

“Ivory Tower”

The Movie and the Review

An excerpt of a review of [“Ivory Tower”](#) in The Chronicle of Higher Education by William Deresiewicz:

“Few who talk about college in public understand it, and few who understand it talk about it.

“Ivory Tower, for the most part, is an honorable exception. The movie, directed by Andrew Rossi (Page One: Inside the New York Times), covers a lot of territory, and it covers it patiently, clearly, and thoughtfully. The headline issues of ballooning tuition and student debt are placed in their historical context: institutional competition, expansion, and borrowing; administrative bloat; the rise of the “party track” and its concomitant amenities as public universities have turned to full payers from out of state to deal with budgetary shortfalls; and the long-term withdrawal of public funding—the shift from taxes to student loans—that has been the fundamental factor in creating the entire mess...

“...Higher education must indeed increase efficiency, but how? Institutions have been willing to spend on everything in recent years except the thing that matters most: instruction. Dorms, deans, sports, but not professors. Piglike presidential salaries, paid for by hiring adjuncts. Now, with MOOCs and other forms of online instruction, the talk is more of the same. My friends, they are coming for you. The professoriate no longer has the luxury of thinking that all this is someone else’s problem. If you want to save your skins, let alone ensure the future of the enterprise, you need to wake up and organize against the people who are organizing against you. The fact is that by focusing exclusively on monetary issues, the current conversation prevents us not only from remembering the higher objectives of an undergraduate education, but also from recognizing just how bad a job our institutions have been doing at fulfilling them. Colleges and universities have a lot to answer for; if they want to regain the support of the larger society, they need to prove that they are worthy of it...”