

Book Review / Compte rendu

Lane, J.E. & Johnstone, D.B. (Eds.) (2013). *Higher education systems 3.0: Harnessing systemness, delivering performance*. Albany: State University of New York Press. Pages: 323. \$34.15 CAD (paper).

Reviewed by Michael Buzzelli, Associate Professor, The University of Western Ontario and Alma Mater Studiorum-Universita di Bologna

Higher Education Systems 3.0 (2013) is published in the State University of New York (SUNY) series Critical Issues in Higher Education and is co-edited by Jason E. Lane and D. Bruce Johnstone. Jason Lane is Vice Provost for Academic Planning and Strategic Leadership and Senior Associate Vice Chancellor for the State University of New York. Bruce Johnstone is Distinguished Service Professor Emeritus of Higher and Comparative Education at the University at Buffalo, State University of New York, and former Chancellor of the State University of New York.

This edited volume grows out of the SUNY series conference held in November 2013 in New York City dedicated to examining "...the current status of higher education systems and what future role they could play to add value to the state they serve and the campuses of which they are comprised" (p. x). The reader quickly appreciates two distinguishing features of *Higher Education Systems 3.0*; first, that it focuses on higher education systems planning, broadly defined, which sets it apart from the institution-level case study and issue-specific coverage of most texts in the higher education library. Second, this volume is very US-focused: that is, it is aimed at the student of American higher education, and system administration and administrators especially.

That "systemness" and a US focus come together in *Higher Education Systems 3.0* is no surprise given the American state-system is still the most ambitious higher education project in history; the issues and challenges are equally important and complex across America's 51 multi-campus college/university systems in 38 states. The volume has thirteen chapters divided into three sections: the first section sets out the history

and definitions of systemness; the second focuses on planning issues such as system and (or versus) campus administration, governance, missions and finance; and the third focuses on special topics including academic affairs, human resources and internationalisation. Contributors represent a range of professional and administrative backgrounds from across the US though, like the editors, most are current or past public state-system administrators (Presidents, Chancellors, Provosts and Vice-Presidents) or associational administrators (such the National Association of System Heads).

The experience and position of the authors understandably imparts an authoritative and insightful air to their treatment of issues faced by (American) higher education, both generally and as it is seen through the systems they govern. For example, Jane V. Wellman describes the changing allocation of state resources toward systems in the context of fiscal constraints, growing tuition dependence, greater campus autonomy and the advent of performance- or outcomes-based budgeting. While “Systems have always had a prominent role in the acquisition and allocation of state resources...Primary attention is moving from acquisition and allocation of state funds to greater attention on resource management,...efficiency and effectiveness, and... balance between public needs and institutional capacity” (p. 101). In another example, David F. Shaffer discusses and compares the experiences of North Carolina, Georgia, Virginia and Massachusetts to guide the professional development of college staff. He writes that, collectively, “...as states strive to meet their workforce needs, they will increasingly turn to more ‘system’ direction for their community colleges systems. Culture and leadership, as much as formal legal controls, may be key to states’ ability to pursue new policies in [staff professional development]” (p. 237). And in a chapter that reaches substantially beyond US borders, Jason E. Lane discusses the advent of and system responses to internationalisation: “...the growing importance, and associated liabilities, of international activities has prompted a number of systems to create new programs and policies in [internationalisation]...” and he discusses “...five areas (i.e. planning, promotion, programs, policies and policing) in which systems are engaging in internationalization activities and discusses the associated tensions between the system and constituent campuses” (p. 261).

Although edited volumes can often be disparate collections, *Higher Education Systems 3.0* is, as suggested by these examples, tightly knit around a unifying theme: that of the tension between institutional autonomy and responsiveness to the needs of the state. Bruce Johnstone writes:

Public colleges and universities operate within a complex field of competing interests and authorities. Individual institutions and their campus heads attempt to maximize their state tax revenues, their prestige, and their freedom from external authority, whether from a system head, a system governing board, or the government. Faculty deans want much the same freedoms but seek their autonomy from their institutional administrations as well as external authorities. Moreover, university departments and individual faculty members seek autonomy from all of the aforementioned. (p. 75)

Though state systems can be governed and structured in different ways (broadly, segmented or comprehensive with nuances within each), we often see the same tensions between autonomy versus responsiveness in non-federated systems. Indeed, there are

shades of grey between federated and non-federated systems that include, for instance, regional flagship-and-branch-campus systems (e.g. University of Toronto) or the programme-based joint ventures (e.g. medical education) that have become more common in recent years. Thus, whatever the structure, the reader will find much to reflect on and compare with one's own institution in Canada or elsewhere.

Let us consider two brief examples and the questions they raise vis-à-vis US state-systems. The first is that of postsecondary sexual violence and assault discourses in several provinces. As reported by the *Globe and Mail* (Dhillon & Hunter, 2016), "The B.C. government has introduced a bill that will require every public postsecondary institution to develop a sexual-misconduct policy, a move that comes amid heightened concerns about the safety of young women on campus." Citing similar legislation in Ontario, the *Ottawa Citizen* (Crawford & Sandstrom, 2016) reported that "A dispute over the term 'rape culture' has set Carleton students and unions against university administrators as the school tries to rewrite its policy on sexual violence." This discourse has all the hallmarks of institutional autonomy in which the universities in their respective provincial systems are required to develop their own policies to satisfy their key stakeholder—their provincial funders—as well as their campus constituents. One wonders whether a provincial infrastructure (like a state system) could make such policy development more consistent. Given our diffuse, institution-by-institution approach, might the different policies lead to safer campuses here versus there? To human rights complaints or legal action over deficient policies at university X as compared with university Y?

A different kind of example is Ontario's recent strategic mandate agreement planning exercise, a process prompted by a tightening public purse in Ontario and a policy discourse that (a) views the province's baccalaureate university system as fiscally unsustainable (Clark et al., 2009) and (b) favours institutional differentiation as a solution (Ontario, 2012). For this planning exercise the Ministry of Training, Colleges and Universities required each university to submit strategic mandate agreement proposals (articulating institutional mission, credentials, pedagogies and curriculum) in September, 2012 (Ontario, 2012). Following assessments and negotiations, the final mandates were agreed to and signed by each PSE institution and the Ministry in 2014. The process by which the mandates will steer institutional vision, mission and, critically, funding in the universities is now unfolding. Here again we are prompted by the systemness perspective of *Higher Education Systems 3.0* to ask any number of questions about this planning exercise and the nature, extent and impact of strategic mandates on Ontario's institutions, its system as a whole and its role in serving the public good.

Katherine C. Lyall writes that "Higher education systems will change, whether by drift or design" (p. 127). Presumably she and other contributors to *Higher Education Systems 3.0* would proffer that state-system planning might offer a more deliberate approach to change in order to satisfy funders, students and their communities. Others might disagree. Whatever one's view, this book is an important read on higher education from voices of accomplished academic administrators. 🍁

References

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