Christine: You are listening to Higher Ed Now, ACTA's podcast on issues in higher education. I'm your host Christine Ravold. This week we welcome Goldie Blumenstyk, Editor and Senior Reporter for the Chronicle of Higher Education, where she has been reporting since 1988. She's covered everything from the changing business model of higher education to digital learning, to federal policy. In 2011 Goldie won first place from the Education Writers Association for beat reporting on the business of higher education. Goldie, welcome to Higher Ed Now.

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Goldie: Thanks for having me here.

Christine: You've been covering higher education for nearly three decades. What is most striking to you about today's higher education landscape?

Goldie: I think the most striking thing is, I mean if I think about it, so vastly different than when I first started reporting for the Chronicle 30 years ago. The most obvious change is just the way tech has kind of taken over colleges. Perhaps not as efficiently or creatively as it has in other industries, but certainly it's a much more tech-infused enterprise than it ever was to, frankly, a more bureaucratized enterprise than it ever was before.

As a reporter, that's occasionally very frustrating to me. There's a lot more administration in higher education than there used to be. In some ways it's a little less respected by the public than it used to be, which is disconcerting in some ways, maybe many ways. But it's also far more diverse than when I first started reporting at the Chronicle.

Christine: When you talk about being less respected by the public, do you think tuition is the primary driver of people's negative reaction to higher education? What do you attribute that to?

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Goldie: I think there's a few things. I think there's a little bit about this value proposition that has changed. People are wondering about, not just the tuition, but the return on their investment. I think that's a different way that people calculate things these days. Obviously, the rising tuition makes people wonder are they getting their money's worth when they graduation. So, it's not just what they're paying for, but does it pay off in the market. I think there is also a question about whether higher education is serving a public good in the way I always felt like it did.

Christine: People took that for granted.

Goldie: I think people took that for granted. I do think higher education is still doing a lot of important research, scholarship and public service that does help the public but that doesn't seem to be understood very well by the public. I know there's a lot of noise in the press these days about the so called liberal bias in higher education. Frankly, I think a lot of that gets somewhat amplified by sort of the outrage machines on [inaud] .

Christine: Social media, as a whole, just kind of…

Goldie: We get so much more news at the Chronicle. We hear about so many more things that are happening on campuses now from Twitter and social media. Back when I first started we had a clipping service and the AP wires and that's how we learned about what was happening. Now, news about higher education seems to be happening and appearing in all sorts of places.

Christine: You kind of have deputized reporters all over the internet, if you just know where to look.

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Goldie: They're not all so reliable, those reporters, but they are everywhere.

Christine: Colleges are under increased financial pressure. Do you think that has any impact on people's confidence in higher education right now?

Goldie: I try to sort of see how one translates to the other. I do think colleges are having to pay a lot more attention to their own bottom lines and are probably, maybe extracting money from students in more ways. Probably relying a lot more, those colleges that are residential, are relying on residential services a lot more for their revenues. Some of the colleges that are doing online education are using that to sort of cover the costs of their other operations.

Christine: So, you kind of have some lost leaders.

Goldie: There's always been lost leaders in higher education. I mean it's not even a dirty little secret, it's sort of the most obvious secret. The whole place is a cross-subsidy. That's probably good because these are enterprises that are not businesses. They are enterprises, except for the ones that are businesses. But they are enterprises that are supposed to be performing all kinds of services and offering all kinds of offerings, not each of which is going to sort of generate its own revenues.

But, I think, in some cases colleges are looking at distance education, for one thing. It's one of those things where they take the revenues from distance

education and then they take some of the margins off of that and use it to subsidize other things on their campuses.

Christine: How do you think university leadership has responded to these financial pressures? Some of it is leaning on distance learning. Do you think the governing structures, or the administrative roles have changed as well?

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Goldie: I don't have a lot of definitive data on this, but I have a sense that CFOs are a lot more sort of central to the operation these days. Provosts are probably working a lot more closely with CFOs than they ever used to. I know in the last few weeks organizations like the provost organizations and the business officers just had some meetings where they put those two together because those relationships need to change a lot more.

I think if they ever were working in silos, they're not doing that as much anymore. A lot of decisions that happen on the academic side need to sort of make sure that they pass muster on the finance side and probably a little bit vice versa as well.

Christine: You mention a little bit that technology hasn't necessarily been implemented as efficiently as it could be. Can you expand a little bit more on that?

Goldie: Yeah. I was really struck by this last night. I'm late to the game on a app called Spotify. I don't know if you play with it. It's like the coolest thing. Who knew?

Christine: Limitless jukebox for free, or you could pay for the premium service. The cool thing I was telling two colleagues of mine about, that I had just joined

Spotify yesterday. Even though I write about tech I can be a little bit behind the times sometimes on this stuff. They said, “Let’s create a playlist.” We sat there at the local beer place we created a special playlist. We each just started uploading songs to each other that we could share to each other from our own tastes. Suddenly, ten seconds later, it was all on our phones. I know it is obvious to everybody, but it just sort of struck me that there are so many industries outside of higher education where this happens just so much effortlessly now than it does in higher education.

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There are still students waiting online in some places to register for classes. I know that’s not true. I know a lot of places you register online now and, like I said, you don’t have to register the way I did and go to the big gym and stand behind six other people and hope you get into the class before it closes out. There are so many other ways where higher ed is not as, particularly on the administrative side where a lot more things should just be a lot more seamless than they really are now. I think they could be a lot more tech-enabled in ways where tech really can make a difference and it’s not.

Christine: Do you think the inertia is from a sort of cultural conservatism? Not politically, but just kind of being set in its ways as an institution that’s thousands of years old. Do you think inertia has kind of set in on that?

Goldie: I don’t think it’s so much inertia. That’s sort of a loaded word sometimes. I think some of it is resources. Spotify has got, I guess, investors and all these revenue sources behind it that’s helping it kind of create a business model. There may be musicians out there that don’t love this Spotify business model as well. Some of it is resources. All these apps and things cost money to implement and they take time to sort change the culture.

I don't think there are that many institutions out there that really want to have archaic registration systems or archaic advising systems and in fact, many are updating that stuff and moving to those ways. It may be that the higher ed industry is a lot more complex than the music industry, for example, or something else. When jokes ran about, "We want to be the Uber of higher education." It's not that simple in higher education. Getting a cab to show up to your door is cool, but educating students from diverse backgrounds and getting them all to the same place, to the professors, getting them the kind of sophisticated curriculums that we want them to have, that's not as easy to sort of generate into an app. 00:08:37
I appreciate that we're not talking about comparable things sometimes but, certainly on the administrative side it does seem like—I don't know what the pressures are on the colleges, but increasingly I'm hoping that more and more colleges are trying to find ways to some of that more smoothly.

Christine: One of our newer reports, Bold Leadership, Real Reform 2.0 looks at some ways that universities could harness technology a lot better and come up with different arrangements to kind of economize. It's not a new idea to talk about combining administration, or if you look at what UIA is doing.

Goldie: Yeah. Like the university consortia and all that?

Christine: Mm-hmm.

Goldie: Yeah. There are some universities, we've written about these over the years at the Chronicle, obviously the five colleges in Massachusetts and tons of other ones. Upstate New York there's one. For some of the small private colleges. They share certain things and they do result in some savings. Unfortunately, it seems like savings on the margins and not really fundamental savings. There aren't that many institutions that have figured out a way to share

an English department. Maybe they share a German department because it's hard to find German [voices overlap].

Christine: The foreign languages are doing pretty well on that shared course initiatives.

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Goldie: That's where it makes sense. There are sometimes relatively few students in these majors. I think they're all critically important. If more people don't start studying Chinese, we're doomed. Right? Clearly, those are the kinds of departments where we ought to be singling out more of that kind of sharing. There are logistical challenges. I don't like doing interviews by Skype. I'd rather talk to the person face-to-face or via phone but if Skype is my best option I'll do Skype.

There are ways to be pushing some more of these consortia relationships on the administrative side and probably on the educational side. I remember going to a meeting of small college presidents several years back and hearing conversations about the demographic challenges that these colleges were facing, particularly in certain regions of the country and very little discussion about consortia mergers, alliances and things like that. I was just very struck and kind of disappointed not to hear more of that.

Christine: It was in 2011 that Clayton Christianson very famously predicted mass closures or the bursting of the higher ed bubble. Do you think that was overblown? Are you seeing that? We've reported a lot more closures this year of universities.

Goldie: Mostly closures of small private colleges and many of them religious colleges or for-profit colleges that didn't really have a market for themselves

anymore. Yeah, completely overblown. I think he would say that himself right now. In fact, he has said that. It's actually one of the reasons I put that question mark in the title of my book: American Higher Education in Crisis. Because, at the time, I was being asked to write the book there was all this noise about the bubble in higher education and it's the end of college as we know it. I just think some of that is just kind of silly.

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I mean definitely we will see more small colleges folding and definitely we will see even some large colleges. We're seeing it already with some public regional colleges doing a lot more merger discussion in Georgia, Pennsylvania and other places right now. Let's face it, the need in our country for education is still…

Christine: It's not going away.

Goldie: It's not going away. Every projection you hear about the future, what the job market's going to need going forward. There's going to be people who are more educated, not less educated. Because of geography and demography there are going to be certain colleges in certain places that are going to be doing poorly and are going to close. That's going to be a tragedy for the people who work there and tragedy for the talents. In many cases these are colleges that are the main employer in their town and important social and cultural…

Christine: Nexus.

Goldie: Nexus. Yeah. I think, broadly speaking, people still appreciate what they get out of a college. Despite what I said about public sentiment because I think people don't—I think whatever this public sentiment is that's negative about colleges, people don't seem to have it so much about their own college.

Christine: That's very true.

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Goldie: You hear it a lot about schools too. People claim to be unhappy with their public schools, but they're generally happy with their own school.

Christine: There's a little bit of pride and kind of a family feel community that comes with that.

Goldie: It's a little bit self-fulfilling. You don't want to go out there and dis you alma mater because then all you're doing is hurting yourself. That's why I think some of the negativity about higher ed is a little bit manufactured.

Christine: We talked about consortia. Are there any other sort of innovative or technological ideas you think colleges should be looking at?

Goldie: We're seeing a lot of attention these days to the use of data analytics. We recently had some people come to us at the Chronical and talk about the most hyped and the most promising innovations in higher education and data analytics was the answer to both. I think it's really promising and sort of a hyped opportunity. Clearly, as colleges are starting to create their own systems or work with companies to understand a little bit more about what their students are doing and how they're doing it both sort of in their campus life and in the classroom.

I think that's generating a lot of really important actionable data that institutions can use. It's also generating a lot of really important ethical and moral decisions for colleges to be making about sort of their understanding of this data. These are decisions that actually need to be dealt with at the board level. You've seen some of these reports as well.

Christine: You've written a few of them.

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Goldie: There are these ethical norms that we need to start to think about. But, at the same time, as you start to get better information about what your students are doing and what helps them succeed and not succeed. I think I've written about this before to the medical field. Does it raise a different duty of care? Do colleges have a different level of responsibility as they start to gather this knowledge about their students through data. I think that they do. I don't know what that standard of care is, but I think it's a decision that college leadership needs to be focusing on.

Christine: We tell trustees to get as much data as they can. Just know where the money is going so you can determine if your institutional priorities are in line. It's not necessarily a bad thing if you're spending a lot more on administration if a need is being met.

Goldie: I mean they talk about this as strategic finance. A strong board will be able to look at those decisions and say, "Yes. Philosophy is costing us a lot of money. Philosophy is critical and vital to what our institution does and we're going to continue to find a way to pay for it and here's how." That's the key to this thing. You can't say the information is dangerous.

Christine: No. All knowledge is worth having. Especially for public schools if you're spending public money. There is an onus to report that responsibly.

Goldie: At the same time, when they get this information the more responsibility they're going to have to take themselves to stand up and defend what they believe in and what they believe their institutions believe in. It makes you vulnerable in some way and, so you have to be prepared.

Christine: There's no plausible deniability.

Goldie: Exactly. Right.

Christine: That cuts both ways in some instances. Right?

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Goldie: There's a new category of people who have an impact on higher education. In my book I call them sort of the new influencers. It's a broad set of groups, a lot more educational foundations, which are taking a little bit more of an activist role in higher education: Gates, Lumina, Kresge, places like that. I think before foundations were a little bit more throwing money at universities or throwing money at higher ed and sort of trusting that the institutions were going to spend the money wisely.

I think now some of the organizations are coming to it with an agenda, a [word] education with the former USA Fund. There are a lot more organizations, like ACTA, AEI, New America…

Christine: Third way.

Goldie: …Third Way…

Christine: Brookings, Center for…

Goldie: …Center for American Progress, Brookings. All these groups. When I first started in higher ed, groups like that were not putting out a lot of reports about higher education that much. Weren't focused on it. Weren't part of the policy discussions. All those groups are now sort of having a role and, frankly,

the investor community, entrepreneurial business community. All these companies that are investing in higher ed, the ed tech companies, all the ed tech companies, sort of executives. All those people are now influencers in the nature of higher education. They're trying to sell to higher ed, but at the same time they're all, in a way, having an impact in how universities operate, and it's not as well understood as some of these other things.

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We understood the role of the state government and the university and we understood the role of alumni organizations, but this is like a whole new category of influencers out there. I spend a lot of my time now paying attention to who they are and what they're doing and why they're doing it.

Christine: Higher education ends up serving all of those different sectors. Maybe not necessarily the research organizations directly, but the entrepreneurs and the businesses for sure, end up being customers of higher education in a roundabout way.

Goldie: Oh yeah, of course. I mean there's a couple of billion dollars has been invested in higher education companies in the last few years and that's relatively new. That is sort of separate from the for-profit college industry. It's a sector, we've dubbed it at the Chronicle, the embedded for-profit. This notion of all these companies, these data analytic companies, companies that help colleges create their online education programs.

Christine: So your Civatas and your Blackboard.

Goldie: Your Blackboard, your Civatas, your Inside Track. All these are companies that are providing a lot of services to colleges that are a lot closer to the educational core than the dining hall used to be. This is a new kind of outsourcing. I think it's kind of creating new, it's not good or bad, it's just different.

I mean it could be good or bad, but I'm not judging them in that respect. I'm just not so sure higher ed governance has adjusted yet to the notion of what it means to have these, what I call these "embedded," for profits operating on the campuses. They do change the nature of the role of the professor. They do change the nature of the role of the professor vis-à-vis the administration. They are somewhat the embodiment of some of what is broader trend of the new influencers that I'm seeing out there.

Christine: Do you think they're going to have an appreciable role on the increasing bureaucratization? Do you think that will eventually help trim some of that down?

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Goldie: It's a little bit of both I think. Because the decisions about bringing some of these companies in that happen at an administration level generally, not at the faculty level. I think that's where I think it changes the nature of the role between the administration and the faculty. In that respect, you need more administrative guidance and administrative control over some of this stuff. I don't know that they're necessarily going to be something that's going to sort of eliminate costs at some other level. Frankly, in some ways they may add to costs.

Like I said, the more you know about what you know about your students are doing better or worse, based on what courses they're taking, it might mean you have to increase your advising costs, because now you know that. It might not really be a money saver. I'm just saying in general…

Christine: But, if it improves quality.

Goldie: It could really improve quality, it could improve retention and it can ultimately improve a bottom line at some level, but there might have to be some

investment on the institution's side at the same time. I'm just saying broadly, the fact that there is this whole new category of influencers. And then, there are these, what we've dubbed as the imbedded for-profits in the mix. It changes the nature of the academy and I'm not so sure governing boards have sort of awaken to that yet.

Christine: You're talking to our network of trustees right now, so now they're going to know.

Goldie: Wake up.

Christine: Do you think there are any hidden dangers in that?

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Goldie: I mean there are people who would argue there are hidden dangers. I'm sure there are hidden dangers and hidden advantages. These are very different relationships. The faculty members are probably concerned because there are companies that make decisions about how you market your online education courses will ultimately make some decisions that will affect…

Christine: How you teach or what you teach.

Goldie: How you teach or how long your semester is because they might argue a 7-week semester is better than a 12-week semester and that changes how you teach it. Some might argue: Some classes it takes longer to absorb the material than others. I mean it has an impact. It's not just a separate thing. I'm not saying it's good or it's bad. It's not for me to decide that. I think these are institutional questions. But, I think if the institutions don't recognize that these are questions, then they won't resolve them.

Christine: That is so important and that is why we are always encouraging trustees to be asking questions. You've been tracking trends in higher ed for a long time. Is there something that stood out that was just all the rage and ended up being kind of a dud?

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Goldie: A lot of it in tech. I mean I think a few years ago we talked about Second Life was going to sort of take everything over. Do you know what that was?

Christine: Tell me about it.

Goldie: It was kind of something with avatars and virtual reality and all that. Now, I'm laughing at myself even as I say it. It was like this fake little world on the internet that you created your own avatar and you own sort of community online. But, even as I kind of make fun of that, I've recently been hearing a lot more discussions from experts in virtual reality and I still think this whole notion of virtual reality, this technology is still quite expensive to be used as a college technology.

But, I'm becoming increasingly convinced that it might actually eventually be something that's very important. A really important pedagogical tool. I've heard people talking about it as a way to teach empathy and to get people, certainly experiences that they could never have in real life. You could experience an earthquake. You could experience all kinds of things in virtual reality that you can't or wouldn't necessarily want to in real life.

I guess what I'm saying is I almost hesitate to make fun of something that I though was a big deal, then it kind of went away because five years later they kind of come back. I mean I still believe MOOCs are going to be important. Am I the last person who thinks that?

Christine: No, you're not the last one. I think there are a lot of way in which MOOCs offer a lot of exciting things to students who at least want to try.

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Goldie: Also, I think the way some of these colleges have been trying to reconfigure these MOOCs, it's actually like the business model around the MOOCs that's more interesting, maybe, than the technology of the MOOC itself. It's no so much that it's massive. If it is open and you could eventually take it and apply toward your degree in some way, like a micro masters or sort of a certificate that stacks to something else. Some of that stuff at the "hype" cycle was great and then it was like no one is going to do it.

But, now people are starting to realize there are ways to take the MOOC experience and make it something that's really useful and open. There are ways you could take a course for free in a MOOC and ultimately transfer it for a very nominal sum for credit. I think even the MOOCs, which a lot of people were ready to give up on, I'm still a believer.

Christine: Anything that makes college more accessible and more affordable is something that we're totally interested in getting to people.

Goldie: I don't think this one is a Johnny come lately, I think this one is sort of a slow burn to success is the open educational resources movement. I feel like that's got some sustainability problems because I'm not so sure how, over time, there is enough resources and infrastructure to make this system of making available openly licensed materials as an alternative to commercial textbooks. But, I think that's something that's coming along and changing the way we sort of think about course materials in higher education.

Christine: I remember I was an English major and we were always very happy when the class was pre-1922 because we could get the novels. [Voices overlap] My econ textbooks were so expensive. So that could also be a good way to address some costs, but it's not necessarily factored into tuition, but it's that thing that is tacked on at the end that students end up, "I can pay for tuition, but I can't pay for my books."

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Goldie: This is a model that is also emerging as the open educational resource movement is going. I think the publishers are also trying to push this other kind of a model where they're trying to create a notion where students would pay a basic book fee and they would get their books under that fee every year.

Christine: Kind of like a subscription?

Goldie: Sort of a subscription that would guarantee you the course materials that you need. Publishers are trying to promote that. They've had relationships like that with for-profit colleges for years. University of Phoenix very famously made deals with publishers and students paid a flat course fee every semester for your course materials and that was just part of the tuition model.

Christine: That has a lot of merit to it. Some of these trends that haven't really worked out still have a lot to contribute to the higher ed space. We have some things trustees might not have considered yet with the new influencers. We know they're hearing a lot about competency-based education. What are your thoughts, Goldie?

Goldie: I probably shouldn't say this, but I'm still kind of confused about what it really means. I know in theory what it means. I always thought, frankly, when you were in a class and you fulfilled the obligations of the class you were

demonstrating your competencies. Part of the problem, I think, is competency-based education is this term we hear a lot about and we also hear a little bit about prior learning assessment, which is sort maybe you shouldn't have to go to class. Maybe you should be able to demonstrate that you know the equivalent of that class and take some kind of an assessment to prove it. Sometimes those two things get a little mushed around in these discussions and I think that's part of our confusion out there.

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Goldie: I think, more broadly, the notion of having competencies, which one could also describe as course as course objectives and making sure that students are fulfilling those is what education is supposed to be about. I mean supposedly 600-plus colleges are now interested in some way in competency-based education. I'm not quite sure how that really differs that much from what they were doing before, if they were doing it well.

Christine: It's also interesting from the point-of-view of what colleges used to do and how much they've changed. It used to be a very set liberal arts curricula, unless you were a research institution or land grant and then you had a different mission.

Goldie: Or you were a professional school, or you had a lot of business majors or you had a lot of nursing majors or…

Christine: But to go from a liberal arts-centered curricula and then talking about competency-based curricula but there's competencies for historians and philosophy majors.

Goldie: Absolutely. I mean there's research skills. There's critical thinking skills. That's what I'm saying. I was a history major at college and I feel like when I took

my history classes, the professors had expectations of what I was going to know by the end of that class. If I didn't demonstrate them well in my papers and my exams I wasn't going to pass. I mean maybe I'm being a little bit literal about this thing. I'm not trying to be a smart aleck about it, but I feel like sometimes it's a terminology problem. If we're talking about prior learning assessment, I think that's a really important new trend in higher education right now. I think a lot of people do have skills, college level skills, that there ought to be easier way for them to get those skills certified in a market that's increasingly looking at certifications for this kind of thing. And I guess I would like to see a little…. I hope that the places that are pushing on competency-based education can provide a lot more clarity on what it is that they're actually doing that is, sort of, markedly different than what we have always thought of them as doing.

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Christine: I guess we're talking about – so many people that the average college graduate now is not a confident graduate, or employers, specifically, are very dissatisfied. Do you think that's a fair assessment from the employers' side?

Goldie: I know I hear it all the time, but I also feel like I've been hearing it for quite a while. I don't know how honestly new it is. To the degree that it is more of a problem these days, I hear a lot about students can't—you know—young graduates can't write. Recent graduates can't write, don't think critically. If I look back at that, I don't think people are stupider coming out of college. Clearly, they're not. I think part of what might be changing is, and I haven't done a deep dive on this, but the biggest major right now in colleges is business and it may be—I've seen some studies on this—a lot of the business majors that colleges offer right now don't offer a lot of opportunity for writing and critical thinking. There are groups like… American Association of College and Universities pushes the program of trying to make sure that even more professionalized majors like that have a lot more liberal arts kinds of skills imbued in them, same

for the sciences, that they should involve writing. Obviously, you have to have critical thinking business and in sciences, but you find to find ways to help people demonstrate that a little bit better. So I think some of that might just be (that) students are not being pressed as much. I mean, clearly, they're not being pressed as much in writing as they used to be for some of these majors and that's probably got to be something that changes along the way. If not, we're going to hear these complaints forevermore.

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Christine: We're used to hearing them here and that's why we serve curricular requirements to see, like, history isn't as required anymore. Writing's not actually as bad as something like economics or foreign language. That's also pretty low on the requirement side.

Goldie: But I feel like you could be an economics major and do a lot of writing in your courses as well. Frankly, these reviews of business courses, some which have a lot more writing than others. If that's a skill that people are concerned about, maybe they need to think about that a little bit more. I don't think it's so much a question of what the major is but it's just what the requirements are as you're taking these majors. Don't just look at what the topic is.

Christine: And also to not burrow so deep into niche subject matter – that you're missing some of the bigger pictures too.

Goldie: I part company with you guys on some of this stuff. I think one could become a really effective critical thinker, writer, communicator, interdisciplinary thinker even if one majored in one – like the trendiest little major at a college right now that you guys might distain. I think don't everybody has to major in classics to be a well-educated college graduate.

Christine: We would say that either and there are no colleges we distain. But niche majors aren't actually our concern. It's that general education isn't broad enough. That once a student starts on a major, they haven't been giving the foundation they need for breadth and depth and further study. We would hope that the business major—to get a chance to read philosophy.

Goldie: Yes. I agree.

Christine: We talked a little bit earlier about ROI. Do you think there's different pressure on parents urging their students to take certain classes or to go to certain schools in hopes of getting that return on investment?

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Goldie: It's a wide swath of student population, by the way. Let's kind of be clear about that because sometimes when we talk about these parents and the helicopter parents, we're sort of talking, in that case often, sometimes actually we're talking about two classes of parents probably. Maybe in a class of parents of students from wealth high schools and then those are like the helicopter parents. And then there are parents to maybe have unease about sending their kids to college altogether because they're not sure if the value proposition—is it going to be worth it to them with their relatively small incomes? And so they want to make sure their students graduate with something productive that comes out of it. I think those are the two levels of the sphere of where you're seeing most of the pressure on students: to pick majors that are productive and promising. Parents send their kids in to become an engineer or a doctor or a nurse, accountant, something that seems very solid. Go to this program and graduate with this degree. I suspect there was probably always a little bit of that out there, maybe more so than I understood. I was very lucky, personally, to have gone to a liberal arts college and my parents had not gone to college. I'm not so sure they

actually understood what a liberal arts college was but they sort of trusted my instincts on that.

Christine: We have lots more information than we used to, even though I know people would like more. I'm one of the people who would like more information. Do you think that influx of consumer information, especially your college board or Princeton Review stuff is contributing to some of that consumer mentality?

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Goldie: There are so many ratings out there right now. My God. And I sort of respect some of the new ratings that have come out because they're—I think—the ones that are just sort of based primarily on perception and brand perceptions are a little less—obviously—they're just kind of noise compared to the ones that really try to crunch some of the data. I'm also kind of impressed by the ones that try to look at the places that are adding value to the students' experiences, ones that look at economic mobility. Some of these are not even commercial ratings. There are a whole bunch of researchers that put out some data earlier this year that looks about the economic mobility of certain colleges versus other colleges. I actually don't know how much of that ultimately informs the students and parents choices. It still sounds like students are looking at their traditional ratings, that U.S. News is still the number one source as far as anyone's ever told me. The Money Magazine rankings are one of these ones that looks at social mobility and return on investment. Washington Monthly does something very similar. But Linked-In was doing ratings. It kind of dropped them. Forbes does ratings about people who make the most money when they graduate.

Christine: Wall Street Journal and Times Higher Ed.

Goldie: Wall Street Journal and Times Higher Ed. I mean, clearly, by the way, The Chronical does not do ratings or rankings. We did once try to poke fun at some of them. We created our own ratings machine where you could generate ratings. You could take your five choices from four other ratings and crunch them into our ratings machine and see what popped up. Best Party School, Make the Most Money: put them in the same ratings and seeing which two show up. Let's face it. Most students in the country still go to the college that's closest to their house. Forty-percent of undergrads go to a community college to start and that's a local choice, or they go to their local state university. So it's not like scores of students are leaving their homes and going across the country to go to college. That's a very small slice of the overall student population.

00:38:08
Christine: That's absolutely right. Most people think of college students as having just graduated high school. They're going to be leaving home. They're first time, full time students. But that's really not the case. Most of the colleges that are doing the most exciting work in expanding access and affordability are concentrating on nontraditional students or returning students or students from very diverse socioeconomic backgrounds. So when we consider what we need to do to increase a university's effectiveness or sustainability, we need to be thinking about the people who consume education much more broadly.

Goldie, thank you for sharing your wisdom from your time on the Higher Ed beat.

Goldie: Oh, it was my pleasure to be here.

Christine: To learn more about ACTA's information for trustees and governess, please visit www.goacta.org. For questions or comments on this podcast, please send them to info@goacta.org. Until next time, I'm Christine Ravold and this is Higher Ed Now.