Chapter 4
How Colleges and Universities Create the Value of Their Degrees: Beyond the Formal Curriculum

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ABSTRACT
This chapter explores how colleges and universities have struggled to define who they are and what they are responsible for doing. From the understanding that society has increasingly equated educated with employed and highly compensated, the discussion highlights the formal and informal education students receive, as well as the external stakeholders who attempt to regulate this learning. Authors extend the idea of a formal curriculum to the ‘hidden curriculum,’ that is, the unintended learning and experiences students encounter on campus. The hidden curriculum can play an important role in the student development process, and in many cases, has become the de facto value-added experience that an institution can offer. College policy makers and leaders can use the idea of a hidden curriculum to their advantage in working with students, but must first take the step of creating expectations of student learning and aligning their activities with learning outcomes.

INTRODUCTION
Colleges and universities around the globe have invested heavily in infrastructure, facilities, and technology. Evidence of streamlined business operations are seen daily by students, faculty, families, and public constituents, and in many institutions, there has been a blurring of lines about the effectiveness and need

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for improved learning spaces and the desire to have comfortable, entertaining environments for students to congregate. Aside from the physical aspects of campus, many institutions continue to struggle in their attempts to document and demonstrate student learning. The default throughout much of the world has been on the relationship between enrollment, graduation, and employment. Institutions have been drawn into the discussion of finding jobs for students as they graduate, provide technical training for careers, and have struggled to align the developmental aspects of higher education with institutional activities and academic rigor. Even more specifically, students enter higher education with a strong sense of believing that the experience is career training, and many, if not most, equate career preparation with an academic major, and many students even ask and demand earning salary and life style information for graduating with a specific degree. The past three decades of student enrollment trends have confirmed this, as occupational programs such as business administration, nursing and other health professions, and legal studies have grown dramatically.

Institutions, through their academic programming and curriculum, have struggled to segregate technical skill knowledge with other types of learning, such as interpersonal communication skills, emotional intelligence, and broadly, the maturity necessary to navigate life outside of formal schooling. Some programs have ‘built-in’ some of this needed learning by creating specific classes or required experiences, such as ‘public speaking for business majors’ or ‘patient communications’ in nursing. Other programs, however, rely on the campus experience to somehow transform students from youth to adulthood, and for online programs, this experiential growth and development has been difficult to document and structure.

The history of higher education institutions in the United States varies from the European tradition in the implementation of in loco parentis, meaning that the institution has had historical responsibility for the student (in place of the parents). The role dissipated in the United States over 50 years ago, and in Europe before then, meaning that the two systems, similar to others around the world, expect students to grow, mature, and intellectually develop during their enrollment and that much of this is expected to be the responsibility of the individual student. The notion of self-responsibility, or self-directedness, has in turn been the subject of much discussion and debate, particularly in relation to the question of how much guidance an institution should give a student, or how much guidance and involvement parents should be allowed to have with their college aged students.

The result of the desire for career education and life preparation accompanied by institutional expectations for student development results in a tension between students (and their parents or supporters) and the institution. The tension is fraught with challenges and opportunities and often results in varying levels of satisfaction with the collegiate experience. Those who find jobs with salaries that are consistent with their expectations tend to report a positive college experience, while those who struggle finding a job or getting into graduate school or even earning a lower salary tend to be less satisfied. Similarly, major choice that is related to an occupation and employment outcomes is related to higher levels of satisfaction. As higher education institutions are primarily designed to offer instructional programs for students, they seek to satisfy student needs in some way.

An attempt to satisfy student needs on the part of colleges and universities is also difficult, as students must be prepared to learn, possibly fail, and ultimately master material and grow. The attempt to over-satisfy student needs has been the groundwork for accusations about grade inflation and the over production of degrees with little academic rigor (e.g., degree mills). The unintentional middle ground that institutions have arrived at is the provision of massive entertainment and posh living amid charges that the academic requirements have been significantly reduced while affluent life-style changes have been added to the institution (Sperber, 2011).