

## Book Reviews / Comptes Rendus

Kells, H.R. *Self-Regulation in Higher Education: A Multi-National Perspective on Collaborative Systems on Quality Assurance and Control*. Higher Education Policy Series 15. London: Jessica Kingsley Publishers, 1992, 180 pages. Price: £25. Reviewed by Dr. H. Ian Macdonald, President Emeritus, York University.

*Self-Regulation in Higher Education* is one of a series of volumes that are distinctive for their range of analysis and investigation of higher education. In this case, however, the methodology is rather technical for the general administrator. Ten years ago, as the president of a large university, I would have been unlikely to make the effort to understand and to apply its techniques of analysis; the process would have been deemed to esoteric to warrant the time. The traditional handmaidens of academic management -- peer review based on intuitive insight, classroom experience, and subjective assessment -- were easier, if less subtle, methods of prescription for academic change. When coping with diminishing budgets, once the limits of programme adjustment were reached, across-the-board cuts provided an acceptable blunt instrument. Now fiscal constraints have reached the point where more scientific techniques are required, not only to prevent complete demoralization on the part of faculty members, but even to ensure the survival of certain universities.

This book "is intended both as a reference source and, where appropriate, as a guide for policy makers in institutions, in collaborative buffer-type organizations, and in governments that seek to consider the possibilities of self-regulation of higher education" (p. 11). Therefore, the question is: Does this method serve the purpose well in three senses?; How readily can it be understood by administrators and academics alike?; How conveniently can it be applied?; and Will the results warrant the expenditure of time and effort on the part of already over-burdened university personnel?

For the purpose of the methodology, regulation is defined as "the informed and periodic process through which a system, institution, programme or procedure is attuned over time to expectations (intentions, standards, norms) through choices and actions judged by the regulator(s) to be needed as a result of formative or summative education" (p. 17). Thus we are presented with a problem of defining our expectations in the first place: When and how is a particular programme to be evaluated? As Kells points out, the process often falters at the outset through failure to recognize that without a carefully defined starting point, it is impossible to pass judgment fairly at the end of the course. Therefore institutions with no experience in this process must ask the question: What is a reasonable trial period?

Moreover, the obstacles to self-regulation are formidable. If a university has been accustomed to external regulation, it is unlikely to have established a regulatory culture for itself. If it does embark on self-regulation, the danger is that its efforts may be directed primarily "to protect the guild and its members at the expense of the client and the general public" (p. 39). As a result, success will only be achieved if the leaders of the institutions are capable of creating a culture of self-regulation and designing an appropriate system of quality assessment. Kells' message is that such self-regulation can be achieved, but he warns that it may take a considerable period of time and will require constant re-evaluation of the system itself.

Kells offers a fairly detailed description of concepts and models of self-regulation, without denying the difficulties of applying them to a given situation. The real Achilles' heel in the application of any system appears to be the assembly of adequate and appropriate information upon which to base the evaluation. We are not discussing quality control of cars moving off an assembly line, but the results of teaching and research, much of which may only become apparent, in cost-benefit terms, many years later. A further obstacle is the difficulty of providing suitable incentives to guarantee effective self-regulation. The evidence in chapter four does not suggest that such incentives can be readily provided. The surest route to follow is the provision of groups or teams of peer visitors. In that case, however, are we truly applying self-regulation?

In his valuable cataloguing of experiences in various countries, Kells identifies Canada as particularly praiseworthy where self-regulation is concerned. From his evidence, it would appear that Canadian prophets of self-regulation may not be without honour, save in Canada where awareness of our accomplishments has not penetrated very deeply. The overview, based on twenty-two country reports, also serves to illustrate the wide variety of considerations in the

process. In particular, Kells draws a number of important conclusions that provide essential guidance to any institution contemplating a greater degree of self-regulation. He also makes it quite clear that the design of the process can be time consuming and may take a number of years "...as it unfolds amid the complex political and financial conditions existing in most countries" (p. 151).

Can we afford to wait? Probably not. The alternative has never been more apparent in Canada than it is today: "...the threat of interference...by government can overcome even relatively high levels of professional reluctance to participate in self-regulation or to implement recommended changes" (p. 166).

Administrators and academics alike will not find the models and the procedures described by Kells the stuff of light-hearted common room banter. Those who persevere, however, in seeking an understanding of the potential of self-regulation will find Kells' work to be an invaluable guide and should be pleasantly surprised by the results.

Winchester, I., Jones, G.A., Hebeson, E., & Sadlak, J. (Eds.). *Interchange, Special Issue: The University and Democracy*. Dordrecht, The Netherlands: Kluwer Academic Publishers, 1992, 226 pages. Reviewed by Charles H. Bélanger, Professor of Management, Laurentian University.

Entitled *The University and Democracy*, this special issue covers a wide variety of topics ranging from Plato to Northrop Frye, distinguishing between elite and ordinary, examining the evolution of the university from its origins in mediaeval Europe to the modern age, presenting the pros and cons of the ivory tower and the "wired" university, comparing Chinese and Canadian universities, and tracing the Kameralwissenschaften of Humboldt Universität into the development of the social sciences, as a tool for democracy, at Harvard, Columbia, Chicago, Pennsylvania, and other universities of the West.

The *tour de force* of this special issue comes from the smooth linkage amongst the many similarities within a wide array of different topics, some more central and relevant than others. The Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council of Canada ought to be commended for helping to finance this Conference held at the Ontario Institute for Studies in Education. It was truly an opportunity for the promotion of democracy and for the articulation of the danger to democracy within inherent in the university.

What exactly are the most common undemocratic threats to modern universities? They can be characterized primarily as internal dilemmas. As Clark Kerr