

Book Reviews / Comptes Rendus

Jones, G. A, McCarne, P. L. & Skolnik, M.L. (Eds.) (2005) *Creating knowledge, strengthening nations: The changing role of higher education*. Toronto: University of Toronto Press. Pages: 298. Price: \$60.00 (CAD).

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This volume of seventeen edited contributions follows from a symposium at the University of Toronto in Fall 2002 entitled "Creating Knowledge, Strengthening Nations: The Changing Role of Higher Education" as part of the university's celebrations of its 175th anniversary. The volume broadly "seeks to improve understanding of how universities advance economic growth and entrepreneurialism while contributing to strategic societal goals of equity and redistributive justice" and more specifically seeks "to discuss how internal and external forces are exerting pressure to change the role of higher education in society and how universities are responding to global integration" (front book flap). Rather than create focused discussion on specific themes, "the organizers of the University of Toronto symposium made a strategic decision to invite leading scholars representing a variety of field and discipline perspectives". (p. 5) The perspectives and content of this volume are thus much broader, international, positive, and indeed philosophical than recent critiques of the Canadian university system by Bercuson, Bothwell and Granatstein (1997) and Pocklington and Tupper

(2002) or recent reviews of the problems and challenges facing Canadian universities by Laidler (2002), Beach, Boadway and McInnis (2005), and Iacobucci and Tuohy (2005). The perspective of the contributions in the current volume is much more above the fray. But the flurry of recent major publications in this area does highlight a resurgence of interest in universities and their changing roles in society and the economy.

The present volume begins with an extended Forward by Robert Birgeneau, then President of the University of Toronto, and proceeds to a substantial Introduction by the editors which identifies several major themes of the following chapters and provides a richly textured overview of the major arguments in the chapters. The rest of the volume consists of seventeen chapters written by a total of eighteen authors including, for example, the Harvard economic demographer David Bloom; former university presidents James Duderstadt of Michigan and John Evans of Toronto; Ramamurthy Natarajan, chairman of the All India Council for Technical Education in New Delhi; a number of leading researchers on aspects of higher education in Canada such as Ruth Hayhoe, Glen Jones and Michael Skolnik of OISE and Patricia McCarney, Shirley Newman, Peter Singer and David Wolfe of the University of Toronto; and directors of several centres or institutes in Canada, United States and UNESCO. The chapters vary in length from five to twenty-eight pages and address such topics as: "Raising the Pressure: Globalization and the Need for Higher Education Reform" (David Bloom), "The Opportunities and Threats of Globalization" (Peter Scott), "The Contribution of Higher Education to Reconstructing South Africa Society: Opportunities, Challenges and Cautionary Tales" (George Subotzky), "The Role of Technical Education in Enabling the Creation of a Knowledge Economy and Society: The Indian Experience" (Ramamurthy Natarajan), "Campus and Community: Partnerships for Research, Policy and Action" (Beth Swan), "Harnessing Genomics for Global Health: The Role of Higher Education" (Abdallah Daar and Peter Singer), and "Innovation U: New Practices, Enabling Cultures" (Louis Tornatzky). Each contribution is self-contained with its own set of references. The volume ends with a set of brief bios of the contributors.

In the Introduction, the editors identify several underlying themes to many of the chapters in the volume: globalization, growing importance of information technology, privatization, balancing economic and non-

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economic roles, and growing sensitivity to equity and ethical issues. The chapters are organized around three broad headings: new pressures and roles expected of higher education; higher education and society – strengthening nations, regions and cities; and creating knowledge, research and innovation. Though clearly there is some overlap in both the general headings and some of the papers themselves.

Does the volume accomplish its objectives? I would say yes, but it is both narrower and broader in its perspective than the title and stated goals would suggest. The title and major headings of the volume refer to “higher education” generally, but all save one or two of the papers really focus just on universities per se. There is also much more attention to the research and knowledge generation roles of universities and very little said about the teaching and knowledge dissemination roles. It struck me that the volume could be usefully characterized as essentially a festschrift volume for the university consisting of symposium papers. On average, the chapters are relatively short and examine big-picture long-run broad-scope issues rather than on more immediate problems which, say, motivated the recent Rae Review in Ontario. The coverage, while extremely broad, is balanced and positive (rather than normative or critical). The chapters are not research papers such as one might find in a more tightly focused research conference volume, but they essentially argue positions or convey experienced perspectives on the evolving role of universities in the world. As there are a fair number of chapters, there is a wide range of perspectives. The volume takes a broad international view with very little Canadian content outside of Toronto and UofT.

I would like to have seen a bit more structure and linkage across the various chapters each of which is quite autonomous. The objectives refer to and many of the papers discuss the increasingly emphasized role expected of universities to advance economic growth and entrepreneurialism. Indeed, it is clearly asserted that “higher education is ... a major driver of economic growth through its teaching and research functions.” (p. 58) Yet virtually no references are provided to the economics research literature on the economic role that universities play and exactly how their major activities end up affecting economic growth in a nation or region. Several chapters which look at this, and particularly those by Wolfe (Chapter 10) and Stiller (Chapter 15), offer a number of fine insights as to how this process operates. They are also quite correct in the statements they make

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about the linkages involved as to how universities may drive economic growth. But the fact is that this is not as clear-cut as it may seem or as academics and university administrators may wish. No one, to my awareness, has posited or formally tested a well-developed model of the causal channels, behavioural pathways or worked-out linkages leading from university activities to economic growth. I was looking for some advance on this modelling challenge, but was out of luck on this point. Several papers do point out that there appears to be no single or simple recipe for successful linkage. They rightly put emphasis on the interaction between cutting-edge research and the transmission of knowledge to local workers, entrepreneurs, and savvy managers in high-tech firms. But as some recent research notes, ‘To be blunt, if anything, there is a tendency in the literature to perhaps overplay the role of universities and underplay the role of the private sector in generating innovative technology clusters.’ (Betts and Lee, 2005, p. 150)

The content and quality of the chapters are almost uniformly good. I particularly enjoyed the contributions by James Duderstadt (“The Future of Higher Education in the Knowledge-Driven, Global Economy of the Twenty-first Century”), Michael Skolnik (“Reflections on the Difficulty of Balancing the University’s Economic and Non-economic Objectives in Periods When Its Economic Role Is Highly Valued”), and David Wolfe (“the Role of Universities in Regional Development and Cluster Formation”) and would consider them for course readings. The quality and clarity of the writing in the different chapters are commendable, perhaps not surprising given the experience of the contributors, but are still pleasantly refreshing from what I often read in economic research (my home discipline). Production values – as usual from University of Toronto Press – were high and appealing to the eye (e.g., uniform format across chapters and no footnotes or endnotes). Though I did find a few instances of proofing errors that a copyeditor should have picked up.

Are there any topics that might have been touched upon but didn’t appear in the volume? This is a tall order given the present great breadth of coverage already present. But there is very little discussion of demographics and the factors contributing to rising participation rates in post-secondary education. How has the quality of post-secondary education been changing? How have changing sources of funding to universities affected student access to PSE? How has the rising cost of research in the biomedical

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and physical sciences affected cross-subsidization and internal financial incentives within universities? And what role are universities playing in the growing social and economic stratification that is increasingly being remarked on.

While it doesn't solve lots of research questions, this volume is a valuable addition to the landscape and will stay on a bookshelf close to my desk for ready access to the arguments that are well articulated.

References

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