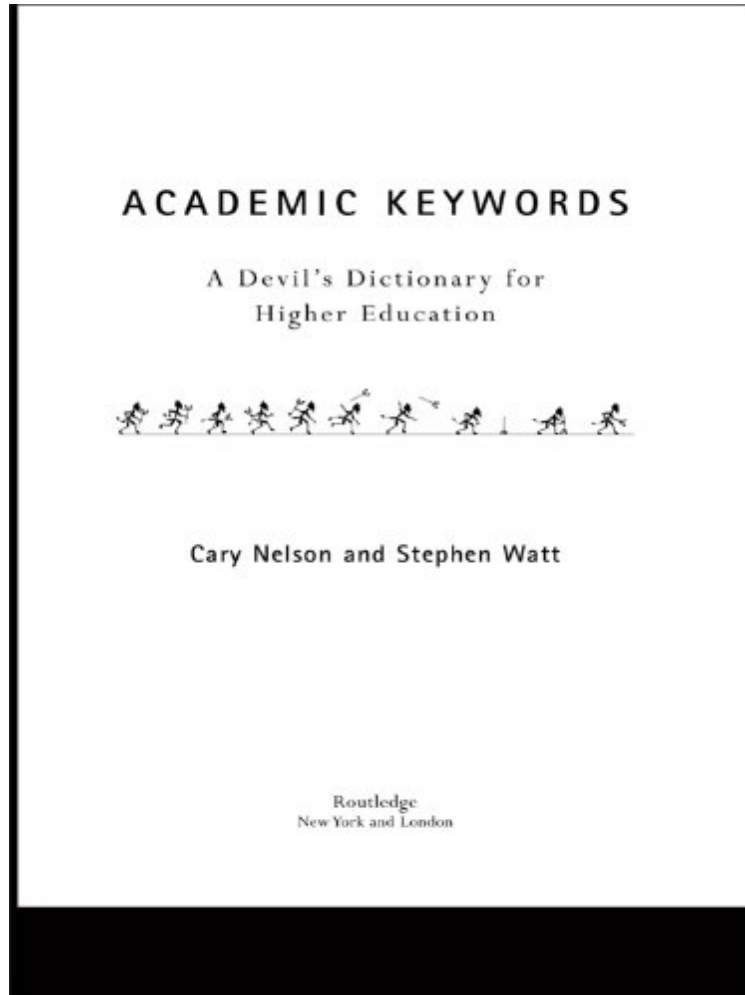


Academic Keywords: A Devil's Dictionary for Higher Education

Stephen Watt

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Stephen Watt : Academic Keywords: A Devil's Dictionary for Higher Education before purchasing it in order to gauge whether or not it would be worth my time, and all praised Academic Keywords: A Devil's Dictionary for Higher Education:

0 of 0 people found the following review helpful. I suspect nobody needs this book, and it does ...By flocksofI suspect nobody needs this book, and it does feel dated, but it makes for lots of laughs if you are in academia and keep it in a space shared by other academics... Especially if you are currently organizing.21 of 23 people found the following review helpful. At Last a Tenured Professor who Tells the TruthBy pannapac@fas.harvard.eduOnce again the prolific, visionary critic of the academic job system, Cary Nelson, and his astute colleague Stephen Watt have the courage to tell it like it is. They expose the false consciousness that permeates higher education: the rhetoric of "apprenticeship," buzzwords like "excellence," the fiction of "academic freedom"--everything that keeps us from recognizing the constructed nature of the academic job crisis. Contrary to what the corporate managers of our universities and their

bloated allies among the tenured faculty would have us believe, the job crisis is not about supply and demand; rather, it is about seizing capital from the weakest members of the profession (graduate students, part-timers, and adjuncts), who have become a disposable commodity, enabling universities to provide their student-customers with cheap instruction while an ever-diminishing academic elite promote themselves bewailing the plight of oppressed people with whom they have no contact. Nelson and Watt's "Devils Dictionary" is the perfect resource for a profession that's going to hell. Every exploited worker in higher education should own a copy of this book, along with Nelson's Manifesto of a Tenured Radical, Will Teach for Food, and Christina Boufis' On the Market. 0 of 0 people found the following review helpful. Subtle treatment of a complicated subject (but a bit repetitive) By Matthew Lefavor In this volume, Nelson and Watt present the reader with a series of alphabetically-arranged essays on the problems confronting higher education. It is a work that bears the stamp of long, evenhanded research and personal involvement, full of surprising statistics and shocking anecdotes. The authors display great skill at discerning the subtle ways many disparate forces interact to effect an almost unseen crisis in university life. When the big picture comes together, it is overwhelming; for me, the moment came when reading the essay on scholarly books. In the late eighties a single British entrepreneur hired a star-studded staff of editors and reviewers to create the world's most prestigious science journal. Shortly thereafter, he was able to charge subscription fees in the thousands. He repeated the model for many of the other sciences, and a number of other journals followed suit. This meant that science and engineering departments began demanding these essential journals, which forced libraries to cut back on their humanities book budget. These cutbacks were felt by the academic publishing industry, who once could have published any book that made a significant contribution to a field but now found itself rejecting scholar's books on the basis of limited marketability. This in turn made it harder for scholars (especially in English departments) to publish their material, which led to their failing to get tenure for reasons entirely out of control. Meanwhile, English departments around the country are ruthlessly exploiting part-time English faculty, paying them less than minimum wage to work impossible hours. This means that individual scholars have less money to buy scholarly books, further exacerbating the book industry's problems, which in turn further exacerbate the part-timers' struggle to get published and build their CVs to prove their worth. This book is full of depressing analyses like the one above; the authors really do not exaggerate the abysmal state of higher education at all. There are a number of problems with the book, however. As Nelson and Watt aim to show, the issues threatening the quality of higher education (and thus American intellectual life) are varied, complex, and tightly interconnected, which is perhaps the rationale for arranging the work into short, discrete essays focused on single issues rather than a sequential narrative. Unfortunately, the fact that the issues are so interconnected means there is a substantial amount of repeated information. The casual reader thumbing through this volume in a public or university library and perusing only those entries that interest them might need to have the point about the gradual replacement of full-time faculty by part-timers to be stated in the entries on 'Superstars' and 'Tenure'; those of us who have been reading straight from Academic Departments to Yuppies, however, had seen that issue addressed numerous times before. Furthermore, the book is marred by a number of unentertaining polemics (which I suppose are what the other reviewers have been praising as "wit") that lessen the author's credibility. I, too, have little sympathy for the unrealistic and misinformed attacks on higher education by the far right, but the I found venomous entry on the National Association of Scholars a little too mean-spirited. Picking on an easy target rarely makes for an entertaining fight. And even when the authors' intent is not overtly polemical, there is still a clear political slant in favor of faculty unionization as a solution for the university's ills. It is, of course, a well-informed slant supported by hard statistics and honest, reasoned reflection, but the format of the book made it impossible to give this solution the full, nuanced treatment it deserves and evaluate it in contrast to other possible solutions. The bottom line: This book is a good purchase (especially at the bargain used prices current at the time of this review), but one is left feeling that it could have been better. It (or something like it) is essential for anyone considering graduate study (particularly the humanities), full of sobering statistics to remind you of the reality you might face when you get there. Otherwise, it might be an inspiring call to action for graduate students, and a valuable wealth of information for anybody who wants to discover the real issues facing higher education today are. But it is only a place to start, and it would be a good idea to supplement it with other views. If anything, Nelson and Watt's greatest strength is showing that the problems of the contemporary university have no straightforward solutions. Lovers of rhetorical showdowns beware--but then again, if spectacle and easy answers are what you are after, you probably aren't much concerned for the state of American intellectual life, anyways.

Know what academic freedom is? Or what it's come to mean? What's affirmative about affirmative action these days? Think you're up on the problem of sexual harassment on campus? Or know how much the university depends on part-time faculty? Academic Keywords is a witty, informed, and sometimes merciless assessment of today's campus, an increasingly corporatized institution that may have bitten off more than its administration is ready to chew. Cary Nelson and Steve Watt use the format of a dictionary to present stories and reflections on some of the most pressing issues affecting higher education in America. From the haphazard treatment of graduate students to the use and abuse of faculty (as well as abuses committed by faculty), Nelson and Watt present a compelling and, at times, enraging

report on the state of the campus.

From Library Journal How would you define academic freedom? Do you know the true meaning of faculty or sexual harassment? These are three of 47 words and phrases explained in this unusual work. Nelson (English, Univ. of Illinois, Urbana-Champaign; *Manifesto of a Tenured Radical*, New York Univ., 1997) and Watt (English and cultural studies, Indiana Univ.) have composed a dictionary they describe as a cross between Ambrose Bierces 1911 *The Devils Dictionary* and Raymond Williams's *Keywords: A Vocabulary of Culture and Society* (1976). Like its predecessors, Nelson and Watts work incorporates (sometimes irreverent) definitions of words and phrases of importance to the academic world to help both academics and the public better understand education today. The definitions range from a few sentences to miniessays several pages long. Some entries include See also references to other definitions. The authors feel that higher education is in serious trouble, and their book works successfully as a consciousness-raising vehicle. We make no apology for and offer no retreat from the very bleak, even apocalyptic, portrait we paint of higher education's prospects, they write in their preface. Recommended for academic libraries. Terry A. Christner, Hutchinson P.L., KS Copyright 1999 Reed Business Information, Inc. ""Academic Keywords demands and deserves serious attention. Nelson and Watt diagnose with keen analyses and illustrative anecdotes a set of ills that threaten the health, if not the life, of the American university. [P]erhaps what is most impressive about this justifiably angry book is the idealism that accompanies its outrage. In their entries on "Doctoral Dissertations" and "Mentoring," Nelson and Watt show that their critique is rooted in a deep commitment to higher education, and specifically to graduate education. The changes they advocate and urge are aimed at improving, perhaps even rescuing, an institution they seem profoundly to care about.."-College Literature "Smart, incisive and brave, "ACADEMIC KEYWORDS probes 47 aspects of academe in droll entries that range from half a page to more than 20. Nelson, a sly University of Illinois liberal arts professor best known for "MANIFESTO of A TENURED RADICAL (1997), and Watt, an Indiana University English professor expert in postmodernism and drama, write like whistleblowers with diplomas from a semi-Marxist cell that alternates Groucho with Karl."-Carlin Romano, "The Philadelphia Inquirer ..."sure to make even the tweediest spit their twice-boiled departmental coffee across the office."-Toronto Globe and Mail ""Academic Keywords won't be a favorite of the corporate university and its proponents, but it is indispensable to those who wish to salvage higher education for open intellectual exchange and real learning."-Judith Roof, author of "Reproductions of Reproduction "A dictionary that redefines the basic vocabulary of academic life, "Academic Keywords is also an action handbook for faculty reformers, student activists, adjunct organizers, and even thoughtful administrators."-Karen Thompson, President, Part-time Faculty Union, Rutgers University About the Author of the landmark reader, *Cultural Studies*, (1992) as well as *Higher Education Under Fire* (1994) and *Disciplinary and Dissent in Cultural Studies* (1996), all published by Routledge. Stephen Watt is Professor of English and Cultural Studies at Indiana University.