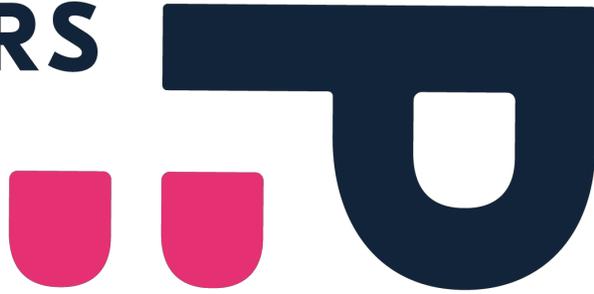


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Book Review: The Great Brain Race

How Global Universities Are Reshaping the World

Mary Sullivan

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Contact info@prowibo.com

In *The Great Brain Race: How Global Universities Are Reshaping the World* author Ben Wildavsky explores the “globalisation” of higher education. Wildavsky argues that academics and students alike must view the global system of higher education as a form of international trade. Moreover, in this system, nations act in accordance with liberal economic theory entering into agreements to maximize benefits of the global economy. An advocate for academic free trade, Wildavsky explores this thesis through six chapters to outline the processes that have created this new system.

Wildavsky examines how Western universities have tried to capitalize on the advancements in academic mobility. Wildavsky dives into the evolution of academic mobility with the early movement of traveling scholars in the 13th century. As students and faculty are able to easily move around the globe, institutions continue to globalise their activities and ambitions. This has compelled Western universities to establish branch institutions throughout the Middle East and Asia. Wildavsky believes that the continuously changing realities of the global system of higher education have led to behavioral change of states themselves. For example, like China, India, Saudi Arabia, Germany and France all have made lofty investments in higher education so that their institutions can compete with Western “World Class Universities”.

Moreover, Wildavsky argues that the consequence of the race to achieve “World Class” status has contributed to the explosion of university rankings systems. These lists have increased in popularity since the 1990s and allow students and universities to determine how universities compare at the national and global level. While there is not a truly global university rankings systems, despite recent efforts of the OECD, affects the behavior of universities. This intense competition between universities is further exacerbated by the booming market of for-profit universities. Utilizing the case studies of Devry, the Apollo Group and Laureate, Wildavsky examines the “democratization” of higher education. Wildavsky examines for-profit universities early adoption of distance learning in an attempt to maximize their market share. This action has thus revolutionized higher education overall, with nonprofit and for-profit institutions incorporating aspects of distance or e-learning into their curriculum.

While this system of free trade in minds is revolutionizing the future of higher education it is not impervious to market failures. Like all free market systems, Wildavsky’s can be brought to its knees by acts protectionism. Therefore, Wildavsky concludes that states who seek to limit the movement of international students and protect domestic interests are a threat to the future of higher education.

Overall, *The Great Brain Race*’s key strength is the way in which Wildavsky is able to articulate and substantiate his overall thesis. Throughout each chapter, Wildavsky provides the reader with an abundance of quantitative data as well as several examples of easily digestible case studies. For example, in Chapter Two, Wildavsky offers detailed cases studies of New York Universities establishment of a branch campus in Abu Dhabi, UAE and Education City in Doha, Qatar. This analysis is well-rounded because it incorporates quantitative figures and interviews with administrators, faculty and students. to clearly define branch universities for the reader.

However, the central weakness of Wildavsky's book deeply rooted within liberal and neoliberal economic theory that promotes free trade between nations at all costs. This ideological framework effectively redefines education as a necessary dimension of a functioning world economy instead of a fundamental human right. Moreover, in many chapters of *The Brain Race*, Wildavsky's claims and evidence are skewed heavily in support of traditional Western values. Through this, Wildavsky contributes to the tradition of Western cultural and intellectual imperialism that continues to exist in higher education across the globe.

Wildavsky was correct in predicting that for-profit universities would help to improve access to higher education around the world. However, the expansion of the for-profit industry is grounded in the principles of global capitalism, not altruism. Since *The Brain Drain*'s publication, for-profit universities have wreaked havoc on the United States and Latin America. From predatory recruitment tactics (Hernandez, 2018) to awarding fraudulent degrees (Kimes and Smith, 2014), for-profit universities have continued to operate free from any form of global higher education regulatory standards. Therefore, these for-profit institutions have not contributed the democratization of higher education as Wildavsky predicted but instead contributed to higher education's age of mass consumption.

In conclusion, *The Brain Race* is a detailed account of the state of global higher education, but it is just one interpretation. As the forces of globalization are accelerated by technological change thus making the world more connected than ever, the future of higher education seems promising. Many of Wildavsky insights are valid even eight years since the publication of his book. Wildavsky's optimistic take on the future of global higher education is engaging and easily digestible, but it could benefit from a more critical lens. However, in a world where protectionism is quite pervasive, it is important to see academics advocating for the blending of national borders for the pursuit of education.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Mary Sullivan has a Bachelor's Degree in Development Studies from Richmond, the American International University in London. She joined the PROWIBO team as an intern in the summer of 2018 assisting with the logistics of the summer school programs. In the fall of 2018, Mary became the Think Tank Projects Manager for PROWIBO and plans to continue to work with PROWIBO while pursuing her M.A. in Global Health at the University of Glasgow in the fall of 2019.

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