Was Creationism Involved the State Closure of Columbia Pacific University?  
The Case for Disparate Treatment

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**Subject:** Credibility of Creationists

**Introduction**

I have a degree in biology from Columbia Pacific University (CPU), which some now argue “is a diploma mill.” This paper was written to respond to this charge. My evaluation of CPU in this paper is based on my 35 years as a college professor, and the fact that I have a total of eight other degrees (plus two additional graduate degrees -- both doctorates -- for which I have completed most of the course work) from fully accredited Universities. My other degrees are from Wayne State University, the University of Toledo, Medical College of Ohio, and Bowling Green State University. I have also completed post bachelors course work at the University of Wisconsin, Miami University in Ohio, and the University of California, Berkeley.

I originally pursued a degree from CPU because where I now live is a considerable distance away (generally a 2.5 hour round trip) from the closest graduate schools (the University of Toledo, Medical College of Ohio, and Bowling Green State University). Consequently, in the late 1980s I inquired about a suitable college where I could complete my graduate work in the science area (I already had a number of graduate credits, all of which Columbia accepted).
To make an informed decision on graduate school, I consulted the most authoritative alternative education reference in print, *Bear's Guide*, which *Wilson Library Bulletin* says is “the authoritative guide in the field.” The 2003 *Tenspeed* catalog says, “after 25 years this classic bestseller is still the resource for anyone looking to earn a degree in a nontraditional way.” This guide highly recommended Columbia Pacific with the following words:

Columbia Pacific is the largest university in the United States and one of the largest in the world offering non-resident Bachelor’s, Master’s and Doctorates. Despite the size, students report an extremely high level of personal attention from the faculty and staff. The faculty numbers more than 400, nearly all with traditional Doctorates. Two former presidents of major accredited universities serve as two of the deans of Columbia Pacific, and their president, Richard Crews, is a prominent psychiatrist with his medical degree from Harvard.... Degrees are offered in dozens of subject areas, including business, administration and management, engineering, psychology, education, holistic health, health sciences administration, architecture, and nutrition. Special programs are created for students wishing to work in specialized areas... Work may be done in almost any language.... The University has two campuses: a million-dollar university-owned urban campus in downtown San Rafael (just north of San Francisco) and a 13-acre North Campus in northern Marin County, with library, student housing and other facilities. There is an office in England, where a special program in travel and tourism is offered Jointly with British Air, and where former Prime Minister Harold Wilson is one of many prominent people serving as honorary fellows of the university.

Bear concluded his detailed review of CPU with the following words:

No other non-resident doctorate-granting institution has a staff with the credentials, reputation, and experience of Columbia Pacific. Many major universities, including Harvard, Yale and Princeton have expressed a willingness to accept C.P.U. degrees. Hundreds of C.P.U. alumni have written me (more than from any other school) to praise the very personal approach, the valuable learning experience, and the usefulness of their degrees (1985, p. 96).

Bear also rates schools from 1-5 (5 is fully accredited, and Columbia had a 4, which meant it was given the authority by “the superintendent of public instruction of the state of California” to award the degrees being offered). The 1981 edition of *Bear’s Guide* says the founders and staff of CPU “have, by a wide margin, the most impressive credentials of the people associated with any such school” (1980, p. 49). The school was founded by three senior academics, two of
whom were former presidents of regionally accredited American universities (see www.altepualumni.org). CPU now has over 10,000 alumni in 60 countries. Bear adds that no other alternative non-residential Doctorate-granting institution has officers who approach the reputation, prestige, and experience of those of C.P.U. I have had more positive, enthusiastic feedback from students and alumni of C.P.U. than from any other school, accredited or not. These people praise the very personal approach, the valuable learning experience, the comparatively low cost, and the value of the degree to them. C.P.U. operates from a large leased building just north of San Francisco and from a 13-acre residential retreat center (with library, student housing, etc.) in Northern Marin County. There is also a residential psychology program in Santa Cruz, and offices in England.

I also consulted with some CPU graduates, and found quite a number of very successful alumni. One is John Gray, Ph.D. the award-winning, best-selling author of the *Men are from Mars, Women are from Venus* series that critics claim was once very controversial (but has now moved more into the mainstream). I also encountered numerous CPU graduates who have done well in academia, such as Frank G. Shelloch, Ph.D., FACC, FACSM, assistant professor of radiology at the University of California, Los Angeles, School of Medicine and a research scientist at the world renowned Cedars-Sinai Medical Center in Los Angeles. I reviewed the publication record of Dr. Shelloch, who has his Ph.D. from Columbia Pacific University, and from a single search located the following articles:


The school utilizes faculty from other colleges and universities to supervise students’ graduate work. My faculty advisor was John A. Short, Ph.D., department of anatomy and histology at the University of Pittsburgh. Some of his many scholarly publications include:


J. Short and P. Ove, Recent hypothesis advocating a prominent role for the thyroid hormones in mammalian liver cell proliferation in vivo, *Cytobios.* 38, 39-49 (1983).


**Published Abstracts:**


D. Truitte, J. A. Short and M. Ontell, Paucity of prereplicative alterations in hepatocyte proliferation induced by triiodothyronine. *Journal Cell Biology.* 87, 158a (Abs.) (1980).

Furthermore, my Ph.D. dissertation was published by University Microfilms International in Ann Arbor (see appendix). When I completed my degree in February of 1992, CPU was fully licensed and authorized by the state of California to award degrees. Their degrees were accepted not only by industry, but also by education, government, and other areas. Columbia Pacific graduates are teaching, or on the staff of, the following traditional colleges and universities:

Antioch University, Athabasca University (Canada), Bedford College of Higher Education (England), Boston State College, Brigham Young University, Bryant College (Rhode Island), California State University, Hayward, California State University, Los Angeles, Central University of Venezuela, Cogswell College (California), College of Female Education (Saudi Arabia), Cuyahoga Community College (Ohio), Edward Williams College (New Jersey), Exeter University (England), Futtising Kang College (Taiwan), Georgia Tech, George Watson’s College (Scotland), Golden State University (California), Grand Rapids Baptist College and Seminary (Michigan), Hargrave Military Academy (Virginia), Michigan State University, Moorpark College (California), Morain Valley Community College (Illinois), Mt. Sinai Medical Center (New York), Nassau Community College (New York), Nebraska Wesleyan University, New York University, North Texas State University, Norwalk Community College (Connecticut), Nova University (Florida), Odessa College (Texas), Oregon Institute of Technology, Pecos Valley Christian College (New Mexico), Pierce College (California), Purdue University (Indiana), San Francisco State University, Schreiner College (Texas), South Florida Community College, Swinburne Institute of Technology, (Australia), Tampa College (Florida), Temple University, Umm Al Qura University (Saudi Arabia), Univesidad de Costa Rica, University of Bridgeport (Connecticut), University of British Columbia, University of Hawaii, University of Manchester (England), University of Massachusetts, University of Oregon, University of Salonika (Greece), University of Texas, El Paso, University of Vermont, University of Wales, University of Waterloo (Canada), University of Wisconsin, Stevens Point, U.S. Army Reserve School (Illinois), Wake Forest University (North Carolina), Wallace State Community College (Alabama), West Coast University (California), West Virginia Northern Community College, Yeungnam University Medical School (Korea).

I was able to locate scores of faculty members from many other colleges and universities who were CPU graduates. An example is Dr. James Yarmus (he has his Ph.D. from CPU), who teaches at Howe School of Technology Management, a division of Stevens Institute of Technology. His fellow faculty have degrees from Harvard, Vanderbilt, MIT, Stanford, Columbia, and Cornell. Another example is Macomb Country Community College (MCCC) President Al Lorenzo who has his Ph.D. from CPU. MCCC, one of the nations largest community colleges, is also one of the most innovative. He established the four year university center that allows students to earn over 40 bachelors degrees from 10 different colleges. When Lorenzo wanted to complete his Ph.D. in the early 1990s he "called the Michigan Department of
Education for a recommendation, and Columbia Pacific University was suggested" (editorial in The Macomb Daily dated August 30, 2004).

Lothar von Blenk-Schmidt, Ph.D. (engineering) on March 4, 1982 was invited to serve as an advisor on the United States Congressional Advisory Board for National Security.

Percival Fernandez, Ph.D. (1983) Bangalore, India, was appointed Director of St. John's Medical College in charge of three major institutions, a hospital with 850 beds, a medical school with 400 undergraduate and post-graduate students, and a college with nearly 1,000 support staff. Interestingly, the oldest CPU graduate, Lloyd Maxwell, Ph.D. (economics), was 95 at graduation. A few more of the many academics and professionals with degrees from CPU include the following:

1. Shaffideen A. Amuwo, Ph.D., Associate Dean, Community, Government, and Alumni Affairs, Clinical Assistant Professor, Community Health Sciences, UIC School of Public Health.
3. Dana M. Barry, Ph.D., technical writer and editor, Clarkson University's Center of Advanced Materials Processing (CAMP), Clarkson University.
4. Harvey Bauman, Ph.D., Visiting Professor of Business, Lees-McRae College.
5. Lewis Bornmann, Ph.D., Professor of Math, Mesa State College.
6. James Bosworth, Ph.D., Faculty, Colorado State University.
7. Frank J. Bracelin, Ph.D., Health Sciences Department, City University Los Angeles.
8. Timothy Brady, Ph.D., Assistant Professor, Southwest Texas State University.
9. Tania Bridgeman, Ph.D. RN, University of California Irvine Medical Center, Orange, California.
10. Donald Burleson, Ph.D., Director of Developmental Studies Lab, Eastern New Mexico University.
11. Rudolph D. Calabrese, Ph.D., Adjunct Professor, The Institute for the Psychological Sciences.
12. Rick Chimblo, Director, HARC's Geotechnology Research Institute, Houston Advanced Research Center.
13. James Chopyak, Ph.D., Music Department, California State University, Sacramento.
15. Lynn Collins, Ph.D, President Lynn Collins and Associates, Albuquerque, New Mexico.
16. Judy Compton, Ph.D., Business/Management faculty, Lester L. Cox College of Nursing and Health Sciences.
17. Ralph Cooper, Doctor of Philosophy in Musical Arts, Adjunct Instructor, Piano, Brewton-Parker College.
18. William B. Cooper, music faculty, Hampton University, Hampton, VA.
19. John A. Cosco, Ph.D., Business Law Instructor, Kansas Wesleyan University, Salina, KS.
20. Jeane Crowther, Ph.D., General Education Professor, Huntington Junior College.
21. Alice M. Defriese, Ph.D., faculty, College of Medicine, University of Arizona.
22. Jeff Dillon, Ph.D. Adjunct Professor, Azusa Pacific University.
23. Glenn Donnelly, Ph.D., RN Assistant Professor, College of Nursing University of Saskatchewan, Saskatoon, Canada.
24. John Dovelos, Ph.D., Professor of Psychology, licensed psychotherapist, Breyer State University.
25. Priscilla Ebersole, Professor of Nursing, San Francisco State University.
26. William Paul Emmerling, EdD, Professor, Breyer State University.
27. Michael Fadem, faculty, Kent State University.
28. Laurie A. Fitzgerald, Ph.D., Senior Practitioner, The Consultancy Inc., Professor, Jones International University, Englewood, CO.
29. James A. Fowlie, Sr., Ph.D., Lecturer, School of Graduate Studies, Anna Maria College, Paxton, MA.
30. Carl T. Gass, Ph.D., Human Services Professor, Missouri Valley College, Marshall, MO.
31. Roger Geronimo, Ph.D., Director of Business Services, Central Connecticut University.
32. Mary Granley Ph.D. Assistant Professor of Nursing, Aurora College
33. Paul E. Greene, Ph.D., Assistant Professor of Education, Piedmont College.
34. Robert Guyon, Ph.D., Tutor Coordinator, Adult Basic Education, Idaho State University College of Technology.
35. Bruce Heald, History faculty, Plymouth State College and Babes-Bolyai University in Rumania.
36. Gerti Heider, Nursing faculty, University of Medicine and Dentistry of New Jersey.
37. James Ho, Ph.D., Professor, Cogswell College.
38. Rene Hollander, BS, MS, Psychology Professor, Ryokean College.
39. Dale R. Hoyt, BA, Lecturer in Catholic School Leadership, St. Mary's University.

40. Agnes Huff, Ph.D., President and CEO, Agnes Huff Communications Group, LLC, Howard Hughes Center, Los Angeles, CA.

41. Don Trent Jacobs, Ph.D., Associate Professor, College of Education, Northern Arizona University. Formerly Adjunct Professor at University of California, Berkeley.

42. Gregory Jantz, Ph.D., Board of Regents, Columbus Evangelical Seminary, founder and administrator, The Center for Counseling and Health Resources, Washington State licensed counseling center, Edmonds, WA.

43. Richard I. Kagel, Ph.D., Associate Professor, Brigham Young University.

44. Sher Kannar, Ph.D, Professor, Department of Natural Sciences, Stillman College.

45. Charles Killingsworth, faculty, Pittsburgh State University.

46. J. Philip Kittel, Ph.D., Computer Applications, Douglasville, Georgia.

47. Robert R. Klepper, Ph.D., Associate Professor, Microbiology Botany, Buena Vista University. In 2004—Associate Professor, Chemistry, Iowa Lakes Community College.

48. Tom Kolda, Ph.D., Executive Director of University Relations, University of Wisconsin.

49. Martin Krepcho, Ph.D. Faculty Associate, UT Southwestern Family Medicine Residency Program Faculty, The University of Texas Southwestern Medical Center at Dallas.

50. John Langevin, Ph.D., Assistant Dean of Students, University of New England.

51. Ira Lansing, Ph.D., Mathematics, College of Marin.

52. James Leigh, Ph.D. MA, Assistant Professor Campus Coordinator, Languages Intercollege, Nicosia, Cyprus.

53. Lila Lloyd, Ph.D., Instructor, School of Business, North Carolina Agriculture and Technical State University.

54. Harvey Loomstein, Ph.D., Health and Human Services/Psychology, City University Los Angeles.

55. Marc Lucas, University of New Mexico.

56. William Lupton, Ph.D., Chairperson, Department of Computer Science, Morgan State University.

57. Jack Dwyer Lynch, Ph.D., has worked in the international education field in The Hague, Holland; London, England; Quito, Ecuador; and most recently Rotterdam, Holland.

58. Reed Markham, Ph.D., Higher Education Administration, City University Los Angeles.

59. Jim Marler, Ph.D., Adjunct Faculty, Drury University.

60. William B. McClaran, Ph.D., Learning Assistance Center, Southern Maine Community College.

61. Kathy McCloskey, Assistant Professor, School of Professional Psychology, Wright State University.
62. Glen McDaniel, MS, Assistant Administrator of Clinical Operations, Atlanta, Georgia.

63. Michael McGuire, Ph.D., Assistant Professor of Psychology, McChord Academic Center, Chapman University.

64. Donald R. McNeely, Ph.D., now President and Chief Operating Officer, Chicago Tube and Iron Corporation.


66. Ruth Mullins Ph.D. Professor of Nursing California State University, Long Beach California.

67. Frank T. Murphy, BBA, Accounting Professor, Woodbury University.

68. Muthena Naseri, Ph.D., Professor, Environmental Science, Moorpark College.

69. Joseph J. Nicholas, Ph.D., Biological Sciences/Department Chair, Northland Pioneer College, Navajo County, Arizona.

70. Daniel L. Orr II, Ph.D., now an Oral and Maxillofacial Surgeon, Las Vegas, Nevada.

71. Tulio Otero, Ph.D., Adjunct Professor Columbia College, Puerto Rico and Elgin, Illinois.

72. Darrell Page, Ph.D., President, Bladen Community College, Dublin, NC.

73. Judy Pellat, Ph.D. Department of Medical Oncology University of Southampton, England.

74. Norman Phillips, Professor of Civil and Environmental Engineering, University of Dayton.

75. Erik Podszus Ph.D., Assistant Professor New York City College, New York.

76. Gene J. Pollart, Ph.D., Professor, University of Rhode Island, Kingston, Rhode Island.

77. Constantine Polychroniou, Ph.D., Assistant Professor, College of Business, University of Cincinnati, Ohio.

78. Diane Portfleet, Ph.D., Associate Professor, Hope College.

79. Claire Pryor, Ph.D., Assistant Professor, DeVry University.

80. Sofia Puerto, Ph.D., Faculty, Loma Linda University School of Nursing.

81. Larry Dale Tazan Purnell, Ph.D., Professor, Department of Nursing, University of Delaware, Newark, DE.

82. William Redel, Full Professor, International Studies, Sierra Nevada College.

83. Louis Roller, Ph.D., Associate Professor and Associate Dean, Monash University.

84. Anton Seidl, Ph.D., Professor of English, Southern Connecticut State University.


86. Ravi Shankar, Ph.D., Adjunct Professor, Wittenberg University, Springfield, Ohio.
87. Yoshiko Shimamoto, Ph.D., Professor of Nursing, University of Honolulu.

88. Larry Smith, Ph.D., now Senior Computer Engineer, United States Air Force, New Mexico.

89. Maureen E. Smith, Ph.D., Lecturer in Psychology, Marymount University.

90. Rainer Sommer, Research Associate Professor, George Mason University.

91. Melody Thompson, D.Ed., Assistant Professor of Adult Education, Penn State World Campus.

92. Richard A. Van Gieson, Ph.D., Professor, Economics, Sonoma State University, Rohnert Park, CA.

93. Norman J. Van Houten, Ph.D., Adjunct Faculty, New Jersey Institute of Technology.

94. Jaroslav V. Vaverka, MS, Applied Engineering and Technology Professor, California University of Pennsylvania.

95. Michael Watson, Ph.D., Psychology Professor, Burlington College, Vermont.

96. Steven Wehrenberg, Lecture in Organizational Sciences, George Washington University.

97. David Young, Ph.D., Professor of Theater, University of Florida.

This is only a small sample of the thousands of CPU graduates teaching at State and private colleges and universities. I estimate, based on a Google.com search, and other sources, that several thousand college and university faculty have degrees from CPU, often the Ph.D. degree.

My Own Experience

While pursuing my course work at CPU, I was very impressed with both the quality and the format used by the school. I ended up putting more work into this degree than for those I completed at major public state universities. This opinion was also shared by those persons that I interviewed for this paper. For example, Dr. David Gardner, now emeritus professor at Boston University stated that when he applied to CPU for a second doctorate he was a full time Boston University tenured faculty and would not have gotten my second doctorate from CPU if I thought it was a diploma mill. I was on the CPU faculty along with a number of faculty members of other prestigious universities for several years. I chaired several doctoral dissertations during this period. I required the same rigorous scholarship of CPE
When completing CPU courses, I soon noticed a “spiritual” side was being advocated in several of the readings and assignments. Of the 40 or so books I read for the degree, one in particular stands out—the Eastern Philosophy intelligent design work by Gary Zukav titled *The Dancing Wu Li Masters*. Using quantum theory, particle physics, and relativity (the new physics), he argued for intelligent design in the universe. This, of course, raised a red flag, and my perception in 1990 was that, sooner or later, this would get them into big trouble. I soon was proved correct. Some of the course work also looked at so-called “alternative” or wholistic medical treatment approaches (alternatives to standard orthodox medicine), which also raised a red flag. Of the books in this area included *Health: A Holistic Approach* by Dennis Chernin, M.D., and Gregory Manteuffel, M.D. This book covered nutrition, yoga, stress therapy, and even homeopathy.

I was negative to some of these ideas, yet it did not hurt to be exposed to them. Medical heresy sometimes becomes medical orthodoxy. For example, I had high blood pressure when pursuing these courses. I had in the past talked to my doctor about various alternative techniques used to deal with this problem (specifically nutrition and exercise). At that time, the nutrition-exercise health solution was still seen as quackish (Adele Davis and other nutritional gurus had published extensively in this area, but mainline medicine tended to discredit their work, pointing out that many of those who published in this area were not qualified physicians, although some had undergraduate degrees, or even graduate degrees, in nutrition). Both nutrition and exercise have since moved more into the mainstream and, it turns out, that at least this advice was ahead of its time.

It is obvious from much of the criticism of CPU that their advocating alternative approaches to orthodox medicine was a major reason for fierce opposition to the school. Critics of the school spend much time attacking their “alternative” medicine approach. One Web site
Stephen Barrett (who, according to http://www.altcpualumni.org/wholisticed/hartal2001b.html, lost his medical license) makes it clear that their antagonism to CPU is due to the fact that a few of the over 10,000 CPU graduates became involved in alternative health activities. If more CPU graduates were involved then the average graduate of other colleges is not known, but it is implied on this web site that this was the case (this section of this web site is irresponsible; for an effective rebuttal to Barrett, see http://www.altcpualumni.org/wholisticed/hartal2001b.html).

Much of the attack against CPU is also against John Gray, often by radical feminists. Some people do not like his wildly popular multi-million seller “pop psychology” books, and they attack CPU in order to discredit him. Could the attacks on Gray be due to jealousy? Many people would agree that even a Ph.D. from Harvard would not equal the status of a best-selling author, even if the books were in the area of pop psychology.

I learned later, according to several individuals who looked into the situation, that the religion and related concerns evidently were important in revoking Columbia Pacific’s license to operate in California, a fate not dissimilar to what happened to the Institute for Creation Research Graduate School (although ICR appealed their denial, and eventually prevailed in court).

Evidence that bias was involved in the CPU license loss is indicated by the fact that, as testified by Dr. Betty Dow, a former employee of the State Council for Private Post Secondary and Vocational Education (CPPVE), Sheila Hawkins, then the assistant director of CPPVE, made up her mind to close CPU a full two years before the council inspectors had even visited the school for their on site evaluation! (Court of Appeals Case AO 8982; Marvin Superior Court Case No. 172634, pp. 19-20 appellants’ opening brief).
Nor is it true that the school is closed down. They are still operating in Wyoming, and are licensed by the state there as a post-secondary education institution (private schools licensing act w.s.21-2-401). On their web site, they now openly note the “spiritual” dimension of their educational program. President Richard Crews retired from the school, and several other changes motivated the staff to move the school to Wyoming.

The observations about what happened to CPU correspond with the findings of a recent national study on accreditation. The study found that “accreditation is a poor indicator of educational quality” (Neal, 2003, p. 1) and that accreditors tend to focus their attention almost entirely on a college’s inputs and policies, and pay little attention to the quality of the curriculum, instruction, and learning outcomes. They ask, for example, whether the library is large enough, whether the school has a mission statement, whether the student body is diverse enough, whether the financing appears adequate, and so on. Educational quality is presumed as long as the school meets the numerous input standards. It is exceedingly rare for a school to receive any accrediting sanction—much less revocation—on the grounds of poor academic quality. “The accreditation system has received very little scrutiny despite the fact that the accreditors have the power to decide whether a college is good enough to be allowed to receive federal student aid funds,” Leef said. “Congress thought it was utilizing a reliable system for separating academically sound institutions from those that would take the money but offer little educational value. The trouble is that students can now graduate from accredited schools with an education in name only” (Neal, 2003, p. 1).

A report summarized the study as follows:

Lawmakers largely criticized the country’s 50-year-old accreditation process, claiming that it fails to ensure academic quality, lacks accountability and drives up college costs for administrators and students—Chronicle of Higher Education, Oct. 2, 2002 (quoted in Neal, p. 1).

Interestingly, the state agency that attacked CPU was itself shut down about a year later by the governor of California. According to the governor, it was shut down for carrying out a “vendetta” against certain schools. Governor Pete Wilson’s veto of AB 2960 Assembly Bill regarding the then Council for Private Post Secondary Vocational Education is part of his June
9/30/96 letter where he states, in part: “I am concerned about the number of schools, all of whom are still operating, that have described a pattern of reprisals and their only recourse is to take their questions and objections to court. Surely, the Council itself should provide some administrative appeal process short of litigation.” (The complete letter can be read on http”//www.leginfo.ca.gov/pub/95-96/bill/asm/ab_2951-3000/ab_2960_vt_960930.html). This Neal study also found that “accrediting associations have clearly adopted a political agenda” and have tried to force colleges to confirm to this agenda. Also available is a document titled The Birth and Death by Execution of California’s CPPVE found at: www.altcpu-alumni.org/chronicles/cppveorigins.html. Information regarding the actions of the Council is public and is available in California government archives.

The reasons given for closing down CPU include awarding a degree without the professor reading the thesis. This was also a problem I am personally aware of at two universities at which I have taught. It is so common that I have often felt the professors should be tested on the content of the thesis they were supposed to have read! The same thing is true of papers written for classes.

Another reason given for closing CPU was that the university “failed to employ duly qualified faculty” (a claim that was never qualified or quantified). This was also a problem at several colleges where I have taught. At one school, all six faculty who were hired in one year alone lacked Ph.D.s—but all were minorities (and the white males with Ph.D.s who applied were not hired). There may be several reasons for this, including the fact that some small colleges tend to hire “known entities”—mostly part-timers or female spouses of current faculty. And most men cannot support a family on part-time teaching, which usually pays below $10,000 a year for the equivalent of full-time work. As a result, their wives teach part-time (often for years) earning poverty wages until they are hired full-time (which, at times, some of them are).
The last claim was that CPU “awarded excessive experiential learning to many students.” This is also becoming a problem in some universities (especially at large state universities), and especially for classes called “readings” or “directed study,” which, as is well known, usually entails far less work than a normal class. For three semester hours, one can fulfill the class requirements by doing a 15-page paper that may require as little as a total of a week’s work in a normal class (or 1/16 the total work), or even less for some independent study classes. Fortunately, some professors have high standards, and this does not happen in their classes. At my college, we have caught students who turned in papers printed off the internet (and, no doubt, many others who did this were not caught). A published student complaint about CPU that is of interest is as follows:

When Margaret Chester decided to get her doctorate in health and human services in 1996, Columbia Pacific University sounded perfect. Based in San Rafael, Calif., the distance-learning institution offered a self-paced curriculum that would allow Chester to earn her Ph.D. ...The beauty of the school was its flexibility. Each student prepared “learning contracts” that defined his or her own path of independent study. ...Things went smoothly at first. The 25 or so papers Chester wrote garnered good grades and complimentary comments. But once she began preparing her dissertation, Chester began to worry. She said her faculty adviser rejected three proposals without providing meaningful advice, except to urge her to buy yet another book on how to write a dissertation proposal. ...After much soul-searching—Chester had worked hard and already spent $8,600 in tuition alone—she withdrew (Mannix, 2001, p. 68).

It would seem that her major concern was that, after completing the heavy level of requirements (25 or so papers), she was frustrated with getting her thesis accepted (I had a very similar experience at Wayne State University in Detroit with my Ph.D. thesis, and was not given much help either, so consulted friends, including a professional writer, for help). The implication of other CPU critics is that their requirements were too minimal, while this student implies that they were too stiff! Mannix continued: “The judge who ruled to yank the school’s approval cited such flaws as the failure to develop course objectives.” This, if true, seems easy to fix (all my
CPU courses had objectives, so I doubt if this is true). The article concludes that degrees granted before 1997 “are valid in the state’s view” (Mannix, 2001, p. 68).

If these concerns were real, CPU should have been given time to remedy them. At all of the colleges where I have worked, numerous shortcomings were noted by the on-site visit team. The agency did not close the school or deny accreditation; rather, we were allowed to work on remediying the perceived shortcomings. Interestingly, nothing was said in the state report about the quality of instruction or the satisfaction of the students with the program—a concern that conforms with the report on accreditation cited above! Mannix concludes:

For most of the time she was enrolled, Chester had no clue that her school’s status was in jeopardy. Indeed, some graduates of the school, which had been awarding degrees for two decades, have been stunned and angered to learn that the quality of their alma mater was in question. “We found the academic rigor to be extremely stringent,” says a clinical analyst at a major California health system who earned a Ph.D. in 1999. The school’s attorney, Orrin Grover, says he hopes to file a lawsuit to overturn the decision. “I don’t want to criticize the Court of Appeals, but they are just wrong” (2001, p. 70).

Nonetheless, regardless of where this lawsuit leads, my degree is fully legal. A state education memo dated May 23, 2000 said that

Students Who Received Degrees From CPU Before June 25, 1997: Your degree, and any certificate or license you received by virtue of the degree, should not be affected. CPU had legal approval up to June 25, 1997, and the degrees it issued on or before June 25, 1997 are legal (http://www.bppve.ca.gov/press_releases/cpuweb.htm).

Columbia Pacific has now proven to be a forerunner of a major educational movement. The requirements of many college classes now often involve on-line study. Hundreds of colleges now offer so called distance-learning classes on the internet (schools that use regular mail are referred to by the derogatory term “correspondence schools,” while the use of electronic mail is now accepted as “distance learning”). Graduate schools now offer MBA’s or other graduate degrees that require only one night a week class for a mere 18 months! In comparison, my
masters degree from a medical school took over three years, often three days a week in the lab, and much time in class and in the library! Even some of America’s leading universities now offer “on-line” degrees, including Johns Hopkins University, which has an on-line MPH (their “in class” MPH is considered the best in the business). Others have made similar observations:

Some CPU grads are not using their degrees, as Roger mentions. Many are still teaching in accredited schools (CPU was respected during the 1980's and early 1990's, and there continued to be a wave of tolerance for alternative approaches). One guy I know is finishing his Canadian PhD and no longer mentions CPU on his resume. He says he did just as much work for his CPU PhD as the Canadian PhD (http://www.degreeinfo.com/static/forum_archive/5/5320/thread_page_1.html).

Summary

It is clear that the system of higher education in the United States, and especially California, is now undergoing major turmoil. It also appears that government corruption is involved in the CPU case and that this situation should be investigated.

References


