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## “Reinventing” Higher Education: Symbolism, Sloganeering, and Subjectivity in the Lone Star State

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# “Reinventing” Higher Education: Symbolism, Sloganeering, and Subjectivity in the Lone Star State

*Staci M. Zavattaro and Terence M. Garrett*

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*Faculty performance data released by Texas A&M University and the University of Texas – the only two major public research universities in the country to have released such detailed data – for the first time shines a bright light on higher education’s faculty productivity gap. The data shows in high relief what anecdotally many have long suspected, that the research university’s employment practices look remarkably like a Himalayan trek, where indigenous Sherpas carry the heavy loads so Western tourists can simply enjoy the view.*

—Richard O’Donnell, former consultant to the University of Texas Board of Regents

## **Introduction**

Higher education is part and parcel of a market spectacle (Debord 1967/1994; Garrett and Sementelli 2012) that follows some prescriptions of reinventing government (Osborne and Gaebler 1993), essentially charging these institutions with inefficient operations and minimal customer service standards. Following the “reinventing government” *qua* business model, any semblance of public service (Denhardt and Denhardt 2007) – now including public colleges and universities – that ignores “customers” is under attack. While governance values shifted with these business-based movements (Box, et al 2001), higher education values, too, have moved universities from producing *academic* capital to *economic* capital (Naidoo and Jamieson 2005).

The professorial ranks, in particular, are being scrutinized as part of a politically charged agenda that makes an explicit assumption that could possibly lead to their employment “restructuring” or elimination if they do not succumb to prescriptions of individuals who, and organizations that, advocate that teaching duties are more important to the general public than research activities. Traditionally, in the academy, these aspects are part of a seemingly equal triumvirate – research, teaching and service. Attacks on higher education throughout the United States, and elsewhere,

threaten to kick out important legs of the professoriate’s responsibility to society and the profession.

One person who promotes the teaching-above-all approach is Richard “Rick” O’Donnell, quoted above, who gained notoriety in Texas for making controversial remarks regarding faculty productivity within the state’s public higher education institutions. The quotation at the outset of this paper is an introduction to a 2011 report O’Donnell released regarding the costs of higher education in Texas. O’Donnell, a well-known conservative who once worked for the Texas Public Policy Foundation (TPPF) pushing for higher education reform by devaluing research, analyzed faculty productivity within the above-mentioned report (O’Donnell 2011).

To classify faculty productivity, O’Donnell developed a 2x2 matrix based on teaching (“course load based on credit hours taught”) and research (“dollar value of externally funded research”) (p.1). Labels in the matrix include Coasters (low teaching and research), Pioneers (high research, low teaching), Sherpas (high teaching, low research) and Stars (high teaching and research). The attempt by the TPPF – a non-profit research organization that aims to promote liberty and free enterprise – is to extract surplus value from the work of the Texas professoriate, categorized as productive laborers (Harvie 2006).

A special dot off the 2x2 matrix indicates faculty who are Dodgers, “the least productive faculty, who bring in no external research funding, teach few students and cost nearly ten times as much as Sherpas to teach one student one class; in essence they’ve figured out how to dodge any but the most minimal of responsibilities” (O’Donnell 2011, 1). As one potential solution, O’Donnell recommended eliminating said faculty Dodgers and increasing the student population in a Coaster’s classes by 97 students per year. (We acknowledge here that Dodgers do exist, but, we believe, they are the minority and an enticing image used to promulgate the “lazy professor” myth. The Dodger classification could work within any organization, not just academe.)

He identified these unproductive faculty members within both the University of Texas and the Texas A&M systems, imploring lawmakers to take immediate measures to remove such academics to save students, parents and taxpayers money. Gov. Rick Perry is taking seriously these suggestions and others like them from the Texas Public Policy Foundation, even before the O’Donnell 2011 report. For example, the Texas Higher Education Coordinating Board, the state agency overseeing higher education programs, recommended modifying funding formulas for universities, colleges and community colleges to be commensurate with results (graduation) rather than enrollment (Texas Higher Education Coordinating Board 2010).

As such, it becomes prudent to examine effects of business-based interventions into higher education, as business values often run counter to values of higher education (Delucchi and Korgen 2002; Naidoo and Jamieson 2005). Our paper, then, explores the following question: How can Morgan’s images of organization (2006) help explain the transformation of higher education policies and organizational practices in Texas? Essentially, we focus the answer of this question on politicians, administrators and faculty. We leave aside, except anecdotally, the effects of marketization on students, as we feel that students ultimately are directly impacted by what happens to those three groups who are, for all intents and purposes, in control of their educational futures.

We analyzed the University of Texas and Texas A&M systems, the state's largest, using three images from Morgan (2006): organizations as cultures; political systems; and psychic prisons. Each lens explained part of the transformation of higher education within Texas, but came together to frame the effects on higher education values in general. We chose to use Morgan as a foundation because of his concepts' recognition in organizational studies, even including higher education settings (Simsek 1997). More specifically, we found the three lenses to be particularly useful in explaining the situation in Texas simply because of the myriad players involved. We did not choose, for example, Morgan's brains or machines metaphors because they did not provide us with the kind of insight we were looking for when trying to better understand the political, decision-making, business climate in the state.

We admit here our approach might be a bit biased toward the faculty side, as we serve in that capacity. Some might describe our piece as polemical, and we indeed embrace that label. We further submit that making our case – that of defending traditional academe, the protection of academic freedom, and faculty governance on behalf of the professoriate – is important to the ultimate survival of the public university based on corporatist-ideological attacks on those institutions (Garrett and Sementelli 2012). We welcome the debate as to the shape of the American academy in the present and future and offer suggestions and questions for future research in this regard.

The paper begins with a brief overview of reform movements within an American higher education context. Then we outline the University of Texas and Texas A&M Systems before turning toward Morgan's images as mechanisms to understand the rhetoric taking place in Texas – and throughout the country. In our concluding section, we offer a possible solution as well as a future research agenda in this area.

### **“Reinventing” Higher Education**

As we noted in the preceding section, cushioned within an overall move of public administration toward commodification and marketization is a parallel transformation within higher education. Similar to popular bureaucrat bashing, especially that arose with management movements encouraging governments to run like businesses, came academia/academic bashing. (The quote at the outset of this paper illustrates this point.)

Many reform movements get lumped under the reinvention umbrella (Frederickson 1996) – Total Quality Management, New Public Management and Reinventing Government itself. We do not go into nuances of each, or engage in the debate about differences between the theories. (For a critique of these management movements, see, for example, Garrett 2006; Zavattaro Forthcoming.) The major takeaway from each we employ here is the notion of pushing business practices and values, especially efficiency, as central tenets of public administration, a notion considered antithetical to a well-functioning democracy (Waldo 1948/2007), which, at its core, serves pluralistic interests in a messy fashion.

Scholars have critiqued market movements in myriad manners. To illustrate, Fox (1996) argues that reinventing government is internally logically inconsistent. “Market theory is based on

atomistic individualism whereas community is based on group solidarity—deeply contradictory social philosophies. Papering over them with an epiphenomenal one-liner [embracing both business markets and community] is at best naive, at worst cynical; either way, it is postmodern” (Fox 1996, 258). The problem with such a “reorganizational” goal, however, is that business values and practices marginalize the organization-public relationship at the expense of public participation and substantive democracy (Box et al 2001; Zanetti and Adams 2000).

Within higher education, market-based reform movements also have taken hold, becoming part of an overall market spectacle (Garrett and Sementelli 2012). Universities traditionally are structured to provide “available knowledge” (Miller 2003, 898) to interested students, delivered by professional instructors and administrators. Miller puts it bluntly: “Colleges have transformed into big businesses” (902), effectively morphing academic organizational culture from one of public good delivery to one of commodity production.

Institutionally, public higher education has a culture and history of engendering trust with the public, as members collectively provide service to society. As Carnevale (1995, 22) notes,

For [a public] organization, how it chooses to organize and operate symbolizes its assumptions about how much it trusts its members. An organization makes choices about whether communication systems are open or closed, decides whether jobs allow some measure of autonomy or are carefully regulated, shows confidence in the knowhow of its members by encouraging participation in decision making or devalues the intelligence of staff by ignoring their advice. It reaches for moral involvement and mutual commitment or relies excessively on transactional or contractual means to enforce agreements. It encourages or suppresses voice and demonstrates a tolerance or resistance of dissent. It drives at ensuring procedural justice or is arbitrary in disciplining members. It earns a reputation for ethical conduct in dealings with employees and clients or is greeted with well-deserved cynicism by both. It favors either explicit formalisms or implicit values.

As such, knowledge within many organizations (not only higher education) has become commodified (Suddaby and Greenwood 2001; Garrett and Sementelli 2012). Knowledge commodification takes expert-level, managerial knowledge out of its contextual frame and reduces it into transferable goods (Suddaby and Greenwood 2001), effectively negating the benefits of tacit knowledge. Professionals often are the ones driving institutional change and reform (Suddaby and Viale 2011), so altering professional culture in academia at the street-level (here, professors) could influence knowledge management and transfer. To illustrate, economic and capital production (pushing professors to bring in external funding) could eclipse traditional spheres of knowledge production, student learning and the social charter (Nickolai, Hoffman and Trautner 2012).

Moreover, there also is a shift in how students see their roles in the university. Especially when constructed as customers, students are more likely to feel entitled to a grade or even take a course that guarantees a higher grade without learning substantive material (Delucchi and Korgen 2002). This clashes with how faculty view their roles, which is to proffer public service values, teach critical thinking, and help master discipline-specific knowledge (Higher Education

Research Institute 2009). Ultimately, student/professor/community ties become transactional rather than transformational (Gibbs 2001).

Examining the literature regarding reform movements and higher education, several patterns emerge that neatly parallel (naturally?) with critiques levied against reform movements in public administration in general – shifts in service provision, accountability, and equity.

First, service provision values took a new focus from delivering competent students and developing competent researchers to providing *more not necessarily better qualified* students to “a citizenry that is ready to produce consumables, as well as become comestible” (Giberson and Giberson 2009, 3). Society is meant to benefit from higher education both from the professoriate producing research and students becoming employees in chosen specialties and actively engaged citizens. Second, accountability shifted *from the societal, political and plural* (academia, in general, is accountable to myriad audiences) to the *political only* (Romzek and Dubnick 1987), as performance measures and quantitative data replaced broader, less easily measurable effects of higher education. The market-based shift in higher education took place when “public policies combined with market mechanisms particularly in the 1970s and 1980s when political accountability overtook professional judgment in universities as the quality mechanism” (Huisman and Currie 2004, 532).

Externally controlled accountability measures took responsibility out of the institution’s hands and placed it within political confines, be it state legislatures or other funding agencies. Institutions were left, largely, at the whim of political shifts (McLendon, Deaton and Hearn 2007). Broadly speaking, students become “customers” who should perceive value for dollars invested (Huisman and Currie 2004, 533; see also Wills 2009). Customers are put into a passive, take-it-or-leave-it, often non-dialogic role with organizational masters; this is antithetical to substantive democracy (Box et al, 2001).

Accountability should have many pillars, lest one form of accountability overshadow another (Romzek and Dubnick 1987). Government policy makers are imploring universities to produce more output (graduating students) with fewer inputs (budget allocations) in the name of increased accountability (ACE 2010). Overall, reform movements made higher education institutions and employees accountable to political masters *alone* (Huisman and Currie 2004), instead of bureaucratic, political, professional and legal (Romzek and Dubnick 1987). All four together should, ideally, improve democratic decision making.

Finally, equity often is sacrificed in the name of efficiency under the managerialist (or new public management) approach (Rosenbloom, Kravchuk and Clerkin 2009) – what is efficient is not necessarily effective or fair (McLendon, Deaton and Hearn 2007; Garrett 2006). To address the equity issue, for example, the World Bank recommended overhauling tertiary education so countries can compete in a globalized, knowledge-based society (World Bank 2002). The report addressed equity in higher education, noting that most students worldwide do not have access to adequate, or any, financial assistance, leaving them behind in the knowledge-driven society – unequal access to a commonly public good. Equity as a value construct, perhaps tied conceptually in citizens’ minds to tenets of socialism in the current era of corporatization, may be taboo as a viable alternative to efficiency and runs counter to American ideals of capitalism

(Bellah 1992). As such, corporate values in the American ideology prevail –especially in higher education (Garrett and Sementelli 2012).

## **Organizational Images and Texas Higher Education**

With foundational and background material given, we can now turn to Morgan’s (2006) lenses through which scholars and practitioners can examine organizational development and behavior. For example, when one speaks about organizations as machines, the idea of a closed, rigid system comes to mind. Contrast this with an organization as organism, and one thinks more about a dynamic, open system interacting with, and feeding off of, its environment. Looking at the manipulation of imagery to achieve an organizational point already has precedence within the literature (see Fox 1996).

This paper utilizes Morgan’s images of organizations as cultures, political systems, and psychic prisons to explore how business values potentially change the culture, maneuvering and decision making within academia. Each metaphor is treated one by one but come together to understand organizational development and behavioral effects of rhetorical prescriptions noted above. While there are several metaphorical approaches we could have taken, for space limitations we chose the metaphors we believe were most apt to analyze public management of higher education in Texas. We focused attention on politicians, administrators and faculty, as each should, ideally, work together to foster goals of higher education. As we saw – and continue to see – in Texas, that is not always the case.

Before delving into the images, we offer a brief background on the two Texas systems upon which our analysis focused. We turned our attention toward the University of Texas and Texas A&M Systems because, taken together, institutions within each statistically reach most of the state either by directly educating students, interacting with the community (service learning), employing people, or contributing to an overall field (via research).

The University of Texas System (UT System) is made up of nine universities and six health institutions (The University of Texas System 2011a). An appointed Board of Regents supervises the system, with the chancellor reporting directly to the board. An 1876 Texas constitutional mandate established, along with legislative action five years later, an education system to be called the University of Texas, which has since grown to include the branches given above (The University of Texas System 2011b). UT Austin is the state’s flagship institution, and other system universities are located throughout the state. The system includes more than 18,800 faculty members and more than 68,500 staff members. Student enrollment tops 211,200, with 43,274 students earning degrees (The University of Texas System 2011c).

The UT System’s overall budget for Fiscal Year 2011 was \$12.8 billion, with \$2.37 billion going toward research expenditures in Fiscal Year 2010 (The University of Texas System 2011c.). Within the system, most of the money goes toward the healthcare institutions, followed by instruction and research, respectively. Depending upon the institution, tuition costs remain relatively low, with many students receiving some kind of financial assistance, thus reducing the

cost of per-year attendance for students (The University of Texas System 2011c). These figures will later play into statistical representations of faculty efficiency.

Rivaling the UT System is the Texas A&M System (A&M System), which comprises 11 universities, seven state agencies, and a health science center (Texas A&M System 2011a). The A&M System reaches more than 120,000 students and employs more than 28,000 faculty and staff. The A&M System also has a Board of Regents and chancellor to govern its operations. Though universities date back to 1876, the system was officially recognized in 1948 (Texas A&M System 2011b).

During Fiscal Year 2011, the A&M System, like all other public agencies in the state, faced mandatory budget reductions. Cutting five percent from the system totaled an \$80 million loss, supplementing that with only a marginal 2.41 percent tuition and fee increase (Texas A&M System 2011c). During Fiscal Year 2009, the system spent more than \$731 million on research-related activities such as equipment and maintenance (Texas Higher Education Coordinating Board, 2010). Texas A&M University, the largest institution within the system, invests \$652 million in research activities (Texas A&M System 2011d).

With this background given, we can now begin to utilize Morgan's images of organizations as cultures, political systems and psychic prisons (2006) to shed light on the relationship between faculty, administrators and politicians within the systems. Ultimately, these discourses and constructions affect student learning, the social contract, morale, productivity and much more within a university setting.

### **Texas Higher Education as Organizational Culture**

We begin with the organizational culture lens, which refers to: the development of organizations as cultural phenomena, societal culture, and culture within the organization itself. We focus on the latter conceptualization. Organization culture is germane to the particular organization and serves as an overarching guiding principle "created and sustained by social processes, images, symbols, and ritual" (Morgan 2006, 128; see also Bolman and Deal 1991). Social cues become institutional myths that guide overall employee and organization practices.

There can be cultural divisions within the organization, which often are referred to as sub-cultures. For example, the UT and A&M Systems have cultures at the macro levels, and each system institution (i.e. UT Austin, UT Arlington, etc.) has its own organization culture and subcultures (micro level). Overall, micro, institution-level cultures should relate back to respective system macros cultures.

In light of reinvention/business methods affecting higher education service delivery, there is an organizational culture clash taking place within Texas between: 1) Boards of Regents-favored business norms and the 2) traditionally more democratic and collegially based norms favored by professors and staff. (We mean more democratic when compared to business-based models of higher education that, as we noted, place efficiency above a social contract.)

To illustrate the root of these cultural clashes, we looked at the backgrounds of politically appointed Board of Regents members. The A&M system board included (as of this writing) a



dentist, insurance salesman, a former ExxonMobil executive, a bank executive, lawyer, and accountant (Texas A&M System 2011d). UT System Regents included former oil executives, a real estate developer, an engineer, and business owners (The University of Texas System 2010). None, at least according to available biographies, have *direct* experience in higher education.

What most had in common, though, was a tie to Texas Governor Rick Perry. For example, UT System Regents Chairman Eugene Powell recently came under fire for actively campaigning for Perry’s presidential campaign in 2011. Despite a seeming conflict of interest, Regents remain private citizens who can donate to, and actively participate in, political campaigns (Hamilton 2011a). Indeed, “regents appointed by Perry have given more than \$5.8 million to his campaigns over the past decade” (Hamilton 2011a, para. 7). Such conflicts led the State of Texas to examine conflict of interest policies governing the Regents (Hamilton 2011b).

Another controversy surrounded UT System Regent Alex Cranberg, an energy company executive who became a Regent two weeks after moving to, and registering to vote in, Texas (Hamilton 2011c). Cranberg had ties to Governor Perry and other political allies who wished to revamp higher education by making universities operate more efficiently by raising class sizes and devaluing research (Hamilton 2011c). Moreover, Cranberg was linked to Jeff Sandefer, “a board member at an influential Austin-based conservative think tank known as the Texas Public Policy Foundation – the source of many of the reforms being implemented at A&M that have set the old academic guard off kilter” (Hamilton 2011d, para. 3). UT Regent Brenda Pejovich also is on the TPPF board.

The second element present in the cultural conflict involved professors and professional staff. Considering that universities are diverse in reach and scope, there cannot be one universal definition of academic culture. Several characteristics, perhaps, are shared: broad, discipline-specific and institution-specific goals are difficult to measure; internal and external stakeholders are diverse; professional staff are varied and require myriad and varied training; university environments change frequently; and belief systems often differ between professors and administrators (Bartell 2003). “Professors tend to place a high value on autonomy and academic freedom, while administrators are oriented to maintenance of the administrative system and the associated procedural requirements” (ibid, 53).

As such, universities are not ideal places to implement rigid business-based structures of governance (Bartell 2003). Faculty often are loath to give into an organizational cultural change that counters those norms and values. Within universities, beliefs about what constitutes good teaching – and how to effectively measure it – are at the core of the current struggle between university administrators (driven by external boards and politicians) and higher education teachers transmitting knowledge in their respective disciplines to their students (Entwistle, Skinner, Entwistle and Orr 2000).

To illustrate the cultural clash manifesting itself in policy recommendations, the aforementioned Texas Public Policy Foundation devised what it called Seven Solutions to reforming higher education. The Seven Solutions are: “measure teaching efficiency and effectiveness”; “publicly recognize and reward extraordinary teachers;” “split research and teaching budgets to encourage excellence in both;” “require evidence of teaching skills for tenure;” “use ‘results-based’

contracts with students to measure quality;” “put state funding directly into the hands of students;” and “create results-based accrediting alternatives” (Texas Public Policy Foundation n.d.). Academic research often is the backbone of academia, generating grant funding and publications in journals or books. The TPDF argues that separating research and teaching budgets “allows for excellence in both but others worry [it] merely lays the groundwork to choose the latter over the former, particularly because it is less expensive” (Hamilton 2011d, para. 14).

To reiterate, organization culture is socially constructed (Morgan 2006). Symbolic elements of each side clashed in Texas, showcased by Regents using symbols of wastefulness and professors using symbols of democracy to further their respective points. As one TPDF adviser put it: “It is commonplace now for professors to teach only two classes, or six hours a week, per semester, with release time from the classroom to conduct research. And what are we getting? A recent study issued by the American Enterprise Institute reveals, for example, that from 1980 to 2006, 21,674 scholarly articles were published on Shakespeare. Do we need the 21,675th?” (Trowbridge 2011, para. 4).

### **Texas Higher Education Organizations as Political Systems**

As we can tell from the analysis above, there is a clash begin traditional political and academic cultures taking place in Texas. The second organizational lens we employed was organizations as political systems. The political systems image alludes to “the activities of rulers and ruled” within an organization (Morgan 2006, 150). It gives credence to power and authority relations between managers and employees, as well as to the supposedly “dirty” dealings between organization members. Overall, this image of organization refers to hierarchical relationships between executives, boards, supervisors and employees, as well as lateral exchanges between members of the organization. Such interrelations make this an appropriate lens to employ when examining the Texas higher education case.

Morgan (2006, 153) offers several systems of rule within organizations, all the way from autocracy to direct democracy. Within a university, faculty, through the collegial educational model of governance, would exhibit something close to a representative democracy, whereby elected officers act on behalf of the people; the parallel is a faculty senate. Cultural changes noted briefly above threaten to turn that collegial system in a technocracy, whereby knowledge and expert power rule the day (Hummel 2004; 2006).

Instead of organizations being neat, rational systems, organizations, within the scope of this image, appear as coalitions that “arise when groups of individuals get together to cooperate in relation to specific issues, events or decisions to advance specific values and ideologies” (Morgan 2006, 162). In other words, the metaphor sheds light upon the network approach to governance. Networks come together to tackle issues or concerns, in theory trying to prevent one coalition from dominating and controlling the organization. Within this framework, there is recognition that debate is healthy, that dissensus can emerge (Mouffe 1999).

We saw this pluralistic lens eroding in Texas in terms of accountability, which seemingly favored *strictly* political accountability. This happened because politically appointed Regents in each system carry out a politically driven agenda. Therefore, accountability, which should

consist of bureaucratic, political, professional and legal (Romzek and Dubnick 1987) aspects, became majority political. Bureaucratic and professional accountability were virtually removed amidst the rhetoric painting people, especially faculty, as wasteful. Faculty credibility was being diminished under such attacks, so accountability *to* them also waned.

We return to our two competing networks within the Texas case – politically appointed boards, and administrators and university faculty. Ultimately, it trickled down to students who might not receive personalized attention from professors teaching larger classes. Such is a concrete example of the efficiency versus effectiveness battle – it might be *efficient* to teach classes of 150 but not necessarily *effective* in terms of producing writing or critical thinking skills. (Note that we purposefully use qualifiers such as “could” and “might” throughout so we do not generalize that ALL professors who teach large classes do not get to know students. Generally, however, the former has been our experience and that of our colleagues.)

It is no secret that Governor Perry is a fiscally conservative Republican who traditionally derides federal intervention and extols states’ rights. Not surprisingly, Perry appointed political allies to each System’s Board of Regents. (We write not surprisingly because politicians, no matter the party, appoint like-minded supporters to key positions all the time.) These appointments, though, put the Regents at odds with university administrators. For example, UT System Regents Chairman Powell, who donated more than \$56,000 to Perry’s past campaigns, “pledged to cut costs and to do all he can to hold tuition level or even lower it. That echoes themes sounded by Perry, whose proposed budget for higher education essentially mirrors the House and Senate versions. *In contrast*, UT System Chancellor Francisco Cigarroa warned last month that proposed reductions would have ‘immediate and future devastating consequences for our students, patients, faculty, staff and the communities of Texas’” (Haurwitz 2011, paras. 21 and 22, emphasis added).

Political leanings, and suggestions to reform higher education based upon them, of Regents also put them at odds with other lawmakers in the state. For example, State Sen. Judith Zaffirini, a Democrat who chaired the body’s Higher Education Committee, took issue with Powell’s assertions that: the UT System should increase enrollment at system schools, especially UT Austin; reduce tuition costs by nearly half; and add a low-cost bachelor’s degree – in the ballpark of \$10,000 total – to current offerings (Hacker 2011). (The \$10,000 degree, though, apparently has been accomplished as of March 2012 (Caldwell 2012).) Zaffirini wrote: “I am dismayed by the extensive negative publicity caused by the actions of Chair Powell. Since his election in February he has caused a firestorm of negativity that is detrimental to UT-Austin, to the system, to higher education in general—and to his relationship with legislators” (Hacker 2011, para. 7).

In terms of implementing these political suggestions, the A&M System produced a report based on the TPPF’s “Seven Solutions” regarding faculty cost-benefit to the university. The report was based on an analysis that looked essentially at professor salary, versus students taught, versus research dollars brought in (Mangan 2010). When salary outweighs these supposed benefits, the professor is seen as inefficient. “Critics say the measure is simplistic and doesn’t take into account much of the work faculty members do, including advising students, grading papers, and serving on committees” (Mangan 2010, para. 6).

Critics of the A&M report believe that the A&M System has implemented, in spirit or practice, some of the Seven Solutions (Patel 2010). For example, Patel (2010) reported that A&M embraced the TPDF's suggestion of merit raises based on student evaluations, which are often anonymous, as well as measured professor efficiency based on number of students taught. The more students a professor teaches, the less he or she costs the university, as each student represents a dollar figure – according to the TPDF. One professor quoted in the article “taught 561 students that year in large classes. He generated more than twice his salary in just student tuition dollars” (Patel 2010, para. 25). The politically inspired economic emphasis of these cost-benefit comparisons amounts to a truncated depiction of the work of professors and instructors in the academy and their overall value to their institutions and the public.

To reiterate, these examples showcase a one-sided political debate centering on efficiency, as defined by politically appointed, business-minded boards of regents, and a silencing within the political sphere of those ideologically opposed to these changes. Accountability, then, shifted to solely political rather than political, bureaucratic, professional and legal (Romzek and Dubnick 1987).

### **Texas Higher Education Organizations as Psychic Prisons**

The final image used was organizations as psychic prisons, which “joins the idea that organizations are ultimately created and sustained by conscious and unconscious processes, with the notion that people can actually become imprisoned in or confined by the images, ideas, thoughts, and actions to which these processes give rise” (Morgan 2006, 207). The image is a direct tie to Plato's allegory of the cave (Reeve 2004). Within that story, people are confined within an underground cave, bound only to look forward. Light from a fire behind them casts shadows on the wall, which the prisoners perceive as reality. Emergence from the cave upsets this frame of reality, leading to confusion and skepticism. The metaphor “[explores] some of the ways in which organizations and their members become trapped by constructions of reality that, at best, give an imperfect grasp on the world” (Morgan 2006, 208).

We applied this frame to analyze differences in the relationships and perceptions of the two main constituencies upon which our research has focused – politicians and faculty. Each group has the potential to get stuck in ideological views, thus casting proverbial shadows on the wall that represent a fictionalized reality and a stalemate toward deciding how to best execute higher education objectives in Texas. Within this frame, all three lenses come together to paint an overall picture of the effects of market-minded changes in higher education. Within the cave, shadows become reality for the prisoners (Reeve 2004). Ideologically speaking, the same is happening when higher education in Texas is scrutinized, especially through the political systems and culture lenses. Each side – faculty, administration, politicians, students, the community, etc. – has its own view of the world that becomes reality. In this case, we focused on political ideologies clashing with faculty ideologies, thus creating two divergent views of reality. As with any competing tales, perhaps somewhere in the middle lies the truth.

One Truth being proffered is the “lazy academic.” As noted above, one insider termed these faculty members Dodgers (O'Donnell 2011). Dodgers do not bring in research funding and teach few classes – essentially wasting taxpayer dollars as the narrative goes. Regents for both systems

embraced this rhetoric, as discussed above, and tried to find data that supported their claims of inefficient university operations.

For example, at the request of the Regents, the UT system released a draft spreadsheet reporting faculty compensation, research expenditure, grade distribution and student satisfaction (The University of Texas System 2011d). Faculty, though, examined the data and uncovered numerous inaccuracies (June 2011). As one commenter on *The Chronicle of Higher Education's* website noted: “Is this exercise in accountability a search for truth or a political tool?” (Hawki72 2011). The A&M System took similar steps, releasing the faculty report cited above.

To counter these images, faculties within the UT and A&M systems have issued reports regarding efficient operations – the faculty version of Truth. Marc Musick, associate dean for student affairs in the UT Austin College of Liberal Arts (as of this writing), compiled a report (Musick 2011) that detailed that institution’s efficient operations. According to the document, UT Austin is the “second most efficient public research university when considering graduation rates and comparing the amount of public money received to the percentage of students who graduate and the number of professors employed” (Musick 2011, 6). (Topping the list is the University of Florida.) Musick compiled the study based on data from the Integrated Postsecondary Education Data System. Based on tuition dollars and state funding received, coupled with the number of professors instructing students, UT Austin’s efficiency ranking came out second. One shortcoming noted in the report is the relatively low graduation rate at the institution.

Interestingly, each side often utilized the same set of numbers yet came to wildly different conclusions to further its reality. These brief examples, within this section and throughout, showcased how faculty battle administrators who are in turn combatting political appointees working closely with the governor. Seemingly, image control problems within the state are masking the reality that both faculty and administrators are not necessarily opposed to reducing costs of delivering a service, being more transparent about salary, and increasing quality skills given to students. Images, though, become powerful tools, thus stalling critical debate regarding this issue. In other words, each group gets stuck in its own cave, only seeing the shadows on the wall as reality.

## **Comments and Discussion**

Assaults on higher education, and public service in general, come when there is a (real or perceived) waste of scarce resources. Governments at every level still are striving toward striking a balance between quality and efficiency. It is a never-ending tug of war that has found its way into the higher education discourse throughout the U.S. We focused attention specifically on the situation in Texas, drilling down into the state’s two largest systems – The University of Texas System and the Texas A&M System. To explore the effects of such rhetoric on higher education, we employed three images of organization: cultures, political systems and psychic prisons (Morgan 2006).

Each frame was independent but combined to paint a fuller picture of what was – and still is – taking place in Texas. Politicians and appointees seek to deliver services to customers (students) at the most cost-effective price. In turn, professors (specifically tenured or tenure-track faculty) argue they will have less time to focus on research endeavors and pedagogical improvement.

Professors being labeled as inefficient by the TPPF and others are the ones with reduced course loads for reasons that do not appear in, say, the UT system spreadsheet. For example, that data do not reflect: (1) if the person has an appointment in addition to being a professor (department chair, dean, other administrator, etc.); (2) student advising and working with graduate students (thesis chair, committee member, etc.); (3) number of publications; (4) departmental, college, university, and community service; and more. In other words, key aspects of the professoriate often get left out in favor of dollars in, dollars out data.

Morgan's (2006) cultural, political systems and psychic prisons images provided our framework. Others, e.g., organizations as instruments of domination, organizations as brains, etc., could conceivably have been used to analyze the clash. We could have, for example, pursued an "instruments of domination" approach where we would have "employ[ed] a 'radical,' or critical, interpretation based primarily on concepts and social critiques developed by [Karl] Marx, by [Max] Weber and by [Guy] Debord, to offer a position, polemic, and perspective regarding the nature and effects of public management on the American polis" and higher education in general (Garrett and Sementelli 2012, 456). However, we thought that the political systems, culture, and psychic prisons frames best explained the conflict between political actors – the UT and A&M regents – and faculty.

So what are academicians to do? While we do not attempt to claim our suggestions are panaceas for change, we do think they are places to begin a logical discussion about the role of all the actors in the higher education process. To that end, we suggest revisiting complementarity (Svara 2001) to bring parties – students, faculty, staff, political actors, the public, interest groups, alumni and other stakeholders – into more of a mutual relationship that one dominated solely by the political group.

Svara (2001) argued that complementarity involves elected officials and administrators working together while retaining their own spheres of expertise to achieve mutual governance goals. For complementarity to work, administrators must be dedicated to accountability and responsiveness, while politicians understand administrative expertise and organizational commitment (Svara 2001). The underlying key to complementarity is mutual dialogue and shared work, so "the knowledge and values of those who do the ongoing work of government complement the knowledge and values of those who ultimately set the course for government and ensure that it stays on course" (180). By recognizing that all stakeholders in the learning community can engage together, the following could occur:

- 1) Organizations can begin changing cultures from adversarial to cooperative. Morgan (2006) noted that culture is a powerful driver for organization success. By working together, faculty and administration can ideally increase buy in and morale throughout the institution. Overall organizational culture change would need to occur

- with top management and disseminate toward deans, department chairs, faculty and other campus leaders.
- 2) Faculty senates would be seen as legitimate sources of institutional knowledge. If complementarity is in place, faculty senates would be given a pronounced role in university policy making and in turn would be open to working with administration to design, pass and implement policies. In some universities, this might already be the case. Where it is not (where, for example, there remains an Academic Senate rather than a Faculty Senate), faculty and administrators should respect each other’s areas of expertise when working together.
  - 3) Decision making would include faculty, students, staff, administrators and politicians. It would more resemble proposed models of inclusive citizen participation (King, Feltey and Susel 1998; King 2011). This would open up potential for engagement and participation across campus from these stakeholders. If culture changes, the university as a whole could be more open to transparent and inclusive decision making rules that, again, could engender increased buy in as opposed to decisions made in secret. Now, we certainly do not advocate that every single decision must be executed in this manner. Clearly that is not feasible. We suggest, for example, that sweeping policy changes should go before students, faculty, staff, administration and political actors who can work symbiotically to produce a policy outcome.
  - 4) Each production sphere (Nickolai, Hoffman and Trautner 2012) would be considered equal. In a marketized state, generating research dollars and producing more, not necessarily better, graduates is the key to (perceived) success. Ideally, we should have universities that balance knowledge production, student learning and social obligation fulfillment. By understanding, as we have attempted to do here, underlying discourses from faculty, administrators and politicians, we can begin to speak the same language to possibly move toward this balance.

Each of these propositions, naturally, leads to further questions that should be addressed when thinking of American academy’s future:

- 1) How can Morgan’s other images (2006) be utilized to understand the current climate of U.S. higher education?
- 2) How can organizational culture shifts take place in a marketized environment?
- 3) What role does organizational communication play in either exacerbating or hindering complementarity?
- 4) How can each sphere – faculty, administration and political – work better together to achieve mutually beneficial goals?
- 5) What aspects of marketization can be harnessed to further the goals of each production sphere?
- 6) What role do students play in developing educational institutions? How can students be more involved in the discussion about the university’s role? How does their social construction as “consumers” affect how they feel about university life?
- 7) How can faculty and administrators improve the image of research in the university? In other words, is more community outreach needed in a knowledge economy (Nickolai Hoffman and Trautner, 2012) to: 1) better explain the purpose of research and 2) better connect town with gown in an applied manner?

- 8) Can complementarity work in a university setting? If so, why? If not, why not? Put differently, what factors might contribute to a university's success in stakeholder engagement?
- 9) How can we move higher education from a transactional basis to transformational one? Is such a shift even possible in light of marketization?
- 10) What role might traditional administrative values such as justice, fairness and democratic ethos play in higher education reform?

We welcome an ongoing political discourse on the fate of the academy, especially public higher education institutions in the twenty-first century.

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