

# Introduction

## The Examined University

### Process and Change in Higher Education

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If I tell you that the unexamined life is not worth living for a human being, you will be even less likely to believe what I am saying. But that's the way it is, gentlemen, as I claim, though it's not easy to convince you of it.

Socrates, in Plato, *Apology* 38A

#### CHICKENS AND EGGS

Any observer of higher education over the last decade will undoubtedly point out three trends that appear to be taking shape, and two tensions that have subsequently arisen. The trends pertain to privatization, politicization, and restructuring. The tensions refer to increased demands for accountability and questions regarding autonomy. Whether the tensions have created the trends or the trends have caused the tensions is a bit like asking which came first: the chicken or the egg. Although an argument over whether there is a linear relationship between the tensions and trends might be of interest to academics interested in organizational and system theory, such a discussion is of limited utility. Organizational life is rarely uncausal, such that a move toward privatization takes place only because of one stimulus, or a concern about accountability arises solely because of another.

Accordingly, rather than engage in a jejune debate about causality, I have assembled here a thoughtful group of scholars that grapples with these trends and tensions in order to provoke a discussion about the academy. All five topics warrant investigation and analysis because understanding them will help determine the role of the twenty-first century research university. By suggesting that topics such as accountability and autonomy are worthy of discussion and analysis, I walk a fine line between those who are more interested in

abstract theoretical discussions about organizational life and those who desire immediate solutions to what academe should be doing during a time of great flux.

On the one side are those who have little interest in the specific actions of the university and are more interested in the university as an idea and organizational change as a theory. On the other side are those who seek immediate answers to the complex problems that institutions face and who are impatient with reflexive deliberation. In this book, however, we seek to examine higher education in a manner akin to what Socrates has argued about life. Indeed, although we surely do not wish to personify an idea—the university—we readily acknowledge that higher education holds a special place in the life and well-being of the United States. Academic institutions are not simply another organization that is undergoing the trials and tribulations of change due to globalization. Yes, colleges and universities must contend with economic, social, and cultural forces that are impacting virtually all organizations and systems, but postsecondary institutions are related to America's concept of the "public good" in ways that corporations and businesses are not.

As Brian Pusser points out in chapter 1, the public good is not merely an economic idea of goods and services—who can deliver and provide a particular good to whom—it is also an ideology and a belief about how things get done and whether the "public" provides those services in ways different from those in the private sector. In higher education, then, to discuss the public good inevitably leads to discussions about governance. Conversely, to entertain proposals about reforming one or another governance structure in higher education (as seems to occur on an almost daily basis) and not to take into consideration what is meant by the public good seems to overlook the *raison d'être* of academic life. Education writ large and public higher education in particular, as Pusser reminds us, derive from a fealty to the public good—not simply to educate the citizenry for jobs, skills, and citizenship but also to be a public place where thoughtful debate and examination about the polis might occur.

Unfortunately, the phrase "public good" has gained a currency and cachet equivalent to other deceptively simple concepts that make it into the public domain stripped of all meaning other than what can be found in a sound bite. The public good also has the positive ring of authenticity. To betray the public good is bad; to speak on behalf of the public good is, well, good. The public good has become like motherhood and apple pie. Everyone supports the public good, even while not understanding the history of the term or its current trajectory very well.

In what follows, we seek to tie the notion of the public good in higher education to that of governance. We ask, if one accepts the notion of higher education as a public good, what does it suggest for how one thinks about the governance of America's colleges and universities? The assumption is that

asking the question is what matters right now, more so than developing an answer, for no single answer that pertains to all institutions and all individuals may exist. We need to interrogate the interrelationships between governance and the public good with the intent that such an examination will lead to a more informed polity. A more informed polity is likely to develop a plurality of responses for governance in higher education that is responsive to the multiple needs of the citizenry.

The chapters that follow generally develop complementary arguments about governance and the public good, but I by no means tried to put together a lock-step argument that proceeds in deterministic fashion. Instead, I invited authors with a particular expertise to focus on questions of vital concern: What is the role of a twenty-first century college or university? What does the changing definition and interpretation of the public good suggest for that role? How is governance impacted by these questions, and how does it impact them?

In order to provide focus for the text, I have not entertained a discussion about community colleges or for-profit providers, but I certainly acknowledge that both institutional types deserve thorough analysis in a manner akin to what we are attempting here. Instead, we have focused on four-year institutions in general, in particular, public institutions. Public colleges and universities still serve a majority of the students who attend four-year institutions, so they deserve particular attention—especially with regard to governance and the public good. The chapters derive from a mixture of data-driven sources as well as hands-on experience of authors who are living these questions in the “real world.” Before turning to Pusser’s discussion of the public good, I offer here a road map that discusses the trends and tensions that currently exist and what the authors have to say about them.

## TRENDS

### Privatization

Privatization has impacted postsecondary institutions in many ways but most significantly with regard to basic funding, faculty work, and student tuition. A century ago, public universities relied largely on the munificence of the state to fund their operations; even during the Great Depression, public institutions still received virtually all of their support from state governments. Private institutions relied largely on tuition, and over the last century, tuition has been increasingly supported through grants and loans provided by the state and federal governments. In the twenty-first century, however, public and private institutions have been required to significantly diversify their funding bases. Although many private institutions still receive an overwhelming amount of

their income through tuition, and public institutions through state support, the trend is toward privatization and funding diversification.

Similarly, prior to World War II, faculty were largely full-time tenure track professors who primarily saw their role as teaching undergraduate students combined with a modicum of research and service to the institution. A handful of individuals, mostly in the natural sciences at research universities, sought funding from foundations and the government. Today, more part-time faculty are hired than full-time professors. The trend is away from full-time faculty. Those who are full-time tenure track faculty are increasingly expected to generate revenue. Whereas tenure once implied 100 percent of a professor's salary, the possibility increasingly exists that tenure actually means a certain percentage of an individual's salary, the rest to be generated by the individual or the home department. The strength of this suggestion resides on the possibility of an individual (or a department) generating more income than would have been set if a cap existed, so that one's salary can dramatically increase. The downside, of course, is that job security for a job that does not pay one's full salary provides a new meaning to "job security."

Research where patents are developed and distance learning is employed also has generated discussions over the nature of intellectual property. The Bayh-Dole Act, coupled with the invention of the Internet and the potential of serving thousands of students without ever seeing them, has raised questions about who owns what. Only a generation ago, if someone had asked professors who owned their scribbled lesson plans, the question would have been seen as absurd. Who could be troubled to read an English professor's yellowed pages about Chaucer? However, in an age when a lesson plan suggests a carefully crafted series of lectures provided via Web pages that do not necessitate the actual professor to be in attendance, one can understand the argument. A professor, and perhaps the majority of those who thought about it as well, always assumed that the ideas developed for a class were her or his property. In a world where privatization has taken hold, however, such an assumption is no longer secure. If a private institution is akin to a company, and a public institution is owned by the state, then an argument may be made that the business owns what the worker develops, not the individual.

Tuition also has risen dramatically; the reason being is twofold. On the one hand, one need not be an economist to recognize that when fiscal support in one area drops—state support—then the organization needs to generate revenue in another area, such as tuition. On the other hand, the sense that the collective as defined by state support should provide all of the necessary funds for individuals to attend college has come into disfavor. Once again, the idea of the public good has come into question. The result is that individuals increasingly have to shoulder the burden for paying for a college education. The implicit assumption is that a postsecondary degree is a private good rather

than a public good. Thus the state or federal government may try to provide loans for citizens so that they are able to attend college, but the individual should assume the cost of an education rather than the state.

Karen Whitney, in "Lost in Transition," traces the shift in state funding of higher education and points out the relationship between who governs or controls public institutions and who provides the funding. She suggests that privatization is likely to continue and to bring with it less control by the state. She provides a historical overview to privatization and points out that governing bodies have long made attempts at privatization by raising fees for one or another activity, though the recent move toward privatization seems more dramatic and is coupled with a fundamental shift in philosophy. That shift is from the assumption that education is a public good toward the belief that it is a private benefit. Whitney also suggests, however, that the current movement toward privatization is not only a philosophic shift but also a political one. The state has been prone to de-fund higher education, she argues, because of academe's ability to generate funds from a wide range of sources.

In "Rethinking State Governance of Higher Education," Jane Wellman does not so much disagree with Whitney as add to the argument. Wellman maintains that state governance is historically disorganized and inefficient; the recent political and economic contexts in which states exist have made a messy relationship only more disorganized and inefficient, if not dysfunctional. She also argues that the state is frequently at odds with the manner in which colleges and universities define their priorities and conduct their work. The state is concerned with access to undergraduate education and economic competitiveness, she notes, whereas postsecondary institutions frequently seem more concerned about graduate education, research, and autonomy. Wellman suggests that state governing bodies that deliberate over policy appear to be on a collision course with institutions that will be framed through a contentious political environment. The result, she contends, is a move toward privatization. In this sense, then, Wellman is suggesting that the definition of the "public good" has shifted, and that mission redefinition by institutions has resulted in privatization. The vehicle for that redefinition has been the decision-making structures employed by the state and the institutions themselves.

### Politicization

Colleges and universities have long been contentious and conflict ridden. Indeed, the rise of tenure in part came about because boards of trustees and state governments sought to fire professors for making statements that went against the grain. One cannot think of the protests that engulfed the country over Vietnam in the 1960s without considering that the site of many of those

protests was a college campus. Berkeley and the Free Speech Movement, the rise of Students for a Democratic Society (SDS) at Columbia University, and the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee (SNCC), originating at Shaw University in North Carolina, all used colleges and universities as main theaters for action.

Campuses also have been inherently political in the manner in which they have governed themselves. The rise of faculty senates and the increase in collective bargaining are examples of formalized arenas for politics. But any faculty member will also surely attest to the numerous informal arenas for politics, whether a departmental meeting where who teaches what when gets debated or in never-ending discussions about office space, parking, and an array of benefits and/or rights that faculty, staff, and students believe they deserve.

However, the current politicization of the campus differs somewhat from the past. Boards of trustees and regents have inserted themselves into the life of the institution in a manner to an extent that has not previously been seen. Wellman points out that several external groups, such as the Association of College Trustees and Alumni (ACTA), the National Association of Scholars (NAS), and the National Committee for Responsive Philanthropy (NCRP), have been created with the mission to encourage governing boards to engage in activist oversight of academic quality. An “academic bill of rights” has been championed by the conservative David Horowitz, which has brought into question hiring policies and tenure. The bill has been seriously considered at the federal and state levels. Whether one applauds or abhors such events is not my point here; rather, I simply wish to note that along with a trend toward privatization is one toward politicization as well.

Ken Mortimer and Colleen O’Brien Sathre offer a case study of a public university that closed a professional school—an inherently political act. The authors suggest that an inevitable tension exists in academic governance between staying focused on core missions while at the same time recognizing the political environment in which they operate. The interactions of the board, administration, faculty, and public have to be seen through a political lens where conflict is inevitable and focus is essential. David Longanecker, in his chapter, agrees with Mortimer and Sathre, but he argues that all too often governing boards do not stay focused and frequently become political. Longanecker points out, using current data from states and public institutions, how easy it is for the mission of an institution to fall by the wayside as a governing board pursues an unrealistic goal that ultimately does not serve the state very well. Board members act as entrepreneurs, points out Longanecker, and they may be well versed as businesspeople in their own particular businesses, but they are commonly neophytes in the academic arena. The result is an unfocused system that is neither efficient nor effective but decidedly political.

One ought not to bemoan that politics exists but instead accept it as a social fact. Indeed, insofar as higher education has been thought of as a public good, why would one expect that it is not to be ardently debated? A public good means that the “public” has some involvement in the definition and delivery of the good. The public has much less say regarding private goods in a country dedicated to individual liberties and rights. “A man’s home is his castle” goes the cliché, and within that castle is the assumption that the individual has broad leeway to live in it in a manner that the individual decides, without external interference. If higher education is a public good, however, then those who govern the campus do not get to do just as they please. Rather, multiple constituencies will be involved in determining what to do. Thus debates about mission and attempts by governing boards to expand an institution’s role inevitably involve arguments over higher education as a public good.

## Restructuring

The rise of administration and bureaucracy is a hallmark of American higher education in the twentieth century. Whereas a century ago a thin administrative veneer populated most institutions, today an elaborate structure exists that encompasses tasks and activities that could not be conceived at the turn of the last century. Directors of libraries have become vice presidents of information services. Deans of graduate schools frequently have the research aspect of their work separated off into another office. Offices of human subjects, intellectual property, and business development have become as large, if not larger, than a classics and philosophy department. Restructuring, of course, is inherently political; an individual assumes an office and sets out to increase the power and authority of the office through an increase in size and accumulation of resources.

Restructuring, however, has taken on a different shape in the new economy. To be sure, as Mortimer and Sathre suggest, politics is ever present, and much restructuring resembles the rough and tumble of any organizational change. And yet when coupled with privatization, an odd centralization/decentralization of authority appears to be taking place. One would assume that a public good demands greater external supervision and that a private one has less external involvement. And yet the federal government seeks greater oversight of graduation rates and time to degree when it simultaneously loosens federal regulations pertaining to for-profit institutions. Regional accreditation agencies seek increased authority at the same time institutions are expanding their reach beyond regional boundaries and questioning the need for accreditation. States decrease their support for public colleges and universities but expand their demands for accountability. Boards

insert themselves in campus activities in ways unheard of in the past but resist measures to conform to their own oversight and accountability. Budgeting measures such as revenue centered management (RCM) are lauded as good tools because they make institutions more entrepreneurial and decentralized, but the institutions are then criticized because they do not respond to state and public needs that call for centralization.

Restructuring always implies new governance arrangements, of course, and the most recent wave of restructuring usually has called for less faculty input. Decision making needs to be more “nimble,” we are told; faculty governance may be many things, but it is not nimble. Concomitantly, boards and presidents presumably need greater authority with which to make decisions. In a helpful chapter that is based on events in Australia, Craig McInnis questions such assertions. He points out that a key assumption pertaining to restructuring is that streamlined smaller bodies, with more external expertise and less internal faculty involvement, can best provide focused whole-of-institution leadership. Ironically, the role of academic expertise and authority, however, is needed now more than ever before, argues McInnis. He is not a proponent of the status quo.

In the context of recent national reforms in Australia, McInnis argues for an increase in ad-hoc (or “short cycle”) working groups composed largely of faculty. The challenge of implementing such a suggestion, however, is similar regardless of where the reform is implemented. There are those external to the organization who have no interest in gaining faculty input in governance and decision making; there are faculty within the institution who see any attempt to change traditional governance structures as, at a minimum, misguided and, at worst, subterfuge. Until such an agreement is reached, suggests McInnis, the road to joint agreements is going to be rocky indeed.

## TENSIONS

### Accountability and Autonomy

Jay Dee offers a unique way of thinking about accountability in his chapter on “Institutional Autonomy and State-Level Accountability: Loosely Coupled Governance and the Public Good.” Dee calls upon a well-utilized organizational term, “loose coupling,” to examine the tensions that exist around accountability and autonomy. Accountability here refers to the responsibilities that an organization assumes in order to respond to external entities that have some form of control over the unit. Until recently, accountability was most often defined as accreditation and a loose confederation of institutions fre-



quently held together by a coordinating board to avoid duplication of services. In large part, self-regulation was what the state and federal government requested and what institutions desired. Along with the trends listed earlier, external demands have grown over the last two decades such that the state and federal governments now require institutions to collect data on any number of topics; the most hot-button topic pertains to undergraduate students. Retention, graduation rates, time to degree, job placement, and a host of other topics are now demanded of institutions. The shift to performance-based funding has forced institutions scurrying in order to bolster institutional research with the hopes of providing data that justify not so much a budget increase but at least not a budget decrease.

Dee points out that loose coupling, a term generally used within an organization to determine how structures interact with one another, may be a useful way to think about how the organization and external entities such as the state should interact with one another. In a loosely coupled system, Dee observes, the tendency is to tighten the coupling; such an action is inappropriate if one wants to improve effectiveness. Rather than spend money and time to ensure that all components have little independence, the emphasis should be on giving different elements of the organization the flexibility to respond to the abstruse demands and opportunities of the environment while at the same time having some sense of organizational cohesion.

From Dee's perspective, a loosely coupled governance structure would focus, for example, more on policy inducements than on policy mandates. Performance measures would be customized rather than cookie-cutter style. The basis for such responsiveness would be the ability of the state and the organizations to create shared commitments. Such commitments, maintains Dee, are more than simply platitudes about academic quality. Commitments suggest that higher education is a public good, and that the state and the campuses have a relationship with one another. Shared commitments point the organization and the state toward purposive action that creates a unique equilibrium between accountability and autonomy.

Enter Judith Ramaley. In "Governance in a Time of Transition," she takes Dee's argument one step farther. Although she concurs with Longanecker's assessment, that too often boards lose sight of the mission of the institution and are susceptible to mission creep, she argues that no function of a board is more important than ensuring that institutions contribute to the public good. Ramaley in part agrees with Wellman's assessment that constituencies external to postsecondary institutions question academe's commitment to pursue public goals rather than personal agendas. She frames her argument by way of an analysis of "Pasteur's Quadrant," an intellectual space in which theory and practice come together to create the capacity for colleges and universities to address societal problems.

Dee (and Pusser) may well disagree with Ramaley's (and Wellman's) assessment that colleges and universities are not being responsive to the public. They conceivably might argue that trends occurring in the environment have forced institutions to respond in ways that are counter to the public good. Once again, I am unconvinced that the argument moves any farther if we simply assign blame to one or another group. A circle seems to have been set in place where decreased funding has forced organizations to act in a manner that begets calls for greater accountability that suggests that privatization is the answer, and so on.

One point the authors agree on is the need for a shared commitment. Indeed, such a need is the very essence of a public good. By definition, a public good is shared by the public. Fiscal and academic flexibility is necessary, Whitney reminds us, but flexibility does not mean that an institution can be all things to all people, or that the state ought to expect that of an institution. How best then to develop a shared commitment?

By way of a case study of a large research university, in my chapter I discuss the idea of trust in the academy as an integral component of this shared commitment. If I expressed concern about the conceptual looseness of the term "public good," then I am even more troubled by the vagueness of a notion such as trust. "I can't trust him as far as I can throw him" is a negative comment; "she personifies trustworthiness" sure sounds good. However, in the chapter I argue that during periods of change and transformation, trustworthy behavior is essential for governance. I offer a contrasting theoretical framework from organizational theory pertaining to the idea of trust, and I then expand on the notion from a cultural perspective. As with the intent of the book in general, the purpose of the chapter is not to offer a comprehensive framework for trust. Instead, I advance the notion of trust in governance for consideration as a way out of the morass that we currently seem to be in, and as a way to develop shared commitments that reframe the notion of the public good. In the conclusion, Karri Holley illustrates the importance of redefining our understanding of public higher education as well as the role of the state and the significance of the public good. By offering the reader a summary of the preceding chapters, Holley underscores the dual response needed by colleges and universities: to define and advance the institutional mission as well as to respond to social, economic, and political demands. The nature of the response means that the status quo is unrealistic and unacceptable. The question is not if higher education will change as a result of these demands, but how colleges and universities will confront the need for change.