When The Corporate Storm Strikes The Academy: Faculty Response Required

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ABSTRACT

When the corporate storm strikes the academy, faculty must be willing and able to repel administrative assaults upon academic freedom, shared governance, and tenure. This paper will describe the on-going clash between administrators who embrace the corporate mindset and faculty who cherish traditions of shared governance and collegial decision-making. The corporate model of management will be contrasted with the shared governance model. A brief explanation of those forces that fueled the corporate takeover will be provided. Lastly, suggestions for faculty action designed to haltl/slow down the eroding force of corporatization will be shared.

Keywords: Higher Education; Corporatization; Faculty Governance

INTRODUCTION

*T*he landscape of the college classroom has significantly changed during the past three decades as witnessed by smart boards replacing black/white boards, personal electronic devices (PEDs) of various sizes, processing speeds, and distracting ringtones replacing students' spiral notebooks, and exploited adjunct instructors replacing tenured professors in some 70 percent of undergraduate classrooms (Ginsberg, 2011). While changes within the classroom have been substantial, changes to the academic governance structure at our nation's universities can be characterized as catachlysmic. Equating a university to a business proposition embodies the ideology of this restructuring movement – an idea that is diametrically-opposed to those faculty-cherished ideals of shared governance, academic freedom, and tenure.   This paper will describe the clash over governance between corporate mindsets and faculty espousing a shared governance position. We will briefly identify those forces that spurred corporatization and cite specific examples of administrative usurpation of responsibilities historically accorded to faculty. Lastly, we will offer specific suggestions how faculty might respond if the continuing deconstruction of faculty governance in higher education is to be halted.

THE SKY IS FALLING

Prognosticators (doomsayers) have described the academy bubble as bursting for more than 100 years (Christensen & Horn, 2013; Glassner & Shapiro, 2012). Dire predictions have called for half of the 4500 colleges shutting down, residential colleges going the way of land-line phones, and the elite universities enrolling 10 million students via on-line courses pre-recorded by academic luminaries (Harden 2012). The current cohort of alarmists point to marketplace demands, in the form of consumer expectations and wants, necessitating an "agile university" whereby mission statements and curricula can be overhauled by the time it takes to issue a presidential decree approved by a small but potent "corporate cabal" (aka Executive Committee of the Board Trustees). Factoring in a dramatic decrease in state funding, these proponents of academy disruption identify yet another argument to substantiate their claim that the current, faculty-dominant mode of conducting university operations is obsolete. Crisis, real or imagined, sets the stage for the corporate take-over with an agenda best captured in the ominous adage "Unless this university is run like a business, it will soon be out of business".

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THE ACADEMIC PRESIDENCY

Historically, college presidents honed their leadership skills in the professoriate, achieving the academic rank of full professor with tenure while teaching and researching some 20 years. These academicians prided themselves as "faculty on-loan" to the administrative side of the university. Their time spent in the Office of the President was viewed as a transitory, albeit necessary, decision. Perhaps, more than anything else, these leaders understood and respected the faculty's role in educational decision-making. Without question, faculty deliberation can be glacially slow; faculty training engenders a methodical approach to problem solving – an approach that can be maddening to folks seeking immediate answers to questions posed yesterday. Leading a university to the next level is a daunting task, requiring herculean effort and exceptional diplomacy skills. The sheer size, complexity, and diversity of today's university begets a "creative anarchy" (Duderstadt, 2007) in which the university president must operate. At times, the system is divisive and dysfunctional; nevertheless, it must be navigated. The effective university president, schooled in the culture of academe, leads the institution via cooperation, persuasion, and consensus-building. The true university envisions itself as a community of learners where viewpoints from all constituents are shared, analyzed, and evaluated. Debate, argument, skepticism, and criticism can serve as vehicles to promote institutional development. In many cases, the most convincing argument holds sway, regardless from where that position emanated. The professor-turned-president acts on the assumption that good ideas are likely to emerge from disparate sources – sources that include students, faculty, staff, alumni, trustees, and external stakeholders.

THE CORPORATE PRESIDENCY

By contrast, the corporate president manages by control (Chomsky, 2014; Ginsberg, 2011). The careerist administrator, the campus CEO, may be described as a disruptive innovator whose passion for re-branding the university, establishing multiple global campuses, rushing madly into distance learning, and creating additonal layers of administrative staff is well documented (Collis, 2004; Cox, 2013; Delbanco, 2012; Ginsberg, 2011). The dramatic growth of administrative personnel and the subsequent reduction of academic tenure lines are hallmarks of corporate leadership. This professionalization of university management (deridingly referred to as "deanlings" and "deanlettes" by Ginsberg, 2011) has been justified on the basis of increased reporting demands of state, federal, and accrediting agencies. To be fair, colleges today are expected to report far more than ever before. However, the reporting demand has not increased at a commensurate rate of this ever-expanding bureaucracy (Ginsberg, 2011) even after factoring in requisite student services (Delta Cost Project, 2014). When corporate presidents perceive faculty as obstructionists or as adversaries or as moral-bound traditionalists, then it seems plausible that they would intentionally reduce faculty numbers and replace faculty with more manageable employees, i.e., more non-academics and/or part-time instructors. Top-down decision-making appears to be the preferred leadership style of the campus CEO as evidenced by the firing of Teresa A. Sullivan at the University of Virginia for being too consultative – the antithesis of an agile university. Patience is absolutely essential for any college president; however, it is a quality that is largely eschewed by the corporate presidency. Given the myriad challenges facing the academy, administrative leadership should avail itself to the entirety of an institution's knowledge, skill, and competency resources – experiences and expertise located within the faculty and staff that the college president is charged to lead and maximize. Ignoring this human repository of information and insight diminishes the likelihood of institutional advancement.

HOSTILE TAKE-OVERS

Administrative incursions into domains long considered under the auspices of faculty have increased exponentially these past two decades. Specific instances of corporate raids have included admission requirements, graduation requirements, curricular content, instructional methodology, and assessment of student learning (Backer, 2012; Buffalo State University, 2008; Fain, 2010; Fredonia State University, 2008). While the aforementioned faculty arenas appear as low-hanging fruit at colleges without the benefits and protections of collectively-bargained rights and responsibilities, it is particularly unsettling when these same intrusions by administrative leadership occur at institutions with state-sanctioned binding negotiated items. Evidently, the campus climate emboldens corporate usurpation – an environment where traditions are trampled, process is passed over, negotiations are negated, discourse is discarded, and presidential proclamations prevail. Yet, despite denials from certain pundits, climate

change can occur! But, what exactly can faculty do to halt the ever-growing erosion of faculty influence on our nation's campuses?

SUGGESTED COURSE OF ACTION

In the ideal campus milieu the faculty is represented by a state-recognized organization empowered with collective bargaining rights with respect to wages, hours, and other terms and conditions of employment. Additionally, this agent will have negotiated a viable Collective Bargaining Agreement (CBA) that assures faculty governance in clearly designated areas. When *Faculty By-Laws* are melded to the CBA, then faculty voice becomes more entrenched in campus discussions of educational operations and procedures. Faculty unions are only as effective as their memberships are active, informed, and trusting of union leadership. However, even when these criteria are satisfied, the threat of corporatization may not be reduced, let alone vanquished. At best, the language contained in those binding documents (CBA and *Faculty By-Laws*) constitute the means by which faculty must use to oppose the encroaching corporatization of campus life. Specific actions by individual faculty members (and the collectivity itself) would include:

- Revisiting and sharing the history of higher education: doomsayers have predicted the university's demise for 100 years (end of liberal arts—1900; Great Depression—1930s; GI Bill/mass education—1945; Baby Boom—1970; Baby Bust—1990; distance learning—2010) (Glassner & Shapiro, 2012) Soothsayers have been wrong!
- Organize faculty (AAUP, AFT) Insert/strengthen shared governance statement in CBA/*Faculty By-Laws* (regional accreditors expect verification of faculty voice)
- Utilize standing faculty committees to counter irresponsible claims/policies issued by administration (enter committee reports/resolutions/position papers into *Faculty Minutes*)
- Investigate where monies are channeled on-campus
- Interact/ally with Board trustees
- Interact/ally with state legislators
- Publish and present papers on faculty governance
- Monitor administrative decrees and RESPOND when warranted

CONCLUSION

As faculty, we are obligated to speak up when we perceive something is amiss. Administrative staff and students are far more vulnerable to retaliatory actions for having protested or criticized corporate decision-making. More times than not, university stakeholders (including Board trustees) look to the faculty for sounding the alarm so that corrections can be made for "righting the institutional ship". Core faculty (those serving the college for 20-40 years) must intervene when they perceive navigational misjudgments by the institutional captain. Without question, faculty are not always right when we do speak up but we will always be wrong when we remain silent. Doing nothing when the university ship is off-course can be interpreted as tacit approval – an inaction that is tantamount to dereliction of duty.

AUTHOR INFORMATION

James L. DeBoy earned a PhD in Human Development (with minor concentrations in Special Education and History of Education) at the University of Delaware. He was appointed to the Lincoln University faculty in 1975 and achieved rank of Professor in 2000. A department chair for 22 years, he has served on virtually all major academic committees, assumed a lead role in outcomes assessment for 20 years, assisted in his university's re-accreditation process for 30 years, acted as Faculty Contract Administrator for the past three years and as an active AAUP member for 39 years while teaching in the Health Science Program housed in the Department of Nursing & Health Sciences. Dr. DeBoy has presented papers at regional, national, and international conferences on such diverse topics as psychomotor development, human cognition/metacognition, substance abuse prevention, obesity screening, and outcomes assessment of student learning. E-mail: Luhper1111@aol.com

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