

Public trust and institutions of higher learning: implications for professional responsibility

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Introduction

Institutional elements of society serve specific, sometimes overlapping functions. Privileges and responsibilities flow from those functions and the role in which the institutions play in society. Institutions of higher learning are experiencing an array of pressures that are political, financial, professional and market based [1]. Fundamental questions concern what society reasonably expects of institutions of higher education, and whether and how those expectations are being met.³

Public trust

Education is generally seen by the public as fundamental to an informed and responsible citizenry, as well as the basis for economic well-being through both a productive workforce and new goods and services [2]. This view has been borne out historically, and institutions of higher education receive a significant degree of public trust, a trust resulting from a reasoned expectation that involves both confidence and reliance that these educational institutions are acting responsibly and for the common good [2–5]. This trust is highlighted by the relative autonomy of institutions of higher education, and the substantial financial support they enjoy from a wide array of sources. Individuals and their families, private organizations and foundations, and government agencies invest heavily in the cost of education in the form of tuition and grant support for students and trainees. In addition, there is outright public financing of many state universities, colleges and community colleges. Trust is further reflected in the tax-free status given to private educational institutions by local, state and federal governments, albeit sometimes grudgingly.

Unfortunately, recent evidence indicates that colleges and universities are not fulfilling their mission to produce active and responsible citizens who are able to engage in analytic reasoning, think critically and communicate their ideas clearly [6–8]. Furthermore, there is some controversy as to whether public trust remains

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³This paper deals with the topic from the U.S. perspective since my knowledge of European and other non-U.S. institutions of higher education is largely anecdotal.

high [9–13] or is declining [2,6]. Perhaps trust remains high in some segments of the population and is deteriorating in others both because post-secondary education is extremely diverse, and because ‘the public’ consists of very different groups that may simultaneously hold and communicate divergent views depending on how an issue is presented or how survey questions are asked.

Whether or not public trust is declining, concerns about deterioration in the quality of education, apparent conflicts of interest in university–industry partnerships and ever-increasing tuition costs have brought demands for greater accountability and transparency [2,9,14]. To quote Martin Trow ([97], p. 318), “Accountability and trust particularly are in a peculiar relation of tension, sometimes mutually supportive, sometimes at odds”. Accountability and trust are at opposite ends of a continuum, one making up for the absence of the other, yet they can also support and reinforce each other. However, there are costs to accountability as well as the possibility that it may become an exercise in “accountability in name only” ([9], p. 315). Furthermore, given the difficulty, or even impossibility, of developing performance measures that can actually determine the long-term impact of post-secondary education on the individual and on society, the methods of accountability can be far removed from the actual matter of interest: the quality and value of higher education. As Trow ([9], pp. 321–322) points out:

“There are other ways to assess the impact of higher education, not only on students but on institutions and society as a whole. What large effects do we hope our systems of higher education will have on society? How do we weigh the effects of higher education, for example, in reducing levels of racial and ethnic prejudice; or of enabling people to change their jobs, their skills and their professions as the economy changes; or of motivating people to enroll in continuing education throughout life; or of enabling people to raise children who want and get more schooling than their parents?”

Should we use the school achievement rates of children twenty-five years after the graduation of their parents as performance indicators of the colleges and universities of 1970? How do we weigh the value to the society of the organizations created to protect the environment, defend battered wives, reform the criminal justice system, or help new immigrants, or the emotionally disturbed – all the voluntary institutions outside of government that make life more civilized and compassionate, and all of them disproportionately led and staffed by college and university graduates? Are leadership or participation rates in those institutions to be used as performance indicators as well?”

Trustworthiness

At the same time, because trust cannot be expected or demanded, but must be generated through demonstrations of trustworthiness, it is possible, and important, to put into place components that demonstrate both an awareness of the importance of accountability in a democratic society, and the trustworthiness of the institution. In a professional context, trustworthiness is closely linked to the notion of prospective responsibility [5,15]. In order to be worthy of trust, Leveille emphasizes

that, "...individual and institutional integrity must prevail if higher education is to maintain the public's trust" ([2], p. 102). From the top down and from the bottom up, individuals and institutions must be committed to 'doing the right thing' and sustaining public trust as integral to their core responsibilities as professionals [15]. This may be easier said than done in some circumstances given that determining the right thing may be elusive as the short- and long-term interests of various stakeholders are evaluated, weighted and compared. Nevertheless, institutions of higher learning must provide an environment where faculty members and staff can and do behave ethically, and where they, in turn, provide an environment in which the ethical behaviour of students and trainees is expected, supported, encouraged and facilitated.

Because the public continues to expect that colleges and universities are preparing students and trainees (undergraduates, graduate students and postdoctoral trainees) to become professionals in their chosen fields, and because the process may not be completed by graduation, these institutions have a responsibility to provide an adequate foundation on which graduates can build through formal and informal continuing education and training. Specifically, post-secondary education needs to provide not simply the rudimentary elements of the discipline, but also make explicit the array of professional expectations and the ethical values and standards of the community of which trainees hope to become a part of. Furthermore, the special place of higher learning institutions in society is accompanied by the expectation that these institutions will contribute to the production of not only socially aware and attentive professionals, but also socially responsible citizens and members of society.

The goal here is to explore these twin responsibilities of higher learning institutions: to create a workplace environment that not only allows, but also expects and facilitates ethical, responsible behaviour of faculty, staff, students and trainees; and to create an educational programme that is designed to assure that graduates are not only competent in their chosen field, but are also socially responsible professionals who behave ethically both as professionals and as members of society.

A workplace that supports ethical behaviour

Institutions of higher education have a responsibility to provide an environment in which faculty and staff can conduct their professional activities responsibly. Jeroen van den Hoven [16,17], scientific director of Technische Universiteit Delft, has recently pointed out that among the responsibilities of organizations and their representatives, there is the ethical obligation to facilitate, or at least ensure, that others are able to meet their own professional responsibilities. In addition, Trow [9] has discussed internal accountability within organizations that is moral as well as scholarly. Accountability in this sense not only reflects legal and financial details but, more importantly, it is sensitive and responsive to the essence of the concerns that prompted the request for accountability initially. More specifically, David Leveille ([2], p. 81) has highlighted the importance of an organizational commitment to "ethical practices and the responsible stewardship of resources", and to the elements that support that commitment, including a "balance of powers, clear

expectations, a framework for decision making, effective and efficient infrastructure, [and] strong leadership”. Furthermore, he discusses the features of an organizational environment that includes the integrity of the leadership and truthful, open, full and transparent communication regarding the rationale that underlies decisions, thereby generating a trustworthy and trusting environment. However, these efforts will not be sufficient if staff and faculty members are repeatedly misinformed, misled or placed in conflicting circumstances. From this, one can conclude that institutions ought not to create an environment where employees are perforce placed in ethically problematic situations where, for example, their various responsibilities and interests compete or conflict, a circumstance that might well arise in institutions of higher education given the competing demands on the time of faculty members and the finite number of hours in a day.

The fact that faculty members should find themselves in conflicts of commitment and even conflicts of interest is not surprising given the array of institutional and professional demands, commitments and responsibilities that must be fulfilled by the average academic. As teachers, they not only teach courses and evaluate student performance, but also advise students and supervise graduate teaching assistants. The time spent in the classroom is frequently the tip of the proverbial iceberg and is often dwarfed by the amount of time and effort required in preparation for class time. It can be several times in excess of the teaching time itself. Furthermore, the time involved in meeting with individuals or small groups of students to address specific educational needs and issues, as well as the time necessary to evaluate student performance can also be substantial.

As researchers, the faculty must write grants to obtain funding not only to pay for their own time, equipment and supplies, but also to support research staff and often students and postdoctoral trainees. They are responsible for the fundamental elements of the research: the design and conduct of research projects, and the coordination and supervision of the tasks of research staff, students and trainees as well as their training in research methods and proper data management practices and presentation. As researchers, the faculty write manuscripts and give formal and informal presentations about their research, and must teach trainees to do the same. They also travel to meetings and conferences in order to participate in the intellectual life of the discipline, as well as to disseminate the results of the research.

Beyond teaching and research responsibilities, faculty members are also expected to review both manuscripts submitted to journals and grant applications to funders. In addition, they serve on committees for funders, foundations and their own academic institutions. Furthermore, they are expected to provide mentorship and letters of reference for undergraduates, graduate students and postdoctoral trainees.

All of these inter-related responsibilities require institutions to attend to potential conflicts of commitment and even conflicts of interest for which they themselves may be partly responsible. Examples include the manner in which faculty members balance research and teaching, and the roles they are asked to take in community outreach, institutional governance and in the funding of research.

Samuel Gorovitz ([18], p. 236) has identified a number of ways in which faculty members who teach and train graduate students face what he calls ‘ethical perils’ in the course of their professional activities, in part owing to “the distinctive

intensity of relationships in graduate programs [that produce] opportunities for exploitation, insensitivity and conflicts of interest". A few of his many examples of ethical challenges include developing graduate programs that are designed to adequately prepare students for the profession rather than to further the research interests of the faculty; selecting students for admission into graduate programmes based on their potential to learn and contribute to the discipline and to society, rather than their skills or connections that might meet the particular needs of a faculty member; and providing training and supervision of graduate students and postdoctoral trainees that adequately prepare them for the profession and the job market.

Perhaps the most problematic issue is the most fundamental. The primary mission of higher education is education. It is its *raison d'être* and the product/service for which tuition is paid. Yet, education is too often neglected, especially in research institutions, where the emphasis and reward structure is built around research. Whereas research can have a positive impact on education to some degree, it is, in general, detrimental to the education of undergraduates [19]. Moreover, faculty members who may be capable, successful and even award-winning researchers are not necessarily effective teachers – teaching and research are not congruent skill sets. This highlights the importance of both specific preparation of faculty members to teach, and explicit acknowledgement of (and rewards for) good teaching and its value to the institution and society. The conflicts between research and teaching are ones that need to be recognized and addressed.

Preparing students to be professionals and members of society

Public institutions and the students who attend them are subsidized if not fully supported with public funds with the assumption that institutions of higher education will produce educated citizens who will enhance the quality of society as well as contribute to the workforce and the economy. Thus institutions of higher learning also need to be able to assure that students receive an education that adequately prepares them to be not only competent, but also responsible, professionals, each in his or her chosen field [15]. Education in science and engineering is a case in point.

Students and postdoctoral trainees, who receive a good education in scientific concepts and research methods, are nevertheless not necessarily being adequately prepared to be independent researchers, engineers and colleagues. It is apparent that if one only knows the science, one will not succeed as a researcher or engineer. One must also know how to write and review manuscripts, obtain funding, manage a research group, communicate with colleagues and with trainees, and an array of other skills. In addition, and just as important, one will be expected, by colleagues, trainees and society alike, to know and conform to accepted professional standards of the discipline, and of the society of which the research community is a part. This kind of education rightly includes an awareness of the values, standards and responsibilities of the profession. As an example, as scientific researchers, trainees need to become explicitly aware of the values and

standards inherent in research practice, whether these are the intended values of openness and integrity, the values of the scientific community such as the fair allocation of credit and the responsibilities of authorship, or the values of society that legally and ethically must be reflected in research practice such as the humane treatment of research subjects.

Educators have generally believed that their responsibility was to teach the fundamental concepts and other core elements of their field. For educators and researchers in science and engineering, as an example, these fundamentals are scientific concepts and research techniques or engineering methods. However, approximately 20 years ago, a survey of U.S. university deans and faculties revealed that they also believed that ‘ethical preparedness training’ (i.e. preparing students and trainees to recognize and deal with ethical issues they may encounter in their field ([20], p. 238) *should be* an important function of universities and their departments. At the same time, it was expected that professional values and standards, and a sense of social responsibility would be acquired by observing the good behaviour of others. Contemporaneously, the U.S. NIH (National Institutes of Health) identified ‘broad-based faculty involvement’ as a key element in educating students and trainees in the responsible conduct and reporting of research [21]. Yet, preparation in responsible research conduct often did not (and still does not) happen to any great degree, partly because faculties believe that ethical issues should be discussed as problems arise [20], and also because they believe that the curriculum is already full and they feel ill-prepared themselves to provide such training to their students [22].

More recently, the science and engineering communities have become aware of the need to *explicitly* address the responsible conduct of research. This is in part the result of egregious incidents of research misconduct [23]. It also partly reflected a widespread belief that by the time they reach graduate school, the moral development of students is in place and they cannot be taught to behave ethically if they do not already do so. Fortunately, James Rest [24,25], Muriel Bebeau [26] and, more recently, many others have shown that moral development can and, with attention and nurturing, does continue throughout formal education as individuals learn about and appreciate their personal and professional role in society as members, professionals, contributors and citizens.

As a result, over the last 20 years things have changed in many respects in the U.S.A. The NIH established a requirement that pre- and post-doctoral trainees receive formal education in the responsible conduct and reporting of research, which has come to be known as RCR (Responsible Conduct of Research) education [27,28]. Engineering societies have long explicitly attended to ethical aspects of engineering and have incorporated into codes of ethics what is widely known as the ‘Paramountcy provision’, that is, “Engineers, in the fulfillment of their professional duties, shall hold paramount the safety, health, and welfare of the public” [29]. Scientific professional societies have more recently begun to focus on considerations of responsible research conduct; for example, the Society for Neuroscience has produced ‘Guidelines: Responsible Conduct Regarding Scientific Communication’ [30–32]. ABET (Accreditation Board for Engineering and Technology) now includes requirements for specific elements of engineering ethics in the education of engineers [33] and the Center for Engineering, Ethics, and Society of the National

Academy of Engineering has an Online Ethics Center. Ethics has been identified as a 'core competency' in engineering. In 2007, the U.S. Congress added training in RCR to the mission of the National Science Foundation [34]. One could argue that governmental requirements for the inclusion of formal education in the responsible conduct and reporting of research are, at least in part, a consequence of the earlier abdication of the responsibility of the research community to develop adequate professional education and training of younger researchers.

A wide range of approaches have been developed to integrate RCR education into science and engineering [23,35–40]. In general, the goals of these efforts are to:

- Increase awareness and knowledge of professional standards and the assumptions that underlie them
- Increase awareness of the ethical dimensions of engineering and science
- Provide experience in making and defending decisions about ethical problems
- Teach students and trainees to develop approaches and identify resources for making decisions about ethical problems
- Promote a sense of professional responsibility

Faculty members play a key role in education in the RCR [37,41], in part because they are the experts on the research and engineering communities' expectations regarding the behaviour of colleagues, including junior colleagues. Faculty members know what they themselves expect of each other, and are best in a position to convey that information to trainees. They can make explicit the values, standards and assumptions that are too often implicit and therefore misunderstood, misinterpreted or simply missed altogether. As (and to the extent that) standards change over time (for example, the decreasing acceptability of honorary authorship), faculty and senior researchers are in the best position to clarify the evolving standards in a meaningful context. Furthermore, senior researchers and faculty members participate in the promulgation, interpretation and application of professional standards and values through both professional societies and their everyday activities in conducting and reporting research. Just as important, faculty involvement in RCR education emphasizes the legitimacy, indeed the importance, of explicit discussion of the ethical, legal and social implications of science, engineering and technology, and the social responsibilities of scientists and engineers.

Beyond professional competence, RCR is not the only essential skill of successful science and engineering professionals. For example, they also need to be adequately prepared in what is aptly known as the 'survival skills' (e.g. how to write and review papers, obtain funding and manage a research group [38]) in order to effectively participate within their professional communities. Furthermore, science and engineering students and trainees need to learn how to both find and become mentors in their fields in order to obtain and provide the detailed and often crucial information necessary to understand and address the challenges and issues that arise in the workplace [42]. Trainees in science and engineering also need to learn to communicate within and beyond the research and engineering community so that they can appropriately and effectively lend their expertise to the larger society as it attempts to deal responsibly with the

ethical, legal and societal implications of science and technology [43,44]. This may be increasingly important in the face of growing global technology and the special expertise that scientists and engineers can and should bring to bear on technical problems and the concerns of society.

What institutions can and should do

There are a number of ways that institutions can address these issues in order to assure that they both provide an environment in which faculty members, staff and students can perform ethically and responsibly, and also assure that students learn what will be expected of them as colleagues and professionals in their chosen fields and as socially responsible members of society. In doing so, they will go some way towards demonstrating their worthiness of the public trust.

Institutions can and should explicitly identify, as a goal, the ethical development of their graduates as responsible members of society, and develop an EAC (Ethics Across the Curriculum)-type programme. For example, Union College, founded in 1795 and one of the oldest educational institutions in the U.S.A., recently revised its mission statement to include “[to] develop in [...] students the analytic and reflective abilities needed to become engaged, innovative, and *ethical contributors* to an increasingly diverse, global, and technologically complex society” ([45], emphasis added by author). As a concrete reflection of this aspect of their mission, they have an EAC programme that can serve as a vehicle to implement the global mission and interests of the college. Given that modelling ethical behaviour is necessary but not sufficient, a programme that explicitly identifies and explores what it means to be an ethical contributor in a diverse, global and complex society no matter what the discipline, and also teaches students how and encourages them to do so, has the potential for making actual progress towards that goal. Implementing an EAC programme requires the training of faculty and departments in integrating ethics and social responsibility into the curriculum, promoting and facilitating the teaching of professional and social responsibility in departments and within the institution, and rewarding individuals and institutions for doing so.

Institutions can also develop mentoring programmes that tailor the education of students and trainees to their skills and talents and the requirements of the profession. Programmes will need to train mentors, since few individuals are naturally good mentors, and toxic mentors need to be identified and rehabilitated. Furthermore, it is important to recognize and acknowledge that individuals generally need several mentors, since no one person knows everything about a profession that may be of relevance to someone else. In addition, institutions can actively encourage and facilitate mentoring and reward good mentors in order to enhance and energize the process. Moreover, mentoring programmes can be interwoven with EAC programmes, each building on and enhancing the other. In doing so, they create an environment where the emphasis is on learning in a larger, societal context, and they use major educational principles that have

become apparent in research in adult learning [46] while improving the ethical environment of the institution as well [47]. At the same time, it is important to recognize the challenges, limits and ethical issues that can arise in mentoring relationships [48,49]. Thus integrating mentoring and EAC (and education in RCR as appropriate) can counteract the potentially negative departmental climate that can precipitate questionable research practices [50–54] and undermine public trust in research and institutions of higher education where questionable research practices take place.

Institutions and the academic community should not expect that everyone, or indeed anyone, can do it all, that is, high-quality research, teaching, training and supervision of graduate students, writing, mentorship etc. Rather, institutions need to build interactive teams that develop programmes and workshops that train students to teach, write, give talks, manage research groups, learn about the responsible conduct of their profession etc., as well as carry out research. The various contributors to the team should be recognized and rewarded. The goal is not that the students should be expected to do all of those things, but that they should learn what these professional activities entail, and where their own skills and talents lie, so that they can both determine how best to contribute to society, and recognize and value the contributions of others.

Conclusions

The relationship between institutions of higher education and society is a dynamic one. Educational institutions exist to support and serve society, and also to shape it. For centuries they have been a bastion of critical thought, and a haven for discussion and debate of current events and ideas, especially the philosophical underpinnings of society, including the foundational concepts of the full range of disciplines from history, philosophy and the arts, to mathematics and the sciences. The public has entrusted its future in the form of large segments of its youth, with the expectation that society's leaders would naturally and appropriately come from those who have been shaped by the higher educational experience. The responsibilities of institutions of higher learning for the preparation of future professionals are not simply for their training in the narrow sense, but, in the broad sense, for their education. It depends on a deeper understanding of their role in the larger society, both as professionals and as citizens. They must understand the continuum of their role and responsibilities as individuals, as a representative of a profession, and as a member of society as a whole.

In a society and a world that is becoming increasingly fractured and factionalized, institutions of higher education are especially and possibly uniquely situated to emphasize the interconnectedness of the elements and members of society, and to educate future generations with regard to the implications of this interconnectedness in the workplace. From this position, institutions of higher learning have the opportunity and the responsibility to advance this activity implicitly and explicitly.

Comments by Terri Kim^{4,5}

Stephanie Bird's discussion is a very helpful reminder of both ethical challenges and responsibilities of university academics, especially in preparing students to be professionals and socially responsible members of society. Taking this further, I think we need to think about the politics of professional responsibility that we, as university academics, cannot escape.

I note that academic claims cannot be detached from a particular political and societal context, neither can they be unrelated to the interpretations of being and time, invoking Heidegger's *Sein und Zeit* [55]. Some fundamental questions are:

- What are universities for?
- To whom should they be useful and accountable?
- Who says so and why?

Higher education that is taking place inside universities is more than professional training. Therefore Bird's propositions about 'ethical preparedness training' within the institutions of higher learning can be extended to the task of critical thinking that precedes the task of becoming a professional. After all, we need to be alert to the normative assumptions about university academics' professional accountability within the politics of our time.

Thus, for me, Bird's paper raises three main questions for discussion:

1. Where do professional ethics and trust, for this area, come from as a normative force?
2. Who has provided this definition?
3. Accountability for whom, in whose interests, and for what purposes?

The first decade of the 21st Century has witnessed the acceleration of two trends already evident at the end of the 20th Century: first, the withdrawal of governments from the task of providing for the ultimate welfare of their citizens and, secondly, the increasing assumption of this responsibility by the private sector ([56], p. 774). In the neoliberal 'market state', business leaders are often unprepared to take up the moral and political responsibilities that governments are busy casting off, and politicians and bureaucrats are seldom well situated to make the long-term investments in infrastructure that create a new paradigm of opportunity. Yet, how many institutions of higher learning, especially university-based professional schools (e.g. business schools, law schools and public policy institutes), will plan the next semester's curriculum with these shortfalls in mind? How many are even aware that they are contributing to these mounting intellectual deficits? Where is the evidence that teaching the core values of professional

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⁵ I have noted that I am the only East Asian participant in this symposium. Originally from Seoul, Korea, I have lived, studied and worked in London and Paris for 18 years and travelled to 21 countries for work. I have been at Brunel for the last 8 years, and I have been privileged as a foreigner to gain various experiences and intercultural insights. As a specialist in comparative higher education, my questions and comments here are bound to draw on my observations as an inside outsider or outsider within, and as a mobile academic in the U.K. and Europe.

responsibility in university-based professional schools will generate positive change in the global market-framed public sector?

All across the post-industrial world, many national governments have been reforming the public sector and have implemented NPM (New Public Management) systems, following private sector management principles. Universities have been caught up in this neoliberal ‘policy epidemic’ [57]. As a result, neoliberal NPM has altered the discourse of public accountability of the university: i.e. to instrumentalize, standardize, marketize and externalize ‘accountability relationships’ at the expense of democratic values such as participation, professional self-regulation and collegiality [58].

In terms of the public accountability of the university, neoliberal management systems have been altering the nature of the academic profession, shifting the core academic commitment: from scientific search for universal truths, enlightenment and emancipatory knowledge to quality control/assurance. The notions of knowledge management in the discourse of performativity have consolidated evidence-based/evidence-informed practice in higher education. There is a legitimation of business culture, of the ‘what counts is what works’ principle in academia in the U.K. and many other countries across the globe, where the new public management has been carried out [59].

Neoliberal economic imperatives have both national and transnational global consequences. We have seen the end of tenure: casualization of academic labour in short-term and fixed-term contract-based staffing amid the further division of academic roles, i.e. research compared with teaching compared with management. Part-time, contract-based academics now outnumber the tenure-track academics in many universities framed by neoliberal market economies. In the U.K., for example, the casualization of academic labour commenced earlier and academic tenure was abolished in the late 1980s. Throughout the 1990s the position of academic faculty in the U.K. became progressively less secure [60]. In many research-intensive universities the proportion of academic faculty members on full-time permanent contracts is only approximately 30% [61]. Similarly, in the U.S.A., the so-called adjuncts, both part-timers and full-timers not on a tenure track, account for nearly 70% of professors at colleges and universities, both public and private [62,63].

These phenomena have become transnational. We have seen the emergence of a transnational mobile academic elite as well as a mobile academic underclass. Contemporary corporatist university governance and management has led to the changing styles of university leadership, which intends to transform the traditional values and independent role of the university into a managed organization as subordinate to the values and role of the corporate. It requires the conversion from academic leadership that used to be *primus inter pares* into managerial skills and competencies (in line management).

The neoliberal discourse of corporatist management as ‘governmentality’ (following Foucault) has managed to take hold of, and is entrenched in, the university academic psyche as subjectification [64]. This phenomenon is now, in my judgement, widespread.

Bönisch-Brednich, a Professor of Anthropology in Victoria, New Zealand, who is originally from Germany, offers a powerful analysis of her position

as an academic migrant in the neoliberal market-framed university. She says the corporatist performativity regime often creates another layer of culture shock to her as a German academic migrant [65]:

“It is experienced as a deep intrusion into my academic identity. It is an imposition of another learning process in the entrepreneurial system of producing and selling knowledge. Resisting this often means a slow or sudden professional death.”

Overall, universities are already part of the culture, which, in principle, they should reform. As more and more academics are categorized as academic experts, many of them increasingly define their roles as researchers with transferable methodological research skills.

There is, similarly, according to an EU (European Union) report [66], an emphasis on university graduates being equipped with soft skills. As Stephanie Bird mentions ‘survival skills’, soft skills, such as confidence, teamwork, self-motivation, networking and presentation skills, are now seen as key to employability and considered more important than subject knowledge.

Similarly, it seems that the majority of university academics no longer need to profess. In the advancement of online course development, university lecturers are told that they do not need to give lectures anymore. At Brunel University, for instance, the staff development workshops on teaching and learning are increasingly focusing on technology-driven online learning. The workshop instructor invited from Oxford Brooks University as a specialist in online course development informed us that we do not need to create academic contents, as these are already available online. At present, star professors’ lectures are recorded and disseminated online and the role of ordinary academics is to facilitate students’ learning, coordinating discussion based on the online lectures.

All of these, it can be suggested, confirm the further division of academic labour, commodification of academic knowledge and academics’ alienation from knowledge capital. The global expansion of neoliberal market-framed university regimes at present has left very little space available for academics as public intellectuals, who would like to keep the position as a free-floating critical thinker whose creative role is to engage as legislator and interpreter contributing to a creative destruction and reconstruction of the paradigms of academic work [60]. Thus the remaining question is whether universities are actually able to provide an alternative voice to that of the corporate interests?

Would the new kinds of universities that are emerging be able to contribute to sustaining the core academic and professional values of what we used to know as the university, and what we used to count as emancipatory knowledge, something beyond instrumental knowledge and technical innovation? I personally have severe doubts.

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