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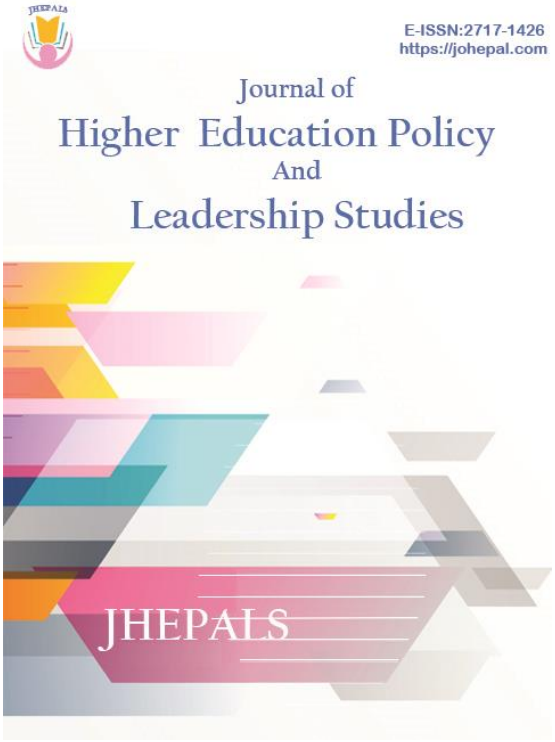


# The Commercialization of Higher Education Worldwide: An Interview with Prof. Alexander W. Wiseman

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# The Commercialization of Higher Education Worldwide: An Interview with Prof. Alexander W. Wiseman

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**Alexander W. Wiseman** *

Dr. Alexander W. Wiseman has more than 25 years of professional experience working with government education departments, university-based teacher education programs, community-based professional development for teachers, and as a classroom teacher in both the U.S. and East Asia. Dr. Wiseman examines and informs educational policy development, leads strategic planning workshops, provides evidence-based training programs, speaks internationally and presents extensively in the areas of evidence-based decision-making, teacher preparation and professional development, strategic planning, system assessment and reform, education policy, change management, equitable educational access for girls and boys, institutional capacity building, school-to-work transition, and civic education. Dr. Wiseman's research uses large-scale education datasets on math and science education, information and communication technology (ICT), teacher preparation, professional development and curriculum as well as school principal's instructional leadership activity.

He serves on the editorial board of *Educational Administration Quarterly* and *Educational Researcher* and is the author or editor of more than 100 articles, chapters, and books. He is the series editor of the volume series, International Perspectives on Education and Society, and the senior editor of the journal, *FIRE: Forum for International Research in Education*.

https://www.depts.ttu.edu/education/our-people/Faculty/alexander_wiseman.php

**Keywords:** Non-profit Higher Education; For Profit Higher Education, Commercialization of HE, Privatization of HE, Commodification of HE

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***Interview***

It is an honor and privilege for us to host **Professor Alexander W. Wiseman** as a globally renowned scholar and higher education leader whose research, books, talks, interviews, and notes are extensively cited and acknowledged throughout the world.

There is no doubt that all scholars and researchers worldwide are experiencing new challenges within this new era of Covid-19; hence, they might have much academic and administrative commitments to handle. We- at the Journal of Higher Education Policy and Leadership Studies- understand our esteemed authors and researchers' tough professional schedule; in this regard, we warmly welcomed **Prof. Wiseman**'s suggestion to send the responses to the interview questions as a video recording document. However, its transcription based on each question is provided below.

We are sure that **Prof. Wiseman**'s insightful, illuminating and critical responses to the following questions will be of interest to a broad audience of international researchers, students, policymakers, and leaders in Higher Education.

You can also access the **Prof. Wiseman**'s responses to the interview questions at our YouTube Channel.

The following is a transcription of the interview video linked above.

## Question #1

- What do you think about the university in the marketplace and commercialization of higher education? Why is it important? Who are the key actors? Who benefits?
- What are the challenges for the commercialization of higher education? What changes did our universities experience within the recent two decades of the commercialization of higher education?
- What do you suggest for the commercialization of higher education?
- How do we convince those who disagree with the concept of the commercialization of higher education?

## Answer:

Hi this is Alex Wiseman from Texas Tech University; I am recording this video with transcription. I'll send you that because I think it would be a faster and probably more interesting response to your questions than a typed-out response. I just wanted to maybe clarify a little bit what I what I think you're asking for when you talk about the university in the marketplace in the commercialization of higher education. I'm going to focus on the distinction between for-profit and not-for-profit higher education. That's how I'm going to approach it.

When I hear commercialization, I think of not-for-profit versus profit seeking. It's obviously different than primary and secondary or basic education, in that it is not compulsory in most education systems worldwide or any education system that I can think of.

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And there are obviously different levels of higher education that we can talk about from community colleges or sometimes they're called junior colleges or post secondary training institutes, or other institutions all the way up to colleges or universities, which have advanced degrees. Usually they're overseen by a ministry of higher education. In many countries, certainly not all, they're often decentralized in their management, meaning that there are no real standards for curriculum or resources or other things. And then there's a distinction between private and public higher education institutions. You can have private for profit, private non-profit, and most public I think or not for profit.

When we're talking about the marketplace of higher education, we're really talking about competition over student enrollment, research funding, other sorts of government support things like that that might be coming out of either the private sector, or out of public or government sponsored resources.

I think those would be some of the key actors there. What's interesting is that when higher education is privatized. It often can expand in a way that is not necessarily sustainable or benefit benefiting individual students who are enrolling in the institutions nor really the broader community, an easy example I think of is. Mongolia after the fall of the Soviet Union and Mongolia has higher education system privatized and expanded very rapidly the demand for higher education in Mongolia was quite large. And so, there were a lot of privately owned for profit higher education institutions that spread throughout the country very rapidly after the fall of the Soviet Union. Enrollment sort of ballooned. There was unfortunately not the same level of benefit as one might expect.

Some of it is the simple law of economics, with supply and demand, the demand was great. the supply grew, but as more people were becoming college educated, then the demand for a college education among employers and industry, dropped, so the value of that degree. Upon completion may not have equal the expense that individuals put into it to pay the tuition.

There was also some reporting of price gouging so because the demand was so high the beginning, many private universities were overcharging, or at least charging beyond the means of the students in that context. So, the commercialization of higher education, just like the commercialization of basic education or primary and secondary education is sort of fraught with problems, especially if you consider higher education to be or education in general, including higher education to be a human right.

Article 26 of the United Nations Declaration of Human Rights talks about education at the primary and secondary level doesn't necessarily talk about it, the higher education level, but it doesn't indicate that education is a human right been an expansion of the understanding of education to me, lifelong learning or lifelong education. And so, one can say that continuous education or this kind of lifelong education is perhaps a human right.

And if that's the case, then the commercialization of that human right, seems to be contradictory to the, to the point of it being a right that that someone might say they have

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access to or believe they have access to, or should have access to regardless of their background with their needs.

This is a broad question, so my answers I feel are very broad but if you think about private universities, versus public universities and different ways that those institutions sort of market themselves. Since private institutions, usually they don't have the same foundation of resources as public institutions do either because they're owned by an entity, and they're for profit usually in that case, or they might be religiously affiliated or they would have another reason for not being a government funded or sponsored institution, their marketing or recruitment efforts are going to be more important to them than they might be to a public institution that has, the backing of government resources and a more steady, or in some cases and more guaranteed enrollment.

I think we must consider those differences.

All right, you've asked, what are the challenges for commercialization of higher education and what changes that our universities experienced with the recent two decades of commercialization of higher education. Again, not a small question. What are the challenges for commercialization of higher education? One is, I think, very clearly and I said this a little bit in my last comment that when you commercialize higher education. Then there's a problem because it becomes tied to the means of families or individuals. it does not because it reduces access, basically, that's, that's a problem because we know that higher levels of educational attainment, have a lot of benefits for both individuals and societies. it is it is limiting access to those benefits.

It also means that degrees or departments or faculty that are exploring certain subjects will have that restricted based on the commercialization or the commodification of that of that area so if you're not, if you're not teaching or working in an area that has a high potential for profit seeking like you're, if you're an engineer and you're working on a particular engineering project that can be sold or can be contracted out so that it earns money it creates a profit for the baby for the university maybe for the individual researchers that are working on it as part of the university efforts. If it's not one of those then it might be phased out, and that is a real tying every educational program in a higher education institution to potential profit is problematic because it means that some of the most probably most significant and important studies in the humanities, in particular, will often suffer, or be closed or shut. And so, I think that's probably the biggest challenge I can pick up to the commercialization of higher education is that it reduces the importance of different educational endeavors or disciplines to their profit-making potential, rather than to the broader social or cultural value of those studies.

I suggest that the privatization of higher education and its subsequent commercialization must be regulated heavily by whatever organization oversees a particular country or community, to maintain a balance to make sure that things aren't being phased out or things that are being provided more resources than other simply because they have a benefit to specific stakeholders, rather than a benefit to the broader society.

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The next question is how do we convince those who disagree with the concept of commercialization of higher education. Well, I'm not sure that there's a convincing folks who are on board with commercialization of higher education. There is an expectation that higher education will be commodified in fact education more broadly speaking, is, is increasingly commodified because we're always, I shouldn't always say many of us are thinking about human capital development as part of the education that individuals' higher education contributes to that. And so, it is an important concept for justifying and rationalizing the development and the persistence of higher education in a lot of communities so even though there are lots of problems with it I think it would be difficult to convince those who might to convince those who might support commercialization of higher education to disagree with it.

## Question #2

- How do you define the non-profit universities as part of the higher education organizations?
- What was/were the reason(s) behind the establishment/ commencement of non-profit universities?
- What do you identify as the difference(s) between public universities and non-profit universities?
- What changes non-profit universities experienced over the years?
- What do you anticipate from non-profit universities in future?

## Answer:

I'm not sure what this question means how do you define the non-profit universities as part of the higher education organization. a non-profit or not for profit organization is one that literally doesn't make a profit. There might be income that's received as part of that organizations functions tuition revenue would be one example.

But the point is that it's a zero-sum game right that there's, there's no more income than there is our outcome, I guess, in terms of the financial balance that the university, or the organization maintains. It also, I think is important because non-profit or not for profit organizations are usually organizations that serve their community, in a way that for profit universities do not for profit universities, usually serve the people who own or manage the university. And so, a not-for-profit university would be much more likely to engage in either research or other academic pursuits, that are more relevant to the community than they are to simply seeking some sort of income.

I think that also answers the second question about what were the, the next question What were the reasons behind the establishment of commencement of non-profit universities.

What do you identify as the differences between public universities and non-profit universities? Well, I mean you've got non-profit universities that are both public and private. I don't think that is a dichotomy. I think public is one version of a non-profit university. You can have a non-profit university that's private as well. I would define public universities as

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those that are sponsored by or supported by the government. And that means that they have usually a mission or a mandate to serve the government stakeholders, which in many societies is, is the population at large, meaning that there are admission requirements are policies that are reasonable enough to allow a certain percentage of the population to qualify for admission. That means that they would be eligible for funding or other resources from the government itself. It means also that they would be accountable to the government. And they, I think most public universities that that I believe that I work with and that doesn't mean it's always the case.

Next part of the question: What changes non-profit experienced over the years? What do you anticipate for non-profit universities in the future? Well, I'm not sure I have a crystal ball here, so I probably am not going to answer this question very well, I don't really have any predictions for what's going to happen with non-profit universities. I have more sort of warnings about the privatization or the commodification of education. That would be more applicable to for profit universities and non-profit universities. I'm going to skip down here you asked the impacts of Covid-19 and some initiatives such as academic mobility internationalization home and cross border Research and Education have been enormously troublesome and disruptive.

## Question #3

- As you surely know, the impacts of Covid-19 on some initiatives such as academic mobility, internationalization at home, and cross-border research and education have been enormously troublesome and disruptive.
- How can and will internationalization adapt to help shape some creative policies in academia?

## Answer:

How can and will internationalisation adapt to help shape some creative policies in academia? Well, we already know that remote learning, and the use of technology in higher education is one of the big outcomes of Covid-19. We also know that Covid-19 and this sort of shift to maybe more remote or technology driven education has also exposed very long-standing deep-rooted inequities in society. So, remote learning and remote access to education is very much something that is geared towards those who are already technology savvy, who may be in communities, or in families that have access to those kinds of resources that are probably on the, you know, upper income scale, which means that there's a there's a big impact on academic mobility internationalization and cross border research and education.

Meaning, mostly because people will not be traveling, I mean the physical mobility of individuals is severely restrained by Covid-19 and probably at least should be restrained for the near future. Just for health and access reasons internationalization has already shifted to be more based on technology, and you can sort of, you can study abroad at home, basically. The problem is that you can't have the same sorts of informal interactions that are possible in a face-to-face environment. And I think there's a lot of good stuff that comes out

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of those informal interaction because as we know, creativity and scientific discovery and sort of the important things that happen around collaborative higher education don't always happen in a prescribed environment, either through something like this where there's a recording or synchronous meetings online or laboratories that are that are scheduled and conducted online, those, those more structured and prescribed experiences don't carry all of the same potential. So, creative policies in academia.

Again, there's going to be more and more of a focus on, maybe, internationalization that that can take place within the virtual atmosphere, rather than in the face to face or live atmosphere. There'll be more and more an emphasis on synchronous activities online. I think we're already seeing that there is much more targeted academic mobility, although people are opening up and traveling now probably before they should. It's not going to happen everywhere so there's a lot more travel that might happen between developed communities worldwide then between developed and developing or north, south, you might see more North-North transfer than you will see North-South or South-North transfer.

## Question #4

- The commodification and commercialization of higher education has been taking place all over the academic spheres.
- How do you think it can and will shape the higher education policies and leaderships?

## Answer:

I think this question is the same as when I already answered.

## Question #5

- What are the main components of university social responsibilities in the era of Covid-19?
- What are the qualities of a successful professor in this period?

## Answer:

Well, university social responsibilities. Again, it kind of depends on whether we're talking about a for profit or not for profit in a public or private entity. So, because we must define who the society is that the university is responsible to. In the case I am sitting or standing right now in a public institution in the state of Texas in the United States, my university has a responsibility to the state of Texas the government of Texas because that is the funder and the one of the chief funders and sort of the overseer of public universities in our state. we have a responsibility to the state of Texas. We have a specific responsibility to for the health and safety and welfare of the students that we serve and the employees of the institution, there tends to be more of an emphasis and this institution anyway on student welfare and health. Then, on employee welfare now. And I don't think that's necessarily a bad thing it's good that the students are protected and that their health and welfare is a main priority of the institution.

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***Interview***

We also know that universities have a relationship with their surrounding community so the local community in which universities are located is a is a community that they have responsibility to serve and protect as well, especially in a health crisis like this. for example, universities, like, like the one that I'm in, do a lot to ensure that the student population that is part of the university is not damaging the overall health and welfare of the broader community either by encouraging vaccination, or quarantine or masking or whatever. So, those sorts of things are important.

## Question #6

- And as a final word: What is your analysis of the higher education based on its former achievements and future horizon?
- In different eras, we have both pros and cons of higher education!
- What are the key positive points and negative issues which pros and cons of higher education raised in analyses of universities within the two most recent decades?

## Answer:

Okay, where's higher education going, what are some positive and negative issues with higher education. So, I, I think one of the biggest concerns still for higher education is access. There's still a large swath of the population that are not able to access higher education and a lot of that is because of the lack of connection or transition between the secondary schools and higher education. A lot of kids especially those whose parents have not experienced higher education are not versed or do not have the social and cultural capital to make that transition smoothly. This is not a local concern; this is a global concern.

Higher Education is not compulsory. Therefore, it also is not supported in the same way that it would be if it were part of a compulsory or the basic education system. And so, I think that's a negative issue. I'm not saying that higher education should be compulsory but I'm saying that, providing additional supports especially for those who might not necessarily have those supports from their local community or family is increasingly important.

These are not new issues, these are long-term long-standing issues but providing that sort of access and opportunity for higher education is very much a key to making sure that not only do individuals succeed in their community and in the labor market but that whole communities are successful in terms of technology development, social development, political welfare.

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