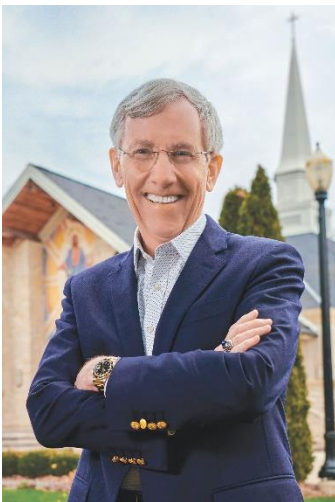


Change your lens: There is not a full-scale assault on colleges and universities

By Dr. Tim Collins, President, Walsh University

David L. Warren's [letter to the editor of the Columbus Dispatch on July 19, 2023](#), is looking through the lens of self-interest: the people are not "assaulting" colleges and universities although many leaders throughout higher education are viewing our work with the same perspective; consequently, elected representatives are seeking to restore colleges and universities to their proper place.



A [Gallup poll](#) released eight days before Warren's correspondence shows American confidence in higher education has dropped 20% in the past eight years, with 62% of respondents offering little to no confidence in our domain. Every major subgroup in this polling data is less confident – an historic low.

Four years ago, a Gallup poll offered insight on how well higher education is preparing students for the workforce: 96% of provosts think we are doing a good job preparing students, yet only 11% of executive business leaders agree.

Perhaps most illuminating is that only 6% of college and university trustees think we are producing work-ready graduates – that is an indictment!

In 2022, 78% of employers reported having unmet needs. National data shows less than a third of college students leverage what they learn in the classroom at their internships ... ought not that number be 99%?

And of course, there is the seismic shift sweeping the nation today that is moving away from college degrees and alternatively toward skill sets for job performance – sweeping up Ohio in June 2023 with Governor Mike DeWine's Executive Order on hiring.

All this likely explains new Gallup polling showing 46% of parents do not want to send their children to college.

And what has been the response of higher education as we watch a decades-long decline in enrollment and confidence in our work? Cancel speakers who offer differing viewpoints, claim as "fact" and teach bizarre concepts that one can refute with the naked eye as well as scientific evidence, develop academic programs that have little to do with workforce readiness or preparedness for life, foster discontent rather than modelling civility, ignore the common good and make condescending arguments for independence from those we serve.



Our system of representation is built on the premise that government is *by* the people – not *of* the people. Checks and balances have always been central to our pursuit of the common good. Recall James Madison’s words in The Federalists Papers: “several constituent parts may, by their mutual relations, be the means of keeping each other in their proper places.”

Legislatures and judiciaries across America are making course corrections that the leaders of higher education cannot see and will not do themselves.

Our Constitutional Republic is premised on government doing the will of the people ... it is representative rather than direct; thus, higher education leaders ought to review their civics lessons before grumbling about legislatures doing their job. Our fellow citizens should rightly participate with us in the enterprise of education because it is a public good.

It is insulting to assert that their involvement is an “assault” ... no, it is their prerogative.

We must take off the blinders and see what others are seeing: we are untethered from the founding principles that legitimize our existence.

What we ought to be doing is commit to strengthening the durability of a college degree; offer students the skills they need to learn “how to think” rather than demanding “what to think;” refocus the higher education enterprise in America on teaching the truth; and reallocate academic resources to preparing students for their first destination and life’s purpose.

Dr. Warren references a Martin Niemöller quote in his July 19th letter, but sadly uses it for political purposes for which Pastor Niemöller would unlikely approve.

After eight years as a political prisoner of the Nazis, Niemöller is speaking to his own moral failure to stand up and speak publicly about the relationships of Church and State.

Niemöller’s quote in the context of the Higher Education and State relationship would reflect his encouragement for others to have their voices heard, an effort to dissuade “shooting the messengers” on the efficacy of today’s higher education experience, while fostering an environment of seeking common ground and maintaining faithfulness to core principles.

If the leadership in higher education would collectively seek to restore common sense in the classroom, promote civility and civil discourse, and return to teaching others to pursue knowledge using evidence and disputation, then we will not need legislation to do that for us.