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Post-Game Analysis: Senior Cole Wilson on Dr. Chris Newfield and the Future of Higher Education

by

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AMS :: ATX is a blog dedicated to representing the many activities and interests of the department of American Studies at The University of Texas at Austin. Together with the department's Twitter feed, this blog exists to serve the AMS and Austin communities by acting as a hub for up-to-date information on events and opportunities at UT and beyond.





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Last month, **Dr. Chris Newfield** came to UT to deliver a lecture as part of the department's "History and Future of Higher Education" class, team taught with Rich Reddick in Educational Administration and Kate Catterall in Design. This experimental, multidisciplinary, collaborative course has addressed pressing problems and issues in higher education over the course of this semester. For more information about the course, you can listen to [this interview](#) with the three professors on KOOP radio.

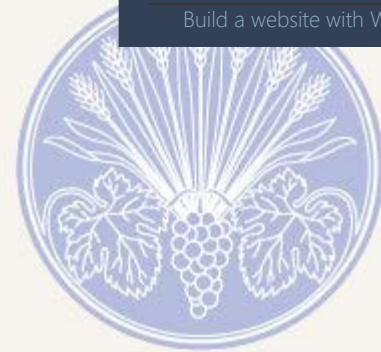
Senior **Cole Wilson** offers this tremendous write-up of the event, which emphasized the troubling relationship between privatization

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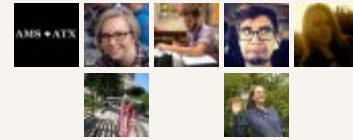
and higher education.

Dr. Christopher Newfield came to the University of Texas as a guest of the American Studies Department and of the course instructors behind the History and Future of Higher Education class. His work in the critical university studies field spiked the interest of Dr. Julia Mickenberg, Dr. Richard Reddick, and Dr. Kate Catterall who jointly invited Dr. Newfield to discuss his upcoming book, *The Great Mistake: How Private Sector Models Wreck Universities – and How We Can Reconstruct Them*. Dr. Newfield is currently a professor of literature and American Studies at The University of California at Santa Barbra where he has worked closely with the school's budgetary and planning committees respectively.

Dr. Newfield's lecture focused on four major issues in higher education: the continued need for more funding in public universities today, the prioritization of STEM fields over the liberal arts, fine arts, and natural sciences, the newfound notion that Bachelors Degrees are a private good, and the privatization of industry-university partnerships. He proceeded to elaborate on these issues, arguing that universities have begun to embrace a market based model where costs rise continuously, causing student debt to rise in cadence. This has pinned a hefty price tag on the contemporary Bachelor's Degree, turning it into a perceived private good and

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marginalizing innovation due to cost.

He went on to argue that the partnerships between private corporations and universities that are forged in a relationship where research exits the university through the private sector and produces income from patented ideas do not give back to the research producing university. He stated that this broken relationship has forced price increases across universities as impotence is continuously placed on costly research in the STEM fields with no substantial income to match the financial output.

In a conversation later that evening, I pressed Dr. Newfield on the possibility of philanthropic donations as an income bridge between the two worlds. He argued that reliance on philanthropic donations typically demands yet more income from the school, that simply “money attracts money.”

While Dr. Newfield did not believe philanthropic donations to be a valid cure to what he called “cost disease,” he argued that a revolution in the classroom and a counter to the STEM field would. Tailored or “personalized” instruction would halt marginalized innovation caused by cost increases. He countered STEM’s dominance by suggesting collaboration across disciplines in the class room advocating for the construction of hybrid classes much like the Future and History of Higher Education.

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Opposed to a reliance of donations as I suggested, Dr. Newfield argued that the injection of non-commercialized technology into all aspects of a university, especially the liberal arts, social sciences, and natural sciences would bolster innovation and result in greater income equality within the university.

Finally, Dr. Newfield countered the notion that a Bachelors Degree is a private good by charging the owners of those degrees with the duty of explaining and expressing the societal value of their degrees whenever applicable. In short, Dr. Newfield demands a culture change led by those with degrees.

For a complete taping of Dr. Newfield presentation, visit the Texas Learning Sciences' Vimeo page [here](#). Look out for his next book coming out later this year, or check out some his previous works like *Unmaking the Public University: The Forty-year Assault on the Middle Class*.

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