

CHAPTER 17

The New University

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Knowledge has become the currency of the new global market; the most successful societies in the future will be those that optimize the creation, distribution, and utilization of knowledge. In this optimization, the universities will play a crucial role.

If our future well-being depends in some measure on the effectiveness of our research universities, what expectations should we have for these institutions? What should the best universities of the twenty-first century look like? Without pretending that anyone can provide a precise blueprint for the research university of the future, several characteristics seem essential. My description will be limited to the American university, not because I think it either the most important or the most likely to serve as a model for those in other places, but only because I know it best. The New American University will prosper to the extent that it can maintain a dynamic equilibrium between several inherent tensions.

CHARACTERISTICS OF THE NEW AMERICAN UNIVERSITY

Described below are what would appear to be some of the most likely and important characteristics of the New American University:

This article will form part of the concluding chapter in a forthcoming book.

1. Institutional autonomy, lively faculty independence and vigorous academic freedom, but strong, impartial, public governance and decisive, engaged presidential leadership

The American university has prospered, in part, because it has enjoyed an effective and responsive pattern of shared governance that has served it well. Unlike some of its counterparts in other places, this shared governance has typically involved a three-fold pattern of public oversight and trusteeship; shared, collegial internal governance by the faculty, and strong presidential leadership. Though the particulars have varied with time and place, this three-fold pattern has proved both durable and effective. Its effectiveness has depended in the past on a large measure of external public confidence and internal institutional loyalty, mutual trust, professional commitment, and impartial judgment. However, these qualities, together with the pattern of shared governance they have supported, now show signs of strain.

Public governance, exercised by lay boards of trustees or regents, remains strong, effective, and responsible in the private universities, but highly variable in the public institutions, where board members are typically appointed by the governor, or, in a few states, elected in state-wide ballots. Political pressures, regional interests, ideological issues, and obsessive notions of accountability have divided public boards, while sunshine laws—ruthlessly applied—have limited their ability to recruit outstanding and outspoken presidential leaders. Meanwhile, faculty loyalty has tended to drift from the university to external professional guilds, funding agencies, corporate sponsors, and private patrons, so that institutional engagement of faculty members has often declined, or is sometimes used to promote special interests or obstruct proposed reforms.

The role of the president—once an influential public figure and a considerable external voice—is now seen by external observers as less and less influential, and by potential aspirants as less and less desirable and less and less effective, so that the average incumbency has declined to less than five years in public institutions and less than seven in all institutions.

As a result of these changes, institutions once admired as models of prudent judgment and strong participatory government are now seen by some as archetypes of bureaucratic bumbling and learned inefficiency, where effective management and decisive leadership are held hostage to a host of competing interests and divided loyalties and where prompt, responsible action and responsive decisions are delayed by prolonged debate or diluted by ideological wrangling. The development of responsible, effective, and balanced governance, leadership, and management

is one of the most urgent priorities for the American university as it contemplates the new millennium.

2. Increasingly privately supported, but increasingly publicly accountable and socially committed

Today's leading research universities include both privately endowed and state-supported, public institutions, though the financial differences between the two have declined in recent years as state appropriations have been reduced. One president of a public university has commented wryly that, within his own tenure, his university had changed from state-supported to state-assisted to state-located! As this trend continues, all major universities—public, as well as private—are likely to become more dependent on private support. Two campuses of the University of California, as well as the University of Michigan, for example, have each embarked on billion-dollar funding-raising campaigns. In 1995-96, voluntary giving to American universities and colleges reached \$12 billion, increasing in 1996-97 to \$13.8 billion, with some 53 percent coming from alumni and other individual donors. Of that total, research universities received \$9.4 billion, with rather more than half of that going to public universities. Of the top 20 institutions in total giving, 8 were public.

Generally speaking, the private universities have been smaller in size, more selective in admissions, and more limited in range of academic programs than their public counterparts. But they have enjoyed more freedom—being unaffected, for example, by the requirement imposed on state universities to conduct virtually all their business in public—and more effective governance than most public institutions, where trustees or regents are politically appointed or elected. Against this, private universities have generally been far less engaged in community outreach and extension activities than have their public counterparts, largely because of the lack of funding for such efforts.

It seems likely that, as all universities become more dependent on private support, the New American University will see reforms in the governance of public institutions and greater emphasis by the private institutions on community outreach and service, with the land-grant extension model reinvented and reapplied on a new scale and in a new context. And both are likely to face a new level of public accountability, based not only on costs, but also on effectiveness.

3. Campus-rooted, but internationally oriented

In spite of the growing benefits of information technology, the New American University will still depend on an established campus base as the essential platform for both its specialized facilities and its scholarly community. Though its role may change, the traditional concept of a

university as a place is unlikely to be made redundant by a virtual institution, however powerful and inclusive distance learning may become. But the “real” university, though it may be located in a particular place, cannot be confined to a single place; campus-based in its location, it will be international in its orientation and cosmopolitan in its character; its graduates will pursue their careers within an increasingly global economy and an increasingly diverse workforce. Both its curriculum and its membership will reflect this diversity; the underrepresented and the underserved will still be recruited; study abroad will become the norm; both the student and faculty bodies will become conspicuously international in their membership, and living productively in a diverse community will increasingly come to be regarded as a “job skill.” International students already form a significant proportion of the university’s student body (typically 10-15 percent of its undergraduates and up to 50 percent of its graduate students) and foreign-born faculty members are already found at all levels within the ranks of most of its departments. Boards of trustees of private universities already generally include several international members. New research partnerships, teaching exchanges, scholarly consortia, and institutional associations all serve to reinforce these growing international linkages. This emphasis on global knowledge is scarcely new; it recapitulates and reflects a characteristic as old as the university itself. While most colleges and universities will still draw their students from their local regions, the great research universities will become ever more international in their membership and outlook.

4. Academically independent, but constructively partnered

The New American University will continue to enjoy the remarkable degree of institutional independence and academic freedom that has marked its recent existence and been an essential part of its success. That scholarly independence—exasperating as it has sometimes been to its detractors, and buttressed, as needed from time to time by boards of trustees and courts of justice—has served society well.

The New American University and its scholarship will continue to depend on that *independence*, but it will thrive to the extent that it also acknowledges its own *dependence* on others. For no institution, however wealthy, can “do it all.” No university, however large, can be truly comprehensive in its programs. Nor should it seek to be. If the university is to meet the increasing range of societal needs, it will require new alliances within the academic community and new partnerships outside it, with communities; local, state, and national agencies; corporations; foundations; hospitals; professional associations; scholarly societies; and other institutions—from other universities, schools, and colleges to

federal research laboratories—to enrich and extend its scholarly work and support its services. Because the traditional “university-years” are but one part of a lifelong learning experience, universities will establish closer cooperation with other “providers” and “users” of knowledge, including not only other universities, professional associations, corporations, and local groups, but also commercial vendors of educational hardware and software.

5. Knowledge-based, but student-centered; research-driven, but learning-focussed

The distinctive feature of the New American University will still be its commitment to learning in its widest sense. This involves not simply the transmission of existing knowledge, but also the creativity that produces new achievements, and the research that leads to new discovery and new knowledge. World-class scholarship will require both greater selectivity and greater interaction among disciplines than is now the case. But this will be pursued in the context of a student-centered culture, with clear educational goals, explicit statements of curricular objectives, clearly defined professional skills, and new measures of educational outcome. It will include a new commitment to effective learning at every level—professional, graduate, and especially undergraduate—with emphasis on clearly defined standards, high competence, effective advising and mentoring, cultivation of learning skills, personal growth, individual creativity, and meaningful assessment, all based on a variety of learning styles, teamwork, off-campus experience, lifelong learning, and the effective use of educational technology.

The “best” universities and colleges of the future will be those demonstrating the most effective gains in learning and learning skills among their students. This new accountability will demand a better understanding of the learning process and a clearer statement of instructional purpose and effectiveness. The traditional pattern of a student accumulating information—however advanced—and a professor teaching “subjects”—however effectively—will be displaced by an emphasis on developing in students the initiative, skills, and discipline to pursue knowledge independently, to evaluate and weigh it effectively, and to apply it creatively and responsibly.

6. Technologically sophisticated, but community-dependent

Harnessing all the power of new information technology, both on the campus and in distance learning, the New American University will display a greater dependence on the power of the scholarly community in both teaching and research. The new electronic community will reinforce and complement the older resident community, each contributing the power of distributed intelligence in both inreach into the campus

community and outreach beyond it. Intellectual cross-fertilization will become a more powerful learning tool and a more effective means of research and inquiry.

7. Quality-obsessed, but procedurally efficient

Because scholarly discipline and analytical rigor are the keys to understanding, the New American University will continue to be obsessed with quality. It can have no other standard. But scholarly quality and academic excellence are not inconsistent with administrative efficiency and cost-effectiveness. Universities have too readily assumed that, because quality is priceless, cost was no object, that no support level could ever be fully adequate for their needs. A new commitment to both excellence and cost-effectiveness, with thoughtful translation of quality improvement, effective practices, and meaningful benchmarking, will be applied across the campus.

For most universities, this task will have to be undertaken within a context of continuing financial constraint. Cost-effectiveness is likely to be a major factor in both student choice in enrollment and in corporate—and institutional—choice in creating new partnerships for “outsourcing” education and research. This will require continuous improvement in the effectiveness of the learning process, not so much in cost-cutting, as such, as in improving quality and performance. New and sophisticated measures of “output” and effectiveness will be required to satisfy public accountability.

8. Professionally attuned, but humanely informed

The growth in importance of professional studies has been paralleled by a decline in influence of the traditional liberal arts. This is partly cause and effect, influenced in part by the growing importance and increasing public role of the professions, and by the growing popularity of professional studies among students. But part of the decline in the influence of the liberal arts reflects the lack of internal cohesion within their own traditional core disciplines. The sciences have become powerful, but increasingly unintelligible to nonscientists. The social sciences, entranced by microanalysis and quantification, have become increasingly irrelevant to social issues and public policy. The humanities, embracing fragmentation, otherness, and unreality, have neglected the great overarching issues of human commonality in favor of partisan advocacy.

Yet never has professional practice stood in a greater need of enlightened influence and humane awareness. There is limited value and little benefit in information, undigested and unscrutinized by personal reflection, or in professional skills, unguided by thoughtful insight and personal commitment. If the university fails to educate free and responsible citizens, who will undertake the task? So the New American University

must reinvent the liberal arts, perhaps expanding the range of cultural statement by the creative integration of sound, text, and image, and using the new communications technology to create both a new form of expression and a new level of literacy. This integration is, as yet, characterized more by trash than by pearls, more by entertainment than by enlightenment. But it offers the possibility of enriched cultural expression and a new cultural literacy to which the traditional liberal arts have yet to respond.

CONCLUSIONS

These eight characteristics seem likely to shape, and perhaps define, the New American University. They will change the culture of the campus, in much the same way that the changes of the late nineteenth century transformed the American college into the more comprehensive research university. The transformation will involve a combination of the best in the current model with the external connections and service ethic of the public land-grant university and with new global partnerships as strong as those of multinational corporations.

How creatively the university deals with these tensions will depend on the strength of its core values and its willingness to adapt to changing conditions and needs. This adaptation will involve changes—some of them wrenching—within the university. But American universities need to change, not because they are weak, but because they are strong. American universities are not “in trouble,” not in decline. In spite of financial pressures, which are real, and public concerns, some of them justified, universities are doing well. They include world-class institutions; a dozen or so provide the benchmark for the rest of the world.

So change for the sake of change offers no benefits. But responsive and responsible change is the requirement for their continuing strength, and their continuing effectiveness. Like it or not, universities were originally created and continue to enjoy public support because they are “service organizations,” serving the growing needs of society for knowledge and professional skills and service. But that responsibility is best discharged not by immersion in the issues of the moment, but by taking the larger, comprehensive view of knowledge, in all its dimensions. The community that is a university is the best means yet devised for achieving that comprehensive view, with all its benefits. Perhaps the biggest challenge for the university is to balance the inevitable tension between that scholarly community, and the degree of separation that sustains it, and responsible concern for the clamoring needs of society.

University trustees, deans, provosts, and, especially, presidents must become the challengers of complacency, the voices of institutional conscience,

the patient advocates for change, the champions of excellence, the midwives of new alliances and partnerships, the facilitators of teamwork, and the untiring exemplars of both traditional values and a new level of commitment.

In an age of limits and constraints, of cynicism and suspicion, universities must reaffirm the soaring possibilities that enlightened education represents. In an era of broken families, dwindling religious congregations, decaying communities, our nation desperately needs a new model of community—knowledgeable but compassionate, critical but concerned, skeptical but affirming—that will serve the clamoring needs of our fragmented society and respond to the nobler, unuttered aspirations of our deeper selves.

This is not to pretend that universities have either wholesale solutions to humanity's ills or a monopoly on skills to address them. Universities are human creations, full of human imperfection, with as much sloth, envy, malice, and neglect as any other community and rather more than their share of pettiness, arrogance, and pride. But it is to assert that universities, with all their imperfections, represent the crucible within which our future will be formed. Boiling, steaming, frothing at times, a new amalgam must somehow be created within them if we are to surmount our social problems and rediscover the civic virtues on which our society depends. And, as leaders in every field of endeavor are educated within their walls, as knowledge is increased within their laboratories, new works created within their studios, and professional practice developed and refined within their facilities, so universities provide each new generation of leaders, educated, influenced, and shaped within the culture of the campus. This emerging community—analytical and affirming, critical and creative, inclusive and inquiring, engaged and enabling—will be the New American University.