Normal

Gary Rhoades¹

Underlying this essay are three observations and corresponding suggestions. First, as the U.S. starts to come out of the pandemic, public declamations about and private deliberations within colleges and universities are framed in part by negotiating getting back to some form of “normal.” At the center of and delimiting these labor/management negotiations is an all-too-familiar master narrative articulated by management invoking a “new normal,” a time of conditions and challenges borne of, transmitted by, and/or accelerated and amplified due to Covid-19. Yet, I suggest that yet another iteration of disaster/disastrous academic capitalism is neither called for nor does it offer a compelling future for higher education.

Second, there is a counter-narrative articulated by some in the media, scholars, activist groups, and labor that the pre-pandemic “normal” was deeply problematic due to systemic and enduring patterns of disinvestment and of racial and other inequities. The premise and promise is that we need to get to better than the preceding normal. To the end of progress being made in that direction, I note some important markers in broader public discourse and policy as well as in locally negotiated collective bargaining agreements.

Third, there has been an increasingly expansive pattern of academic employees working coalition within and beyond the academy’s walls, even forming “wall-to-wall units.” In what could be framed as a “new progressive normal,” community and broader social concerns are becoming increasingly centered in organizing and contract campaigns. I suggest that therein lies the best future not only for academic labor but also relatedly for fulfilling academic institutions’ public missions and securing greater public support for higher education.

The generative and collective source of my thinking here lies in my national and local study and experience of the academic labor movement. It also lies in studied and experienced patterns in academic management at departmental, institutional, system/statewide, and national levels. To convey the key themes borne of this study and experience, I offer selected, specific stories to flesh out the larger narrative, in some cases weaving in stories of my own university.

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A New Normal: Beyond Disaster/Disastrous Academic Capitalism

In April 2020, the University of Arizona's (UofAZ) president announced the first and most extreme university-wide furlough program of any peer university in the country. The program was said to be necessary and prudent in the face of a projected budget deficit. Ensuing months witnessed many other universities and colleges announcing layoffs and furloughs, such that *The Chronicle of Higher Education* tracked them in a database (CHE, 2020). However, most of Arizona's peer institutions did not implement university-wide furloughs, and those that did set them at much lower levels than UAZ's 4-7 *weeks* (versus at the University of Wisconsin, Madison, it was 4-9 *days*). Moreover, at some prominent, peer institutions that were unionized, such as the University of Oregon and Rutgers University, the claims of financial crisis were challenged by academic employees. So, too, one with a "minority union," United Campus Workers, Georgia, rescinded the furloughs it had announced in the late Spring. Still, layoffs and non-renewals were implemented at unprecedented levels at campuses nationwide.

The most hard-hit places were small, non-selective private and regional public institutions and systems, (at community colleges, in which nationally nearly three-quarters of faculty are contingent, the brunt of faculty reductions fell on adjunct faculty, whose numbers were reduced through non-renewals rather than layoffs). Even in the above settings, though, with some major exceptions, what was more at play than actual financial exigency was, in my words, "disaster academic capitalism" (Flaherty, 2020). Combining the ideas of disaster capitalism (Klein, 2007) and academic capitalism (Slaughter & Rhoades, 2004), by that I mean, managers using the crisis to "amplify restructuring" that was already underway, invoking Covid recession as a rationale "to restructure and retrench with management trying to bypass deliberative, strategic, shared governance" (Flaherty, 2020).

Notably, a year later, an assessment of the pandemic's impact on universities and colleges was entitled, "Why doomsday hasn't happened" (Gardner, 2021). As the article's subtitle read, "Most colleges averted financial disaster; But the pandemic will still have a lasting impact." For most, then, the sky did not fall, notwithstanding the widespread managerial projections of massive budget shortfalls and unparalleled financial stress. In a lesson that many bargaining units of academic employees learned many years ago, there is a world of difference between managers' budget projections of crisis, and the actual financial health of institutions, identified more accurately in the years-long pattern of their independently, externally audited Comprehensive Annual Financial Reports. The former may be constructed and invoked by managers to justify all manner of measures, from furloughs to layoffs, retrenchment, and restructuring. That is the modus operandi of disaster academic capitalism, capitalizing on a combination of a perceived, projected, and partly real crises to amplify pre-existing plans and

patterns of resource allocation, justified as prudent and necessary for the institution to survive. Notably, for example, at the UofAZ the level of the furloughs was cut in half in October, though it still remained the highest among peer universities. And somehow, amidst it all, college athletics continued to be subsidized, remain intact, and new coaches as well as new central administrators continued to be hired, and bonuses paid.

For some systems and institutions, the crisis which the pandemic/recession catalyzed was more serious and substantial. In some of the most prominent of those cases, it was borne in large part of a combination of managerial choices made for over decade along with ongoing state disinvestment in public higher education. There, the pattern could partly be called the product of “disastrous academic capitalism,” of administrators trying to play a losing game they had little chance of winning—investing at imprudent levels in facilities (and increasing debt load accordingly) to attract wealthier and Whiter out-of-state students (Salazar, Jaquette, & Han, forthcoming). Although they built new dorms, recreation centers, and other fancy facilities to attract such students, participating in a frenzied arms race of facilities, the (out-of-state) students did not come. Combine that with ongoing state disinvestment and state imposed limits on tuition increases, and you get a managerially made disaster.

At a system level, arguably no more significant case of manmade disastrous, disaster academic capitalism can be found than in the Pennsylvania’s State System of Higher Education (PASSHE) 14 regional public universities. A major “redesign” plan of the current system leadership, overwhelmingly opposed by the faculty, has been proposed that would merge two sets of three universities each, reducing the number in the system from 14 to 10. It is projected to save \$18.4M after five years, which for a system PASSHE’s size is very little (Snyder, 2021)—and there is ample reason to be healthily skeptical about such savings, as with projected losses, given the history of mergers and costs. Moreover, for all the claims of sustainability, the discourse about sustainability and paving the way for the future is far more developed than any detailed analyses and plans as to whether and how the mergers will preserve, let alone enhance the academic opportunities offered by the institutions to students in rural, lower income areas, as well as contribute to the economic vitality of the regions in which they are keystone to the local economies. Rather, the vision is rather a narrow one of students facing increased costs and debt loads, and universities facing continued austerity from a state insufficiently committed to supporting either/both college opportunity or quality.

The proverbial plate for the current system chancellor and the faculty union (APSCUF—Association of Pennsylvania State College and University Faculties) was set by management decisions of previous administrations, as well as by state disinvestment that have contributed to increased debt load and decreased student enrollment. Notably, a RAND study commissioned by

the state's Legislative Budget and Finance Committee largely overlooked that history in suggesting five options for "Promoting the long-term sustainability and viability of the universities in the system" (Seltzer, 2018). Having been interviewed by members of the RAND team for that study, I am both disappointed and unsurprised: One of my observations about the system was that for many years institutions had been seeking to increase out-of-state student recruitment by investing in facilities, a game they seemed destined to lose (indeed, out-of-state enrollments remained minimal (~11%) throughout the 2000s). One team member acknowledged that indeed, debt service on such facilities was a problem for many campuses in the system. But the lead person was far more interested in laying the blame for financial problems on the "restrictions" of the collective bargaining agreement, a claim that in reviewing APSCUF's contract relative to other comparable ones I pointed out simply was not true (it is a strong contract, but would not, with consultation prevent restructuring). What was, true, though, was the state's systematic disinvestment in PASSHE, which rather undermined the legislature's alleged goal of "long-term sustainability and viability." As the APSCUF president at the time pointed out, the state was 47th in the country in per capita support for higher education (Mash, 2018). As for enrollment trends, the noted decline was less an inexorable function of demographic trends than of strategically misplaced investment and of missed opportunities in serving transfer and adult student markets, or tapping into emerging professional Masters degree markets, all of which remained basically stable in the 2000s, and none of which would have involved the over-investment in residence halls and facilities (PASSHE, 2021).

At the institutional level, arguably no more publicized, prominent case of manmade disastrous, disaster academic capitalism, and of accompanying management/labor dispute can be found than the University of Akron. The administration's announcement in July 2020 of layoffs of 96 and 82 staff and contract professionals (McClellan, 2020) generated immediate faculty union resistance, followed by mediation (which ruled that the university had the right to invoke the "force majeure" clause in the contract—contract language matters). In March, the faculty signed a new three-year collective bargaining agreement and three-year contract extension, which included a small pay cut, the provision of bonuses if certain enrollment targets were hit, and a one-time \$3,000 bonus to faculty for having shifted online during the pandemic. Ultimately, 80 full-time faculty were laid off, with no calculation of the number of adjunct faculty who were non-renewed—part-time faculty do not have collective bargaining rights in Ohio, and are not included in the unit (Goist, 2021).

The parallels with PASSHE are striking in terms of what led up to the hotly contested situation in the Summer/Fall of 2020. For over a decade, the University of Akron had aggressively invested in the amenities (and athletics) arms race (Stripling, 2017). Having visited the campus in 2010 to meet with the AAUP bargaining unit, I was struck by the largely unused

lazy river in the \$17M student union, the construction of expensive new residence halls (to attract out-of-state students), and the very expensive investment in football and soccer facilities. Such investments were combined with roughly a \$23M/year subsidy from the main campus to athletics, in a university with a 39% graduation rate at the time (Exner, 2019). With all due respect to the glory days of Akron as a producer of zippers and the resultant “mascot” of the university, the result of these initiatives has been basically zip (in attracting out-of-state students as well as in developing revenue generating teams). And, so, too, with other entrepreneurial ventures. During my visit, I stayed in a cylindrically shaped hotel in “Quaker Square” (which was a former silo in a Quaker Oats mill). In another disastrous academic capitalist initiative that failed, Quaker Square had been purchased by the university in 2007, much of which was later sold off. with the hotel being converted to a residence hall.

Nevertheless, for all of these managerial missteps, and notwithstanding the projections of financial crisis, by 2021, “the board of trustees approved a revised budget that forecasts a surplus at the end of the fiscal year of about \$19.6 million.” (Goist, 2021) As suggested, the gap between projected losses and the real financial condition of the institution is a common characteristic of disaster academic capitalism, restructuring under cover of Covid. And as in the case of PASSHE, the vision for the future is neither clear nor bright.

The Old Normal: Beyond the Preceding Normal

A significant counter-narrative has emerged in response to the pandemic, and to the prognostications about the post-pandemic world. It has centered on pre-pandemic “old normal” of systemic inequities that were being further heightened with Covid-19, such that “getting back to normal” was a profoundly problematic goal. More than ever, goes the storyline, the pandemic has made it more clear than ever that systemic inequities need to be redressed. According to those articulating some variation of this counter-narrative, the goal must be to move beyond the preceding, inequitable, (as Charles Toombs, President of the California Faculty Association phrased it on a recent National Center panel) ugly normal. That has include addressing inequities amidst the pandemic.

Within higher education, activists and unions sounded forewarnings early on about the pandemic/recession’s disparate impacts on employees and students (as on larger communities in society). For example, some provided recommendations on how to support women and faculty of color, exhorting institutions to “not let go” of diversity amidst cuts (Gonzales & Griffin, 2020). Others produced reports and recommendations about food insecurity, and what universities should do to support students (Goldrick-Rab, 2020). In the case of the latter, the Hope Center not only targeted university administrations for taking action, but also has worked with the Temple

Association of University Professions to establish, generate, and administer a student emergency aid fund. In both cases, the scholars/activists were addressing phenomena that pre-dated the pandemic, and they were leveraging the surfaced and heightened awareness brought about by the pandemic to make recommendations for moving beyond the bad old normal days.

Although it was almost immediately evident that the pandemic and recession were disproportionately hitting marginalized populations of students and campus employees, for the most part, university and college administrations responded to that challenge with statements (important exceptions can particularly be found among some community colleges—Wang, 2020). It cannot be said that higher education's formal leaders have been leaders in mobilizing collective, ameliorative national and/or statewide responses to mitigate systemic inequities. Certainly, at individual institutions there were some efforts in some cases to mitigate the effects of the pandemic on students generally, with emergency aid and other measures. Certainly, as well, in research universities there was mobilization around developing (and then in the Fall of 2020) delivering vaccines. But most commonly, institutional managers responded with financial mitigation measures that tended to prioritize the institution's medium to long-term financial needs over the immediate financial and employment needs of employees and students (though sometimes, in conjunction with employee unions, as at Rutgers, layoffs were coordinated with unemployment insurance benefits to help support laid off employees). And, managers responded with statements that invoked various tropes about family, shared sacrifice, and being in this together, even as they implemented measures to layoff and non-renew staff.

Much scholarship has previously spoken to the “non-performative” nature of too many such university statements expressing concerns about particular and particularly charged matters (Ahmed, 2012; Hypolite & Stewart, 2019; Squire, Nicolazzo, & Perez, 2019). Such statements often “absorb” the particular needs of disparately impacted marginalized populations under an overgeneralized umbrella discourse equivalent to saying “all lives matter,” as well as with a discourse that foregrounds the needs of “the organization.” And such statements often as well not only fail to specify concrete actions to redress the situation, they also undercut/delimit substantive action as not legal or practical. An analysis of presidential statements of compassion about the pandemic (from a sample of research universities) corroborates such a reading, as the statements analyzed from March 2020 to March 2021 repeatedly invoked and spoke to the needs and future of “the organization,” far more than to the immediate and medium-term needs of the employees and students within it (Mars, Rhoades, & Thorp, undated).

Of course, notwithstanding pronouncements to the contrary, we are NOT all in this together in colleges and universities. And obviously, we are not in the situation equally, with equivalent sets of resources, supports, and potential for recovery. Nor are we all getting through this

equally. Indeed, the pattern of job losses starkly clarified who was disproportionately bearing the brunt of higher education's financial stress. One Fall 2020 analysis concluded that job losses in the academy, "mirrored historic losses on the national level," (Bauman, 2020) analogizing the pattern to the findings of an analysis in *The Washington Post* that the "pandemic-inspired economic crisis may be the most unequal in history," with youth, women, and workers of color. (Long, Van Dam, Fowers, & Shapiro, 2020). A subsequent Chronicle article's title told the story, "The lowest-paid workers in higher education are suffering the highest job losses." (Douglas-Gabriel & Fowers, 2021).

Recognition of such inequities underlay much activism. For example, within weeks of the UofAZ's furlough announcement an activist group, Coalition for Academic Justice, University of Arizona (CAJUA), was formed. As a coalition of faculty, staff, and graduate employees, it was the eventual progenitor of a wall-to-wall union discussed below, United Campus Workers, Arizona (UCWA). Although financial matters were the spark, the animating focus was on (in)justice, embodied in the university's furlough plan. As CAJUA set forth in its "Alternate Furlough Plan," the university's plan protected the most privileged by having a cap of \$200K on the furlough rates. The activists' plan called for a higher cap, centered its call for greater cuts to be taken by central administrators, and suggested a salary floor (\$70K) and a progressive scale that would protect lower-paid workers. On the latter two proposals, CAJUA realized some success (e.g., a floor of \$45K was established, as was a somewhat more progressive scale). As an indicator of CAJUA's justice orientation, many of the early activists had been involved in protests surrounding campus policing of students of color, and much of their eventual focus on financial matters was tracking and reversing non-renewals of contract faculty and graduate employees.

Concerns about who was being disproportionately cut also emerged among existing bargaining units. Two examples exemplify that pattern. At the University of Oregon, the United Academics union, which includes tenure-stream and non-tenure-track faculty (as well as postdocs) responded to the administration's proposed furloughs and layoffs by providing alternative proposals in which the tenure-track faculty would carry a disproportionate burden of the furloughs relative to career-track faculty (UAUO, 2020). At the University of Illinois, Chicago, where the tenure-track and non-tenure-track bargaining units were separate, but where they maintained an ongoing, supportive relationship, part of the push of the tenure-track unit was to reappoint contingent faculty who had been "let go prematurely" (UICUF, 2020). Moreover, the tenure-track unit advocated for greater access to PPE for unionized custodial workers. Such solidarity with staff was in evidence in other faculty bargaining units nationally as well. And in places it translated into reframing who "essential workers" are at colleges, which played out advocacy about provision for protective equipment as well as priority in vaccination.

Beyond this sort of solidarity with laid off and other workers, a central part of what gave life to counter-narratives in the academy and academic organizing were broader social movements of the day (e.g., #MeToo, #BLM) that were also playing out in academe. That can be seen in the advocacy campaigns of many academic bargaining units calling for an active reckoning with and redressing of raced/gendered/classed systemic inequities in their institutions. It can also be seen in contract campaigns of academic bargaining units. Thus, recognition of the inadequacy of previous mechanisms in universities for handling sexual harassment, (gender and race-based) discrimination, and treatment of international students/employees, has translated into in a number of cases contract demands by local bargaining units. That has been much in evidence in New York City most recently, with the contract demands of the Columbia Postdoctoral Workers, the Columbia Graduate Workers, and The NYU Graduate Student Organizing Committee. For each of these units, one of their central demands was for strengthened, and external, independent arbitration on harassment. Such social justice matters, including about child care and about international workers, were foregrounded alongside other more longstanding, conventional job security and financial issues of salaries and benefits.

Academic employees, then, are laying the foundation for developing processes and steps for undertaking a serious racial reckoning in the academy, as well as a reckoning about sexual harassment/misconduct and gendered structures. Such efforts can be grounded in collective bargaining agreements, but also in larger ways the move beyond the bargaining table.

Working in Coalition, and Wall-To-Wall: The Progressive New Normal

For some time, the smartest and most progressive locals of academic employees have understood and acted on the importance of working in coalition, on and off campus. That model has played out in distinctive ways and contexts. For the California Faculty Association, that has meant a combination of working with local labor councils in the metro areas of campuses, with outside academic advocacy groups such as the California Part-time Faculty Association, as well as developing a strong program for engaging and working with undergraduate students (Hoffman & Hess, 2014). In the case of the Professional Staff Congress it has entailed an “industrial union” model of including multiple categories of workers within the union (Negri, 2018). In the case of the United University Professions it has entailed mobilizing contract and political campaigns with various statewide and local labor and community groups. For Rutgers AAUP/AFT, it is rooted in a coalition of academic unions (each with different contracts but much coordination), and a broader coalition beyond campus called Rutgers One, embodied in an historic hall (part of the Labor Studies and Employment Relations department) at which I spoke in 2009, filled with the union flags of locals throughout the state.

Each of the above locals has in different ways and to different degrees foregrounded not only the systemic racism that needs to be redressed, but also the related structural deficit in the support of public higher education. Within the faculty ranks, that plays out in the growing proportions of adjunct and full-time contingent faculty, particularly in postsecondary education institutions with most first generation, working-class, and BIPOC student populations (most obviously in community colleges but also in regional public universities). The California Faculty Association's report, *Equity Interrupted* (2017), made this connection particularly clear, detailing how in California as the numbers and proportions of students of color increased in the California State University system, the per capita state support for that system declined (CFA, 2017). Better supporting those students must involve better support the faculty and staff who educate them, for these employees' working conditions shape students' experiences and opportunities. Nowhere is that clearer, and more clearly advanced by academic labor than in the case of adjunct faculty (Maisto, 2012; Rhoades, 2020).

Just a decade ago, the importance of such coalitions for academic labor arguably became more clear than ever. At the time, I was General Secretary of the American Association of University Professors, and Ohio's governor, John Kasich, had signed a "right to work" bill, SB 5, that hamstrung public sector collective bargaining in several ways, and that also targeted higher education faculty's rights, effectively eliminating them if faculty were involved in shared governance. Notably, after the previously successful assault on public sector collective bargaining rights in Wisconsin, there was not much of a learning curve on the part of those in Ohio drafting the legislation, and a very important mobilizing benefit of that previous fight for labor. In Ohio, in contrast to Wisconsin's law, firefighters and police were *not* exempted from the new law in Ohio (McNay, 2013). Two memories stand out for me regarding the nature and value of worker coalitions. First is one of standing outside the statehouse in Columbus at a rally with masses of public sector workers, including a sizeable contingent of faculty (Ohio was one of the two largest states of AAUP collective bargaining members), and at their appearance experiencing the re-energizing power of the firefighters showing up, in full uniform, in a marching band, loudly, proudly, and strongly demonstrating solidarity. The second one is of a question that leaders of other unions asked one of the AAUP faculty leaders in the committee work and mobilization leading up to the successful referendum challenge that repealed SB5 with over 61% voting to repeal the legislation—"Why are they coming after you [the faculty] so specifically?" (The faculty later found out that a central group of university presidents were the originators of that particular section of the legislation.) Although other unions in Ohio were much more powerful than all the faculty unions combined, faculty leaders were welcomed and played important roles in working and testifying against the legislation. Coalitions matter (which sadly, the full-time faculty units in Ohio seem not to have fully internalized and learned with regard to advocating with and for part-time faculty members' collective bargaining rights).

Over time, that understanding has moved closer to the center of organizing in academe. It particularly has been taken up and advanced by categories of academic employees once on the margins of academe, and academic labor, who are now in the vanguard of the latter (Rhoades, forthcoming). From the start, that has been evident in the organizing of contingent faculty. From the metro campaign of SEIU Local 500 at George Washington University, the first major success of an adjunct-only campaign in a major private university, the coalition building with students and other groups, for example, was evident (Berry & Worthen, 2018; Rhoades, 2013). Subsequently, at the Georgetown campaign that student connection was all the more important, in the foundation laid by them in establishing a Just Employment Policy for custodial campus workers (Wertsch & McCratin, 2018). Later still, various Faculty Forward campaigns were informed by “Fight for \$15 campaigns linking contingent faculty to low-wage workers in the local economy (Rhoades, forthcoming). And the contingent faculty movement generally was shaped and strengthened by an inside/outside strategy of activists working within various unions and advocacy organizations (Berry, 2005; Rhoades, forthcoming). It has been informed as well by the powerful, mobilizing mantra that, “Faculty’s working conditions are students’ learning conditions” (Maisto, 2012), a mantra that, as is so critical for public sector unions, mobilizes larger public support by connecting workers’ interests to larger public interests (Johnston, 1994).

As noted at the end of the last section, graduate and postdoc employees have consistently taken the coalition work to even another level. That has meant actively campaigning about and centering in contract campaigns various social justice concerns linked to larger social movements and policy contexts (e.g., xenophobic nationalism). For these categories of employees, these community-based concerns are arguably part of a larger inflection point within the labor movement, as perhaps in society.

At a more local, and personally experienced level, the increasingly expansive and inclusive character of the academic labor movement nationally is evident in the birthing of an activist social justice coalition and then wall-to-wall union local of UCWA, Local 7065 of the Communications Workers of America. As discussed above, the UofAZ’s furlough plan, announced April 17, 2020, triggered the establishment of CAJUA. Just four months later, August 18, 2020, a wall-to-wall “minority union” (without collective bargaining rights) was formed, UCWA, Local 7065 of the Communications Workers of America. The union includes all categories of faculty, staff, and student employees. It is *not* bound by “community of interest” restrictions often guiding public employment relations board decisions about configuration of the unit. Similar UCW’s are found in Georgia, Kentucky, Tennessee, and indeed throughout the south (<https://www.unitedcampusworkers.org>). Some, as in Tennessee, date back two decades. Arizona’s is the most recent, but UCW Colorado was established in 2020 as well (it was grounded in a more longstanding graduate student organization).

Across the above “wall-to-wall” settings, there is much diversity in the driving issues underlying and undertaken by the locals. Yet, there are common themes, dating as far back as UCW Tennessee’s “living wage” campaign in 2000, kicked off with a “Labor rights are human rights” event (<https://www.ucw-cwa.org/history>). Overwhelmingly, the activism is driven by intersecting economic, workplace, social justice issues, foregrounding institutions’ most vulnerable workers and students. The wall-to-wall membership of the locals helps shape that collective orientation

Such themes were evident as well in the case of CAJUA, which preceded UCWA, even though the plurality of members in the activist group and originally in the union were tenure-stream faculty. Beyond those financial issues, matters of campus health and safety amidst Covid were drivers as well, and underlay the establishment of a chapter at Arizona State University, which had been preceded by a “Community Care Coalition” working not only for a safe workplace, but equally importantly, as in the name, for policies that would ensure care for the communities in which ASU’s campuses were situated. That care was derived from an understanding that the lowest paid employees of the university were being left particularly vulnerable in the pandemic, without adequate support, protection, and pay. It also was derived from an understanding that employees and students moved back and forth between campus and community in a fluid process that threatened to contribute to community spread. Indeed, a January 2021 study found that the UofAZ had the dubious distinction of being a leading campus in the country in terms of contributing to community spread (Burke, 2021).

Another major issue that gave rise to UCWA was the UofAZ’s “deal” with then for-profit Ashford University and its private OPM services provider, Zovio (McKenzie, 2020). The backlash triggered by the announcement, which was undertaken without meaningful shared governance, led to an overwhelming vote of opposition to the deal, and the formation of a Faculty Senate advisory committee that developed recommendations for mitigating issues related to the arrangement. Beyond the lack of shared governance and the financial prudence of the deal, judged by many business school faculty to be a “lemon,” at the heart of the outcry was criticism of the arrangement with a for-profit provider, essentially selling them the university’s name for an upfront payout and possible ongoing marginal revenues, as an abrogation of Arizona’s land grant mission. Managerial claims that the arrangement would enhance and serve diverse student populations were anything but supported by Ashford and Zovio’s records of problematic student outcomes (leading to a Notice of Concern from the accrediting body, as well as lawsuits). To most faculty, staff, and students who articulated their views, the arrangement was viewed as deeply problematic. It was what I would call yet another case of disastrous academic capitalism.

Part of the critique of the Ashford arrangement is related to a critique of corporatization and privatization in higher education. The concern of many is that such deals are pitched by managers as benefitting “the organization” or “the enterprise,” and yet can have serious adverse consequences for communities in which universities are situated and are charged to serve. To return to the system redesign proposed in Pennsylvania, such concern about adverse impact underlies not just the response of the faculty and their union. It is clear that some state legislators are concerned about the adverse impact of the redesign for the communities in which the “merged” campuses are located and perhaps programs are downsized. Those concerns are amplified by the working-class nature of the communities involved (Schackner, 2021). And they are partly borne of internal-to-the-university processes that insufficiently draw on community members and partners, and that fail to conduct sufficient economic impact studies of how universities’ decisions impact local populations and economies.

In such concern about supporting local communities and economies, academic labor is in solidarity with broader labor groups in wanting to increase public investment in higher education. Both want to break the ongoing cycle of public disinvestment. Labor cares about the opportunities that higher education can afford the children of labor. As one academic union leader (Elizabeth Hoffman, of the California Faculty Association, now retired) related to me about a meeting with a local labor council many years ago, some of her colleagues were surprised by how much members of the local labor council seemed to “care” about the situation of (in this case) university faculty. Her response to them was, “They don’t care about you, they care about the opportunity that the university education that we conduct can provide for them and their children.” At UCWA, we are hearing much the same from local labor leaders, who are excited about the formation of a workers union at the university. They, as much as we campus workers, seek to enhance access to affordable, quality higher education that prioritizes and serves local and state communities, not just the prestige and financial interests of “the university.” Indeed, the local is currently developing a “workers’ budget” proposal that foregrounds precisely these priorities.

The wall-to-wall configuration of the UCWs, then, inclusive of all categories of campus workers, is emblematic of the increasing commitment on the part of groups of academic employees to work in coalition with other employees and groups on campus and beyond. It also embodies the larger trend of academic employees and bargaining units increasingly centering broader community and social concerns in their organizing and contract campaigns.

Summary

The title of this essay, and the subtitle of the preceding section are more than an observation about patterns in academic labor organizing. They are also a suggestion to management, at the institutional, system, statewide, and national levels to learn from, emulate, and work in concert with academic labor in forming common cause. Academic capitalism, and its corollaries of disaster and disastrous academic capitalism have been a dominant policy regime for four decades. They are playing themselves out in an ongoing, downward spiral of public disinvestment in concert with the academy's privatized practices and efforts, at which many if not most institutions have failed to succeed. The result compromises possibilities for employees and students in higher education, and for our contributions to the broader communities we are supposed to be serving.

Now is the time to re-think, re-envision, and re-structure the priorities and strategic practices of colleges and universities to a more progressive new normal of working in coalition with employees and communities to advance wall-to-wall benefits of higher education for all. I have laid out in the preceding section what that means for academic labor. For academic management, what that means is expanding their articulation of fiduciary responsibility and vision beyond the boundaries of "their" institutions, which in fact are not theirs, but for which they have a stewardship role in relation to broader communities. It means framing strategic actions and initiatives not to get "buy-in" from various groups within (and beyond) the organization, but as partners in defining new possibilities that center and serve the academy's public responsibilities, and given its history of systemic inequity and participation in patterns of oppression and exploitation, defining success in ways centered in better serving underserved communities.

The above sort of project is one around which labor and management *could* form common cause. In doing so, they *could* imagine, leverage, and successfully work towards a much needed, fuller re-investment in not-for-profit higher education. The aim would be not simply to make it more affordable and in some schemes free for students (who in the neoliberal mindset are consumers). For it is not free to provide higher education. The aim would also be necessarily to make higher education a safer, better, more supportive workplace for all employees, wall-to-wall, and a fuller contributor to the communities we serve. Because, to play on/modify a longtime mantra of the contingent faculty labor movement, employees' working conditions are students learning/living conditions, and communities' public (and private) benefit. It is time to move beyond disaster, disastrous academic capitalism, and its ongoing false/forced austerity. It is time, as well, to move beyond the preceding old normal, and its ongoing systemic inequities. It is

time to work in coalition, wall-to-wall, and beyond the academy's walls towards a progressive new normal.

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