

Advising and the Consumption Metaphor in Higher Education

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This essay discusses the rhetorical impacts of the consumption metaphor on how advisors think about their work using student responses to the COVID-19 pandemic to highlight the problematic nature of the consumption metaphor for higher education. Academic advisors should reconsider how they think about their work and their messages to students, as they are paramount to the process of student identification with academic institutions. Considerations of language choice can build certain student identities and encourage student (dis)engagement with their education in particular ways. Strategies for discussing skills learned, framing higher education for students, and discussing majors based on the realities of the economy, not the rhetoric of “crisis” in one area or another, are also discussed.

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Colleges and universities are organizations that, like any other organization, are impacted by the explicitly or implicitly adopted metaphors that help structure beliefs and provide a guiding logic for the organization and those who make up the organization. The metaphors used in organizations encourage specific language choices that can become what Burke calls terministic screens, which “direct our attention, goading us to notice some things and the expense of other things” (Stob, 2008, p. 139). People interpret their world and experiences through screens constructed via language that encourage them to pay attention to certain things while ignoring others, leading them to conclusions and away from other options. These screens can also impact how people feel about what they encounter. The good news about the ability for language, specifically metaphors, to create terministic screens is that what can be created can also be changed by simply changing the language used within an organization. Applied here, this means that the impacts of the

consumption metaphors used by and in higher education can be minimized if enough people change the way they talk about higher education to all stakeholders.

It is also important to remember that while metaphors highlight certain actions, beliefs, perceptions, and values, they also relegate other actions, beliefs, perceptions, and values to the background. Metaphors are also significant for the public with which an organization engages, as they help form key perceptions of that organization. Thus, metaphors not only impact members of an organization, but they also impact members of the public. And as those two audiences meet at a college or university, the impacts of the student-as-consumer metaphor are played out in classrooms and offices across campus. There is perhaps no clearer example of the impact of the student-as-consumer/consumption metaphor than the response of some students to changes in the academy because of the COVID-19 global pandemic.

Bringing with it demands for tuition refunds and lawsuits purporting a loss of educational value in the shift to online education, the COVID-19 pandemic offered a logical conclusion of the decades-long construction of students and education within the metaphor of consumption. Thus, this opportunity should be used to rethink the rhetoric of consumption in higher education. Advisors in higher education can play an important role in encouraging a shift away from the view of college as a consumer good and toward (re)defining higher education as the *public* good. This essay addresses the valuable members of higher education who have a substantial role in how students think about their education and their roles in that education—those institutional personnel and faculty members who academically advise students. The essay discusses the importance of understanding not just what metaphors are but also *how* they impact thinking about advisor roles and responsibilities. Next, the essay examines the consumption metaphor and its implications for higher

education. Finally, it explores what advisors can do to encourage student engagement in the educational process rather than simply consume it as they would an iPhone or a new pair of Nikes.

Why Metaphors Matter

Metaphors are typically discussed as rhetorical devices meant to make meaning more clear, vivid, and memorable by describing one thing as similar or equal to another thing. When we use a metaphor, what is being described in the metaphor is called the tenor and what we are using to help define the tenor is the vehicle (Foss, 2017). The metaphors used encourage thinking in the images created by those metaphors (Lakoff & Johnson, 1980) and then those metaphors become heuristic—a sort of guiding logic that steer thinking and reasoning—often without the individual even realizing the impact (Lakoff & Turner, 1989). Metaphors encourage individuals to “illuminate particular aspects of an object, simultaneously casting other dimensions into their shadows” (Beatty, 2004, p. 187). In other words, they encourage a particular definition or way of understanding something in terms of the prejudices of the metaphor’s vehicle. Thus, in the higher education-consumption metaphor the student is the tenor and the vehicle used to describe the student is “consumer.” When that metaphor is used, advisors, often uncritically, ascribe the characteristics and behaviors they link to “consumers” in their minds to their students. Metaphors can create the “boxes in our brains” by which individuals organize and make sense of the world. Without critical assessment of the metaphors individuals use, these boxes can solidify to some extent and create associations between one thing and another thing that seem like common sense (Lakoff & Johnson, 1980). Thus, metaphors are so much more than just a rhetorical means to make an argument more clear, vivid, or memorable. Metaphors also help *constitute* the world by not only making ideas more comprehensible but by helping to define those ideas in particular ways depending on the metaphor being used. And not all metaphors are created equal.

There is a distinct difference in choosing a cancer metaphor and a weed metaphor to discuss something spreading. The difference between using a cancer versus a weed metaphor speaks to the important function of metaphors in

constituting how individuals think about the world. Certainly, both cancer and weeds can kill, but *what* is killed and *how* death happens are distinctly and significantly different. Importantly, seeing something as a cancer as opposed to a weed changes the affective response to the subject being described. Emotions of fear and dread associated with cancer are transferred to whatever is being discussed rather than the emotions of perhaps annoyance or frustration associated with weeds. Those affective differences are important because metaphors are a guiding logic for engaging with the things they are describing. Thus, humans engage with an entity the way that metaphors encourage them to and, importantly, those metaphors also promote and discourage certain options for engagement with whatever is being described.

The impact that metaphors can have, as they serve as shorthand to communicate assumptions about a particular thing, is important to remember because the *work* done by metaphors is often not immediately recognized in conversations. Often, metaphors are used mindlessly when people do not stop to think about their underlying assumptions. When the mindless use of metaphors becomes a pattern, they then become the guiding logic for how people understand what is being discussed. Indeed, metaphors even have the power to construct a very specific reality in which people live and engage with whatever is being discussed. Metaphors can help create and sustain realities and thus how people perceive and engage with the world is often based on how they have come to define different elements of that world through common metaphors used to discuss and define those elements.

The debate about the utility of the consumption metaphor as it applies to higher education is not new, nor is it a debate limited to the United States. Those fond of using the consumption metaphor typically perceive education as something consumed by students (Barrows & Murray, 1997; Beronja & Bee, 1989; Constanti & Gibbs, 2004; De Vita & Case, 2003; Driscoll & Wicks, 1998; Groccia, 1997; Kramer, 2001; Levidow, 2002; McCulloch, 2009; Molesworth et al., 2009; Nicholls et al., 1995; Pitman, 2000; Propp & Rhodes, 2006; Severy, et al. 1996; Severy et al., 1994; Scott, 1999; Spicuzza, 1992; Spokane, 1994; White, 2007; Yudof, 2003;). Those less enchanted with the student-as-consumer metaphor raise several concerns. For example, Dillard and Tinker (1996) considered the disconnect between

commodifying education and the political practice that is education. Franz (1998) argued that the metaphor strips students of an active role in their education. Beatty (2004) addressed the problem of the construction of grades as currency and its relationship to the larger business metaphor. Gross and Hogler (2005) noted that the consumption metaphor privileges one set of stakeholders (students) to the detriment of others and hurts the academy's ability to fulfill purposes not linked directly to students. Applying the functions of metaphors to higher education, after at least 20 years of the consumption metaphor seeping into the rhetoric of higher education, the business models of operation they have encouraged have had a profound impact on how students and the public perceive higher education and their roles in it.

Students are sold on one college or another and there seems to be no delineation between selling the amenities of a college, like rock climbing walls, luxurious dorms, and education itself. College has become a specific consumption choice with students opting for one college brand over another.¹ The idea that students are consumers of a college or university becomes a sort of *modus operandi* for students and as the consumption metaphor has become systemic, it has profoundly impacted the ways that students think about their educational experience. For example, the public talks about the return on investment (ROI) of an institution rather than its existence as a public good that educates good citizens and moves the nation forward. The consumption metaphor not only guides the public's thoughts and actions as they relate to higher education; but as that metaphor and the language choices it encourages have become more systemic, it has also become more difficult for students (and probably faculty members and institutional personnel, too) to identify the consumption metaphor as *only one possible way* of understanding higher education. It has become common sense or just the way things are for many engaged in choosing, running, and working in higher education.

¹ This is not to say that the branding of colleges is a new development. "Tiers" and rankings have always been a part of college decision-making. Only within the previous 2 decades or so, however, have amenities been regularly promoted as equal or almost equal in importance to academic reputation.

The Consumption Metaphor and Higher Education²

Total Quality Management has infiltrated academics focusing on customer expectations. Take, for instance, one advisor's comment about their customer service initiative:

This culture has produced college students who are savvy comparison shoppers with short attention spans and high expectations. Increasingly, our students want relatively fast service with few hassles and fair value for the tuition dollars that they are spending at our institution...Our assistant dean for student services encourages us to "own the student's problem." Rather than referring a student to other offices on campus, we attempt to resolve problems by communicating with the offices directly and then informing the student of the outcome. (Dorsey, 2004)

Of course, this philosophy is rarely called by its business-oriented names; rather, these ideas are often encouraged with phrases like student-centered. Certainly, there are merits to the true philosophy of *learner-centered* teaching and education.³ However, it seems that student-centered is used as a synonym for customer service, a distinct component of the consumption metaphor. But what are the consequences of such excellence in customer service? Do students benefit when their problems are solved for them? Would students be better served if given an explanation on how to solve their problems and then left to work through these problems for themselves? A college degree does not just communicate a student's ability to master a subject. It also implies a student's ability to navigate a complex system and complete the many tasks required to graduate. Are we doing our students a favor when we embrace the consumption metaphor and do the difficult work of navigating the degree program and other issues that emerge for them?

² For a full discussion of the consumption metaphor and its recent history in higher education, please see Gross and Hogler, 2005.

³ The shift from "student-centered" to "learner-centered" signaled linguistically to me that the folly of "student-centered" rhetoric had been recognized by many as problematic and grounded in customer service, not educational goals or philosophy.

Implications of the Consumption Metaphor

I copresented a warning about the impact of the consumption metaphor on higher education and its consequences on academic advising at the 2005 National Academic Advising Association (NACADA) conference (Ramsey & Stella, 2005). Though that presentation was many years ago, the recent context of a global pandemic brings those concerns into focus. Because of shifts in education forced on institutions by COVID-19, a logical conclusion of the consumption metaphor has permeated higher education in the last 2 decades. After moving courses online in response to the need for physical distancing, colleges and universities faced demands for tuition reimbursements because students were not getting what they paid for. Indeed, a Cornish College of the Arts student declared, “I am spending thousands of dollars—and I’m going into debt for the rest of my life—to sit on my couch.” This student continued, “I feel like I’m not getting what I paid for” (Vansynghel, 2020). A Johns Hopkins student said, “Our faculty are doing a good job of working with us,” but then followed with, “It shouldn’t just be a part of the business model where, no matter what happens, you have to pay the same amount. The cost needs to reflect some of the realities” (Anderson, 2020). And a New York University senior proclaimed, “It isn’t the education we paid for” (Asmelash, 2020). Thousands of students have signed online petitions. At least one law firm set up a complaint website and began suing universities almost immediately, arguing that, “There is some product being delivered that has value, but it does not have the same value of what students paid for” (Snyder, 2020).

In addition to the problems associated with the customer service orientation to advising that the consumption metaphor encourages, it is important to understand how this customer service mentality can impact how students relate to their institutions. First, the overuse of the consumption metaphor can create the perception that students are outside the institution rather than a *part* of it. For years, this metaphor has discouraged students from being actively involved in their education or feeling responsible for the institution and their education. In a pre-COVID-19 context, did seeing themselves as merely consumers promote feelings of alumnus nostalgia—the kind of nostalgia that means institutions will see them again when they mentor, provide internships, or fund scholarships? Or did it mean that they left the college gates and never looked back simply because they felt no

strong connection to it? In the age of COVID-19, it could be argued that the consumption metaphor seems to have discouraged some students from seeing themselves as part of the institution and its struggles to face the pandemic. Thus, while many students and faculty members are working together with grace and compassion, understanding that this context is one no one signed up for, some are demanding a refund for not getting the product they paid for.

The consumption model also invites students to perceive their education as something they get rather than something they earn, leading them to eschew responsibility for the educational process, putting that expectation on faculty members and the institution alone. What kind of leaders and citizens are created when higher education fosters the attitude that education is merely a commodity only useful to the extent that it can get a particular job or income level? What kind of thinkers are created when higher education works to make students happy instead of what makes students smarter, more thoughtful, and better problem solvers? When education is framed as merely a commodity, as something that can be bought and sold like a pair of shoes, higher education is more likely to fail the world’s future. It should not be surprising, then, that with the emergence of COVID-19, some students did not see themselves as part of the process of figuring out how to learn in that new context and took it as an opportunity to learn something about problem-solving, the mental requirements of remote work, and flexible thinking in working with their colleges and universities to get through this together. Instead, some are filing lawsuits because they’re not getting what they paid for.

The Consumption Metaphor and Academic Advising

Like other organizations, colleges and universities live, breathe, and change systems because the people who make up those organizations make them so. An individual or a group within an organization can affect change in the whole organization simply by changing themselves or their office. Just as changing a diet can affect/change/impact different parts of the body, so can changing language affect/change/impact different parts of an organization. While it is not usually the case that one advising office or advisor can single-handedly change the metaphors that undergird an institution, students can

be influenced to think differently about their educations, which encourages them to engage differently with their learning. These changes can ultimately help shift or eliminate problematic metaphors that serve as part of the organization's guiding logic. Of course, the more stakeholders actively engage in behaviors that encourage a shift in metaphors, the more likely change will happen. So, it is the responsibility of all—professionals, faculty members, and administrators—to encourage this important shift in metaphor if change is to happen. Academic advisors can play a key role in this shift. They are the people students often see first as they are enrolling in their first year, scheduling classes for each semester, and looking to for guidance throughout their college careers.

Lowenstein (2005) discussed different methods of advising and challenges advisor to consider advising as teaching or learning-centered advising, which focuses on the “logic of the curriculum” (p.65) and helping students see that their education “is not just the sum of its parts” so that they can engage in “thoughtful curriculum building” (2005, p. 71). For academic advising, this means that “prescriptive advising” and its tendency for “bookkeeping” is simply not enough (Lowenstein, 2005, p.65). It is not enough for teaching or learning-centered advisors to make sure students are advised correctly in terms of course credits, class choices, and the impact of their decisions on things like financial aid and housing. Advisors should feel charged with helping undo the problematic consumption metaphors that the rhetoric of higher education has encouraged students and the public to embrace. Advisors must understand that how students see their education and their role depends on how they see education itself. Seeing higher education as a consumption choice can negatively impact their education and their lives. Academic advisors are some of the most important people for encouraging students to understand higher education in specific ways that encourage their engagement and discourage the notion that being “satisfied” equals being educated well. If Lowenstein is correct, academic advisors can have a significant impact on how students enter and engage their education. A good place to begin this work is to think about language use, responses to student thinking grounded in the consumption metaphor, the encouragement of holistic views of educa-

tion, and different discussions on academic major options.⁴

Language Use

What can advisors do to shift student ways of thinking? First, advisors can pay attention to their language use and make impactful corrections as needed. When students talk to advisors about what grade they got, they can be reminded that they have *earned* that grade. That simple shift in language removes the second half of the consumption equation of getting something in return for payment. In another example, when advisors talk about graduation requirements, rather than presenting this work as checking boxes, advisors can learn to talk about these requirements more holistically and about one another. Rather than talking about these courses as distinct requirements that need to be checked off the list for graduation, advisors can explain why courses in general education, such as communication skills and visual arts, are useful regardless of degree choice. This is the logic of the curriculum discussion Lowenstein (2005) encouraged.

Teaching students how to talk about their general education requirements related to and supplementing their majors encourages them to *think differently* about those courses and their importance. It also helps them better set themselves apart from others once they graduate. When they consider their courses more holistically, they have a better chance of understanding their education and communicating that holistic experience to employers. Advisors can encourage students to think about their choices in ways that get them to take ownership of them, which requires faculty members and personnel to work together to teach each other how to best frame these conversations and the disciplines that are a part of them. These shifts in language and strategy could help change student thinking about higher education and their role in that educational process. They have the additional benefit of encouraging joint work between faculty members and other personnel on campus.

Advisors can also move away from phrases such as “soft skills” and “hard skills.” When advisors talk about soft skills they are talking about skills such as writing; oral communication;

⁴ These suggestions are made with the understanding that context matters and thus each situation can require and/or discourage certain responses depending on the context of the student's complaint.

interpersonal communication and conflict management; collaboration; an understanding of diversity; and other skills and knowledge more consistently linked to disciplines in the humanities. Many in higher education tend to differentiate these skills from the hard skills learned in STEM (science, technology, engineering, and math) disciplines. What is important to recognize is that research on the skills and knowledge most desired by employers from college graduates clearly identifies that what are typically called soft skills are the vast majority of the skills and knowledge employers want (Hart Research Associates, 2010, 2013, & 2015; National Association of College and Employers, 2011, 2012, 2013, 2014, 2015, 2016, & 2017). Thus, these skills are not soft at all. In fact, because they are so highly sought and essential for college graduates to have, they are what Grobman and Ramsey (2020) called core skills and knowledge. When advisors talk about courses offering soft skills, they can encourage students to think of those disciplines as soft and such encouragement may lead to students not taking those courses seriously enough. A shift in this language can discourage students from considering courses in general education that are not linked to their major as wasted money and wasted time.

Advisors can also think about how to engage consumption-based assumptions, arguments, and complaints from students in ways that discourage that continued framing of their educations. For example, if students complain that they are not getting what they paid for, advisors can encourage students to reconsider the relationship between tuition and their education. Responses can express the distinction between paying tuition for the opportunity to learn skills and knowledge critical to their success and earning credits just because they were paid for. This general complaint is a teachable moment wherein an advisor can carefully delineate for the student their role in their success, as well as communicate how important it is in the high-tech, global economies of the future for them to be agile, flexible thinkers and learners, which means learning how to learn in different contexts, via different methods, and outside of their specific set of academic interests.

Should students be put in the situation of shifting to online education again because of a pandemic or other unforeseeable circumstance, advisors will likely again hear students arguing that just sitting on the couch is not the same as being in the classroom. And, of course, it is not. If

COVID-19 should have taught higher education anything, institutions should have learned that there are serious barriers to effective online learning. But it is also the case that, if framed effectively, students might be convinced that they are simply honing different skills online than they do in the classroom. For example, advisors can talk to students about time management, work ethic, strategic planning skills, and self-discipline to succeed in online classes. Discussions can explore how students will learn effective and tactful communication in many contexts, including face-to-face in class, on videoconference platforms, in online discussion posts, or in written work. In a world increasingly encouraging online teamwork, advisors can talk with students about learning global collaboration. Students can be encouraged to talk about how they were creative and innovative when shifting to online courses. Advisors can congratulate students on their ability to adapt to difficult and unexpected shifts—like global pandemics, encourage them to be comfortable with the ambiguity that can result from not being in a traditional classroom setting, and point to ways to frame this experience with ambiguity for future employers. And, of course, advisors can point to how much more technological competence and literacy students will garner if they take online learning seriously. Simply put, advisors can frame these monumental shifts as opportunities to hone many of the core skills and knowledge employers want from college graduates and help get students excited for the additional challenges online learning brings rather than automatically assuming it is less than.

Holistic Views of Education

Advisors can also encourage students to think about the purposes of higher education differently. It is, of course, the case that students of all generations typically have job security and success in mind when deciding to venture into higher education. Faculty members and institutional personnel are reasonably good at communicating the importance of higher education to students regarding its impact on their future and earning potential. Still, advisors are perhaps less skilled at communicating another important role of higher education in our society and lives. As Grobman and Ramsey (2020) argued, “Democracy requires wisdom, engagement, civic knowledge, and the ability to debate and dialogue. Arguably, great works of art, literature, rhetoric,

and philosophy foster relationship-building, empathy, the understanding and value of difference and diversity, democratic citizenship, and a well-functioning democracy” (p. 55)

Here, Grobman and Ramsey discussed education and democracy as it relates to the humanities. Still, the well-educated citizenry is also promoted when students graduate with an understanding of how the knowledge created by specific disciplines that may not be directly linked to their majors can inform the rest of their lives. For example, advisors can help students understand that math helps hone logical reasoning skills to assess political campaign messages critically. Advisors can help students see that the knowledge learned in science classes can help explain relationships to the natural world, an important set of relationships to understand as students consider supporting specific environmental policies. Similarly, advisors can help students understand that general computing knowledge can help them recognize the impact of technology on themselves and society, including its impact on our ideas of the First Amendment’s protection of expression. Advisors can also help students understand that higher education is of paramount importance in a thriving and functional democracy. Such a shift in the way advisors talk about higher education can encourage students to move from thinking about higher education as a place where they pay for credentials that will open doors for them in terms of their careers—a *quid pro quo* relationship that discourages more holistic thinking—and instead, encourages them to think about their time in higher education as time spent building their skills sets for their careers *and* their lives in a democratic society.

Discussing Majors Differently

Advisors can also talk about majors in different, more productive ways grounded in reality and research, not the rhetoric of consumption. For the better part of 2 decades, the consumption metaphors of higher education focused less on the broader education that has made U.S. colleges and universities so admired worldwide and more on training for specific jobs, suggesting that courses and students are simply two commodities that can be matched for production purposes, not individual entities to develop holistically for the greater good. Faculty members constantly hear that students want skills, not theory. Theory is tough work, and thinking about theory is even tougher. There is a reason

why the theories of the great Roman and Greek rhetoricians are still taught—those great thinkers developed methods that have stood the test of time and changing contexts. Sure, a public speaking teacher could just teach a student the skill of writing a speech for today’s audience using the types of argumentation strategies that are more common now. But what happens when contexts change? How will a student who has only learned a specific skill—and not the *rhetorical theory* behind that skill—acclimate to this change and continue to succeed in a new context, such as adapting to a Zoom presentation during a global pandemic? As Steve Burnette of the Burnette Group said, “Regardless of the changes in technology, the market for well-crafted messages will always have an audience” (Williams, 2015). Students who understand rhetorical theory can adapt to those changes in technology, while students who only see their public speaking class as a set of skills will probably be less likely and able to do so.

Higher education does our students and their futures injustice when it sacrifices theory to the altar of skills and mental training to the altar of job training. When college is about consumption, that metaphor invites a host of other business metaphors and analogies into the equation. When students are encouraged to think of college as specific job training instead of *mind* training, and higher education begins trumpeting some majors as superior to others because of the assumed ROI, advisors help boil down an entire college career to a pathway to a job for their students, helping no one. Bracketing the fact that these beliefs about certain majors having a better ROI than others are not true in most cases (for example Anders, 2017; Carnevale & Cheah, 2015; Carnevale et al., 2015; Deming, 2017; Grothaus, 2018; Hartley, 2017; Humphreys & Kelly, 2014; Jaschik, 2015; Liu & Grusky, 2015; National Association of Colleges and Universities, 2018; Pearlstein, 2016; and Robinson, 2014), the consumption metaphor and its biases invite and encourage unstated assumptions about which majors are practical and which are not. Such assumptions ignore context and the fact that the high-tech, global economy in the United States changes very quickly, and thus what seems practical in one year may not be practical in others. And these assumptions, grounded in the view of college and major as consumer choices, can also negatively impact a graduates’ futures.

As Roth (2012) argued, by concentrating on what is defined as practical, advisors run the risk

of training students for yesterday's jobs and yesterday's problems. Indeed, as Roth suggested, calls for practicality "calls for conformity. . .for conventional thinking that, if heeded, will impoverish [our] economic, cultural and personal lives" (para. 7). But as higher education has continued to engage in the consumption metaphor, these calls for practicality have steered students to particular majors and away from others, often based on flawed assumptions about supposed return on investment. Not only do these tendencies implicitly, and sometimes explicitly, promise students guaranteed returns that salary and workforce data indicate are not as guaranteed as we might think, but they also can encourage students away from studying what they are passionate about under the pretense of a bad ROI.

If faculty members and institutional personnel try to learn about what the data say regarding different discipline options for students and the fact that most majors are going to offer students the opportunity to enjoy a good living, students can be discouraged from considering their majors only in terms of ROI and encouraged to follow their passions into disciplines and careers that promise both a good life and a good living. Higher education *must* pull back from consumption-based assumptions about majors that trumpet some degrees over others, as academic research clarifies that students need not choose from only a limited number or type of majors to enjoy a good living in a career that they are passionate about.⁵

Conclusion

As COVID-19 continues to impact life significantly, the public continues to see the cracks in normal ways of thinking and acting emphasized. COVID-19 is giving academic advisors and the entire higher education system an opportunity to push pause on how higher education is talked about and to reconsider the impact of that talk. As students line up to sue their colleges and universities, faculty members and institutional personnel are granted the ability to see a logical conclusion of the consumption metaphor. This context also gives advisors a chance to think about the impact of the consumption metaphor on how students make and justify decisions that impact the rest of their lives.

As colleges and universities struggle to answer how they will function during COVID-19 and

how they will survive financially, they rightly look at state and federal government leaders for financial support. But this crisis was part of higher education's own making because as higher education began founding its decisions and rhetoric on the consumption metaphor and its corollary business language, it began changing the perceptions of higher education in the minds of the public. These changes discourage the public from seeing higher education as a public good—as a tool for the collective good—not simply a place for individuals to train for specific jobs. As a result, we are often no longer seen as investments in our local, state, and federal communities.⁶

Advisors are on the front lines of this battle. From academic and social orientations in the summer, to group advising meetings for majors/colleges, and individual appointments with students, advisors play an important role in encouraging a shift of thinking away from higher education as a product and toward higher education as a public and common good. Advisors can make different language choices that encourage students to take responsibility for their roles in their learning. Students should be referred to as citizens of colleges and universities so that they see their educational homes as a community rather than a business and see themselves as part of a community, not as simply consumers. Advisors should talk about their education as a *public* good, not just as making their employment chances better. Students should be asked what grades they earned rather than what grades they got, which puts their education responsibility into the final grades equation. If these types of phrases must be used at all, advisors should move away from phrases like student-centered, which hints at students as consumers, and toward phrases like learning-centered. Advisors can remove the ineffective categories of major versus general education that encourage students to disconnect these disciplines in their minds and their learning and recognize that *all* disciplines offer skills and knowledge vitally important to their success. Advisors can call these courses core skills and knowledge or interdomain learning or anything else that communicates that they are more than just requirements they have to take to get their

⁵ For a detailed discussion of this argument, see Grobman & Ramsey (2020).

⁶ The onslaught of news releases and videos about the "economic impact" of your local college or university are evidence of this shift in the public's thinking and are higher education's response to that shift.

diplomas. Advisors can also talk about education as more than just a pathway to a good job. They can discuss education as a public necessity for a vibrant and functional democracy. They also communicate how these same skills and knowledge will help them succeed professionally after graduation. And advisors can discourage students from making ROI a factor when it comes to making choices about majors by making sure they are up to date on the data that tells us that all majors can lead to a good living, thus encouraging them to focus on those areas about which they are passionate.

Of course, advisors cannot completely eliminate the language of business from their ways of thinking about higher education and its roles. By definition, higher education is engaged in the economy and wants to make sure that students are well-prepared to market themselves once they graduate. There is nothing wrong with *some* business thinking/language in higher education. But recognizing a relationship to business and thinking of higher education as a business are two different things. Colleges and universities are now seeing the result of consistently framing higher education as the latter. The shift from the consumption metaphor also has the chance to start impacting the way that the public sees us—as a public good rather than as only a potential ROI—by avoiding that metaphor as much as possible. As Colonnese (2000) argued, the metaphor is a false one. Higher education and the relationships between students and faculty members, institutional personnel, and administration are simply too complex to make the metaphor an effective one and its use can also have implications for many things, including levels of rigor, as “students don’t like” becomes a reason to make changes, as opposed to making changes based on applicable data.

Advising is a vital place to start making these shifts. As a faculty member, I may see a student in my public speaking course for 15 weeks, but I can see an advisee throughout the entirety of their academic career. Advisors have enormous power to encourage students to see their education as more than just an exchange of money for a set of credentials. We should all consider how we, as advisors, *think about* our jobs, not just how to *do* the nuts and bolts of those jobs. We should also contemplate what changes we can make in talking about higher education with our students. Higher education’s ability to weather upcoming economic storms, like the next international pandemic or

global meltdown, will depend in no small part on how our students and the public think about the role of higher education in society at large and students’ lives, more specifically. All faculty members, institutional personnel, and administrators should take this moment to reconsider the impact of the consumption metaphor on institutions and students. No one is well served by the predominance of the consumption metaphor and the language and processes it encourages. COVID-19 provides insight into what ramifications another pandemic or downturn in society and its economy could bring if this ship stays the course.

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