

Feature: The future of work in higher education

Changing discourses and practices of academic work¹

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Abstract

This paper describes a number of "ideal types" or models of academic work and makes links between these models and changing conceptions of the roles of universities. Given that institutional change has been a significant feature of higher education in Australia (and elsewhere), an attempt is made to analyse the models in terms of Raymond Williams' notions of 'residual', 'dominant' and 'emergent' discourses and practices. The real and potential impacts of changes on the nature of academic work varied considerably across universities and across discipline areas/faculties within universities as higher education in Australia moved from a binary system, to a unified national system, then to a looser "system" of quasi-autonomous marketised/privatised institutions. It is argued that it is no longer possible for any one model of academic work to stake a claim for hegemony as universities 'no longer embody plural, but compatible, uses but starkly different representations, or meanings, which cannot be integrated satisfactorily' (Scott, 1995, p.3). Despite this situation, it will be argued the academic as sui generis still holds considerable sway as discourse. The paper concludes by briefly speculating on the forms of academic work which are likely to be associated with various sites in universities in the short to medium term. It suggests that continuing differentiation within the academic profession will see a variety of discourses and practices operating throughout internally disparate institutions within a diverse "system".

Introduction

Institutional change has been a significant feature of higher education in Australia for at least the last decade. Most notable in this regard was the abolition of the binary system of colleges of advanced education (CAEs) and universities and the establishment of a "unified national system" (UNS) consisting of thirty-six large institutions all having university status. In addition to the structural

changes, such as amalgamations, which this transition entailed, there were also changes in the ways in which universities were financed, governed and managed and a change in research funding towards a more competitive model. The creation of the UNS consolidated the move towards mass higher education in Australia, but in a context of increased reluctance of governments to fully fund public activities and instead to move towards user pays models and to encourage the institutions to raise monies from other, private sources. Most recently, the 1996 Commonwealth Budget of the new Coalition Government increased (again) the costs of higher education for students and expanded (again) the need and ability of universities to raise funds from non-government sources. It is not sufficient therefore to depict these developments as simply a move from an elite to mass system - though it is surely that in the size of the age cohort now participating in higher education - they are more accurately depicted as a reconstituting of elite and mass features within and across the institutions comprising the quasi-privatised UNS (cf Scott, 1995).

Both the earlier and recent changes called into question more traditional understandings of the roles of higher education and the nature of academic work (O'Brien, 1992). As such, they generated a number of critiques (e.g. Harman and Meek, 1988; Junor and O'Brien, 1989; Penington, 1990; Hunter et al., 1991; Smyth, 1995a), many of which expressed concern about the potentially deleterious effects of the changes.

In this paper a number of "ideal types" of academic work are identified, namely academic *sui generis*, academic as professional (state, market and corporate), and academic as worker.² The discourses (ideological dimensions) and practices (empirical dimensions) of these ideal types are linked with particular conceptions of the roles of universities in the context of an Australian higher education policy regime which has moved from the old, largely government funded binary system, through the

Dawkins creation of a partially privatised UNS³, to the current Coalition model of an even more extensively privatised and marketised “system” of “quasi-autonomous” universities.

These ideal types of academic work are analysed in terms of Raymond Williams’ (1980, 1981) concepts of ‘residual’, ‘dominant’ and ‘emergent’ discourses and practices. Williams’ approach is tied in with an essentially progressivist account of history which links these discourses and practices to wider social relations⁴. Our usage here is more modest. We simply use the terms to refer to the degree to which a practice is pervasive and the discourse associated with it is attractive to academics. As will be seen, however, the links between the coherence and power of the discursive features of a particular category and the pervasiveness of the practices associated with it are problematic. Also of interest are the ways in which these differing discourses and practices interact with each other. The situation of academic work now appears to be one in which a plethora of discourses/practices are playing off against each other. We argue that, given the fragmentation both within individual institutions and across the putative higher education “system”, this situation of multiplicity is likely to continue. However, at the level of discourse, it appears that the *sui generis* model remains most attractive to academics, despite the apparent disjunction between it and the reality of practice. We begin by considering this *sui generis* model.

The academic *sui generis*

Traditionally, within the Enlightenment view, the roles of the university and the nature of academic work were seen as indivisible: academics saw themselves as the university. A university was a site, as the Murray Report (1957, p. 11) put it, where people ‘seek the truth, and make it known’. Society had a vested interest in supporting such institutions because the disinterested pursuit of knowledge was the basis of social progress — to interfere with this pursuit was to block the course of progress. As noted by A.H. Halsey (1995, p. 40), Thorstein Veblen was perhaps the most forceful exponent of this model:

For Veblen the possibility of a university was rooted in universal human nature as ‘the instinct of workmanship’ and the impulse to ‘Idle Curiosity’. These impulses, he held, gave rise to esoteric knowledge... and therefore to a custodial function for a ‘select body of adepts or specialists — scientists, scholars, savants...’

Veblen wrote in the early years of this century but as recently as 1995, in post-Dawkins Australian universities, nine senior Australian academics were moved to write to the weekly higher education newspaper, *Campus Review* to assert that universities were ‘the institutional embodiment of the disinterested pursuit of truth’ (Miller, et al., 1995, p. 9) and to castigate the National Tertiary Educa-

tion Industry Union (NTEU) for failing to comprehend this. This contribution is particularly interesting in that the authors included academics working in disciplines such as financial studies, information sciences, and management⁵ — which are not “pure research” areas typically identified with the traditional university. Indeed, they are intimately linked to the efficient and effective working of both private and public sectors, that is, they have a clearly instrumental character. Furthermore, most of the authors were academics in universities formed by amalgamations of former CAEs, institutions which had no specific tradition of elite research/scholarship.

As Scott (1995, p. 143) notes in relation to “pure” science, the construction of academic work as the disinterested pursuit of truth has implications for the ways in which it should be supported:

The funding and organisation of science were regarded as public responsibilities... Practically, science had to be largely funded from public sources because pure science... was by definition pre-social and pre-commercial... Beneficiaries, and so contributors to its costs, could not be accurately identified in advance. In any case, premature identification was considered undesirable for reasons of fundamental principle. The best science, which produced the most successful innovation, was likely to be produced within an open and therefore disinterested environment which encouraged curiosity and creativity. The state was best able to provide such an environment, although as guardian of the public interest not as a direct or proxy customer for research “services”... It was also important that the professional autonomy of scientists should be similarly guaranteed, because their collective expertise validated good science.

The academic in this model is constructed as ‘nothing but intellectual’ with a ‘world-rejecting ethos’ (Hunter, 1994, p. 99). The academic *sui generis* exists ‘outside economic exigencies and beyond the limits of accountability’ (Symes, 1996, p.135). Veblen’s position, with its absolute rejection of a utilitarian role for universities (he opposed the location of professional schools in universities) expresses this view in its purest form, but it is also reflected in statements such as Halsey’s (1995, p. 184) defence of pure science: ‘that utility sometimes results... is desirable and encouraging, but not essential to the case’. Furthermore, as noted above, the ideals of disinterested inquiry are asserted even by academics working in areas and institutions where social utility is an indispensable part of the *raison d’être*.

Nevertheless, despite its hegemony amongst academics, in the wider community this discourse was never strong enough in its own right to secure the degree of closure university-based intellectuals sought. The conditions of its practice depend, as Halsey (1995, p.135)

reminds us, on 'social scarcity' (i.e. on elite rather than mass provision of higher education) and on state sponsorship and funding. In order to secure this sponsorship and funding, it was always necessary to assert the utilitarian as well as transcendental benefits of higher education. As Halsey (1995, pp. 16-18) notes, an expansionary impulse, based on notions of social utility, has long co-existed with the exclusionary impulse. The binary system in Australia, which directed from the sixties some of the growth in higher education - purportedly in those areas with a more utilitarian focus - away from universities, can be seen as an attempt to balance, as well as quarantine, exclusionary and expansionary impulses.

Implicitly if not explicitly, the academic *sui generis* model privileges research over teaching or other activities as the *sine qua non* of academic work. Notwithstanding that Newman (1912), who is usually seen as a seminal writer in this tradition, placed teaching at the centre of the university, it is research which is seen to define a "real academic" (cf Lingard et al, 1994). As Mahony (1995, p. 107) notes, this was manifested during the transition in Australia from a binary to unified system of higher education by statements from 'the AVCC... and influential spokespersons... that the creation of the new order should not be at the expense of research, as a primary delineating function of the university'.

It could be argued that the model of academic *sui generis* presents as an example of an ideologically dominant discourse undergoing residualisation. It has roots in the nature of academic research within the pure sciences and perhaps also the arts and humanities. Within these areas, the assertion that the disinterested and curiosity-driven pursuit of truth was the central feature of academic work represented at best a highly idealised portrayal of reality. In other areas the match with epistemologies and actual practice was even more tenuous. This was evident for those who wished to see it, even under the binary system. Nevertheless, because the model was constructed as in essence pre-social, the mismatch between it and practice was clearly not fatal to its discursive appeal. The credibility of the model was also aided by the existence of the binary system, which *in theory* consigned the more nakedly utilitarian (and less prestigious) functions of higher education to the CAE sector.

A major theme of recent writings on higher education has been the undermining of the practical conditions which make plausible the *sui generis* model, namely, less public and more private funding, more students, fewer full-time staff, competitive research funding and so on. As higher education engaged more with society, one increasingly based on knowledge as commodity, as access to higher education expanded and more areas of endeavour were incorporated as academic disciplines, as the certainties of modernist Enlightenment epistemolo-

gies were challenged, the claim of academics to arcane knowledge and pristine work practices, as expressed by Veblen, became somewhat less plausible.

The status of the model at present is, however, considerably greater than simply that of an historical artefact.⁶ Its remarkable imperviousness to empirical invalidation is made possible because, as Habermas (quoted in Hunter, 1994, p.165) suggests, the idea of the university is constructed as 'something universal, something prior to the pluralisation of social life forms'. Harman (quoted in Becher, 1994, p.152) is almost certainly referring to this when she notes of the University of Melbourne that from a 'babel of conflicting voices, divergent interests and divided loyalties, were aspects of a common culture which encapsulated a deeply entrenched, "unwritten" occupational ethos'. The hegemony of the academic *sui generis* model is also reflected in Mahony's (1995, p. 87) finding in relation to the UNS:

While official expectations were for a more diverse higher education system, influenced by the legacies of the former CAE system and those of the former binary universities, the college legacy is not perceived to be notably significant in the new order... The values of the new higher education institutions are regarded as being neither highly adaptive nor pluralistic.

Indeed this "academic creep" preceded the abolition of the binary. Even in the absence of work conditions such as smaller teaching loads and extra research infrastructural funding enjoyed by university academics, the academic *sui generis* model provided a discourse for the aspirations of many CAE academics. The keenness of the former CAEs to adopt the trappings of the former binary universities is but one indication that the force of the model derives from something more than nostalgia and time-honoured norms and practices. Another indication is the fact that the institutions which appear to have fared best following the creation of the UNS are the former elite universities with which the academic *sui generis* model is most closely associated. However, even within "elite" sections of universities, the academic *sui generis* model continually runs up against changes in the character of academic work, such as complex and disparate career and work patterns, diverse pay conditions including varying security of employment, and differing balances of teaching, research and publication. Furthermore, and not withstanding the comments of Mahony cited above, these institutions have themselves experienced a reverse "applied creep", taking up opportunities to interface with the commercial/industrial world. Finally and relevant to both academic and applied forms of creep, is the apparent ability of the *sui generis* discourse to accommodate, adapt to, inform, transform and be transformed by a variety of practices far removed from the traditional humanities and sciences.

Whereas the *sui generis* model of academic work stakes its claim to privilege on the basis of superior knowledge alone, the notion of academic as professional stakes a claim on the basis of knowledge which is putatively both superior and *useful*. There are perhaps three models of academic as professional: the academic as state professional, the academic as market professional and the academic as corporate professional⁷. Each is next considered in turn.

The academic as state professional

Academic work shares features with what might be called state-based bureaucratic professions (or somewhat condescendingly, semi-professions), such as school teaching and nursing. This largely non-market strand of the academic activity defines itself as being 'about freely circulating scientific research and social criticism as public goods' (Marginson, 1995, p. 33), as well as the delivery of services such as teaching. Such activity has been depicted as more about the reproduction and dissemination of knowledge, rather than its production through research and scholarship. This assertion is arguable; at least some state workers are clearly involved in the production of knowledge (eg CSIRO scientists).⁸

In Australia, most academics work in public institutions - though these might now be styled "quasi-public" as universities are forced more and more into the marketplace of monies rather than of ideas. Academics are specifically state workers who have benefited from their location within the state, that is, as noted above, the autonomy of university academics is owed to a significant degree to state funding and sanctioning. This state sanctioning is due in part to the role that universities and academics play in the reproduction of culture. It is also due, however, to the struggles which have occurred relating to the role of the state itself in capitalist societies. State sanctioning and struggles within and for the state have created "spaces" for autonomous academic practice. Academics have, however, also seen and experienced state intervention as a threat to their professional autonomy.

The ideology of the state professional is one of 'public service' and, as Weber described, is technical/rational in orientation and ethos, typically manifesting itself in bureaucratic organisational structures. The public institutions in which academics work are bureaucratic organisations which stand in relation to other government bureaucracies, but bureaucratic structures with their emphasis upon hierarchy rather than collegiality have been regarded by academics as anathema to autonomous practice. Additionally, the public service ethos of state professionalism raises questions in relation to the nature of academic responsibility to "the public" and to government, and about the ways in which academics are affected by or implicated in government policy.

The growth of higher education and the progressive extension of government intervention in this sector can be seen as contributing to the increasing bureaucratisation of academic life - or, as Campion and Renner (p. 75) put it, to 'the domestication of the university'. Nevertheless, bureaucratic modes of operation have always formed a part of academic work. Additionally, academics have regularly asserted that governments ought to have an interest in higher education and have courted their attention as a means of encouraging these governments to provide greater funding. These assertions have emphasised the utilitarian (public service) purposes of universities, including, for example, their potential contribution to social and economic planning and resource allocation⁹. Recently, however, the model of academic as state professional has been undermined in the transition to the UNS, where the onslaught of corporate managerialism and marketisation have altered the objective conditions of academic work which could be seen as reflecting it.

In summary, the model of academic as state professional has long reflected the reality of at least some aspects of academic work and, indeed, it can be argued that it was the dominant paradigm of academic work *practice* in the old CAE sector; that is, it reflected much more accurately the conditions of work (eg bureaucratic rather than collegial decision-making, less individual autonomy, less focus on research and less distance from government policy) for most academics located there than did the academic *sui generis* model. Furthermore, aspects of the public service ideology have informed the rhetoric of those who sought public support for higher education even in the university sector, but this discourse of service did not provide as sound a basis for the claim to autonomous practice as did the *sui generis* model. Unlike the *sui generis* model, therefore, it was not an ideologically attractive model to academics themselves. Despite the fact that the collective service ethos implicit in the state professional model stands in contrast to the individualistic and commercial values which have informed changes to higher education in the 1980s and 1990s, it was essentially ignored by academics as a potential basis for resistance to these changes. Thus, despite the fact that it accurately depicted certain features of academic work, in ideological terms it was always a residual discourse for academics.

The academic as market professional

Alongside the model of academic as state professional has co-existed the model of academic as "market" professional. This model draws on the parallels and links between the academy and established professions such as medicine and law which comprised groups of 'entrepreneurial, self-employed producer[s]... [who] define their own work, but production for the market takes

priority over any other purpose' (Marginson, 1995, pp. 32-33). Loyalty for academics in these areas was seen as a dual one: to the academy, but also the profession. Academics in these areas were encouraged to "keep their hands in" as it were, and also augment their incomes, and loadings on university pay complemented the dual loyalties of such professionals within the universities.

The academic as market professional model could be considered as a residual discourse in that it only ever applied to a minority of academics in the binary system and within the UNS. In recent times, however, even academics outside of the established professions have received greater encouragement to act as professionals in the market via involvement, for example, as consultants to both commercial and public sector operations and through the production of commissioned and applied research for commercial and other purposes. Some "entrepreneurial scientists" (semi or wholly self-employed) are also carving out opportunities in the market and impacting upon the practice of "academic science".

This model of academic practice is informed, on the one hand, by the values of the market place (eg competition, informed self interest), and on the other, by a service ethic embodied in professional codes of practice, enforced by a professional association acting somewhat in the capacity of a producer cartel in the market. Unlike the academic as state professional model, for those academics to which the market professional model applies/applied it has/had an ideological attraction. This can be seen in the intermeshing of status hierarchies of academics and non-academics in the established professions of medicine and law.¹⁰

The promise of autonomous practice in an unregulated market which this model holds up has been influential far beyond the boundaries of these established professions. Ironically, while a major theme in Veblen was the incompatibility of the *sui generis* model and markets, developments since have encouraged some to see market forces as the most promising means of protecting autonomous academic practice from the incursions of the state. Less public funding in such a view is seen to mean less government "interference" and thus more autonomy. Prestigious US private universities and liberal arts colleges are held up as working examples.

The academic as corporate professional

Marginson (1995, p. 33) argues that recent changes in higher education have created another type of professional, notably, the corporate professional. The corporate professional is a 'salaried employee... albeit one who may receive royalties'. Unlike the state professional but like the market professional, the corporate professional engages with the market. Unlike the situation of the market professional, however, this engagement is under the direction of the corporatised institution in which the

corporatised professional works. This, argues Marginson (1995, p.33), creates 'a crisis of traditional academic autonomy':

Academic labour is pulled in three directions, between market professionalism (especially in commercial research and consultancy), corporate professionalism (for example in full-fee marketing programmes) and non-market labour ranging from individualised tuition to large-scale government-financed teaching and research.

The explicit linking in recent times of government policy in higher education with micro-economic reform, the greater involvement of private sector corporations, the creation of a competitive environment, the encouragement of fee-for-service courses and other commercial activities, the imposition of corporate managerialist strategies derived from private sector businesses and reforms in the allocation of research funding, have meant that most academics' lives have at least been "touched" by the forces of the market. The impact of the market on academic work is mediated by various factors, for example, the degree to which the individual operates as a state, market or corporate professional. This in turn varies according to discipline, type of university, level of employment and so on.

This new policy regime has been complemented by attempts by the state to assert greater control over academic work, albeit via indirect or market mechanisms rather than by 'close and direct forms of surveillance and governance... such... as legislation, prohibition and regulation' (Smyth, 1995b, p. 6). As Scott (1995, p. 80) observes, in the market model of social service provision:

... the emphasis shifts from the state as provider to the state as regulator, establishing the conditions under which various internal markets are allowed to operate, and the state as auditor, assessing their outcomes.

In Australia, for example, these changes have been accompanied by a reduction in the number of collegial committees and elected positions in university departments and governance in favour of structures based on corporate managerialist principles. Within the academic as corporate professional model, the role of the senior academic is defined as fundamentally about *management* and this, of course, informs the relationship between senior and junior academic staff, emphasising its hierarchical, rather than collegial features.

That the model of academic as corporate professional is an emergent discourse which has captured the imagination of at least some senior academics is evidenced in the observations of a current deputy vice-chancellor and pro vice-chancellor:

The recent changes imposed by the Commonwealth [i.e. via the 1996 Budget] make it essential that we bring more "real world" commercial expertise to financial

management [of universities]... We are in the market place, we deal with clients and consumers, we advertise, promote and polish our product and its brand name... We will operate in a more commercial way... I see universities with departments almost totally funded through private and commercial money (in fact, some will be totally privatised)... (Sharpham, 1996, p. 8)

Universities... have already begun to think about how to plan and structure their institutions as service enterprises... Universities that regard themselves this way will be participating in highly competitive markets where there are higher potential rewards and commensurately higher risk... They will have abandoned the internal institutional imperatives that have driven most decisions... Instead... matters will be driven by the external necessity that they reach out to customers. (Reinecke, 1996, p. 35)¹¹

Symes (1996, p.133) argues that this type of thinking - 'an instrumental culture centred on galvanising the economic potential of knowledge' - has already become the 'hegemonic philosophy' of the UNS. That this hegemony applies to academics at all levels below that of the managerial elite is, in our view, unlikely. Nevertheless, as Marginson (1995, p. 32) notes, even if 'the majority of academics do not sell teaching and research... they are employed within universities engaged in the production of positional goods'¹². Furthermore, market-based practices drive out non-market practices: '[as] the requirements of the market are managed more efficiently... the remaining non-market practices become still more difficult to sustain' (Marginson, 1995, p. 34). This situation is perhaps reflected in the changing criteria for, as well as realities of, career advancement within the universities.

The academic as worker

In common with other workers, academics work for a salary/wage and are dependent on their employer and industrial regulations in relation to a number of working conditions. As noted above, increasing government intervention in higher education and the growth of corporate managerialism have diminished academic autonomy and established a more overtly hierarchical structure in universities, accompanied by increased differentiation within the academic profession itself. The changed management structures of universities have seen the development of a new management class within the institutions, divided off in many ways from their other academic colleagues. Additionally, the entry of universities into such things as commercial operations and competitive funding arrangements — while turning some academics into entrepreneurs — has made the situation of many other academics more akin to that of other employees. This is true in terms of increased workloads, reduced conditions, deteriorating comparative salary levels and increased precariousness in employment. Of

particular note is the growth in part-time, casual, temporary and contract academic positions and the increasing instances of academic "lay-offs" and "voluntary early retirement packages" as institutions cope with financial constrictions and fluctuations in market demand. In such a situation collective intervention in the market is by trade union strategies rather than by the "producer cartel" approaches utilised by established market professions.

In Australia, academics have now entered fully into the industrial relations system and have both their salaries and conditions determined through the same type of industrial processes as other workers. Unionism and industrial action are now features, to a greater or lesser degree, of academic work at all institutions of higher education. The decentralisation of the industrial relations system and failure of both the former Labor and current Coalition Governments to provide systemic funding to higher education institutions to support an increase in academic salaries has led to institution-based negotiations and a high profile series of industrial activities targeting individual institutions. Furthermore, the formation of the NTEU, which brings academic and general staff into closer conjunction industrially, has advanced to some extent the academic as worker as a positive model.

As an ideological orientation, however, an industrial (i.e. workers') perspective is one to which most academics, if no longer totally antagonistic, are still likely to be at least slightly uncomfortable. As Currie and Woock (1995, p. 149) note, it is not hard to find contemporary examples of academic writers who have expressed dismay that the relationship between academics and their employing institutions should be seen as employee/employer adversarial. As the conditions of academic work are further deregulated, however, for instance as a result of the Coalition's proposed changes to industrial relations legislation, this ideological resistance might weaken. As there is further (heavily gendered) differentiation within the ranks of academic workers, a large section of these workers will experience conditions approximate to those of school teachers and nurses. For this group of academics the academic as worker model might very well be attractive. Even for those academics who find such a development unappealing (probably still a majority), many would see it as inevitable.

The future of academic work

Prior to the formal ending of the binary system precipitated by Dawkins' reforms, the division between CAEs and universities was linked to a division of role and function and related to different conceptions of academic work, although CAE aspirations were usually in the direction of the academic as *sui generis*. Within the UNS there are now differences within and across institutions, rather than a simple binary CAE/university divide. Different practices of academic work occur in these different

sites as the system is privatised further in a number of directions by Coalition policies. A new academic managerial class has emerged, along with a highly gendered and casualised teaching force at the bottom of the hierarchy, with other academics practising the different forms of work referred to throughout and located at various positions within the hierarchy. As Kogan et al's (1994) study conducted for the OECD noted, 'it is no longer sensible to speak of a single academic profession'. Within higher education there is now a sharper and more complex division of labour, consisting of 'a plurality of occupational groups divided from one another by task, influence and seniority within the institution' (Nixon, 1996, p.8). However, with Symes (1996, p.134) we would note that all workers within universities to a lesser or greater extent now have to 'dance to the tune of the economy' which has witnessed an emphasis upon the utilitarian rather than transformative value of knowledge. And, as John O'Brien (1992, p.4) has noted, the incorporation of all academics within the industrial relations system has seen 'teaching, research, scholarship, curriculum development and administration' included, 'although in different balance and measure', in the classification descriptions for all levels.

Having noted the differences within and across institutions constituting the UNS, for heuristic purposes within this conclusion we will utilise Symes's (1996) threefold model of clusters of institutions to talk about the present and future of academic work. While Symes developed his model to examine how different universities were positioning themselves in the emerging academic market, the typology is nonetheless useful for our purposes here. We thus note that these clusters are ideal types because aspects of each are found in all the currently existing universities. Symes speaks of 'real universities' to refer to the more traditional Australian institutions which have some reasonable provenance, the 'real world universities' to refer to those which heavily emphasise the utilitarian in both research and teaching, and the 'student-centred' universities whose major focus is upon teaching. Likewise, Nixon (1996) writing about changes in universities in the UK suggests that the place of research and the extent of support for it divides the old and new universities in that context.

Now, to this point we have spoken of three ideal types of discourses and practices in relation to academic work, which in turn are linked to differing conceptions of the role of the university and its relationships with society and the economy. We would argue that academic as *sui generis* remains dominant within Symes's 'real universities', but that it is being challenged by the emergent model of the corporate professional. In contrast, the 'universities for the real world' are increasingly dominated by the corporate professional discourse, with academ-

ic as *sui generis* in a residual position. Within the teaching focused, 'student-centred' universities the dominant discourse and practice is that of the state professional with some emergent talk of corporate professionals.

We would note here that empirical work is required to ascertain the changing nature of academic work within the universities which now constitute the UNS. For instance, it would seem that academic as worker might be a reasonable depiction of those at the bottom of the hierarchy who have mainly teaching functions and little job security. Academic as state professional might be a likely characterisation of those in more secure positions within the hierarchy who also mainly teach. All the universities now have their corporate professionals who pursue funds in the private sector through commissioned research and consultancies. There are also probably differences within faculties in and across institutions. Given the ageing nature of the academic profession, there are very likely generational differences in relation to which discourses of academic work have purchase related to actual academic work experience. Furthermore, there are still those academics, largely but not exclusively in Symes' 'real universities', whose actual work practices reasonably closely approximate the discourse of academic *sui generis*.

This new and complex division of labour within academic work complicates the work of the union for academics, as does the move towards industry unionism which attempts to bring academics and general staff closer together industrially. It would seem that the likely industrial relations scenario to emerge from the Coalition Government will see a widening of differences between (and probably within) institutions in relation to both salaries and work conditions. The situation of US higher education comes to mind here where academics within the two year community colleges have been proletarianised and are heavily unionised, while those in the elite, private research universities are largely union-free.

At present, it is thus difficult to identify any of the models as reflecting the dominant practice in relation to academic work, but the *sui generis* model nevertheless remains highly influential as discourse. In our view this is not a temporary state of affairs pending the "triumph" of one of the models (or of an alternative model) as the dominant discourse and/or practice. Rather, on the evidence it appears that universities for the foreseeable future will be,

... characterised by radical discontinuities. They no longer embody plural, but compatible, uses but starkly different representations, or meanings, which cannot be integrated satisfactorily or for long. They are anti-organic, anti-systematic, anti-totalising... They resist all but the most ephemeral classification. (Scott, 1995, p.3)

A current deputy Vice-Chancellor has also suggested: *Universities will become a patchwork quilt of diverse funding and the university's task will be to devise an allocation system that allows all areas to exist and flourish somewhat independently, yet within a core operation.* (Sharpham, 1996, p.8)

The effects of institutional change will continue to be extremely uneven and as a consequence, as Simon Marginson (1995) has observed, academics and academic work and its constituting discourses will continue to be pulled in different directions. This might be a result of what has been called the post-modern condition, as well as reflecting the impact of globalisation and the move to knowledge-based economies globally. Certainly the discourse of the academic *sui generis* was a manifestation par excellence of modernity and the Enlightenment project, both of which will continue to be under challenge from a variety of progressive and reactionary forces. The exclusionary character will only continue to have purchase within an inclusionary mass system of higher education in which new hierarchies and elite sites are emerging between and within institutions.¹³ However, because the system of higher education has been quasi-privatised there will also be pressures towards the academic as corporate professional even within these elite sites. At the same time, some of the TAFE colleges will begin to offer undergraduate programs and be staffed by state professionals akin to those within some of the largely teaching institutions of the UNS. A complex and highly differentiated academic labour market would seem to be here for some time to come as a negative feature of what we might call the mass, post-modern higher education "system". Nonetheless, the *sui generis* model appears to have the capacity to be rearticulated in these changing empirical conditions, perhaps because of its pre-social character, and thus appears to retain considerable salience and attraction for many academics.¹⁴ Questions about the purposes of universities and how best to meet them remain relevant to ideal conceptions, as well as the practices, of academic work.

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Footnotes

1. This article develops some ideas originally examined in McCollow (1996a, 1996b). We would like to thank the two anonymous referees who provided very useful comments on an earlier draft of this paper.
2. A task which is left unaddressed in this paper is a consideration of the discourses and practices relating to the work of general staff in universities. A more complete picture of the nature of university work would need to consider these and how they interact with academic discourses and practices. This is particularly relevant to post-Dawkins higher education given the increased opportunities for cooperation and conflict between academic and general staff arising from local bargaining about wages and conditions.
3. Privatisation here is not used in the sense of going into private ownership, but rather to refer to the privatisation of costs (eg reduction in the proportion of public funding, increased commercial activity, user pays).
4. For example, Williams links the dominant discourse to existing relations of social dominance, and non-incorporated discourses to embryonic alternative social formations. We reject the teleological and totalising features of Williams' analysis.
5. The other areas represented were humanities and social sciences, education, science and technology, visual and performing arts, and health and human studies.
6. As this paper was going to publication we note the remarks of the Chair of the current government's review of higher education, Roderick West, which appear to draw heavily on the *sui generis* model. (See, for example, Adey, 1997.)
7. These categories parallel those identified by Marginson (1995).
8. There are a number of debates here, for example, relating to hierarchies and codification of knowledge production, and to distinctions between applied and pure research.
9. See, for example, the description by Coombs of the arguments put to the then Australian Labor Government in the 1940s to secure support

for the establishment of the Australian National University (in Porter et al, 1992).

10. Engineering is usually classified as one of the established professions along with medicine and law. However, given that most of its practitioners are not usually self-employed, engineering can be seen to be informed by a mixture of state, market and corporate professional models.

11. Reinecke is referring specifically to imperatives to do with investment in information technology, but we do not believe that quoting the passage so that it omits this specific reference misrepresents his position.

12. Marginson (1995, p.19) defines positional goods as 'places in education which provide students ...with relative advantage in the competition for jobs, income, social standing and prestige'.

13. Coalition higher education policies will most likely ensure that the student body becomes more elite.

14. There are important questions about relationships between university accountability, the conception of the university and the nature of academic work which have not been addressed in this paper. Further, questions of equity have not been considered. In our view it was government intervention rather than university autonomy which ensured that equity questions about access to higher education actually got onto the agendas of the individual institutions.

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