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**The Restructuring of Academic Work: Themes and Observations
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Abstract

The objective in this paper is to provide an overview of the key themes that can be identified by looking across the contributions to this special issue, and highlight a number of the important observations that emerged during the seminar in which these papers were originally presented. The seminar, which took place in Berlin in October of 2005, was organized by UNESCO-CEPES in collaboration with the Observatory of the Magna Charta Universitatum and the German Commission for UNESCO.

Introduction

While the seminar, “Contractual Regulations and Institutional Practices related to First Place of Employment and Additional Teaching/Research/Consultancy Contracts of Academic Staff” (21–22 October 2005, Berlin, Germany), and this special issue focuses on a number of key themes and trends associated with the restructuring of academic work, it is clear that there are important differences between universities that must be kept in mind in any discussion of these issues. While there are shared values and norms, including, for example, academic freedom as a core value of higher education, universities operate under quite different state regulatory environments. It is extremely important to recognize that there are significant differences in the legal and organizational assumptions that underscore academic work in terms of the “first place of employment,” given that some institutions operate within environments where there are national salary and labour laws that govern the conditions of faculty work, while in others these arrangements may be subject to institution-level collective bargaining or individualized contracts between the university and the professor. As Eric Gould noted in his paper, there are very important common issues and concerns related to the restructuring of academic work, but it is also “dangerous to generalize” given that there are differences in how academic work is defined and understood in different institutions and jurisdictions.

This paper is organized into three major sections. The first focuses on the external factors that are influencing the redefinition and reconstruction of faculty work. The second focuses on the university level of authority, and discusses the institutional response to these external factors. The third focuses on the human factor and how these changes are experienced by the professoriate. Each section synthesizes key elements that emerged both from the scholarly papers

and the critical discussion during the seminar. The paper concludes with a brief discussion of recommendations that emerged during the final session of the seminar.

External Factors

At least three external factors can be identified as having a substantive impact on the changing nature of academic work: the massification of higher education; the repositioning of the university in terms of economic development; and the shifting relationship between the university and the state. These factors are not mutually exclusive but tend to be intertwined in complex ways.

Massification

The expansion of higher education in order to address increasing societal demands is a key factor in the discussion of the restructuring of academic work. Dr. Jan Sadlak noted this factor in his introductory remarks at the seminar, and this theme emerges in all of the case studies, including the papers focusing on the UK (Edwards), Poland (Chmielecka) and Romania (Agachi). In the context of higher education, expansion is far more than simply increasing the number of students but involves a much broader, multifaceted transformation of the higher education system and its relationship to the society in which it functions; this is the phenomenon that Martin Trow (1973) described in his classic essay on “Problems in the Transition from Elite to Mass Higher Education.” This complex transition is frequently referred to as massification.

Massification has obvious and direct implications for the role and nature of teaching in terms of academic work. System expansion is frequently accompanied by the pressure for individual faculty to devote more time to teaching, by increasing faculty teaching loads, by increasing the number of students in existing courses, or both. In many countries the need to address increasing demands for university teachers has led to the creation or expansion of part-time contract-teaching arrangements. In other words, massification has increased the pressure on the teaching role of faculty in terms of their first place of employment, but it has also been a factor in the growth of multiple contractual relationships as some full-time faculty take on additional teaching work, while others, unable to obtain a full-time position, sustain themselves by taking on multiple part-time teaching contracts (Rajagopal, 2002).

Massification is also associated with increasing institutional diversification, and the related creation of quite different conditions of work by institutional type. The system of higher education in the USA has received considerable attention in the research literature, but much of the interest in this system has focused on the prominent research intensive universities. The US system is highly differentiated and hierarchical, and while the elite research universities form the apex, the vast majority of American students attend institutions at lower tiers (Duderstadt, 2000). Faculty work is constructed in quite different ways in different types of institutions, with substantive differences in teaching loads and research expectations depending, for example, on whether one is employed as a professor in a community college, a four-year college, or a state university. In other words, in some systems massification has led to substantive differences in the nature and balance of academic work as a function of institutional diversification. The “first

place of employment” matters since the conditions of work may vary considerably from one institutional type to the next, and differences in remuneration and workload will have an obvious impact on whether faculty engage in other contractual activities.

Several of the case studies focus on systems where the massification of higher education led to the emergence of a large private university sector. In the case of Poland, for example, the rapid growth of the private sector without a related growth in the number of professors created a situation where the new institutions were forced to rely heavily on staff employed under part-time teaching contracts. Multiple employment situations became pervasive, with full-time faculty at traditional public institutions frequently entering into additional teaching contracts with one or more private institutions. Chmielecka notes that by the mid-1990s there were more Polish institutions of higher education offering business management studies than the entire number of professors in this area of study. The magnitude of faculty teaching in the context of multiple employment led to a decline in the quality of teaching, the quality of the student experience, and the capacity of professors to actively engage in research and service activities. There were frequent conflicts of interest as faculty found themselves fulfilling multiple roles in different institutions, including universities that were in direct competition with each other.

The University and Economic Development

The second external pressure that has had a considerable impact on the restructuring of academic work concerns the repositioning of the university in relation to economic development. While the conclusion that universities play an important role in economic development is far from new, seminar participants noted that the nature and form of this role is shifting in the context of the “knowledge economy.” The university has now come to be viewed as a central institution in an economic system where knowledge is increasingly commodified, where labour market demands for highly educated personnel continue to increase, and where knowledge production is directly linked to regional and national economic growth (Jones, McCarney and Skolnik, 2005).

The repositioning of the university in relation to economic development in the context of the knowledge economy has direct implications for academic work. The push for the increasing expansion of higher education becomes increasingly legitimized in economic terms related to the labour market, and, as noted above, massification has significant implications for the professoriate. In addition, this new understanding of the university's role in economic development has already had a significant impact on how research is defined and understood within the knowledge economy, and it is leading to a restructuring of the research component of academic work.

There is an evolving understanding of what research is, how it should be conducted, and how it contributes to regional and national economic development. These changes are complex and multifaceted; they include an increasing emphasis on interdisciplinarity, applied problem-based initiatives, and programs of research that involve direct collaboration with industry. In this context, contractual relationships between professors and industrial partners shift from being positioned as peripheral moonlighting in the context of academic work, to being viewed as a legitimate and an encouraged mechanism for facilitating knowledge transfer and evidence of the

university's contribution to economic development. As in teaching, new short-term contractual positions have emerged within university research programs, as well as hybrid arrangements involving joint appointments and cross-appointments between institutions (including institutions in different countries).

Gould notes that professors are increasingly described as knowledge workers and, as such, captured beneath an umbrella of knowledge labour that services the new economy. He concludes that faculty work “is dangerously close to being swept into purely utilitarian market definitions.” The critical role of faculty in terms of knowledge creation and dissemination related to social, and not just economic, development must be more clearly understood. The traditional freedoms of the professoriate must be defended as a mechanism for maintaining their unique contribution to society in the face of incredible pressure to define academic work in purely market-driven terms.

The University and the State

The third external pressure emerges from the shifting relationship between the university and the state. In many higher education systems there have been significant changes in state regulatory and coordination arrangements. In many European jurisdictions these changes are designed to shift the role of the state from one of central coordination to one of steering locally-managed, more autonomous universities (Amaral, Jones and Karseth, 2002). These changes reflect a growing sense that highly centralized coordination has been ineffective, and that the university needs to have the autonomy necessary to contribute to regional economic development given its central role in the knowledge economy.

In many jurisdictions the relationship between the university and the state has also been recast in order to create quasi-market conditions based on the assumption that the “market” represents a more appropriate mechanism for strengthening universities than traditional government coordination (Teixeria, Jongbloed, Dill, and Amaral, 2004). Universities are encouraged to increase revenues through partnerships with industry and by commercializing the outputs of faculty research. They are encouraged to compete with each other for student tuition revenues and/or government support. While there appears to be a general trend towards the development of market-like approaches to coordination, there continue to be substantive differences in terms of how far different countries have moved in this direction.

In some jurisdictions these changes in the relationship between the university and the state have had a direct impact on the restructuring of academic work. Edwards notes that the Thatcher reforms to higher education in the UK included the elimination of tenure since permanent contracts were regarded as a barrier to the large-scale organizational reform of the universities required as a function of massification and their central role in economic development. The government later introduced a legislative protection of academic freedom. Both represented clear and direct policy changes related to the conditions of faculty employment.

Changes in the relationship between the university and the state have had an indirect impact on the nature of faculty work (Morey, 2003). New accountability mechanisms have encouraged or

valued certain types of activities over others. Research funding is increasingly linked to economic development, and therefore privileges certain fields of study over others. Declining government financial support has forced institutions to become more entrepreneurial and seek out additional revenue streams from industry partnerships and/or commercialization activities.

The University Response

The three broad types of external pressure described above have enormous implications for the university and the restructuring of academic work. A range of university responses to these pressures are analyzed by contributors to this volume or emerged from the seminar discussions, including the professionalization of university management, institutional restructuring, the division of academic labour, and specific steps taken to address problems associated with multiple employment contracts.

All of the external pressures have increased the need for universities to strengthen their capacity to manage their own affairs. Many of the case studies illustrated the tremendous challenges associated with managing massification at the level of the institution. The universities profiled in the Polish, Romanian, and Serbian case studies were forced to manage dramatic increases in student enrolment with limited resources. One of the mechanisms for addressing this challenge was to increase the number of part-time teachers paid under short-term contracts, and given the shortage of faculty available within these systems, multiple-contractual relationships became commonplace.

The need to increase the management capacity of universities has frequently resulted in the professionalization of university management (Amaral, Meek and Larson, 2003). Once regarded as senior academic peers who were asked to take their turn at administration in the context of a collegial decision making structure, university management is increasingly viewed as a professional, distinct career stream. The managers are increasingly positioned as senior executive officers of the corporate university who are responsible for establishing the strategic direction of the university or sub-unit. They frequently have independent budgetary authority and responsibility for “managing” the affairs of the unit, including staffing decisions. The professionalization of university management has served to distance senior administrative positions from the traditional academic stream.

The increasing professionalization of university management has also emerged as a byproduct of institutional restructuring. John Taylor's analysis of the reorganization processes associated with four universities in the UK includes a number of important insights on this relationship. His study focused on four universities that were already viewed as successful, but which decided that restructuring would provide each institution with the capacity to further advance within an increasingly competitive environment. Each institution merged existing academic units in order to create large super-faculty units headed by a senior academic administrator, and, at the level below, interdisciplinary schools led by a permanent academic head. Discipline-based departments were either eliminated as they merged into the new, larger school structures, or remained as a symbolic sub-unit without budgetary or staffing responsibility. Each of these

universities completely reorganized its academic structures to create larger multidisciplinary units led by senior, professional academic administrators.

Taylor's study illustrates the shifting historic role of the disciplines within higher education, a theme that also emerged in the papers by Gould and Edwards. In traditional organizational arrangements, university professors are located in discipline-based departments and their principal affiliation and sense of loyalty is to their discipline/department. The shift towards interdisciplinary, problem-based, methodologically heterogeneous research, frequently conducted in partnership with industry, is challenging the traditional role of the discipline within the academy, and the traditional role of the department within the university.

Taylor's study also addresses the increasing division of labour within the academy. The professionalization of management creates an administrative cadre replacing what had previously been a component of faculty work performed by peers, or responsibilities shared within committee structures. While Taylor found that some faculty resisted these changes, many supported the diminution of committee service activities and the creation of professional academic managers with the skills and expertise required to lead academic units. Administrative responsibilities that had previously been viewed as a component of academic work, as faculty took turns leading academic units, are increasingly viewed as the responsibility of university-appointed academic managers with a distinct career trajectory.

A second, equally important form of division of labour is occurring within the more traditional teaching and research components of faculty work (Morey, 2003). In order to increase flexibility and efficiency, many universities have created a range of new types of positions that perform academic work, including part-time teaching contracts, specialized research staff, permanent teaching-only faculty, and hybrid cross-appointments between institutions. Individuals in these positions are performing academic work, but frequently under quite different employment contracts with the university. In some cases the terms of employment are such that individuals must enter into multiple contractual arrangements to have enough money to live. They may have multiple institutional affiliations and divided loyalties. They frequently lack the job security or professional development opportunities associated with traditional professorial roles. Academic work is now performed by multiple classes of teachers and researchers with quite different conditions of employment and remuneration schemes.

Multiple contractual arrangements are not limited to these new categories of academic workers. Professors may supplement their income by entering into part-time teaching contracts with another institution of higher learning. They may be encouraged to develop linkages with private industry, and these relationships may evolve into contract research or consultancy arrangements. University-industry partnerships may include financial incentives for participating professors in addition to regular salary. Intellectual property arrangements may evolve into complex multi-party contractual terms designed to further the commercialization of products or services. Universities may encourage faculty entrepreneurship by facilitating, or at least tolerating, hybrid employment arrangements.

Seminar participants noted that there are both benefits and problems associated with multiple contractual arrangements for the university as the first place of employment. Given the

increasing emphasis being placed on university-industry partnerships, applied research contracts and consultancy arrangements are now viewed as legitimate mechanisms for knowledge transfer. These relationships can represent important professional development opportunities for faculty as they apply their expertise to new problems and learn through their interactions with external agencies. Allowing faculty to engage in multiple contractual arrangements can provide a mechanism for increasing faculty remuneration without increasing university costs, and can therefore be regarded as a mechanism for retaining some faculty who might otherwise leave for positions in private industry, or for higher paying positions at other universities. Entirely new programs of research may emerge as professors learn more about the application of knowledge to industrial settings, or new questions are raised from consultancy work. Teaching can be strengthened when faculty bring their learning from these new industrial experiences back to the classroom, or when they see alternative curricular possibilities by teaching at another university.

There are also serious problems associated with multiple employment arrangements. In the case of Poland, the extraordinary level of multiple contractual teaching arrangements led to a perceived decline in the overall quality of teaching within the system. As professors increased the number of courses that they taught, they became less available to individual students and devoted less time to providing students with appropriate feedback. The balance between teaching and research within academic work shifted dramatically; as faculty devoted more time to teaching under multiple employment contracts, their capacity to remain actively engaged in knowledge creation decreased. One of the challenges associated with multiple employment arrangements relates to maintaining an appropriate balance between research and teaching in academic work.

These arrangements can also lead to real or perceived conflicts of interest. By definition, multiple employment arrangements involve multiple roles and multiple employers. The roles and responsibilities associated with a second contractual arrangement may conflict with the roles and responsibilities associated with the first place of employment. There may be intellectual property issues associated with research conducted by one individual employed under separate contractual arrangements with two or more organizations.

There are also issues of transparency and ethics. Professors may use university facilities in order to fulfill the terms of the second contract, and the university may therefore be unknowingly subsidizing this external arrangement. Universities may not be aware that multiple employment contracts exist, and may later find that their faculty members are involved in activities that have a negative impact on the university, or are inappropriately conducting private business under the university's name.

Universities have adopted a number of approaches to address the problems and concerns associated with multiple employment arrangements while sustaining the benefits. Many have attempted to increase the transparency of these arrangements by requiring that professors disclose the existence of external contracts. Many have created institutional policies that deal with potential issues of conflict by regulating the conditions of external contracts, including the amount of time that can be devoted to these activities, the conditions under which institutional approval of contractual activities is required, and regulations governing the use of university facilities in these arrangements. In some cases these problems have provided a foundation for a

discussion of guiding principals or professional ethics within the university that have guided local practices. Given the benefits associated with these arrangements, seminar participants noted that the emphasis in university policy has been on establishing the conditions for beneficial contractual arrangements while attempting to avoid issues of conflict and unethical behaviour.

The Human Factor

In his opening keynote address at the seminar, Professor Daxner noted the importance of understanding the human factor in considering issues of faculty work and that “this is all about people.” He argues in his paper that a broad range of external factors are shifting the delicate balance of the academic, science, and professional systems that underscore our understanding of ethical conduct and institutional expectations within higher education. It is the interrelationship between these three systems that make the university unique within society, but a failure to balance these three systems or recognize the perils associated with unethical practices that can emerge in each of these systems is shifting the course of higher education. For Daxner, addressing the human factor means focusing attention on ethical conduct within the university. It means encouraging and facilitating discussion within the autonomous institution, through democratic, participatory processes, on how faculty should conduct themselves in ethical terms.

Seminar participants emphasized the importance of understanding the conditions of academic work associated with the first place of employment, especially given the ways in which academic work is being restructured in response to changing external pressures. These conditions of work must include a salary that is a living wage. They must establish the conditions for a collegial home within the university. They must protect the academic freedom of professors. They must provide the conditions that allow professors to disagree, but also to achieve consensus.

This is the great challenge for the university in the face of the restructuring of academic work and the enormous external pressure to move closer to the market. As several seminar participants noted, there may be advantages associated with the development of strong linkages between universities and industry in order to facilitate economic development, but the market should not be viewed as a panacea. Universities should play a major role in the knowledge economy, but they must also play a major role in the knowledge society. The shifting balance of research and teaching to favour addressing the needs of the market endangers the university's equally important contributions to critical debate within a democratic society, issues of culture and understanding, and the development and dissemination of knowledge that may have broader social, though not necessarily market, importance.

Recommendations

Seminar participants concluded that academic work is being restructured in response to a number of key external pressures, and that multiple employment contracts are now common in many higher education systems. The challenge is to create conditions where the “first place of employment” offers professors a personally and intellectually rewarding professional experience, and where appropriate additional contractual activities can be pursued in a manner that is both

ethical and transparent. A number of recommendations emerged during the concluding session of the seminar:

Underscoring this final recommendation is the clear conclusion that faculty work is changing but that these changes have received little attention in the research literature. In many respects the work of the university is the sum of the accomplishments of its academic workers, including those within the more traditional professorial ranks who engage in both the creation and dissemination of new knowledge, and those who have a more differentiated role through permanent or contractual employment. Given the enormous challenges faced by the university in a rapidly changing context, and the increasingly international dimensions of the academic labour market, there are enormous risks associated with failing to systematically study the restructuring of academic work.

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