

**Promoting Differentiation in University Missions:
Three Suggestions for the University of Toronto**

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It is an honour to be invited to share a panel on “The Mission of Our University in the Future” with so many famous scholars and educators.

I would like to thank this morning’s speakers, including former university administrators and the current president of the faculty association, for their generous comments about our book, *Academic Transformation*.¹ There seems to be agreement at the Symposium that the book properly describes the forces that have been reshaping higher education in Ontario, particularly those associated with the pressures for enrolment expansion and more research.

Several of you have congratulated me on having my name and our book featured in this morning’s article² by “Canada’s most influential columnist.” Let me share my two-part formula for getting your name in the newspaper for a collectively authored book. The first part is to find very able colleagues to collaborate in the hard work. In this case they are Greg Moran, former provost at The University of Western Ontario and chair of the Ontario Council of Academic Vice-presidents, Michael Skolnik, professor emeritus at OISE and Canada’s leading scholar on post-secondary education, and David Trick, former assistant deputy minister for the Ontario Budget and subsequently for postsecondary education – one of the very few people in the province who understands the intricacies of university funding arrangements. The second part of my formula is to make sure that all of your co-authors have surnames that occur after yours in the alphabet.

Our book has many suggestions for system change but the one that has generated the most discussion this morning is the call for greater differentiation in the missions of Ontario’s higher education institutions. This derives from three findings:

- 1) Ontario is the only jurisdiction of its size in the world that tries to do virtually all its undergraduate education with the world’s most expensive model, the research university 40-40-20 model where faculty are expected to devote as much of their time to research as to teaching.

¹ *Academic Transformation: The Forces Reshaping Higher Education in Ontario*, Ian D. Clark, Greg Moran, Michael L. Skolnik, and David Trick, McGill-Queen's University Press, 2009, 244 pages. (See www.academictransformation.ca.)

² *Universities are sitting ducks for reform*, Margaret Wentz, The Globe and Mail, April 13, 2010. <http://www.theglobeandmail.com/news/opinions/universities-are-sitting-ducks-for-reform/article1532075/>.

- 2) The dollars per student from grants and fees for Ontario universities have, contrary to popular belief, essentially kept up with the consumer price index (CPI) over the last twenty years. The reason class sizes and use of adjunct and part time faculty have been increasing in all universities is that the prices of inputs, mostly faculty salaries, have been rising much faster than the CPI, and because hours of teaching per faculty member have been declining, partly due to increased administrative complexity associated with the greater research focus.
- 3) The relationship between undergraduate teaching performance and research productivity has been extensively examined in the literature and the evidence is unequivocal: there is essentially no relationship. There are good and less good researchers and good and less good teachers and no correlation between them. (This audience may find this hard to believe, but remember, you are in that quadrant of professors who happen to be good at both.)

In her remarks the morning, the Provost noted the impact that government fiscal contraction in American states and in England is having on publicly funded universities. It is no secret that Ontario is also facing dramatic fiscal pressure in the coming years. This province cannot continue to try to provide all undergraduate education using the research university model and have any hope of achieving an internationally competitive quality³ of research and teaching.

With a more differentiated system we could, for the same system cost, achieve better research and better undergraduate education, with teaching that is better adapted to the needs of the hugely diverse population seeking bachelor's degrees. A more differentiated system would see a higher fraction of the province's research and graduate education being done at those institutions with the most productive researchers, and it would shift the balance of effort from research to teaching in other institutions.

This cannot happen without changes in government regulation and funding arrangements. The reasons are obvious: most professors would like to do more research and less teaching and would like the same pay as equivalent-ranked faculty at the highest paying institutions; most university administrators and their community supporters would like to see their institutions acquire the prestige associated with top-flight research and researchers. But our province cannot afford to accommodate all these aspirations.

To achieve greater differentiation, provincial funding needs to become more mission-based and more performance-based. Given the strong interests at play, decisions to create a more differentiated system have to be made at the political level and they require public comprehension and support. This leads to my three recommendations for the University of Toronto.⁴

³ The measurement of quality is addressed in Chapter 5 of our book and Michael Skolnik has subsequently extended the analysis in his nicely titled paper, *Quality assurance in higher education as a political process* in Higher Education Management and Policy, Volume 22/1, © OECD 2010.

⁴ The three recommendations in this note are specifically directed at the promotion of institutional differentiation, and not at the related issue of differentiation within universities. In our book we say (page 192): "Besides differentiation *among* universities, a form of greater differentiation *within* universities could be very helpful in enabling these institutions to cope with the diverse demands that they face. We are thinking here of the creation and widespread utilization of different appointment categories that promote role differentiation among members of faculty. In Chapter 4, we described the efforts that some universities have made to establish teaching-only positions, i.e., faculty positions in which the predominant role is teaching, engaged ... in "scholarship of teaching" without a

To help develop public understanding and support for a more differentiated system, the University should:

- 1) Commission a rigorously objective research paper to be presented to the Government of Ontario that describes how other leading jurisdictions provide differential funding for their public universities. The study should document how each government funds the universities doing the most research compared with how it funds the universities doing the least research. One could look, for example, at California, Michigan, British Columbia, England, New Zealand, The Netherlands, and Japan. I would be extremely surprised if the funding for the most and the least research-intensive universities in these jurisdictions were as similar as in Ontario.
- 2) Continue to demonstrate leadership in the measurement and publication of the university's research and teaching inputs, costs, outputs and outcomes, and encourage other universities to do the same so that relative performance will be clearer to taxpayers, students and policy makers.
- 3) Encourage (and provide technical support for) every single faculty member to have a public web site that has up-to-date descriptions of teaching, research and service contributions. The internet is now the main source of information for people interested in what goes on in universities. It is remarkable how much you can now learn from university web sites about what professors are actually doing.⁵ An intelligent reader does not have to be an expert in the field to get a pretty good idea of the quality and relevance of the research output of a university department by spending a few hours reviewing faculty web sites.

The transition to a more efficient and differentiated system of higher education in Ontario will not be easy. The debates will invoke equity, fairness, community pride, regional development, academic freedom,⁶ institutional autonomy and collective bargaining.

But this university, and one hopes other universities, can help with this difficult process by providing policy makers and the interested public with relevant facts and analyses in a highly transparent manner.

Thank you again for the opportunity to contribute to this Symposium.

substantial expectation of applied or discovery research within their discipline. A small portion of time could be provided for research in such positions, but it might be most appropriately focused on research that will improve teaching and learning. We noted that such positions do not exist at all universities; where they do, they are very limited in number except at a few institutions, and they make up a very small percentage of full-time faculty positions system-wide, generally not in the tenure stream. A compelling case can be made, both in regard to efficiency and quality of teaching (and research) for expanding the number of such positions and making them part of the tenure stream.”

⁵ See, for example, *A taxpayer view of university funding, or, Steve and Di's evening on the Internet*, Ian D. Clark, University Affairs, March 8, 2010, <http://www.universityaffairs.ca/a-taxpayers-view-of-university-funding.aspx>.

⁶ See, for example, *Different Pipers, Different Tunes – A review of Selling Out: Academic Freedom and the Corporate Market*, Ian D. Clark, Literary Review of Canada, April 2010, <http://reviewcanada.ca/>.