

In all, while some of the book presents familiar material and ideas, often applying to an educational organization not fully comparable to Canada, there are also several sections which are of great value, particularly for social scientists engaged in research in higher education. There is more to recommend in this book than just its thorough approach to the subject.

John D. Dennison
Professor of Higher Education
The University of British Columbia

Robert Birnbaum, *Maintaining Diversity in Higher Education*. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass Publishers, 1983, 187 pp.

Institutional Diversity has been one of the ideological cornerstones of American higher education, and educators in the United States have taken great pride in having the most varied array of higher education institutions in the world. During the past decade or so, however, numerous concerns have been expressed that diversity is being steadily eroded, with unfortunate consequences for accessibility, relevance, and resilience of the higher education system.

Diversity is a difficult concept to measure or even to operationalize in a meaningful way, and research on this subject has been limited by observational difficulties. There is an almost unlimited number of institutional characteristics which could be considered when attempting to determine whether institutions are becoming more alike or more dissimilar, and indices of diversity may vary according to which characteristics are included in the analyses. Surprisingly, some studies of diversity have focussed upon just a few characteristics of institutions. After an incisive review of the literature on diversity and discussion of measurement problems, Professor Birnbaum settles on six characteristics: proprietary status (private, public, church controlled, etc.); highest level of degree or certificate awarded; programmatic concentration (liberal arts, professional, comprehensive, etc.); size; sex segregation; and minority status (predominantly white or non white). The categorization of these six variables provides 768 possible combinations for classifying institutions. In 1980, the 885 institutions in the eight states which Birnbaum studied occupied 138 of these 768 cells, compared to 614 institutions occupying 141 cells in 1960. According to all five indices of diversity which the author calculates, there has been a perceptible decline in diversity between 1960 and 1980.

If this book consisted solely of a report of the author's findings regarding measured diversity in eight states between 1960 and 1980, it would be of limited interest to Canadian readers. After all, diversity has not been a pre-eminent policy variable in Canadian higher education, and at least three of Birnbaum's six variables (proprietorship, sex, minority status) would be of little relevance in

studying diversity in Canadian higher education (indeed, almost all Canadian universities would show up in one or two of Birnbaum's 768 cells).

There are a few reasons which lead me to bring this book to the attention of Canadian readers. First, there is an excellent theoretical analysis of the competitive interaction of institutions of higher education with one another and with their own environments. In fact, one of the author's subsidiary purposes in writing this book is to challenge the dominance of the resource-dependence model in systems theory and in explaining organizational change, and to explore (as an alternative) the usefulness of the population ecology model. In so doing, he presents a very useful succinct summary of each model as well as a more convincing case for applying biological models to the study of social systems than I've seen elsewhere. Second, he presents one of the most comprehensive catalogues of the benefits of diversity – for institutions, systems, and society – that I have seen. One of these benefits that should be of particular interest to Canadians in these times of systemic cutbacks from the single dominant funding source for all institutions is that diverse systems are better able to withstand common environmental pressures (and catastrophes) simply because of the enormous variety involved in them. Third, Birnbaum provides an excellent policy recommendations chapter in which he identifies the types of policy approaches which are most conducive to maintaining diversity. Plumping consistently for reliance on the market, he expresses concerns about the movement toward system control and co-ordination in the United States, arguing that the concept of planned diversity is a contradiction in terms, and that central planning can lead only to consideration of fewer, not more, alternatives. Fifth, his presentation of methodology for comparing organizations along a multi-dimensional scale is exemplary (as is his writing), and he provides analytical tools (though, as noted, not the variables) which could be used for assessing diversity in Canadian higher education – subject to two concerns.

One of these is my concern as to whether anything so complex as diversity can reasonably be reduced to a half dozen discrete characteristics. Birnbaum acknowledges this issue, but soon comes down in support of numerical reductionism. That his findings are consistent with those (“critical analysts”) who have taken impressionistic approaches to this subject perhaps should give us more confidence in both types of approaches. At the same time, I can't help but feel that the business of generalizing about something so inherently subjective as “whether institutions are becoming more or less alike” involves philosophical questions with which the author's expeditious treatment does not adequately come to grips.

The second concern pertains to whether or not diversity is an issue of such significance in Canadian higher education as to warrant this type of analysis. Ultimately the usefulness of this book to Canadian researchers depends upon the value attached to diversity by educators and policy makers in Canada. As Peter Leslie (1980) has noted, the Canadian higher education system has been designed to emphasize minimum standards and approximate comparability of

degrees from one institution to another. As a result, we have not had to contend with the plethora of programs of questionable quality (or the need for institutional accreditation) as the Americans have or (as much as they) with the problems of hierarchical ordering of different degrees in the labour market. On the other hand, there is some concern that changing patterns of demography and societal needs could be addressed more effectively by a system that is characterized by more institutional differentiation. To a considerable degree, the Canadian system has tried to accommodate diverse social and labour market needs by increasing intra-institutional diversity, which, as Birnbaum notes, is negatively correlated with inter-institutional diversity. Regarding the alternative of increased generalization within institutions, Birnbaum cites the Carnegie Commission's judgment that (in the United States at least) "differentiation of structures can better lead to differentiation of treatment than can the combination of all functions within a single structure". Even if the latter should be deemed the most appropriate strategy for Canada, the capability of having many institutions respond to the same diverse set of societal needs is being eroded rapidly by underfunding. In recognition of this fact, co-ordinating boards have been encouraging greater institutional differentiation. However, there are strong systemic forces against institutional differentiation in Canada (including other actions of co-ordinating boards). If differentiation is to become a major goal in Canada, a re-thinking and re-formulation of higher education policies at the highest levels of policy making is required. Also required would be some solid research on diversity in Canadian higher education, using variables that are appropriate to the Canadian scene. Professor Birnbaum's book would be a useful primer for such research, as well as a highly readable stimulus to discussion of the appropriate role of diversity in Canadian higher education.

Michael L. Skolnik
University of Toronto, OISE

REFERENCE

Leslie, P.M. *Canadian Universities 1980 and Beyond*, AUCC Policy Study No. 3 (Ottawa: Association of Universities and Colleges of Canada), September, 1980.

Norman P. Uhl, (Ed.), *Using Research for Strategic Planning*. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass Publishers, Inc., 1983, 106 pp.

This brief volume is the 37th in the quarterly paperback "New Directions in Institutional Research" sourcebook series published by Jossey-Bass. The publisher currently offers seven such series. The particular series represented by this book was one of the first established by Jossey-Bass nearly a decade ago in conjunction with the Association for Institutional Research. The Association regards this series