

“Where are we now?”: Negotiating a Changing Model of the University

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FOR CONGRESS 2011, held at the University of New Brunswick in Fredericton, the ACCUTE Committee for Professional Concerns (CPC) organized two panels, “Situating Sessionals” and “The Corporate University.”¹ As I was preparing to present my own paper on “The Corporate University” panel, and while I was in the initial stages of bringing together contributors for this readers’ forum, I was also in the thick of working on behalf of my university’s faculty association as we negotiated a new collective agreement (which is likely why the term “negotiating” found its way into the title of this forum). Thus, at the time, I was philosophically and substantively absorbed in the idea of the collective rights and responsibilities of the professoriate and in the way the principle of the university as a self-governing institution could be mobilized as a framework for articulating and enshrining particular terms and conditions of work. And, certainly, what emerged in both CPC panels were far-ranging considerations about

¹ “Situating Sessionals” was organized by Veronica Austen and Alessandra Capperdoni, and “The Corporate University” was organized by Kit Dobson and me. An expanded version of Marjorie Stone’s paper, presented as part of the “The Corporate University” panel, will appear in a special issue of *ESC* edited by Len Findlay. My thanks to Jason Haslam, then-Chair of the CPC, for co-ordinating both panels.

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the detrimental material effects of institutional policies that emerge, shift, creep, breed, and stealthily (or sometimes overtly) gain formidable, almost overwhelming substance. However, what also emerged was perhaps a more broadly considered exploration of how concrete changes within postsecondary educational systems have come to bear not only on the academic's professional function but also on the sense of his or her cultural and personal identity.

This focus on identity and the toll of institutional hiring, workload, resourcing, and accountability policies on the individual academic—on the person behind the doctorate—brings to mind a talk I recently attended entitled “The Slow Professor.” In their emerging research project, Maggie Berg (Queen's) and Barbara Seeber (Brock) consider how the political, philosophical, and social principles of the slow food movement might offer academics a constructive vocabulary for responding to the changing and changed university. After picking up on Frank Donoghue's survey of the language of crisis that permeates current scholarship on the state of the university—for example, Martha Nussbaum's clarion cry, “We are in the midst of a crisis of massive proportions and grave global significance”—Berg and Seeber suggest that such language is unhelpful: “The discourse of crisis creates a sense of urgency—act quickly before it is too late—and contributes to the problem of overwork, perceived powerlessness, and stress.”² Berg and Seeber seek to examine how the individual academic—as teacher, researcher, and colleague—becomes a locus for reflection and day-to-day engagement, and, in many respects, contributors to this readers' forum have adopted a similar focus on the local. Robert Zacharias calls for a concerted effort toward the “critical professionalization” of graduate students, a process that might productively empower these members of the university community to understand and critique how their role is discursively defined. Adam Beardsworth writes frankly about the way sessional members of a department undergo extra scrutiny due to their precarious employment status, which sometimes leads to feeling coerced into performing—both in the sense of *doing* and *showing*—extra departmental work. In her own piece on the situation of sessionals, Veronica Austen questions the rhetoric of survival that seeps into conversations

² Maggie Berg and Barbara K. Seeber, “The Slow Professor,” The Centre for Teaching, Learning, and Education Technology (Brock University, 2 December 2011). See Frank Donoghue's *The Last Professors: The Corporate University and the Fate of the Humanities* (Fordham UP, 2008) and Martha Nussbaum's *Not For Profit: Why Democracy Needs the Humanities* (Princeton UP, 2010).

between contract faculty and their tenured and tenure-track colleagues, suggesting that the “survival of the fittest” mentality stymies the will to challenge inequities. Writing from the perspective of tenured faculty member and former dean, Donna Palmateer Pennee encourages the professoriate to pay renewed attention to their service responsibilities within the institution, noting that it is through a responsible attitude toward service that we confirm our professional autonomy. Heather Murray encourages members of English departments to start questioning our participation in a culture of self-abnegation that not only leads to overwork but also undermines attempts to effectively advocate for resources. Finally, in a rousing conclusion, Adam Beardsworth and Stephanie McKenzie offer some first thoughts toward a Sessional Manifesto, stressing on the one hand the need for contract labourers to work toward a sense of their collective rights and, on the other hand, the obligation of tenured and tenure-track faculty to recognize these members of our community as individuals, as valued and dedicated colleagues, and as crucial constituent partners within the university.