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Neoliberalism in Higher Education: A Comparative Approach

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Abstract: Theories of globalization, particularly neoliberalism, provide a framework for a comparative study of the student experience in higher education. Neoliberalism is influencing many aspects of higher education—its public charter with society, faculty roles and responsibilities, and the experiences of individual students. While studies have examined the effects of neoliberalism on nations and faculty, there is considerably less research on these effects on students. This paper outlines a conceptual approach to researching these effects on students in various disciplines.

1. Introduction

The information age is upon us (Castells, 2004), to the extent the developed world is termed a "knowledge society" (Stromquist, 2002). The emerging knowledge-based economy highlights the importance of higher education on both individual and national levels. Earnings are linked with formal education, with a premium on a baccalaureate degree (Bowen 1977; Bowen & Bok, 1998; Boyer & Hechinger, 1981; Nuñez & Cuccaro-Alamin, 1998; Pascarella & Terenzini, 2005; Trow, 2001). Research shows increased postsecondary education leads to higher salaries, more career mobility, and an increased quality of life (Bowen, 1977; Pascarella & Terenzini, 1991, 2005). Nations focus on the key role of higher education in economic policy (Neave, 1988), although governments face concerns about the global expansion of higher education and escalating costs (Altbach, 1991; Teichler, 1996). While there is a focus on decreasing costs, there is also a push for increasing quality and quantity (Slaughter, 2001; Torres & Rhoades, 2006).

As the global knowledge economy becomes increasingly competitive, the role of higher education is under intense scrutiny. The complexity of the educational process and the significance of education to individuals and society raise the importance and challenge of assessment (Wotherspoon, 2004). The function of higher education in nations varies, dependent on the system's history, structure, the traditional roles and responsibilities of faculty, and the experiences, involvement, and characteristics of students. However, there is a global push for assessment of higher education, particularly across nations.

Although higher education systems are bound by characteristics within nations, global forces are changing the nature and purpose of higher education around the world (Giroux, 2003; Giroux & Myrsiades, 2001; Morrow & Torres, 2000; Scott, 2006; Slaughter & Leslie, 1997). Global markets are shifting the scope and operating procedures of higher education, creating opportunities for "new groups of students who, for a complex range of social, economic and cultural reasons were traditionally excluded from, or under-represented in, higher education, have come to participate in higher education in

increasing numbers" (Schuetze & Slowey, 2002, p. 312). International and global movements also alter the methods of studying higher education; the traditional focus within the nation-state does not facilitate explanations of many world-wide trends in higher education (Hirst & Thompson, 1996; Marginson & Rhoades, 2002; Scott, 2006).

2. Globalization

Global forces affecting higher education, including mass enrollment and issues of access, privatization and affordability, and decentralization and accountability, can be united through the process of globalization. Globalization is not normatively defined, partly because "in its current usage [globalization] is quite broad and lacks well-defined boundaries" (Suárez-Orozco & Qin-Hilliard, 2004, p. 9). For example, Robertson (1992) defines globalization as "a concept that refers to compression of the world and the intensification of consciousness of the world as a whole" (p. 8). For Bloom (2004), "globalization refers to the process whereby countries become more integrated via movements of goods, capital, labor, and ideas" (p. 59). The view of globalization as an intensification of relations between the local and the global is shared by many as a holistic definition (Held, 1991; Wiseman, 1998). However, some scholars concentrate on the political and economic aspects of globalization (Hirst & Thompson, 1996; Rodrik, 2002; Soros, 1998; Wallerstein, 1991); others see globalization as having intensely important cultural and social implications (Appadurai, 1996; Bauman, 1998; Rizvi, 2000; Urry, 1998; Waters, 1995). Luke and Luke (2000) caution that globalization does not mean Americanization or Westernization, noting various sources of influence in many regions of the world.

There are many forms of globalization encompassing political, economic, and cultural trends. Some concentrate on the connectedness of the world (Giddens, 1990) and the internationalization of markets and societies (Robertson, 1992). Often there is a charge that globalization is a guise for Americanization (Marginson & Mollis, 2001), although others see the development of a culture that is truly global in scope (Waters, 1995). This mode of thinking embraces the idea that local happenings affect global events and forces and vice-versa (Arnove, 2003).

This study focused on the political and economic aspects of globalization in relation to changes in higher education. Slaughter and Leslie (1997) outline three dominant political-economic theories of globalization: the neoliberal, liberal, and radical. The neoliberal theories focus on the role of the market and the reduction of the social welfare state (Friedman, 1981, 1991; Olssen & Peters, 2005). Repercussions of these political and economic globalization theories are seen in higher education. The resulting changes include declining public funding, a concentration of research funds in technology and science fields, and expanded relationships with corporations (Slaughter & Leslie). Although there are many facets of globalization, neoliberal forms of globalization concentrate on the political and economic aspects that most strongly affect education (Morrow & Torres, 2003). This study used neoliberal theories to explore the relationship between globalization and students in higher education.

The political and economic aspects of globalization dominate changes to higher education. Slaughter and Leslie (1997) outline three leading political-economic theories of globalization in the mid-1990s: the neoliberal, liberal or post-Keynesian, and radical or post-Marxist. The neoliberal theories focus on the role of the market and the reduction of the social welfare state (Friedman, 1981, 1991). The liberal, post-Keynesian view concentrates on the nation-state as a vehicle to stimulate technological growth, build human capital, and open up free trade (Carnoy, 1993; Reich, 1991). In contrast, the radical, post-Marxist theories posit that advanced nation-states and select international trade organizations are creating conditions for multinational corporations to develop a new international division of labor (Chomsky, 1994).

Education, particularly at the post-secondary level, is entering the global economic market. The discussion surrounding the inclusion of education in the General Agreement on Trade in Services (GATS) through the World Trade Organization (WTO) has shifted higher education from the public to the private domain (Altbach, 2004). In turn, the political and economic repercussions of globalization can be seen in higher education. The resulting changes include declining public funding, a concentration of research funds in science and technology fields, and expanded relationships with corporations (Slaughter & Leslie, 1997). "Globalization has brought the free market into universities but with serious ramifications and significant costs" (Currie & Newson, 1998, p. 6). Neoliberal theories help to explain changes in education policy, the role of faculty, and student behavior in response to global forces.

2.1 Neoliberalism

Rhoades and Torres (2006) argue that globalization is the vehicle of neoliberalism, which in turn has marked the character of globalization, although this relationship is not inevitable. Rather, it is the consequence of political and economic decisions. The neoliberal account of globalization is:

> A discourse about progress and a rising tide that lifts all boats, a discourse that takes advantage of the historical processes of globalization in order to valorize particular economic prescriptions about how to operate the economy (through free trade, deregulation, and so on)—and by implication, prescriptions about how to transform education, politics, and culture. (Burbules & Torres, 2000, p. 13)

Furthermore:

> The neoliberal ideology of globalization has infiltrated the minds of politicians and managers to the point where it has become internalized and, alarmingly, normalized. It has become part and parcel of the new scheme of things; the new paradigm has linked local practices to globalized social relations. (Currie & Newson, 1998, p. 7).

2.2 Neoliberalism and Higher Education

The influence of globalization on higher education can be viewed through neoliberal ideology; this encompasses ideologies of the market; new institutional economics based on cost-recovery and entrepreneurialism; accountability; and new managerialism (Ball, 1998). Neoliberal managerialism in higher education is a concept related to corporate cost-cutting and the commercialization universities (Bauman, 1997; Deem, 1998; Miller, 1995).

The neoliberal economic agenda is leading to decreasing funding for public services around the world; in education, this agenda attempts "to weaken public control over education while simultaneously encouraging privatization of the educational service and greater reliance on market forces" (Berman, 2003, p. 253). Globally, decreased public funding of higher education is affecting institutions and systems (Prichard & Wilmott, 1997). Neoliberalism assumes that the market is more efficient than the state, so goods and services once considered public should become privatized, which also frees up capital for the market. "It seems that the policy of privatizing public science and its institutions has proceeded ideologically rather than by rational calculation. Such policies are *assumed* to fuel innovation and maximize wealth creation, but that is a highly contested assumption" (Atkinson-Grodjean, 2002, p. 72, emphasis in original). Higher education institutions must adjust, and are looking across borders for examples of adaptive and entrepreneurial organizations (Clark, 1998; Sporn, 1999).

This coincides with large-scale changes in the economics of academia. There is a global trend of cost sharing in funding higher education, which places a greater burden on individual students (Johnstone, 2004). This era of privatization and deregulation coincides with increasing claims on public money (Slaughter & Leslie, 1997; Slaughter & Rhoades, 1990). Slaughter and Leslie coined the phrase, *academic capitalism*, to explain institutional and professors' market (like) efforts to secure external funding in response to global political and economic changes. These institutional and faculty responses interact with a push for the development of a well-educated citizenry and surging increases in enrollment.

Neoliberalism is an ideology based on individual economic rationality and the idea that a weak state is better than a strong state, and what is private is necessarily good and what is public is necessarily bad (Apple, 2000). This ideology calls for a dismantling of the Keynesian welfare state and the withdrawal of the state from the economy (Hay, 2004; Marginson, 1997). Neoliberalism promotes the policies of deregulation (freeing capital mobility); privatization; and liberalization (including weakening trade protection and tariff reductions) (Stromquist, 2002).

The modern development of globalization and neoliberalism are closely intertwined. Neoliberalism developed as an alliance of theories and interest groups centered around cultural conservatism and economic liberalism under the governments of Margaret Thatcher in England, Ronald Reagan in the United States, and Brian Mulroney in Canada

(Morrow & Torres, 2003). "Neoliberal governments promote notions of open markets, free trade, reduction of the public sector, decreased state intervention in the economy, and the deregulation of markets" (Morrow & Torres, p. 97). The goals of the neoliberal ideology are to reduce fiscal pressure on public enterprises by privatization and to deregulate practices of the state (Hay, 2004; Torres & Rhoades, 2006). Some see globalization as a discourse of neoliberal capitalism (Currie, 1998a). It is important to distinguish between globalization as a process of increased connectedness and communication and a conception of neoliberal forms of globalization that incorporate market ideology and business practices. Much of the resistance to globalization is centered on the political elements of globalization, which are so strong that some see globalization as a cover-up for the neoliberal agenda; which declares that markets, not states, should dominate (Burbules & Torres, 2000). This study uses the term "neoliberalism" to encompass the political and economic aspects of globalization that are affecting higher education.

Neoliberalism manifests in three major trends in higher education: privatization, commercialization, and corporatization (Kezar, 2004). Neoliberal economic policies in higher education are characterized by the growth of capitalist and corporate influence (Apple, 2000; Chomsky, 1998; Rhoades, 2003). "In the neoliberal model higher education is ideally integrated into the system of production and accumulation in which knowledge is reduced to its economic functions and contributes to the realization of individual economic utilities" (Morrow, 2006, p. xxxi).

Much current research in higher education revolves around changes wrought by neoliberalism, including: academic stratification of the disciplines (Gumport, 2000; Rhoades & Slaughter, 1997); technology transfer (Slaughter & Leslie, 1997); privatization (Anderson, 2001; Campbell & Slaughter, 1999); the rise of managerialism in higher education (Deem, 2001), particularly the adoption of practices and values from the private sector such as accountability; the vocationalization of the curriculum (Delucchi, 1997; Rhoades, 1990); corporatization (Rhoades & Rhoades, 2005; Slaughter & Rhoades, 1990); commercialization of athletics, research, and the educational process in higher education (Bok, 2003); students as consumers and customers (Bensimon, 1995); and a global trend of increasing consumerism and corporatism inside the classroom (Dale, 1996). Neoliberalism is also related to recent shifts in higher education funding towards the hard and applied sciences (fields close to the market) and away from the social sciences and humanities (Bok; Slaughter, 1998; Slaughter & Leslie). Torres and Rhoades (2006) note:

> Knowledge is now evaluated with the language of finance, and universities are measured by their efficiency in awarding degrees and certificates. Academic leaders are replaced by managers with business backgrounds, and the university shifts from an educational institution to just another business with a bottom line. (p. 32)

Some of the most dramatic effects of neoliberal policies are those that appear to be affecting faculty roles and responsibilities. The influence of corporatization is seen in the increase of part-time faculty hires, full-time non-tenure-track faculty appointments, and graduate student assistantships to create a cheaper and more flexible workforce (Anderson, 2002; Currie, 1998b; Rhoades & Rhoades, 2005). From the business world, labor flexibility "has infiltrated universities, creating a small core group of academics who receive higher pay and benefits and, in turn, a much larger group of contract workers (more often women) who receive lower pay and have insecure appointments with no benefits" (Currie & Newson, 1998, p. 5). The rising use of part-time instructors and non-tenure-track faculty is raising questions about the quality and success of undergraduate teaching (Ehrenberg & Zhang, 2003; Puplampu, 2004). While neoliberalism has the potential to affect many aspects of faculty and student life, some of the more proximal links are between faculty work and changing global political and economic markets. Therefore, this study concentrates on the role of faculty in students' experiences and learning in the context of neoliberalism.

For example, neoliberal practices in higher education may discourage interaction between faculty and students (Marginson & Considine, 2000). As nations try to maximize their development of human capital through educating a larger number of students at a lower cost (Apple, 2000; Slaughter, 2001), one way to cut costs is by limiting the number of full-time faculty, hiring more contingent faculty, and increasing class size, particularly in low-cost fields of study. Faculty in research institutions are encouraged to pursue externally funded research (Slaughter & Leslie, 1997; Slaughter & Rhoades, 2004; Sporn, 1999). The increased role of commercial activities has reduced the share of faculty time and resources devoted to students and teaching (Anderson & Sugarman, 1989; Blumenthal, Epstein, & Maxwell, 1986). Such policies are leading to a devaluing of teaching and service (Altbach, 1979; Fairweather, 1996; Marginson & Rhoades, 2002; Ross, 1992; Slaughter, 2001; Slaughter & Leslie, 1997).

These changes to the faculty profession are occurring despite the documented importance of student-faculty interaction on student performance and attainment (Astin, 1993; Bean, 1985; Bean & Kuh, 1984; Feldman & Newcomb, 1969; Kuh, Schuh, Whitt & Associates, 1991; Pascarella, 1985; Pascarella & Terenzini, 1991, 2005; Tinto, 1993). Using faculty self-reported data, Umbach (2007) found that part-time and full-time non-tenure-track faculty interact with students less frequently, both inside and outside of the classroom. Furthermore, contingent faculty require less effort and have lower expectations for their students (Umbach). This is of great concern, particularly as student populations become more diverse with increased enrollment of non-traditional students, including part-time, older, and first-generation students, who benefit from greater faculty attention (Rendón, 1994).

2.3 Neoliberalism and Academic Disciplines

The effects of the market on higher education are not uniform across academic disciplines (Rhoades, 1998). Science, technology, and medicine increase in value, and the social sciences and humanities are devalued somewhat, except for their ability to attract student tuition dollars. As Vaira (2004) notes,

> All this is expressing in a re-stratification of academic subjects, knowledge and disciplines upon the increased use-value and exchange-value of particular knowledge in the wider society, but also in the emergence of *academic consumerism* that is reconstructing the relationships between higher education institutions and their clients and stakeholders (governments, industries, students and their family. (p. 491)

Academic stratification and academic consumerism, along with academic management, are leading to academic restructuring of higher education institutions (Gumport, 2000). Academic stratification involves both students as consumers and faculty as managed professionals. Students are limited by classes and majors that are offered; full-time faculty are concentrated in strategic fields, which may or may not coincide with student demand. Contingent faculty are used to fill in supply gaps (Rhoades & Slaughter, 1997). Stratification occurs both between disciplines and institutions, where the rich are getting richer (Gamson, 1997). Neoliberal theories predict greater differentiation within academic disciplines, caused by competition, student demand, and market-potential.

In terms of power, prestige, and economic payoff, the distinctions between academic disciplines are increasing, with significant differences noted by gender (Clark, 1983; Davies & Guppy, 1997). Part of the explanation for gender differences within disciplines is due to the gender composition of faculty in certain fields of study, such as large numbers of female faculty in education drawing in predominately female students (Jacobs, 1995). As noted by Currie and Newson (1998), one repercussion of neoliberalism in higher education is that large proportions of the new contingent faculty cadre are females. This may lead to a situation where female students follow female faculty, who are increasingly located in fields not favored by the market.

Another consequence of neoliberalism noted by Slaughter and Leslie (1997) is the concentration of research funds in science, technology, and medical fields. However, how such large-scale funding changes regarding faculty work affect students is largely unknown. Furthermore, it is unclear if influences upon students are universal, or if they vary by academic discipline-based, institutional, and national contexts. Comparative higher education literature delves into the complexity of these issues affecting countries, institutions, and faculty.

Neoliberalism and the Student Experience

Neoliberalism is transforming all levels of higher education, from its public charter with society (Kezar, 2004), to faculty roles and responsibilities, and the experiences of individual students. While research has investigated the influence of neoliberalism on

nations (Torres & Rhoades, 2006) and faculty research and hiring practices (Slaughter & Leslie, 1997), there is considerably less research examining the effects on students. We do not know how these changes are influencing students' experiences in college, and how the changes in faculty roles and responsibilities affect different types of students in various disciplines in different countries.

The comparative method allows for consideration of global forces on higher education, while taking the history and structure of higher education systems and faculty and student characteristics and behaviors into account. Thus answering cautions placed on cross-national studies of higher education (Deem, 2001), the student voice can inform global trends in higher education. A study of cross-national student engagement allows researchers to move away from commodifying students (Slaughter & Leslie, 1997), to giving them a voice in policy.

Neoliberal theories help to explain changes in education policy, the role of faculty, and student behavior in response to global forces. The "massification" of higher education globally has led to increased student-faculty ratios in some countries (Rae, 2005; Trow, 2001); to decreased quality of faculty in others (Husén, 1996); a re-stratification of academic disciplines (Vaira, 2004); and generally a decrease in proportion of full-time faculty (Slaughter & Rhoades, 2004). The increase in full-time non-tenure-track and part-time faculty positions is an area of increasing concern (American Association of University Professors [AAUP], 2003; Chait, 2002). These are not universal changes; institutional, academic discipline, and faculty characteristics, as well as state and federal policy, influence the direction and magnitude of response to global influences.

Demands for transparency, efficiency, and accountability are moving down from governments to institutions, and further filtering to faculty, staff, and students (Banta & Associates, 2002; Brennan & Shah, 2000; Hodgson, 2006; Schugurensky, 2003). In response to calls for quality improvement, faculty are measured by hourly productivity, number of students and classes taught, and amount of external research dollars brought in to the institution. The shift to market-like behavior by faculty and institutions is altering the relationships between higher education and society, institutions and faculty, and faculty and students.

Comparative research can inform aspects of higher education that single-nation studies cannot capture, such as institutional responses to national neoliberal policies and the effects on faculty and student engagement. Most comparative research is concentrated at the macro-level, rarely reaching the student level. Research conducted at the individual level can be contextualized through larger-scale research and provide greater evidence for the influence of national polices and practices on students.

The effect of neoliberal polices on students, faculty, institutions, and countries is not uniform. Different governmental and institutional reactions to globalization have led to

variations in the type and degree of response to global forces. For this reason, the comparative method can inform higher education research, as explained below.

3. Comparative Method

Analyzing the influence of neoliberalism on higher education from the perspective of multiple countries allows for insights into how nations adopt policies and how these play out in different sectors of countries' higher education systems. Comparative higher education research informs policies and practices of institutions and systems around the world, particularly through international banking and aid organizations. This research is primarily supported by networks of agencies, national, regional, and international, that sponsor and fund policy-based research (Altbach, 1979). Due to the nature of funding, much of the research is descriptive rather than empirical (Slaughter, 2001).

This follows a movement from traditional sociological and philosophical perspectives on higher education (Hutchins, 1995/1936; Shils, 1973) to a more political and economic focus (Leslie, 1990; Premfors, 1980; Williams, 1983). Consequently, there has been development of macro-studies of higher education, such as nation-based studies on the rates of return of higher education (Ashworth, 1997; Psacharopoulos & Patrinos, 2004), with little comparative analysis of the micro-behavior inside colleges and universities. In response, there have been repeated calls for a more individual, student-centered approach to comparative research (Altbach, 1979; Ross, 1992; Slaughter, 2001). The failure to link the larger domain of higher education to individual decisions and processes, coupled with imprecise, undefined measures of outcomes is contributing to public dissatisfaction with higher education.

3.1 Comparative Higher Education Research

> …cross-national difference, or a perspective from multiple places, is a useful technique to observe institutions. If we hold the social world like a prism at just the right angle to the light, we can see something of its institutional structure underneath; cross-national analyses help make that happen. (Baker & LeTendre, 2005, p. 9)

Any historical analysis of higher education begins with a comparative approach, such as the merger of the British residential model and the German research structure in the United States, or the transplants from England, Scotland, France, and the United States in the formation of Canadian higher education (Harris, 1976; Lucas, 1994; Rudolph, 1990; Veysey, 1965). However, after early origins are examined, higher education research is often analyzed within national boundaries, particularly in dealing with concerns of access, affordability, and accountability. When such issues arise, policymakers begin to look outside national borders at how other higher education systems operate. Thus, "comparative research faces many problems of a practical nature. Costly research seems to be granted sufficient funds only if it addresses issues of current political concern" (Teichler, 1996, p. 431).

Comparative higher education often takes a macro-sociological approach (Clark, 1996; deRudder, 1998; Kogan, 1996). It lacks attention to complex agency outside of the nation-state, such as the role of international banking and aid organizations, and of local variations, particularly the differences between cultural groups (Marginson, 1997; Marginson & Rhoades, 2002). There is a noted absence of social psychology of higher education, illuminating the individual experience of students within institutions (Clark, 1984; Scott, 1986). In response, there have been repeated calls for a more individual, student-centered approach to comparative research (Altbach, 1979; Ross, 1992; Slaughter, 2001).

3.2 Comparative Research Methods

Comparative higher education is a problem or policy-based field, dealing with issues such as the global expansion of higher education and escalating costs (Altbach, 1979; Flexner, 1930; Shils, 1973; Teichler, 1996). Most comparative higher education research is concentrated at the national level, rarely reaching the individual student level. Although lacking a specific methodology, comparative higher education has been conceptualized by Clark's (1983) "triangle" with three nodes: professional/collegial, governmental/managerial, and market. In turn, this leads to a focus on nation-states, markets, and systems of higher education.

Comparative higher education research is completed through a mix of case-oriented methods, qualitative historical methods, variable-orientated, and interpretive or causal analytic strategies (Altbach, 1998; Bray & Thomas, 1995; Eckstein & Noah, 1969; Mill, 1967/1843; Phillips, 1999; Ragin, 1987; Weber, 1964). Through these methods comparative research can inform aspects of higher education that single-nation studies cannot capture, such as government policies and impacts of educational structures on students' engagement.

There are arguments that delve into purposes of comparison. Phillips (1999) borrows from Durkheim to say,

> Comparativists investigating educational issues have precisely the advantage of being able to look at situations in other countries which could not be set up experimentally in their own. Indeed, 'indirect experimentation' is a term which might be utilised more widely to describe the processes which many comparativists follow. (p. 17)

There are concerns about treating educational systems in countries as equal entities and analyzing the difference of one policy, while ignoring the role of historical and cultural influences. However, with proper context and care in interpreting results, the comparative method does allow the advantage of studying policies and practices that often cannot be recreated in other contexts. Through a balance and harmony of methodologies, comparative education research can move to informing policy and practice in a careful and thoughtful fashion.

4. Conclusions

Reflecting more broadly on the effects of neoliberalism, it is useful to look at some of the theoretical assumptions of the neoliberal ideology. Neoliberalism is not necessarily good or bad; there is nothing wrong with neoliberalism itself (Rhoades & Torres, 2006). Advantages of the increased movement of higher education into the marketplace include the specialization that stems from increased competition and within the free-market model, the ability of consumers (students) to choose the best product (institution), and devolution of power from central governmental control to individual units, (colleges and universities). The theory and logic of neoliberalism are valid and have great potential.

Neoliberalism posits that increased competition improves quality. For example in the U.S., the movement of financial aid to students in the 1970s put students in the position of consumers in the marketplace assuming that market mechanisms would lead to increased quality in higher education. In the U.S., where there are numerous and diverse institutions, money has already shifted to the student (most often in the form of student loans), so at least theoretically competition among institutions for students could increase quality. However, the situation is dire in Canada, where there are a limited number of large comprehensive institutions, almost all facing cuts in public subsidy and unable to increase tuition, which is under provincial control.

However, the advantages that stem from economic and political models are based on theoretically perfect world scenarios, which assume consumers are rational, have full freedom of choice, are receiving all the available information to make decisions, and that institutions are adapting and responding to consumer preferences. However, due to market constraints and political dynamics, the theory of neoliberalism does not translate into reality. Higher education, particularly public higher education, does not exist in a free market; the reality is regulation through state and federal governments, price restrictions (currently seen in tuition freezing and capping), course offerings, and admissions standards. There are also debates about how rational students act in the education choices they make (DesJardins & Toutkoushian, 2005).

Many of the benefits of neoliberalism, such as consumers choosing the best product and competition leading to quality improvement, are not apparent and the negative impacts are amplified, such as declining public funding without available resources to pursue other areas of revenue, the development of cash cow educational programs, and higher education funding shifted towards high-return potential research rather than to undergraduate education. Rather than blaming current challenges in higher education on neoliberalism, the problem is with neoliberalism under the current constraints that higher education institutions face that is leading to an erosion of quality higher education. In contrast to a focus on the economic bottom-line, Burke (2005) identifies higher education-specific accountability and assessment measures that can be used more effectively and extensively in the future to improve higher education.

In a review of Rhoades and Torres' (2006) edited book, *The University, State, and Market: The Political Economy of Globalization in the Americas*, Marginson (2006) notes that for higher education globally, "neoliberalism is not so much an ideology or a political program as a particular zone of imagining and sensibility, where the problems and solutions are predefined in economic terms and behaviours are moulded in the interests of business" (p. 209). There is concern about the widening scope of markets in all aspects of social life (Carroll & Shaw, 2001). This idea that economic rationality trumps all others is the cause of much angst regarding neoliberalism and globalization, particularly in higher education.

In higher education, problems arise in the gap between the theory and practice of neoliberalism. For example, neoliberal theories would suggest that through increased competition, students would select the highest quality programs and institutions, or those with the greatest economic payoff. In turn, such colleges, universities, and disciplines would be rewarded with increased tuition dollars. However, due to enrollment caps within institutions and majors, this process is not occurring. Furthermore, students who are not accepted into the high-demand programs are funneled into low-cost, "cash-cow" programs—which results in a market mechanism that rewards low-demand programs with increased tuition dollars.

There is a need to study the barriers that mitigate the positive aspects of competition, such as more students enrolling in high quality programs and universities following the market demand for students in disciplines. As Torres and Rhoades (2006) note, there is a danger that higher education is becoming just another business with a bottom line. Under current policies, expenditures for full-time and tenure-track faculty are cut at the expense of student engagement. Through careful analysis and planning, it is possible that metrics of student learning and student engagement can become the new bottom line in higher education.

This study provided an example of student-centered comparative quantitative research, which can give students a voice in policy discussions. As higher education is an increasingly global enterprise, there is rich potential for research that looks beyond borders to other countries for policy comparison, practice improvements, and new paradigms for teaching and learning. Furthermore, comparative research offers the added bonus that the more you learn about others, the more you learn about yourself.

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