
James Carville speaks about the ideological shifts in higher education funding.
STARVING THE BEAST

'Starving the Beast'

New documentary explores the philosophy and players behind cutting state support for high

March 22, 2016

By [Ellen Wexler](#)

S*tarving the Beast* opens with James Carville, a well-known Democratic strategist, standing in front of Louisiana State University.

"They say," he tells the crowd, "education is a commodity."

By "they," Carville means the reformers -- an assortment of politicians, think-tank leaders and others who believe that colleges should operate like businesses. That like any other good or service, education is a commodity. "It's a barrel of oil, it's an ounce of gold, it's a stock," he says. "It's anything."

The documentary, directed by Steve Mims, premiered this weekend at the South by Southwest Music Festival. Clocking in at 95 minutes, it explores the decline of state funding and the philosophical divide over whether higher education is a good. What should taxpayers be expected to support?

"Focusing on the root of it," Mims said, "that's the real story."

The film lays out an overview of the debate's philosophical underpinnings: originally, states viewed higher education as a worthwhile investment in their residents. Poor students could gain useful skills and move up the economic ladder, contributing to their states' economies. In the early days of public higher education systems, states provided free or low-cost tuition.

On the other side, there are the reformers and think-tank leaders, the antispending politicians like Bobby Jindals and Grover Norquists. Reformers like Norquist -- founder of Americans for Tax Reform -- encourages lawmakers to pledge their support for low taxes -- say that public colleges are a moral obligation to keep taxes low. The idea, Mims said, "is that the system is broken. That it's too



Wisconsin Governor Scott Walker. Credit: 'Starving the Beast'

For reformers, that means everything from cutting funding to gutting protections that don't tenure.

"Tenure, as utilized by public higher education, is outdated," Wallace Hall, a regent at the University of Texas, said in the film. "It's almost universally reviled, and it's in desperate need of a competitive alternative."

While Mims interviewed several conservative reformers for the film, Hall thought the final product was somewhat slanted according to the director. "He thought the film was somewhat slanted in a particular direction."

But the goal, he added, was to let advocates on both sides speak without interruption. "If you get people on both sides of this argument, then everything else flows from that."

The film starts in Texas, where former governor Rick Perry -- who appointed Hall -- was trying to implement changes. Created by the think-tank leader Jeff Sandefer, the reforms were designed to treat professors based on measures like student evaluations and create a merit-based system that put money in the hands of students rather than colleges.

"They were so simple," Sandefer says in the film, "that anybody who ran organizations would have implemented the course."

In a similar effort, Texas A&M created the "red and black report," which chronicled how much money was being spent on the university.

Originally, Mims focused the project on Texas. He's an adjunct at the University of Texas at Austin. He watched the cry for reform at Texas's public colleges gain traction. Along with producer Bill Mims, he conducted committee meetings and sit-down interviews. But as they continued their research, they saw similar trends across the country.

Louisiana. North Carolina. Virginia. Wisconsin. "It just became more and more complicated," Mims says. The film chronicles tensions in all five states.

In Wisconsin, Governor Scott Walker cut millions from state colleges and universities last year. In his budget, he also [removed some language \(https://www.insidehighered.com/news/2015/02/gubernatorial-assault-expansive-view-higher-ed-wisconsin\)](https://www.insidehighered.com/news/2015/02/gubernatorial-assault-expansive-view-higher-ed-wisconsin) from the state university system.

that universities “search for truth” and “improve the human condition.” He quickly called the opponents say the mistake signaled a philosophical shift.

In Louisiana, public colleges faced massive cuts last year, prompting the president of Louisiana State University to call for a [financial exigency \(https://www.insidehighered.com/quicktakes/2015/04/23/lsu-prepares-financial-exigency\)](https://www.insidehighered.com/quicktakes/2015/04/23/lsu-prepares-financial-exigency). Louisiana colleges [face many of the same problems \(https://www.insidehighered.com/news/payments-state-grant-program-colleges-pick-slack\)](https://www.insidehighered.com/news/payments-state-grant-program-colleges-pick-slack).

In North Carolina, conservative leaders [shut down \(https://www.insidehighered.com/news/2015/04/23/wants-shut-down-center-poverty-led-faculty-member-who-criticizes\)](https://www.insidehighered.com/news/2015/04/23/wants-shut-down-center-poverty-led-faculty-member-who-criticizes) the University of North Carolina's Center for the Study of the History of Biodiversity, and civic engagement and social change, a move that opponents argued was an attack on academic freedom.

The University of Virginia is the only story in the film that doesn't quite fit the narrative: the university decided to remove President Teresa Sullivan back in 2012, arguing that her approach wasn't consistent with the university's values. But after three weeks of protests, Sullivan was reinstated. It was, for Sullivan's supporters, a victory over a conservative reform agenda.

“The UVa story,” Mims said, “it's the one that sort of has a happy ending.”

For now, *Starving the Beast* will follow the states it profiles: it will screen at Louisiana State University and later at the Wisconsin Film Festival. Beyond that, Mims is still developing a release strategy.

As the film gains a wider audience, Mims hopes it will help shed light on what he says is one of the biggest problems. While many of the academics interviewed were up-to-date on the struggles in the little part of it -- they seemed unaware of the problem's scale.

But Mims is hopeful that the pushback to the reform agenda will help turn the issue into a national conversation. “What made this worthy of being a film is this resistance,” Mims said. “Without the resistance, it doesn't happen at a university, and it's pretty invisible.”



Starving the Beast Trailer

from [Steve Mims](#) PRO

02:30



[\(/print/news/2016/03/22/starving-beast-examines-ideological-shifts-funding-higher-education?width=775&height=500&iframe=true\)](https://www.insidehighered.com/news/2016/03/22/starving-beast-examines-ideological-shifts-funding-higher-education)

[Get the Daily News Update by email every weekday » \(/newsletter/signup\)](/newsletter/signup)

[WANT TO ADVERTISE? CLICK HERE \(HTTPS://WWW.INSIDEHIGHERED.COM/ADVERTISE\)](https://www.insidehighered.com/advertise)

[WE HAVE 14,631 JOBS TO BROWSE \(HTTPS://CAREERS.INSIDEHIGHERED.COM/?UTM_SOURCE=IHE&UTM_MEDIUM=EDITORIAL-SITE&UTM_CONTENT=SIDEBAR-LINK&UTM_CAMPAIGN=JOBS\)](https://careers.insidehighered.com/?utm_source=ihe&utm_medium=editorial-site&utm_content=sidebar-link&utm_campaign=jobs)

[POST A JOB](https://careers.insidehighered.com/post-a-job)

[\(HTTPS://CAREERS.INSIDE](https://careers.insidehighered.com)

I'm looking for ...

Keywords

SEARCH JOBS

[SEARCH TIPS \(HTTPS://CAREERS.INSIDEHIGHERED.COM/TIPS?WIDTH=640&HEIGHT=640\)](https://careers.insidehighered.com/tips?width=640&height=640)

JOB CATEGORIES

[Faculty Jobs \(5,842\) \(https://careers.insidehighered.com/search/category/faculty-jobs-710?utm_source=ihe&utm_medium=editorial-site&utm_content=sidebar-link&utm_campaign=jobs\)](https://careers.insidehighered.com/search/category/faculty-jobs-710?utm_source=ihe&utm_medium=editorial-site&utm_content=sidebar-link&utm_campaign=jobs)

[Humanities \(640\) \(https://careers.insidehighered.com/search/category/humanities-712?utm_source=ihe&utm_medium=editorial-site&utm_content=sidebar-link&utm_campaign=jobs\)](https://careers.insidehighered.com/search/category/humanities-712?utm_source=ihe&utm_medium=editorial-site&utm_content=sidebar-link&utm_campaign=jobs)

[Fine And Performing Arts \(339\) \(https://careers.insidehighered.com/search/category/fine-arts-713?utm_source=ihe&utm_medium=editorial-site&utm_content=sidebar-link&utm_campaign=jobs\)](https://careers.insidehighered.com/search/category/fine-arts-713?utm_source=ihe&utm_medium=editorial-site&utm_content=sidebar-link&utm_campaign=jobs)

[Professions \(2,344\) \(https://careers.insidehighered.com/search/category/professions-720?utm_source=ihe&utm_medium=editorial-site&utm_content=sidebar-link&utm_campaign=jobs\)](https://careers.insidehighered.com/search/category/professions-720?utm_source=ihe&utm_medium=editorial-site&utm_content=sidebar-link&utm_campaign=jobs)

[Science / Engineering / Mathematics \(1,393\) \(https://careers.insidehighered.com/search/category/science-engineering-mathematics-728?utm_source=ihe&utm_medium=editorial-site&utm_content=sidebar-link&utm_campaign=jobs\)](https://careers.insidehighered.com/search/category/science-engineering-mathematics-728?utm_source=ihe&utm_medium=editorial-site&utm_content=sidebar-link&utm_campaign=jobs)

[Social Sciences / Education \(1,169\) \(https://careers.insidehighered.com/search/category/social-sciences-education-729?utm_source=ihe&utm_medium=editorial-site&utm_content=sidebar-link&utm_campaign=jobs\)](https://careers.insidehighered.com/search/category/social-sciences-education-729?utm_source=ihe&utm_medium=editorial-site&utm_content=sidebar-link&utm_campaign=jobs)

[Administrative Jobs \(8,896\) \(https://careers.insidehighered.com/search/category/administrative-jobs-730?utm_source=ihe&utm_medium=editorial-site&utm_content=sidebar-link&utm_campaign=jobs\)](https://careers.insidehighered.com/search/category/administrative-jobs-730?utm_source=ihe&utm_medium=editorial-site&utm_content=sidebar-link&utm_campaign=jobs)

[Executive Positions \(570\) \(https://careers.insidehighered.com/search/category/executive-positions-731?utm_source=ihe&utm_medium=editorial-site&utm_content=sidebar-link&utm_campaign=jobs\)](https://careers.insidehighered.com/search/category/executive-positions-731?utm_source=ihe&utm_medium=editorial-site&utm_content=sidebar-link&utm_campaign=jobs)

[Alt-Ac Careers \(3,881\) \(https://careers.insidehighered.com/search/special/alt-ac?utm_source=ihe&utm_medium=editorial-site&utm_content=sidebar-link&utm_campaign=jobs\)](https://careers.insidehighered.com/search/special/alt-ac?utm_source=ihe&utm_medium=editorial-site&utm_content=sidebar-link&utm_campaign=jobs)

[Community Colleges \(2,341\) \(https://careers.insidehighered.com/search/special/community-colleges?utm_source=ihe&utm_medium=editorial-site&utm_content=sidebar-link&utm_campaign=jobs\)](https://careers.insidehighered.com/search/special/community-colleges?utm_source=ihe&utm_medium=editorial-site&utm_content=sidebar-link&utm_campaign=jobs)

[Online Learning \(2,341\) \(https://careers.insidehighered.com/search/special/online-learning?utm_source=ihe&utm_medium=editorial-site&utm_content=sidebar-link&utm_campaign=jobs\)](https://careers.insidehighered.com/search/special/online-learning?utm_source=ihe&utm_medium=editorial-site&utm_content=sidebar-link&utm_campaign=jobs)

[Outside US \(122\) \(https://careers.insidehighered.com/search/special/global?utm_source=ihe&utm_content=sidebar-link&utm_campaign=jobs\)](https://careers.insidehighered.com/search/special/global?utm_source=ihe&utm_content=sidebar-link&utm_campaign=jobs)

RELATED JOBS

[BROWSE ALL \(HTTPS://CAREERS.INSIDHIGHERED.COM/SEARCH?UTM_SOURCE=IHE&UTM_MEDIUM=EDITORIAL-SITE&UTM_CONTENT=SIDEBAR-LINK&UTM_CAMPAIGN=JOBS\)](https://careers.insidehighered.com/search?utm_source=ihe&utm_medium=editorial-site&utm_content=sidebar-link&utm_campaign=jobs)

[Dean of Undergraduate Admissions and Enrollment Management \(https://careers.insidehighered.com/search/institution/tufts-university-4851?utm_source=ihe&utm_medium=editorial-site&utm_content=sidebar-link&utm_campaign=jobs\)](https://careers.insidehighered.com/search/institution/tufts-university-4851?utm_source=ihe&utm_medium=editorial-site&utm_content=sidebar-link&utm_campaign=jobs)

[Tufts University \(https://careers.insidehighered.com/search/institution/tufts-university-4851?utm_source=ihe&utm_medium=editorial-site&utm_content=sidebar-link&utm_campaign=jobs\)](https://careers.insidehighered.com/search/institution/tufts-university-4851?utm_source=ihe&utm_medium=editorial-site&utm_content=sidebar-link&utm_campaign=jobs)

• Medford, MA

[Associate Vice President for Academic Affairs - Gillette College \(https://careers.insidehighered.com/search/institution/gillette-college-43?utm_source=ihe&utm_medium=editorial-site&utm_content=sidebar-link&utm_campaign=jobs\)](https://careers.insidehighered.com/search/institution/gillette-college-43?utm_source=ihe&utm_medium=editorial-site&utm_content=sidebar-link&utm_campaign=jobs)

[Sheridan College \(https://careers.insidehighered.com/search/institution/gillette-college-43?utm_source=ihe&utm_medium=editorial-site&utm_content=sidebar-link&utm_campaign=jobs\)](https://careers.insidehighered.com/search/institution/gillette-college-43?utm_source=ihe&utm_medium=editorial-site&utm_content=sidebar-link&utm_campaign=jobs)

• Gillette, WY

[Founding Program Director of the Master of Science in Occupational Therapy \(http://careers.insidehighered.com/search/institution/tennessee-wesleyan-college-43?utm_source=ihe&utm_medium=editorial-site&utm_content=sidebar-link&utm_campaign=jobs\)](http://careers.insidehighered.com/search/institution/tennessee-wesleyan-college-43?utm_source=ihe&utm_medium=editorial-site&utm_content=sidebar-link&utm_campaign=jobs)

[Tennessee Wesleyan College \(http://careers.insidehighered.com/search/institution/tennessee-wesleyan-college-43?utm_source=ihe&utm_medium=editorial-site&utm_content=sidebar-link&utm_campaign=jobs\)](http://careers.insidehighered.com/search/institution/tennessee-wesleyan-college-43?utm_source=ihe&utm_medium=editorial-site&utm_content=sidebar-link&utm_campaign=jobs)

• Knoxville, TN

[Director, Center for Advancement of Teaching and Scholarship \(https://careers.insidehighered.com/search/institution/goucher-college-249?utm_source=ihe&utm_medium=editorial-site&utm_content=sidebar-link&utm_campaign=jobs\)](https://careers.insidehighered.com/search/institution/goucher-college-249?utm_source=ihe&utm_medium=editorial-site&utm_content=sidebar-link&utm_campaign=jobs)

[Goucher College \(https://careers.insidehighered.com/search/institution/goucher-college-249?utm_source=ihe&utm_medium=editorial-site&utm_content=sidebar-link&utm_campaign=jobs\)](https://careers.insidehighered.com/search/institution/goucher-college-249?utm_source=ihe&utm_medium=editorial-site&utm_content=sidebar-link&utm_campaign=jobs)

• Baltimore, MD

[DISTINGUISHED CHAIR - PSYCHOLOGY \(https://careers.insidehighered.com/search/institution/university-of-georgia-43?utm_source=ihe&utm_medium=editorial-site&utm_content=sidebar-link&utm_campaign=jobs\)](https://careers.insidehighered.com/search/institution/university-of-georgia-43?utm_source=ihe&utm_medium=editorial-site&utm_content=sidebar-link&utm_campaign=jobs)

[The University of Georgia \(https://careers.insidehighered.com/search/institution/university-of-georgia-43?utm_source=ihe&utm_medium=editorial-site&utm_content=sidebar-link&utm_campaign=jobs\)](https://careers.insidehighered.com/search/institution/university-of-georgia-43?utm_source=ihe&utm_medium=editorial-site&utm_content=sidebar-link&utm_campaign=jobs)

• Athens, GA

[Full Professor of Health, Behavioral, or Biomedical Science; or Engineering with Tenure \(https://careers.insidehighered.com/search/institution/california-state-university-at-long-beach-8325?utm_source=ihe&utm_medium=editorial-site&utm_content=sidebar-link&utm_campaign=jobs\)](https://careers.insidehighered.com/search/institution/california-state-university-at-long-beach-8325?utm_source=ihe&utm_medium=editorial-site&utm_content=sidebar-link&utm_campaign=jobs)

[California State University at Long Beach \(https://careers.insidehighered.com/search/institution/california-state-university-at-long-beach-8325?utm_source=ihe&utm_medium=editorial-site&utm_content=sidebar-link&utm_campaign=jobs\)](https://careers.insidehighered.com/search/institution/california-state-university-at-long-beach-8325?utm_source=ihe&utm_medium=editorial-site&utm_content=sidebar-link&utm_campaign=jobs)

• Long Beach, CA

[Associate Director Student Affairs \(https://careers.insidehighered.com/search/institution/university-central-florida-43?utm_source=ihe&utm_medium=editorial-site&utm_content=sidebar-link&utm_campaign=jobs\)](https://careers.insidehighered.com/search/institution/university-central-florida-43?utm_source=ihe&utm_medium=editorial-site&utm_content=sidebar-link&utm_campaign=jobs)

[University of Central Florida \(https://careers.insidehighered.com/search/institution/university/utm_source=ihe&utm_medium=editorial-site&utm_content=sidebar-link&utm_campaign=job\)](https://careers.insidehighered.com/search/institution/university/utm_source=ihe&utm_medium=editorial-site&utm_content=sidebar-link&utm_campaign=job)

• Orlando, FL

[Sustainability Studies Faculty, Colorado Mountain College, Roaring Fork Campus, Glenwood Spr \(https://careers.insidehighered.com/colorado-mountain-college/sustainability-studies-faculty-colorado-campus-glenwood-springs-co/jobs/1089266?utm_source=ihe&utm_medium=editorial-site&utm_content=sidebar-link&utm_campaign=jobs\)](https://careers.insidehighered.com/colorado-mountain-college/sustainability-studies-faculty-colorado-campus-glenwood-springs-co/jobs/1089266?utm_source=ihe&utm_medium=editorial-site&utm_content=sidebar-link&utm_campaign=jobs)

[Colorado Mountain College \(https://careers.insidehighered.com/search/institution/colorado-utm_source=ihe&utm_medium=editorial-site&utm_content=sidebar-link&utm_campaign=job\)](https://careers.insidehighered.com/search/institution/colorado-utm_source=ihe&utm_medium=editorial-site&utm_content=sidebar-link&utm_campaign=job)

• Glenwood Springs, CO

FEATURED EMPLOYERS

[VIEW ALL \(HTTPS://CAREERS.INSIDEHIGHERED.COM/INSTITUTIONS?UTM_SOURCE=IHE&UTM_MEDIUM=EDITORIAL-SITE&UTM_CONTENT=SIDEBAR-LINK&UTM_CAMPAIGN=JOBS\)](https://careers.insidehighered.com/institutions?utm_source=ihe&utm_medium=editorial-site&utm_content=sidebar-link&utm_campaign=jobs)



[\(https://careers.insidehighered.com/mount-wachusett-community-college?utm_source=ihe&utm_medium=editorial-site&utm_content=sidebar-link&utm_campaign=jobs\)](https://careers.insidehighered.com/mount-wachusett-community-college?utm_source=ihe&utm_medium=editorial-site&utm_content=sidebar-link&utm_campaign=jobs)

Mount Wachusett Community College is an accredited, public two-year college serving five towns in North Central Massachusetts. The 269-...



[\(https://careers.insidehighered.com/case-western-reserve-university?utm_source=ihe&utm_medium=editorial-site&utm_content=sidebar-link&utm_campaign=jobs\)](https://careers.insidehighered.com/case-western-reserve-university?utm_source=ihe&utm_medium=editorial-site&utm_content=sidebar-link&utm_campaign=jobs)

Case Western Reserve University is among the nation's leading research universities, shaped by the unique merger of the Case...

[WANT TO POST A JOB? CLICK HERE \(HTTPS://CAREERS.INSIDEHIGHERED.COM/CONTENT/RECRUIT-INSIDE-HIGHERED\)](https://careers.insidehighered.com/content/recruit-inside-highered)

MOST: Viewed (#) [Commented \(#\)](#)

PAST: Day (#) [Week \(#\)](#) [Month \(#\)](#) [Year \(#\)](#)

[Authors discuss new book on higher education's problems, real and imagined \(https://www.insidehighered.com/news/2016/03/21/new-book-higher-educations-problems-real-and-imagined\)](https://www.insidehighered.com/news/2016/03/21/new-book-higher-educations-problems-real-and-imagined)

['Starving the Beast' examines ideological shifts in funding for higher education \(https://www.insidehighered.com/news/2016/03/21/starving-the-beast-examines-ideological-shifts-funding-higher-education\)](https://www.insidehighered.com/news/2016/03/21/starving-the-beast-examines-ideological-shifts-funding-higher-education)

[Governors State U relies on full-time professors to teach all freshmen \(https://www.insidehighered.com/news/2016/03/21/governors-state-u-relies-on-full-time-professors-teach-all-freshmen\)](https://www.insidehighered.com/news/2016/03/21/governors-state-u-relies-on-full-time-professors-teach-all-freshmen)

['The Good Wife' on Plagiarism \(https://www.insidehighered.com/quicktakes/2016/03/22/good-wife-plagiarism\)](https://www.insidehighered.com/quicktakes/2016/03/22/good-wife-plagiarism)
[Fraternity at Southern Methodist Shuttered for 5 Years \(https://www.insidehighered.com/quicktakes/2016/03/21/fraternity-at-southern-methodist-shuttered-for-5-years\)](https://www.insidehighered.com/quicktakes/2016/03/21/fraternity-at-southern-methodist-shuttered-for-5-years)

[The Most Important Work of Pedagogy I've Read in Ten Years. \(https://www.insidehighered.com/blogs/just-ive-read-ten-years\)](https://www.insidehighered.com/blogs/just-ive-read-ten-years)

[Instead of focusing on college-ready students, institutions should become more student ready \(essay\) \(https://www.insidehighered.com/views/2016/03/21/instead-focusing-college-ready-students-institutions\)](https://www.insidehighered.com/views/2016/03/21/instead-focusing-college-ready-students-institutions)

[Speaker boycott ends as U of California Berkeley agrees to hire workers \(https://www.insidehighered.com/news/2017/09/28/u-california-berkeley-agrees-hire-workers\)](https://www.insidehighered.com/news/2017/09/28/u-california-berkeley-agrees-hire-workers)

[BACK TO TOP](#)