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Newfield, C. (2008). *Unmaking the Public University: The Forty-Year Assault on the Middle Class*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.

Review by Sam Cordes

Professor Newfield is professor of English at the University of California–Santa Barbara, and his latest work is an exceptionally provocative read. I am certain there is widespread recognition of Newfield's basic concern: the decline in support and funding for public universities since the 1970s, following post–World War II economic growth, puts the United States' economic and social progress at great risk.

The concern over the secondary effects of declining public funding, such as rapidly escalating tuition, is also likely to be widely shared. Another secondary effect that often has considerable downside risk is the decision by higher education administrators to look longingly at certain types of alternative revenue streams that are either not very lucrative (e.g., the sale of intellectual property and patents), or that have unintended consequences. An example of the latter is "chasing money" (via grants, contracts, fee-for-service, and philanthropic initiatives) to the piont that resources and attention are diverted from the core functions of the university or from certain foundational disciplines (namely, the humanities and social sciences) to contemporary "hot fields." Newfield, in part three of his four-part book, does an outstanding job of questioning this new "business model" of public universities.

My guess is there is much less consensus about Newfield's hypothesis as to why state support and appropriations for public universities have waned so much over the past three to four decades. He argues that the decline in public support is part of a larger systemic cultural war in which conservative elites felt threatened in the 1960s and 1970s because state universities were producing large numbers of people who supported a left-leaning agenda, including an attack on the free-market economy. Although this argument certainly has some merit, alternative hypotheses are also persuasive. For example, others have argued that public universities, especially land-grant universities, were once linked much more closely to undergraduate education and practical problem-solving. As faculty became more research oriented, however (due, in part, to an infusion of federal support for basic research that began as a trickle in the 1950s and subsequently rose dramatically), they and administrators shifted their orientation and became somewhat

detached or agnostic toward what they once considered their bread and butter.

It is surprising that Newfield makes no mention of such alternative explanations for the decline in public support, and does not consider the possibility that various explanations, including his own, may each have a role. It is also unfortunate that Newfield spends only the last four pages of the book discussing how to reverse the downward spiral of public funding support for public universities.

Readers of the *Journal of Higher Education Outreach and Engagement* may also be disappointed that Newfield focuses almost exclusively on campus activities and frames everything in the traditional lexicon of teaching and research. There is no mention of broader definitions of scholarship and the role of the "engaged university" *(e.g., Boyer, 1991, and the Kellogg Commission on the Future of State and Land-Grant Universities, 1999)*. "Public service" is mentioned for the first time on page 68. One component of outreach and engagement—technology transfer—commands half a dozen pages at the end of Chapter 12. Even here, however, technology transfer is defined narrowly, focusing entirely on revenue streams from patents and inventions.

That Newfield effectively ignores outreach and engagement does not mean readers of this journal should ignore his book. First, engagement and outreach are part of the larger fabric of public universities: Newfield gives us much to think about in terms of the historical "big picture" of public universities, within which outreach and engagement functions reside. Second, Newfield's failure to link his basic hypothesis to outreach and engagement creates an extremely fertile field for exploration within the scholarship of outreach and engagement.

With respect to the second point, I encourage readers of Newfield's book to read it with their minds focused on how they might fill this void in the scholarship of outreach and engagement. For example, Newfield argues that "the public good" dimension of public universities has become somewhat marginalized. Assuming that is the case, how can outreach and engagement work to help address this challenge? Moreover, given that Newfield considers only teaching and research as the core mission of public universities, what is the public good dimension of outreach and engagement? In other words, what outreach and engagement activities meet the criteria of a public good? How should we price those engagement and outreach activities that are *not* public goods?

As another example, Newfield argues that the humanities have been hit particularly hard as overall public funding and support for public universities has declined. He further argues that it is now, more than ever, that we need such expertise to help facilitate social progress and cultural understanding. My sense is that the humanities are much less likely to be involved in outreach and engagement than fields such as the agricultural sciences and professional schools (e.g., colleges of business, health sciences, and education). If that is the case, why? What can be done to encourage more outreach and engagement in the humanities?

Finally, to what extent can robust outreach and engagement functions help rebuild the social contract with the public? Newfield never considers the hypothesis that they might, which is unfortunate. It is those who are committed to outreach and engagement who need to lift up and test this hypothesis—that public university outreach and engagement can help restore public confidence, support, and funding for higher education.

References

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About the Reviewer

Sam Cordes is associate vice provost for engagement at Purdue University.