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Rationalization and Iron Cage: A Critique of Students' Perceptions of Higher Education

Andrew Quinn

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Using Max Weber's critique of bureaucratic institutions and their tendency to impose an iron cage, this research examines the organization of higher education and its role in the motivation and attitudes of the students. Higher education is an institution that thrives on efficiency and profit, often at the cost of education and beneficence by the students. Students often exploit the efficiency of education and rationalize pursuing higher education to obtain a degree as opposed to the pursuit of knowledge. The work herein observes cost of tuition and fees and ratio of full-time professors to part-time professors, as well as information from current students concerning their attitudes about and motivation for attending a higher education institution. Results indicate that students are rationalizing their efforts in higher education as a means to an end and not an opportunity to discover joy in learning. In light of Weber's evaluation of bureaucracies, results are discussed with regard to the role of higher education in students' rationalizations of their educational experiences.