

Academic Grades and Standards:

Performing the University of
Excellence?

Corporatization and the Struggle over Academic Grades & Standards

- 1980s-1990s neo-liberal restructuring, including restructuring of higher education (involved increased centralization and bureaucracy)*
 1. Increase in student numbers without corresponding increase in overall funding
 2. Emphasis on entrepreneurship and commercialization of knowledge
 3. Reorganization of university governance, replacing more collegiate (less formalized) management with centralized, hierarchical system of control
 4. Emphasis on internationalization in recruitment of overseas students (higher education as export commodity)
 5. Introduction of “differentiation” within tertiary sector based on increased competition among universities and emphasis on creating small number of “elite” universities
 6. Attempts by government to “align” university research towards its own economic and political objectives
- Result: “corporatization,” 1990s-2010s

*Cris Shore and Mira Taitz, “Who ‘Owns’ the University? Institutional Autonomy and Academic Freedom in an Age of Knowledge Capitalism,” *Globalisation, Societies and Education*, DOI:10.1080/14767724.2012.677707

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Collective Agreements in the 1990s:

- 1995 collective contract negotiated by Association of University Staff:
 - a) incorporated policies on leave, research & study leave, outside activities, disciplinary regulations, statement of general duties (new but based on historical practice), promotion criteria
 - b) acceptance of compulsory performance review. Established union-management working party to set out practices to be used in review but built on existing form and process. Working party finished its work in 1998 (led to the Academic Performance Review).
- 1998 collective agreement: formalization of Academic Grades-Standards and Criteria Document
- 1999, further negotiations leading to contractual reference to AGSC.

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2000-2005, growing tensions between academic staff and senior management over “ownership” of the university

- 2005, strike over pay that had failed to keep pace with inflation and had fallen 30% behind Oz
 - 2005-12, Strategic Plan: blueprint for corporatization of the university.
Hallmarks:
 - establish UoA as NZ’s premier research university
 - the “producing” of so many “A” and “B” ranked researchers in the PBRF; increased MA and PhD completion rates
 - “narrow and instrumentalist”
 - reflected a top-down, corporate model of control focused on aligning and disciplining staff in pursuit of Strategic Plan goals
- ☞ accompanied by burgeoning ‘Human Resources’/administrative layer to discipline staff in line with organizational objectives

One problem ...

... the union ...

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2009, Collective Agreement negotiations: employer attempt at clawbacks

- “Policy Matters as Policy” – remove all University policies from ASCA
- Removal of research & study leave; outside activities; Academic Grades Standards & Criteria; disciplinary guidelines; and eye tests
- Employer withdrew these claims

2010-11, collective agreement negotiations and industrial dispute

- Removal of research & study leave; outside activities; Academic Grades Standards & Criteria; disciplinary guidelines; and eye tests
- Resolution: withdrawal of these terms and conditions and their replacement by “Participation Clause”, clause 2.4-2.6.
 - ↳ ***Union members entitled to participate in the academic governance of the University***
- Hope for building a more collegial relationship between union and senior management and more genuine participation of staff in academic governance of the University

Academic Staff Collective Agreement, 2011-2013

- 2.4 The employer recognises that employees covered by this agreement are entitled to participate in the academic governance of the University as provided in this clause, both individually and collectively as members of the union, acknowledging that the University is governed by its Council.
- 2.5 The employer recognises that such collective participation is particularly important in relation to academic matters, complementary to the role and responsibility of the Senate for academic matters.
- 2.6 In order to ensure that such collective participation in the academic governance of the University is effective, the employer shall comply with the following participatory processes when reviewing University policies relating to research and study leave, outside activities undertaken by academic staff, and academic grades, standards and criteria:
- (a) The employer shall inform the union of its intention to review such policies and enter into discussions regarding the appropriate conduct of the review;
 - (b) The union shall appoint representative members to participate in the review on behalf of union members and have the right to seek timely advice from the union members they are representing during the course of the review;
 - (c) Such representatives shall participate collegially and cooperatively in the review.
- 2.7 The union shall appoint two members (one academic and one professional staff) to the Staff Advisory Committee.

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- 2012
- Strategic Plan, 2013-2020: blueprint for audited, corporatized university
 - Emphasis on ranking: UoA as top-ranked university in Asia-Pacific region
 - Increased selectivity in student admissions
 - Increased spending on student “extracurricular” experience and building (at same time that government is starving tertiary sector for funds)
 - Emphasis on international students (education as export)
 - Emphasis on more MA and PhD completions
- The Vice Chancellor’s breaching of the ACSA and his “Academic Standards” proposal
 - Claims AGSC unwieldy and that staff and promotion committees need clarity in determining criteria for promotion (obfuscatory language of power)
 - Must be read in connection with the new strategic plan; in effect it is a disciplinary tool to align the behavior of staff with the objectives of the Strategic Plan (the VC’s words); will function by getting individual staff to monitor and enhance their performance, the criteria for promotion will become internalized benchmarks as staff refashion themselves as units of productivity; the new promotion criteria amounts to a new system of auditing