Reframing the University: The Third Mission and Commercialisation

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“The Death of the Public University?” Symposium
Session 4: The Public University and Commercialisation: The Third Missionary Position?

Third Mission defined:

• ‘activities concerned with the generation, use, application and exploitation of knowledge and other university capabilities outside academic environments’ (2002 SPRU Report to the Russell Group).

• Term hardly used in NZ: Concern with externalization mostly focused on ‘knowledge transfer’, forging links with industry and commercialising IP.

• Business-university linkages are not new (e.g. Stanford University’s engagements with high tech dates back to the 1930s), what is new is the degree to which these relationships are becoming institutionalized
Capital has become increasingly important in shaping the modern university

Questions

1. How are universities being networked into the new ‘ecology’ of industry, finance, capital, government and knowledge producers?

2. What are the consequences of the emphasis on commercialisation?

3. What new kinds of subjects are these ‘third stream’ activities engendering within the university? What new kinds of ‘entrepreneurial academic’ being created?

4. What other pressures does commercialisation place on universities, and how are they engaging with these demands?

• “Universities have been captured by, incorporated into and become constituted of new, ideologically neoliberal, regimes of truth and practice.” (Boden and Epstein 2006: 225)

• Emerging market in educational products and services: the rise of ‘EduBiz’ (Ciancanelli 2006; QV. Slaughter, S. and G. Rhoades 2004, Academic Capitalism.)
Starting assumptions / hypotheses to explore

• Rise of third stream / commercialization of university knowledge is having a major impact on the meaning, mission and character of the university (i.e. its policy agenda, institutional self-definition and organisational culture). It is:

1. Shifting power relations toward those who control substantial budgets and staffing
2. Transforming social relations within universities; new divisions, hierarchies and tensions
3. Process driven largely by government and by the new discourse of ‘relevance’
4. Protagonists do not see this as a departure from the traditional university mission
5. Colonisation by Business ... or self-imposed?
• “Our primary hypothesis is that the dominant university model in Australia – a broad-based teaching and research institution, supported by a large asset base and a large, predominantly in-house back office – will prove unviable in all but a few cases over the next 10-15 years” (2012: 4)

• “Universities will need to significantly streamline their operations and asset base, at the same time as incorporating new teaching and learning delivery mechanisms, a diffusion of channels to market, and stakeholder expectations for increased impact”
New subjects of the Third Mission

- Manageriate
- Super-Rector (Dale)
- Students of the 3rd Mission
- Entrepreneurial academic
- Third Mission Cognatariate
- Facilitariate: brokers, mediators

New subjectivities / relationalities: new subjects, elaborated NPM subjects subjectivities

Academic entrepreneurs: heroic winners of commercial contracts and/or energetic actors in the new webs and/or mobilisers/exchangers of capital
Other Ways of Conceptualising the Third Mission: Copenhagen University’s Technology Transfer Office

- Commercial Agreements
- Scouting
- Protecting/patenting
- Marketing
- Ensuring PoC-funding
- Commercialising (licensing)
- Negotiating

- Research Collab. Agreements
- Ensuring freedom of research
- Protecting publication rights
- Safeguarding against unlimited liability
- Setting frames for future IPR
- Ensuring balanced agreements

Other activities:

- Advise researchers on spin-out creation
- Provide info to management
- Devise policies related to tech transfer
- Give courses and seminars to groups, departments, students.

“I hate the word third mission. And I hate it because I think – there should not be a third mission. There are two missions: there’s education, and there’s research. But technology transfer should be part of those two tasks … it’s not the university’s main mission, to earn lots of money. It just isn’t. And it shouldn’t be.

(Karen Laigaard Interview 2012)
From the University in Ruins to the Rise of Academic Entrepreneurs:

From the eclipse of the Professoriat, to the rise of the administrator ... and beyond?

‘We have entered a posthistorical phase. The mission of liberal education is lost. There is no longer a subject that can incarnate this principle. ... The adventure of a liberal education no longer has a hero. Neither a student to embark upon it, nor a professor hero as its end’.

(Bill Readings 1996, The University in Ruins, p.1)

• Who are the heroes of the new university story?
New Subjects of the Third Mission: Academic Entrepreneurs: the new heroes of the University Story

Generating external income
How Academic Entrepreneurs are extolled & lionised

Externally funded research grew strongly, reaching $206 million in 2009, 56 percent up on the $131 million in 2004. This reflects the confidence granting agencies and businesses have in our research staff. The most obvious example of the quality of our researchers, and of the connection of fundamental research to real outcomes, is the work of Distinguished Professor Peter Hunter, 2009 winner of the Rutherford Medal, New Zealand’s top science honour. Professor Hunter is, with Professors Ted Baker and Richard Faull, the third University of Auckland scientist to win the Rutherford medal in the last four years. Much of their work, and that of many other leading researchers at the University, finds application through the activities of our research commercialisation company, Auckland UniServices Ltd. UniServices’ revenue has grown by 15 percent in the last year, a spectacular result given the recession.

(UoA Annual Report 2009:7)
Locating the Third Mission Mission at the UoA: 1) Auckland UniServices Ltd

1. benefits of creating a commercial annex – removed from the University

‘universities can't own shares because then you would be seen to be investing public money into risky investments. There's a finance act which precludes that. All of the things the University has trouble doing, we can do. We provide a business friendly face to business. So we can make quick decisions, we can write quick contracts, we can buy and sell companies. We can do those things the University can't do well, or couldn't do at all’ (interview with Director 2011)

The equivalent of the off-shore tax haven or casino? (new ‘states of exception’)

2) Institute for Innovation in Biotechnology

Prime Minister the Rt. Hon. John Key last month opened state-of-the-art facilities housing the Institute for Innovation in Biotechnology. Hosted by the School of Biological Sciences, the institute brings academics and industry together to share infrastructure, facilities, and expertise. “It is at the cutting edge of an international trend toward academia and industry working more closely together, to increase opportunities for innovation and accelerate scientific discovery to market,” says Director Professor Joerg Kistler.

Photo: John Key, Joerg Kistler and Vice-Chancellor Professor Stuart McCutcheon
3) University of Auckland Business School

The new University of Auckland Business School is the result of the vision in 2001 by the then Vice Chancellor John Hood, now Vice Chancellor of Oxford University. He wanted to create, through an architectural design competition, an iconic building, a centre of teaching and research excellence that would help transform New Zealand into a more innovative, entrepreneurial economy.

**Project Credits**

**Client:** University of Auckland  
**Architect:** FJMT and Archimedia  
**Contractor:** Fletcher Construction  
**Location:** Auckland, New Zealand  
**Cost:** £81.5 million
How do we explain these trends?
Accounting for the rise of the University third mission

1. University research increasingly believed to hold a large amount of ‘untapped commercial potential’

2. NZ is witnessing an unprecedented level of collaboration between government, the universities and business/venture capital (following the ‘triple helix’ metaphor) [NB. have we been here before? echoes of Mussolini’s fascism]

3. Universities have to be seen to be doing Something; a strategy of legitimation (i.e. demonstrating their value to society)
Conclusions and Analysis: Implications of Third Mission for academia

1. Shifts in the ‘moral economy’ of the university (?)
   - Strengthens idea of higher education as private investment rather than public good.
     (e.g. term ‘private good research’ now features in many policy docs, inc. UoA Strategic Plan).
   - Financialisation of university (‘commercial construction of reality’ cf. C. Wright Mills)
   - Protagonists of entrepreneurial model don’t see changes as posing any contradiction to the traditional ‘public good’ role of university education and knowledge: private investment and personal enrichment are the new public good. Generating revenue seen as form of academic virtue
   - Changing research practices and what counts as valid knowledge e.g. money siphoned off to promote research that management classify as ‘strategic’ (Qv. Alan Hughes Innovation Policy as Cargo Cult)
   - “Commercially sensitive” and embargoed research: knowledge increasingly tied up in confidentiality clauses,
   - New divisions between academics and management, but also between academics (i.e. the ‘star player’ syndrome). Increased competition over resources between faculties (e.g. privileging of STEM subjects).
   - Celebration of entrepreneurial academics as heroes of the university: Arts and Humanities increasingly cast as ‘Cinderellas’ of the university story.
Transformative effects of Third Mission (cont.)...

2. Institutionalising a new discourse of entrepreneurialism and new ways of being an academic

- New career pathways; new reward structures, individual contracts, KPIs etc.
- Speeding up of everyday life (new disciplines of deadlines, targets, opportunities)

4. Intensifies neoliberalising trends – especially New Public Management & competition etc ... which are leading to:

- Return of [new] contractualism
- Fetishization of ‘benchmarks’; the ‘tyranny of transparency’ (rise of ‘audit culture’)
- Transformation in the ‘temporarality of pedagogy & knowledge production’ (what is valued and how value is measured)
- Does all this lead to displacement of trust? Have NZ universities become ‘low-trust organisations?’
4. Emergence of new kinds of university subjects and spaces

- Fuelling the rise of ‘metaexpertise’ (Brenneis 2012: 295)
- Proliferation of administrators, accountants and managers (often at the expense of academics and teachers)
- New spaces/practices of learning: e.g. BAs in ‘Leadership’ and ‘Entrepreneurship’ and MA in Bio-Science Enterprise
- Creates ‘spaces of exception’; university equivalent of the ‘tax-haven’, merchant bank & holding company i.e. spaces ‘set apart’ from university regulations and controls (‘Guantanamo principle’):
- More schizophrenic work patterns and fragmented professional identities:

> ‘New constellations of roles are created as people operate at the intersections of the triple helix, leading “double” and even “triple lives” in university, industry and government, simultaneously and successively. (Etzkowitz and Viale 2010: 595)
5. Transformative potential of the Third Mission: Possibilities for alternative progressive practices?

- Third Mission is variegated: an ‘unstable category’
- Assumes different forms
- Deployed as moniker for very different things (e.g. ‘engagement with civil society’; partnership; service learning etc.)
- Mobilized to develop/institutionalize other forms of (non-commercial) social relations – e.g. social entrepreneurship
- Can these be counter-hegemonic practices? How can we mobilize this potential?
References