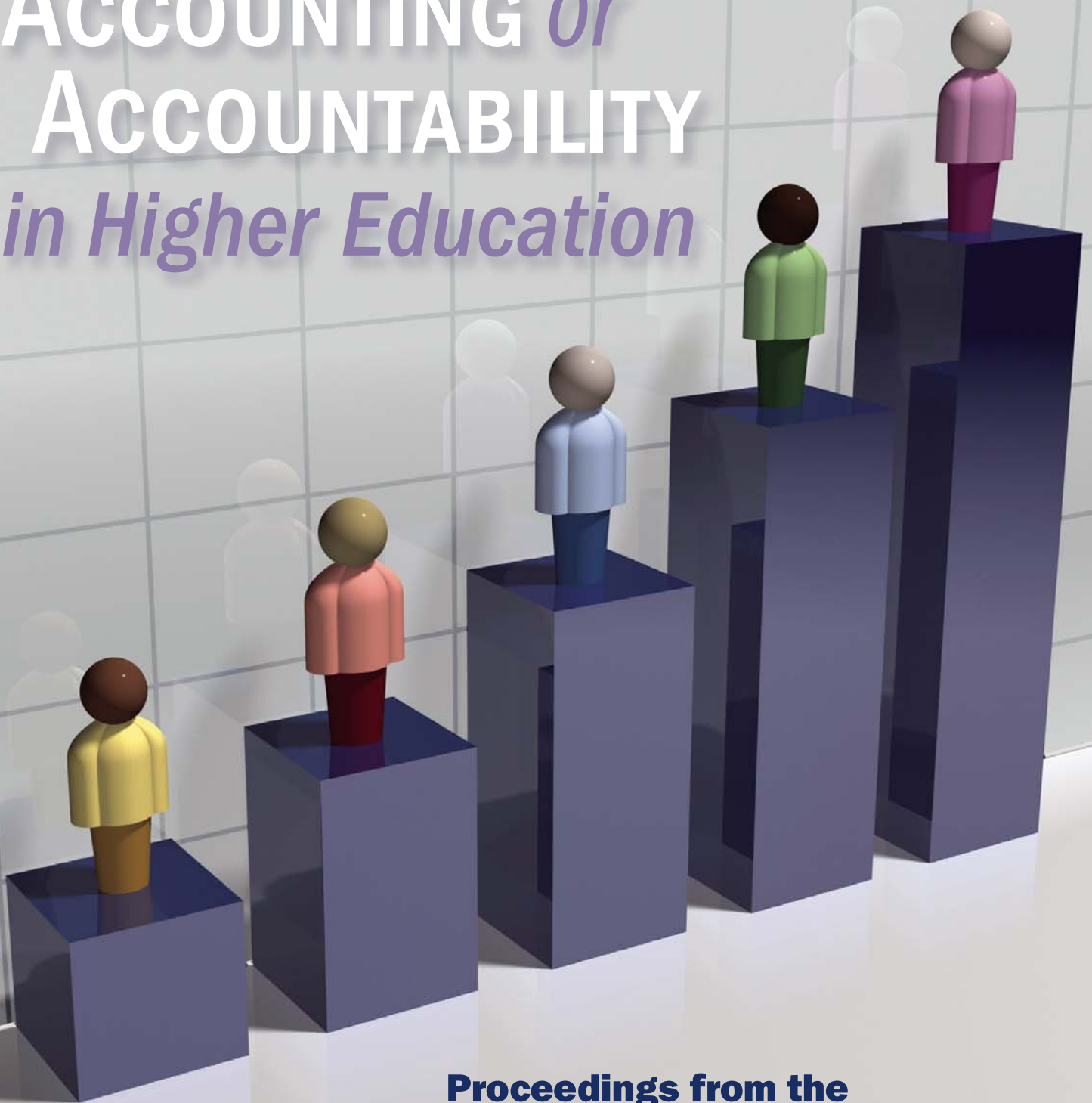# Accounting *or* Accountability
in Higher Education

**Proceedings from the
January 8, 2009 OCUFA Conference**

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OCUFA

Ontario Confederation of University Faculty Associations
Union des Associations des Professeurs des Universités de l'Ontario

FORWARD

The age of accountability has arrived.

From elementary schools to hospitals to public broadcasters, all manner of public services must now be accountable for the tax dollars they receive. Universities are no exception to this trend. Throughout the 1990s and into the 21st century, public universities around the world have been asked to participate in increasingly complex accountability measures. From key performance indicators to comprehensive quality assurance schemes, accountability is ascendant on our campuses.

There is a clear need for a meaningful accountability system. Students, faculty, government, and ultimately, citizens must be assured that both public and private revenue is being responsibly spent to create the highest quality, most effective higher education experience possible. However, accountability schemes become problematic when they instigate punitive dollars-for-performance funding systems, compromise the academic freedom of faculty, or impose heavy administrative burdens on institutions without delivering meaningful data. A balance must be struck between the need to demonstrate value and the integrity of higher education.

In order to explore the issues regarding accountability in higher education, the Ontario Confederation of University Faculty Associations (OCUFA) held a conference on January 23-24, 2009. Titled "Accounting or Accountability in Higher Education", it brought together noted experts on accountability from around the world to assess how the drive towards accountability could best be managed in the interest of a high-quality, independent university system. The conference was organized into five panel discussions – *Accountability Initiatives in Higher Education, Current Approaches to Accountability, International Experiences and Developments, Student Surveys and Accountability, and Changing the Monologue/Dialogue on Accountability.* Each of these sections – and the articles that emerged from them – is represented in this collection of the conference proceedings.

Not every panelist and presenter was able to expand their presentation into an article. Nevertheless, the articles contained within these proceedings represent the breadth of research and commentary that characterized the conference.

In the first section, *Accountability Initiatives in Higher Education,* Theresa Shanahan provides an overview of the impetus towards greater accountability in higher education, how this drive is expressed, and the implications it carries for higher education systems. She argues that Canada has seen a dramatic change in the shape and extent of accountability requirements in postsecondary education, and that these changes are transforming academic work and academic culture.

In the second section, Joy Mighty assesses the unintended consequences of the drive towards greater accountability in higher education. Rather than increase quality or improve responsiveness, Mighty suggests efficiency and profitability have overshadowed social justice and equity issues within the academy.

Next, Bjørn Stensaker of the University of Oslo examines emerging accountability models with an eye to which systems are worth emulating and which should be avoided. After tracing the origins of accountability schemes, Stensaker develops a typology for assessing different models and applies it to the higher education systems in Norway, New Zealand, Finland, the United Kingdom, and the harmonization activities ongoing in the European Union.

In the *Student Surveys and Accountability* section, Ken Steele explores the possibilities – and limits – of student questionnaires in determining educational quality. He states that surveys can be unparalleled sources of insight and quantitative data about student attitudes, perceptions and remembered behaviours. However, he cautions that student surveys should be interpreted carefully alongside appropriate contextual data, lest

they be misrepresented. Similarly, Jeff Rybak argues that the increasing use of student evaluations is a response to specific institutional pressures. At the same time, student and faculty attitudes have also changed in response to these same pressures. It is therefore important to continue student surveys in context of ongoing changes within the university system, and to approach their results with a sophisticated understanding of statistical data.

In the final section, Glen A. Jones asks why there is so little public accountability for the quality of university education. Federal and provincial governments in Canada have devoted very little attention to the creation of public accountability schemes, either the research and teaching assessment exercises or peer review systems of international peer jurisdictions. Jones suggest this is the result of Canada's homogeneous system of universities, limited higher education policy capacity within provincial governments, and the unique nature of Canada's federal system. Taking a different tack, Amy Metcalfe assesses the impact of the "audit culture" on faculty, particularly those at the beginning of their careers. She examines the pressure on these faculty to "measure up", and how this pressure may harm the principles of shared governance at Canadian universities. Metcalfe also provides recommendations for increasing faculty autonomy and involvement in university administration.

The papers presented in these conference proceedings do not provide a definitive answer to the question of accountability in higher education. Rather, OCUFA hopes they provide a starting point for a continuing discussion on this important issue. Accountability – in some form or another – is here to stay. We need to ensure, however, that accountability supports the values of our higher education system and works for all members of the university community.

SECTION ONE:
Accountability initiatives in higher education

ACCOUNTABILITY INITIATIVES IN HIGHER EDUCATION: AN OVERVIEW OF THE IMPETUS TO ACCOUNTABILITY, ITS EXPRESSIONS AND IMPLICATIONS.

Theresa Shanahan,
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Accountability is far from a new aspect of higher education policy arrangements in Canada. Historically, universities and other postsecondary institutions in this country have had to comply with laws and Acts that governed them. Governments have required accountability reporting from universities and universities have initiated accountability activities. In the past, faculty behaviour was monitored by presidents and university governing boards in ways that today would be deemed unacceptable with our expanded sensibility of personal rights and freedoms. However, in Canada over the last two decades we have seen a dramatic change in the *shape* and *extent* of accountability requirements in postsecondary education, largely framed in terms of the pursuit of 'quality' and 'excellence' in education. These changes in the way universities are called to account are transforming academic work and academic culture.

DEFINING OUR TERMS

What do we mean by 'accountability'? To be accountable means to give a reckoning of, or to explain our behaviour, to justify our conduct. It means to demonstrate responsibility in the exercise of our duties. It means being transparent. Accountability in postsecondary education is more than just the technical process of counting. Thus, it means more than counting numbers or monies; or counting the number of students in classrooms; or counting students graduated or employed; it is more than counting publications; and it is more than counting research dollars. Accountability in postsecondary education is more than counting inputs and outputs.

In higher education discussions of accountability include: To *whom* are we accountable? For *what* are we accountable?; And, what *form* should accountability take? Answers to these questions have evolved and expanded over time. Universities are accountable to an increasing range of stakeholders including the general public, students, their parents, government, our sponsors and donors and to our own governing boards and senates and to ourselves as a collegium. Similarly, over time conceptions of what we are, or should be accountable for, have expanded. In general, postsecondary institutions are accountable to achieve their mission and purposes. They are accountable for the administration of their finances—to keep accurate and complete financial records and to use funds received in accordance with the terms under which they were given.

However, pressure has increased for greater accountability around (institutional) 'performance' especially in the areas of 'quality', 'efficiency' 'effectiveness' in all our activities and in particular our teaching.[i]

THE HISTORICAL IMPETUS TO ACCOUNTABILITY
Massification, system expansion, and increased funding

When higher education was a small, elitist enterprise, with comparatively little government financial support, and when scholarship and teaching were not perceived

as crucial to societal and economic well-being, accountability was less of a public and government priority. But with the expansion of higher education systems and the transition from elite to mass higher education (Trow, 1973), postsecondary systems became more expensive and more complex. In Canada, we have witnessed this expansion in the increase in postsecondary enrolments, increases in the number and diversity of postsecondary institutions and increases in the number and kinds of postsecondary programs and degrees.

With massification and system expansion came expense. Higher education institutions became more dependent on outside sources of funds, including (but not only) from the State. In general, we see across jurisdictions that the overall scale of public expenditures on postsecondary education has increased over the last half century. As the cost of higher education increased, accountability for public funds emerged as a higher education policy concern.

Expansion also led to complexity. Indeed, Clark Kerr, in his book *The Uses of the University* (1995), calls the modern university the "multiversity", a complex, conglomerate of many communities that come together for related purposes. At the same time, massification of education, or the explosion of knowledge and access to it through technology, has led to the increasing sophistication of the public. No longer are universities bastions of rarified knowledge, only for the privileged few. Increased access to education has led to the demystification of the academy and has resulted in challenges to the authority and legitimacy of higher education.

These are changes in the socio-cultural context within which universities are located. They have led to new expectations for educational practice and the public's demand for more information and for more transparency. Hence, calls for accountability emerged both to account for increased funding and to make sense of the diverse activities of universities and other postsecondary institutions.

Globalization, neo-liberalism and the market

When we talk about the evolution of accountability in postsecondary education we need to place the conversation in a larger context. Changes in postsecondary education were not happening in a vacuum. Trends could be seen internationally. Around about the 1980s the world economy began to change. Although there is a range of differing analyses that attempt to make sense of the changes, there is consensus that fundamental economic global restructuring began to occur in a process referred as 'globalization'.[ii]

Governments around the world responded in various ways to the changing economic environment which brought with it pressure to compete internationally in a global economic market. In Canada, (and in other jurisdictions around the world), the federal government's response was to free the market by adopting policies that reflected the influence of neo-liberalism. This approach affected the direction ultimately taken by Canadian social policy and resulted in a restructuring of the Keynesian welfare state within a neo-liberal paradigm. Many (but not all) provincial governments also framed their responses to economic globalization within a neo-liberal paradigm.

Underpinning the neo-liberal approach to social policy was the ideological belief in the virtue and infallibility of global markets. This view argues that competition and market forces strengthened the economy. Within this frame the logic, principles, values and language of the market infused and took precedence in social policy including education (both K-12 schooling and postsecondary education). Thus, accountability discussions across public sectors (including education) came to reflect this shift. Accountability increasingly became defined in market terms.

This trend is evident in higher education policy. In Canada, we have seen provincial governments

increasingly adopting market mechanisms in funding and resource allocation. Business and private sector criteria are employed to make education decisions. Job training and meeting labour market needs have become key education priorities. Economic principles of productivity, efficiency and competitiveness have become imperatives. And we have seen our accountability frameworks become infused with market discourse, market principles and market mechanisms. This ultimately influenced for what we are accountable and what form it should take.

This is not to say that higher education had lived in splendid isolation and never had a connection to the market or the private sector. Axelrod has warned us against romanticizing this mythical view (Axelrod, 1988). Moreover, if we look at Thorstein Veblen's *Higher Learning in America* from 1918, we can read him rage against the influence of corporations on higher education as if he is talking about today. However, the nature and extent of the contemporary connection between the market and higher education were new and different to what we have seen in the past. Economic priorities have taken central stage at universities, and more broadly in postsecondary policies across Canadian provinces.

There were other developments associated with economic globalization that contributed to interest in and concern around university accountability. Difficulties surrounding the international mobility of people from different educational systems through immigration emerged from pro economic globalization analyses. Governments typically understood this phenomenon in market terms and from a human capital perspective which emphasizes integrating newcomers into the labour market in order to be competitive in the global economy. This approach identifies barriers to labour market integration including the lack of recognition of foreign/international credentials. Consequently calls came for transferability of education, nationally and internationally. To accomplish this, information and

transparency was needed around postsecondary degrees. This heightened the focus on educational outcomes so that comparisons could be made across jurisdictions. Conversations about comparing outcomes and standards easily led to questions about 'quality.' And questions about 'quality' led to judgments and evaluations about what is 'good' and what is 'poor' quality in education.

In this context the diversity of degrees and education was problematized because it hindered labour market integration. Naturally, if diversity is defined as the problem then standardization must be the solution. So emerged the impetus to harmonization of educational curriculum and degrees which would assist in the seamless transition of people moving between various educational jurisdictions and in their integration into the global economy. The result was that talk of outcomes-based education, and educational standardization in the name of the market and economic competitiveness, crept into discussions of educational accountability.

There are many examples across K-12 education and postsecondary education of this pressure to standardize and harmonize what we do in education. An international example can be found in the Bologna Process that seeks to harmonize academic degree standards and quality assurance standards throughout European higher education. A local example from my law background is evident in the move of a number of Ontario law schools who have changed the name of their law degrees from "LL.B" to "JD" (the American degree) in order that Ontario law degrees are recognized by Americans and, in particular, so that our graduates can move effortlessly from Bay Street to Wall Street. Another example in higher education is the University Undergraduate Degree Level Expectations (UUDLE) exercise mandated by the Ontario Council of Academic Vice-Presidents (OCAV) in Ontario which requires the articulation of program goals and learning outcomes for every undergraduate degree offered by Ontario universities.

University Faculties or Departments must articulate standardized outcomes and degree level expectations for every degree offered across all individual faculty and courses. This standardization exercise in postsecondary education mirrors a similar trend in K-12 schooling in the province. More troubling, it may well be a harbinger of what is to come in postsecondary education. Standardized curriculum? Standardized teaching methods? Standardized assessment and evaluation in universities?

As a consequence of all of these trends a shift has occurred. Universities now have to account, justify and explain their conduct and their educational activities in terms of economic principles. Accountability now means measuring and quantifying activities in order to justify them. Accountability has expanded from explaining our conduct, being transparent and providing information, to 'quality assurance' and standardization which involves control, evaluation and improvement. All of this has affected the form of accountability. And it led to resistance, controversy and criticism from many locations inside and outside of the academy.

It is within this larger socio-economic context that the contemporary accountability movement in higher education emerged internationally in the late 1970s, in the United States in the 1980s and in Canada in the early 1990s. Accountability models that have emerged in Canada within the last two decades are embedded in broader ideological mechanisms associated with the political-economic transition from welfare state to global capitalism.

Depending on the foci of the analysis this trend has been variously described as public sector reform, corporatization, new managerialism, or marketization. Some have also called it the evaluative state, or the audit society. Whatever we call it, in Ontario, accountability emerged as a major higher education policy priority

under Bob Rae's NDP administration between 1990 and 1995. It has been taken up in different ways by each subsequent administration.[iv]

Accountability requirements for institutions in postsecondary education are not new. Universities have been engaged in and have initiated accountability exercises for years. Moreover, accountability has been a priority both in times of financial restraint and in times of massive investment. What are new are the scale, scope and form of the accountability requirements. Of concern for various jurisdictions in Canada (and elsewhere in the world) is the current models of accountability that are being experimented with. Also important are the values that underpin and inform these new accountability models and the implications of these accountability models for education. This is where criticisms arise in the academy. It is not around the demonstration of accountability per se- universities have been doing that for years.

EXPRESSIONS OF ACCOUNTABILITY

Accountability has many forms, processes and mechanisms. The form that accountability takes is determined by a number of factors. First, the unit of analysis for the accountability mechanism can be programmatic, institutional, or sector-wide (as in "for the college sector" or "for the university sector", etc.).Accountability mechanisms can be part of a broad postsecondary system framework or they can be part of a structural component of the system. Second, the impetus for, and expressions of, accountability can emanate internally from postsecondary institutions or they can come externally from governments or intermediary bodies that have some authority over the system. They can be externally regulated by government or an intermediary body, or they can be internally regulated by the postsecondary institution or sector in a self-regulated approach. Third, cultural context influences the shape of accountability

mechanisms. For instance, where institutional autonomy is high (such as in Canada and the US) there is greater tension around and resistance to external accountability mechanisms coming from the government and there tends to be more autonomy over internal accountability mechanisms. In other jurisdictions (such as the UK and Australia) the process is increasingly mediated by the central government and its agencies.

The following examples provide a range of accountability mechanisms currently employed in Ontario postsecondary education (and in other jurisdictions). This is not intended to be an exhaustive list.[v]

Legislation

Using legislation to establish, govern and regulate postsecondary institutions is one common mechanism to establish accountability. Legislation may be used to restrict the use of the term 'university' and 'college' or to restrict degree–granting. Legislation may have built-in accountability requirements for institutions and for programs. For example, in Ontario we have the *Post-secondary Education Choice and Excellence Act,* 2000 which regulates degree granting in the province and sets out the terms and conditions under which organizations may offer a degree. The Act requires that in certain cases the Postsecondary Quality Assessment Board (PEQAB) must evaluate the programs leading to a degree offered by out-of–province institutions, new institutions, private institutions, or colleges seeking to offer an applied degree.

Reporting to government by institutional governing boards

Governing boards of postsecondary institutions have numerous financial and other reporting requirements under law. Most employ internal auditors to address financial reporting and in some jurisdictions postsecondary institutions are subject to scrutiny by external auditors as well. In addition to financial reporting, institutions may report on a myriad of performance indicators and targets. In some cases this may be for reporting purposes only. In other cases it may be that reporting on performance indicators is attached to funding. In Ontario, universities are required to enter into *Multi-Year Accountability Agreements* with the government in which they commit to self-identified enrolment targets and other quality improvements and reporting in order to receive funding from the *Quality Improvement Fund* (QIF) envelope.

External or internal reviews

Another demonstration of accountability is through external or internal reviews. These may be programmatic or institutional. They may be done by external committees composed of academic peers from outside the institution. They might also include a representative from a relevant profession or industry, or they may be internal reviews using self-assessment methods, collecting a wide range of qualitative information at the departmental or institutional level, from a variety of sources (students, alumni, faculty or employers). The results of such reviews may be provided to government in order to be eligible for direct funding or for students in the institution to qualify for government-based student loan revenues. For instance, in Ontario we have the undergraduate program review conducted by the Ontario Council of Academic Vice Presidents through the Council of Ontario Universities (COU). The external peer review process is used in the Ontario Council of Graduate Studies (OCGS) review of graduate programs as well as for eligibility for membership in the Association of Universities and Colleges of Canada (AUCC).

Accreditation

Another type of external review that can be employed is accreditation. Accreditation may be at the program level or it may be at the institutional level. An example of programmatic accreditation is when a state, provincial, territorial or national professional regulatory body reviews a professional program, curriculum and other criteria related student's preparation for entry into a profession. This leads to the approval of the professional program as the educational requirement for entering the professional licensing process. For example, in Canada many professional programs offered in universities such as nursing, medicine, engineering, education, architecture are accredited by the governing bodies of the profession. In contrast, some jurisdictions have national accreditation systems that review for quality in postsecondary institutions. Canada does not have a national institutional accreditation system.

Credit transfer and articulation agreements, guides or councils

Credit transfer and articulation agreements, guides or councils are another mechanism by which postsecondary institutions and systems spell out what they do and how they do it around program delivery, credit awards and course equivalency comparisons. Ontario has relied upon bilateral articulation and transfer agreements whereas other provinces such a British Columbia has the enviable British Columbia Council on Admission and Transfer (BCCAT) that facilitates admission, articulation and transfer agreements amongst postsecondary institutions.

Peer review

The academy also subjects itself to regular peer review in many aspects of our work, including our service, teaching and research responsibilities for tenure and promotion. We submit our research to peer review for publication and for grant applications.

Student feedback

Student evaluations are another important mechanism of accountability employed in postsecondary institutions. In Ontario, public postsecondary institutions draw upon student experience surveys. The results of these surveys speak to the student learning process and learning experiences around satisfaction and engagement. For example, public institutions in Ontario and other jurisdictions employ the National Survey of Student Engagement (NSSE).

Intermediary or Buffer bodies

The use of intermediary bodies or agencies that are arms-length to the government to monitor or develop accountability or quality indicators are other examples of accountability mechanisms. This is a structural or governance mechanism. In Ontario, we have the Education Quality Assessment Office (EQAO) in K-12 schooling and Higher Education Quality Council of Ontario (HEQCO) for postsecondary education. Under its mandate, HEQCO is to create a quality framework and advise the government on system planning and competitiveness including developing key performance indicators to improve postsecondary education.

RECENT TRENDS IN ACCOUNTABILITY

Three major trends can be identified in the contemporary accountability movement. First, we see the increasing use of system-wide frameworks of accountability and broader public sector accountability arrangements that have an impact on postsecondary education. In Canada, human rights codes, freedom of information and the protection of privacy laws, employment equity requirements and disability acts that apply to the public sector also apply universities. Public postsecondary institutions are obligated under these Acts to follow

requirements and to report to the government around certain issues (Shanahan and Jones, 2007). Second, we see an increasing use of institutional accountability contracts between universities and government targeting government priorities. For example, Ontario has multi-year, institution-specific, enrolment and accountability agreements with the provincial government. In some other provinces, new money comes with requirements that universities submit accountability plans to spell out improvements to be made and specific results that will be achieved with the funds (Jones, G. Shanahan, T. et al 2007). Third, we see the extensive reporting specifically on institutional performance. Contemporary expressions of accountability in higher education involve performance models whose purposes and methods are much narrower, conservative and more focused on accounting than broad-based accountability frameworks.

Performance models of accountability may include quality assessment and assurance; performance–based funding, budgeting and management systems; strategic planning and budgeting; total quality management; or value-for-money auditing.[vi] Most of these mechanisms include the use of performance indicators in some shape or form. They are imbued with a consumer ideology that encourages the view of education as a commodity.

Since the 1980's performance indicator (PIs) use to monitor performance of postsecondary education has increased around the globe. While PIs are not new, the way they are being used, and their content and their context differ from the past. Contemporary performance indicators are market-based.

Indicators are not created equally – some are input, or process, or output, some system-wide or sector-wide, others are institution specific. Indicators that are collected and the manner in which they are used vary across jurisdictions, making comparisons and even conclusions about their use complex. Furthermore, definitions of performance indicators and performance data vary which also complicates the discussion.

Performance data is data or information collected on the system. It becomes a "performance indicator" when it is mandated and connected to decision-making, planning, allocation of resources and/or funding. Performance indicators are usually quantitative, standardized measures that allow for comparisons, across institutions and over time. Usually when these models of accountability are employed we see an intermediary body arise that buffers the government and institutions facilitating participation of institutions and sectors in the performance models (Beaton, 1999; Bruneau and Savage, 2002; Cave et al, 1997).

Some jurisdictions (for example, the U.K., France, Netherlands, Scandinavia, Australia, New Zealand and many but not all American states) have been using performance indicators for many years while other jurisdictions are just beginning to establish them.

Since the early to mid-1990s, performance models, along with indicators and value-for money audits, have been applied to university education across various Canadian provinces but not without some controversy and resistance.

Postsecondary performance data are collected system-wide and by institution in Canada. Most Canadian provincial governments collect performance data for postsecondary education. But its use varies by province and only some provinces use it formally as performance indicators. Most Canadian provinces use indicators for performance reporting only. At the time of writing only two Canadian provinces were using performance indicators directly tied to funding: Alberta and Ontario. However, between 2000 and 2003 Quebec employed performance contracts whereby funding and performance were linked (Beaton, 1999; Grosjean et al 1999: Jones G. and Shanahan, T et al. 2007; Shanahan, 2008).

CHALLENGES SURROUNDING ACCOUNTABILITY

Many issues emerge from contemporary accountability trends for faculty, university governance, teaching, learning and other areas of postsecondary education. Performance models of accountability transform the culture of the university and daily working/learning lives of the people within them. A handful of challenges relating to faculty and postsecondary education in general will be considered here.

Definitions of 'quality' and 'excellence'

Performance models of accountability such as 'Quality Assurance' assume a common understanding of 'quality' and 'excellence'. Concerns emerge when attempting to define 'quality' and 'excellence' given the diversity of missions of universities and the principles of institutional autonomy and academic freedom. These terms 'quality' and 'excellence' are socially constructed, as are 'standards.' They change over time. Moreover, there are inherent power relations around who decides what 'quality' or 'excellence' looks like. Conceptions of 'quality' within higher education are elusive and informed by personal values and beliefs (Murphy, 2001). Defining 'quality' is not a technical, neutral process. It is a political process, laden with values and power dynamics (Skolnik, 2007, Bensimon, 1995).

Too often 'quality' is understood and practiced as conformity to orthodoxy and conformity to 'taken-for-granted standards' of what is 'good' in education. This approach fosters conformity of thought and stifles intellectual diversity. At best it reproduces the status quo, dominant discourse and traditional constructions of knowledge and quality (Bensimon, 1995 p.12; Skolnik, 2007).

Scholars have taken issue with the rhetoric of 'quality' and 'excellence', citing vagueness, lack of substance, ambiguity, and lack of meaning. These are terms that no one can disagree with, so they 'organize consent' until deconstructed when it is revealed that there is no shared conception of what they mean or look like (Beaton, 1999, p.33; Skolnik 1989, Readings1996).

Furthermore, increasingly, accountability and quality assurance mechanisms rely upon performance indicators that have an economic utility. They are created with a market bias and industry relevance, within a consumer discourse and ideology. They force us to define ourselves and to define quality in education in terms of the labour market, economic principles (efficiency, productivity, performativity) and in a standardized and quantifiable way.

This approach narrows our choices, our missions, our pedagogy and our research. It subordinates space for critical reflection, creativity, challenges and democratic deals. It problematizes difference and diversity because difference makes comparisons more difficult and comparisons are needed for labour market integration. Institutions of higher learning and professors lose local content and control in teaching and research because they are under pressure to bring their organizations and their writing into line with international trends in order to be competitive in an international environment.

Contemporary accountability mechanisms are narrowly focused on measurement indicators - numerical measurements that are supposed to show 'quality'. They are increasingly focused on outputs (rather than process) in order to facilitate comparisons. Focusing on learning outcomes in the liberal arts leads to an impoverished view of higher education. It pressures us to identify employment-relevant and quantifiable sets of skills or knowledge, instead of focusing on the process of learning – the how and the why a student is learning.

Comparisons inevitably fuel competition within and between universities. The dubious assumption underlying this approach to accountability is that competition

improves educational practice; that competition leads to better research and development; that competition increases the productivity of individuals; that competition improves accessibility; that competition increases employability of our students; that competition improves student learning and students' experience; and that competition leads to greater financial efficiency. What is lost in this approach is the corrosive effect that competition has on academic freedom, autonomy, collegiality, academic relations and last, but certainly not least, student learning. Philosophically, this approach shifts the discussion of education for democracy, or education for citizenship, or education for happiness to a discourse of education for global economic competitiveness. It emphasizes a technical view of education over a transformative view.

Furthermore, reliance on performance indicators can be reductionist. Output indicators focus on the product, not process of learning. They are selective. They do not tell us *why* something is happening or, even clearly, *what* is happening in the classroom. They invite simplistic and misleading comparisons. They ignore institutional context which may affect achievement in universities. They distract against the critical issues of improving the learning of students (Murphy, 2001).

This approach to accountability in postsecondary education transforms *what* we teach and research, *how* we teach and research, *why* we teach and research and *who* will teach and research.

'Measuring' quality

Performance models of accountability assume that quality in education can be captured through measurement and quantification. While defining 'quality' is problematic, measuring quality is fraught with problems of accuracy and adequacy. Too often, critics claim that quality assurance does not ensure, or even demonstrate, quality let alone accountability – that is, are we even measuring what we think we are measuring? For example:

are performance indicators created around employment rates of students a measure of university performance or the economy's performance? Before the sub-prime mortgage crisis and market crash, we might have said they can be a measure of both. But with the current crisis in the economy a university or college could be doing a splendid job of educating it students but its graduates still might not be able to find employment. Employment rates, especially in the current economy, may not reflect the quality of the education received. They may simply reflect the state of the economy.

Disadvantaging disciplines

Some aspects of what we do in postsecondary education are difficult to quantify. For instance, how do you quantify a life's work of scholarly thought advancing a philosophical tradition? How do you quantify a work of art? How do you capture the aesthetic beauty of a dance performance by our student in our Fine Arts departments? How do you quantify our relationships within the academy? The relational pieces that are fundamental to our daily academic lives – relationships between colleagues, between students and faculty, between the university and society – cannot be captured by numbers. How do you measure education outcomes such as critical thinking?

Moreover, the fields of the arts, humanities and social sciences are disadvantaged in the task because they are notoriously difficult to assess through quantitative indicators. The act of quantification discriminates against the arts, humanities and parts of the social sciences because these disciplines are not captured in a quantified form of assessment. The hard disciplines such as science 'outperform' the liberal arts and humanities when it comes to quantifiable measures such as the amount of research dollars, number of publications and the number and dollar value of commercialization of research (Grosjean et al,1999;

Newman, 1998). Unfortunately what is 'counted' is what gets rewarded with further funding and other resources. Consequently parts of the university and significant aspects of what we do on a daily basis in the university which cannot be captured within this counting paradigm are unrecognized and disadvantaged in competitions for scarce resources (Bruneau and Savage, 2002; Grosjean et al, 1999).

The conflation of accountability with quality assessment for the purposes of compliance and regulation

Today accountability frameworks, and the quality assurance components within them, are a reality of every national higher education system. They are an important government regulation and steering tool (Alberto, 2007). However, in discussion there is a tendency to conflate the two even though they are distinct, although connected. The emphasis on quality assurance and other performance models has expanded accountability purposes beyond transparency and information to include improvement, control and compliance imposed by government –often masquerading in rhetoric of 'excellence.' The current trend toward embedding quality assurance in accountability frameworks transforms accountability frameworks into effective regulatory mechanisms. Grosjean et al refer to this as a 'compliance model' of accountability (1999, p.6).

In Ontario, accountability frameworks gather information that is used to make decisions about resource allocation and funding. Ontario's approach has a punitive reward system attached to compliance to government priorities. That is, if you do not make your targets you will not get the targeted funding. In this way performance accountability frameworks tend to measure the extent to which the university is meeting government priorities. If frameworks and indicators

within them are created with a market-bias, then they measure the extent to which universities are meeting industry or private sector priorities.

As a consequence, faculty and administrators must justify their disciplinary activities in terms of their relevance and responsiveness to the economy. They must show how their educational activities provide students with the skills needed by industry. In so doing, certain accountability frameworks may redefine our priorities, inside and outside of the classroom. To the extent that these frameworks accomplish the reordering of our academic priorities, they undermine faculty and university autonomy.

Re-ordering and intensifying academic work

Performance and compliance models of accountability re-order relations and intensify working conditions within the university. New accountability mechanisms create further burdens on faculty without necessarily improving quality. Workloads increase with more reporting in the name of accountability. Currie argues this "ever increasing amount of petty bureaucracy and form-filling" is supposed to make universities more accountable to external stakeholders but is simply just changing the labour process of academics and increasing administrative demands of faculty. Ultimately, this impinges on their ability to engage in meaningful intellectual work (Currie, 1998, p.3).

Many scholars, (Polster and Newson, 1998 and Griffiths, 2001 to name a few Canadian scholars) have critiqued the use of business-style performance indicators in universities. Using Dorothy Smith's framework these scholars argue that these business measurement protocols "intrinsically reorder the social relations of academic work" (Polster and Newson, 1998, p.173).[viii] They contend these practices change how academics

engage in their intellectual activities, their relationships, and their judgments. They restructure the everyday work in the academy.

Within this education paradigm the cult of accountability flourishes in the form of audits, measuring exercises, school rankings on 'performance', and standardized testing and accreditation. In *The Evaluative State Reconsidered,* Guy Neave describes these as 'instruments of new surveillance' and has characterized accountability in higher education as a 'veritable orgy' of reporting procedures (Neave, 1998, p.266).

Faculty are involved in the implementation of accountability frameworks even though they have limited involvement in crafting them. Their involvement in implementation is crucial, and it is in addition to the demands of teaching and research and the routine service commitments we all engage in as part of our work. Extensive amounts of time, money, and energy are expended to implement the range of accountability exercises for which we are increasingly responsible. This is invisible work that does not show up in the final reporting of numerical targets. Inevitably fatigue, cynicism and resentment sets in.

CONCLUDING REMARKS: THE WAY FORWARD

Discussions of accountability naturally become controversial when entwined with issues of quality assurance, standardization and outcomes-based education, politics and power struggles. However, it is helpful to keep in mind what we mean by accountability. Accountability involves explaining not only *what* we are doing, but *why* and *how* we are doing it. This involves thinking critically, deeply, creatively and reflexively about our educational practice and our aspirations. It involves asking difficult questions about why we are doing things this way? Accountability involves identifying what values and philosophy inform our educational practice. And it involves imagining a way forward. We must find appro-

priate approaches to accountability that show all that we do in higher education. This is not to say that in the process of demonstrating accountability we will never count aspects of what we do. However, the language and practice of quantification can be inappropriate and unhelpful in demonstrating accountability because the essence, the scope and the reasons for what we do in higher education cannot be captured by simply counting, measuring and quantifying.

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i A recent example can be found in the 1999 Council of Minister Education Canada declaration that PSE institutions are accountable for their performance in 6 key areas:

- Quality
- Relevance and responsiveness
- Accessibility
- Research and scholarship
- Mobility and portability
- Accountability

See CMEC (1999). A Report on Public Expectations of Postsecondary Education in Canada. Toronto: Council of Ministers of Education, Canada.

ii It was characterized by increased global mobility of capital, rationalization of production, and economic interdependence of nation-states spurred on by advances in information technology.

iii For a fulsome discussion of neo-liberalism and globalization and social policy see Shanahan, T. (2008) "Creeping Capitalism."

iv For a full discussion and details on Ontario's story please see Shanahan, Fisher, Jones and Rubenson, PSE Policy in Ontario:1985-2007.AIHEPS, (2008)

v For an extensive list and description of accountability practices and quality assurance mechanisms within them, across postsecondary education in

Canada, broken down by province, please see the Canadian Information Centre for International Credentials (2004), Quality Assurance Practices for Postsecondary Institutions in Canada. Council of Ministers of Education, Canada (CMEC).

vi For a full discussion of performance models see: Grosjean, G. Atkinson-Grosjean, J. Rubenson, K and Fisher, D. (2000) Measuring the Unmeasureable: Paradoxes of Accountability and the Impacts of Performance Indicators on liberal Education in Canada. Ottawa: CFHSS.

vii Beaton offers that PI's not intrinsically a market technique but can be co-opted as such. See for example Beaton, 1999 who analyzes the current use of PI's as significantly re-ordering power relations in the university redefining teaching and research priorities. He also offers a critique of the Taylorist, division of labour tend in higher education. Other scholars such as Bensimon analyze them in terms of 'Total Quality Management' movement coming from the business world - although ironically this approach is no longer in favour in business circles, higher education appears to be now embracing it.

viii Dorothy Smith's framework can be found in Dorothy Smith, The Conceptual Practices of Power: A Feminist Sociology of Knowledge. (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1990).

SECTION TWO:
Current approaches to accountability

SHIFTING PRIORITIES: UNINTENDED CONSEQUENCES OF THE DRIVE FOR ACCOUNTABILITY IN HIGHER EDUCATION

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Albert Einstein reportedly had the following sign hanging in his office at Princeton: *"Not everything that counts can be counted and not everything that can be counted counts."* This quotation captures the essence of my message in this article. Drawing on personal experience I will argue that the drive for accountability in the academy has resulted in a shift in priorities so that efficiency and profitability have overshadowed social justice and equity objectives.

According to Delanty and others (2002), there has been a not-so-subtle shift in the positioning of the university in the Western World within what is known as the "knowledge economy". In the past, the university was perceived as an autonomous institution of higher learning, where professors had a dominant voice in its governance, which was fairly immune from state intervention. Accountability was achieved by established methods of demonstrating professional competence, such as peer reviews, journal publications, citation indexes and other indicators of high regard and respect. Over the years, even after the turbulent 1960s and the rise of student power, self-governance remained the dominant model, with professors, students, and administrators sharing in some form of co-operative governance of the university, though not necessarily

equally. Today, self-governance in the university is still primarily academic and ceremonial. However, with the growing massification (or, if you like, democratization) of higher education, and its financing by public funds, there are growing demands on the university to be more accountable to either the state or to private interest groups. The result is an increase in external governance, with the university now being accountable to an array of major funders, including government and corporate donors, fee-paying parents, alumni and others; all of whom have a financial stake in its 'success' (Delanty, 2002:191). This externally induced accountability manifests itself in increased performance indicator information and so-called transparency, with audits of various kinds becoming the norm. An audit represents more than the simple act of taking stock of one's current performance and current position. Indeed, there is nothing inherently wrong with critical self-analysis, and a university *should* engage in self-reflection which is a prerequisite for self-improvement. But an audit goes beyond reflexivity. It connotes an inspection with a view to making a judgement and, most importantly, it suggests external or managerial agency and control.

UNINTENDED CONSEQUENCES

The language that has accompanied this shift in our institutions, particularly how concepts like accountability and transparency are operationalized as performance indicators, does not necessarily capture all that is known, or worth knowing, about our universities. The adoption of a business discourse – with words like accountability, transparency, efficiency, performance indicators, profitability, and product – in many ways reflects a positivist approach to assessing a university's worth. This discourse focuses on input and output measures with insufficient attention to throughput or processes that transform, as education is meant to do

(Giroux, 2002). Witness the numerical, efficiency-oriented data characteristically used in popular rankings of institutions, such as students' entering grades, resources such as library holdings, graduation rates, employment rates, and administrative costs. This discourse, with its emphasis on what is easily counted, can be simultaneously marginalising and exclusionary. Because the language focuses on the countable, it excludes the qualitative, lived experiences of faculty, staff and students, experiences that are not so easily quantified. For example, current performance indicators do not often probe for information or data on issues such as equity, diversity or inclusion. Institutional barriers to access therefore become invisible in the audit academy. There is little 'accounting' for, and few mechanisms for determining the quality or effectiveness of programs that seek to address social justice issues such as access and availability for equity-seeking groups. Current performance indicators tend to exclude information that is not economic, cannot be given a dollar value, or cannot be measured. In short, current accountability measures rarely allow us to account for the uncountable.

Yet, institutions must also be held accountable for such outcomes as the systemic discrimination experienced by racialized individuals and members of equity-seeking groups. I recall that when, in my capacity as the Chair of the Senate Educational Equity Committee at my institution, I brought to the Senate's attention the report on the study of the experiences of faculty of colour and aboriginal faculty (widely known as "The Henry Report), there were many who dismissed the report because "the numbers" were so small. My response was then, and still is, that if only one person experienced the systemic discrimination that the participants in this study reported, it was one too many. This example illustrates one of the consequences of adopting the discourse of counting. We risk 'discounting' the role and power of universities as agencies for social change.

The increase in external governance and control is evident in far more than just the adoption of the financial language of business. In Ontario, one consequence of Bob Rae's (2005) report on the state of higher education in the province was the establishment of Multi-Year Accountability Agreements (MYAAs) between the universities and the provincial government. These agreements require institutions to outline how they will use their total operating budget, including multi-year funding allocations from the government and increased tuition revenues, to develop and strengthen their unique missions and objectives while contributing to the achievement of the "Reaching Higher" goals and results for access, quality and accountability identified in the Rae Report and adopted by the government. Each institution is required to set out institution specific commitments for multi-year strategies, performance indicators and results designed to achieve the system-wide goals and results for access, quality and accountability. It is assumed that institutions will have developed specific goals and strategies in consultation with faculty, staff and students. The release of government funding to each institution is conditional on the Ministry of Training, Colleges and Universities approving that institution's completed Multi-Year Action Plan. The Ministry reviews the Action Plan annually to discuss progress being made on the commitments outlined therein. This process has led university administrators and department heads to conform to established accounting procedures for accountability and transparency to which other 'businesses' are subject.

For example, in my role as Director of the Centre for Teaching and Learning (CTL) at my institution, I was required to respond to the question: "please outline the quantitative outcomes and outputs which will be generated by your strategies and programs in 2006-07, 2007-08 and 2008-09." Under the section "Quality of the learning environment", I was required to describe my Centre's strategies for improving the quality of

learning, the performance indicators for each strategy, and then the results for the past year. One strategy was to provide professional development programs and services for Teaching Assistants (TAs) and Teaching Fellows (TFs) who support undergraduate learning in many ways. That was fairly easy to articulate. But it was much more difficult to provide the "quantitative outcomes and outputs" from this strategy. Eventually, using participation rates as a performance indicator, I was able to demonstrate that, for example, the number of TAs and TFs who attend the annual Professional Development Day organized by my unit has steadily increased over the years, from 300 to 450. This quantitative outcome tells me nothing about the quality of the learning that TAs and TFs promote. But this is precisely one consequence of the audit academy. Those of us in administrative roles often end up "playing games" with numbers in order to give our "auditors" what we perceive them to want – a total or a count. In this case, time could have been more usefully spent developing ways of understanding how our students are learning and what conditions would help them to learn better.

Using a similar strategy and performance indicator for faculty, I was, however, unable to report similar results as for the TAs and TFs. The performance indicator was the number of faculty participants in teaching and instructional development programs and the target was to maintain or increase participation relative to the 05/06 base of 945 registrants in all programs. The 2006/2007 result was a 4.76% decrease in registrations for all faculty members, from 945 in 2005/2006 to 900. This decrease of only 45 persons was deemed to be unacceptable and I was asked to write a note to explain the decrease in these numbers and to describe the "corrective action" that I would take. In my response I pointed out that the decrease in number of registrations for all faculty teaching and instructional development programs may be attributed to several factors, including:

- The overall increase in the workload of faculty that reduces the extent to which they could participate in any but the most essential professional development activities. In the absence of any requirement to participate, faculty members choose to opt out.

- A reduction in the faculty complement due to retirements, and academic and other types of leave. For example, in one department the faculty complement of 33 was reduced to 23. Such a reduction increased the workload related issues for remaining faculty.

- The rescheduling or cancellation of five of the CTL's instructional development programs on account of facilitators' illness or other uncontrollable factors, and finally,

- The possibility that some of the CTL's programs may not be addressing the felt needs of faculty.

I further explained that the "corrective action" to be taken would begin with a comprehensive needs assessment to determine the needs of faculty and to guide the CTL's program planning and priorities for the foreseeable future. I also made it clear that, given the CTL's limited resources, the corrective action necessitated a suspension of all but two of the thirteen formal programs that the CTL typically offered for faculty, since it was impossible to offer programs and conduct a comprehensive needs assessment simultaneously. I therefore warned that this suspension of programs meant that there would be no report on this indicator for the following year.

This example emphasizes one of the negative consequences of the emphasis on audits in the drive for accountability. As an administrator, I spent valuable time counting and accounting for participation in the

programs my Centre offers, but such participation does not necessarily reflect the quality of student learning which is not as easily "counted" as the number of registrants.

Current accountability agreements and procedures may also overshadow the obligations that a university has, as a social institution, to the broader community as a whole, to which it is also accountable. The university is often required to meet a set of criteria contained within performance indicators that may be contrary or counter-intuitive to existing institutional goals. The goals of diversity, inclusion and equity may be abandoned in favour of a sterile economic social regime that would see the university deliver education as a product in the most cost-effective manner possible. The social costs and their implications may be dismissed as intangibles that cannot, and therefore should not, be counted. Eventually, scarce resources would be diverted away from the intangibles and directed towards only those things that the language of economics will allow us to count.

The pressure on our institutions to measure performance and output has led to practices that unintentionally diminish the cultural and social diversity on our campuses. For example, the stress placed on grades as an indication of ability, and very often as the sole criterion for admission, means that we run the risk of homogenising our student body and reducing opportunities for diversity and inclusion on campus. We risk denying access to talented students whose high schools are poorly resourced and who would excel under different conditions. Those are often racialized students who attend inner city schools.

APPROPRIATION OF LANGUAGE

The managerial turn has also co-opted or appropriated the language of learning and assessment. Brint (2008) is critical of what he calls "the learning outcomes movement" which he equates with "accountability". However,

the term "learning outcome" is not synonymous with accountability as discussed earlier. A learning outcome helps both teacher and student to know the goal of the teaching-learning interaction. It is a way of clarifying expectations and providing a means of determining whether those expectations have been met. Learning outcomes may be knowledge, skills, or attitudes; in other words, they are not always countable. The term has been used for decades under a variety of names. For example, most of us are familiar with Benjamin Bloom's (1956) classic taxonomy of educational objectives in the cognitive domain. This taxonomy outlines a hierarchy of cognitive processes believed to be necessary for learning to occur. Learning can occur at the most basic levels of knowledge and comprehension. But higher level learning engages the cognitive processes of application, synthesis, analysis and evaluation. This and similar taxonomies help teachers choose the levels at which they will pitch the material to be learnt, the teaching and learning strategies that would help students engage in these processes, and finally the methods they would use to determine the extent to which students are using these processes. What the managerial accounting turn has done is use the language of learning to denote a process of business accounting. Rather than measuring learning outcomes, universities are now often measuring 'performance indicators' and producing 'deliverables' or, as Brint (2008) points out, adopting externally imposed standardized tests to satisfy pubic expectations about the performance of teachers at the postsecondary level. At a very basic level, we may be able to quantify the 'knowledge' objectives, but as we seek to develop the higher cognitive processes, the outcomes become more subjective and much more difficult to quantify. The ways in which we evaluate or measure these higher processes and the quality of the learning experience are not necessarily compatible with the managerial accounting turn. Performance indicators force us into standardized, formulaic, and quantifiable 'knowledge',

and we can easily lose sight of the quality of the totality of the learning experience. A dangerous conflation of terms has accompanied the managerial turn and serves to redefine the language of learning to conform to the language of business. We are at risk of a 'conceptual takeover' by the managerial turn that could ultimately change faculty's perception of centres for teaching and learning from places that provide assistance with teaching development into places that measure and audit their teaching performance.

This leads to a closer examination of the processes of evaluating faculty. An increased emphasis on the number of published articles, the number of graduate students supervised and the number and value of research grants as a measure of an academic's worth has meant fundamental changes in the academy for university faculty. It means there is less of an emphasis on teaching quality, and more emphasis on quantifiable 'deliverables.' Faculty members, already dealing with burgeoning class sizes and growing administrative obligations, are faced with the additional prospect of having to 'account for' and by implication, justify, their positions within the academy. Think, for example, of the standard ways in which we tend to evaluate teaching. There has been an over-reliance on the student opinion survey that is typically administered towards the end of a course. A significant finding in the literature (e.g. Arreola, 2006) is that a variety of sources is required to evaluate teaching effectively, with feedback from students being an important source but not the only source. Peers are the most underused source of feed-back on teaching and students are the most poorly used source. In addition, the literature distinguishes between "rating" and "evaluation". Rating forms gener-ally measure student perceptions and reactions, while evaluations are generally done by someone else exam-ining all the data (including ratings) and arriving at a judgement. Ideally, evaluation should acknowledge and respect diversity in teachers' actions, intentions and beliefs, and should involve multiple and credible sources of data. It should parallel other forms of judging scholarly work, for example through peer-review (Glassick, Huber, and Maeroff, 1997), and should contribute to the improvement of teaching. The problem with relying on the typical, standardized student opinion questionnaire as a measure of evaluation for faculty is that it produces a "score" that is not very meaningful. It is not very informative and rarely accommodates self-reflection for the purposes of evaluation. Nor can it, in its present form, capture the quality of students' learning experience. Moreover, it privileges a particular approach to teaching and learning with, for example, the student who has had experience with the system (through parents, siblings, and other family members' participation) benefiting more than the first-generation university student who has had no previous experience with the system and is still learning the ropes.

For the past two and a half years I have co-chaired a committee at my institution whose mandate is to review the standard student-based evaluation system used. The committee has recommended a system that uses multiple sources of data, including students, and creates a profile rather than a single score that is compared to the departmental mean. The strongest resistance to this proposed system has come, not from students nor from the faculty with whom the system was piloted, but from those deans and department heads who would prefer a single score that they can compare with the departmental mean in order to make a judgment about the faculty member's teaching. The "managerial turn" has become such a way of life in the academy that an alternative evaluation system that takes into consideration qualitative data (such as peer reviews and self-assessment) is unimaginable.

In the mid-1990s, the Society for Teaching and Learning in Higher Education (STLHE) launched a national project named ironically "Making Teaching Count", a project that sought to raise the profile of teaching in universities and to maintain a balance between the teaching and

research roles in the evaluation of the professoriate, particularly in the tenure and promotion process (Smith, 1997). STLHE, along with the Canadian Association of University Teachers (CAUT), was instrumental in getting the teaching dossier (e.g. Shore and others, 1986) widely accepted in the evaluation of teaching, with its opportunity for professors to describe who they are, their beliefs about teaching and learning, and their goals (aka learning outcomes) for their students. The teaching dossier allows professors to contextualize their teaching to explain why they teach the way they do, something that cannot be understood from a single score.

As a complement to the single score, the teaching dossier provides a place for airing the perspectives of those faculty members whose field of study is focused on social justice, anti-racism and equity issues, issues that are less valued and "countable" in a system that values objective performance indicators, a system that puts them at risk of being marginalized, devalued and ultimately 'discounted' because their work cannot be easily 'counted'.

Let me share a final example of the consequence of the audit academy. The sharp rise in tuition, coupled with the permeation of neo-liberal ideology into all facets of social life, has meant that the current student has become a consumer shopping for the best 'product' for her money. The payment of significant funds of money to the institution often comes with a corresponding expectation of A grades. The neo-liberal student is focused on the numerical worth assigned her perform-ance in any given class, with the knowledge that access to scholarships and future employment will depend almost exclusively on the 'grades' she obtains. The students are impatient with faculty who want to engage them with intangibles; whose focus is not on grading, but on developing the critical thinking skills necessary for a liberal arts education. If best practices include accounting for the unaccountable, then perhaps one of our best practices would be to institute a pass/fail assessment wherein the focus would be on learning and not on a numerical grade.

CONCLUSION

It appears that the academy has abandoned a civic discourse in favour of a business one. This shift in priorities has had unintended consequences that have turned out to be far-reaching and highly transformative, though not necessarily for the better. In the process, we may have privileged what can be counted, rather than what truly counts. This represents a fundamental change in the way in which the university is perceived both from within and from without. It has been an all-encompassing change that has taken over the university's life. Torres and Schugurensky (2002) expressed a similar sentiment in an article in Higher Education about "The political economy of higher education in the era of neo-liberal globalization".

> " After the decline of socialist and welfare-state models, neo-liberal regimes have become hegemonic in many parts of the world. In most countries, changes in financial arrangements, coupled with accountability mechanisms, have forced universities to reconsider their social missions, academic priorities and organizational structures. Concerns about equity, accessibility, autonomy or the contribution of higher education to social transformation, which were prevalent during previous decades, have been overshadowed by concerns about excellence, efficiency, expenditures and rates of return. The notion that higher education is primarily a citizen's right and a social investment – which has been taken for granted for many decades – is being seriously challenged by a neo-liberal agenda that places extreme faith in the market."

(TORRES & SCHUGURENSKY, 2002: 429)

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SECTION THREE:
International experiences and developments

MODELS OF ACCOUNTABILITY OR MODELS TO AVOID? INTERNATIONAL EXPERIENCES AND DEVELOPMENTS

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INTRODUCTION

Accountability is a fascinating topic to explore. It is fascinating because there are so many meanings attached to the whole concept. It is fascinating due to the fact that accountability is related to some of the key changes higher education is currently undergoing. Finally, analysis of accountability is intriguing in that it may shed some light on the development of higher education, and the future status of the sector in our societies.

In higher education, some words and concepts attract special attention because they are interpreted in particular ways. Such attention is given because the given concepts create positive connotations among recipients. Hence, it is not difficult to find a number of articles where concepts such as quality, autonomy or integrity are perceived as important key characteristics of higher education. Accountability relates to all of these, not least since the concept also could be interpreted as a synonym for being responsible, answerable, explicable, understandable, comprehensible, and interpretable, according to a standard dictionary in English (Oxford Dictionary and Thesaurus 1996: 12).

Of course, the meaning of accountability is often dependent on its context, and since higher education traditionally has been a national responsibility, accountability usually has been interpreted in a particular national context (see e.g. Trow 1996; Burke 2005). However, as part of the changes higher education is undergoing, the increasing importance of internationalisation and globalisation is perhaps the most noticeable element. As a consequence, higher education institutions around the world find themselves in a situation where they no longer only are accountable to stakeholders within their own country, but also to the international community at large. Some of the developments that feed this increasing interest in 'global' accountability are the steadily growing number of international students, international faculty or guest professors, the impact of global businesses and industry, international newspapers performing rankings of universities, establishment of international quality assurance schemes, joint degrees, strategic partnerships and consortia, and many more. Since much of the expansion of higher education now is taking place internationally and globally, these 'new' issues increasingly will be on the agenda of universities and colleges – and in various ways will direct the attention towards accountability. To what extent, and in what way, higher education institutions should deal with these developments is fast becoming one of the greatest challenges facing institutional leadership. One thing seems clear though, ignoring these developments is not a viable strategy as the environment surrounding universities and colleges seems more demanding than ever (Gumport 2001).

Those critical of the transformation of higher education and recent claims about accountability often argue that accountability is not a novelty in the sector, and that accountability claims have been raised in the past without dramatic consequences for higher education (Mortimer 1972; Trow 1996). While this is true, it can still be argued that internationalisation and globalisation represent a new development (Huisman & Currie 2004). For one thing, while national authorities traditionally have had a central place in various accountability

schemes around the world, the ascent of new stake-holders creates a higher education sector that can be characterised as incorporating continuously expanding multi-actor, multi-level and multi-subject governance networks (Djelic & Sahlin-Andersson 2006). Part of the reason for the rise of such networks is related to changes in governmental policy. Increased institutional autonomy has provided universities and colleges with more space for creating their own development and destiny. But this has also meant that institutions are linking up with new actors, new markets and new contexts. At the same time, numerous studies of change in higher education also remind us that this sector tends to be 'path-dependent' (Maassen & Olsen 2007) – heavily influenced by national, cultural or institutional particularities and histories. As such, one can anticipate an interesting development with creative mixes as to how accountability schemes appear as a combination of the 'old' and the 'new', incorporating various national and international elements.

The outcome of this process is interesting for all students of higher education. It says something about whether and how higher education is changing; whether there can be something to learn from how others interpret and organise their accountability schemes; the extent to which internationalisation and globalisation also means standardisation and greater uniformity; and whether accountability schemes manage to deliver what they promise - trust in the legitimacy of the sector. This article aims to begin the development of a conceptual framework paving the way for more thorough empirical, international and comparative analysis of accountability. It starts by tracing the origins and developments of accountability, and its various meanings and forms, before suggesting some simple criteria that can be used as benchmarks for analysing accountability in a more global perspective. By providing empirical evidence from different countries illustrating the diversity that can be found with respect to accountability

schemes, the paper offers some speculation as to future trends in accountability together with some reflections on the critical issues for further research.

TRACING THE ORIGINS AND DEVELOPMENTS OF ACCOUNTABILITY

According to Bovens (2006: 6) the word accountability is of Anglo-Norman origin, semantically very close to that of accounting or bookkeeping. Hence, the first trace of the concept dates back to King William I who in 1085 asked property holders to render 'a count' of their possessions (Dubnick 2002: 8). In other words, the origin of the concepts hints towards a more technical process.

Of course, in later democratic societies accountability schemes were designed to go the other way – citizens held the politicians accountable through electoral processes. The growth of the state, its services and supporting bureaucracies have over time led to growing scepticism as to whether the old model – of citizens electing representatives who in turn hold civil servants accountable – is viable (Day & Klein 1987: 51). The argument is that the state is far too complex and modes of delivery are sometimes so difficult to understand that accountability must be developed through other means.

With the emergence of 'New Public Management', 'managerialism' and the 'Reinvention of Government' one can argue that it was exactly with respect to accountability that such schemes were legitimised. Accountability became both an instrument and a goal (Bovens 2006: 7). The consequences are familiar to those interested in public policy in general and higher education in particular. Since the mid-1980s we have seen a transformation of the state from being 'protective' towards its own bureaucracy and service-providers to becoming more 'evaluative,' paving the way for what

some have termed the audit society (Power 1997). The logic underpinning a number of the schemes developed is that growing complexity must be met with greater clarity in individual roles and responsibilities in service delivery. Furthermore, the new schemes require citizens to behave like, and be treated as, customers, with respect to the public services.

In higher education, the traces of this development are noticeable in various parts of the world. While evaluation and assessment historically were activities organised within universities and colleges, but at a local or department level with the aim of improving teaching and learning activities (Schwarz & Westerheijden 2004), new external and national schemes were developed aimed at making the institutions take a central responsibility for providing information to the public on performance and effectiveness. This has been often combined with the establishment of a national regulative framework and independent agencies with a particular responsibility for the accountability of the higher education system (Stensaker & Gornitzka 2009). In sum, this development has led to what some label a 're-regulated' world (Djelic & Sahlin-Andersson 2006: 5) in which states may claim that governance is taking place at an arms-length distance, although for those adjusting to the new rules, standards and regulation, the situation is not perceived in a similar way. Protests against what many perceive as burdensome and bureaucratic reporting have increased during the last decade (Considine 2002).

THE SYMBOLIC AND NORMATIVE DIMENSIONS OF ACCOUNTABILITY

To protest against being held accountable for one's actions may nevertheless be a rather risky move. Currently, accountability is one of those words that it is difficult to argue against because of the positive symbolic value of the concept. For example, when going through legislation proposed to the US Congress,

Dubnick (2002: 3) found out that the word accountability occurred in over half of the proposed legislation in each two-year term. Accountability is today often used as a 'rhetorical tool to convey an image of good governance...[and]..has become an icon for good governance both in the public and the private sector' (Bovens 2006: 7).

Underpinning such symbolic aspects of the concept are popular understandings interpreting accountability as creating public services with high quality, low cost, and performed in a courteous manner (O'Connell 2005: 86). It is perhaps these normative understandings of accountability that create particular challenges for higher education. First, quality is usually a highly contested phenomenon within the sector with heated debates on what, exactly, constitutes 'quality'. Second, the costs associated with higher education, and the production of higher education services, are poorly specified and understood in economic terms. Finally, higher education is a sector where performance is usually hidden from the public eye, where performance may not be difficult to measure, but rather to interpret (i.e. are high failure rates at exams a result of high academic standards or poor teaching?), and where good benchmarks are difficult to come by. No wonder then that rankings of universities are a fast growing phenomenon with the promise of responding to at least some of these challenges.

The problem with rankings is, all methodological criticism aside, that they usually target only a small proportion of the many potential stakeholders of higher education – the students – while other constituencies may or may not feel that their needs are met. Hence, for higher education institutions, the challenges relating to accountability are that they must develop combined ways and means to respond to and be relevant for what Burke (2005: 23) calls the accountability triangle of *state priorities, academic concerns and market forces,*

or to what Jongbloed (2007: 134) labeled as the triple bottom line of corporate social responsibility (people, planet, profit). To be able to deal with the conflicting (and often normative) expectations of this triangle will in most instances also require a great deal of skill in mastering the symbolic aspects of accountability.

ACCOUNTABILITY AND TRUST

It is not difficult to agree with Burke (2005: 23) that accountability is about finding a good balance between conflicting demands and expectations, and that higher education institutions should "serve all while submitting to none of these imperatives". However, while one could easily interpret this as a more technical process, one should perhaps rather see it as a process to find a level of trust between higher education and its environment.

The notion of trust is in this respect interesting as it is in many ways the antithesis of accountability. If two parties totally trust each other, there is in principle no need for establishing an accountability scheme. This situation can be said to characterise the more historical ties between the state and higher education in some countries, and especially in continental Europe (Maassen & Olsen 2007). Of course, the key advantage of trust between two parties is that one does not need to spend a lot of resources and energy on accountability issues (Zucker 1986). Hence, several authors argue that the deterioration of trust between higher education and the state has led to the establishment of the many accountability schemes in various countries. Power (1997) has argued that we have seen a transformation of professional exchange relationships from being based on a tacit (normative) pact to increasingly being based on explicit (rationalistic) audits and other accountability measures. The interesting aspect here is that many accountability schemes have been launched to promote trust in higher education, although the logic in how trust

is intended to be created may differ. Stensaker & Gornitzka (2009) has argued that in principle one can distinguish between two perspectives on trust:

- The rationalist-instrumental perspective on trust with the basic assumption that individuals will follow the logic of consequentiality. If otherwise not induced to it, the individual will pursue self-interest and maximise his or her own utility. Trust is established through the existence of independent actors and auditors that can be trusted by all parties involved in a relationship, which then is assigned to check the quality of higher education. Procedures, standards, rules and regulations established by the independent auditors are then the proxies of trust. Trust is established on the basis of thorough analysis of how procedures, standards, etc., are followed. This perspective fits well with newer forms of how accountability is achieved.

- The normative-cognitive perspective sees trust as established by the existence of strong norms and expectations as to what is appropriate behaviour by various parties involved in a relationship. Such strong norms are internalised by all actors creating trust because it is taken for granted that everybody should and will follow norms and rules. Trust is achieved when institutions, over time, demonstrate accountability through the results and outcomes produced. The reputation a given university achieves will then become a proxy for trust. Whereas the problem of trust is seen as an issue of control and incentive in the rational-instrumental perspective, it is seen from a norm-based institutional perspective as a question of appealing to common identity and socialisation and acting according to what is appropriate. This perspective fits well with more historical forms of accountability.

At the same time, these two perspectives and their variants can also be combined in various ways; they are sometimes blurred and overlapping. For example, a stakeholder will normally not engage in 'blind trust' but will use a combination of calculative (if available) and norm-based judgements pointing to the indication that trust – and accountability - is a 'hybrid phenomenon' between calculation and predictability on one hand and goodwill and voluntary exposure to risk on the other (Bachmann 1998: 303). Hence, the balancing act concerning accountability is not only about balancing the interest of many stakeholders in higher education, but also realizing that auditing, monitoring and accountability schemes may in fact undermine, rather than build trust (Djelic & Sahlin-Andersson 2006: 13). Identifying, analysing and understanding which schemes accomplish the latter is therefore a crucial task – not only for politicians, but also for researchers.

ACCOUNTABILITY FORMS – AN INVENTORY

However, before starting any analysis there is also a need to provide an overview of the different forms and ways in which accountability is provided. A review of the literature discloses that this is no easy task. In broad terms, accountability is in principle owed to all people, groups or institutions which are or will be affected by what the accountable actors are doing. Such a broad understanding is nevertheless quite meaningless since it dilutes accountability beyond enforcement and a reasonable level of expectation (Trow 1996: 231).

Trow (1996: 232) distinguishes between two central dimensions of accountability. First, between *external* and *internal* accountability, where the first notion relates to the obligation universities and colleges have towards their supporters and funders, and the second relates to how well different parts of the institution is performing, how and whether people work towards the mission, and how units and people work to improve their activities.

The second dimension is between what Trow labels as legal/financial and academic accountability. The first notion relates to the obligation institutions have to report on how resources have been spent, whether institutions are acting in accordance with the rule of the law, etc. The second notion relates to the obligation the institution has to inform about teaching and learning activities. Although the different types of accountability offered by Trow make sense, one could still criticize this typology for not being very clear-cut and mutually exclusive. For example, academic accountability may come in both internal and external versions.

A more detailed typology is offered by Vidovich and Slee (2001) who also start by identifying four different forms; *Upward, downward, inward* and *outward accountability.* By upward accountability Vidovich and Slee mean any form of accountability with a principal – agent relationship including bureaucratic, legal and procedural means. *Downward* accountability is suggested to include the responsibilities of the principal towards the agent, which in higher education translates into a number of collegial mechanisms. *Inward* accountability relates more to how individuals, professionals or disciplines adhere to ethical or professional standards, while *outward* accountability in their view imply how institutions respond to markets, users and clients in higher education, including the political system.

Yet another typology is offered by Leithwood *et al* (1999) who point to the meaning of the information provided for accountability purposes, and differentiate between *descriptive, explanatory* and *justifiable* forms of accountability. As Romzek (2000: 22) this also hints to the inevitable *political* dimension found in almost any accountability scheme.

However, one could argue that all of these forms of accountability appear rather stylistic, and do not manage to capture the complexities of how accountability occurs

today. As Bovens (2006: 21) also underline, changes in governance schemes have implied that traditional forms of accountability are transformed, for example, by the establishment of new intermediate agencies and bodies consisting of representation from both external, internal, academic and legal/financial constituencies. The result is more *diagonal* accountability forms, sometimes replacing, at other times adding, existing horizontal and/or vertical forms of accountability.

In addition, it is also possible to note a tendency towards the blurring of a number of the stylistic forms of accountability identified above. While diagonal forms of accountability may be interpreted as a blurring between traditional vertical and horizontal forms, it is also possible to identify a possible blurring between traditional legal/financial and academic forms of accountability. An example here could be the new systems and schemes for internal quality assurance which higher education institutions are often required to establish. In such systems, legal requirements concerning stakeholder participation and the need to conduct certain kind of evaluations and assessments undermine the traditional boundaries between more administrative and more professional accountability. Another example of blurring between various accountability forms can be found when increased institutional autonomy actually strengthens the links between external and internal schemes. This development may go both ways. Universities may want to develop evaluation and reporting systems, for example in research, that match national and/or international priorities within a given research field. On the other hand, state authorities and/or external funding agencies may develop specific research assessment schemes and criteria that are copied internally by institutions, and consequently function as a form of accountability (Whitley & Gläser 2007: 7-9). Finally, with the emergence of university rankings, international benchmark studies and report cards, and international agencies, standards and routines, the distinction between the national and the international

forms of accountability is also blurring (Brunsson et al 2000; Djelic & Sahlin-Andersson 2006; Drori et al 2006).

The result is that the emerging networks consisting of multi-actor, multi-level and multi-subject governance schemes are matched by new 'accountability networks' with similar characteristics (Harlow & Rawlings 2006: 5).

ASSESSING ACCOUNTABILITY SCHEMES

The analysis so far points to the fact that accountability is an increasingly complex phenomenon where it is difficult to draw exact borders as to what counts as accountability, and how accountability schemes should be assessed. While some perhaps would argue that relevant systems require reasons for specific conduct (Roberts & Scapens 1985), others would perhaps perceive as valid accountability schemes that provide convincing excuses (Kirk & Mouritsen 1996). If being accountable means to be responsible to everyone, then accountability becomes a relative concept in which the assessment is a result of individual stakeholder perceptions.

An alternative way forward is to understand accountability as part of the continuous dialogue in a democratic society. If accountability is perceived as a dialogue between two (or more) parties, the underlying logic is that the social relation between these two parties should be conducted, organised and assessed in certain ways (Jang 2006: 167; Bovens 2006: 9). Bovens (2006: 12) also suggests the exact criteria structuring such a social relation. According to him, a relationship qualifies as a case of accountability:

1. When there is a relationship between an actor and a forum
2. Where the actor is obliged to participate
3. Explanation and justification are required

4. Conduct is evaluated
5. The forum can pose questions
6. Judgements are passed
7. And the actor may face consequences.

The interesting point with these specifications is that accountability is developed from being merely 'statements', 'results' or 'reporting' to some kind of interactive debate and dialogue between those held accountable and those that are holding them accountable. While specific top-down accountability schemes with little social interaction probably still can be labelled 'democratic' if they are designed as a result of a fundamental electoral process, one could argue that recent changes with respect to accountability may hamper the civic dialogue that underpins a truly democratic society (Day & Klein 1987: 248). With respect to higher education, and the importance usually given to institutional autonomy, academic freedom and the potential unintended consequences of poorly designed accountability schemes in terms of bureaucracy and compliance (Elton 1988), the specifications offered by Bovens may be perceived as a more valid, fair and relevant in that both parties involved in the process are equally represented in the dialogue.

Still, this does not mean that the scheme offered by Bovens is beyond criticism. For example, the criterion concerning 'consequences' may be problematic. From a civic society point of view, the concept of sanctions is perhaps not the best way to foster an open and honest dialogue between two parties. In fact, it may actually create incentives to deny responsibility (Harlow & Rawlings 2006: 4), and, as a consequence, may hinder potential performance improvements as a result. It can, therefore, be argued that this criterion should be excluded when assessing accountability schemes, and that the assessment instead should address the overall outcome of the dialogue in forms of improvement, change, performance gains, etc.

Based on our discussion so far, some characteristics of how accountability systems could be assessed can be suggested:

• Accountability schemes should be perceived as relevant by central stakeholders;

• Accountability schemes should contain fair judgement of performance;

• Accountability schemes should be open for feedback and dialogue; and

• Accountability schemes should stimulate trust.

SOME EMPIRICAL EVIDENCE AND TRENDS

A question one should ask is, of course, whether it is possible to find empirical evidence of accountability schemes matching all of these characteristics? Although much has been written on the development of quality assurance in higher education and research (see e.g., Schwarz & Westerheijen 2004; Westerheijden et al. 2007; Whitley & Gläser 2007; Ewell 2007; 2008), there is not much evidence on the functioning of accountability schemes within a broader system context. The trend is to perceive quality assurance as equivalent to accountability. Although quality assurance undoubtedly is part of any accountability scheme, there are relatively few studies that try to broaden the perspective beyond quality assurance (for some exceptions, see Burke 2005 on accountability in the US, and Currie et al 2003 on a study of globalisation and university responses).

However, if increased accountability is a result of changing governance of the whole higher education sector, then one could argue that all elements and processes that are taking place between those being held accountable and those asking for accountability are part of an accountability scheme. It is then an empirical

question as to which activities are considered important for achieving accountability. For example, while accreditation in the US is generally considered as an important accountability mechanism both by states and institutions (Ewell 2008: 106), this mechanism may not be seen as so important by elite institutions such as Harvard, Princeton, and Yale, which may rely on other measures.

If we search for accountability schemes that fit the four assessment characteristics above, it is difficult to find examples of countries that have implemented schemes that match all the dimensions. But we can find examples of schemes that may match some. One possible example can be found in New Zealand where performance contracts are a key instrument in the overall governance of the system (Goedegebuure et al 2008). New Zealand is an interesting case as this perhaps is the country which at one point went furthest in implementing New Public Management governance arrangements but where this arrangement now is being softened, and applied in a more pragmatic style. The introduction of performance contracts can be seen as an attempt to solve the efficiency-effectiveness dilemma in higher education (see Gornitzka et al 2004), and as a way in which governance and accountability is becoming more integrated. The advantages of a contract in relation to accountability is that it has the potential to introduce a fair judgement on performance, in which the objectives set – which the institution is held accountable for – are negotiated between the parties and institutions may influence how targets and objectives are set. Depending on how contracts are negotiated, this mechanism is also open for feedback and dialogue, although one should be aware that those with the rewarding or sanctioning power usually are the stronger part in any negotiation process.

A second example of an accountability scheme integrating governance and accountability can be found in Norway, in which the national accreditation scheme has the multiple purposes of regulating public and private providers, ensuring institutional autonomy and improving the quality of teaching and learning at the same time (Stensaker 2004). The logic of the institutional accreditation scheme is that accreditation provides institutions with a given status with corresponding levels of institutional autonomy. Accreditation as a 'university' means that all decisions to establish or close study programs at all levels (bachelor, master, PhD) are given to the institutions themselves, implying that programme accreditation is not needed. This system has been created both to ensure equal conditions for public and private providers, to deal with the tendency towards 'academic drift' in the system where a number of colleges want to be upgraded to university status, and to create a scheme with minimal bureaucracy (Stensaker 2004). Hence, while one could imagine that tendencies toward academic drift could have been dealt with by policy-makers alone, the Norwegian system regulates institutional behaviour within a context of quality assurance. As such, the Norwegian system is perceived as relevant to key stakeholders in the sector (Langfeldt et al 2008), and where accountability is a key outcome of the process.

Concerning schemes in which trust-building is a key characteristic, Finland is perhaps an interesting example. While most accountability schemes around the world have some aspect of systematic comparison, or a standard procedure every higher education institution has to go through, as a key element, Finland has chosen a different approach since 'there has been no social need to define certain evaluation processes accreditation or approval of institutions or degrees other than as approval' in the country (Välimaa 2004: 122). As a consequence, evaluation purposes and methods can vary considerably from institution to institution – both with respect to research and education. The targeted and cooperative design of the evaluations in which institutions are active in influencing the whole evaluation process seems to have created a national accountability system in which 'less is more' - at least when it

comes to the administrative and bureaucratic conse-quences related to accountability. In the national evalu-ation agency (FINHEEC), there are only a handful of people employed full-time, and the system is based upon a number of academic working groups/committees providing academic legitimacy, and with considerable effort given to training and increasing the professionalism of evaluations conducted (Välimaa 2004). In sum, one could argue that the scheme has been designed to fit the existing mode of trust in Finnish higher education, with the potential to stimulate it further.

Given the examples above, it is interesting to note that there perhaps are changes taking place in the country most widely known for its extensive national accountabil-ity scheme – the UK. While this country is characterised within the literature as having established a very 'strong' accountability scheme with a wide array of eval-uations, surveys, reporting schemes, and performance indicators, there is evidence that the emphasis on ac-countability is being transformed (Harvey & Newton 2007: 236). The causes for the noted changes are both related to the costs associated with the accountability scheme, and to the growing awareness that accounta-bility also should contribute to improve teaching and learning. Harvey & Newton (2007: 242) have argued that this tension is illusory, and that upcoming account-ability schemes should be open for the possibility that there is a benefit to demonstrating improvement in the sector. In recent years, and with the establishment of the Higher Education Academy – an institution set up to stimulate teaching and learning in UK higher education – and with the ambitions of a 'lighter touch' with espect to accountability, the UK, at least rhetorically, seems to be on the move towards a changed accounta-bility system. The latest example of this can be found in a report from the funding council in the UK where it is stated that 'we have been surprised by the amount of measurement information we collect and disseminate... [and]..that any new measures should be subject to our sector impact assessment process to review possible unintended consequences, check the balance between

burden and public value and ensure measures capture the full range of benefits we want to encourage' (HEFCE 2008: 5). This statement hints to the importance of rele-vance, trust and fair judgement, and indicates that re-flections about how accountability systems actually work is not only an academic concern, but increasingly a political one as the creation of new measures 'can be problematic and contentious' (HEFCE 2008: 17).

Tendencies to build accountability through a more dialogue-based approach can be found in addition within the EU-system both in general through so-called 'accountability networks' (Harlow 2002; Harlow & Rawlings 2006) and in higher education through the so-called 'Open Method of Coordination' (Westerheijden 2007; Stensaker & Gornitzka 2009). However, it should be underlined that all of the examples found above have elements and effects that may run counter to ambitions of building trust, stimulating dialogue, and establishing fair judgement and more relevant account-ability schemes. Hence, if we want to label the develop-ments in accountability based on the examples above, hybridisation and complexity easily comes to mind.

CLOSING REFLECTIONS

Accountability schemes are continuing to develop throughout the world, and although we do not have a comprehensive overview of how different regions and dominant countries are changing their accountability schemes, the expansion of accountability measures is perhaps the most dominant trend creating the new hybridisation and complexity. Current accountability schemes contain both hard and soft elements, combine internal and external needs, feature blurred distinctions between national and international elements, and reflect the growing number and types of stakeholders interested in holding higher education accountable. No wonder that Fisher (2004: 495) argues accountability

is becoming the ultimate principle for the new age of transnational governance regimes, where the exercise of power transcends the boundaries of the nation state and crosses the public/private border.

The need for better integration of, and more meaning attached to, the accountability schemes can on this background be seen as a natural next step behind the recent political interest in redesigning current accounta-bility schemes. More user-friendly information, either in form of combined information from independent measures, or interactive designs allowing users to customize information on an individual basis are most likely developments here (see also HEFCE 2008: 7).

However, the underlying argument in this article is that accountability is far from merely a technical exercise. The interesting aspect concerning the current develop-ments in accountability is that technological designs may hide power struggles concerning how higher educa-tion should develop in the future. Hence, there is a need for more empirical investigation as to how the recent re-framing of accountability schemes actually implies a change towards more 'user-friendly' and trust-worthy schemes. From other fields, we know that our re-ordering world is marked by more – not less – rule-making (Brunsson 2000). We also know that 'soft' regulation may have potentially hard consequences (Djelic & Sahlin-Andersson 2006). With respect to accountability, new actors, not least from the private sector in forms of rankings, may enter into the account-ability game and change the rules of how the game is played (Stensaker & Gornitzka 2009).

The links between accountability and quality is another aspect we need to know more about, and where we need to go beyond the technicalities of criteria and indicators. The current swing towards emphasising 'learning outcomes' and results can be interpreted as a reminder of this link, but it is an empirical question as

to whether various accountability schemes will manage to deliver on these issues in the future (see also Ewell 2008: 117).

Finally, we need to know more about how and to what extent accountability actually enhances the legitimacy of (and trust in) higher education. One potential consequence of current developments with respect to accountability is that there is an emergent 'market' for accountability. With numerous providers of accountability, and increasing complex ways and methods as to demonstrate accountability, the question is what consequences this might have for higher education. If institutions, countries or states 'buy into' the accounta-bility scheme that suits their interest best, the result need not be increased legitimacy, at least not if the benchmarks are more global. On the other hand, more customised schemes may also offer value-for-money for institutions, governments and users of higher educa-tion. The issue emerging is, in other words, whether accountability schemes increasingly are faced with the same requirements concerning accountability as they traditionally have imposed upon others. The tensions arising in the aftermath of the Commission on the Future of Higher Education (2006) in the US is just one example to be mentioned. And while some perhaps may suggest that it is about time the controllers take their own medicine (Neal 2008), the issue at stake is really about trust in higher education.

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SECTION FOUR:
Student surveys and accountability

INTERPRET WITH CAUTION: WHAT STUDENT SURVEYS CAN AND CANNOT TELL US

Ken Steele, senior vice-president and co-founder of Academica Group Inc.,

Student surveys – whether conducted online, by telephone, as campus intercepts or in the classroom with pencil and paper – can be an unparalleled source of insight and quantitative data about student attitudes, perceptions, and remembered behaviours. At the same time, survey results must be interpreted carefully, with a detailed understanding of the methodology, and ideally with benchmarking or comparative trend data to provide context, or there can be a serious risk that findings will be misinterpreted or misrepresented.

THE INSTRUMENT

Superficially, a survey instrument may appear dangerously familiar to university professors: a series of succinct questions, with either multiple-choice responses or open-ended "essay" answers, administered to a class of students, in many cases using the same pencils and machine-readable forms as a subject examination. Unlike exams, however, survey instruments must seek to eliminate ambiguity and complexity, avoid unfamiliar terminology, and be entertaining enough to keep students motivated rather than testing their patience. The ultimate objective of a survey is not to evaluate each individual's depth and breadth of knowledge, but rather to average all the answers to a given question and evaluate collective impressions on that issue. While the best students can write informed, eloquent, and even inspiring answers to the most pedestrian of exam questions,

survey questions must be carefully worded to ensure that the data being gathered will be clear and actionable.

From the outset, it is also critical to ensure that we are measuring what really matters. In management studies, it is axiomatic that organizations get what they measure: "what gets measured gets done." Survey metrics often become de facto performance metrics or key performance indicators (KPIs). Unrecognized prejudices can "lead the witness": it has been suggested, for example, that the National Survey of Student Engagement (NSSE) measures behaviours and situations that inadvertently idealize the small, rural liberal arts colleges of New England, and punish large urban commuter colleges which operate on a very different model. Media attention can quickly transform these metrics into oversimplified ranking systems that can misrepresent or distort survey findings.

Even worse, universities can become so obsessed with these metrics that policies, procedures, resource allocations and institutional strategies are adjusted (some might say "twisted") to serve the metrics as an end in themselves. For example, professors have long argued that course evaluations, a popular measure of teaching effectiveness, may encourage grade inflation, relaxed workloads, and "edutainment" in the lecture theatre.[i] The *US News & World Report* rankings of American colleges emphasize admissions "selectivity," leading some institutions to encourage applications from even unqualified students, in order to bolster their apparent selectivity by rejecting a higher proportion of their applicants. When graduation or completion rates are considered as a KPI, faculty start experiencing more pressure to award passing grades to students. Some Canadian universities reportedly invest in remote storage of outdated books and periodicals, rather than culling their library collections, at least in part because *Maclean's* reports on library holdings in their annual

university rankings. When indicators become ends in themselves, they can lead to inefficient or downright unfair efforts to "game the system."

THE METHODOLOGY

University administrators and academics, like most readers of consumer research, tend to examine survey methodology for flaws only when findings disagree with their own gut instinct or assumptions. Yet the methodology employed in a student survey can profoundly influence the respondent sample, and the resultant findings. For example, response bias is evident in most consumer surveys, since generally females are significantly more likely to respond than males. Most research teams will account for this predictable bias by weighting the sample in the analysis phase, which is easily done when the gender ratio in the total population is known. It can be more difficult to account for response bias when, for example, an alumni survey is more likely to be completed by those graduates who feel an affinity for the university. Time can also be of the essence: how different might student responses be during orientation week, December exams, or reading week?

Many have observed that provincial KPI surveys of graduates, typically conducted by telephone, could be biased toward connecting with those grads who are unemployed and at home, sitting by the telephone. When our own *UCAS™ Applicant Study* surveys 150,000 college and university applicants each spring, we have to bear in mind that the invitations and reminders are sent by e-mail – so the overwhelming preference respondents express for e-mail as a means of communication is hardly surprising.[ii] Without a doubt, the methodology employed can have an impact on research findings.

THE RESPONDENTS

Obviously, nothing determines the validity of survey results as significantly as the respondents themselves. Whenever interpreting the results of a student survey, it is essential to bear in mind that the survey is measuring the attitudes and perceptions of the students: *perceptions,* not necessarily reality. For example, if students perceive a problem with campus security, the answer is not always a larger budget for campus police; sometimes the perception is a bigger problem than the reality, and increasing the budget for landscaping or graffiti removal might be the most effective response. If students in one department report greater satisfaction with their classroom experience than those in another, it might reflect differences in teaching style or facilities, but it might also reflect differences in the expectations or perceptions of the observers themselves.

Any survey needs to ensure that it is seeking information from the best possible source. High school guidance counsellors, or fellow university presidents, can rate your university's reputation, but for purposes of recruitment marketing planning and evaluation, the most valuable measure of institutional reputation is the perception of the actual target market, the prospective students themselves. Most administrators concentrate on NSSE results to benchmark and trend the engagement of their students, but organizers of parent orientations or communications might learn more from the results of the "National Survey on College Parent Experiences," conducted annually by the College Parents of America.[iii]

Over the years, many university professors have argued that undergraduate students are in no position to assess faculty teaching abilities or subject mastery, and to some extent they are correct that undergraduate perceptions should not be the only metric considered. Undergraduates know when their professor is engaging,

interested and interesting, when they are available and responsive, and when course expectations are clear and consistent. But other perspectives can also be valuable. Academic peers could audit undergraduate lectures and provide feedback or ratings, but this is seldom done for senior tenured professors. Recent graduates could provide a very different perspective on their classroom experiences; at a small distance, many might well appreciate the truly demanding, difficult, and perhaps even crusty professor who pushed them beyond their comfort zones and demanded exemplary scholarly work. To my knowledge, no university combines course evaluations from students, alumni and peers to gain a truly well-rounded understanding of faculty teaching – although this is just one example of the advantage of multi-faceted quantitative analysis.

A selection of results from the national *UCAS™ Applicant Study* demonstrate that sometimes, incoming undergraduate know exactly what they want – although it may not be what we think is good for them.[iv] Although it may be surprising, even among applicants to the liberal arts, the overriding cluster of considerations in selecting a university are the "outcome" factors (including graduate employment success, co-op and internship programs, completion rates and graduate school placements). Secondarily, applicants are influenced by "campus" factors (including an attractive campus, student experience, extracurricular activities and convenient public transit). In general, "academic" factors – which most faculty would likely rank highest – come in third place for prospective undergraduates (including academic reputation, high profile research, and investments in the latest technology). When a survey asks respondents for their opinions, this is precisely what the results will reflect.

INTERPRETING RESULTS

The results of almost any survey need to be interpreted very cautiously, with awareness of the complex interaction of instrument, methodology, and respondent. For example, most Ontario universities are now participating in NSSE to evaluate and monitor their efforts and improvements in nurturing "student engagement" on campus. But student engagement, like the process of education itself, is a collaborative undertaking: "it takes two to tango." Student engagement results from the complex interaction of faculty and staff efforts, campus environment and culture, peer pressure, parental influence and student predisposition. A university will experience higher levels of student engagement if it recruits more engaged applicants in the first place.

The news media, politicians, governing boards, and other interested bystanders can easily be caught up in misinterpretations of survey results. For example, provincial KPIs can often suggest that individual institutions or programs do a better job preparing graduates for employment – but variations could just as readily reflect the strength of the local economy, employment growth in given sectors, or the selectivity of admissions to a given program.

The media caters to the popular hunger for rankings of any sort, from the best business schools, to the most Vegan-friendly campuses, to the greatest party schools. As NSSE results have increasingly been made public, the media have inevitably begun to use them as an indicator to compare universities on the basis of their ability to engage students – and this can be quite misleading. The 2008 NSSE final report emphasizes that 95% of the variation in NSSE results actually occurs *within* individual institutions, and only 5% of the variation occurs *between* institutions.[v] In other words, students attending the same university will experience 19 times as much variation in engagement, as the average for

one university will differ from another. NSSE results can be used productively to identify internal successes and best practices, and to focus energies for improvement, but the survey is a profoundly inadequate tool for comparing institutions.

OBSERVER EFFECTS

If the act of measurement can endow a metric with disproportional impact, it can also transform opinion into reality. Student surveys, like any polling or research, can create a feedback loop in which the participants are unduly influenced by peer opinion, and create a self-fulfilling prophecy. Universities with prestigious reputations will attract top researchers, teachers, students and research funding, further enhancing their reputations. Institutions with strong NSSE results may start attracting more engaged students. Certainly universities rated highly by Maclean's enjoy a recruitment advantage to attract the highest-achieving undergraduate applicants. If the most attentive students compete to register in course sections taught by professors rated highly on websites like RateMyProfessor.com, those professors will enjoy more responsive and better prepared classes, reinforcing their teaching effectiveness.

Surveys, like any other form of research, must be undertaken responsibly and professionally, with careful instrument design, due consideration given to methodology and timing, and careful analysis and interpretation. In presenting survey findings to a wider audience, we are obliged to communicate clearly and concisely to anticipate and prevent misinterpretation and oversimplification: in the words of Albert Einstein, we must make survey results "as simple as possible, but not simpler."

[i] Perhaps the most recent expression of this perspective can be found in James E. Côté and Anton Allahar, Ivory Tower Blues: A University System in Crisis, University of Toronto Press, 2007.

[ii] 2008 UCAS Applicant Study, syndicated research conducted annually by Academica Group Inc. on behalf of North American colleges and universities.

[iii] See www.collegeparents.org for further information.

[iv] Academica Group Inc, 2008 UCAS Applicant Study, syndicated survey of 150,000 applicants to colleges and universities. Results cited in this paragraph are drawn from an analysis of Canadian university applicants only.

[v] National Survey of Student Engagement, Promoting Engagement for All Students: The Imperative to Look Within, 2008, page 12.

CONTEXTUALIZING STUDENT SURVEYS, FEEDBACK, AND EVALUATION: HAVE STUDENTS CHANGED, OR HAS THEIR ENVIRONMENT?

Jeff Rybak, University of Toronto law student and author of *What's Wrong with University: And How to Make It Work For You Anyway* (ECW Press, 2007)

University is changing. This surely isn't news to anyone. Faculty who are caught up in this change can point to any number of factors that have a direct and often detrimental impact on their work as researchers and as educators. Resources are stretched thin. Classes are expanding. The pressure to do more with less results in a more stressful and less personal environment all around. And in the midst of all of this it seems that students have become more demanding, less respectful, and want to approach their education as consumers rather than learners. This is, of course, immensely frustrating to many faculty. Confronted with an increasing volume of student feedback in the form of polling, ranking, and internal evaluations, instructors can easily come to feel captive to the whims and desires of students. And it goes without saying that students do not always know what's good for them.

What I would like to do, in this short and informal article, is to explore the relationship between these trends. The trends are readily observable, but the whys and the wherefores are not. It is a matter of common sense that most institutional trends have structural roots. Less money means a worse student to faculty ratio. Larger academic units contribute to poorer community spirit.

Reliance on stipend instructors dilutes the curriculum. And so on. Certainly these structural causes were once policy decisions, and the chain of cause and effect can be traced backwards. But things don't spontaneously change without a concrete motivator. Things change because one or more of the background elements has changed.

There seems to be, among many educators, the assumption that student consumer culture just happened. If you challenge that assumption there might be some vague attribution to consumerism more generally, to less respect within society, to "generation me" and so on. I submit that this is lazy thinking. Our society has been consumerist for quite some time. The suggestion that students are less respectful today by their very nature is just one step shy of some absurd complaint that starts with "kids today...." And equally strange is the notion that one generation acts differently from the last simply because they were exposed to different cultural forces. There may be some argument for all of these claims, and I don't care to dismiss serious study along these lines, but we hardly need to get so obscure with our theories. A much simpler and concrete cause is staring us all in the face.

Just as professional academics have felt their relationship to university change, in response to institutional pressures, so too have students changed in their relationship to university. Just as the experience is more anonymous and alienating for faculty, so too is the experience more anonymous and alienating for students. And just as faculty feel shortchanged and frustrated, so too do students. We readily understand and explain the changing attitudes among faculty with reference to these institutional forces. Why are we reluctant to apply the same logic to students?

The information gleaned through student feedback and evaluation must be understood with reference to these institutional pressures. Changing attitudes cannot be considered to be the spontaneous cause of other problems but must be regarded, rather, as effects. Even further, I would suggest that the emergent culture of student evaluation and feedback is itself the product of institutional pressure. Feedback that was once spontaneous has become automated by necessity, in order to deal with larger groups of students. Polling has replaced daily interaction as a means to gauge student satisfaction and attitude. Again, one can make that case that polling, evaluation, and organized feedback are the result of student demand for such mechanisms. But considering that we know many institutional realities have changed, and we do not have any reason to believe that students have changed in their fundamental character, the better explanation may well be structural.

Student attitude is not the problem. Students are simply responding to the same pressures as faculty. When this is properly understood, their responses and feedback may even be seen as supportive rather than threatening. Of course they may not be very articulate or considered in their dissatisfactions, but essentials truths are buried in there somewhere.

THERE'S NOTHING NEW ABOUT FEEDBACK

A lot of the debate about student feedback and evaluation centers around how qualified students are, or are not, to voice opinions on particular topics. That's an entirely wrong-headed way to approach the subject. The fact is that students do have opinions on what goes on at university and knowing what they think isn't the problem, whether qualified or otherwise. Knowing how seriously to take their views is often difficult. But it's keeping feedback in perspective that's the real challenge, rather than trying to neatly decide exactly where to stop asking questions.

Students have always had opinions about instructors, course content, institutional policies, and everything else that goes on at university. And they have always voiced those opinions, for as long as we've had organized universities. It's only recently we've begun to ask students en masse to fill out Scantron forms, as a structured kind of survey. That's simply a change in methodology, and we can have a wonderful debate about appropriate methodology. But structured or otherwise, student feedback obviously contributes to the system as a whole and always has. Feedback may simply be a candid conversation in the hall, concerning how a particular class is going. And if that feedback is meaningful, surely any instructor may be influenced by it.

Not all students are created equal. Some students are qualified to offer intelligent commentary on everything that goes on at university – more than some members of faculty at any rate. Some students aren't competent enough to take note of the weather accurately. In other words, students are human, just like everyone else. And their feedback varies wildly in quality.

There are so many good stories about irrational and unconstructive student feedback that it's almost unnecessary to cite any of them, but I do have a personal favorite. In the process of producing several Anti-Calendars for my students' union, I had access to course evaluations in their raw form. There were always some desperately ignorant and insulting comments in there. One of our "future leaders" chose to not only tell his professor what he should go and do but even drew a helpful diagram to illustrate the activity. Of course these sorts of comments are only a small minority of the whole and are disproportionately memorable. But they do occur. I'd never claim otherwise.

Where we run into problems is when faculty take these examples to stand for the whole endeavor of feedback and evaluation. Frustrated professors, with ample

justification, express their dismay that their merit pay increases, tenure review, and professional reputations could be in the hands of such fools. And it is frustrating, and entirely inappropriate, that the opinions of the more ignorant students weigh into the mix. But that doesn't invalidate the project. It only tells us what we already knew – that some students' opinions are vastly more useful than others'.

In informal dialogue, rather than mass survey feedback, there is much more opportunity to consider the source. Unconstructive opinions can be easily dismissed as such. Concerns can be explored in dialogue rather than a one-sided critique. And certainly a lot of self-selection must occur. Those students who will take the time to express an opinion or provide some feedback, without institutional prompting, are far more likely to have something useful to say.

None of that should be taken to suggest I favor an end to anonymity in course evaluations. Anonymity is simply the de facto reality, when the student population grows beyond a certain size. Forcing students to sign their names might moderate their feedback but it won't change their status as strangers. As long as the great mass of students remains effectively unknowable as individuals their feedback cannot be contextualized. And it is no solution to focus on the opinions of the highly exceptional and knowable few. We still need to know how the average student thinks and feels. If that student is lost in a sea of faces it is the result of institutional forces that desperately need to be understood both structurally and qualitatively. Student feedback paints some of that qualitative picture.

It is not at all that we've lost touch with the original intention of student feedback and evaluation. Those able to offer intelligent and constructive feedback should be given an opportunity to do so, while those who are ignorant and unconstructive should be ignored. The problem is that with our automated systems we've lost the ability to screen one from the other. And so it

isn't quite accurate to say that universities have become responsive to ignorant student opinions. Rather, universities have been confronted with the choice to either lose the benefit of the good feedback or else deal with the consequences of the bad. And most seem to be erring on the side of collecting everyone's views, and trying as best as possible to screen out the worst drek. But that's especially difficult to do when it is rendered down to statistics, and one student who thoughtlessly rates everything a one out of seven is accorded equal weight alongside the student who agonizes over the difference between a four and a five.

I'll take one more moment to concede that sometimes an over-sensitive administrator may willingly acknowledge the opinions of even the most irresponsible students, and allow faculty to be bullied by unreasonable demands. This does happen, but it is outside the larger problem. We can assume for the sake of argument that reasonable administrators want to listen only to the reasonable students. Our biggest problem is that we've lost the ability to clearly identify them as such. And students know that too.

THE PROBLEM OF ANONYMITY

Anonymity invites irresponsibility, and contributes to feelings of alienation. When students are aware they cannot be identified as individuals and cannot be called to account for their actions there is very little incentive to behave responsibly. Further, when students are treated as product on an assembly line they feel very little loyalty or obligation to the people they interact with at their educational production plants. I'd like to suggest that faculty understand these feelings very well, and react similarly.

There's a wonderful faculty blog that I read (though I won't name it), that invites professors to "rate your students" (hint) and contributions are all anonymous. What these

professors have to say is often intelligent and insightful, but it certainly varies significantly in tone from how academics usually sound. No surprise there at all. The anonymity of the site is part of the fun. Frustrated professors show up and say all the things they wish they could say but normally cannot. And if students respond the same way, when assured of their anonymity, it isn't cause for alarm or amazement. It points to nothing more than some consistency in human nature.

Similarly, we are all familiar with the problem of disengagement in the academic environment. Some departments are full of life and activity, whereas others are dispirited and lax. How to grow a vibrant department culture is far beyond the purview of this piece, but I think we can agree it would involve acknowledging people as individuals, respecting their concerns, and showing regard for their particular needs. I've heard very respected academics, in all candor, indicate that they feel no qualms about screwing over their departments because they don't really know anyone anyway and feel no debt of loyalty. They feel they are not respected as individuals and therefore owe no respect in return. Sound familiar? Should students respond any differently?

When faculty feel attacked by the increasing prevalence of student surveys it would be natural to imagine that students must feel grateful for the opportunity to participate in this way, as though they've won something. In fact, for students who feel alienated and processed throughout their learning experience, the mechanisms of feedback available to them are more likely to seem a final insult. There is nothing remotely empowering about a Scantron form or a mail-in survey. It's only the latest example in a long trend of anonymous interactions with a faceless institution.

So again, if the tone and content of student feedback has taken a turn for the worse, that may be seen to be the result of institutional forces in two ways. First, their experiences may well be genuinely worse. And second, the ways in which we solicit their views may be affecting

the result. For the purposes of this point I consider that disrespectful and even downright insulting feedback is still relevant. What a student says in this frame of mind about a particular instructor or topic should be justifiably ignored. But the fact that a student is so utterly dissatisfied with the university experience and detached from social norms – that should absolutely be acknowledged.

Most likely, the strongest and most direct expressions of student dissatisfaction are ignored entirely. That's because the unhappiest and most disengaged students can't be bothered to wait until the appropriate time and place when the proper survey question finally comes around. Instead, they express themselves at inappropriate times, and very often in any kind of survey where anonymity is guaranteed. So these students are asked for one kind of opinion and they reply with an entirely different, but very important, kind of feedback. In a personal conversation that comes through loud and clear. But automated systems can't cope with it. Of course the students who offer this deliberately antagonistic feedback obviously don't expect to be listened to. But that's also part of what they are saying – that they have no expectation anyone actually wants to listen.

APPROPRIATE USES OF STUDENT FEEDBACK

Just like any other kind of information, there are far more ways that student feedback can be abused than ways in which it can be properly used. Some of this may simply be beyond institutional control. Students and their parents, for example, will inevitably reference the popular rankings as a decision-making tool and will draw all kinds of simplistic and erroneous conclusions from this information. The very presentation of the surveys may be designed to encourage this. But many

uses of feedback and surveys are within institutional control, and it is important to distinguish the positive applications of this information from the negative.

To begin with, any survey is best used to track trends within an institution or an academic unit than to measure between institutions and units. Measuring between institutions is the very point of some popular surveys and, of course, that is very frustrating to administrators. But the results of such a survey, assuming some consistency of methodology, can still be very relevant as a way to note improvement (or the reverse) within the individual institutions. The number of variables between institutions may be so great as to make comparison meaningless. But the variables within one institution, over a short timeframe, are quite few. Then such a survey might have a lot to say about what has changed in the past year or two.

Within institutions that same problem can occur. Satisfaction surveys might reveal that students in one unit are strikingly more positive than in another unit. But what does that really prove? If it prompts administrators to go looking for a cause (which might well be beyond anyone's control) then that's a good usage of information. If it leads instead to a competition between units, then that's a bad outcome. It would be good to know if the dissatisfied students in one unit become happier over time. That might suggest some positive change is occurring. But this should be measured against the yardstick of past results, and not against the average of other, less relevant comparators.

Student evaluations are often used as a cudgel to bludgeon unfortunate instructors. Evaluations may factor into merit pay increases, tenure review, and so on. This isn't necessarily a bad thing, but a too simplistic view of what these evaluations are saying often negates all value in the exercise, and may even make it counterproductive. Some courses are simply tough to deal with and create dissatisfaction. That may or may not indicate a possible change to the course itself, but it certainly

should not be laid at the door of the instructor. Some courses attract a very specific cohort of students, for reasons that must be understood before their feedback can be contextualized. And any number of other factors may occur.

All of these nuances are lost on many administrators, who look only at the statistical averages that emerge from polling. That isn't to say all nuance must be lost. Relevant comparisons can be established either formally or informally. Outlier results might be disposed of, to control for the students who offer thoughtlessly negative (or positive) feedback. Trends over time, in particular courses and programs and with particular instructors – all of this could be considered. But it takes time and effort. Instead, far too often, survey results are used in simplistic and irresponsible ways to shore up poor human resources practices.

Of course, even in the best of times, with all the context in the world, surveys and statistical feedback can only go so far. For many purposes there is simply no substitute for a live conversation with a real person. And so sometimes the most responsible way to poll student opinion is to simply do it the old-fashioned way and talk with student representatives rather than with some numerical aggregate of their opinions. I feel particularly strongly about this topic because I know that responsible student participation is possible at almost any level of university administration. In fact, once you get a real live person at the table it doesn't even matter if that person is especially brilliant or perfectly informed. Somehow reasonable people find common ground. All of those problems associated with anonymity can be solved, at least for this one representative student, simply by sitting down and talking about things in person.

Almost any kind of survey can yield good and useful information, provided it's done properly. The problem is that this information is too often placed in the hands of

administrators who simply don't know how to use it evaluate it. And just like any tool surveys have their uses, but they can't become the answer to every problem. It's the lack of controls and the lack of context that cause many difficulties. And unfortunately, quick and lazy usages of survey results sometimes distract from the most important things they could tell us, if we only were to look a little deeper.

CONCLUSION

Throughout this article, I have tried to broaden the topic of student evaluation and feedback to take in many of the wider trends in education today. I feel the topic cannot be properly understood in isolation from these trends. Things do not simply happen, after all. The increasing prevalence of evaluation and feedback isn't simply a fad but a response to certain institutional pressures. So too is changing student attitude. So too is changing faculty attitude.

With all that in mind, what is to be done? The most obvious solution would be to return to a simpler time when there were more resources, greater personal interaction, and when technology wasn't needed or employed to such a degree. But of course that's simply impossible. Instead, what's needed is some way to make the best of the situation we are in now. We need to avoid the worst abuses of surveys and feedback and to mitigate the negative consequences, while at the same time deriving what benefit we may from tools which are admittedly quite powerful and even rather interesting when properly deployed.

I've made some broad references to potential improvements. I don't wish to get more specific than this because there are far more qualified people than I to make specific recommendations. Generally, I do believe that a greater appreciation for the complexity of statistical data would be appropriate, and perhaps training on this topic for administrators who deal with it. But before we can even get to this point we need to overcome the mistaken belief that we already know what is wrong and it is simply that students today have a bad attitude.

Students are not the problem. They haven't changed in some fundamental way and if they are interacting differently with university than in the past it is far more reasonable to suggest this is because university has changed. Students are not demanding to be polled at every turn simply out of some consumerist impulse. Universities, rather, have been driven to mass solicitations of feedback for lack of any other functional options. And students are no happier about it than faculty. Their expressions of dissatisfaction may be crude and difficult to accept, at times, but they are certainly expressing their dissatisfaction loudly.

Faculty often take negative feedback personally. It's hard not to. But faculty are only the most visible and obvious targets that students have in their sights. Almost any criticism, even of individual instructors, can be recast as an institutional complaint. What students are really upset about are all the same things that faculty are upset about – limited resources, devalued education, impersonal interactions, and the like. That may not be what students are saying, in direct terms, but the truth is there just under the surface. These dissatisfied students are potentially powerful allies in any struggle against these negative trends. And the feedback they offer is potentially very effective ammunition. You just have to listen, and leverage what they are really saying.

SECTION FIVE:
Changing the monologue/
dialogue on accountability

WHY SO LITTLE PUBLIC ACCOUNTABILITY FOR QUALITY?

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Given the theme of the Accounting or Accountability conference, it is not surprising that much of the discussion focused on the increasing interest in accountability on the part of governments and universities. I would like to take a step back to raise a broader question: "Why is there so little public accountability for quality in Canadian higher education?" I do not ask this question because I believe that there is no accountability within the Canadian higher education sector. While there are significant differences in regulation by province, universities in most provinces produce dozens of annual reports, financial statements, and other documents to satisfy government accountability requirements. Several provinces have introduced modest forms of performance funding. Many individual institutions have taken proactive steps to produce public reports on their performance and success. In addition, while institutional and academic leaders have raised important questions concerning the meaningfulness of university ranking systems, there is little doubt that these rankings are increasingly playing a role in terms of disseminating certain types of comparative data on the university sector.

The issue here is not whether Canadian universities are accountable; the institutions have clearly responded to increasing federal and provincial government reporting requirements. The question that interests me is why Canadian governments at both the federal and provincial

levels of authority, unlike their peers in other nations, have devoted so little attention to public accountability for quality in Canadian higher education. We are a country without a national accreditation system, a fact that makes us unique among our American and European peers; we have somehow avoided both the draconian research and teaching assessment exercises introduced by some of our Anglo-Saxon cousins, and the more traditional national peer-review mechanisms introduced by governments in other western nations. Why?

In this article, three major reasons why there has been so little attention to public accountability for quality in Canadian higher education, especially in the university sector, will be examined: the development of a relatively homogenous system of universities; limited provincial government policy capacity in the higher education sector; and our federal structure. The article concludes by offering a few observations on moving forward in this area.

LIMITED INSTITUTIONAL DIFFERENTIATION

As many observers have noted, the post-war massification of higher education in Canada was accomplished largely through the expansion of the university sector (in enrolment and in the number of institution), and through the development of new institutional types that are frequently categorized under the term "community colleges." There were major differences in the role and function of these institutions by province, but in every case these new institutional models were designed to address the specific needs identified in each province, and complement the activities and programs associated with the university sector (Dennison, 1995).

The university sector became increasingly homogeneous as a function of the expansion process. Many autonomous, private denominational institutions transitioned to become secular, public-supported institutions

in response to increasing student demands for accessibility and government funding policies. Many universities expanded their program offerings to include some combination of undergraduate, professional, and graduate programs.

By the early 1970s it was possible to argue that a relatively common university model had emerged across the country (Jones, 1996). Universities were publicly-supported, autonomous, secular institutions. They were comprehensive institutions with undergraduate, professional and graduate programs. Every Canadian university had a mandate to engage in both teaching and research. They had similar governance and administrative structures. These institutions obviously varied in size, program-mix, and other important factors, but they were remarkably similar in terms of key institutional features. The influence of this common institutional model can be seen in how institutions that were originally created with distinctive missions have taken steps to more closely resemble this national model. Ryerson Polytechnic Institute became Ryerson Polytechnic University and then Ryerson University. The original mandate of Nippissing University, which focused primarily on undergraduate teaching, was later amended to more closely resemble the mandate of other Ontario universities.

Perhaps the clearest indication of the homogeneity of the Canadian university sector is that institutions have generally treated each other as equals. They are all members of the same national association, the Association of Universities and Colleges of Canada (AUCC). Most importantly, each university treats the credentials of every other public Canadian university as roughly equivalent to its own.

Given these arrangements, there has been no reason to develop a national system of accreditation or quality assessment. Unlike the United States, the Canadian provinces tightly controlled the number of institutions with the legal authority to grant degrees, so there were no degree-mills, fly-by-night institutions, or third-rate private universities to identify as failing to meet educational standards – the major objective of the accreditation system in the United States (Skolnik, 1986). The public universities were autonomous institutions operating under distinct provincial charters, and each institution's senate, or equivalent body, was assigned responsibility for making decisions about academic quality. Several provincial governments developed approval mechanisms for new degrees, and Ontario universities developed the Ontario Council on Graduate Studies as a mechanism to periodically review the quality of all graduate programs offered by publicly-supported institutions, but there were seldom questions about which institutions were, or were not, legitimate universities, and the universities generally treated an "A" from Brandon University as equivalent to an "A" from Regina or McGill.

While the relative homogeneity of the university sector in Canada provides a partial explanation for why there has been so little discussion of public accountability for quality, the increasing number of distinctive and differentiated universities and the expansion of degree granting in several provinces may lead to a renewed interest in some form of national quality assessment mechanism, a point I will return to later in the paper.

LIMITED PROVINCIAL POLICY CAPACITY

A second explanation for the limited level of public accountability for quality in Canadian higher education is that most provinces have a very limited level of policy capacity in the higher education sector. Canada's public universities have been created as relatively autonomous institutions; in fact, they have greater autonomy than their peers in many other jurisdictions. They are chartered as private, not-for-profit, self-governing corporations. Given the high level of autonomy and

self-governing capacity of the universities, provincial governments have come to assume only a modest role in monitoring and regulating the sector.

In most Canadian provinces the number of civil servants focusing on policy issues in the university sector is quite small, and most of these individuals focus on provincial student assistance programs and operating grant mechanisms. Most provinces simply do not have the capacity within the relevant government ministry to engage in new policy initiatives without a major increase in staffing, and few governments are willing to invest in greater policy capacity in this sector. For the most part, governments have trusted universities to do the right thing, and there has been little interest in making major investments in the creation of a new government infrastructure to deal with issues of quality or accountability. It is not surprising that the most interesting innovations in government policy in Canada in recent history are associated with the largest provinces, especially British Columbia, Alberta, Ontario and Quebec – the provinces which have the greatest capacity to develop policy within the government unit with responsibility for higher education.

In short, most provinces simply do not have the capacity to do much more than simply maintain the current policy arrangements, let alone the capacity to undertake a major initiative like a provincial quality assessment mechanism beyond a basic structure for approving new degrees. Governments have been quite reluctant to expand government, and institutions have generally argued that every dollar spent on government personnel is a dollar that could have been spent on student learning.

OUR FEDERAL STRUCTURE

Like most federal constitutional arrangements, the Canadian constitution assigns responsibility for education to the provinces. Unlike most federations, Canada's federal government continues to play only a modest role in the overall regulation of higher education, though it

plays a significant role in a number of very relevant policy areas, including research and student financial assistance (Jones, 2006). In other federations the national government has come to assume a greater role in higher education policy based on the assumption that the sector is of national economic and social importance – in some jurisdictions this role involves collaboration with local government (such as in Germany), but in others it has involved the assertion of a central role for the national government (as in Australia).

In contrast to many other jurisdictions, higher education policy in Canada is highly decentralized. The provinces play the central role in the regulation and funding of universities. Given this structural arrangement, it comes as little surprise that the tenor of provincial discussions of quality in higher education, when they arise, is... provincial. The emphasis is on higher education in terms of its contributions to the economic and social needs of the province.

The decentralized nature of Canadian higher education policy means that there has been little discussion of national standards or quality issues. The Council of Ministers of Education, Canada (CMEC) has taken steps to develop pan-Canadian indicators. The Canadian Council of Learning, a federally supported agency, also periodically advocates for a national discussion of higher education. But there has been nothing beyond the most basic discussion of the national goals for higher education, let alone anything resembling agreement on national quality assessment approaches or mechanisms.

The fact that higher education is a matter of provincial responsibility means that the discussion of quality, when and if this discussion occurs, focuses on the local rather than the national. There has been little discussion of national needs, or discussion of a range of issues that look quite different from a pan-Canadian

perspective than they do at the provincial level, such as national student mobility, internationalization including participating in international research and research networks, etc.

MOVING FORWARD

The homogeneity of the university sector has meant that there is little pressure from within the system for some form of national accreditation or quality assessment mechanism since the institutions have largely trusted each other and assumed a rough equivalence of standards. The limited policy capacity within the relevant provincial government departments means that few provincial governments have the ability to move forward in this area. Canada's decentralized federal structure has meant that most discussions of quality, and of the objectives of the sector, are provincial. There is no clear forum for a discussion of national standards, goals, or structures.

There are, I believe, indications that the situation is changing and that there are new possibilities for moving forward, while at the same time avoiding some of the more draconian, invasive, and inefficient approaches that have emerged in some other jurisdictions. I would like to briefly highlight three types of changes or initiatives that I believe have important implications for the discussion of quality in Canadian higher education.

The first is associated with the expansion of degree granting and the emergence of new, somewhat differentiated, institutions within the university sector (Shanahan and Jones, 2007). The expansion of degree-granting in several provinces now means that a range of institutions that are not members of the university sector have the authority to grant degrees. Some of these degrees have special titles, such as the applied degrees, but the expansion of degree types, as well as the fact that different types of institutions now grant degrees, has raised issues of standards and credential recognition. New universities have emerged in British Columbia,

Alberta, and Ontario, and some of these institutions have distinctive missions. The assumption that all Canadian universities have roughly the same standards, and that degrees are roughly equivalent, may no longer be appropriate. In an era of increasing international student mobility and a global labour market, universities and governments in other jurisidictions are beginning to ask questions about the legitimacy of new institutions and credentials, and they may not find our "provincial" answers satisfactory. This external pressure for some definitive list of pan-Canadian or nationally approved and accredited institutions and degrees may need to be addressed.

A second important shift is that the discussions of both quality and accountability are, in my opinion, becoming more nuanced and sophisticated. I believe that there is a growing recognition of the limitations associated with simplistic views of quality, especially at the system level. If the discussion of rankings has taught us anything, it is that despite our fascination with indicators and hierarchies, the university is probably not the best unit of analysis if we are trying to understand something about quality in terms of curriculum, learning and the student experience. Students attend university, but they enroll in programs, and we know that there can be significant differences in the student experiences by program within institutions, perhaps a difference that is even greater (and certainly more meaningful) than differences between institutions in aggregate indicators.

In thinking about accountability for quality at the system level, perhaps an appropriate starting point is the approach being adopted in Ontario in relation to undergraduate program reviews. The central assumption is that it is the program which is the more important unit of analysis in the discussion of quality, but that the goal should be one of ensuring that those in leadership positions at the program level have processes in place to ensure that appropriate decisions to strengthen and

improve program quality (and degree standards) are being made. The accountability component takes the form of periodic audits of these processes. In other words, system leaders are assured that quality is being considered in program-level decision making – not through the reporting of rankings or generic indicators – but through processes of data analysis, self-study, and peer-review. The approach does not require an increase in government monitoring or policy infrastructure, but it does hold institutions accountable for quality in terms of auditing ongoing program assessment policies and mechanisms. The emphasis is on quality in terms of improvement – and perhaps this is the most important objective in any discussion of quality and accountability in higher education.

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FACULTY AND
THE AUDIT CULTURE

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In an increasing climate of performance accountability in higher education, which has been experienced in many jurisdictions worldwide (Casper & Henry, 2001; David, 2008; Huisman & Currie, 2004), younger academics are being socialized into an "audit culture" (Apple, 2005). In a recent study of early career scholars, Archer noted:

> As people who had grown up and engaged in processes of 'becoming' academics within the context of neo-liberalism, it was unsurprising to find that all the younger academics had, to some extent, taken up the language of neo-liberalism and audit within their constructions of selfhood and academic identity (Archer, 2008, p. 272).

Archer found that in becoming academics in this era of accountability, younger faculty construct this new reality as their own. This embodiment of the audit culture has potentially negative implications for the future of the academic profession (Clegg, 2008). In other words, where goes the junior academic, goes the academy. In this article, I discuss junior faculty as the future of the academic profession, the pressures on them to "measure up" in an era of accountability, and implications for shared governance at Canadian universities. I end with some recommendations for increasing faculty autonomy and involvement in shared governance, particularly with regard to junior academics.

DEFINING THE CONTEXT

First, it is important to begin with some defining concepts. In an article titled, "What is Neo-liberalism?" Mudge (2008) states that neo-liberalism "is a sui generis ideological system born of historical processes of struggle and collaboration in three worlds: intellectual, bureaucratic and political" (p. 704). She goes on to describe the "three interconnected faces" of neo-liberalism that are characterized by these worlds. For this article, the "intellectual face" is not as relevant as the "bureaucratic face" and the "political face", although the cycle of ideas borne of the academy and their influence on the academy deserves further study.

Mudge describes the "bureaucratic face" of neo-liberalism as that expressed in state policy: "liberalization, deregulation, privatization, depoliticization and monetarism" (p. 704). Here she specifically locates education, stating that a characteristic neo-liberal policy agenda includes the promotion of "competition in previously 'sacred' institutional spaces (a prime example is public education)" (p. 718). In the higher education sector we note increasing competition in the form of student enrolments, research funding, individual and institutional performance evaluations, and targeted resource allocations. In parallel with bureaucratization of the state, higher education institutions have not responded to the call of liberalization with a decentralization of the audit function to the most efficient unit but rather have increased institutional capacities for oversight and have often centralized managerial authority.

Mudge's "political face" of neo-liberalism is also relevant to the discussion of accountability in higher education in that the market and its participants are increasingly legitimated as a new political force in higher education decision-making. While the market has been considered relevant to higher education policy for decades (as seen in Clark's 1983 "triangle of coordination"), the impact

of marketization in the evaluation of academic performance (individual and institutional) is perhaps now more evident than ever. In Canada, this can be seen in the commercialization agreement between the AUCC and the federal government, with discrete targets and measures for assessing the profit-potential of academic work now firmly in place.

In this context, Archer's discussion of academics as "neo-liberal subjects" takes a particular shape. Academic life is affected by neo-liberalism not only in terms of increased accountability of one's work but also by the destabilization of the public sphere in which higher education is located. Drawing upon the work of Davies and Petersen (2005), Archer stated that:

As subjects, we will always be subjugated to ('played by') the system (whether or not we consciously realise it), as governance is enacted via our hearts and minds and the technologies of neo-liberalism close down dissent and the perception of alternatives. Hence, they [Davies and Petersen] argue, it is not possible to resist the onslaught of neo-liberalism and it is not possible to *do* without *being* a neo-liberal subject (2008, p. 281, italics in original).

Yet, Archer holds out hope for younger academics to create and participate in "spaces of resistance" to neo-liberal forces in higher education. Although not mentioned by Archer as an arena for bureaucratic and political resistance, I offer that faculty associations, particularly in the Canadian context, can provide such a space if we are able to collectively mobilize in such a way as to support junior faculty in their socialization process.

WHO SPEAKS FOR NEO-LIBERAL SUBJECTS?

To continue with Archer's findings, she noted that the early career faculty in her study exhibited five behaviours in reaction to perceived accountability mechanisms:

(i) safety/protection through 'playing the game', (ii) 'speaking out', (iii) creation of supporting practices, (iv) self-protection through work on the psyche, and (v) being otherwise (Archer, 2008, p. 276). Of these, I will focus here on the second, "speaking out", which for the participants in Archer's study took the form of making "complaints" at the institutional level. However, for the participants in the study, speaking out was not an easy choice, or even a conscious alternative. Archer stated that "neo-liberalism infiltrated their bodies and minds and made it difficult for them to speak about what was happening to them and the injustices and losses they experienced" (Archer, 2008, p. 282).

While the making and receiving of work-related grievances is an important responsibility for faculty and their faculty associations, Archer's study highlights a limitation in the current practice of relying on those who are perhaps the most "subjugated" to bring forward their case. In the traditional academic system, where peer-review is paramount, the nature of the tenure process is to socialize junior academics into the system rather than encourage them to vocally critique the institution. It is therefore understandable that it is not only difficult to articulate the burdens of accountability for those who have never known academia to be otherwise, but also that junior academics might sense that making complaints about accountability measures could be perceived by senior academics and administrators as a warning sign that a junior academic is unfit for the "rigours" of academic life. Junior academics are already under evaluation as part of the tenure process, a reality only exacerbated by increasing accountability measures.

Perhaps a contributing factor to the potential silencing of junior faculty is that they are "seen but not heard" in many arenas of academic governance. Indeed, service is devalued in the contemporary academy, and junior faculty are counseled to avoid the burdens of too much committee work so that their research productivity is

not negatively affected. However, it may be that we do a disservice to junior faculty by "protecting" them from sharing in the governance of their institutions. We might ask ourselves, "What are we protecting them from?" The unintended consequence of this protection is that while early career academics might be shielded from the distracting work of governance, institutional leaders are not subsequently confronted with the day-to-day realities of life as a "neo-liberal subject" and hence the management of the academy does not regard the situations of the "managed professionals" at the lowest ranks (Rhoades, 1998). Were junior faculty to have a full voice at the table, and if this service work were valued as part of a pre-tenured faculty's career, how might the agendas of our institutions and faculty associations be different? Consider that early career academics might have a particular viewpoint of the future of the academy from their lived experiences in an era of accountability, and that recognition of these experiences might support an alternative, peer-based socialization of new faculty. The future of an autonomous academic profession might rely upon a re-orientation of the newcomers, and a re-calibration of the academic system with their needs in mind.

There is hope of a turning tide, as evidenced in a memo presented at the January 21st, 2009 meeting of the University of British Columbia's Vancouver Senate meeting, on the topic of a "Culture of Service." This memo stated that the UBC Senate should direct the Nominating Committee to:

- Consider ways to enhance the "culture of service" amongst members of the university community;

- review ways in which service to the University is currently evaluated and recognized;

- explore mechanisms by which faculty, students, and staff can be encouraged to actively participate in the governance of the University and its units; and

- report back on its deliberations by the May 2009 meeting of Senate (available online at http://www.senate.ubc.ca/vancouver/schedule.cfm?go=archive).

While it is too early to know the outcome of this discussion, fostering a culture of service at Canadian universities is a positive step toward a more inclusive and fully-aware faculty governance model.

MAKING WHAT COUNTS COUNT

While research on early career faculty, such as Archer's study, can provide insights into areas of concern for new academic professionals, we must realize that the Canadian higher education policy context is not the same as that found in Australia, the UK, or the United States. Conditions for new faculty in Canada are likely less onerous than that of countries with formal performance assessment schema like Australia's Research Quality Framework or the UK's Research Assessment Exercise. Indeed, recent research conducted in Canada shows that faculty here are less burdened by performance criteria (or so they perceive) than their peers in other countries, particularly outside of North America. In our survey of Canadian university faculty collected in 2007-2008 for the Changing Academic Profession (CAP) project, faculty were asked about influences on academic decision-making (internal and external), the locus of performance evaluation, performance-related budget allocation, and participation in academic governance (Fisher et. al. forthcoming). Preliminary analysis of the survey data show that 49% of Canadian faculty overall agreed or strongly agreed that "a strong performance orientation" existed at their institutions, compared with 69% of faculty in the Australian survey, 68% of those in the UK survey, and 48% of the respondents in the US survey. However, more "junior" faculty[ii] in Canada (58%) answered that they perceived a strong performance orientation at their institutions than their "senior" colleagues (45%).

From my own experience, I have seen that early career faculty in Canadian institutions respond to the pressures of performance accountability by making "what counts" count, both personally and professionally. By this I mean that my colleagues are rising to the challenge of peer-review and administrative oversight, but with clear visions of the society they want to help build in the process. These emerging academics, many of whom I met at new faculty orientation a few years ago, are taking up research agendas that focus on human rights and anti-racism, fair housing, labour unions, Aboriginal education, happiness studies, and patient rehabilitation in the health sciences. They approach their work from a variety of research methods and methodologies that include action research, community participation, feminism, and decolonizing perspectives. Some are approaching the scholarship of teaching and learning as a way to further link their research and teaching. One friend has remarked about his extensive work with policy-makers that "of course none of this counts for tenure, but there is more to life than tenure." In the absence of a nationalized performance accountability structure and with the support of senior faculty and faculty associations, I have hope that Canada's junior faculty can continue to do "what counts" for society while also achieving tenure and promotion. If this is not possible, my bright, socially-committed friends will leave the academy, by their choice or the institution's, to its detriment.

CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

What can be done to increase faculty autonomy and participation in governance, especially for junior faculty? Some recommendations include: early participation in faculty associations; encouragement to contribute to institutional committees, Senates and governing boards; and changing performance criteria to more highly value service, especially that relating to shared governance. At every performance review, junior and senior faculty should question why particular academic activities do or do not "count" and make adjustments to assessment criteria when necessary.

I conclude this brief discussion with a question posed by Shore in a 2008 article titled, "Audit culture and illiberal governance: Universities and the politics of accountability": "How can we make sense of the 'present' when we are *in* it and *part* of it?" (p. 279, italics in original). This question is all the more difficult for new faculty to answer since the present academy is the only one they have ever known. The answer must lie in collective recognition of the "audit culture" and its effects on intellectual engagement and the social outcomes of higher education. Given our preference for autonomy and self-direction, academics are well-suited to the internalization of accountability measures. Collective recognition and reconsideration of the accretion of performance criteria may provide an alternative to the silencing and complicity of the audit regime. On this point Shore noted that:

> The complicity of academics also stems from the fact that the system can only be contested collectively – and there are huge costs and penalties if individuals, or individual institutions, try to challenge or opt out of the auditing process (2008, p. 291).

Faculty associations are an ideal location for the debate on performance criteria and, if changes are necessary, for collective resistance and the formulation of alternative assessment measures. Furthermore, consortia of faculty associations provide even stronger protection for individual academics and institutions. Particular attention should be paid to the status and situations of new faculty within our systems. This is especially important as new faculty demographics may show that those of us on the lower ranks of the ladder are more likely to be women and visible minorities, groups that have already

had an unfortunate history with society's "accounting" mechanisms in the form of quotas, rosters, and registries. In addition, early career faculty should be actively mentored into the governance of their institutions and faculty associations. The future of an autonomous and socially-conscious academic profession may depend upon it.

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[i] Mudge describes the "intellectual face" of neo-liberalism as the "hegemonic force" (2008, p. 709) of the Anglo-American neoclassical economists, particularly the Chicago School, and its ideological influence on elite political institutions.

[ii] "Junior" faculty in the study were Assistant Professors in tenure-track appointments.