

“Point. Click. Matriculate:” (1) Corporate Influence in the University and the Academic Library

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Corporations are playing a growing role in U.S. universities as they increasingly turn to the corporate sector to supplement the budget of the institution. This coming together of the academy and the business world is having an impact on the universities themselves. To the extent that academic li-

braries mirror their parent bodies, academic librarians must be concerned about the effect that external corporate values will have on their libraries. Intelligent choices for the library of tomorrow will result from a careful understanding of these issues.

The Association of College & Research Libraries held a conference in April 1999 with the theme “Racing Toward Tomorrow.” The theme is an interesting choice of phrase. In North Carolina, the term “racing” brings very specific images to mind; namely the image of corporate-sponsored vehicles (racing cars) going around in circles as fast as they can. These logo-covered cars are used by their corporate sponsors to develop and test new products even while the cars are outwardly engaged in a popular activity that attracts individuals’ money. The professional drivers of these vehicles also make more money from corporate endorsements than from their primary occupation. Unfortunately, if we look at current trends in U. S. higher education, this scenario could be a harsh analogy for the universities and colleges of “tomorrow.”

In the 1980s, a number of events occurred which paved the way for corporations to increase their influence in higher education by increasing the amounts of their donations. First, U.S. federal funding of higher education, so ample in the preceding two decades, was cut considerably during the Reagan administration and included re-

ductions in the funding of federal grant-giving agencies. To make up the shortfall in income, universities turned to the private sector for increased financial support. Then, two U.S. laws were enacted which made financial support to education more worthwhile for corporations. The 1981 Tax Recovery Act made monetary largesse to higher education more attractive to corporations by “increasing the tax deductions for ‘donations’ made to universities” (Soley 1995: 10). The University and Small Business Patent Procedures Act of 1980, and its supplement in 1983 to include large corporations, made an even greater impact. This law enabled universities to sell the patent rights to products of the research of university faculty and staff and it allowed corporations, “by sticking some of their dough into universities ... to buy the results of university research,” (Soley 1995: 10) even if the primary funding of that research came from the federal government, i.e. U.S. tax dollars. Corporations then were able to increase their profit margins by transferring some of the costs of their research and development to universities. Lawrence Soley, in his book *Leasing the Ivory Tower*, states bluntly:

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The story about universities in the 1980s and 1990s is that they will turn a trick for anybody with money to invest; and the only ones with money are corporations, millionaires and foundations. These investments have dramatically changed the mission of higher education ... (Soley 1995: 5)

Some of the changes that Soley documents include: cases of corporate influence affecting university research agendas toward their own corporate profit; funding of academic projects and programs which promote free market capitalism or conservative ideologies; the placement of university administrators on the boards of corporations which directly benefit from the administrator's position; and faculty stockholders in corporations who benefit, as do the corporations, from research supporting the effectiveness and safety of corporate products, and from the censorship of research that does not. It is not a pretty picture. Nor is Soley the only one painting it. In his article in *Lingua Franca*, senior editor Daniel Zalewski explores the effects of corporate influence in scientific research. One effect being that in some fields, particularly biomedicine and pharmaceuticals, disciplinary journals including *The Journal of the American Medical Association*, *The Lancet*, *Science*, and *The New England Journal of Medicine*, are requiring disclosure of financial interests from prospective contributors because of the increasing number of university scientists with vested interests in the research they are conducting. He also quotes Harvard's JoAnn Manson who states “The public can't have it both ways – demanding speedy medical advances and some fairy-tale vision of academic purity” (Zalewski 1997: 59).

Kevin Kniffin, in his article in *Multinational Monitor*, a watchdog publication founded by Ralph Nader, notes that “The presidents of more than one half of the 50 institutions listed on *U.S. News and World Report's* dubious rankings of leading universities serve on corporate boards,” (Kniffin 1997) and raises questions of university autonomy and academic integrity. “University officials face two sorts of conflicts from outside positions such as corporate directorships: direct and indirect conflicts of interest, and conflicts of commitment. Members of corporate boards acquire fiduciary duties to advance the interests of the shareholders they represent, and these interests may not be commensurate with what is best for a university” (Kniffin 1997).

In addition, Kniffin has compiled a database, using university annual reports, university administrative biographies and the Security and Exchange Commission's database as sources. This database is accessible via Internet (<http://www.essential.org/monitor/hyper/mm1197.db.html>). It lists the top 50 *U.S. News and World Report* universities with the corporate board positions held by each university's president, including salaries and additional compensations, and provides a listing of over 50 corporations with university ties (Kniffin 1998). While admittedly not comprehensive, it provides a chilling overview of the intertwining of administrators in higher education with corporate bodies.

Another facet of higher education's increasing corporatization and another means to offset budgetary deficiencies, is the “selling of chunks of the curriculum to corporations which contribute relatively modest sums in order to obtain trained workers” (Aronowitz 1998: 33). Just one significant example is that of CUNY's New York City Technical Colleges' curriculum for employees of Bell Atlantic, then NYNEX, which was initiated in 1996 by a grant from the National Science Foundation (NSF). The significance lies in the fact that while “this type of relationship isn't anything new, the big change is that by funding and championing this program as a model, a prestigious government agency, the NSF, is sanctioning the subordination of curriculum to specific corporate needs” (Aronowitz 1998: 33).

Curriculum is not the only area effected by university/corporate “partnerships.” A newer trend is “financial arrangements with corporations that limit students' rights and choices” (Corporatized 1997). An editorial in *Multinational Monitor* cites the example of the University of Wisconsin-Madison's contract with Reebok. Student protest caused the dropping of a “no-disparagement” clause, which would have prohibited the sports' coaches from saying anything negative about not only the company's apparel, but also Reebok's labour practices and its relationship with the university. The signed contract still requires that student athletes exclusively wear Reebok clothing and shoes at games, practices and media interviews.

While university administrators contract with corporations in various ways to make up for budgetary shortfalls, one area of growth in higher

education has been in the number of administrative personnel (Hanley 1998). From within this group has emerged the outline of the "corporate" model of higher education. Major decisions about education and learning are now couched in terms like "efficiency," "productivity," and "outcomes." The quality of education is now judged by success in spreading resources as thinly as possible.

Corporate practices such as downsizing and union busting are also now a part of academe. The closing of Columbia University's linguistics program and library school, despite their high national rankings, is one example (Aronowitz 1998: 34). The 1996 strike at Yale University called by the GESO (Graduate Employees and Students Organization) brought to light not only Yale management's classic union-busting tactics (refusal to recognize election results and threats of job loss and expulsion to strike participants), but also a more insidious and widespread academic reality (Lafer 1997). Approximately 43% of all academic faculty are part-time (Aronowitz 1998: 34). At Yale, the teaching responsibilities are split roughly in thirds between faculty, adjuncts and graduate students, with the graduate students actually teaching slightly more than faculty, but paid only a little more than a tenth of the faculty salary. This downsizing of teaching staff, reflecting a national trend, "is also working major changes in the very definition of scholarly communities" (Lafer 1997).

The traditional image of academic life pictures the campus as a refuge from the rat race – a place ... where scholars can engage even controversial issues without the pressure of market forces Instead, the type of community being shaped by the corporatized university is one that promotes fear and insecurity among its central operating principles. The adjuncts, part-timers, and graduate students who now constitute the preponderance of teaching staff are not only paid less than their tenure-track colleagues; they also occupy positions of institutional insecurity (Lafer 1997).

Just as the composition of professional staff at universities and colleges is changing, so is the composition of the student body. "The archetypal 18-to-22-year-old undergraduate going through school in four consecutive years and financed by parents is becoming increasingly rare and unconventional" (Brown 1996: 10). Adult, "non-traditional" learners are returning to higher education as never before. One way that corporate interests

have tapped into this trend is in the rapid growth of for-profit universities. The best known of these is the University of Phoenix, which, as of 1998, had enrolled more students than the nation's largest private non-profit university. By tailoring its classes and schedules to already employed adults, 23 years and older, by shortening the typical semester system, and by accepting 99% of applicants, the University of Phoenix (UOP) and its parent corporation, The Apollo Group, are thriving (Soley 1998). *Money* gave The Apollo Group an "A" rating for investors in 1997, projecting a return of 41.9% (Cullen 1997). These returns are possible because of a number of cost-cutting measures that the University of Phoenix employs including use of part-time faculty (there are 45 full-time faculty spread out over 65 locations in 12 states), university-developed course content used by all instructors at all campuses, and no libraries. Students have access to an on-line collection of abstracts and full-text periodicals. Kurt Slobodzian, head of UOP's Learning Resource Center stated that books simply aren't as important as they were when he was in college 30 years ago and "libraries don't have enough copies for everyone to check out, anyway" (Soley 1998: 16–17).

For-profit and non-profit institutions alike are courting adult "non-traditional" students with their increases in distance education options. "In 1995, according to a 'flash estimate' released this spring by the U.S. Department of Education, fully a third of all institutions offered distance education courses, and another quarter planned to" (Marchese 1998). While a myriad of institutional configurations have developed (and are continuing to), their predominant emphasis is on on-line offerings; in some instances to the exclusion of all else. Western Governor's University, founded in 1996 by 17 governors, and with 14 business partners including IBM, Sun Microsystems, Microsoft, Cisco and International Thomson, is a prime example. "WGU won't employ teaching faculty, develop courses, or deal in credit hours; its online academic content will come from a range of qualifying providers (colleges or businesses, here or abroad), and all degrees will be competency-based" (Marchese 1998). Nation-wide, colleges and universities in partnership with various hardware, software and media corporations are scrambling to get courses and academic support

material on-line, ostensibly to increase the quality of education for distance learners and campus residents alike. In an article first circulated in academic and labour-related listservs, historian David Noble examines this phenomenon and identifies slightly different motivators. First are the corporations themselves, network hardware and software developers, cable companies, "edutainment" and publishing companies, who are all looking to exploit a new market. Another is the university administrator who wants to promote their institutions as "cutting-edge," and look at

computer-based instruction as a means of reducing their direct labor and plant maintenance costs – fewer teachers and classrooms – while at the same time undermining the autonomy and independence of faculty. At the same time, they are hoping to get a piece of the commercial action for their institutions or themselves, as vendors in their own right of software and content (Noble 1997).

Noble's point of view might be considered extreme, but the concerns he raises regarding faculty are shared by at least 850 faculty members of the University of Washington who have protested to Governor Gary Locke in a form of a letter written by the campus representative of the American Association of University Professors (AAUP). The letter decries what these faculty see as a "'frightening' and potentially 'disastrous' shift toward replacing instructors with computerised teaching tools (Monaghan 1998).

Their fear is not unfounded. Robert Heterich, president of Educom, a management consortium of 600 colleges and universities and a hundred private corporations now merged with CAUSE to form Educause, has stated about higher education, "Today you're looking at a highly personal human-mediated environment. The potential to remove the human mediation in some areas and replace it with automation – smart, computer-based, network-based systems – is tremendous. It's gotta happen" (Noble 1997).

It may "gotta happen," but to whose benefit? Technological innovation does not necessarily equal educational progress. Mark Shields, assistant professor of Technology, Culture and Communication at the University of Virginia calls computer-based instruction (CBI) "dubious, inconsistent, and ephemeral," (Shields 1995). He notes that "Despite quantum improvements in

the power, versatility, and elegance of instructional computing technology and software authoring tools, the pedagogical grade point average for CBI is a low "B" – just above average" (Shields 1995). Dee Stallings, a proponent and developer of on-line instructional courseware, speculates in her article in the *Journal of Academic Librarianship* on not only a "techno-utopian" vision of higher education, but also an equally plausible "dystopian" future where "educational and training services become nothing so much as online vending machines" (Stallings 1997).

Students, for whose benefit these digitalisation efforts have been touted, are expressing their own doubts. At UCLA, York University and the University of British Columbia, where administrations have undertaken massive online instruction programs (and set up their own corporations to direct them), students have protested vigorously against the commercialised computerisation of their educational experience.

Significantly, at both UCLA and York, the presumably cyber-happy students have given clear indication that they are not exactly enthusiastic about the prospect of a high-tech academic future. They recommended against the Initiative at UCLA and at York lending their support to striking faculty and launching their own investigation of the commercial, pedagogical, and ethical implications of online educational technology (Noble 1997).

So where does the academic library stand in this volatile institutional dynamic? According to Stallings, the library will be the "center of the physical and virtual campus of the future," (Stallings 1997: 279) although she does not elaborate on how this is to occur. David Lipsky, head of the Distance Learning Office at Cornell "sees librarians playing a big role in implementing and refining the communications technology" that will allow Cornell's programs to be globally accessible. He believes librarians should take the lead because "they know the content, and it should be the content that dictates the technology, not the other way around" (Chepesiuk 1998: 54). In order to take that lead, Ron Chepesiuk, even as he acknowledges the "pitfalls" (albeit slightly) of network security, copyright permissions, appropriate technological infrastructure, and the time, money and effort involved in any digitalisation effort, believes that libraries will basically need to add staff, do more for on-line students, be patient

with the technologically-challenged, and make sure faculty understands the library's role (Chepesiuk 1998: 55). It may "take" a little more. Not the least of which is overcoming administration's view of the library itself.

Polley A. McClure, Vice-President and Chief Information Officer at the University of Virginia, in her article on the technological "transformation" of traditional universities tellingly mentions libraries once; under the sub-title "Barriers to Increased Learning Productivity." Her point being that libraries have a "long way to go" toward providing the complete electronic collections she feels are the "only viable way" for universities to enable equitable access to resources for distance learners (McClure 1997).

This point of view is far from unique. Ronald F. Dow, in *Library Trends*, states:

Campus administrators, with greater frequency, speculate on the nature of an electronic library and question the need to expand or maintain the physical edifice that is the library. More and more, librarians and friends of the traditionally defined library fear for the further erosion of institutional support for library programs, while some have even come to fear for the future of libraries in academia and for librarianship as a profession (Dow 1994: 462).

So how does the profession confront this challenge? One way is in how "future" librarians are educated. Four library schools have significantly altered their structure and curriculum in order that their graduates may meet the "requirements of the future" (Marcum 1997: 35). The library schools at Drexel University, University of Illinois/Urbana-Champaign, University of Michigan, and Florida State University broadened their curricula in varying degrees to include, among other disciplines, computer systems management, analysis, architecture, and distribution. Three of the four also deleted the word "library" from their departmental name. The impetus for these restructuring efforts and the source of their ability to accomplish them came from funding provided by the Kellogg Foundation, a non-profit philanthropic foundation, founded by W.K. Kellogg in 1930, that includes among its goals "Building a Free Market Economy" (Kellogg 1998). It is this same Kellogg Foundation that funds the Benton Foundation, source of the report "Buildings, Books and Bytes: Libraries and Communities

in the Digital Age." One of the major concerns of the authors of the report is their belief in the necessity of libraries carving out "their competitive niche in a marketplace of exploding information resources" (Benton 1997). The report's emphasis on electronic access issues provoked Michael Gorman to believe that its "true agenda is to replace real libraries with virtual libraries" (Gorman 1997: 187).

External funding, however, such as that from organisations like the Kellogg Foundation, has become a necessity for academic libraries and library schools alike. In its guidelines for distance learning library services, the ACRL acknowledges the necessity of "special funding arrangements ... to deliver equivalent library services and to maintain quality in distance learning programs" (ACRL 1998). In her article on the four library schools mentioned previously, Deanna Marcum expresses the concern that "the schools that have broadened the definition of information studies have been able to do so only by obtaining external funds for making the transition. If universities must substitute new programs for the old, the choices are going to be difficult and, most likely, bitter" (Marcum 1997: 37)

Choice, or lack of it, is not only an issue in library school programs, but also in library collections, print and digital. The merging of media companies into multinational conglomerates has become almost commonplace. Read a daily newspaper and you read about the mergers and the buy-outs of publishing houses, television networks, newspaper chains, media outlets and media creators, resulting in relatively few large corporations controlling a large percentage of the sources of public information and entertainment. Time Warner and Turner Broadcasting, ABC and Disney, and Rupert Murdoch's News Corporation are just a few of the more prominent examples. In just the last year, Information Today's "NewsBreaks" headlines reveal that same pattern can be found in companies that provide vast amounts of direct resources and services to libraries, including the M.A.I.D. purchase of Knight-Ridder Information, Elsevier Science's purchase of Engineering Information, FCC's Acquisition of Moody's Financial Information Services, and International Thomson's merger of IAC, Primary Source Media and Gale into The Gale Group. (NewsBreaks 1998). Peter McDonald

believes that these and other activities are reducing the available choices of materials, and subsequently, points of view which libraries offer, thereby undermining freedom of access to information, a basic tenet of librarianship, by an increasing corporate control of media content.

What becomes of our vaunted “access to information” when the very mechanisms of access, namely our computers, our databases, our networks are wholly corporate designed and in the case of many databases, wholly created and priced for commercial gain? (McDonald 1997: 41).

Even given the American Library Association’s explicit commitment to intellectual freedom and freedom of access to information in its Code of Professional Ethics, McDonald believes it is “far-fetched and unlikely in the extreme” that the ALA “infused as it is with corporate membership” would “find their voice to call a halt to this hell-bent romance between corporate-dominated paradigms and the way libraries do their business” (McDonald 1997: 42). Considering that ALA’s corporate membership includes such companies as Kraft Foods, a subsidiary of Phillip Morris (one of *Multinational Monitor’s* 10 Worst Corporations of 1997 (Mokhiber 1997: 17) whose CEO, Geoffrey Bible, recently joined the board of Murdoch’s News Corporation (Murdoch has been and still serves on the board of Phillip Morris) (Klein 1998: 9) and the innocuous-sounding HarperCollins Children’s Books, a division of HarperCollins, also Murdoch-owned, where Murdoch made the “infamous editorial directive” to kill a book by Chris Patten, Hong Kong’s last British governor, despite a contract, in order to curry favour with the Chinese government, a media market he is trying to enter (Mother 1998: 3). McDonald’s concern gives pause.

The profound integration of corporate influence into universities and academic libraries briefly explored here reveals an uncomfortable parallel to the auto racing analogy mentioned at the beginning. Corporate logos brand almost all aspects of university life. Administrators serve on the boards of hardware, software and telecommunication company boards of directors while they decide on the capital appropriations needed for their institutions various forays into digitalisation. Faculty are becoming increasingly split among three groups: those whose corporate-

endowed research provides prestige and security (much like the winning racing team’s pit crew); the part-time and adjunct faculty whose services are contracted much as seasonal workers are; and the remaining tenured faculty who are likely to be under pressure to turn their courses into digital products to which they may or may not have intellectual property rights.

Academic libraries are struggling with the fantastic pressures of administrative devaluation combined with expectations of digital wizardry and responsibility, while their collections, print and digital, are increasingly influenced by a corporate-dominated media environment. And the students? While thousands are flocking to for-profit universities to keep up with a progressively techno-oriented workplace, activism by students at traditional universities against corporate influence in academia, beyond those cited here, is alive and well (Wieczorek 1998: 21). If students at UCLA and York University are any indicator, it is students who may be those most apt to view critically the corporate and university pushes to digitise their educational experience.

And it is not my belief that these digitisation efforts are inherently negative. On the contrary, as a “non-traditional” distance learner myself, the resources made available digitally and which I have been able to access through the libraries of my degree-granting institution and its local counterpart have been invaluable in allowing me to advance in my course of study. The citations supporting this paper attest to that fact. But, I agree with McDonald when he states:

If we wish to adhere fiercely to the First Amendment, to preserve the open door policy of libraries as civic forums, if we are committed to shunning non-stop corporate huckstering at our very workstations, and to slowing the relentless march to digitization (in order to formulate and examine its implications at every step coherently, on our terms, not Microsoft’s), then each and every one of us had better infuse into our daily practice a meaningful discussion of these issues and openly examine their implications among colleagues, patrons, and administrators (McDonald 1997: 44).

The difficulty in embracing ACRL’s chosen name for its 9th annual conference, and the concepts it represents goes beyond the discomfort brought to mind by the “racing” analogy. While thoughtful deliberation is not exactly a national trait of the

U. S. at present, that is precisely what is needed to make intelligent choices about just what sort of "tomorrow" we are "racing toward." If we do not, we can all be assured that the choices will be made for us. The stakes are high; you can bet on it.

Notes

1. "Point. Click. Matriculate" is taken from advertising copy on the packaging for *CDMS Administrative Software Solutions for Higher Education*.

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