

teachers and schools according to the students' test score gains, regardless of what they mean. Amazon recommends books to purchasers on the basis of detected purchase patterns. Social networking sites announce how many friends or fans each person has and how many people liked the person's post or comment; such ratings are supposed to guide the Internet user through the morass. Employers administer multiple-choice personality tests to determine whether potential employees have the desired personal qualities. These measurements, disparate as they seem, all serve to rate performance, predict success, and prevent failure. Of course, these are decent aims, or can be, but the formulas rely on a false understanding of them. We don't always want books that others like us have liked. The curmudgeonly employee may prove brilliant and industrious. The person with few online "friends" may be beloved and admired elsewhere.

Perhaps we are losing the words that separate themselves from success's screech and glare. Television has slowly tipped our consciousness and sensibilities toward the visual display. For decades, anyone with a public profile has had to pay some attention to looks—or be rebellious in not doing so. The author interviewed on the talk show has to dress well, wear makeup, speak clearly, make good eye contact, and appear relaxed; the presidential candidate has to look both dynamic and confident. Slowly wrought arguments must contend with the jingles of commercials. Today this pressure extends to all. The Internet and accompanying technology—hand-held digital video cameras, the World Wide Web—make it even easier to craft a public persona, and with that ease comes obligation. College and job applicants bolster their applications with videos, photos, and animated slideshows. Colleges use videos to advertise themselves; in 2010, Yale University's admissions office released a musical video, "That's Why I Chose Yale," which gives the impression that Yale students are outgoing, hard working, beautiful, and fun loving.⁴ Presenting yourself online has become an essential skill, not just for celebrities and institu-

tions, but for job seekers, students, artists, freelancers, business owners, and scholars. Everyone can have a public self for the world to see. Even comments on blogs often come with an "avatar" (a cartoon figure or photo). It is common today to speak in terms of one's "personal brand"—the particular way that one presents and markets oneself. Schools and universities, even school systems, have taken up self-advertising with fervor.

Colleges and universities, seeking to improve their image, recruit aggressively so that they can both attract a more diverse student body (or, rather, a less eccentric one) and turn more students down. According to the *New York Times*, the University of Chicago has sought to break away from the stereotype of "a place for nerds and social misfits who shun sunlight and conversation." Whereas in the past, the university drew students who were attracted to its particular intellectual climate, in 2010 it received 19,347 applications, an increase of 43 percent over the 2009 total. It abandoned its unusual essay questions and joined the Common Application, which supposedly brings in more applicants. It hired the direct marketing firm Royall & Company to assist with its recruitment campaign. It put out a brochure showing University of Chicago students in a variety of group activities. When conducting outreach, admissions officers emphasized the university's preprofessional and career preparation opportunities.⁵ As the University of Chicago joins a larger trend, it loses its identity as a university that stands outside of trends.

The trend toward advertising has affected K-12 education as well. There are essentially two kinds: advertising for political self-promotion, and advertising for survival (with overlap between the two). Beginning in the fall of 2008, the Fund for Public Schools purchased subway advertisements proclaiming the successes of the New York City Department of Education. One advertisement read, "Because finishing is the start of a better future, New York City public high schools have increased graduation rates by more than 20% since 2002." Aaron Pallas, a professor of sociology and education at Columbia University's Teachers College, noted that such advertise-