

Book Review / Compte rendu

Schuetze, Hans G., William Bruneau and Garnet Grosjean (Eds.). (2012). *University Governance and Reform: Policy, Fads, and Experience in International Perspective*. New York, NY: Palgrave Macmillan. Pages: 266. Price \$90 US (hardcover) ISBN 9780230340121.

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University Governance and Reform is a collection of papers around the theme of university governance. There are sixteen papers from various countries organized by geography (North America, Latin America, East Asia, and Australia). This volume is part of the series International and Development Education Series. The collection of papers is timely and welcome, and the quality of them is generally good to very good to excellent. The authors are of individuals with long and deep experience in many aspects of higher education.

Governance is defined broadly so the topics cover a wide range of material including the role of administration, government, university stakeholders, business and industry, and international organizations. As a university provost rather than a professor in education, I read this book looking for advice on how to manage the affairs of a large, comprehensive, public university.

Since World War II we have seen higher education move from the margin of government thinking to centre stage. Universities are seen as agents of innovation, new company creation, mass education, agents of immigration, and engines of the economy. Often expectations are added to the mandates of publicly funded institutions, mandates that often arrive with little additional support. For example, students and employers are demanding that increasing attention be paid to employability skills such as leadership and entrepreneurship. Government is expecting that we recruit international students as permanent residents. And, industry wants universities to do more of the company-specific training that used to be done in-house.

The central question for administration is, how do we respond to the new and increasing number of mandates being assigned to public universities and remain independent? For me, independence is the unfettered ability to decide within the academy the critical issues around teaching, research, and membership in the professoriate.

These papers have a lot to offer. Of particular interest are the contributions from the countries that are emerging as the major, new players in international higher education. Articles on China and South America add important insights. Worthy of special mention is the article (“Intellectuals, Academic Freedom, and University Autonomy in China”) by Qiang Zha in which the historical foundations of higher education in China are presented. A surprising gap in the volume is the absence of any discussion about the education systems in India or Brazil.

This collection is particularly valuable to those who often do not have time to read extensively in the education literature. The articles in aggregate present the range of topics that should be considered in dealing with many of the pressures that confront our sector. There is a good discussion of the evolution of the new quality control system emerging in Australia, a system (known by the acronym TEQSA) that is being studied by officials outside of Australia. There also is a useful presentation on governance issues emerging in Canada, where we have a higher education system that is very different from that in Australia, despite the many similarities in history and culture. For Canadians it is important to compare the Australian experience with Canada’s experience and ask why the Australian postsecondary education system is so different from ours. South America, especially Brazil, is rapidly emerging as the next set of major postsecondary systems to enter the international arena. The chapters in the section on Latin America cover a number of the pressure points being experienced in this rapid development, from internal politics to the efforts at fitting into international frameworks.

How does a public institution remain both independent, while also responding to the many mandates assigned by governments that contribute funds to the operations of the institution? This is a central question for the staff, students, and administration of an institution. The central contribution of this volume deals with this issue. Many parts of the public sector deal with this same question. Municipal government and secondary school systems have one set of responses. The structures of shared governance, or collegial governance, that define decision making in public postsecondary systems pose particular challenges in framing a response. A number of the articles in this collection touch on this critical issue.

How to respond and maintain independence? The suggestions in these articles range from exploring the role of the provost, to the warnings about the dire consequences of permitting further influence from the corporate world from entering the academy, to the relationship between the president and the board of governors/regents, to the role of faculty associations/unions. In my view the arguments vary in presentation from evidence-based arguments to an emotional plea for more authority being restored to the professoriate. What is missing is a clear definition of the university autonomy that we are trying to protect. Public institutions face many pressures. These pressures are very different from those confronting private institutions (see the chapter on QUEST, a private institution in British Columbia). In particular, Canadian institutions that continue to enjoy relatively high levels of operating support (especially compared to peers in the US and Australia) face a situation in which funding is being linked more and more to performance in areas such as commercialization of research. A common definition of independence would help organize the contributions of the various chapters. My personal favourite definition is that the academy must control who is taught, what is taught, and who does the teaching. It would be valuable to have the authors test their proposals against a more precise definition of autonomy.

The ability to remain independent is defined by the governance structure of the institution. In aggregate, this is the primary contribution of this collection. Whether a system is expanding or shrinking, the ability of the governance structures in place to protect the academy will define the institution's future. In the day-to-day struggle to meet operational demands, governance issues are often overlooked by central administration. Decisions, in my experience, are rarely passed through a lens of governance. Will an action being contemplated strengthen or weaken the ability of the institution to remain independent in core areas? Questions of governance and independence should be asked more frequently as public institutions become more engaged internationally. Answering such questions requires a deep understanding of the structures of our international partners and the views of our local supporting governments.

These articles provide a clear message of caution in an increasingly complicated world.✻