

DIY U: Edupunks, Edupreneurs, and the Coming Transformation of Higher Education

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DIY U is a spectacularly useful orientation and guide for anyone who's contemplating post-high school education or advising someone who is. Enriched with up-to-date statistics and cogent assessments, the book reveals the pros and cons of community colleges, conventional four-year residential colleges, for-profit universities and—most helpful of all—pedagogically adventurous online institutions and services. Kamenetz, a graduate of Yale, is passionate about the subject of higher education and how its many incarnations fit into the larger tapestry of American social values; but she is rigorously even-handed and unsentimental about each educational prospect she discusses. Self-trained as a journalist, Kamenetz writes here in first person and in the informal, readable style of a news reporter.

One of her main points is that there are expensive and depressing mismatches between the much-touted American ideal of a college education for everyone and the personal, political, and economic realities that confront this ideal. Would-be college students have different needs, aspirations, and abilities that must be addressed by different educational approaches. When they do graduate, by whatever avenue, most students will find themselves saddled with crippling loan debts. (Kamenetz suggests one's total debt should not exceed the salary one reasonably could expect to receive the first year after graduation.) A college education still gives one a foot up in the job market, but it is not, the author stresses, an *open sesame* to financial success. Nor is it the hoped-for leveler between sexes and races.

Most of Kamenetz's analysis surveys current online methods of making higher education available to the variegated masses. She covers such new-approach and online-dependent ventures as Western Governor's University, MIT's OpenCourseWare project and FlatWorldKnowledge, an open-source textbook supplier. She also interviews educational visionaries who predict great things for online teaching and study. Prominent among these seers is David Wiley of Brigham Young University. It is his mission, says Kamenetz, "not to bring technology into the classroom," since it's already there, but "to capture the potential of that technology to both lower costs and improve learning for all."

The book ends with the chapter, "A Resource Guide to a Do-It-Yourself Education," in which Kamenetz not only analyzes the personal qualities essential to fruitful self-instruction but also suggests a four-step sequence by which to pursue it. Appended is a five-page list of Web sites Kamenetz refers to in the text. *DIY U* will be especially valuable to those who want to explore the rapidly expanding universe of online learning.

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