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A five-year Study of the Education of Educators reveals an all-too-familiar pattern: the pursuit of research university status. Negative consequences of the pursuit include faculty resentment at changes in institutional mission, threats to legitimation, and unacknowledged opportunity costs. Causes of the pursuit stem from extramural support of research, undergirded by a society preference for knowledge production, as opposed to knowledge dissemination. A change away from the research emphasis to a broader conception of a metropolitan university will require a most difficult shift in rhetorical ground.

On Lemmings in Higher Education

The Relentless and Destructive Pursuit of Research University Status

There have been times when talk of higher education has not been much more than murmured affirmation. At other times, the talk has been harsh: what were reassuring verities are viewed as rigid constraints; what was high principle, enervating dogma; the past becomes either Paradise Lost to be regained at all costs, or a dubious heritage to be denied and forgotten.

But although perspectives vary, talk of higher education inevitably comes around to talk of mission, purpose, and norms. What is the purpose of our institution? What are we doing here? What should we be doing? What do others ask (or urge, or command) us to do? Such questions underlie discourse in higher education whenever we are faced with the immediately mundane matters of budget, faculty recruitment, office space, or curriculum. To justify—speciously or appropriately—our positions on immediate matters, we turn to mission, purpose, and norms, invoking arguments from first principles (e.g., academic freedom) while eschewing arguments from circumstance.

And such questions have provided the foundation for discourse here at the Center for Educational Renewal at the University of Washington. The center was created some six years ago to conduct a comprehensive five-year Study of the Education of Educators in the United States and to support efforts for the simultaneous renewal of K-12 schools and the education of

those who work in them. Central to our Study of the Education of Educators have been the perennial questions of our perceptions of our higher education institution's mission, purpose, and norms, versus those that we desire for our institution. The questions formed much of the framework for development of questionnaires and interview protocols and tinctured our thinking in our visits to twenty-nine teacher-preparing institutions in eight states.

The context of the study, the findings, and ensuing recommendations are discussed at length in three volumes and numerous technical reports (see Suggested Readings). For my purposes here, I cannot treat the whole, but rather focus on selected findings dealing with mission, purposes, and norms. In this article, I address selected data on the changes in mission, particularly the desire on the part of virtually all of our twenty-nine institutions to become internationally known research universities. I address, too, the consequences resulting from such a quest. In a follow-up article, to appear in a subsequent issue, I'll deal with a specific aspect of institutional mission—the faculty reward structure and the consequences for school-university interaction.

Findings

Education faculty members responding to our questionnaires were presented nine posited institutional missions and asked to indicate their perception of how much importance currently was placed on the missions by their respective institutions. Faculty members also were asked to indicate how much importance they think *should* be placed on each of the missions, by indicating their desire to see the mission emphasized. Responses were analyzed by category of importance ("not at all," "marginally," "moderately," and "centrally") and by institutional type: three types of public institutions—flagship, major comprehensive, and regional comprehensive, and three types of private institutions—major, regional, and four-year liberal arts. Responses for missions perceived and desired for one category—"centrally important"—are presented in Table 1.

The data presented in Table 1 suggest considerable discrepancies between types of institutions in terms of perceived importance of the posited missions. For example, only 28.9 percent of those in public flagship institutions indicate teaching is of central importance, as compared with 81.6 percent of those in private liberal arts institutions. Research is indicated as centrally important to the institution by 81.3 percent of those in public flagship institutions, while only 23.6 percent in public regionals perceive research as centrally important at their institutions.

As for desired emphasis on the posited missions, it will be noted that without exception across the six types of institutions, the first and second

Table 1: Institutional Missions Perceived and Desired As Centrally Important

Mission	Public Flagship	Public Major	Public Regional	Private Major	Private Regional	Private Lib. Arts
Teaching						
Perceived	28.9%	49.1%	73.9%	71.8%	76.0%	81.6%
Desired	76.2	80.0	91.8	94.9	93.3	95.7
Research						
Perceived	81.3	43.9	23.6	52.6	32.7	34.8
Desired	60.8	52.7	32.0	62.8	41.3	26.1
Development						
Perceived	8.5	16.4	18.0	7.9	28.2	6.7
Desired	36.2	37.9	39.0	25.0	41.7	15.6
Ad Hoc Services						
Perceived	7.0	20.5	16.7	13.2	22.1	4.4
Desired	25.1	36.3	37.6	24.0	35.0	8.9
Effecting Change						
Perceived	12.0	22.4	21.0	30.3	36.9	15.6
Desired	50.0	57.1	54.1	61.8	58.3	37.8
Preparing Teachers						
Perceived	38.6	59.8	78.2	71.6	72.7	77.8
Desired	66.7	75.6	86.7	82.4	83.5	89.1
Preparing Special Educators						
Perceived	15.1	33.9	53.8	36.8	30.1	4.3
Desired	33.5	44.6	58.8	41.9	43.6	17.8
Preparing Administrators						
Perceived	19.5	42.9	39.5	36.8	43.7	20.0
Desired	37.8	48.8	43.1	42.7	51.0	21.7
Preparing Researchers						
Perceived	47.9	16.4	8.2	22.7	5.8	6.8
Desired	56.0	47.3	21.6	46.1	13.7	15.9

desired priorities of education faculty are the same. Teaching is desired as the first priority. Preparing teachers is desired as the second priority.

It will be noted that there are varying degrees of discrepancies between perceived and desired mission priorities. Comparing missions across institutional type, the percentage of education faculty desiring a mission to be emphasized as centrally important is larger than the percentage perceiving it to be emphasized. There are but two exceptions to this pattern. Some

81.3 percent of those in public flagships perceive research as centrally important, while 60.8 percent desire research to be central. Similarly, 34.8 percent of those in liberal arts institutions perceive research as centrally important; 26.1 percent desire it to be so.

Faculty members were asked also to predict whether emphasis on the nine posited missions would decrease, remain the same, or increase. The percentage of those indicating a predicted increase is presented in Table 2.

Discrepancies between perceived and desired importance placed on various institutional missions already have been noted. The data in Table 2 suggest that the discrepancies will, if anything, widen in the years to come, should the predictions of faculty members prove accurate. Across institutional type, research most likely is seen as increasing in importance as a mission. Even among those in public regionals, 50.2 percent foresee increasing emphasis on research, as do 52.5 percent of those in private regionals and 45.7 percent in liberal arts institutions.

From questionnaire data and, even more so, from interviews with faculty and academic administrators, Study of the Education of Educators researchers concluded that there is a strong shift in the institutions housing schools, colleges, and departments of education from an emphasis on teaching and service to an emphasis on research. This shift is seen as occurring not only among the major comprehensive institutions, but most interestingly and tellingly among the historically much more modest and unassuming public regionals—in many instances former normal schools. And this shift seems to be occurring, too, among the four-year liberal arts institutions, traditionally places enjoying a sustained emphasis on teaching as opposed to research. Typical of the articles in the educational press is a recent one in *The Chronicle of Higher Education* that notes a "Strong Push for Research on Liberal-Arts Campuses Brings Fears that Their Culture Is Threatened."

Table 2: Institutional Missions Predicted as Increasing in Importance

	Public Flagship	Public Major	Public Regional	Private Major	Private Regional	Private Lib. Arts
Mission						
Teaching	18.1%	18.2%	25.4%	26.7%	16.8%	8.7%
Research	41.3	52.9	50.2	52.0	52.5	45.7
Development	18.9	28.0	37.0	31.5	24.8	26.7
Ad Hoc Services	18.4	25.4	40.9	33.8	27.5	22.2
Effecting Change	35.6	31.1	47.1	45.2	40.0	29.5
Preparing Teachers	21.7	29.6	40.0	31.5	33.7	20.0
Preparing Spec. Ed.	12.0	19.3	27.2	22.2	26.0	15.5
Preparing Admin.	15.4	20.7	23.7	21.9	32.7	6.5
Preparing Researchers	31.9	36.4	23.0	43.8	23.8	11.4

The shift in emphasis from teaching and service to research has been occurring for quite some time, of course: we can consult Christopher Jencks and David Riesman, *The Academic Revolution*, or Laurence Veysey, *The Emergence of the American University*, for earlier examples, as well as William James's *The Ph.D. Octopus*. My interest here, however, is less in a historical catalogue and more in an exploration of the current consequences of the across-the-board quest of all types of institutions to become research universities. It is to that exploration that I now turn.

Consequences

In considering consequences, we might well start with a consideration of positives, the payoffs. What becomes clear early on, however, is that the payoffs are few in this becoming-a-research-institute sweepstakes. Few participants score, in large part because scoring criteria cannot be finally determined. For, like Faust, there is no limit, no way to be satisfied. "Prestigious," "research-oriented," "widely known," and all other such descriptors of success in this business are dialectical terms, not positive terms. Even those institutions that gain some relative degree of recognition realize that they most likely will be regarded as parvenus by the more fortunate of the earlier arrivals.

Although the payoffs are few, the consequences of opting to participate are often many and unpleasant. One common consequence is a resentful faculty. The degree and distribution of resentment, of course, depends on individual circumstances. If you are, say, a young assistant professor embarking on a career, you may welcome the shift to research. After all, the more research money attracted to your institution and the greater the institution's notoriety, the faster you'll be able to position yourself for the jump to a really top-drawer institution from what you see as a cow college cum normal school posing as a university. For many members of the old guard, twenty-year veterans who got in at a time when teaching and service was the name of the game and the orientation of the institution more local than cosmopolitan, the shift to research as the *summum bonum* may well produce much less positive responses. One such response is withdrawal. Work is done with a minimum of emotional involvement; one goes about as a polite cipher, offending nobody, risking nothing. Another response is adoption of a passive-aggressive strategy, whereby whatever moves academic administrators make to achieve research institute status are thwarted by Byzantine (and time-consuming and distracting) maneuvers. Whatever the responses, we can be reasonably certain that for many of the settled, older veterans, those who are hardly in a position to pull up stakes, and hardly in a position to significantly alter work patterns, the pursuit of research status means pain, bitterness, and feeling bad.

Part of the pain felt by many faculty members stems from two additional sources. In many of the study institutions, researchers were told that although the announced shift was toward the research ideal, there had been little, if any, reduction of teaching loads or the provision of research assistants, grants writers, and other support. For many in these institutions, the pursuit of research status was turning out to be one more add-on to an already busy schedule. In other institutions, administrators claim to be broadening definitions of scholarship and productivity; however carefully worded and well meaning these pronouncements might be, they are invariably interpreted by faculty members as focusing primarily on the traditional output indices—publication in refereed journals. Again, in these institutions, one senses hostility toward administrators tinctured with accusations of hypocrisy.

The lines are not all that clear-cut, of course. As indicated by our study data, many junior faculty would like to see more emphasis on teaching and less on research. And many senior faculty, or at least those poised to produce rapidly, see no particular harm in their institution becoming a research institute. The presence of the less energetic, the wind testers, and the crafty must be acknowledged: for some of these, the shift in mission simply represents new ways to appear productive.

Another consequence is possible loss of legitimation. Particularly among the second- and third-tier public institutions, it can be argued that the move to become a research institute weakens the traditional claims to legitimacy and thus sanction and support, without substituting equally strong claims of another order.

The traditional legitimation claim has been grounded in service to sons and daughters of the local constituency along with provision of useful knowledge to the community—knowledge immediately and commonly recognizable as useful. The legitimation claims of the institution embarking on the climb to research institute status are considerably different, to wit: "We are going to spend considerable sums to attract big-name people who in fact won't be here all that much because they are big-name and thus are on the international circuit, but this is a good thing because we will become well known." The potential reaction by state legislators to such claims was well articulated by a professor of science education interviewed during our study:

> They've got an idea we should have a national, even an international reputation for productivity. I don't know what's going to happen after my generation retires. They place such an emphasis on research and such a low emphasis on teaching. The young faculty come here, you can't blame them for wanting to do research and ignore teaching because they know they have to. Sooner or later it's going to catch up with us. Legislators are going to send their kids here, there will be nobody here to teach these kids, except TAs, and *then* you'll see funding cutbacks like never before.

Opportunity costs need to be considered as well. As implied in the above prognostication, the shift toward the research institute involves a shift away from other matters. Thus, an institution might have a fair to good teacher-preparation program, one that with suitable attention and focus could become first-rate—a statewide model. But if the attention and focus is instead on becoming a research institute pretender, the teacher preparation program will most likely lapse into mediocrity. As my colleague, John Goodlad, has pointed out, "things left unattended deteriorate." No institution can maintain more than a few items on the agenda at any one time: if the focus is *here*, it cannot be *there*, and *there* can limp along or sink, or fade or blossom as it will.

Causes

This recital of common costs of aspiring to research institute status leads us to other questions. Why do so many institutions seek such exalted status, given the odds against winning, and given the apparently deleterious consequences? Why is there such persistence in the face of what would appear to be common-sense reasons to forego the aspirations? Or are we faced with a Barbara Tuchman-like example of pursuing folly?

One reason for the pursuit of research institute status, already alluded to, is the same given by Willie Sutton when asked why he robbed banks: "because that's where the money is." An institution looking for money will be more likely to be successful, if it tells a story about research and the frontiers of knowledge than if it tells of the excitement of correcting first-year students' English composition papers. There is no question that all institutions, even the most wealthy (or particularly the most wealthy) are constantly in need of funds. And the push for external funds for research has some reasonably solid ground. For a public institution, the legislature represents a constant, but limited source of funds. Even with a clutch of highly supportive legislators at hand, an institution cannot realistically expect more than modest increases in allocations from year to year. Extramural funds, on the other hand, can be the source of an immediate infusion directed toward a specific and useful goal. A grant may mean considerably more, in the long run, than a several-year stint by a well-known professor. With the professor will come the entourage—graduate research assistants who in turn will take courses from others in the department. A department that grows from, say, forty to sixty graduate students is in reasonable shape to demand more full-time-equivalents (FTEs).

Longevity of funding practice is not justification. But we surely can and must recognize prevailing practice. One does not need to be all that misogynistic to acknowledge that institutions genuinely needing extra funds will go to available and appropriate sources. And if those sources look favorably

upon research and askance at teaching and service, then that is the way of the world.

But the direction and pattern of the flow of money in the system tell us something more, something about the cultural basis for the emphasis on research. It flows this way, rather than that, because of cultural commitments and biases. The cultural roots of the research institute bias are taproots reaching far down. From the beginning, knowledge production is ranked higher than knowledge reproduction or dissemination. Those with higher status should refrain from dissemination, especially to the young. Specialized production among adults is much better. In the ancient hush, we can hear Alcibiades berating a teacher of young children, because the teacher has edited Homer. Why waste your time with the young? Alcibiades demands; you should be dealing with young men, not children. And surely in our own time, it is clear that advanced graduate seminars are more worthy than introductory survey courses.

The critical factor, however, is not age, but our fundamental view of the nature of teaching. Over the centuries, teaching has been viewed more or less as reproductive and not knowledge-producing. In our society, we make sharp distinctions between production and reproduction. An example of the distinction is seen in the status we give to the occupation of printing. The printer might do a creditable job in reproducing an Ansel Adams photograph or a Wassily Kandinsky abstract, but this essentially reproductive act we tend to see as mechanical and routine, and considerably less creative (and thus less valued) than taking the original photograph or painting the original picture. The production/reproduction distinction is perhaps most blurred in music: we are willing to acknowledge the reproduction of a symphony as an epistemic interpretation, a reenactment enabling us to understand the music in a new way, as witness the current controversy over "original" or "authentic" instruments. As for teaching, we tend to see it as we see printing: more or less routine and mechanical reproduction. We see it as mechanical and not as a reenactment or a recreation of culture, and thus denigrate it.

Toward a Better Rhetoric

Like a growing number of colleagues, I believe that uncritical pursuit of research university status is harmful and counterproductive. Higher education has more appropriate and fulfilling tasks at hand, many of which are being outlined in the pages of this journal. But to say that one's institution is *not* going to be, or even pretend to be, a research university is to say a great deal and to ask much of ourselves and others. One is going up against cultural icons of great moment. It is easy to say, as with J. Alfred Prufrock, "No, I am not Prince Hamlet, nor was meant to be." But, as with

most things that are superficially easy, this approach will land us in a muddle. To define ourselves as what we are not—in this case, the not-research-university, is to acknowledge, wistfully and with gloom, that if we *could* be the exalted Other, we would be, no question about it. The Prufrock formulation, with the brave, sighing, acceptance of the "attendant lord" role, doesn't provide solid rhetorical grounding for us. As long as we believe that moving a university toward responsiveness to a wide range of constituencies, with a faculty alert to all kinds of knowledge creation, dissemination, and use, is some sort of "attendant lord" role, we will always be glancing backwards, nagged by a sense of our own failure to be Hamlet. Rather, we must reject the second-best rhetorical ground in favor of positive definition. To be a metropolitan university is to be part of an honorable calling. We are part of it, because it is virtuous, a good in itself. Surely the creation of knowledge can occur in a kindergarten classroom, as well as in a laboratory; one can just as easily be awed and skeptical and discipline-oriented in one as in the other. Surely the dissemination functions differ but in technique. As for dealing with knowledge that is immediately useful, one can argue that the direct application of advanced knowledge to societal problems at hand is to honor an obligation, at least for state-supported institutions. And surely the ethical questions of distance and academic freedom obtain in both "research" universities and metropolitan universities: there is as much threat from the intrusion of federal government bureaucrats as there is from school district administrators.

But, given the deep-rooted causes of the lemminglike pursuit of status, the shift to solid rhetorical ground will be no easy task. Moreover, we have others to convince as well as ourselves. Administrators, boards of regents, legislators, public and private grants people: all have contributed their part to the pursuit of the research university ideal, and all will now have to be persuaded of the narrowness of the old vision and the need for a new vision of the university—one more reasonable in scope and modest in proportion, and, in the end, more fitting.

Suggested Readings

Goodlad, John I. *Teachers For Our Nation's Schools.* San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 1990.

Goodlad, John I. Roger Soder, and Kenneth A. Sirotnik, eds. *The Moral Dimensions of Teaching.* San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 1990.

Goodlad, John I. Roger Soder, and Kenneth A. Sirotnik, eds. *Places Where Teachers Are Taught.* San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 1990.

Jencks, Christopher and David Riesman. *The Academic Revolution.* Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1968.

Veysey, Laurence R. *The Emergence of the American University.* Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1965.

Eleven Technical Reports reporting and analyzing data from the Study of the Education of Educators are available from the Center for Educational Renewal, Miller Hall, University of Washington, Seattle, WA 98195.