



## Safeguarding Public Health from Higher Education

Doug Dix<sup>1\*</sup>

Department of Health Science and Nursing, University of Hartford, West Hartford, Connecticut, USA

\*Corresponding author: Doug Dix, Professor of Biology and Medical Technology, Department of Health Science and Nursing, University of Hartford, West Hartford, Connecticut-06117, USA, Tel: 860 243-1116, E-mail: [Dix@hartford.edu](mailto:Dix@hartford.edu)

It is common to assume that colleges and universities provide service to the public. In the U.S., these institutions are granted tax-exemption on this assumption. In times long past, education, in itself, may have been a public service. But it isn't that anymore as the unintended consequences of progress degrade human habitat and social fabric [1]. Education for progress could easily do more harm than good. I recently provided evidence for such detriment among needy nations [2].

Of the 144 nations providing adequate data [3], 38 qualified as both poor and sick by objective criteria. In order of increasing need, these nations were Djibouti, Comoros, Angola, Lesotho, Gambia, Guinea Bissau, Mauritania, Sierra Leone, Liberia, Laos, Central African Republic, Togo, Papua, Rwanda, Ghana, Cambodia, Senegal, Benin, Burundi, Yemen, Guinea, Zambia, Cameroon, Mali, Burkina Faso, Sudan, Cote d'Ivoire, Uganda, Malawi, Mozambique, Kenya, Tanzania, Democratic Republic of Congo, Nigeria, Ethiopia, Pakistan, Bangladesh, and India. The number of accredited four-year colleges and universities [4] and the number of people in multidimensional poverty [3] in these nations was found to correlate with an almost perfect coefficient of .979 [2].

Correlation can occur by coincidence and, therefore, does not imply a cause-effect relationship. But coincidence is unusual, and an  $r$ -value of .979 is difficult to dismiss. It's tempting to imagine how causality might operate. I cannot imagine how poor people could cause universities to proliferate, but it's easy to imagine how universities could fuel poverty. India, for example, has 150 million more desperately poor citizens than reside on the entire continent of Africa and 140 million more desperately poor citizens than reside in all other Asian nations combined. But instead of directing government resources to alleviate poverty, the world's largest "democracy" is sending those funds to outer space because the intellectual challenge is more important at India's colleges and universities than the rudimentary process of alleviating poverty.

Intellectuals distract from urgent need wherever they operate. Do South Africans really want the world's largest telescope? They've got it whether they want it or not [5]. But that's not how democracy is supposed to operate.

This note is about rich nations, where need is difficult to demonstrate. What is demonstrated, however, is a dearth of benefit from colleges and universities. The Organization of Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) consists of 34 nations: Australia, Austria, Belgium, Canada, Chile, Czech Republic,

Denmark, Estonia, Finland, France, Germany, Greece, Hungary, Iceland, Ireland, Israel, Italy, Japan, Republic of Korea, Luxembourg, Mexico, Netherlands, New Zealand, Norway, Poland, Portugal, Slovakia, Slovenia, Spain, Sweden, Switzerland, Turkey, United Kingdom, and United States. All these nations have gross domestic product per capita, GDP/c, in purchasing power parity, greater than \$15,700 [6]. And all are ranked as "very high human development" except for Mexico and Turkey, which are ranked as "high human development" [6].

The human development index, HDI, is the UNDP's favorite summary statistic. Among OECD nations, HDI correlates positively with GNP/c ( $r = .796$ ) and mean schooling ( $r = .756$ ), and negatively with under-five mortality rate, U5MR, ( $r = -.729$ ), economic disparity ( $r = -.513$ ), and unemployment rate ( $r = -.404$ ) [6]. Mean schooling demonstrates the same pattern, correlating positively with GNP/c ( $r = .515$ ) and negatively with U5MR ( $r = -.516$ ), economic disparity ( $r = -.452$ ), and unemployment rate ( $r = -.487$ ).

The number of accredited four-year colleges and universities in each OECD nation [4] was divided by the population of that nation [6] in order to give colleges and universities per capita, univ/c. Over the 34 OECD nations, univ/c did not demonstrate a statistically significant correlation coefficient with HDI, mean schooling, GNP/c, U5MR, economic disparity, or unemployment rate. The significance of  $r$  was determined by a  $t$ -test that showed  $r$ -values less than 0.3 to be insignificant ( $p > .05$ ). This raises the question of how the assumed public service of colleges and universities is manifest in OECD nations. It certainly isn't manifest in health promotion.

Most undergraduates drink alcohol, and half of these binge drinks [7]. In increasing numbers, colleges and universities sell alcohol for profit. Tobacco use is common at college and not limited to cigarettes [8]. Many colleges and universities sell tobacco for profit. Essentially all of them sell junk food. Essentially all undergraduates struggle with stress.

Colleges and universities are famous for violent, concussion-prone sports. By some estimates 25% of female undergraduates are sexually assaulted [9]. Colleges and universities are lax in preventing and prosecuting such crimes. Where is the evidence of public service?

The number of colleges and universities in OECD nations correlates almost perfectly ( $r = .964$ ) with the population of those nations. What could this mean? Why, for instance, might larger populations create more colleges and universities instead of just more admissions to one or a few colleges and universities? The most

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obvious answer is craving for what isn't offered. New colleges and universities are created to fill desired niches.

Students, Alumni, and Faculty Engaged in Gaining Universal Access to Rights and Democracy, SAFEGUARD, is a new coalition for collaboration designed to fill the currently unoccupied niche for conspicuous public service. It seeks to make the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and the Millennium Development Goals important components of every college's and every university's strategic plan. It will operate peacefully and with good will and good humor by advocacy, protest, and, when possible, boycott. And it seeks international, intercollegiate collaboration.

One way to protect the public from academic abuse is to calculate for each college and university the tax that would be owed and the benefit that is provided, and to demand payment of tax that is not offset by public benefit.

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