

# The Coddling Campus

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There were three all-night cafeterias in Harvard Square the year I arrived for law school – 1964 – and I can still name them all (my favorite was Albani's). Over the years, though, they disappeared one by one. With them went cheap, decent and always available food that a student budget could afford.

There was a plethora of inexpensive cafes in the neighborhood as well. I remember one day walking into the Patisserie Francaise back in the '80s. I sat down next to a distinguished looking man – tall, long-haired, neatly-bearded, impeccably dressed – who looked over my shoulder and saw I was reading Supreme Court First Amendment cases. He engaged me in a discussion of one of the cases. It turned out he was a world-famous cryptographer, Dr. Whitfield Diffie, a pioneer of public-key encryption that to this day drives the CIA, FBI and others quite nuts. We became, and remain, friends.

In 1996, Patisserie Francaise was forced out after the building's owner died and left the deed to MIT. The university quickly and drastically raised the rent and the café fled to a neighboring town – to the dismay of MIT and Harvard students.

Were it not for places like Albani's and the Patisserie Francaise, I – and countless denizens of academic towns like Cambridge – would be immeasurably poorer. These places, which sprung up on the edges of campuses like dandelions after a spring rain, were the meeting places where students, professors, townspeople, out-of-town academics and other terribly interesting folk would meet, by intention or chance, and talk and learn from one another. There are far fewer such places now. Why?

One explanation, I'm quite confident, is that more universities have built and now operate on-campus cafes and grilles. These are open during the hours when students are aloft and foraging for food, coffee, companionship, as well as a place to read or study outside the too-familiar dorm or too-formal library. Harvard, for one, has such facilities in some of its undergraduate residential houses, and there is even an all-night café in one of the all-night libraries.

Recognizing the trend of off-campus coffee joints and eateries giving way to their on-campus counterparts, I posed a question to a high administrator at Harvard a few years ago: Why does the university insist on building facilities that are seemingly geared toward keeping students on campus, rather than encouraging them to venture out into the real world?

I noted that this seemed a particularly inappropriate and counter-productive educational strategy, particularly for a university located in such a culturally rich area as Cambridge-Boston. His answer was to the point: It's a competitive world out there and we need to offer students the comforts and conveniences they can find at other colleges. It sounded

a lot like an oft-used corporate phrase--customer service. And this was coming from the institution somewhat sardonically called, by *Boston Globe* columnist Alex Beam, The World's Greatest University, a place that for centuries relied on its reputation for academic excellence, not its life-comforts and other amenities, to attract the best and the brightest.

I'm skeptical that student comfort and convenience provide a complete answer for the proliferation of these on-campus accommodations. I suspect that it's part of a long-running trend that started in the early-1980s, by which the university, acting *in loco parentis*, took over more and more aspects of its students' lives and instilled upon them the peculiar, un-worldly world view that infuses our campuses today.

This era saw the advent of speech codes to muzzle the bolder students and supposedly protect the delicate feelings of "historically disadvantaged groups." And then there were the now-infamous campus kangaroo courts that shredded all notions of fairness, much less due process, in order to punish anyone accused of a politically-incorrect verbal offense that, in an ideal world, would be protected by academic freedom.

Then came the sensitivity training programs and the tendentious, politically-skewed freshman (whoops--sexist language--I mean "first year") orientation sessions aimed at teaching students how to be acceptable (in academic culture, at least) human beings. Alan Charles Kors and I wrote about this development in our 1998 book, [The Shadow University: The Betrayal of Liberty on America's Campuses](#).

Because indoctrination requires university administrators to maintain as much control over student life as possible during the four short years most are on campus, I guess it helps to keep them from wandering out into the "real world" for their espresso and such.

Maybe I've become too cynical watching what universities try to do to students between matriculation and graduation, but I can't help thinking that all of these trends--including the sad passings of places like Albiani's Cafeteria and the Patisserie Francaise--are somehow interconnected.

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