

The Collegial Tradition in the Age of Mass Higher Education

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 Springer

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Preface

Much of our writing reflects a long-term commitment to the analysis of the collegial tradition in higher education. This commitment is reflected most strongly in *Oxford and the Decline of the Collegiate Tradition* (2000), which we are pleased to say will re-appear as a considerably revised second edition (*Oxford, The Collegiate University: Conflict, Consensus and Continuity*) to be published by Springer in the near future. To some extent this volume, *The Collegial Tradition in the Age of Mass Higher Education*, is a reaction to the charge that our work has been too narrowly focussed upon the Universities of Oxford and Cambridge (Oxbridge). Not surprisingly, you would expect us to reject that critique, while responding constructively to it. The focus may be narrow, and although the relative presence and, more arguably, the influence of Oxford and Cambridge may have declined in English higher education, they remain important national universities. Moreover, as the plethora of so-called world-class higher education league tables would have us believe, they also have a powerful international status. This, however, is essentially a defensive response dependent upon the alleged reputations of the two universities.

This book is intent on making a more substantial argument. To examine the collegial tradition in higher education means much more than presenting a nostalgic look at the past. It is our contention that we are dissecting a model of the university that exhibits a range of characteristics, which are to be found widely in higher education systems and their universities, and not just in England. Our work on the two ancient collegiate universities represents one particular theme in the collegial tradition, which will be set in a much broader context as this book unfolds. We believe, therefore, that there is a synergy of purposes between this volume and our work on Oxbridge; the one complements and reinforces the other. This book therefore will be reinforced by the forthcoming *Oxford, The Collegiate University: Conflict, Consensus and Continuity* and certain themes that are more integral to Oxbridge's collegial tradition (for example, tutorial teaching) will be discussed fully in that setting. Furthermore, while we may believe that Oxford and Cambridge, as collegiate universities, represent the most developed model of collegiality, this book consistently illustrates the point that its core ideas can be expressed in different ways in contrasting supportive contexts.

This book has several purposes. Initially we dissect the concept of collegiality, with this essentially conceptual task being followed by an overview of the

contemporary challenges that the collegial tradition faces. There are three broad themes contained within our interpretation of collegiality. First, the collegiate university with the focus mainly upon collegiality as a federal model of governance in which university and college share responsibility for the delivery of key academic functions. Second, there are colleges and commensality with the former providing the framework within which the latter develops. Broadly speaking commensality refers to the social fabric of the colleges, the manner in which the college shapes the socio-cultural and academic relationships of its members – tutors to tutors, students to students and tutors to students.

Third, there is the organisation of the academic life of the university. While within the collegiate university the most distinctive facet of this relationship may be the pattern of interaction between college and university, the book examines the extent to which non-collegiate universities nonetheless incorporate the idea of collegiality in their delivery of academic goals. The proposition is that universities need to be organised collegially if they are going to deliver high-quality academic goals. The proposition is examined in the light of the recent penetration of the university by the so-called managerial revolution.

The intellectual focus of this book is broad ranging. Self-evidently, the concept of collegiality is at the heart of the book, which inevitably leads to an analysis of the idea of the university. The conceptual interest is located within both a social science and historical context. The history, with the exception of the wide-ranging historical sweep of the collegial tradition in continental Europe, focuses mainly upon developments in higher education that have unfolded over the past 25 years. The historical material, however, provides the context for our interpretation of the contemporary collegial tradition.

We draw upon political science to understand the process of change in higher education with particular reference to the policy significance of ideas, the manner in which different national systems of governance have attempted to influence (more by steering than outright state control) the development of higher education and the response of higher education institutions to state pressure. We turn to sociology to examine the way in which the internal dynamics of college life have been destabilised by social change as well as to show how broader societal pressures, often expressed through market mechanisms, have impacted upon higher education institutions. The central, albeit obvious, contention is that on an international front higher education is experiencing if not a crisis then a profound ongoing change in its character. And, of course, we believe that the prism of collegiality provides a fruitful avenue for charting and interpreting those changes.

Our previous research has taken an essentially British, more particularly English, perspective. That continues to be true of this book, although we have attempted to move beyond our own national boundary with chapters that examine differing aspects of the collegial tradition in the United States (the importance of the residential college in American higher education) and in continental Europe (the identity of the university in the light of the power of the academic and student guilds, including the role of the professoriate). It would have been possible to extend the empirical scope to create a broader international perspective. We feel, however, that even

within the current confines of our range of empirical case studies, we come close already to stretching the boundaries of our academic competence and credibility.

More importantly, however, although the comparative dimension is critical to this book, it should be remembered that it serves a particular purpose. It is designed to demonstrate both different interpretations of the collegial tradition and in the process provide a guide to its conceptual and pragmatic boundaries. No doubt (with particular reference to those Commonwealth nations – Australia, Canada and New Zealand – in which the British settled in large numbers) we can find different manifestations of the collegial tradition, but we believe we have a sufficiently robust comparative perspective that covers the most interesting variations. Furthermore, it is our contention that intrinsic to the idea of the university is the penetration of, and at the very least powerfully influencing the conduct of its academic affairs, the values of collegiality. If this is so, then a truly global empirical scope was required. Almost by default, therefore, we have been purposefully focussed as opposed to being dangerously over-ambitious.

Undoubtedly this is an academic text, but hopefully one that avoids most of the jargon that seems to overwhelm the current burgeoning research into higher education. We have written it with the intention of providing a serious analysis of current developments in higher education. We offer no policy prescriptions, although we do present alternative scenarios of the future of the collegial tradition. Besides the usual academic audience – students (both undergraduates and postgraduates) and academic faculty – we hope it will also appeal to those who are formally responsible for shaping the direction of higher education policy at both the institutional and system levels. It will not tell them, except in the broadest possible terms, what we believe is the best way forward, but we hope that it will help to provide a context in which they can think more deeply and reflectively about that most important of issues: the essence of the idea – and the ideal – of the university.

Oxford, UK
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But, of course, we alone take responsibility for the final product.

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