COMPREHENSIVE UNIVERSITIES?

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In a crisp and stimulating paper* read at the 1980 Conference of HERDSA, and reported in the Australian Higher Education Supplement on May 7, 1980, Dr. Ron Parry (1) commented that the decision of the Tasmanian Government to hand over a major part of its activities to the Hobart Branch of the Tasmanian College of Advanced Education to the University of Tasmania highlighted the failure of the Committee to comprehend the instability of the Martin binary principles. (2) predicted that the Tasmanian system would soon be copied elsewhere in Australia, (3) warned against such measures without first contemplating the role of the TAFE, and (4) threw out for debate a suggestion that States might create new types of institution to replace their TAFE colleges, and the universities that decided to go “comprehensive” in order to survive to deal with the problems of rationalisation.

I think that Dr. Parry overestimated the significance of the Tasmanian decision. The Kearney Committee recommended that the University should have the major responsibility for tertiary education in the south and the CAE in the North. The recent decision to go a little further became unavoidable because the original Tasmanian TEC — the University undertook “to provide all the features of teacher education required in the South” and in particular “an integrated B.ED. course”. It does not seem to me that because of this, to quote Dr. Parry, the Government of Tasmania “in one crisp decision over-turned the framework of our national dialogue on the nature of higher education and the relationships between the two”. Dr. Parry placed great emphasis on the University’s decision to describe itself as a “comprehensive university” and to offer some sub-degree courses. But I am not certain the University will become a “comprehensive university” on misleading and should be abandoned. The University is and will remain a much less comprehensive university than the Universities of Sydney, Melbourne and Queensland. The two significant changes in Tasmania are (1) a sharper geographical specialisation between the University and the CAE and (2) the decision of the University to take over a small number of sub-degree programs, and neither is at all revolutionary.

Sub-degree programs were common practice in universities before the Universities Commission adopted the view of the Murray and Martin Committees that universities should abandon them. The Williams Committee pointed to the success of some CAEs in providing TAFE courses without losing their “integrity” and of some TAFE colleges in providing advanced education courses without losing interest in “lower level” courses, and suggested that some universities introduce or re-introduce sub-degree courses (for up to 20% of enrolments) where that would lead to more economical operations and or an extension of educational opportunities. The Committee suggested the use of “contracting across the sectors” to provide a co-ordinating role.

It is intriguing that Dr. Parry regards the Tasmanian decision as contrary to the Williams Committee's analysis and recommendations whereas — subject to one reservation — I take the opposite view. My reservation in applauding the Tasmanian development relates to the possible response of the Federal Government to the move. Dr. Parry maintained that after Deakin “the binary philosophy could never be the same again in Australia”. Deakin bulked large in CAE submissions to the Committee of Inquiry into Education and Training, and the sudden change in course-approvals procedures and in levels of finance when a university is created to replace the Teachers College and the Gordon Institute of Technology was submitted as evidence that the binary approach simply perpetuated the same problems. For institutions called universities, that view would be strengthened by the basic binary approach weakened if the University of Tasmania created a significant number of sub-degree programs and admitted a significant number of students to them, but the TEC treated the degrees and diploma programs at the University as covered by the normal procedures and financial formula of the Universities Council.

I agree of course with Dr. Parry that post-secondary boards in other States should not rush to copy Tasmania without considering the type of TAFE — nor would I add without a careful study of the action rather than the rhetoric in Tasmania.

The Evolution of Statewide Boards

By all historical and comparative standards, most Australian higher education institutions have moved relatively quickly to give their students immediate access to their credit in higher education. Given a primary role by virtue of history and the U.S. Constitution, the States, from some early colonial support for private colleges to the emergence of large public systems over the past hundred years, have invested vast sums of public tax money to support wider access, greater diversity, and enhanced quality. Of course, many close to higher education will immediately protest this generalisation, and point to lingering vestiges in the States of its commitment to higher education. This is particularly true with the rise of diversity, and to assorted signs of the decline of diversity, and to assorted evidence of the threats to academic standards.

Yet for those who will put things in perspective, either historically or in terms of higher education systems abroad, the overall verdict must be that, by and large, the States have done well. This is particularly true when another important variable is added to the picture. For most of the time in the States, there have been no significant signs of the decline of diversity, and to assorted signs of the decline of diversity, and to assorted evidence of the threats to academic standards.

Normally instrumentalities of state governments were required to operate under fairly tight financial controls in order to ensure that their activities and expenditure were approved by the State Parliament. In most states, the power to public institutions was only granted through amendments to the State’s Constitution or state legislation. When the States began to found public universities, however, they were not subject to the same financial controls that the State Parliament set up for its own activities. Each University was able to raise its own funds, and in most cases, the States agreed to provide a grant of a fixed amount. The expansion of institutions that led to wider access, greater diversity, and enhanced quality was not the result of a policy of the States to provide funds to support wider access, greater diversity, and enhanced quality.

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1. Twenty-three states give some form of constitutional recognition to higher education whereas few state departments, other than constitutional offices, are so recognised.

2. Forty states confer corporate powers on their highest educational boards (few other departments have this power).

3. Elections or appointments of board members are for a longer period than for most public offices, and it is often specified that selection of board members be on a nonpolitical basis.

4. Many boards have been given direct borrowing power rarely given to state divisions.

5. Many are given power to appoint treasurers and select their own depositories and disburse funds, especially institutional funds, directly—a condition very rare in other state agencies.

6. Many higher education boards are given wide discretion and in many instances complete autonomy on policy matters, such as admission requirements, curriculum requirements, programmes, courses, and degrees to be offered.

7. Almost all states leave to the higher education boards full authority over all matters relating to academic and professional personnel.

8. Most states require more or less complete personnel reporting in connection with the budget but leave final determination to the boards after the appropriation is made. Few boards are given complete authority over administrative and clerical personnel other than the highest administrative position.

A major difference from the private sector after the Dartmouth College Case in 1819 was that except for those instances where such legal arrangements were put in place, college boards were granted the power to public institution governing boards could later be altered by mere state legislation. And, of course, even state constitution provisions could be amended, albeit with greater difficulty. The impressive thing is that, given the pressures which emerged, so many essentials of the self-denying ordinance survived as long as they did in so many states as they did.

Let us examine now the ways in which the increasing size, cost and complexity of higher education and other state government activities over the past 100 years or so have ultimately caused nearly all states to modify the self-denying ordinance.

The Emergence of Complexity

When, in a given state, there was only one state university, its lay board could police the governor and state legislatures on what programmatic and fiscal policies they considered to be in the best interests of both the university and the state. Student...
numbers were so low, the costs involved were so relatively modest and curriculum issues in the early days of classical studies were so straightforward that no major conflicts emerged between the existing state university and state government could be worked out on a direct bilateral basis. The trustees, after all, had been appointed precisely because of their ability to include a concern for the public interest in their deliberations. Furthermore, such trustees often had strong political connections with the governor.

But the century following the Civil War witnessed basic changes in several aspects of American life which were ultimately to have major impact on higher education. The economy gradually shifted from agricultural to industrial; society similarly moved from rural to urban; state governments left behind laissez-faire for extensive regulatory and welfare activities; and the national government grew in power and functions even more than the states. Responding to these changes, higher education developed from an elite to a mass system (now poised on the brink of universal access). The curriculum was broadened, more students were attracted and both diversity and costs increased.

State problems with higher education were not confined merely to appropriating adequate funds to provide the necessary facilities for student access, as difficult as the money problem was. In addition, many questions arose about the desirability of the state university and land-grant college beginning to overlap in programs of normal schools evolving toward university status, about the educational rationale for two-year institutions becoming four-year ones. In these various issues, the device of traditional lay trustees was something less than totally effective in helping the state to resolve them. The same "boosterism" or "marketing" as the "Wisconsin idea" at Madison by President Van Hise. The resulting richness of programme has been well described.

Universities began extensive research programmes in the physical and biological sciences; provided new service programmes in agriculture, medicine, and dentistry; and increased course offerings in almost all previously existing academic fields. Land-grant colleges began to extend their programmes into academic and professional disciplines which had traditionally been offered only by the state university. Another layer of complexity resulted from the spread of normal schools, speeded by state moves to consolidate them into university tuition, speeded by state moves to consolidate them into state universities, or expanded by expansion into doctoral level work occasionally permitted.

Another major source of growth and diversity has been this American commercial movement. Curersing particularly to urban areas relatively neglected by earlier established universities and colleges, the junior colleges, beginning with Illinois in 1919, new groups of young people, who could not meet the admission standards of some four-year institutions and who could not afford to attend college unless they lived at home. As time passed, these institutions also broadened their functions and became "community colleges" where college transfer, two-year technical and adult education programs were all combined. Although these institutions began as products of local government, problems of funding, planning and co-ordination gradually brought them more and more into the statewide orbit as well.

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There are clearly a variety of forces, both internal and on board decisions. There is some 46 states have either designated their existing allocations from an 4c. 2c. 4c. 3a. 3b. 3c. 3d. 4c.

"What's excellent viewed from an evening; free to combat excesses of centralisation. We ask ourselves, "What is left on campus to govern?" almost as if to invite a cynical response, in mood of exhaustion, a president is tempted to say that he is left with all the distasteful tasks of governance; to divide a slavation budget equitably, to patch a restless student body, to telephone the Mayor or Governor or National Guard to quell the streetiers, to mediate intramural controversies, and to put a far face on the disaster of a losing athletic team. However, as John Gardner has so often emphasised, these large systems within which we spend our working lives contain much more elbow room for personal initiative than we dare admit, especially to ourselves.

So what's left to govern? Just about everything.

• The lump sum appropriation is fairly common; we have the necessary legal freedom to alter priorities in the division of resources.

• Faculty and deans and vice presidents are not hired or fired by super-boards; this is our sweet privilege.

• The humane and efficient management of our dormitory systems is our task alone; no super-board in its right mind would have it otherwise.

• The initiative for seeking research grants, foundation largesse, and private fund raising is exclusively ours.

• The demotion of loafing coaches is everyone's interest but the exclusive burden of the president and/or the trustees.

• The organisation of curricula and of courses of instruction is still our domain, as are methods of evaluation and the direct measurement of student performance.

• We are free to reorganise our administrative structure, consolidate departments, create centres and institutes, plan programmes, and join in inter-institutional co-operative ventures.

• As for the tenure system, this brier patch is ours to cultivate, to trim, and join in. Perhaps the best way to illustrate this diminished but still essential role is to quote at some length from an excellent article by Harold Enarson, a President of Ohio State University. In a 1974 address to the American Association for Higher Education on "What's Left on Campus to Govern?", he said:

"In the university world we have watched this accumulation of external authority over the life of the university in many ranging from vague disquiet to near despair. Recently we have witnessed an acceleration in the imposition of external controls. All this has created a literature that is rich with the language of lamentation. We speak sadly of outside intervention, of intrusions into internal affairs, of the erosion of autonomy, of the homogenisation of higher education, of the excesses of centralisation. We lay full claim to the pejorative phrase, and saturate our arguments with emotive words such as red tape, bureaucracy, politicisation, and the like. We're shining, in most of us bring to the new scene the fine

We speak about institutional insignificance, the neglect of constituencies and communities, the fair pricing of education, and the balanced development of all the constituent units that make up a state system. Both the university and the state system agencies are accountable to the public through their elected representatives. If the state agency "intrudes" in institutional affairs, as it frequently does, it is also true that the university may "intrude" in the domain of the state agency by actions that conflict with public obligations imposed on the state agency. Put simply, any unbridled provincialism on the part of the university is as threatening to the public interest as is the desire of state agencies to police universities for the sake of control itself.

Plainly the task ahead is to develop consultative relationships that bring the legitimate concerns of the individual institution to the legitimate concerns of state agencies into shared perspectives. Warfare is too costly. Moreover, in most states both the universities and the state higher education agency share — at the deepest level of conviction — those multiple goals symbolised by words such as equity, efficiency, economy, and accountability, and the like. Our conflicts — intense and passionate as they may seem to the public — are not so great. Rather they are over quarrels by persons who see things differently but who unite in a common conviction that the higher education system has only one real concern and responsibility. Put still another way, some state control of public higher education is inescapable just as some substantial degree of fiscal dependence is unavoidable. Our collective task is to make a planned 'mesh of things.' Wars of manoeuvre are poor substitutes for responsible, creative statesmanship.
Perhaps we have more freedom, even with all the constraints, than we have the talent, courage and imagination to exercise.

We are free to enforce the "no-smoking" signs in the classroom, to require full work for full pay, to equate teaching loads, to police the manifest abuses of our grading systems, to improve space utilisation by using late afternoon hours for instruction, to recruit minorities (at least for the present) and even to expel star athletes who flunk Physical Education 101.

So what else is left to govern? Only educational policy in virtually every aspect — that's all.

• We can despair in the face of the dreary statistics on the new depression in higher education, or we can change those educational policies and practices which deny working people of all ages equal access to educational opportunity and deny ourselves the market that we need to sustain enrolments.

• We can deplore the current emphasis on career training as the triumph of mere vocationalism, or we can fashion much improved classroom instruction.

• We can lament that educational standards and requirements for a baccalaureate degree, or we can work-study experiences. There is simply no good reason why the world of work should be impoverished with an insistence on rigid and inflexible intellectual training as the triumph of mere vocationalism, or we can cherish our few remaining overseas enrollments.

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Public Control

Institutional Independence

Financial and Business Affairs

Academic and Intellectual Affairs

Academic Affairs — Innovation

Influence but not Public Control

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Function

Levels of Decision for Higher Education Functions

Elements in the System

State Government

Coordination Element

Governance Element

Institution

System

Organizational Structure

Programme Allocation

Budget Development

Fiscal Policies

Programme Content

Personal Selection

Planning

Evaluating the Results

I

Evaluating the Results

Ideally, when all the sorting out of powers is completed and the agreed system has been operational for an adequate time, there would be some way to evaluate the way it all works.

The ECS Task Force on Comprehensive Statewide Planning for Postsecondary Education+ recommended that in addition to thinking conceptually about long-range planning in both strategic and tactical terms, efforts should be made periodically to establish an independent evaluation of the process itself, not encumbered with efforts to rethink substance as such.

Only one state — Alabama — now has provisions for formal outside evaluation every four years. But evaluation is very much a "blooming in the wind" these days and I predict the formal process will become more common — via such legislative innovations as
the so-called “sunset” laws (e.g., all Colorado state agencies must pass scrutiny and be recreated every so many years) by other more specifically higher education approaches.

At the level of the governing board, Gil Patridge of the Berkeley Center is now working with the Association of Governing Boards to develop board self-evaluation kits for trustees at public four-year, private four-year and public two-year colleges. So it may soon be possible for board members to use carefully designed instruments to see if they are living up to their challenges. Of course, would press strongly to include several self-evaluation questions concerning board relations with the statewide co-ordinating board. Here I don’t want to be misunderstood: there is nothing in my training as a political scientist that tells me it will be possible—or even desirable—to set up structures and seek personalities wherein all differences and conflicts between governing boards and a state-wide board relationship can be made to disappear. There will always be areas where differences in constituencies, in perspectives and in perceived interests will—and should—lead to vigorous disagreement over given issues in postsecondary education. A co-ordinating board is no more infallible than other social institutions, and it needs strong and articulate institutions as healthy counterpressures. But, given some goodwill of the kind expressed by Harold Enerson, open decision-making procedures, accurate data gathering and no small degree of statesmanship, it should be possible to confine the disagreements to non-pathological levels.

The Carnegie Commission recommended that some national agencies like the American Council on Education (ACE) create with the addition of significant lay participation an equivalent operation to the AUP Committee which investigates allegations of abuses of academic freedom. The ACE counterpart would have been on call to examine alleged cases of abuse of controls. ACE has not moved to implement this recommendation (the prospect of trying to apply sanctions to guilty states may have been too perplexing), Roger Heyns, President of the ACE, did send out a letter on January 6, 1976, announcing that his organization would establish panels of qualified persons who would then be available to visit a state where relations between the central board and institutions had become badly strained. The invited observer(s) would then do their best to restore the necessary working relationships.

In the light of the severe challenges which face postsecondary education over the next decade, let us hope that most of these co-ordinating/governing board relationships will stay healthy—or that when they deteriorate dangerously, they can be quickly restored. Anything other than that and we shall end up as civil servants of the state, and no one that knows thinks higher education can prosper in that context.**

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ACCOUNTABILITY AND AUTONOMY: A CROSS-NATIONAL ANALYSIS OF RECENT TRENDS

If misery loves company, then Australian academics disturbed over State encroachments on university autonomy might take some solace from cross-national comparisons. State power over higher education has been growing throughout much of the world. Increased dependence on government funds, increased accountability, increased mandated inter-institutional co-ordination—these and other common Australian themes are being widely played out in different variations. The balance between State control and university autonomy stands at the heart of this salient question, cross-nationally, in the politics of higher education.

This essay focuses on the changing relationship between the State and the university. It obviously provides no more than a brief overview, if it analyses the trend toward greater direct accountability to the State than it uses some common comparisons of the fate of institutional autonomy.

Direct Accountability

Universities today being held accountable more than previously to the idea that they should serve the public interest directly. The notion that the university best serves the public interest, by pursuing its own goals directly, has fallen upon relatively hard times. So has the related notion that sufficient accountability is insured through free market mechanisms. The rationale of the first is that students, professors, and university administrators are the best able to set the way to making goods, by teaching and research. Good teaching and research then benefit society-at-large. The rationale of the second is that the market competition satisfies student and professor choice, and thereby fosters institutional responsiveness, administrative and curricular innovativeness, and institutional flexibility. Thus efficacy and excellence are ensured, demands met. But both rationales are laced with the rationale for direct accountability to the State—that the State has a responsibility actively to pursue the public interest when it spends the public dollar. While these rationales often co-exist in different degrees, the last is ascendancy and most requires elaboration.

Size is a key factor. The enrolment boom following the Second World War signalled the end of the traditional, elitist university, not just in many of the more developed countries but even in some of the less developed. Bigger enrolments mean bigger expenditures, and bigger accountability to a wider body. Bigger enrolments mean bigger accountability to a wider body. Bigger expenditures, as the Robbins Committee in England (1965) or Martin Committee in Australia (1964-5) argued, justify more direct State activity. Government expenditures generally have risen, not just in absolute but even in proportional terms so that many universities have come to rely increasingly on public revenues. Higher education claims significantly greater shares of the public dollar, even of the enlarged public education dollar, than previously. Such trends are familiar to Australians, who have seen university income evolve from a government-endowment-fuelled mix to a near government monopoly, while higher education's share of the GNP more than doubled from the early 1960s to the mid-1970s.** Heightened university dependence on government funds is generalisable to many nations (Canada, Great Britain, the U.S.) where mixed public-private funding had been characteristic. And skying over government expenditure has occurred, not just in these nations but in the traditionally State-oriented ones in which public funding has already been the rule for some time. Moreover, if bigger enrolments and expenditures have been accompanied by greater accountability to the State, so has retrenchment! The argument is that scarcity makes direct protection of the public interest all the more imperative.

Universities are now held directly accountable to contribute to a wide variety of social, economic and political goals—some of which their governments themselves did not pursue actively. Roger Heyns, President of the ACE, did send out a letter on January 6, 1976, announcing that his organization would establish panels of qualified persons who would then be available to visit a state where relations between the central board and institutions had become badly strained. The invited observer(s) would then do their best to restore the necessary working relationships. In the light of the severe challenges which face postsecondary education over the next decade, let us hope that most of these co-ordinating/governing board relationships will stay healthy—or that when they deteriorate dangerously, they can be quickly restored. Anything other than that and we shall end up as civil servants of the state, and no one that knows thinks higher education can prosper in that context.**