



The Texas Independent

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More professors speak out to critique proposed higher ed reforms

By [Mary Lee Grant](#) | 05.02.11 | 5:43 pm

“Hi, I’m Robert Jensen, a provider of educational products to consumers at the University of Texas at Austin. I used to introduce myself as a UT professor, but that was before I attended a Texas Public Policy Foundation session last week ...”

That’s how the University of Texas at Austin journalism professor [began a critique](#) of state higher education reforms published in the Texas Observer today, [part of a growing chorus](#) of professors reacting to proposals by the conservative think tank Texas Public Policy Foundation that call for professors to minimize research and “emphasize” teaching.

Jensen takes issue with higher education “reforms,” pushed by Gov. Rick Perry and his allies at TPPF which advocate turning students into consumers and higher education into a market-driven service. Jensen said he had a hard time looking at his journalism courses as an “economic exchange,” [the words](#) Neal McCluskey of the Cato Institute used when speaking at a [TPPF conference](#) in Austin last week.

“Instead of pretending to be able to measure faculty output and draining the life from teaching, we need to embrace the ideals of the university rather than capitulate to the false promises of failed market ideology,” Jensen wrote. “The obsessions with measurement and testing have nearly destroyed K-12 public education, and if applied to higher education it will have similar effects.

“That model may be particularly attractive to those on the right precisely because it is so effective at undermining the kind of critical thinking some of us are trying to encourage in our classes. As U.S. society has moved steadily to the right over the past three decades, conservatives have been eager to eliminate the few remaining spaces in the culture where critiques of power—especially concentrated economic power in a society marked by obscene wealth and indecent inequality—can flourish. Some parts of the modern university—especially those teaching business, advertising, and economics—are devoted to propping up that power, and much of the rest of the campus is not far behind. ... The victory of the market model would be the end of real education, if by education we mean independent inquiry into the power

that structures our lives.”

Two other professors at the University of Houston-Clear Lake also criticized the reforms in an [op-ed piece](#) in the Houston Chronicle, debunking TPPF fellow Ronald Trowbridge’s demonization of university research.

“Why does he think that much academic research is worthless?” wrote Debra Clark, and Keith Parsons. “Because, he says, ordinary citizens do not understand it. In 1919, Albert Einstein became famous when the New York Times and other newspapers proclaimed that his theory of relativity had been confirmed. What did the ordinary citizens of 1919 understand of relativity theory? Advanced research always sounds esoteric initially, yet worldwide interest in Einstein’s theories was enormous.”

Trowbridge responded to similar critiques by A&M and UT professors in the Austin American Statesman with an [op-ed piece](#) that said: “It is often argued that if we question research, we are ‘anti-intellectual.’ This is a non sequitur because research... can be valuable or it can be nonsense. The Texas Public Policy Foundation seeks to put students first, valuing research that serves these students or wider societal needs. Toward those ends, we do not reject valuable research but rather ask for transparency and accountability for use of what is, after all, taxpayer money.”

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