



USING TRADITIONS TO FACILITATE CHANGE

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Traditions and Change in Higher Education

- Many Higher Education traditions are sacred (e.g., P&T, Peer Review)
 - Violating the sacred traditions creates principled even emotional resistance
- The future of Higher Education is volatile/uncertain today
 - There are many political, technological, and other “external challenges”
 - But there are also many internal Higher education developments that are equally impactful-e.g., new teaching models, interdisciplinary programs
 - Traditions can be an impediment to adaptation—or a source of stability in volatile times
- The focus of this paper is on constituents using traditions to facilitate change



Historical Background

- There have been many Higher Education changes during the past century
 - Many different kinds of institutions and sectors evolved
 - Traditions evolved with evolution of different kinds of institutions/sectors
 - Traditions vary greatly across sectors—and even individual institutions
- Elite “Privates” (e.g., Harvard) are models in many ways
 - Their traditions have trickled down through many evolving sectors
 - Especially “restrictiveness” as a measure of ‘quality’ (e.g., restrictive admissions is a measure of stature)
 - A key example of “trickle down” is that regional universities want their students to be able to transfer to high-prestige universities (e.g., for graduate or professional education)
- Summary: sectors share some “overarching traditions” but they play out differently operationally



Perspectives on Tradition and Change in Higher Education

- The ideas of “tradition” and “change” are complicated
 - Traditions are often seen as obstructing change
 - But if “practice” is different than traditions, then following traditions leads to change
 - Change is equally complicated
 - If admissions criteria are changed from “origins in a high-status family” to ACT score, not much changes given the high correlation between ACT score and socioeconomic status
 - Also, different traditions overlap in complicated, often conflicting ways
 - For example, Admissions, the American Dream, Rankings/Stature, Equity/Diversity, Research, and Financial Aid



Traditions and Constituencies

- Traditions are seen differently by different Higher Education constituencies, who often have conflicting interests
- Accordingly, different constituencies may “use” (or “manipulate”) traditions to achieve their goals
- Table 1 shows the links between a broad list of traditions and constituencies
 - The traditions are foundation elements of Higher Education
 - Constituency groups are important ones, but the list is not all-inclusive
- Key point: nearly every constituency links to nearly every tradition



**Table 1:
Relations of Traditions to Constituencies**

Traditions	Constituencies										
	Faculty	Administration	Parents	Students	Legislators	Donors	Employers	Accreditors	Regents	Publishers	Disciplines
Hiring	X	X	X		X	X		X	X	X	X
P&T	X	X			X	X		X	X	X	X
Admissions	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X		X
American Dream	X	X	X	X	X	X		X	X		X
Research	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X
Prepare for jobs	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X		X
Equity/ Diversity	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X		X
Shared Governance	X	X		X	X	X	X	X	X		X
Fiscal Responsibility	X	X			X	X	X	X	X		X



Recent Examples of How Constituents Use Traditions to Achieve Their Goals

- The topic is too complex to attempt a comprehensive analysis of the relations of traditions and constituents
- I will be looking at three examples of recent dynamics based on recent articles in the *Chronicle of Higher Education*
- We'll be looking at two traditions
 - Shared Governance
 - Equity and Diversity
- And we'll be looking at one constituency
 - Disciplines
 - Note that “disciplines” could also be seen as traditions



First Tradition: Shared Governance - 1

- There is a notable conflict among constituencies—most important:
 - Faculty see administrators as having agendas for which shared governance is a cover-up
 - Administrators see faculty as unengaged, uninformed, and naive about the complexity of administrative issues
 - There is a significant base of reality on both sides
 - Faculty positions are divided based on discipline or profession, whose cultures (traditions) are very different—e.g.,
 - Applied vs. Basic research (Engineering and Physics; Social Work and Sociology, etc.)
 - Research vs. performance (Musicology vs. violin performance; Art History vs. Painting)
 - Professions vs. A&S (Medicine vs. Biological Sciences; Business vs. Economics)



First Tradition: Shared Governance - 2

- A complex issue is the time commitment for faculty engaged in shared governance
 - E.g., committee service, that interferes with teaching and research, and therefore with Promotion and Tenure prospects
 - Kerry Ann O'Meara says "Serving on committees is the sort of work we don't associate with star faculty"
 - David Perlmutter's article "Embracing Governance and Efficiency" makes the point that "... not all committees are created equal."
 - He suggests ways of incentivizing important committee service
- Thus, shared governance conflicts with P&T, Research, and other traditions
 - Complexity of the relations may hinder progress in shared governance
 - Or, shared governance may create faculty support for change



Second Tradition: Equity and Diversity

- Few traditions generate the passion, anger, and confusion in Higher Education as Equity/Diversity
- Sarah Brown's article in the *Chronicle* discusses Shaun Harper's "painful gratitude" for Trump's bringing a reality check to race issues
 - Many people thought racism was over when a Black president was elected
 - Trump's "gift" was having racist/white supremacist people emerge from obscure corners
 - We must deal with racism: hard to deny its existence on campuses and U.S. society broadly
 - Ward Connerly says he's hopeful that nontraditional presidency will bring us back to a color-blind government
 - In Higher Education, the example is "color-blind admissions"
 - Powerful examples of using traditions for political ends



Second Tradition: Equity and Diversity – 2

- Many scholarly works have sparked controversy over this tradition
- A major conflict grew from Crenshaw's 1989 work on intersectionality
 - She argued that sexism and racism could not be seen independently
 - She said to do so leads to “black women being theoretically erased”
 - The work brought strong and bitter resistance from scholars in black and gender studies
- A similar conflict arose from Tuvel's work on transracialism
 - An article drawing parallels between Rachel Dolezal's and Caitlyn Jenner's experiences drew strong opposition
 - The work “discounted important scholarly work by transgender and black academics”
 - Support for Tuvel grew; the publisher was pressured to rescind the article (did not do)
- These are powerful examples of scholarly traditions creating conflict and change ... and potential change that in some ways did not happen



Constituency: Disciplines/Professions

- Disciplines advocate for themselves both in and outside higher education
 - Often in conflict/under attack by each other
 - Often under attack or receiving support from outsiders
 - See Lafer's article in the *Chronicle* "The Corporate Assault on Higher Education"
- Much of the public discussion relates to "clusters" of disciplines (e.g., STEM, Liberal Arts) who are often in a defensive mode—and often competing with each other
- A high-profile STEM issue relates to research on climate change
 - Very broad corporate engagement
- Another is concern about "wasteful research"
 - Often related to humanities and broader liberal arts
- There are many questions about the value of National Institutes for the Arts and Humanities
- These issues link to many traditions (e.g., Preparing Students for Jobs, Hiring and P&T, The American Dream, Research, and Fiscal Responsibility)



Concluding Thoughts

- Traditions and change come together often in Higher Education
 - For many constituents, goals are highly principled (e.g., shared governance)
 - For many the goals are about politics and corporate benefits (e.g., profits, well-trained employees)
- Traditions can become “tools” for various constituents’ desired changes (e.g., to support race-blind admissions or reduce higher education budgets)
- Traditions can also be impediments to change
 - E.g., adaptation to volatile environment
 - But also to provide stability in volatile times
- Take Away: Understanding “Traditions and Change” from the perspective of Higher Education constituencies is critical for managing Higher Education’s future

