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Neoliberalism, academic capitalism and higher education: Exploring the challenges of one university in rural Haiti

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ABSTRACT

This analysis of Rural Haitian University (RHU, a pseudonym) highlights the complexities that have arisen as a social entrepreneur in an extremely poor rural region in a deeply impoverished developing nation has sought to employ higher education to encourage community development. We argue that RHU has languished as a result of its founder's embrace of a grass roots-centered vision that nonetheless ironically tracked neoliberal assumptions and conditions concerning institutional sustainability. We contend that our case suggests that a strategy that assumes self-sustaining and autonomous higher education institutions is unlikely to succeed in very poor nations.

1. Introduction

This article explores the efforts of a Haitian social entrepreneur to develop Rural Haitian University (RHU, a pseudonym), to promote development of the remote agricultural region in which it is located.[1] Frederick Kiberlain (a pseudonym), who created the institution, did so as an early adopter of the view that higher education could stimulate development in deeply impoverished contexts. His view was consonant with then emerging World Bank policy encouraging such efforts. We suggest that neoliberal assumptions and international donors' funding priorities as well asKiberlain's initial mistaken hope that the university he founded could be community funded and self-supporting, have limited the strategic choices available to this NGO leader by pushing him to emphasize 'autonomy' and 'survival' for RHU. That fact has placed the university in persistent jeopardy of failing and has undermined development of its potential reach and effectiveness. This article comprises six parts: this introduction, a description of the Haitian context (labeled background), a summary of recent World Bank policy concerning higher education, an overview of our research approach, a brief comparison of the close similarity between RHU's struggle to survive on the basis of its Founder's assumptions and the dynamics of academic capitalism and our conclusions.

2. Background

Haiti occupies a land area of 28,000 km^2, and mountains make up 70% of the country's territory. Roughly 70% of Haiti's nearly 10 million residents live in its 570 rural communal sections, while 30% of its people reside in the nation's urban centers. The government's 18 Ministries and State Secretariat find it extremely difficult to provide even basic public services to any portion of the country due to chronic governance challenges, including the lack of anything resembling an adequate national taxation system and an exceptionally poor population (Kiberlain, 2009). Indeed, as we write, the nation is once again embroiled in a governance crisis that is threatening its path to democratization and vigorous development (Razafimbahiny, 2015; USAID, 2016).

In consequence, social services are principally provided by international nongovernmental organizations (INGOs) that also serve as the backbone of the nation's economy. In January 2010, for example, such NGOs supplied more than 70% of available health care in Haiti. Similarly, private schools, operated primarily by INGOs and NGOs (often funded by their international cousins), provide education to 85% of the nation's elementary and secondary school-aged population that receive it (International Crisis Group, 2009; 13). Haiti has one of the most privatized school systems in the world (Edmonds, 2013; 440).

Moreover, local NGOs and the Haitian state rely heavily on foreign

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[1] We have employed pseudonyms to protect the confidentiality of those individuals we interviewed for this analysis and use those throughout this article. We assigned pseudonyms to interviewees and to the university we examined when citing documents related to it or describing its operations. We have done so to honor the conditions of the consent provided by participants in our study.

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funds to support their operations. In fact, fully 70% of the central government's budget is foreign financed (Ramachandran and Walz, 2012). In the absence of a working tax system, national state budget resources depend disproportionately on collection of customs revenues, especially from Haiti's main port in Port-au-Prince (PAP). However, special interest groups have controlled the capital city's harbor and all other secondary seaports and customs houses since a devastating earthquake in January 2010.

The state and NGOs alike confront a situation in which approximately 76% of the Haitian population lives on less than $2 a day, and 56% survive on less than $1 per day. Moreover, about 30% of Haiti's Gross Domestic Product (GDP) is comprised of remittances from the country's diaspora, on which approximately 1.1 million people depend for sustenance. This situation of low income and strong reliance on external support has been aggravated by the fact that impoverished farmers have been migrating to already overcrowded Port-au-Prince at the rate of 75,000 people per year.

The nation's former President Michel Martelly (2011–2016) embraced education as essential to the future of the nation. But only 22% of Haitians finish elementary school, and 1% complete college (Downie, 2012; A8). While more than 40% of the children who live in and around Port-au-Prince continue to seventh grade, less than 10% of young people living in the rural areas do so. For the nation's other urban centers, the overall enrollment rate in seventh grade is approximately 30% of the eligible population (IHSI/Fafo, 2003, cited in Lunde, 2008).

For its part, notwithstanding recent rhetorical support from national leaders and fiscal aid from international donors, the higher education sector in Haiti faces a number of challenges, including a lack of reliable and ongoing sources of funding, an ongoing brain drain through international migration and to INGOs located in-country (that frequently offer better pay and working conditions than Haitian public or private sector posts may provide), and a continuing population shift away from rural areas and toward the country's already overwhelmed cities, particularly Port-au-Prince. Moreover, as noted in 2. above, the nation's universities, including RHU, have all had to find ways and means to address the destruction of major shares of their infrastructure by the January 2010 earthquake, and in this effort they have received very little support from the Haitian government, whose facilities and work force were also badly affected by that disaster. These trends have contributed to an ongoing depletion of Haiti's human and social capital.

3. STET The World Bank and higher education

A 1994 World Bank report on higher education outlined the rationale on which the Bank had dramatically reduced lending for higher education to developing nations in favor of primary and secondary education:

> … higher education investments have lower social rates of return than investments in primary and secondary education and investments in basic education can also have more direct impact on poverty reduction, because they tend to improve income equality (World Bank, 1994; 12).

Bloom et al. later found that the Bank had indeed decreased support for higher education from 17% of its worldwide education portfolio between 1985 and 1989 to just 7% between 1995 and 1999 (Bloom et al., 2006; 4).

The Bank's 1994 analysis also contended that developing nations could ill afford to treat higher education as a public good (World Bank, 1994; 21). The World Bank's position was that access to higher education should be limited and provided to students on a cost-sharing basis (World Bank, 1994; 4). But, in a signal of a possible shift, this document also suggested that countries that adopted this more 'sustainable' stance might be provided support (World Bank, 1994; 86). In practice, this observation meant little, as the Bank did not reconsider seriously the role of higher education in development for six more years.

In 2000, a World Bank-UNESCO Task Force on higher education encouraged the Bank to reconsider its lending policies based on the need to address the global knowledge economy. The group contended that lesser-developed nations might be lifted from poverty by cultivating citizen capacities to engage in the so called 'knowledge economy' through improved access to strengthened higher education institutions.

Naidoo has observed that the primary assumption underpinning this mindset was that developing countries could succeed by emulating the developed world (Naidoo, 2008; 85). The manifestation of this frame was a repositioning of funding to support, "higher education in developing countries as a crucial site for social development and for the production, dissemination, and transfer of economically productive knowledge and innovation" (Naidoo, 2008; 84). The important phrase in this sentence was 'economically productive knowledge and innovation.' The Bank was willing only to acknowledge forms of knowledge and inquiry that in its view were directly germane to a country's existing employment markets. This sort of thinking was a direct product of the assumption that knowledge could be commodified and only such curricula as could be viewed as instrumentally serving current employment could be perceived as legitimate (Kauppinen, 2014). Both assumptions were (and are) powerfully reductionist and unable to accommodate broader views of higher education as crucibles for individual acquisition of multiple forms of communication and reasoning capacities that are applicable to diverse forms of employment as well as the exercise of citizenship responsibilities.

This view also supposes that there are adequate public and private sector employment markets with demand sufficient to absorb those who graduate from developing nation universities. In Haiti, as in many other emerging nations, this assumption is false, with too few jobs available to support a burgeoning youth population. In fact, as noted above, the job market in Haiti is by and large driven by international NGOs that employ those individuals who are better educated, thereby diverting human capital that might otherwise be available for locally driven entrepreneurial initiatives. Furthermore, As Daumerie and Hardee have argued:

> Haiti's demographic characteristics contribute greatly to the country's economic and environmental challenges and opportunities. Ninety-seven percent deforested, Haiti is densely populated with 339 inhabitants per square kilometer. The high rate of population growth for several decades combined with limited arable land has resulted in unsustainable environmental pressure. … The median age of the population is 20 years, and almost 70 percent of Haiti's people are under age 30 (Daumerie and Hardee 2010; 2).

More generally, as Kruss, McGrath, Il-haam Petersen and Gastrow have recently argued,

> the relationship between higher education and economic development is extremely complex and deeply contextualized and based in particular sectors in particular skillsets [and] in particular firms (cited in Van Hilten, 2015; Kruss et al., 2015).

To attain their goals for higher education in developing nations, the World Bank and the IMF "have exerted tremendous pressure to roll back state control, deregulate domestic markets and open them up to international trade and competition" (Naidoo 2008; 86). Consistent with these neoliberal aims to dismantle state social support programs, the World Bank, as noted above, had long been openly unsympathetic to understanding higher education as a public good. In addition, consistent with neoliberal notions of free trade and the movement of goods and ideas, the Bank has supported efforts by universities to be more competitive in the knowledge economy.

A UNESCO position paper on Higher Education post-2015 (2014) found that unequal access to higher education is likely to continue to exist in most developing nations for decades to come because of poor elementary and secondary education and persistent poverty:

> Progress in the provision of basic education and the growing need for relevant skills and lifelong learning opportunities have substantially increased demand for access to different streams and forms of post and basic and tertiary education. Ensuring equitable access to relevant and diversified post-basic and tertiary education is a challenge that all countries must meet.
>
> This challenge is particularly acute in the least developed countries, where insufficient opportunities to access higher levels of learning have resulted in a knowledge gap with serious consequences for social and economic development (UNESCO, 2014; 5).

UNESCO has likewise called for developing nations to strengthen technical curricula for their higher education students.[2]

This neoliberal perspective, by virtue of being imposed on developing nations, including Haiti, via structural adjustment programs, has displaced local narratives and culture:

> [The neoliberal account] universalizes policies and obscures country and regional differences. … [It] denies the capacity of local institutions and cultural values to mediate, negotiate, reinterpret and transmute the dominant model of globalization and the emergent form of knowledge capitalism on which it is based (Olssen and Peters 2005; 330).

In short, UNESCO and World Bank's a priori assumptions concerning knowledge, employment and higher education in developing nations, including Haiti, stand in stark contrast to the conditions actually obtaining there. In consequence, its policy prescription ill fits the contexts to which it is targeted:

> One factor missing to spur economic growth is qualified manpower. Only six out of every 1000 people in the labor market have a certificate or diploma and less than two-thirds of the population is literate (Daumerie and Hardee 2010; 8).

There is neither a vigorous job market of the sort the Bank and UNESCO routinely has envisioned in their commodified view of knowledge arising from higher education, nor a workforce equipped to assume positions in that ideologically imagined marketplace in Haiti.

4. Research approach

We conducted fieldwork at RHU in 2011 and 2012 and have remained attentive to the institution since, a task aided considerably by the (participant observer) service of one of the authors on the United States Board of Directors for RHU from 2012-present. Indeed, one author's governance role for RHU has afforded both authors routine access to the institution's leaders and to documents the university has produced during that time concerning its ongoing efforts to maintain its operations. During our field visits to Haiti, we interviewed 8 RHU-affiliated students (of the approximately 20–25 then active), 3 university administrators, 3faculty members and 2 volunteers. We also interviewed 2 other local citizens, 1 INGO representative responsible for a grant to RHU and 7 well-known Haitian education leaders familiar with the aims and operations of the university. Our 26 interviews were semi-structured in character and varied in length from 35 to 75 min. One of the authors is fluent in French, which allowed many conversations to occur in that language. When that was not possible, we arranged for a translator to undertake simultaneous translation from Creole to English. We used our interview data to parse key questions confronting RHU as its stakeholders viewed them.

We translated as necessary and thereafter reviewed our notes from our interviews for key themes linked to stakeholder perceptions of RHU's vision, mission and challenges. We did so iteratively for each text by means of a process of open and axial coding, identifying all possible themes and then aggregating those until we had identified a set of core perceptions among our interviewees concerning the relationship of RHU aims, capacities and capability to ensure continued pursuit of its stated aspirations, on the basis of its goal of autonomous institutional sustainability.

We also gathered all of the documents we could obtain for the period 2011-present concerning the founding vision and evolution of RHU and we examined each for its assumptions concerning the financial and organizational structure and standing of the institution as well as for its leaders' arguments concerning how such was to occur as the university confronted a continuously unforgiving economic and political context.

5. Rural Haitian University

5.1. A community supported strategic vision

RHU, which formally began operations in January 2004, is located in a remote mountain rural area in Haiti and is the product of the imagination of its founder, Frederick Kiberlain. He envisioned RHU as a mechanism to combat Haiti's cycle of poverty through the creation of social capital and economic opportunities in its region and beyond. Kiberlain foresaw recruiting students for RHU via specialists working with local grassroots organizations in each of the 570 rural communities in Haiti (Kiberlain, 2013). In his view, the nation had to decentralize educational opportunity to retain intellectual capital in its countryside, since the major share of the country's citizens continue to reside there, and to nurture a workforce able to secure development (Kiberlain, 2013).

In an interview with the authors in 2012, he suggested that it is necessary to work at different levels to cultivate and retain social capital within communities (Kiberlain, personal interview, May 15, 2012). He saw RHU as part of an effort to secure that purpose and the development linked to it in its region and across Haiti. In particular, the University's 2012 strategic plan embraced a grass roots-oriented mission centered on peasant culture and sustainability as a way to break a perceived cycle of dependence on external support:

> The university will be based on a solid ethical foundation that respects the Haitian peasants' cultural identity, their set of values. For instance, the university will be founded on the principle of solidarity. The university will be based on the principle of popular education. That means it takes as its starting point the peasants' life experiences. … The philosophy of the university and all the subjects taught should also be based on the principle of sustainability. The students must be prepared in such a way that they learn to minimize their dependence on external factors and instead maximize the self-management and development of their communities. In other words, they become promoters of independence rather than dependencies (Rural Haitian University, 2012, emphasis in the original).

Notably, all of these goals aimed to develop community capacities while reflecting local character and needs. Were they to be realized, these aspirations would result in the creation of human, and thereafter, social capital; both appropriate and necessary for rural development. Kiberlain also specifically embraced self-reliance and funding as a pillar of RHU's mission. In particular, the university's founder originally envisioned villages throughout Haiti sponsoring students to attend RHU by providing all or substantial shares of their tuition requirements. He has suggested to us in multiple interviews and conversations that such would have created community "buy-in" for the institution, while also ensuring adequate support for participating students. More, in theory, it would have encouraged RHU graduates to bring their capacities back to their home villages on completion of their degrees as a way to repay

[2] For more on specific contextual factors that mediate the influence of higher education on development see, Crossley et al., 2017; Population Council, 2012; Kigotho, 2014; Kruss et al., 2015; Usher, 2016.

community members for their support. That fact in turn would yield entrepreneurial opportunities and nurture social capital formation for development. But this bootstrapping vision for RHU has never been realized due to the deep poverty of communities near RHU and of the nation more generally, and the weakness of the country's governance institutions. Indeed, the University's "home" village is populated by subsistence farm families whose average income is less than $1.00 per day (Kiberlain, Personal interview, May 15, 2012).

Students never came to RHU with the village support that Kiberlain had envisioned. The upshot of this circumstance was that the university founder's view of the priorities for the institution, while originally quite differently justified, have come to echo the World Bank's call for university independence from government and community support. One might argue that Kiberlain's vision of an autarkic community-linked university was at once pragmatic, since the Haitian government was ill positioned to provide needed support when he created the institution, even as it was also profoundly idealistic or even romantically utopian. Irrespective of this mixed picture, perversely, in principle, Kiberlain's founding dream also relieved the nation's government of an imperative to adopt a supporting role for higher education, whatever its specific particular capacities to do so at the time of RHU's founding. In this, ironically, Kiberlain's vision echoed in practice, if not in its originating conceptualization, the World Bank's stance that higher education should be considered a private good in developing nation contexts. However, Kiberlain quickly found that this vision could not be realized in rural Haiti and he therefore turned to the imperative of seeking other sources of financial support, principally from international donors, for the institution in order to prevent its closure. Indeed, RHU has fought potential collapse throughout its existence as a result of its students' (and their communities') poverty and the institution's relative paucity of other sources of income.

RHU had graduated 20 students prior to the cataclysmic earthquake that struck in January 2010. That natural disaster either destroyed or seriously damaged all of the physical infrastructure of the university and its affiliated elementary and secondary schools. RHU quickly committed to rebuild, and as of February 2014 formally enrolled 44 students (although only approximately 20 of those were actually pursuing course work on a sustained and systematic basis) in its three schools. In addition, nominally, at least, it offered study in four languages: English, French, Creole and Spanish in temporary facilities consisting largely of shipping containers modified for the purpose (Kiberlain, 2014).

In line with Kiberlain's holistic view of development, Rural Haitian University is one of four organizations he has established since 1988 that also include a Peasants Association (PA), a rural-focused microfinance entity and an order of nuns. While, in Kiberlain's words, all of these institutions share an aspiration "to empower, to serve and to transform the living conditions of the poor in rural Haiti" and are, therefore, "members of the same family," they each have separate governing boards, administrations and institutional structures (Kiberlain, 2013). A rural-focused micro-finance entity has been the most successful of the three organizations to date. That NGO has placed social goals at the center of its commitments and now has branches located throughout the country, several hundred employees, more than 250,000 depositors and 65,000 borrowers (Zanotti 2010).

In its founder's view, the Peasants Association has also played an important role in supporting the community in which RHU is located by empowering area farmers in their relations with the central government, providing logistical and expert support and assisting women's business development efforts. The PA has also provided water to many families in the community, helped to plant more than 1 million trees in the region surrounding the village as part of a reforestation project sponsored by an INGO, and served as a major advocate for the national government's creation of a Ministry of Peasant Affairs in 2012. That new government entity resulted in part from an effort begun by the National Peasant Congress, of which the Peasants Association was a formative part, in 2008.

According to Kiberlain, the PA has undertaken several other development projects, including efforts to improve infrastructure or provide additional communication, health care, agricultural training and animal husbandry services (Kiberlain, 2013). Along with an order of nuns Kiberlain was instrumental in establishing, the Peasants Association also manages schools in the university's region for approximately 750 children from kindergarten through high school. We were not able to verify personally all of these activities during our visits. We did, however, tour the elementary and secondary schools and became convinced that, notwithstanding the fact that the earthquake had leveled their original buildings, they were well-managed and offered solid instruction. Several community members informed us that many children walked for hours each day from surrounding communities to attend classes at each.

The Sisters also operate an orphanage for 58 children in the village and, as noted, help to staff the Peasants Association schools. In addition, the nuns offer women's entrepreneurship programs and manage a small restaurant and a rudimentary health clinic in the community in which RHU is located. We garnered the impression during our visits that the children's home was well-funded and managed and that the Sisters enjoyed considerable standing and authority in the village.

In view of the above, it is obvious that Kiberlain has played a very important role in the region, not only through RHU, but also by means of the other institutions he has nurtured there (and whose reach now extends more broadly than that of the university) during the last 30 years. It is also clear that Rural Haitian University has struggled more than its sister organizations, in no small part because it has lacked a stable and sustainable financing scheme.

5.2. Kiberlain's goals and assumptions regarding RHU encounter local poverty and lack of government support

We turn now to a brief account of some of the complex obstacles that have confronted RHU and its leader as he has sought to offer higher education in one of Haiti's poorest rural areas. The University's struggle well illustrates the challenges of attempting to establish higher education institutions as triggers of development in very poor countries without public support and on a cost- sharing basis, as envisioned by the World Bank. Because of the lack of capacity of the government to support such initiatives, Kiberlain embraced self-reliance to operate the University. However, because of the scarcity of resources available in the communities expected to support the students, as well as the lack of job opportunities for university graduates, the neoliberal cost-sharing model simply does not work in Haiti. As a result, RHU has found itself increasingly dependent upon international donor funding, whose availability and guiding premises it does not control.

We contend overall in this section that Kiberlain's original assumption of autonomy never accorded with the university's operating environment. That fact has made it exceedingly difficult to keep the university operating. Moreover, internationally crafted funding priorities, routinely based on neoliberal, standardized and decontextualized assumptions have contributed to RHU's ongoing fiscal crisis. Given the institution's continuing lack of financial stability, Kiberlain has sought to keep the institution afloat by seeking such support as can be obtained from international entities, even at the price of hard tradeoffs regarding the coherence and quality of the instruction the university has offered.

An additional by-product of this approach has been continuing faculty and staff dissatisfaction and disillusionment, which have resulted in frequent resignations and high turnover. Today, most faculty make the difficult commute to the university from PAP and when not paid as promised (a frequent occurrence during RHU's existence), many choose simply not to return. The institution has also had three presidents in just the last five years. This situation was symptomatic, according to several former University managers in interviews with us, of the fact that RHU has not transitioned from 'charity' to 'development' in its overall

orientation (Personal interviews, administrators 1, 2,3, 2012). In their view, charity entails delivering programs selectively in accord with whatever resources are available at the discretion of those who control those without breaking the cycle of dependence, while development implies following consistent strategies aimed at empowering community members.

RHU has had persistent difficulties paying its teachers since the 2010 earthquake and has been on the verge of closing more than once. The faculty members and administrators we interviewed reported that the University today is primarily sustained by insufficient and sporadic INGO funding and by tuition, which is about $2500 per academic year per student (Personal interviews, Faculty members 1,2,3, 2012; Rural Haitian University, 2013). In a nation and region in which an income of $500 per year is high, this sum is indeed large, especially for the university's students, (nearly all of whom do not have access to sponsorships from relatives or friends in the diaspora.

And, unfortunately, the nation's ongoing economic crisis has made it more difficult for those matriculating to garner support from neighbors or family members. The poverty of its students and catchment communities as well as deepening difficulty in securing external assistance have made meeting the University's curricular and budget benchmarks extremely challenging. A RHU report, summarized below in Table 1, highlights the fact that only a few of the courses formally in the curriculum had actually been offered at the time of its creation, due to the institution's inability to pay and retain faculty (Internal RHU document 2011, translation by the authors). This situation remains an ongoing concern as we write.

Given these issues, 'running the university' de facto has come to mean seeking to position RHU so as to attain whatever funding might become available from IGOs and INGOs, even at the cost of mission displacement. One particularly telling example of this behavior found the institution's founder suddenly describing RHU as seeking to incorporate vocational experiences into its curricula as a way to reduce its tuition costs, when he had not done so before. In fact, the founding charter and related documents of the university included nothing about the aim of reducing student tuition in return for specific work experiences as an animating focus in its founding or later strategic documents. Nonetheless, when an INGO offered to provide the university a grant if it had a rationale to involve its students in a tree planting-reforestation effort in its village region, RHU's founder began to offer such arguments as a rationale to gain the support.

All of the students we interviewed argued that the effort had not been integrated into their course work and that they saw themselves as offering "free" labor to plant trees so the university could obtain needed funds (Student personal interviews, 2012). We also interviewed the INGO manager involved with this project and that individual was well aware of this concern, but also realized RHU needed resources and "hoped" that the university administration was earnest when they suggested they would integrate the effort into relevant classes (Personal interview, INGO representative, 2012). We note, parenthetically, that the founder's orientation in this example is common in our experience in Haiti, where survival is often at issue and needed funds are often only available in support of someone else's agenda. Taking such steps as illustrated here would be widely perceived as necessary. In sum, RHU's leader has, as in this example, practiced 'survival,' by seeking the injection of one-time funding, irrespective of its provenance, to stave off institutional collapse. In this context, Kiberlain's original assumption of autonomous institutional sustainability on the basis of ongoing community support loses much of its meaning. Instead, RHU has found itself dependent on whatever funds it can garner directed from afar, whether those arise from grants only ancillary to its articulated mission or from well-intended foreigners providing gifts via its U.S. based-sister organization.

The following list of university strategic priorities identified by its founder in autumn 2012 (the institution's latest such update) provides additional evidence of his adoption of a 'rescue plan' approach of adopting ways and means to garner revenue by whatever means feasible, as opposed to a strategy for ensuring RHU's sustainability:

a) The Peasants Association Food security Project: which is a Wealth Creation Project: Creation of small business and job opportunities—a sustainable development project.
b) INGO/RHU project: which is a Project of Food Production and Animal Production: Actually, we are looking for the approbation of the INGO to manage this project as a wealth creation project—a project of sustainable development.
c) Creole Institute: A program to teach Creole to foreigners who are working and living in Haiti and who want to pay for this program.
d) Project to reinforce Peasants Association activities: This is a project financed by an INGO. It will help RHU create a Development Center to incubate the small businesses in the region with a view to scaling up their operations in other areas of Haiti.
e) Improve RHU's facilities: the university now has 60 beds and 5 classrooms for approximately 75 students and must find a way to manage this facility as an income generating activity for its operations.
f) Project to recruit a new group of 75 students for September 2012 that can pay each a minimum of 100 dollars per month to study at RHU. Any student who recruits three new students who have financial capacity to pay will receive a payment from RHU.
g) List of other works that students and teachers can do to help RHU generate money/reduce costs. (Students can work as security guards, housekeepers and in RHU administration: they can work in registration, in the library, in communications between RHU with the Federation of the Mayors and the Association of the Kazek (the Peasants Association).
h) Students can ask their community mayors to finance their studies at RHU and to send other high school graduates from their home community to come study at RHU. This specific objective is to help the Mayor and the Kazek staff to have a specialist in sustainable development to come to work with them on a permanent basis after students graduate from RHU (Kiberlain, 2013).

All of Kiberlain's priorities on this list, with the exception perhaps of point 'f,' which emphasized the need to broaden the student population (and which was not realized), are examples of an RHU 'survival strategy.' That is, the founder's memorandum stressed the institution's need to remain fiscally afloat in the near term, however possible, via a

Table 1
RHU Curricular offerings.
Source: Internal RHU document, 2011.

Curricula	Total number of classes planned	Total number of classes offered	Difference between total number of classes listed and offered	Number of sessions planned	Number of sessions completed	Number of sessions remaining
Agronomy 2nd	78	21	57	10	2	8
Agronomy 3rd	78	38	40	10	5	5
Veterinary	76	39	37	10	5	5
Management	60	38	22	8	5	3
Total	292	136	156	38	17	21

patchwork of initiatives, all aimed at securing income. Not coincidentally, too, this document also offered a roadmap in which students increasingly shoulder the brunt of Rural Haitian University's unsustainable financial situation, itself an untenable stance given the fact that so very few possess means to support it. To date, in short, in the face of the lack of any reliable revenue streams beyond some intermittent international NGO funding and infrequent student tuition payments (which, when they do arrive, are often late, sporadic and/or deeply discounted), RHU has experienced serious difficulties in maintaining its fiscal viability and strategic focus.

A strong vision is insufficient to make RHU an instrument for creating human and social capital and a well-equipped workforce and retaining it in the local community and in Haiti's other rural areas. Only reliable sources of revenue, combined with a sound curriculum, qualified faculty, an adequate government taxation and public services capacity, robust employment markets and an enduring focus on academic excellence, may result in the University becoming a powerful instrument of individual and social change for Haiti's rural communities. The Rural Haitian University case suggests that, notwithstanding Kiberlain's attempts to creates some of these conditions through multiple grassroots institutions, RHU has found itself dependent on aligning its aims with those of international funders and NGOs whose goals and conceptual frame are developed with little or no consideration of its specific needs or context.

Paradoxically, while Kiberlain did not create the university on the basis of that construct's specific assumptions, this situation neatly comports with what Slaughter and Rhoades (2004) have called academic capitalism, and we employ their framework briefly here to highlight the paradox that RHU was unlikely ever to succeed on the basis of the expectations on which it was founded. Whatever may have been his initial intentions, Kiberlain's plans in fact tracked World Bank assumptions and UNICEF recommendations to developing nations concerning how to organize their higher education sectors. For its part, for example, a 2010 United Nations Children's Fund report concerning the education systems in Middle Eastern and North African nations criticized those countries' higher education institutions as insufficiently responsive to their employment markets (UNICEF MENA Regional Office 2010, 84). The UN Children's Fund analysis noted a "lack of feedback loops between the education system and the needs of the labor market," and contended:

> The global marketplace calls for new competencies that the current education system is not fully prepared to teach. And to adjust to the realities of globalization, schools must be prepared to transform their curricula even while they diversify their funding sources (UNICEF MENA Regional Office 2010, 64).

As this quotation suggests, the World Bank and other United Nations bodies were pressing developing nations to adopt a neoliberal approach to higher education throughout the world, as Kiberlain was seeking to develop RHU. In doing so, the leaders and staffs of these institutions assumed first, that only 'practical' curricula could serve employment markets and second, that there were sufficient jobs being developed by individuals and firms in those markets to employ a rising number of university graduates with such 'relevant' skills. In practice, both of these assumptions have since been shown to be empirically ungrounded, as many developing nations do not possess sufficient private sector employment to absorb even strong percentages of their college-aged populations (skilled or not) and such is surely the case in Haiti.

These flawed ideological arguments and assumptions can be traced ultimately to the conservative movement in the United States and the United Kingdom, beginning in the 1960s. Their rising salience and ultimate dominance in higher education in the U.S., for example, began with Ronald Reagan's attack on taxpayer support for colleges and universities as Governor of California. In 1966, when newly elected as that state's chief executive, he demanded that California end its standing policy of ensuring its citizens' higher education at taxpayer expense by taking the following steps:

- Calling for an end to free tuition for state college and university students
- annually demanding 20 percent across-the-board cuts in higher education funding
- repeatedly slashing construction funds for state campuses
- engineering the firing of Clark Kerr, the highly-respected Chancellor of the University of California system, and
- declaring that the state 'should not subsidize intellectual curiosity' (Clabaugh, 2004).

Just as Reagan argued, others pressing for a neoliberal political economy, including United Kingdom Prime Minister Margaret Thatcher (1979–1990), a close colleague of Reagan throughout his presidency (1981–1989), have since consistently insisted that higher education should at most be treated as a quasi-public good, and preferably a wholly private one, and public colleges and universities should rely principally on student tuition and fees, gifts and research contracts to fund their operations, instead of government support. In keeping with this view, U.S. state legislatures have for decades now reduced support for public institutions while private nonprofit colleges and universities have grappled with ever rising tuitions while seeking to attract sufficient paying students to fund their operations. In addition, both public and private institutions in the United States now confront increased competition for students thanks to nationally portable financial aid packages. Meanwhile, owing principally to a severe decline in government support, students attending public higher education institutions bear much higher debt loads following graduation today than their predecessors did, as they have come to shoulder the major share or all of the costs of their university educations.

In this climate, those studying academic capitalism have charted how public universities especially have responded to their changed strategic and operating environments by tracking the ways and means by which these institutions have sought to raise funds to augment student tuition and fees (and thereby garner adequate operating revenue and relieve persistent pressure to increase them). The Slaughter and Rhoades (2004) analytic framework has been much used by scholars to examine western university responses to declining public support. That conceptualization suggests that higher education institutions that adopt academic capitalist responses to the intense pressures on them to privatize exhibit one or more of the following characteristics:

- New circuits of knowledge: more broadly defined pathways to learning that occur outside the traditional professional and scholarly networks that once dominated higher education
- Interstitial organizations: administrative structures and processes that have arisen from the need among colleges and universities to manage revenues from profitmaking activities
- Intermediating networks: alliances across public, business and civil society sectors that coalesce around concrete issues to enable each party to take better advantage of opportunities in the new neoliberal economy
- Extended managerial capacity: additional managerial capacity to market opportunities more effectively (Slaughter and Rhoades, 2004; 26).

In our view, Kiberlain has evidenced efforts in each of these domains as he has struggled to maintain RHU. First, as to new circuits of knowledge, Kiberlain sought to develop a robust cultural tourism program and had laid plans at least to offer professional programs outside the university's traditional curricula (most notably to prepare bakers) in

order to gain needed revenues to sustain the university, even though neither of these efforts closely aligned with the university's curricular foci. Second, while RHU has never developed sufficiently to create the patent and trademark offices and sponsored programs offices that Slaughter and Rhoades called interstitial organizations, its leaders have nonetheless established a counterpart nongovernmental organization in the United States, overseen by a governing board of individuals sympathetic to the university's aims, whose overriding aim is to raise funds to support the institution. In addition, to attract outside support RHU has created, or offered to construct, such structures as potential funders might desire, including, as we have noted, using its students to plant trees for a reforestation project that was not integrated into curricula in any meaningful sense. These efforts parallel those Slaughter and Rhoades and others have chronicled.

Third, RHU was founded on the idea that intermediating networks would lend the university sustenance and connect it to the communities on which it was, at least as conceived initially, to rely for support. While matters have not unfolded as its founder had hoped, his plans suggest he envisioned positioning RHU to take advantage of just such synergies. Finally, while, again, never developing adequately to require new vice presidents for research or directors overseeing new revenue-creating enterprises as has occurred in other institutions facing privatization pressures, RHU was explicitly designed to exploit funding opportunities, and its president is unambiguously charged with identifying and pursuing such possibilities as a central part of his portfolio of responsibilities.

Oddly, as we have argued, Kiberlain may be said to have tracked World Bank and UNICEF policy prescriptions closely, even if, at least initially, unknowingly, in his design for RHU. In any case, the university has since actively sought to embody, and in some instances, has realized, the principal elements that together comprise academic capitalism—a view of higher education that imagines it as a private good whose provision can be assured by private market/student support. However, it has done so to forestall failure, rather than on the basis of an ideological claim that such was a preferred way to proceed. Kiberlain's original assumption that RHU could be individual and community funded and therefore autonomous, ironically consistent with neoliberal thinking, has proven to be the proverbial fly in the ointment in the university's design and development.

This has been so for several reasons. First, Kiberlain has never identified a sufficient number of communities or students able and willing to pay tuition to sustain the university enterprise in anything approaching a vigorous way. Second, and perhaps as importantly, the vast majority of potential Haitian University students do not have recourse to a robust banking system or to government or private bank sponsored loans to help them defray the costs of their higher education, even if (very unlikely) they have the income to qualify for the same. Potential students have been and remain, largely on their own in this crucial respect. Third, while less frequently remarked by Kiberlain or other RHU administrators with whom we spoke, Haiti's firms and entrepreneurs are not producing sufficient employment opportunities to employ a steady stream of university graduates, in part because the nation lacks a routinely functioning government (and tax system), adequate physical and social infrastructure and accompanying trade networks.

It is difficult to imagine, too, that the incomes of local farmers, near to subsistence or below on average, will be able soon themselves to support financially the wildly imaginative 'entrepreneurial' ventures of the sort Kiberlain has always envisaged RHU students would produce that would result in sustainable rural development in Haiti. In our view, these hard realities, perhaps more evident in this poor island country than in many other developing nations, but certainly at play in other countries, too, suggest that while dreamers of Kiberlain's stripe or neoliberals embracing a market focused ideology may wish to believe that higher education institutions do not require government support, in practice that is paradoxically likely to be impossible to attain, even if accepted as a legitimate aspiration, in the absence of robust market and public institutions. Indeed, even when such conditions obtain, as in the United States, the approach is likely to be bedeviled by its assumptions concerning the forms of knowledge that matter to society and to democracy and by the uneven distribution of its education outcomes. On this point, at RHU, only those who can pay even a deeply discounted tuition are now allowed to enroll or progress, when offerings can be made available at all. It is supremely difficult in such circumstances to imagine that higher education will soon realize the benefits that the university's founder rightly envisioned were possible in appropriate circumstances. In short, in the face of the lack of ongoing revenue streams beyond occasional international NGO funding and tuition, RHU has been unable to maintain its strategic focus. We contend that unless the University can identify sustainable sources of funding that do not require its pupils to shoulder heavy costs and that lift the institution out of continuous survival mode, it will not thrive. Moreover, it will not succeed in the medium and longer term should it otherwise survive, unless the nation's government and international organizations create conditions that allow for genuine economic growth through trade and provision of necessary services throughout the country.

6. Conclusions

This article has explored the challenge of whether it is possible amidst extreme poverty and weak political and economic structures and systems to build human and social capital through a higher education institution on the basis of an assumption of autonomous sustainability. Throughout, our analysis has emphasized that RHU has embraced a nearly textbook neoliberal definition of higher education, without, in fact, originally defining its enterprise in such terms. Instead, its founder had sought institutional autonomy in the name of community control and responsiveness. Nonetheless, and perhaps perversely, his assumptions have yielded outcomes and a scenario that closely tracks neoliberal claims.

In practice, privatization of higher education on the basis of neoliberal ideology or by means of claims for grassroots responsibility amidst high poverty and weak state institutions run a high danger of failing to encourage local population agency. Moreover, the ubiquity of NGOs, or the 'NGOization' of Haiti, combined with a formidable array of obstacles to creating virtuous social and economic circles in a situation of extreme poverty and weak infrastructure, have placed RHU in a persistently vulnerable position that it has so far been unable to address successfully on the basis of its community-centered autarkic assumptions.

Paradoxically, and unintentionally as a formal matter, Kiberlain's vision positioned RHU as an academic capitalist institution even as analysts began systematically studying the implications of neoliberal assumptions for higher education and had begun to employ that term. Unexpectedly, in Kiberlain's original vision, though for wildly different reasons, RHU was to be a paragon of such an institution and was to be created full-blown in what often has been characterized as the neoliberal image of higher education. RHU did not adapt to enervating state support and create revenue raising opportunities to offset declining public subsidy as other western universities have done before it and thereby evidence academic capitalism. Instead, this nongovernmental Haitian University was created to stand alone and apart from the government on behalf of its rural constituency, while being supported by the same. That it has never done so as its founder had envisaged, and is unlikely to do so in the future is not an indictment of its creator or the good efforts of all of those who have worked assiduously to bring his animating vision to fruition. Instead, it is a reminder that effective governance structures and robust economies are vital to development and to creating the conditions for higher education to play appropriate roles in such processes. Universities alone cannot create the conditions for their flourishing.

RHU's situation has only been exacerbated by the international

community's embrace of neoliberalism. Rather than continue to pretend otherwise, bilateral and multilateral organizations and states with an interest in Haitian development should turn to efforts designed to develop that nation's public institutions and infrastructure and trade system, and do so as soon as possible. Such will not occur without sustained international support given Haiti's deep poverty. Nor will robust development occur, including a vibrant presence of higher education in the country's rural regions, without a rethinking of the erroneous assumptions that have thus far underpinned both the neoliberal and romanticized grass roots views of such institutions.

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