

NEOLIBERAL POLICIES AND HIGHER EDUCATION: A COMPARISON BETWEEN SOCIOLOGY AND PSYCHOLOGY DEPARTMENTS IN PUBLIC AND PRIVATE UNIVERSITIES IN TURKEY*

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Abstract

Today, neo-liberal policies are changing the higher education arena. Students and the corporations, that are their future employers, expect universities to operate and supply knowledge which can only be market-relevant. The transformation of Turkey's higher education system is parallel to the stated global transformation of higher education systems through neoliberal policies. When we look at Turkish higher education, we see that even though sociology and psychology disciplines are both branches of social sciences, in comparison to public universities, following market demand, establishing a psychology department is preferred to establishing a sociology department by private universities.

Keywords: Neo-liberalism, Higher education, Turkish universities, Higher education demand

Neoliberal Politikalar ve Yükseköğretim: Türkiye'de Devlet ve Vakıf Üniversiteleri, Sosyoloji ve Psikoloji Bölümleri Üzerine Bir Karşılaştırma

Öz

Günümüzde neo-liberal politikalar, yükseköğretim alanını dönüştürmektedir. Öğrenciler ve onları ileride istihdam edecek şirketler, üniversitelerin pazara yönelik şekilde işlerlik kazanması ve bilgi üretmesini beklemektedir. Türkiye'de yükseköğretimde yaşanan dönüşüm de, dünya yükseköğretim alanında küresel anlamda yaşanan dönüşümlerle paralellik göstermektedir. Türkiye yükseköğretimine baktığımızda, ikisi de sosyal bilimler alanında yer alan disiplinler olmalarına rağmen, devlet üniversiteleri ile kıyaslandığında, vakıf üniversitelerinde pazar talebi değerlendirilerek, psikoloji bölümü açmanın, sosyoloji bölümü açmaya tercih edildiği görülmektedir.

Anahtar Kelimeler: Neo-liberalizm, Yükseköğretim, Türkiye'de üniversiteler, Yükseköğretim talebi

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Introduction: Neoliberal Ideology

This study is part of a PhD thesis in progress, which is concerned with how universities are transforming through neoliberal policies and how this is affecting the academics in the field of social sciences in Turkey. Our aim in this study is to provide an outline for the effect of neoliberal policies on higher education, mainly for the universities and to present a small case in which we see one of these effects taking place in the higher education system of Turkey. We will start by briefly introducing neoliberal policies in general and will be moving on to the subject of the effect of these policies on higher education. Later on, we will be looking at how these neoliberal higher education strategies are creating a hierarchy between different university departments and will present our case in which we compare two branches of social sciences; sociology and psychology, trying to highlight the fact that private universities are establishing departments according to the market demand in the higher education arena. We take this case as a part of a broader subject of privatization of higher education and see it as an indicator of how universities might be transforming towards becoming corporate entities that look at disciplines from a business perspective carefully calculating demand and supply.

The economic crises of the 1970's and the fall of the (working) class, lead to the collapse of the idea of Keynesianism (Crouch, 2014: 10-28). The fall of the idea of "real-socialism" based on Soviet Union, has also been a setback for the left economic perspective (Bora & Erdoğan, 2015: 16). After the collapse of the idea of Keynesianism, neoliberal economic theory has taken over the globe.

Taking into consideration the thoughts of libertarian neo-classicists, Tilman (1976: 424) describes how individuals in society are regarded in the neoliberal ideology: "(...) the notion of 'economic man,' endowed with a hedonistic psyche, which makes him a 'lightning calculator' of pleasure and pain and a rational maximizer of self-interest; (...)". These rational individuals are thought to have the capacity to take their fate in their own hands and work for a better social position. When they succeed it is their success and when they fail, it is their fault. This makes the capitalist system unquestionable. Everyone is thought to enter the race in an equal position; everyone's chances to succeed are regarded as even.

Everyone bears the sole responsibility of their success or failure and in this neoliberal ideology individual good is prioritized to societal good. The notion of societal good is replaced with personal responsibility (Oulette, 2009: 225). Neoliberal arguments state that the market is more 'efficient' than the state (Kandiko, 2010: 156) so all public institutions are to be privatized (Çavdar, 2013: 25). Even when these institutions are kept public they are expected to behave like corporate entities. Crouch (2014: 184) states that neo-liberalism

forces all institutions like universities, hospitals, charity organizations and even the government itself to act like corporations. This means that they will have to enter the market competition on the basis of 'efficiency' principles built on profit maximization. These institutions will be deemed inefficient since they carry multiple missions, with outcomes which may not always be profitable. Inefficiency is not tolerated in the market, and this is the neoliberal threat for higher education. We will try to see how neo-liberalism affects higher education in this regard.

Neoliberal Transformation of Universities

Taking the University as the main institution of higher education, we will try to look at the transformation that the universities are going through with the neoliberal policies taking effect in the higher education arena.

The idea of modern university is rooted in the philosophical contributions of Humboldt, Fichte and Schlegel (Charle & Verger, 2005: 86). In this standpoint, university is seen as the place where national values and culture are transmitted to the citizens, who will be serving their country by acquiring a scientific education and carrying on the national heritage (Tekeli, 2003: 130). The university, which is rooted in this idea, is referred to as Humboldtian University and has been influential in the higher education arena since the 19th century.

Humboldtian University is closely linked to the idea of nation-state and welfare state. When societal changes occur towards decreasing national ties and destroying the welfare state, the existence of this modern university will become problematic (Kwiek, 2002: 135-139). Today we see the unprecedented development of knowledge and technology in a new era called 'knowledge society' (Önder Erol, 2013: 20). The commodification of knowledge, the process of globalization that erases national borders, together with the acceptance of neoliberal policies, which is destroying the idea of welfare state throughout the globe, means that, universities are to be transformed and higher education is to establish new values.

Higher education becomes a commodity to be bought and sold. The fact that higher education should be treated as a commodity has first been mentioned by Merrill Lynch. This institution has stated that higher education market carried a lot of profit potential. (Lynch, 2014: 1) Global institutional actors such as The United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO), World Bank, International Monetary Fund (IMF), The Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) and European Union (EU) started forming policies for higher education and have been carrying these policies throughout the world (Vaira, 2004: 488). World Bank has advocated the establishment of private universities and proposed the allocation of public funds to universities on the basis of performance (Lynch,

2014: 2). As can be seen globally influential institutions are imposing the neoliberal agenda.

The global higher education market has proved to be very profitable indeed. In the year 2008-2009, the foreign students have contributed 15 billion Dollars to the American economy (Nardali, 2011: 26). while higher education was one of the biggest export items in Australia in the same year. Benefiting from the student flow mainly from China, India and Asia towards the OECD countries, UK has earned 43 billion dollars from the international university students in 2007-2008 (Lynch, 2014: 4). Globalization has been a vehicle for neo-liberalism enabling the smooth flow of capital- in this case capital in the area of higher education- through borders.

While neo-liberalism means the state is downsizing, the financing of services by the state in the time of the welfare state and accordingly the financing of universities by the state is gradually decreasing. In many countries, universities are expected to create their own financial resources getting into contact with external actors (Tilak, 2012). After World War II we see the massification of higher education throughout the world. The rise in student numbers has led scholars to claim that higher education has come out of its 'elite' status (Enders, 1999; Enders, De Boer, & Weyer, 2013; Parker & Jary, 1995). These developments- increasing student numbers and decreasing state funds- oblige universities to form new partnerships.

Another outcome of these developments is the change in the relationship between students and academics. Through neoliberal policies, the students are seen more as a 'human-capital' or as customers (Nalbantoğlu, 2003: 12). When students are treated as customers their relationship to academics are established on business principles. They will not be citizens with the right to education but customers with preferences (Lynch, 2014: 5). While students' preferences are very important in the higher education process, taking it as the only means to operate might mean that the traditional academic values will be renounced.

While the idea of the Humboldtian University is being abandoned, the new ideal university is being called the 'Excellence University'. The concept of excellence is taken directly from the corporate world (Tekeli, 2003: 137). Kwiek (2002: 142), tells us that this notion of excellence is actually referring to the most useable and hence marketable and easily reachable information. This University supplies the information that has the biggest use-value and exchange-value both to the external (corporate) stakeholders and to the students who are the future workers of these stakeholders.

With the effect of neoliberal policies, when business model is adopted by higher education, notions such as efficiency, total quality management and cost accounting take over higher educational efforts. When we apply these

notions directly, we would see many higher education activities as inefficient. When activities such as teaching, critical thinking and writing skills are not quantifiable in cost accounting, it will be hard to show that these activities are vital (Roberts & Donahue, 2000: 348). This means that the priorities in higher education might be shifting towards quantifiable activities. These will be assessed through performance criteria.

While there is deregulation in the higher education area, we see the new control through performance criteria. In this management, which concentrates only on the output, the key notion is 'accountability' (Lynch, 2014: 4-5). Governments want universities to be more accountable through their performance output (Pedro, 2009: 423). Therefore, universities are expected to perform better globally- attracting more international students. This is through performance calculations and university rankings. The outcome might be an obsession with performance where quantity will be prioritized to quality.

Since universities are expected to create their own resources, projects which will be funded by external sources, in other words marketable projects will be preferred by the university, causing a hierarchy between academics, research topics and eventually disciplines. Rhoades & Slaughter (1997: 25) state that: "What was once referred to as basic and then fundamental research is now often referred to in reports as curiosity-driven research". Academic curiosity which is the driving force behind scientific growth is now seen as a luxury. The incentives for research are not coming from the academic herself but from the outside environment. So, research is conducted more and more to fulfill market needs (Evans, 2007: 12-18). 'Publish or perish' becomes the main principle (Tekeli, 2003: 135) causing a superficiality in academic production (Gendron, 2008). In this regard quantity will become more important than quality and university departments are to be evaluated on their market value, which will bring a strict hierarchy posing a threat to certain university departments in certain national settings.

Neoliberal Threat on University Departments

Neoliberal policies are changing the university in many respects and one of these important changes is the way universities are establishing and closing down departments. Evans (2007: 5) states that, the respect for knowing and learning is renounced and any expertise that cannot be quantifiable and used towards meeting immediate societal (corporate) needs which becomes redundant and something to be afraid of. In the neoliberal era, as we have stated before, knowledge should always have a use and exchange value. Where all things are commodified, academic knowledge and departments start to be evaluated on the basis of market principles.

The change from the Humboldtian University to the Excellence University revolves around the concept of relevance. Kogan & Teichler (2007: 10) explain this as:

"Whereas the highest goal of the traditional academy was to create fundamental knowledge, what has been described as the 'scholarship of discovery', the new emphasis of the knowledge society is on useful knowledge or the 'scholarship of application'. This scholarship often involves the pooling and melding of insights from several disciplines and tends to focus on outcomes that have a direct impact on everyday life".

This tendency to see knowledge as a means to acquire immediate outcomes and the tendency to quantify every bit of knowledge and learning on the basis of market principles such as 'efficiency' is the neoliberal threat on academic departments. Questions arise such as 'What use does this academic endeavor carry in this department?' or 'Does this department provide a good career prospect to its graduates?' or 'Are these graduates valuable in the market?' When these questions become the only means of evaluating disciplines, we might expect a restructuring of academic departments in universities.

The public pushes higher education to provide what is demanded by the economy (specifically by the capitalists). Students and their parents become more aware of the market value of the academic degrees (Vaira, 2004: 490) . They become more conscious in their role as both consumers of higher education and the suppliers of labor. As we have stated, neoliberal argument regards the individual as a rational 'economic-man' who is able to make decisions that will have immediate effects on her well being. The system is unquestioned where the only one who is questioned is the individual herself, whether to see if she has made the right choices. The right career- higher educational degree choice is substantial in this manner.

The consumer interests in various degrees become a major factor in determining the future of the academic department. There are many studies in which students (and their parents) are considered as customers. For example, Evans (2007: 3) state that when students pay for their higher education they become customers. On the other hand, Rhoades and Slaughter (1997: 14) argue that students are not consumers-customers, but that they are inputs of the industry and the real consumer of the higher education service is the 'private, corporate employers'. The student is the future employee who is looking for a workforce training, a stable job and hence a secure future in that sense. Choosing a degree program becomes a very 'strategic' selection (Gumport, 2000: 79). Anwaruddin (2013: 371) uses three metaphors in describing students, as: 'consumers, managers and as a commodity'. The idea of the student as a manager is also important in our argument. As we have stated before, the individual is the manager of her future, determining the way to

success or failure in the neoliberal era. Students can be seen as managers of their lives, who are trying to make good business choices, such as their degree selection.

As an outcome of neoliberal policies, when universities become part of the corporate world, they are obliged to act as corporate entities taking a 'customer-centered approach' (Anwaruddin, 2013: 364; Lynch, 2014: 135). We see the restructuring of academic departments in this sense.

In 1994 UCLA closed down or merged 8 departments due to financial difficulties. California State University suggested closing down the Department of Sociology while in 1997 University of Chicago closed down the Graduate School of Education (Torres & Daniel, 2002: 440). Centre for Contemporary Cultural Studies and Department of Sociology has been closed down by University of Birmingham in 2002 (Anwaruddin, 2013: 366). The statement released by the University explaining the rationale behind their decision was 'the search for excellence' (Erdoğan, 2003: 43). University of Sussex's vice chancellor announced to lay off more than 100 employees and to close down less profitable departments (Anwaruddin, 2013: 366). All these examples show us a glimpse of the future in which the degree programs are swiftly and strategically altered according to immediate market needs.

Universities in Turkey

The first higher education institution of Republic of Turkey, Istanbul University, was transformed from Dar-ül fûnun as a result of the 'New University Reform' and was established in 1933 (Öklem, 1973: 44). A Humboldtian University was aimed to be achieved with this transformation (Tekeli, 2003). From the establishment of Istanbul University until the establishment of Council of Higher Education (YÖK), higher education has been a public service, developing through the public universities which were being established all around Turkey.

Neoliberal policies have taken effect after 1980's in Turkey. Turgut Özal is epitomized as the practitioner of neoliberal agenda in the country (Çavdar, 2013: 16). Establishment of Council of Ministry of Higher Education (YÖK) in 1981 is also a development that could be linked to the institutionalization of neo-liberalism in Turkey. The restructuring of higher education in the country cannot be separated from the structural adjustment efforts imposed on developing nations by international agencies such as the World Bank and IMF (Hız, 2010: 69). These efforts may be carried by state authorities themselves, just as we can see in the example of Turkey. Coşar & Ergün (2015: 106) argue that YÖK is the institution which enabled the enactment of neo-liberalism in higher education through authoritarianism and their argument is as follows: "In the larger picture, it can be argued that YÖK was designed to work in line with the

coup spirit: instituting the structural prerequisites for the smooth working of neoliberal transformation in Turkey".

Torres & Schugurensky (2002: 445), see a similar vehicle when analyzing the transformation of higher education in Latin America. They claim that the university restructuring is occurring through the "interesting combination of privatization and government control". We can see a common process of institutionalization of neoliberal policies.

Following the establishment of YÖK, we see the change in law which permits the establishment of foundation universities and the first foundation University-Bilkent University- is founded in 1984 (Erguvan, 2013: 138). The second private¹ university is Koç University which was established in 1992 (Nardalı, 2011: 34). Afterwards, we can say that the higher education in Turkey expanded with the establishment of private universities (Sargın, 2007: 114). Private universities increase in number, while as we will see higher education is still mostly a public service in Turkey.

Analysis and Concluding Thoughts: Comparison between Sociology and Psychology Departments in Turkey

Here we will try to present a case from Turkey which indicates that neoliberal policies transform universities into acting as corporate entities. These entities will try to assess the market demand and supply degree programs to the market according to this demand. While the transformation in public universities, with their big bureaucratic institutional structures is slow, the main product of the privatization of the higher education arena, which is private universities, are expected to act in total accordance with the neoliberal higher education market. We will now look at some descriptive higher education data. Our main concern is undergraduate formal education since other types of degree programs (such as Open University, PhD programs...) may be part of other discussions.

In the year 2014-2015, there are 193 universities in Turkey, of which 109 are public, 76 are private and 8 are private vocational schools (Üniversitelerimiz, 2015). In total, there are 6.062.886 students enrolled in the higher education system including, public, private institutions, in vocational training, undergraduate, masters and PhD programs and formal, secondary, distance and open education. When we look at the total number of students in undergraduate formal education, we see that there are a total number of 1.473.867 students of which 275.353 are enrolled in private higher education

¹ We will refer to these universities as private universities due to various reasons which may be addressed in a further argument. As part of the argument please see: VATANSEVER, A., & YALÇIN, M. G. (2015). "Ne Ders Olsa Veririz" Akademisyenin Vasıfsız İşçiye Dönüşümü. İstanbul: İletişim Yayınları.

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institutions (Öğrenci Sayıları Özet Tablosu, 2015). We can say that 18.68% of all undergraduate formal education students are enrolled in private institutions.

In 2014-2015, there is a total of 148.903 teaching staff employed in higher education. The total number of teaching staff in undergraduate formal education is 126.240 of which 18.074 teaching staff is employed in private institutions (Öğretim Elemanları Sayıları Özet Tablosu, 2015). This shows us that 14.32% of all undergraduate formal education teaching staff is employed in private universities.

These descriptive data show us that even though there are 76 private universities in Turkey, the number of students enrolled and the number of teaching staff employed is fairly low when compared to the public higher education in Turkey. We can say that Turkey's higher education service is still, mostly a public service.

Selecting sociology as our standing ground we have tried to find a degree which is usually compared to the field we are working in Turkey. Accordingly, we have selected Psychology as our comparison unit. When we compare two branches of social science- sociology and psychology- we see that psychology degree in Turkey is more in demand. We can say that the university entrance exam is a good indicator of the demand for degrees. It is a system in which everyone who wants to enter the higher education system is centrally evaluated, in which the student scores determine which universities and the degrees these students can choose hence making it possible to see the demand for specific degrees.

The scores are grouped according to the area. Sociology and Psychology are both in the TM-3 (Turkish-Math 3) area, making their scores comparable. The highest base score in the 2014 university entrance exam (LYS) for psychology in public university formal education system (in Boğaziçi University) is 472 while the highest base score in sociology (also in Boğaziçi University) is 454. In the same year, the lowest base score in public university formal education system for psychology is 395 (Bingöl University) and the lowest base score for sociology is 269 (Karamanoğlu Mehmet Bey University-Karaman) (En Küçük ve En Büyük Puanlar (ÖSYM TABLO-4), 2014). Looking at the differences between highest and lowest base scores, we can say that a psychology degree is preferred to a sociology degree.

When we look at some of the web forums and blogs in which people are asking the question whether 'to study sociology or psychology' and questioning the career prospects for the graduates, we see from the answers² that sociology

² Please see: http://forum.donanimhaber.com/m_97328727/tm.htm,
<http://sorucevap.turkstudent.net/soru/1430/sosyoloji-mi-psikoloji-mi>,
<https://eksisozluk.com/sosyoloji-okumak--1181635>, <http://www.kizlarsoruyor.com/egitim->

is regarded as a field which does not offer many job opportunities whereas after completing a psychology degree, psychologists are even able to open their own clinics when they complete a clinical psychology masters degree.

We see the hierarchy of departments according to job opportunities. The attitude towards sociology is that it should be regarded as a 'curiosity' field whereas psychology is regarded more as a 'career' field. For example the member 'Frostorm'³ states that sociology should be regarded as a hobby, not as a degree a person would finish and get a career after s/he graduates. Bayoğlu⁴ states that currently, while evaluating degrees to choose from, it is thought that Psychology is better than Psychological Guidance and Counseling, which is better than Sociology, which is better than Philosophy.

It is also mentioned that in order to get a job after graduating from the department of sociology, you should be studying sociology in one of the best universities in Turkey. For Example, member 'JilberProduct'⁵ states that s/he is interested in studying sociology but also thinks that s/he would study it in a 'good' University. While referring to a 'good' university this member may be talking about many indicators such as location, cost and ranking of the university in university entrance exam. Looking at the strategic decision making process regarding the decision as to where to study in Turkey, Çokgezen (2014: 30) concludes his study by saying "...students prefer universities that have a good academic reputation, are located in bigger cities, and in which the education language is in English. They also want to receive these services without paying too much". A department selection cannot be isolated from the university selection process.

As we have seen in the base scores, while there was little difference between the highest base scores which was between Boğaziçi University sociology and psychology departments, the difference in minimum base scores, between Bingöl University psychology and Karamanoğlu MehmetBey University sociology is bigger. This does mean that university ranking is also an important factor in department selection. Boğaziçi University has been founded in 1971 while Bingöl and Karamanoğlu MehmetBey University have both been founded in 2007 (YÖK, 2017). The universities founded in 2007 are both provincial universities, showing us that university and department selection making

kariyer/q1444732-hukuk-mu-pdr-mi-psikoloji-mi-sosyoloji-mi, <http://ferhatbayoglu.com.tr/psikoloji-mi-pdr-mi/>

³ Frostorm. (2014, 01 16). *sosyoloji okumak*. Retrieved 26 09, 2015, from eksisozluk: <https://eksisozluk.com/sosyoloji-okumak--1181635>

⁴ Bayoğlu, F. (2014, 09 22). *PSİKOLOJİ mi PDR mi?* Retrieved 09 26, 2015, from Ferhat Bayoğlu: <http://ferhatbayoglu.com.tr/psikoloji-mi-pdr-mi/>

⁵ JilberProduct. (2014, 09 16). *Psikoloji mi Sosyoloji mi* . Retrieved 09 26, 2015, from Donanım Haber: http://forum.donanimhaber.com/m_97328727/tm.htm

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involves a 'strategic' degree selection by looking at the status of the university which offers the related degree. While Boğaziçi University may be regarded as a prestigious university, looking at these two newly established provincial universities, the hierarchy of departments become more evident.

We have stated that today, the basic urges which promote scientific endeavors - basically 'to see and to understand the world'- are seen as a luxury. Neoliberal policies expect people to be managers of their own futures and of the ways in which a secure future is thought to be possible. This managing process involves a good degree selection. A good degree is evaluated on the basis of market value. Also the fact that students are seen as consumers of higher education urges them to be more careful in their degree selection, making them conscious consumers who can evaluate their options on the strategic calculation of effort and outcomes, not on a simple urge to pursue their interest and curiosities.

Looking at the public and private universities separately to compare the preferences towards offering sociology and psychology degrees, we clearly see that private universities' tendency is towards establishing psychology departments rather than sociology departments.

TABLE-1

Number of Sociology and Psychology Departments in Public and Private Universities in Turkey- 2015

	Public Universities	Private Universities
Number of Psychology Departments	64	52
Number of Sociology Departments	86	28
Total Number of Universities	109	76

Source: Data has been collected from YÖK website

We can say that in general, private universities are more open to market demand and in this respect even though more public universities in Turkey have sociology departments; private universities prefer psychology departments since there seems to be a conviction that a psychology degree offers more job opportunities hence creating a demand for a psychology

education. This is a small case in which we can see that the market demand is a determining factor in higher education.

The case we have presented involves private universities and it seems like the tendency to establish or close down departments on the basis of their market value has not affected Turkish public education in the same way.

However, we can expect this trend to prevail in public education since neoliberal policies involve public institutions to act as corporate entities in the end. There is clearly a case involving a different pattern for newly founded and more established public universities. This topic on the operation of the provincial universities in Turkey and universities which are newly established in neoliberal era requires further research.

While we have limited ourselves to the comparison between sociology and psychology departments, we need further research on the state of basic sciences in Turkey. The question regarding many departments such as mathematics, biology, chemistry... is unanswered at the moment. While this trend towards neoliberal reorganization of departments seems to pose a threat towards basic sciences, we cannot make a legitimate scientific claim on the situation of these departments in Turkey.

In this neoliberal era, we can see societal actors trying to make strategic choices since they bear the sole responsibility of their actions. When it concerns the future job opportunities, choosing a field to study is not a simple choice to make. Performance criteria, quantifiable educational activities, rankings all serve to create a volatile higher education market in which students are expected to strategically 'choose' their future. While the market changes, every actor present ranging from the academic to the students' parents, need to change their position.

Comparison of sociology and psychology departments in Turkish higher education indicates that in this neoliberal higher education system, departments are evaluated in terms of their market value. This means that, in this system, while the capitalist market changes rapidly, universities have to constantly reorganize their departmental structures, making it hard to offer stable higher education and to build on scientific knowledge. While we are leaving the idea of the Humboldtian University behind, it seems that it is important to understand the threats that this 'Neoliberal University' impose on the legacy of the University as an institution of higher education.

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