

## **‘Disaster Academic Capitalism’**

Gary Rhoades, director of the Center for the Study of Higher Education at the University of Arizona, doesn't have a crystal ball, either of course. But asked how unique Missouri Western is among the many financially strapped colleges and universities now navigating a pandemic, Rhoades said he sees three patterns emerging.

As usual, he said, the most precarious instructional ranks -- contingent faculty members and graduate students -- “are being and will be the first and worst hit through silent layoffs, aka nonrenewal.”

Next, he said, there is "disaster academic capitalism." Those institutions that had been experiencing enrollment and fiscal challenges pre-COVID-19 will "amplify their restructuring," using the crisis "to restructure and retrench, with management trying to bypass deliberative, strategic, shared governance."

Even if this isn't the case at Western Missouri, based on faculty accounts of shared governance, Rhoades said he knows of no institution that has addressed such challenges "by reinvesting in core academic programs and personnel, and incrementally reduced administrative costs."

Overall, Rhoades also remarked on the "heightened discourse of austerity," even as disinvestment in core academic functions continues, to the detriment of students and those from marginalized populations most of all. Public colleges and universities face this at the state level, too, with many lawmakers showing little appetite for aiding local communities and institutions.

For all the "talk of this crisis being transformative, I am seeing similar trend lines to what has defined American higher education for decades."

<https://www.insidehighered.com/news/2020/05/14/missouri-western-cuts-quarter-faculty-along-programs-history-and-more>