

## Book Reviews / Comptes Rendus

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Meyerson, J. (Ed.). (1998). *New Thinking on Higher Education: Creating a Context for Change*. Bolton, MA: Anker Publishing Company, Pages: xxv, 185.

Reviewed by Sandra Pohl Casey, Queen's University

Collections of essays serve a useful purpose when, like a mosaic, each essay contributes its part to the whole and leads to a greater understanding of the topic. To some extent, the essays in *New Thinking on Higher Education: Creating a Context for Change* fulfill this purpose. However, if you are looking for an essay on innovations in higher education curriculum or teaching, look elsewhere; the “context” of the title is distinctly management with a U.S. focus. The excellent lengthy introduction by Maureen E. Devlin divides the collection's nine essays into three useful categories: economics; mission, accountability, and change; and technology.

Unlike the Canadian situation, three-quarters of the four-year institutions of higher education in the U.S. are private, although about two-thirds of the undergraduate population attend public institutions, facts which substantially influence the discussion in the first three essays dealing with the economics of higher education. The issues raised are instructive, especially now when Ontario has opened the door to private universities and even though such new private universities would not have extensive endowments available to them as do older private universities in the U.S.

In the first essay, “Why Can’t a College Be More Like a Firm?” Gordon C. Winston points out that colleges and universities do sell goods and services, such as education, for a price, such as tuition; and they make these goods and services with purchased inputs and hired workers, such as fuel oil and professors; and they use a lot of facilities and equipment, such as classrooms and labs and parks and computers; and they compete hard for customers and for faculty inputs (pp. 1–2).

Despite the similarities between business firms and institutions of higher education, Winston finds their differences more compelling, particularly because even if colleges and universities show a profit, there are no shareholders to distribute the profit to. Secondly, they are dissimilar in their revenue sources in that colleges and universities are funded through tuition fees, government funding (in the case of public institutions), and charitable donations and endowments, with the result that institutions of higher education do not charge the consumer (student) the full cost of the product (university education). Institutional “subsidies” such as below-cost tuition and student aid allow well-funded colleges and universities to choose a better quality of student with a feedback effect on student demand. Increased student enrollment, however, does not necessarily bring economies of scale to higher education and instead results in such fixed resources as endowments and physical plants being spread more thinly across the student body with the potential for a drop in the quality of education.

James S. Roberts (Duke University) discusses the costs and rewards of attending elite private institutions in “Opportunity and Responsibility: The Market for Selective Private Higher Education.” He asks whether fears are justified that, because of the high costs to students at private universities, public universities will snap up the best students, or if “this favorable demand relationship, which apparently favors a small number of well-established, high-quality, high-cost institutions (is) likely to last?” (p. 38). His answer is that market demand continues to outrun market supply for the most elite, highest-priced universities in the U.S. Roberts sees web-based higher education, which could provide the best faculty to the best students at lower cost, as possible, though unlikely

competition, as long as elite universities are creative in adapting new technologies to their advantage.

In "Thinking Seriously about Paying for College: The Large Effects of a Little Thought," George R. Goethals and Cynthia McPherson Frantz report the results of research into whether students are knowledgeable about the real costs of the higher education they receive. The answer is no. In one study, for example, a substantial minority of subjects at private institutions (45%) and a substantial majority at public institutions (81%) believed that institutions charged more for tuition than they spent per undergraduate student. In other studies, Goethals and Frantz found that providing information to students on the true costs of education and on the extent to which their costs are subsidized led to a somewhat more considered approach to the economics of higher education and a belief that tuition and fees were more reasonable, even if still too high.

The second group of four essays includes those devoted to "mission, accountability, and change." These are interesting and useful essays to the extent that readers are interested in aspects of planning and quantifying higher education and also to the extent that generally applicable truths are, or can be, derived from the specific circumstances described. Michael J. Kelly in "Enabling Metaphors of Innovation and Change" advocates the use of institutional biographies "thoughtfully describing an institution and the elements that are crucial to its character" (p. 57) in order to capture and convey a sense of its past and to serve as a means to envision its future. "Campus-Wide Approach to Systems Planning" by Frederick A. Rogers describes efforts at Cornell University to become a "best-managed university" by "working to implement a model for business engineering adapted to higher education" (p. 63). In "Manic Over Measures: Measuring, Evaluating, and Communicating Administrative Performance in Higher Education," Richard N. Katz discusses major factors related to budget, governance, management, and culture which contribute to the current preoccupation with measurement and then sets measures of accountability in the context of an institution's vision and goals.

The final article in the "mission, accountability, and change" section is "Benchmarking in Higher Education" by C. Jackson Grayson, Jr. in which benchmarking is defined as "the process of identifying, learning,

adapting, and implementing outstanding practices and processes from organizations anywhere in the world to help an organization improve its performance” (p. 106). In Grayson’s view, educational institutions are mired in isolation and inertia and therefore lag behind business firms, government agencies, and health care institutions in benchmarking. He lists seventeen reasons why educators say benchmarking is unworkable in higher education. Readers may find reasons they agree with in Grayson’s list. He criticizes “educators (who) mistakenly believe that benchmarking will only work for administrative processes and not for the teaching/learning process” (p. 115). Grayson offers no argument to support his position, and it is unclear how “decision-making that is driven by data” (p. 111) can be used to modify curriculum and teaching across the university’s spectrum of academic disciplines.

The most forward-looking essays in this collection, and well worth reading, are the final two: “Higher Education’s Information Challenge” by Marshall W. Van Alstyne and “The Unsustainability of Traditional Libraries” by Brian L. Hawkins. Van Alstyne and Hawkins, in different ways and for somewhat different reasons, question the future role of the university in a society awash in free, or at least cheaply accessed, information.

Van Alstyne focuses on “the university’s role in creating, teaching, caching, and accrediting information” for which reason “educators can benefit significantly by applying a model of the university as an information processor to their strategic thinking” (p. 144). He cautions that the university’s historic role is simultaneously being undermined and enhanced by information technologies which serve as delivery systems to provide information at little or no cost to all, and at the same time allow researchers to collaborate and share data with less effort. Van Alstyne argues for the view that information, derived from research, drives economic progress. If this is the case, he asks, should universities share information freely as a public good or sell it like merchandise?

Hawkins writes of the current pressures on university libraries which struggle to maintain relevant collections in the face of inflationary pressures and the increasing rate of publishing. He supports the “just in case” model of information rather than the “just in time” model, pointing out

that those who criticize libraries for not being more efficient fail to understand libraries' archival and stewardship roles. Hawkins suggests two new paradigms. The first is to stop giving away the results of academic research to commercial publishers, only to have libraries buy it back at great expense in the form of scholarly publications. He would rather see professional organizations or other nonprofit organizations publish electronically over the Internet. Secondly, he recommends that libraries around the world act collectively to provide electronic access to their collections, that is, "information access — rather than ownership" (p. 165).

Neither Van Alstyne nor Hawkins anticipated the speed with which commercial publishers and "aggregators" (who provide electronic access to journals from many publishers) would respond to the opportunities presented by electronic publishing, and the resulting move by libraries to form consortia in order to bargain for the best prices for electronic access to journals and basic library resources such as encyclopedias.

Although not specifically stated, the essays in this volume appear to have first been presented at the 1996 Forum for the Future of Higher Education and represent strategic thinking at that time. There is an excellent index which makes following one topic through several essays easier. However, just to underline a point, there are no entries for "curriculum" or "academic disciplines" and the only entry for teaching is "teaching load."



Bond, S., & Lemasson, J. (Eds.) (1999). *A New World of Knowledge: Canadian Universities and Globalization*. Ottawa, ON: International Development Research. Pages: xii, 294.

Reviewed by Dick Henley, Brandon University

*A New World of Knowledge* is an important book and deserves a wide-readership among everyone concerned about the future of higher education in Canada. A publication of the International Development Research Centre (IDRC), this volume consists of ten chapters by thirteen