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The academy has lost in recent years much of its sense of collective purpose -- precisely the quality for which it once was accorded deference and respect. One result is a growing communications gap between higher education and its publics. Another is increased pressure to evolve new ways for redefining faculty work that provide incentives for cooperative entrepreneurship, consistent with both societal expectations and core academic values.

Restoring Our Links With Society:

The Neglected Art of Collective Responsibility

*Bare virtue can't make nations live
In splendor. They that would revive
A Golden Age, must be as free
For acorns as for honesty.*

-- Bernard Mandeville
"The Fable of the Bees"

When I accepted Clara Lovett's request to prepare a discussion paper for the AAHE conference, I knew that my response would likely prove personal and provocative. The knowledge that what I might say would be personal was rooted in a growing awareness of deep contradictions embedded in what I do. For the past eight years or so, I have perched precariously on the border between two worlds — the professoriate where I was born and bred, and the realm of policy and academic management which is the chief current destination of my work. In that period and that role, I have gradually seen reasonable people drawn from both these arenas exhibit increasingly unreasonable behavior. As an active participant in this drama, moreover, I have found it more and more difficult to carry on the necessary work of mediation with any hope of success. More relevant to the current task, I'm finding it a great deal harder these days to say things that don't end up alienating both sides.

My premise in this piece is hardly original — that the academy has lost in the eyes of the public (and I believe in its own eyes as well) much of its sense of collective purpose, and that this is precisely the quality for which it once was accorded deference and respect. But there are perhaps two differences in my particular take on this common theme.

First, I've arrived at this conviction largely through an exercise in what might be termed "participatory linguistics" — caught up in increasingly heated conversations among a diverse (but admittedly far from random) sample of academic leaders and policymakers, and attempting to discern the growing differences in structure and culture that lie behind the rhetoric. Hence, the first part of my argument will be about communication. And, because the assigned topic is faculty, it will be directed largely at the things that I believe faculty need to really understand about the current policy dialogue in order to engage in it productively.

Second, I'm aware that invoking an image of faculty-as-community runs substantial risks of retrospective romanticism. Far too many who have made this point have slipped into a kind of nostalgic, "world we have lost" view of faculty roles and responsibilities — based largely on the archetype of the small liberal arts college — that despite my personal affinity for such a vision, seems at best to be obsolescent and at worst inaccurate. The academy now looks as it does because we as a society have made it so, through a range of past choices and continuing incentives. It does little good to simply exhort faculty to behave differently, absent full public consciousness of these choices and explicit policy attention to these incentives.

At the same time, there is overwhelming evidence that growing numbers of faculty have become uneasy about their own roles *on their own* — quite apart from the stimulus provided by outsiders. And in doing so, they have begun to evolve solutions consistent with, but not always rewarded by, the emerging policy agenda. Hence the second part of my argument will be about some things "collective responsibility" can mean now and concretely — and some specific new ventures based on entrepreneurship and reward that both faculty and policymakers might embark upon to attain it.

Third, I'm more than usually grateful for the fact that "success" in a piece like this lies only in getting people talking. I'm aware that my points here are neither novel or definitive. Absent this caveat, this is territory into which I'd have never dared venture.

I. Some Things We Need to Hear

Vignette: At a recent statewide gathering of faculty and academic administrators last spring, I was taken aside by a faculty participant with a familiar plea: "You need to make them [the legislature] understand the damage they are doing," he insisted, "If they only knew the consequences..." Within an hour, a legislative speaker at the same conference in turn sought me out: "They still don't get it, do they," he observed.

What lies behind the growing communications gap between higher education and its publics? Partly, the answer is obvious, natural, and historic — reflecting the markedly different ends, values, and backgrounds of its respective participants. But in part I believe that it is also a product of the way communication of this kind has recently been handled on the majority of campuses I've observed. Here, disengagement is by mutual consent: in a noble attempt at protection, administrators have largely shielded faculty from what has happened politically; faculty, for their part, remain happy to delegate to others the role of justifying what they do. In normal times, perhaps, this dynamic was healthy and productive. Running interference is, after all, an expected part of the administrative job description. But times are now far from "normal" for higher education, and I'm not alone in contending that they will never be so again. Hence there is the need for faculty — all faculty — to listen personally and carefully to just what the politicians are saying.

Listening carefully demands more than opportunity and attention. Like any form of cross-cultural interchange, it requires both new vocabularies and a large measure of sensitivity for the problems and perspectives of others. I am the first to say that this injunction applies equally to policymakers, and I've tried hard in other settings to attempt a suitable translation from us to them. For the present exercise, though, I'd like to mention four prominent gaps in the other direction — between what I believe the policy community really means and what we stubbornly continue to hear.

We Hear: “You won't give us the money we need (and we know you have)!”
They Mean: “There isn't any money.”

Perhaps the most fundamental current misunderstanding between policymakers and academics centers on the current allocation and future availability of resources. While many collegiate leaders will recognize that current economic difficulties must inevitably lead to short-term troubles, few are yet ready to admit (and still less to plan for) serious threats to higher education's “manifest destiny” of continued expansion. Meanwhile, their strategy is to protect perceived core assets (chiefly full-time faculty) unchanged and across the board, with the expectation that the temporarily-cut periphery (chiefly plant and equipment, support services, libraries, and part-time people) can be quickly restored when the coffers once more are filled. Faculty, duly protected, often don't know how close the axe has come, as the nature of their personal work has really changed little on a day-to-day basis. At the same time, they tend to ascribe experienced cuts as actively punitive — a product of ignorant ill-will on the part of political philistines and the culpable failure of those whose chief job it is (presidents and governing boards) to get them the money.

Both administrators and faculty must recognize once and for all that current funding levels are a product of fundamental structural conditions. In growing numbers of states, higher education has become the “budget balancer” — the major piece of discretionary spending remaining after mandatory expenditures such as court-ordered elementary school funding and required state-level matching for increasingly expensive federal programs like Medicaid are accounted for. A second element of the problem is that taxpayers simply will not support further increases, however worthy the cause. Flat or inflationary resource environments will be the best we can hope for in the foreseeable future, and we will have to learn to work within them.

We Hear: “You want me to sacrifice quality by doing more with less!”
They Mean: “You have to change what you do.”

Not only is the reality bleak for public finance, but what the public is demanding of higher education also is going up. Most states now face the prospect of accommodating substantial increases in enrollment beginning the second half of this decade. At the same time, society is demanding more and better higher education to help prepare an adaptive, responsible, and “teachable” workforce to meet the competitive realities of a global economy. Faced with these demands, the academy is in one sense quite right when it hears the public demand “more for less.” But it is wrong to see it only as a demand for greater “efficiency.”

This combination of structurally-induced fiscal stringency in the face of an increasingly demanding customer now faced by higher education recalls vividly, for

instance, the operating environment of U.S. industry over the past decade — an experience with which many policymakers are quite familiar. Fundamental to this environment is a demand for quality service delivered at *reduced* provider cost — a conceptual linkage which for higher education has been virtually unimaginable. Public policymakers are aware that restructuring in other public enterprises (like K-12 education and health care) has been fueled by a growing awareness that traditional alternatives will forever remain inadequate. The way the *work* gets done will have to change. We, in contrast, continue to view each new responsibility as an add-on, requiring a new and independent budget line, and having little or no impact on our wider organizational forms and functions. At the same time, we fail to recognize the degree to which *all* the historic professions — including medicine, business, and law — are being forced to become more responsive and client-centered as the conditions of their societal context change.

To outsiders, moreover, nothing has been more telling than the way we have weathered the recent round of budget cuts. After double-digit decreases in the public support of such enterprises as the California State University System, for instance, there is to policymakers little evidence beyond rhetorical anguish that educational outcomes have been affected. Instead, their reaction resembles that occasioned by recent well-reported discoveries of deceitful faculty members successfully holding more than one simultaneous full-time appointment: if this is possible on current budgets, why not go a good deal farther?

We Hear: “You Faculty don’t work hard enough!”

They Mean: “Students aren’t getting the experiences they need (and increasingly have to pay for directly).”

This last well-*Chronicle*d example raises what is probably the most misunderstood and acerbic current public preoccupation: faculty productivity. Beginning just over two years ago, what has become a virtual epidemic of states began mandating investigations of faculty workload. Rather than seeing in such actions an unprovoked and unjustified attack on the professoriate *per se*, however, we need to understand what lies behind this current interest. Certainly a part of it indeed centers on simple efficiency — as was also true in the mid-seventies when the standard technologies to account for faculty time were first developed. But the bulk of current external concern addresses less what faculty are *doing* than what students are *getting*.

It’s tempting to dismiss this assertion as merely another incarnation of the perpetual (and largely unproductive) debate over “research vs. teaching,” and to ascribe it therefore to a permanent public misunderstanding of the faculty role. Indeed, for the vast majority of policymakers, higher education is (and should be) overwhelmingly about teaching — and in particular, undergraduate teaching. Current discussions about reshaping scholarship, regardless of how important they appear to us, will have little resonance for those on the outside unless their results are made visible in a classroom, student lab assignment, or hallway conversation.

If funding is the policymaker’s point of entry to issues in higher education, student experience remains its bottom line. And since about the mid-eighties, the volume of complaints that they’ve been receiving from students (and their parents) has been on the rise. Most such complaints, revealingly, are not about outcomes, and only some of them have directly to do with faculty. Prominent among them are such matters as inflexible and incomprehensible procedures, the inability to get the

classes that they need when they need them, or lack of attention to their legitimate needs for further explanation from those who are paid to provide it. Through the good auspices of such organizations as the Education Commission of the States and their own direct sponsorship of state-based reforms, the more thoughtful among public officials are also aware of the profound “student-centered” changes in instruction that have been attempted in public K-12 classrooms. Familiar with such concepts as “active learning,” peer-based “learning communities,” and “authentic assessment,” they wonder why they see little of this after students graduate from high school.

Much of the current public policy agenda with respect to higher education is thus also advanced in the form of “consumer protection.” Recent federal actions under the banner of financial aid such as “Student Right-to-Know” and changes in federal accountability structures through the “Program Integrity Triad” of Title IV are clearly intended to improve student ability to “comparison shop” and to require institutions to prove public claims about what students can expect. The rhetoric and content of recently-initiated “effectiveness indicators” in many states have much the same ring. And as students themselves shoulder an increasing share of the cost burden for undergraduate study through tuition, we can expect more in a similar direction from public policymakers.

We Hear: “We [legislators] don’t trust you to do a good job, so we’ll run higher education ourselves.”

They Mean: “You have to take responsibility for what you do.”

One of the most pernicious misunderstandings I detect in the recent upsurge of policy interest in accountability is that boards and government agencies want greater ultimate “control” over higher education. Admittedly, the press for greater and more specific accountability has in most states risen markedly in the last three years. But rather than representing a change in agenda on the part of state authorities, I’d argue that this shift is a short-term reaction to what’s seen as higher education’s failure to take seriously for itself the task of self-examination and improvement. In the realm of assessment with which I am tolerably familiar, the issue for public officials regarding higher education was never, like K-12, one of specific performance. Instead, what provoked assessment in the mid-eighties was a growing sense of unease about whether colleges and universities were running themselves responsibly. Our reluctance to undertake this task of self-examination, together with the slow pace with which it is being accomplished, has only served to confirm the premise that first brought assessment to the fore. And in many states it has resulted in further and more intrusive action.

But they would rather we do the job ourselves. Partly this is because, ironically, we really aren’t the current crisis. In a policy atmosphere dominated by growing prison populations, a deteriorating transportation infrastructure, health care reform, and K-12 restructuring, higher education registers low on the political-problem-detection radar of most public officials. (Though more than a few are a bit annoyed that with our considerable expertise in these areas, we refuse to help engage them directly.) More importantly, though, they are learning that direct control in higher education (and indeed in any enterprise) really doesn’t work very well. Increases in regulatory control are far from the currently-popular public themes of “re-inventing government” or of decentralized decisionmaking for “continuous improvement” in business and industry. But these themes also emphasize setting clear

public goals and assuming collective responsibility for their effective discharge by all members of the work-group or professional community — areas in which I believe we've been quite rightly criticized for inattention.

Don't get me wrong here. We are undoubtedly in the middle of what my colleague Aims McGuinness calls an "eerie" period in regulatory policy — with profound doubts on the part of public officials that decentralized responsibility-centered governance will work, tempered by equal ambivalence regarding the effectiveness of old control-oriented accountability structures. It could go either way. But one thing at least seems clear: demonstrating the potential of our side of the responsibility-centered premise is a necessary condition for its success; and so far it hasn't really been tried.

II. Some Things We Might Do

Vignette. A friend and scholar who happens to work for a state higher education agency recently told me of her exasperation with the reaction of a university faculty member to being reminded that he received public money. "I am not a public employee," he replied, "I am a member of the Corporation."

What does it mean to really *be* "a member of the 'Corporation?'" One answer, I think, contains both the key to addressing the growing communications gap between academy and society, and to redefining faculty work on a basis consistent with the core values of both faculty members and citizens. Its principal attributes are incentive-based cooperative work and the assumption of collective responsibility.

A point of departure here is to recognize how well we *already* embody these attributes in at least one prominent portion of our activity. Large-scale research — particularly in the sciences — is increasingly a cooperative venture involving specific and well-known "corporate" cultures. Its primary unit of organization is a diverse faculty team, governed by a strong sense of voluntary internal discipline, and organized flexibly in pursuit of specific collective goals. At the other end of the research process, the quality of the product is assessed in common through peer review — a form of collective judgment that, when it works well, has proven both rigorous and responsible. Rewards, in turn, return to the team, and benefit collectively all who participate. A final intriguing observation is how *entrepreneurial* these activities appear — particularly in their ability to respond quickly and creatively to new initiatives and funding opportunities. Increasingly in such settings, in fact, the traditional academic department becomes irrelevant — except as a bureaucratic convenience for housing faculty and accounting for funds.

This illustration suggests that when they are working well, some elements of our current practice already appear consistent with the kinds of "re-invented" organizational structures increasingly being advanced for public enterprise. The problem, of course, is just how consistently these elements align with societal needs and expectations. Though "corporate" in the best sense, university research priorities are set within the academy, and tend in the main to reinforce existing discipline-based organizational structures and values. The areas most frequently cited by the public and its elected representatives as needing higher education's attention, in contrast, are equally "corporate" in nature. But they require faculty to attempt collective action against the grain of current academic organizational and incentive structures. Examples include lower-division undergraduate general education (and especially the development of cross-cutting collegiate skills like higher-order thinking and communication); and applied research in support of specific, identified social

problems like urban violence, waste management, or adult illiteracy — problems which are very likely to be strongly cross-disciplinary in nature.

Together, these points suggest that the needed academic management trick may lie less in “redefining” faculty work than in creating a fiscal and structural environment within which the strongly cooperative and entrepreneurial tendencies already nascent in faculty culture can be more effectively channelled. What might such an approach suggest concretely? For the purposes of argument, let me advance a couple of modest propositions:

- **Funding problems and functions instead of units and lines.** Externally-sponsored research and the remainder of the academic enterprise (principally instruction and service) differ decisively in the way the dollars flow. In the former a “client” is funded, and “providers” must organize to deliver what’s wanted in order to obtain funds from the client. In the latter, the “providers” are funded directly, with the hope that they act as required. Academic institutions currently consist overwhelmingly of “provider-funded” reward structures, with the bulk of the regular budget allocated to permanently-established units and lines. Within such structures, substantive change occurs only on a voluntary basis. Alternatively, it must be induced directly through external regulation and control. This, by default, is the route being taken increasingly by public officials — particularly in the realm of faculty teaching loads.

But what if teaching (or more radically, undergraduate general education or writing) itself had a significant budget — owned by a senior faculty teaching council or some similar body? Not only might individual faculty and departments be induced to do more of it, but the process would contain natural opportunities for engaging in mutual review and quality assurance. A similar case might be made for problem-based applied research institutes. Funded independently of academic departments, and with allocational priorities determined largely by societal clients instead of disciplinary imperatives, such units might release new cooperative energy on the part of faculty in just the same manner as external research sponsors already do.

- **Reviewing performance continuously and collectively.** A primary attribute of a truly corporate culture is its continual assessment and promotion of the contributions of its members. Current faculty reward structures tend to do this infrequently and primarily on one dimension. Funding functions is intriguing because, as noted, it has the potential of “making a market” — providing natural opportunities for affected constituencies (who control a budget) to review specific elements of performance. But what of the larger question of an individual’s continuing contribution to the enterprise? On the one hand, mechanisms such as tenure might be “re-invented” along the lines of a continuing “license to practice,” as its counterparts already operate in other professions. Rather than guaranteeing an individual a wage and function, its award might signify a base level of support (well below current salaries) with the balance of an individual’s remuneration being covered through specific activities engaged in.

A second key attribute of a truly corporate culture is its assumption of collective responsibility for outcomes. Consistent with this intent, the award of tenure might signify full membership in a senior academic community — with specific responsibilities to serve on one or more of the institution’s funding councils or review bodies. At the same time, senior members of the community might be charged

with examining the institution's performance and direction as a whole — ensuring that its structures and incentives remain consistent with its mission, and suggesting specific adjustments and improvements as they arise.

• **Promoting innovation and risk-taking.** With the exception of “entrepreneurship” in research, little in current academic culture encourages faculty to experiment — particularly in the realm of undergraduate teaching. Indeed, most incentives actively oppose innovation in this arena, as individuals must incur the often considerable costs that changed curricula or instructional delivery entail, with little systematic support and virtually no additional reward. The fact that despite these conditions, many faculty remain actively interested in instructional renewal implies strongly that “making a market” in undergraduate education might in itself pay substantial dividends. But it additionally suggests the creation of specific incentive pools designed explicitly to promote and support exploring new ways of doing things.

Such mechanisms might serve as a critical counterpart to rewarding exemplary performance (like teaching awards) by allowing new ideas and techniques the opportunity to prove themselves in practice. But past experience with the incentive grant mechanisms of the eighties (and the parallel track record of “innovation funds” in other enterprises) suggests a number of important caveats. First, such experiments must be allowed sufficient time to mature; in far too many cases, incentive grant mechanisms have encouraged a “soft money” attitude that emphasizes short-term results and makes few provisions for continuing the activity if it proves beneficial. Second, such mechanisms should contain features that clearly identify priority areas within which innovations are most needed and will be funded; this again, might be a task for a senior faculty council. Third, sufficient organizational support must be present for individuals and teams to feel comfortable taking the risks that real innovation entails. Currently, many institutions invest considerably in building an infrastructure that effectively nurtures the development of innovative external research proposals; similar support infrastructures might be developed for other key functions, built on existing institution-wide instructional development or public service centers.

• **Doing it all together.** Decentralized, entrepreneurial approaches to change hold considerable promise because of their consistency with the public rhetoric of restructuring on the one hand, and existing faculty cultures on the other. But if attempted, their success will depend critically upon the maintenance of collective institutional discipline — especially in the early stages of the process. If better deals on old terms can be had at the college or university down the street, reshaped incentives within a single institution will count for little. As a result, any attempts along these lines will have to be undertaken in common — as partnerships or compacts among institutions of like type, or across all units of a state university or college system. Assuming collective responsibility at this level — unprecedented in the academy for some time — would in itself constitute a significant signal to the policy community that renewed trust is warranted.

Achieving the required levels of inter-institutional consensus with regard to risk-taking that would make this alternative viable might at first glance seem impossible. But historic faculty mobility has been extremely limited in all sectors except the major research universities — even in recent hard times where the unevenness of faculty reward across states has occasionally been extreme. Far fewer faculty may be willing to change horses in response to broadly changed incentives than might at

first be supposed. And, if recent statistics about widespread dissatisfaction with current research-oriented reward structures are to be believed, many may from the outset actually *like* the new arrangements.

My chief point in posing such suggestions is that new collective visions and commitments on the part of faculty are possible, but only if inclinations and behaviors currently present are properly cultivated. Admittedly, acting on such notions will induce a culture that is far from the idyllic *Gemeinschaft* that many envision as the academy's Golden Age. But designed with the proper incentives and organizational structures, the potential "corporation" that results can be both flexible and collectively responsible. It is consistent with what society wants, and it is based on what we do best.

Note: This article is excerpted from an essay commissioned by the American Association for Higher Education for its second National Meeting on Faculty Roles and Rewards, held in New Orleans in January 1984.