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Protests against cuts in education financing have rocked cities throughout Europe, including Barcelona, Spain, where students burned an effigy and mock coffin. The national government is pushing budget cuts and hiring freezes.

ALBERT OJA, GETTY IMAGES

With GI Bill's Billions at Stake, Colleges Compete to Lure Veterans

BY LIBBY SANDER

AT THE END of eight years in the United States Marine Corps, Paul Szoldra found himself at an impasse. He had just earned an associate degree from the University of Phoenix while stationed in Okinawa, and wanted to use the Post-9/11 GI Bill to go on from there. But when it came to choosing a college, he was stuck.

"I was totally ignorant," he says. "It was awful."

Nobody in Mr. Szoldra's family had gone to college. The sergeant's head swirled with unknowns: What made one campus different from the next? How did accreditation work? If a college cost more than its competitor down the road, did that mean it was better? What about all the ads and Web sites that turned up on Google, promising "GI Bill-approved schools" and "veteran friendly" institutions?

Mr. Szoldra's uncertainty about how best to use his federal tuition benefits is all too common. As the Post-9/11 GI Bill nears its fourth year, with more than 550,000 veterans enrolled in thousands of institutions, advocacy groups, lawmakers, and President Obama warn that veterans are vulnerable in a higher-education marketplace eager for their GI Bill dollars—with some purveyors, particularly for-profits, recruiting aggressively. The stakes are high: So far, colleges have collected more than \$4.4-billion under the new GI Bill.

But while the government puts money in

■ Seven federal bills introduced this year to support student veterans: A8

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Europe's Austerity Measures Take Their Toll on Academe

BY AISHA LABI

WHEN THE GLOBAL financial crisis hit in 2008, it looked at first as if many European universities were going to escape the worst. Higher education has long been considered a public right and a taxpayer-financed obligation, and there was optimism that universities, which government leaders hail as drivers of economic

■ Italy's system is in decay: A10

■ In London, an institution for the working class wrestles with change: A12

growth, would emerge relatively unscathed. Four years in, that is no longer the case. With governments facing unyielding international pressure to reduce deficits by curbing public

spending, universities in Britain, Greece, Ireland, Italy, Spain, and Portugal are suffering from their most painful cuts in decades. European universities, which on average rely on public money for nearly 75 percent of their finances, are wrestling with hiring freezes, rising tuition, and declines in campus services.

Greece, which has been subjected to stringent fiscal requirements by international

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"I did not come to Dallas to create just another university," says John Ellis Price, president of the U. of North Texas at Dallas.

Business Advice Meets Academic Culture

At the U. of North Texas at Dallas, 'disruptive innovation' raises hopes and fears

BY GOLDIE BLUMENSTYK

DALLAS THE UNIVERSITY of North Texas at Dallas was conceived 10 years ago as a public institution along tried-and-true lines—a comprehensive metropolitan university meant to serve a diverse student population and to improve the economic outlook of a part of the city that prosperity has left behind.

But that was before management

consultants from the likes of Bain & Company began popping up at colleges. It was before disciples of Harvard Business School's Clayton M. Christensen—champion of "disruptive innovation"—began winning converts to their ideas for reinventing higher education.

It was before those disruption advocates began talking up the success of Brigham Young University-Idaho, the low-cost branch of BYU that uses some of those ideas to serve the legions of students who

want an affordable Mormon education. And it was before powerful political figures like Gov. Rick Perry, of Texas, began slashing budgets and challenging colleges to be more creative in controlling costs.

Now UNT-Dallas administrators are considering a new model, based on the work of Bain, that would use those disruptive, efficiency-minded ideas as tools to reshape this fledgling university, which has a full-time-equivalent enrollment of only

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Open courseware, super-size classrooms, and more. Section B

The Digital Campus



The Week in Brief

College leaders see a growing tension between their mission to produce better citizens and the myriad other functions that students, parents, and lawmakers would have them serve, to judge from talk at the Association of Governing Boards of Universities and Colleges' annual meeting.

Several congressmen and leading university and advocacy groups unveiled a "Golden Goose Award" to honor research that turns out to have been an especially productive use of federal money.

A group calling itself "The Threateners" claimed responsibility for some of the scores of recent bomb threats at the University of Pittsburgh, and declared an end to its campaign.

Over the wishes of its faculty, Ohio State University said it would seek bids from investors who wanted to take over the institution's vast parking operation—for a minimum lump-sum payment of \$375-million.

A tenured sociology professor at Appalachian State University was put on leave after four students complained about her "inappropriate speech and conduct in the classroom," including showing a film about pornography.

The University of Florida dropped a controversial plan to revise the duties of tenured and tenure-track computer-science faculty members to focus on teaching and advising, not research, as a way to save money.

Preliminary results of a study of undergraduates' online learning habits show that most students shop around for digital texts and videos beyond what professors assign in class.

Eleven weeks into student-led strikes that have disrupted campuses across Quebec and sent hundreds of thousands of protesters into the streets of Montreal over planned tuition increases, talks began and then failed to find a way out of the impasse.

The business-fraud instructor at the Globe University/Minnesota School of Business at Shakopee was sentenced to five years in prison for defrauding banks of \$8-million in bogus mortgage deals that occurred before the school hired him, in 2009.

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Correction

An article about pressure on colleges to open up their data on students (*The Chronicle*, April 20) misstated the job title of Katie L. Vale at Harvard University. She is director of academic technology for Harvard's Faculty of Arts and Sciences, not for the entire university.

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NEWS | STUDENTS



Melissa Werner manages commencement ceremonies at Arizona State U., which graduated 17,000 students last year. "It's like a wedding for 10,000 people," she says. "Everyone's important that day"—but only briefly.

Pomp, Circumstance, and the People Who Make It All Happen

BY DON TROOP

BARNARD COLLEGE scored the prize commencement catch this year, landing President Barack Obama to speak at its ceremony on May 14.

With the president, of course, comes drama: a kerfuffle over his bumping the originally scheduled speaker, the first female editor of *The New York Times*, and the bruised egos of Mr. Obama's alma mater (to say nothing about bringing the Secret Service to a women's college after that business in Colombia).

Melissa Werner knows what sort of pressure Barnard's commencement planners are under. As director of university ceremonies at Arizona State University, she was in their position three years ago when Mr. Obama delivered his first commencement address as president. She's spent the past academic year carefully mapping out this week's four days of commencement activities on Arizona State's four campuses, culminating with an address by Tom Brokaw at the undergraduate ceremony.

Not as big a catch as the president, perhaps, but with his broad appeal and newsmanship's gravitas, Mr. Brokaw can expect loud cheers. The same cannot be said of Ms. Werner, who, no matter how well things go, is more likely to hear about the less-than-ideal experience of some graduate or grandparent.

"If you do your job well, don't expect a lot of praise," she says. "And that's OK."

Look behind the scenes of any college

commencement, and you'll find a Melissa Werner or someone a lot like her. At the University of Richmond, her name is Anita Yearwood, a young events planner who credits her success to tactful communication and student helpers. At the University of Texas at Austin, his name is Douglas W. Bolin, a laid-back former opera singer who organizes some of the biggest academic ceremonies in America. At Concordia University, in Montreal, she is Susan Durkee, an office-technology analyst who custom-designed a multimedia system to manage and coordinate the ceremonies that Canadians know as "convocation."

Depending on how their particular job evolved, they might answer to the dean of students, the registrar, the head of the development office, the director of alumni relations, the provost, or someone else.

"Sometimes it's just somebody in the president's office who agreed to take it on 40 years ago and still does it," says Ms. Werner, who emphasizes that commencement officers do much more than simply manage graduation ceremonies twice a year.

In her own case, Ms. Werner also serves as the university's protocol officer, coordinating visits by diplomats and other VIP's. She started doing commencements more than a dozen years ago when she joined Arizona State's summer-sessions office, where administrators assumed people had time to plan the ceremonies. During the job interview, her new boss, Carol Switzer, floated the idea of starting an association of commencement

professionals who would meet to exchange knowledge. A year later, Ms. Switzer announced it was time to get the group going.

The North American Association of Commencement Officers convened its first meeting in 2000, attracting about 75 people. Ms. Werner was selected as its founding president, and Ms. Switzer its first treasurer. The two women set out to change commencement from a thankless job into "a symbolic ritual" that honors the institution. Ms. Switzer died last year, but the organization she dreamed up has continued to grow.

HAPPY GRADS, GENEROUS ALUMS

In early February, 300 commencement professionals and vendors gathered at the University of Texas at Austin for the 12th annual meeting of Naaco (say NAKE-oh), as the group is usually called.

In a session on commencement participation, Brian Anderson, a sales manager for the graduation-products vendor Jostens Inc., said graduates who skip their commencements say they do so because the ceremonies are too long or their families aren't attending. He asked his listeners to describe what their campuses had done to make their ceremonies more attractive. Among the solutions: low-cost overnight campus housing for family members, events like lobster bakes and riverboat cruises, and graduation scholarships for distance-ed students to offset their travel costs.

Christopher R. Retzko, manager of special events and programs at Rutgers Univer-

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NEWS | STUDENTS

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sity at New Brunswick, said his institution had revamped its universitywide ceremony "to give everyone the permission to have fun." Rutgers, he said, has what may be the world's loudest commencement.

The faculty and students of each separate school are equipped with noisemakers that symbolize their group: Last year graduates of the School of Environmental and Biological Sciences rattled green cowbells. The School of Communication carried megaphones. This year the School of Pharmacy will blow pill-

"When a person is graduating, that's the last chance you have to make a lasting impression on them" about the college.

shaped whistles. At the end of the ceremony, each school takes turns rising en masse and cutting loose with its noisemakers.

Mr. Retzko described the cacophony. "It was very loud," he said, "but you're in a stadium, so it was just jubilant." Some of the commencement officers wrinkled their noses, suggesting that what works at one college might be a poor fit at another.

Mr. Anderson asked his listeners to estimate what proportion of their graduates showed up for commencement. "We're less than 50 percent," said Michael W. Pasquarelli, director of special events at the private, nonprofit National University, a "lifelong-learning" institution with campuses in California and Nevada. Representatives of some small, private colleges, however, reported participation rates as high as 95 percent.

Attendance is an important yardstick because it demonstrates graduates' affinity for their alma maters. Mr. Bolin, the artistic director and director of operations for university events at Texas, said satisfied graduates are more likely to donate when they become successful alumni.

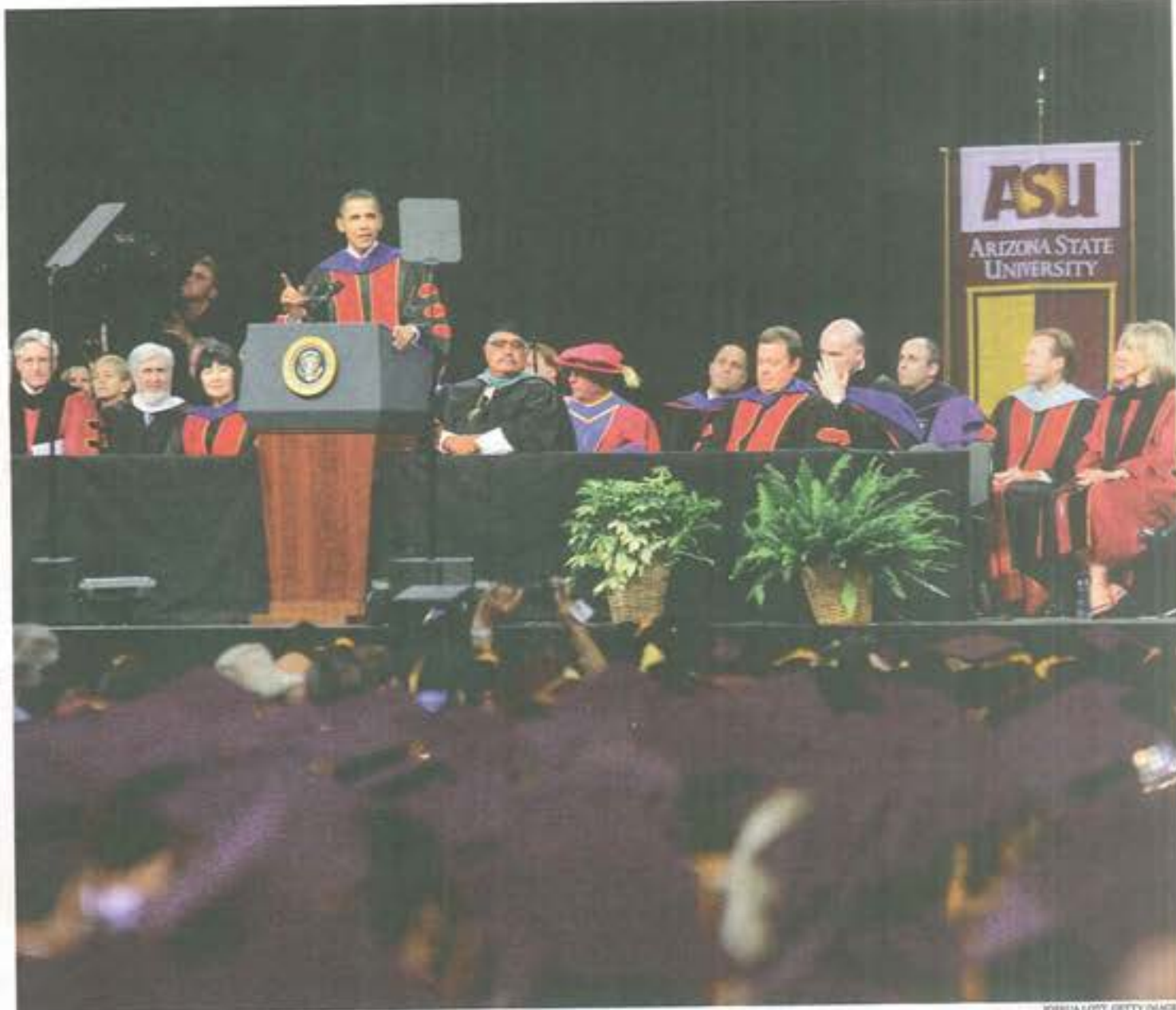
Last year Mr. Bolin, who is Naaco's president through July, surveyed members to learn whether their commencement budgets had been trimmed as a result of the poor economy. He was relieved to learn that most had not been. "When a person is graduating," he said, "that's the last chance you have to make a lasting impression on them" about your institution.

THREE AND A HALF SECONDS

Mr. Bolin declined to say how much his university spends to make that impression. "It's a legislative year," he said, then quickly pointed out that donors, not taxpayers, pay for the spectacle. Austin's universitywide spring commencement, which attracts about 35,000 guests and graduates for an event that takes place around the iconic Texas Tower, has several indoor viewing areas where video is pumped in "so Grandma can get out of the heat," says Mr. Bolin. The show concludes with a fireworks display and the famous, Paul Cret-designed tower lighted in burned orange.

Ceremonies for individual colleges give graduates the opportunity to walk across the stage and hear their names read aloud. Arizona State's College of Liberal Arts and Sciences graduates about 1,200 students in two ceremonies, giving each student about three and a half seconds to cross the stage.

"It's like a wedding for 10,000 people," Ms. Werner says. "Everyone's important that day"—but only briefly.



President Obama delivered the commencement address at Arizona State in May 2009. The event, at Sun Devil Stadium, drew 63,000 guests and resulted in only minor dramas, to organizers' considerable relief.

Among the countless volunteers who help out with Arizona State's commencements are the "catchers," people who stand on blocks just below the stage to keep nervous graduates from tumbling five feet onto the concrete floor. "The lights are bright, they turn, and they start to go off the edge of the stage," she says. Most of the time the wayward grad can be gently shoved back onto the stage, but Ms. Werner says there have been cases where catchers have had to live up to their name.

Ms. Werner began working last August on the schedule for this week's commencement. Like most of her counterparts, she has no say in the selection of the speaker. Rather, she concerns herself with a whole range of logistical concerns: lighting, the script, parking, water stations, restrooms, and accessibility for the disabled. "You don't want that special day to be ruined because you forgot to put water out, or you didn't think about how Grandma was going to get to her seat," she says.

The best commencement officers, Ms. Werner says, are the ones who can pay attention to the details but also know when to pull back and look at the big picture. "I'm very mindful that we're telling our story well, and celebrating our students."

After each commencement Ms. Werner revises her script as needed. But one year, she forgot to revise someone else's.

In December 2010 she handed the commencement remarks to Arizona State's pres-

ident, Michael M. Crow, before he stepped onto the stage to speak. President Crow, she says, does not always follow the script, but on this particular day, he read verbatim a particular line. "And the date was wrong," she remembers with a horrified whisper. She had forgotten to change "2009" to "2010." As he descended from the stage, Ms. Werner stood waiting at the bottom of the stairs. He looked her in the eye.

"You don't want that special day to be ruined because ... you didn't think about how Grandma was going to get to her seat."

"That date was wrong twice in the script," he said.

"Yes, sir," she replied, "and it will never happen again." Ever since, she's made a note in her calendar to check.

In 2009, Ms. Werner learned just 80 days before commencement that President Obama had accepted her university's invitation to speak. "It was the best and worst moment of my whole life," she says. That was the semester that employees had been ordered to take unpaid furloughs. "That

was never going to happen with the president of the United States coming," says Ms. Werner.

In the end, Mr. Obama's visit to Sun Devil Stadium, which drew 63,000 guests and 9,000 graduates, resulted in only minor dramas: The university chose not to give the president an honorary degree, saying that his "body of work is yet to come." A graduate who had been booked to sing the national anthem three months earlier heard a rumor that he was going to be bumped by the *American Idol* winner and Arizona native Jordin Sparks (he wasn't). And Secret Service agents denied a request by the shock-rocker Alice Cooper—a John McCain supporter—to meet Mr. Obama.

When the president walked backstage on his way to the lectern, Ms. Werner saw her opportunity to introduce herself. "I said, 'This is it. This is my chance.'" She extended her hand and he smiled and shook it. "Thank you very much for being here, Mr. President."

As his name was announced, he stepped onto the stage. Then came a wall of sound and explosion of flashbulbs like she'd never seen before.

"I was dumbstruck."

If Ms. Werner were to advise the event planners over at Barnard, she says she'd encourage them to take time to absorb the sheer impressiveness of a presidential visit.

"Stand back and listen to the crowd, watch people's faces, and enjoy the experience," she says. "You'll never forget it."