

## External engagement and institutional autonomy in higher education

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### Introduction

This paper presents selected findings from the author's doctoral study of Australian universities' external engagement and network activities.

The 'ivory tower' university, in which disinterested scholars reflected on the world from a distance, has been replaced by the 'engaged university' as the dominant institutional model in contemporary higher education (Gibbons, 2001; Henkel, 2007; Watson, 2007). Universities now are part of the 'knowledge economy', where they are simultaneously more central and less powerful, as knowledge becomes more important and its creation and application is shared more widely with different kinds of organizations (Gibbons et al). Modern universities are required to meet the expectations of government, customers and industry that they demonstrate their economic impact and social utility.

However these changes are not complete, universal or smooth. Rather, they involve competing interests and contradictory forces. A central tension is between institutional autonomy, and the maintenance of coherent identity for universities collectively and individually, and the impact of the kinds of adaptation required by engagement (Harding, Scott, Laske, & Burtscher, 2007). There are conflicting accounts of the relationship between universities' external engagement and their autonomy as institutions. For some commentators, like Clark universities need to seek engagement in general and external funds in particular, to increase their autonomy (Clark, 1998). For others, engagement necessarily means a reduction in autonomy (Slaughter & Leslie, 1997). Part of the confusion around this debate is because it conflates different aspects of autonomy. Understanding these conflicting accounts involves unpicking the concept of autonomy itself. As Maton argues, autonomy has two dimensions – positional and relational autonomy – that interact (Maton, 2005). Who is in control and by what principles they control are not the same thing. This formulation overcomes the problem of other attempts to create typologies of community engagement activities which conflate these two dimensions.

This paper examines these issues at the institutional level, and tries to draw out what these debates mean for universities in the current environment. Drawing on the author's doctoral research into the external network relationships of three research-intensive Australian universities, the paper argues that the drivers for engagement are

interpreted locally. Strategies and outcomes are affected by particular historical circumstances, by the university's own internal organization and by mediating factors like the news media. The paper concludes that the institutions in the study are both trying to preserve their own boundaries and meet external demands, and that this results in a range of activities with a spectrum of sometimes contradictory outcomes for relational and positional autonomy.

### **Fields and autonomy**

This study uses Pierre Bourdieu's theory of field as its framework. This section briefly outlines the concepts of field and capital with particular reference to Bourdieu's own studies of higher education.

Bourdieu's approach can be categorized as 'constructivist structuralism' (Fowler, 2000, p. 1; Grenfell, 2004, p. 26). His theoretical framework attempts to overcome the structure/ agency problem by arguing that social space is structured by meanings, which are externalized as 'fields' and internalized as 'habitus': 'Social reality exists, so to speak, twice, in things and in minds, in fields and in habitus, outside and inside of agents,' (Bourdieu & Wacquant, 1992, p. 127). His theorizations admit a high degree of complexity and nuance, overcoming internalist/ externalist explanations (Maton, 2005) and allowing linkage of the micro and macro (Naidoo, 2004). In particular, for this study, Bourdieu's ideas provide a fruitful way of looking at the interactions between universities and other organizations because it enables an understanding of the different institutions and individuals located within a network of relationships with an encompassing logic of action.

In Bourdieu's framework, complex societies are made up of a large number of different fields, for example the law or the media. These fields are a configuration of relations – 'To think in terms of field is to think relationally.' (Bourdieu & Wacquant, 1992, p. 96). Fields are constituted by exchange, but they are not simply markets or networks. Unlike markets, there are other forms of capital at stake than economic capital. Capital is 'accumulated labor' but agents' investments are not only in translation of their time into money but also their effort into other forms of reward such as social status or cultural influence. Although economic capital is at the root of other forms of capital, they are never entirely reducible to economic capital. In fact, the most powerful and specific effects are produced when their relationship to the economic is disguised (Bourdieu, 1986). This process of transfiguration is termed by Bourdieu 'symbolic violence' (Bourdieu, ref). Nor are fields reducible to the visible social connections of networks, but are underpinned by broader power relations (Bourdieu & Wacquant, 1992, p. 114; Maton, 2005, p. 689).

Capital, then, is a relation which can exist in different forms. In his essay 'The Forms of Capital', Bourdieu identifies three main forms of capital: economic, cultural and social. Economic capital is immediately convertible into money and is institutionalized as property rights. Cultural capital exists in three forms: embodied in 'long-lasting dispositions of the body and mind', objectified in cultural goods (books, pictures, machines) and institutionalised (a particular form of objectification) for example in educational qualifications (Bourdieu, 1986). Universities have a pivotal role in the creation of cultural capital, not only inculcating embodied cultural capital,

but as repositories of objectified cultural capital (books, machines, pictures) and as certifying institutionalized cultural capital (in the form of qualifications). Social capital is of particular interest in this study because it goes to the importance of networks and networking behaviours. The persistent power of personal connections reveals the constructed nature of the economic sphere as a site where 'business is business', and personal sentiment is irrelevant (Bourdieu 1992 p98). New forms of capital may emerge, for example 'media capital' (Couldrey, 2003).

Conflict within a field involves not only control over the accumulation of capital itself but over the terms on which it is accumulated. The limits of the field are 'always at stake in the field itself', and so can only be determined by empirical investigation (1992, 100). The extent to which a field transfigures power into something specific and irreducible determines how autonomous it is from economic or political imperatives. The artistic field has constituted itself in opposition to the economic field, in the process developing a series of distinctions – for example, what it means to be 'an artist' – which are historically specific and define the field itself (Bourdieu & Wacquant, 1992, p. 94).

Fields are related to each other through the 'rates of exchange' of different forms of capital, which are determined within a kind of overarching field termed by Bourdieu 'the field of power' which is closely related to the State. The ultimate prize is control over the rules of game itself – the 'dominant principle of domination' (Bourdieu, 1996, p. 265). Although particular elements change, there is a continuing opposition between economic and cultural capital, which interact to structure the field of power:

The field of power is organized according to a chiasmatic structure. The distribution according to the dominant principle of hierarchization – economic capital – is, as it were, 'intersected' by the distribution based on a second principle of hierarchization – cultural capital – in which the different fields line up according to an inverse hierarchy, that is, from the artistic field to the economic field. ' (Bourdieu, 1996, p. 265).

In this conception, the state is not 'well-defined, clearly bounded and unitary reality' but rather itself a site of struggles and collusions in which the stake is 'the monopoly of legitimate symbolic violence', as well as physical violence (Bourdieu & Wacquant, 1992, pp. 111-112). For example, academic titles are a form of '*state magic*: the conferring of a diploma belongs to the class of the acts of *certification* or *validation* through which an official authority, acting as an agent of the central bank of symbolic credit – the state – guarantees and consecrates a certain state of affairs, a relationship of conformity between words and things, between discourse and reality ...' (Bourdieu, 1996, p. 376). So the state is not coterminous with the field of power, but the struggles over state 'meta-capital' are the most visible manifestation of the field of power.

The degree of autonomy of a field depends on how specific and exclusive the particular form of capital operating in the field is. Higher education is conceptualized by Bourdieu and others as a field with a relatively high degree of autonomy in generating 'its own values and behavioral imperatives that are relatively independent from forces emerging from the economic and political fields' (Bourdieu & Collier, 1988, pp. 73-74; Naidoo, 2004, p. 458). Bourdieu gives two accounts of the specific

form of capital operating in the field of higher education in *Homo Academicus* and in *The State Nobility*. In the earlier book, Bourdieu emphasizes the dual nature of academic or scholarly capital as an organizing principle within higher education, while in *The State Nobility* academic capital is used in a narrower sense and contrasted with economic and cultural capital. The different uses are not necessarily inconsistent, but rather illustrate the specificity of capital in relation to a field at a given time.

In *Homo Academicus*, the specific capital of the academic field has two faces: 'academic' capital which is linked to reproduction of the field, control of hiring and promotions, and 'intellectual' or 'scientific' capital which is linked to scientific authority or intellectual renown (Naidoo, 2004, p. 458). Academic capital is 'founded on the accumulation of positions allowing the control of other positions and their holders', and operates particularly strongly at the 'society' pole of the field, in particular the faculties of law and medicine (Bourdieu & Collier, 1988, p. 73). In contrast, at the 'scientific' pole – the science faculties – prestige rests almost entirely on achievement in research, and university administrative positions are regarded with little respect (74). The faculties of arts and social sciences are similarly bifurcated between the scientific/ intellectual enterprise and the reproduction of legitimate culture and basic social structures; however the division is not as stark as in the disciplines located at the poles of the field (Bourdieu & Collier, 1988, p. 74).

However in *The State Nobility*, this differentiation between academic and scholastic capital is absent, and the emphasis on the translation of external pressures into field-specific forms of capital is not so pronounced. Throughout there is one definition of academic capital, mostly as a characteristic of individuals, 'based on properties such as prior educational achievement, a 'disposition' to be academic (seen for example, in manner of speech and writing), and specially designated competencies' (Naidoo, 2004, p. 458). Bourdieu catalogues in great detail how the qualities of academic capital are congruent with class-based attributes (for example, Bourdieu, 1996, p. 37). While *Homo Academicus* is concerned with the internal workings of higher education in France in the 1960s as they concern the personnel of the various institutions. *The State Nobility* is more focused on students' origins and social destinies – so the definition of academic capital used is more appropriate to discussing the trajectories of individuals through the educational system. In *The State Nobility* Bourdieu appears more concerned to demonstrate the complicity and conflict between economic and cultural capital as meta-forms of power which structure the 'field of power' to which all other fields are related (Bourdieu, 1996, pp. 265-272).

These different forms of academic capital have been taken up differently by critics. Rajani Naidoo in her paper on admissions policies in South African universities, uses 'academic capital' in the sense it is deployed in *The State Nobility*, which fits with the purpose of her study (Naidoo, 2004, p. 458). On the other hand, in his consideration of the 'new student' problem in the UK in the 1960s, Karl Maton argues that the distinction between the two forms of capital is critical to understanding the dynamics of the field:

The two main forms of capital circulating in a field represent competing principles of hierarchization: an autonomous principle looking inwards to the ostensibly disinterested activities of the field (such as 'knowledge for its own sake') and a heteronomous principle looking beyond the field's specific

activities and towards economic and political success (such as generating research income or wielding administrative power. ... Higher education is, therefore, hierarchically structured not only into 'haves' and 'have nots' but also by competing ideas of what should count as 'having'. (Maton, 2005, p. 690).

This understanding of the internal conflict of the field of higher education is central to the argument of this paper. In the period of the last twenty-five years, the whole field of higher education has been moved towards the heteronomous pole, in Australia and globally (Marginson, 2007). State intervention (the Dawkins reforms, reduced public funding, changes to student funding regimes) and the increase need to raise funds from non-government sources have weakened the boundaries of the field. The inclusion of the former Colleges of Advanced Education into the class of 'university' and the extension of degree-granting powers to vocational education and training providers and private higher education providers are two examples of the reduction of universities' distinct powers. Similarly, the reduction in public funding has come with an increase in activities conducted on a fee-paying basis, particularly the recruitment of international students as well as fee-paying domestic students and an increase in research conducted on a commercial basis. One result has been a more stratified field, in which older, richer, research-intensive universities have been advantaged by their historical accumulation of cultural capital and assets. Another result has been the importation of mechanisms of management and measurement developed in the commercial field into the university world.

Weakened autonomy for higher education overall, and increasing stratification within the field itself is the context for the current study of universities' engagement activities. However, Maton goes on to argue that Bourdieu's account of autonomy can tend to conflate a field's symbolic and social systems, leading to empirical reductionism (Maton, 2005, p. 696). His solution is to distinguish between positional and relational autonomy, where:

1. Positional autonomy refers to the nature of relations between specific positions in the social dimension of a context or field and positions in other contexts. ...
2. Relational autonomy refers to relations between the principles of relation (or ways of working, practices, aims, measures of achievement, etc.) within a context or field and those emanating from other contexts. ...

In short, the distinction asks 'Who is running higher education?' (PA) and 'According to whose principles?' (RA). (Maton, 2005, p. 697)

This differentiation is illuminating in the case of contemporary higher education, where much of the reduction in relational autonomy has occurred without substantial change in positional autonomy. Higher education is still largely controlled by agents within the field (people with an academic background) but these agents are increasingly directing the activities of the sector according to principles derived from the economic field (Maton, 2005, pp. 699-700).

Attempts to identify types of university engagement have also been limited by this tendency to confuse relational and positional dimensions. For example, the University of Minnesota developed the following typology for community-university partnerships (Minnesota, 2002):

- Consultative partnership – provision of expertise to an organisation/ group by a university staff member or department on a similar basis as a private consultant.
- Technical assistance partnership – similar to a consultative relationship but more specialized and outcomes more strongly defined by the client.
- Partnership of convenience – initiated by the university, often linked to specific project and for a fixed timeframe.
- Generative partnership – relationship between the university (or some part of it) and some external entity that produces something – deliberately vague – that takes on its own life.
- Partnerships for mutual benefit – centred on a common project, longevity of the partnership depends on continuing mutual benefit.
- Outreach – activity initiated by the university to meet defined needs of community; balance of power tipped towards university.

This typology jumbles the structure of the relationship ('on a similar basis as a private consultant', 'balance of power tipped towards the university'), the nature of the work involved ('a specific project', 'more specialized') and the ethos of the partnership ('continuing mutual benefit'). Other typologies such as that developed by RMIT focus exclusively on the structure of the partnership, ranking them from 'networking' through 'cooperating', 'coordinating' and 'collaborating' (Berman and Badenhorst, 2005).

### **Methodology for the current study**

The present study, which forms part of the author's doctoral research, sought to investigate the experience of engagement at the institutional level. The aim of the research overall was to the strategies universities use in establishing and maintaining networks with external organisations, what activities are conducted through these relationships and what outcomes result. A case study method was used to examine the external relations of three research-intensive Australian universities: Monash University, University of Western Australia (UWA) and University of Queensland (UQ). The case study method has the intrinsic limit of trying to apprehend a fundamentally dynamic system through snapshots of particular points in time. (Bourdieu & Wacquant, 1992, p. 97). This shortcoming is balanced by the strength of the case study in offering contextual depth and the opportunity for 'thick description' (Silverman, 2005).

The three case study institutions were selected to offer controlled variation. All three are research-intensive universities, and all are members of the 'Group of Eight' (Go8) universities, which is the representative group of the most powerful and research-intensive universities in Australia, similar to the Russell Group in the UK. The sampling decision was based on several factors. First of all, the Go8 are the most

significant institutions in Australian HE, particularly in research. They conduct a large proportion of Australia's research. They are the market leaders in terms of attracting high-scoring Australian and international students (Marginson & Considine, 2000, p. 208). Secondly, it was interesting to investigate the proposition that the tension between the 'ivory tower' and the 'engaged' university paradigms might be particularly strong in the more research intensive universities. Thirdly, controlling for some institutional characteristics helped to isolate other variables of interest such as location (Sayer, 1992). Finally, many of the case studies of individual universities' engagement activities are from regional or new universities (Garlick, 1998; Klich, 1999; Nairn, 1997; Winter, Wiseman, & Muirhead, 2005), so considering the Go8s filled a gap in the literature.

In the typology developed by Marginson and Considine, all the Go8 universities are either 'Sandstone' or 'Redbrick' institutions (Marginson & Considine, 2000). The Sandstone universities are the first generation of Australian universities, and have an institutional ethos focused on elite formation as well as research excellence, while the Redbricks were established in the postwar period and have a similar research orientation but less association with elite formation (Marginson & Considine, 2000, pp. 195-196).

The three institutions together represent a sample of the leading Australian universities, by size and location. Student number rather than income or research profile was chosen as the differentiator as it indicates the scale of the overall university operation and staff numbers in particular.

|                          | <b>Sandstone</b>   | <b>Redbrick</b>   |
|--------------------------|--|---|
| Small<br>(< 20,000 EFTS) | <b>University of Western Australia (WA)</b><br>University of Adelaide (SA)<br>University of Tasmania * | Australian National University (ACT)                                  |
| Large<br>(> 20,000 EFTS) | <b>University of Queensland (Qld)</b><br>University of Melbourne (Vic)<br>University of Sydney (NSW)   | <b>Monash University (Vic)</b><br>University of New South Wales (NSW) |

**Bold** indicates universities in this study.

\* University of Tasmania is not a member of the Go8.

The study design aimed to capture both the institution's overall strategic direction and examples of specific interactions across a range of sectors. There was a particular effort to identify activities with a civic or community component. For the purposes of sampling, the institution was defined as including all faculties and administrative departments, as well as university-owned enterprises operating under the control of the university executive. The study specifically excluded: interactions with other universities which did not include a non-university partner, for example university consortia like Universitas21, joint credit, credit transfer or twinning arrangements, and student exchange programs. Due to time and travel constraints, the study focused on Australia-based operations. Research with international partners was included, but offshore teaching and student recruitment activities were not. A fuller study including comprehensive data collection in different countries would be very valuable, especially with the growth in interest regarding international alumni.

Preparation for each case study included review and analysis of key strategic documents including annual reports and strategic plans, as well as published reports of

key activities, and media sources including university websites and magazines, and news media.

Within the universities, interviewees were selected by purposive sampling, drawing on areas with particular strategic or operational responsibility for external relations and partnerships. Categories of interviewees included:

- senior executive – members of the Vice-Chancellor’s Group or equivalent
- academic leaders – Deans, Heads of Department and equivalents
- academic staff – from lecturer to professorial level
- general (professional) staff with responsibility for different aspects of external relations, eg alumni, media.

External partner organizations were selected based on a significant, ongoing and/ or strategic relationship with the university. Categories of organizations included:

- local government
- state government, including state-owned enterprises
- industry, including small to medium enterprises, large corporations, industry associations, professional associations
- community/ non-government organisations
- schools
- other educational institutions, including TAFE.

Within these organisations, interviewees were sought who had responsibility for maintaining the relationship with the university in either a strategic or operational capacity. As can be seen from the list, there was a wide range of types of relationships, ranging from very project-specific to very broad-ranging.

Fifty-six interviews were conducted across the three case studies (see table below for details). The overall ratio of internal to external interviews was 7:3, with the strongest representation of external interviewees at UWA. The response rate of university staff invited to be interviewed was high, but there was difficulty in engaging external interviewees. Across the three institutions, almost ninety percent of internal university staff approached agreed to be interviewed. Of those who agreed, about seventy percent translated into a recorded interview, as it was not always possible to schedule an interview within the data collection period. The response rate of internal interviewees at Monash was particularly high, possibly as the candidate was based there at that time. This response is reflected in the high number of Monash internal interviewees, which is also increased by the decision to interview at least one staff member from each of Monash’s Victorian campuses. In each case study, key external interfaces were covered, including the executive, media, alumni, and industry offices. A selection of disciplines was also included in each institution.

There was considerably more difficulty in obtaining a response from external organizations. This was particularly true at Monash, the reverse of the situation internally. Urban local government was particularly unresponsive in Perth and Melbourne, as was industry in Melbourne and Brisbane. In most of these cases repeated contacts by email or phone failed to elicit any response, or a simple refusal. This lack of response is hard to interpret but could be attributed to: lack of interest in the research; the requirement from the Monash Ethics Committee that contacts be

directed via the CEO, leading to a chain of correspondence and lack of personal contact with the target interviewees.

Interviews conducted for the doctoral study

| Group                 | Monash | UWA | UQ |
|-----------------------|--------|-----|----|
| Senior executive      | 3      | 2   | 2  |
| Academic leaders      | 4      | 2   | 4  |
| Academic staff        | 7      | 4   | 3  |
| Professional staff    | 3      | 4   | 2  |
| <i>Total internal</i> | 17     | 12  | 11 |
| Government            | 2      | 4   | 3  |
| Community/NGO         |        | 2   | 1  |
| Industry              |        | 3   | 1  |
| <i>Total external</i> | 2      | 9   | 5  |
| TOTAL                 | 19     | 21  | 16 |

The interviews used a semi-structured format, with a consistent series of opening questions regarding the interviewee's background and responsibilities, the organisation's strategic approach to the area in question and the evaluations of success used. The second part of the interview addressed particular aspects of the interviewee's work and pursued issues raised in the course of the interview. The majority (50) of the interviews were conducted in person, with 6 conducted by phone due to difficulties in scheduling. The interviews were audiotaped and transcribed. The transcripts were analysed using NVivo and coded for theme and function.

## Findings

This section provides a sample of the findings from the case studies and notes the factors supporting consistency and variance, and identifies important mediating factors in the relations between universities and assorted stakeholders. As expected, a large range of engagement activities were identified and recorded. Although there were common factors across the three institutions, each university had its own distinct habitus and some elements of its engagement profile that were unique to it. Each university had major relationships located in the government and industrial sectors, while there was wider variation in the community area. External relationships involved activities across the domains of teaching, research and service, with the strongest relationships often in research. Throughout the interactions, the operation of different forms of capital could be identified, sometimes resulting in conflicts. Interactions were conditioned or mediated by a number of external factors, including the role of the media.

As expected from the selected sample, there were some common elements across the three universities as they all have substantial research programs and are on the whole selectors rather than recruiters of students. All three are well-established institutions with some considerable networks in their respective states. The city and state dimensions of their activities are important to each, particularly the relationship with the State Governments. Each university is closely linked in to key state infrastructure, in particular the health sector, where research, clinical training, teaching, assessment and practice are particularly intertwined. Within these common elements however, there was divergence based on the history of the university, the length of its

establishment, its 'foundation story' (confirming Watson 2007), and its size and internal diversity (of discipline, location etc).

Monash University is from a different generation of universities than UWA and UQ, but it shares some issues with UQ in its size and multicampus nature. UWA and UQ share a similar foundation story, but UWA's is more strongly local, and its smaller size means that it is a more coherent institution than the other two in the study. A brief sketch of each university's composition and its 'habitus' follows below.

### *Monash University*

Monash University is probably the most diverse institution in Australia, as well as the largest, with more than 55,000 enrolled students and over 5,300 staff. Several interviewees pointed out the Monash can be seen as a microcosm of the Australian higher education sector, encompassing campuses of different sizes, types and locations, international operations, distance education, a broad range of disciplines. The study found Monash University's external interface is dominated by two factors: the history of Monash as Melbourne's 'second' university, and its broad spread of campuses, which give it distinctive relationships at each geographic site, and also create internal tensions and difficulties in coherent action.

Monash's signature engagement activities are the Synchrotron, newly constructed on the Clayton campus, with associated 'big science' projects and its diaspora of campuses. This devolved Faculty structure and number of campuses is a management problem for organizational coherence. Monash has large Melbourne suburban campuses at Clayton and Caulfield, smaller outer metropolitan campuses at Berwick and Peninsula, a specialist inner-city campus at Parkville, a regional campus at Gippsland and overseas campuses in Malaysia and South Africa and centres in London and Prato. Some of these campuses have been sites of educational institutions for many decades – the College of Pharmacy dates from 1881, Caulfield and Gippsland from Technical Schools established in the 1920s – while Berwick and Malaysia and South Africa were all established in the last ten years. The legacies of amalgamated institutions give a different style to each of the campuses.

This diversity is presented as an advantage by the Vice-Chancellor:

[There is] richness in [campus] diversity, provided we recognise that we don't want each campus to be a mini Clayton, and they each develop their research specialisation which allows them to be the cutting edge, high quality in some areas of research rather than try to do it across the board with undue replication between campuses. (VC, Monash)

However this understanding of Monash's diversity is not necessarily the dominant one:

I think Monash is, largely in the city of Melbourne, seen as being [Clayton] campus ... and the other campuses are more or less invisible. (General staff member)

The outer suburban and regional campuses are small and not research-intensive, a source of resentment for Clayton-based staff who see them as a burden. However, the campuses do give Monash a broad engagement profile. There is an important link to

economic development and state government science policy centred around the Clayton Campus, particularly with the Synchrotron development, and developments associated with the Monash STRIP development which houses a variety of Monash and non-university technology-transfer activities. At the time of research, Monash was trying to build on the potential of its location in a technology-heavy centre of Victorian industry to create more leverage for the university, for example by boosting its relatively poor performance in ARC Linkage Grants.

There is a collection of science-based outreach activities based at the Clayton campus, including the Monash Science Centre and the proposed Monash Science High School. Monash Gippsland is also developing as part of the Gippsland Education precinct, which will see senior secondary and TAFE facilities co-located on the Gippsland campus. Monash has some active service-learning programs, including the community partnerships program in medicine and the Monash Legal Service, both of which involve students in learning in community settings, as well as providing services to community members.

#### *University of Western Australia*

UWA is the smallest and most tightly networked of the three universities. In number of students and staff it is considerably smaller than both UQ and Monash. The relative isolation of Perth from the rest of Australia and the boom in the WA economy are important elements of the current context for UWA. UWA's foundation narrative is exceptionally strong, as it was founded with strong support from the WA community, and throughout its history it has enjoyed a high level of philanthropic and community support, which is reflected in its handsome campus and significant art and museum collections. In a small, isolated but wealthy community, the university has taken on a role that crosses over sometimes with that played by cultural institutions in other states. For example, the Perth International Arts Festival was established in 1953 under the auspices of the University and UWA until 2007 was its major sponsor and supporter.

The Arts Festival remains one of UWA's signature engagement activities. The other is the University Club, built on the river at Crawley, which is designed to attract alumni and businesspeople from the Perth CBD to engage with the campus. UWA also has a teaching centre at Albany which hosts several full-scale degree programs and several research programs.

#### *University of Queensland*

The University of Queensland shares many characteristics with UWA, including a picturesque riverside campus and a foundation narrative closely linked with the development of its home city. Like Monash, it also has a large undergraduate cohort, substantial international activities and an active interest in research commercialization. Where UWA has worked to get close to the whole Perth elite, and to generate income from as many sources as possible, UQ has aimed primarily for a smaller number of very large partnerships, with smaller partnerships following on from the big investments. The centerpiece of UQ's research strategy is a suite of five research institutes which concentrate the university's research strengths, outside the

Faculty structure. The institutes have been established with major external funding, including from the US-based Atlantic Philanthropies and the Queensland State Government. To date the investment is approaching \$400 million.

The intimacy of UQ's relationship with the state government and the policy and financial leverage that UQ has gained is distinctive. The other two case study institutions both have important relationships with their respective state governments but Queensland's is unique. This is mainly due to the Beattie government's Smart State Policy initiative, a suite of policies and programs designed to promote the development of new and technology-intensive industries in Queensland. The Smart State policy program has been accompanied by substantial direct investment into research infrastructure, of which UQ has been the major beneficiary.

Other aspects of UQ's external engagement include the community engagement focus at UQ Ipswich, the substantial allied health clinics program and the well-established commercialization apparatus, including UniQuest, the university's development company.

### **Dimensions of autonomy**

What impact do all these activities have on universities' autonomy? To consider this question, some of the major types of engagement activity have been categorized below according to Maton's differentiation of relational and positional autonomy (Maton, 2005). Maton uses the two terms at the level of the field as a whole; this analysis translates his terms to the institutional level. Positional autonomy is determined by the answer to the question 'Who is running higher education?' and relational autonomy by the question 'According to whose principles?' (Maton, 2005, p. 697). Maton argues that in the current period, positional autonomy remains strong, with the agents governing higher education at the institutional and government levels located primarily in the higher education field, despite the increase of government inspection regimes. Relational autonomy refers to the degree to which the practices, aims and measures of a field emanate from that field or from other fields. In the case of higher education, this refers to the relative strength of purely academic values like 'knowledge for its own sake' versus heteronomous values such as social or economic outcomes. It is relational autonomy that has been most weakened by marketisation of education, and the importation of corporate management practices.

The table below attempts to make these distinctions at the institutional level in relation to engagement activities. It should be noted that both dimensions represent continuous axes rather than a clearly defined categories, however for the purpose of this argument they have been represented as a table. On the vertical axis, activities are differentiated by their positional autonomy. It can be seen that most of the major activities are still fully controlled by the university, conducted and managed by university staff. Although they may be funded from other sources, their governance rests with the institution. In the lower row are activities which involve shared or devolved governance arrangements. They involve collaboration with other organizations and are staffed and managed by a combination of personnel. These hybrid organizational forms are increasing. There is also a growth in advisory groups,

for example the UWA Business School Board or the UQ Boilerhouse Community Advisory Group which provide advice and guidance to management.

The horizontal axis divides activities by their relational autonomy. The box on the right-hand side lists activities which have a primarily academic purpose. On the left are activities where the purpose is defined by a different logic, which may be commercial or social. The middle column contains activities which combine academic and other logic and purpose.

| Relational autonomy ><br>V Positional autonomy | Primarily non-academic  | Mixed   | Primarily academic   |
|--|---|---|--|
| Full university control                        | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Student volunteering</li> <li>• <i>Consulting</i></li> </ul> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Galleries, museums</b></li> <li>• <b>Alumni</b></li> <li>• Community engagement research</li> </ul> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Public lectures</b></li> <li>• <b>Continuing education</b></li> <li>• Clinics</li> <li>• Service-learning</li> </ul> |
| Partial university control                     | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <i>Spin-off companies</i></li> </ul>                         | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Arts festivals</li> <li>• Think-tanks with uni funding</li> </ul>                                      | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <i>Joint research centres</i></li> </ul>  |

This analysis shows that relational and positional autonomy are different, and that one does not necessarily follow the other. For example, some activities with non-academic purposes and rationales are university controlled, while other strongly academic activities may be governed by arrangements involving non-academic agents. Closely related activities, for example student volunteering and service learning may have a different relational dimension, as one is primarily concerned with providing a social benefit through volunteer labour, while in the other the experience of undertaking similar tasks is conceived and assessed as an educational experience.

Considering activities only by relationship between academic and non-academic conflates the ‘non-academic’ fields. These in fact are not one field but several different ones, of which the economic field is probably the most significant. A fuller picture of engagement emerges by considering relative force of fields in tension with the academic field. The examples of engagement highlighted in bold are ones in which academic capital is dominant. Those in italics demonstrate a strong economic element, involving transactions for economic gain. The remaining activities fall into the category of ‘community engagement’. These three types of engagement are considered below. Relations with other fields, such as the professions and the media are also briefly considered.

Some engagement activities (highlighted in bold) reinforce the powerful position of the institution as holder of particular kinds of cultural capital, and so have a positive impact on autonomy. Most of these activities are the classic ‘town and gown’ activities that are particularly strong in sandstone universities. The public lecture is a key form of this kind of engagement: the expertise of the university is made available

to the public for free, but requiring attendance in person on campus.<sup>1</sup> Similarly, in continuing education or extension, people usually come to campus to undertake study in the form of short courses or conferences. University continuing education is part of a range of adult and community education offered by VET providers, private providers and other institutions. This activity in Australia is limited in scope and scale compared to the UK for example, where lifelong learning is significant in education policy. Not all of what is offered is highly academic (UWA for example offers yoga and basic IT programs alongside languages and classical studies), but as a form it is refracted into the logic of the higher education field and framed by educational rather than social concerns. Galleries and museums are another example of how the university's cultural capital, this time in its objectified form, are made available to the public.

[UWA] runs a lot of concerts, there's music... a lot of the Festival of Perth activities for instance occur in the sunken gardens there. It's got amazingly beautiful surrounds for that kind of activity... So we can go and watch a movie in the Somerville Theatre, people do go and sign up for summer courses and learn about Tibetan architecture or whatever. So there is that public profile of UWA as a key community participant and provider of cultural events in Perth. (Manager, public sector)

The physical setting of the campus is very significant, the sandstone architecture in particular. Many couples have their wedding photographs taken with the walls of UWA and UQ as a backdrop. The expansive sporting fields and facilities of all three main campuses are also important. The image and the experience of the campus as a culturally rich place draw on the popular imagination of Oxbridge and Harvard, and reinforces the status of the university. This group of activities shares the characteristics of being relatively long-established and resting on traditional ideas of service, campus-based, involve objectified or institutionalized forms of cultural capital, academic purposes, but relatively peripheral to core academic teaching programs and research.

Universities have become more interested in their alumni over the past five years. This interest has been primarily driven by the rising potential for repeat business in the form of postgraduate enrolments and donations or sponsorship. International alumni relationships are particularly important to student recruitment. Alumni relationships strengthen the 'brand' of the university, as individuals associate themselves with the cultural capital of their institution, and the social capital of their peer group. Universities hope that in turn they can draw on the social and economic capital of their alumni. Each case study university had or was in the process of establishing, a substantial alumni office as well as faculty based and offshore alumni groups. In several cases, staff or consultants from North America were used to try to replicate the success of US and Canadian universities in 'leveraging' their alumni relationships.

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<sup>1</sup> Podcasts on the university website, and projects like the MIT Open Courseware initiative, can be seen as modernized forms of the public lecture, but they are open to interpretation and re-purposing in new ways by their online audience, rather than being strongly framed by the public lecture format. The ways in which universities and individual academics are presenting themselves in the virtual world is the topic for another paper.

The second group of activities is characterized by conflict between academic and other (primarily economic) forms of capital. These activities, highlighted in *italics* above, are mostly research-based and involve some degree of external specification of needs or collaboration in production. There is a wide range of activity here, and some of the subtleties have been elided to draw out the general points. Joint research centres, like the ARC Collaborative Research Centres, involve two or more universities and/or research organisations and one or more corporates or government departments jointly contribute funds and personnel to a research centre, overseen by governance structures in which all groups are represented. Joint research centres are a major structure for undertaking large-scale scientific research in Australia. Another kind of activity involves direct research commercialization, which can take a number of forms and stages, including patents, and sometimes culminating in spin-off companies. This is the face of knowledge transfer, where university research is translated into products for market, most strongly associated with the physical and biological sciences (pharmaceuticals in particular) but can be seen throughout the university in development of training programs, assessment tools and testing services which for sale to corporate or individual customers.

Academic capital – both in the form of a reputation for academic excellence and the lingering image of the ivory tower – forms the basis of the powerful position of the case study institutions. At the same time, the protection and maximization of that academic capital requires investment of time and resources in particular ways. As international rankings of research become more important, research that contributes to the indicators measured on those indices becomes increasingly important (Marginson 2007). Refereed research publications are critical to this, but so is dollar turnover of research contracts for clients. In terms of orientation and where funding and effort are placed, these two aims are not easy to accommodate:

I think the key [to success in commercial research] is being able to present the results in a way that is easily digestible by the clients. That's a real issue because on the one hand you want to put the stuff in the peer reviewed literature because that's how academic careers are built and that's how national competitive grants are won. But the clients don't want to read stuff that's written for peer review. (Senior researcher)

Despite the extensive changes to university management and academic practices, there is still a distinct and identifiable academic identity and processes which are unique to higher education. Although these may no longer buffer the sector against the forces of market and state, they do create barriers to free interaction with external groups. The internal incentives and rewards for academic work are different to those in other fields, and the disjuncture between priorities, emphases and timeframes means that a process of negotiation is required to produce collaboration. As one Dean commented:

... being an academic has a certain interpretation for people which isn't necessarily as relevant in the day to day and that's what we're trying to address because I don't think that's true.

The senior executives interviewed were consistently concerned about their institution's interface with industry in particular. These concerns ranged from first contact through to developing relationships

We are very confusing to the outside world. If you wanted to come to us with a problem, where would you go? (Senior executive)

You get these language difficulties ... in the university you've got results, in business you've got products. (Senior manager)

All three universities had invested substantially in organizational units and specialized personnel dedicated to solving this problem by acting as liaison between prospective clients and researchers. However there were also concerns that universities were making their own research priorities:

It's certainly the view of universities that industry doesn't know what it wants. (Senior executive)

[In Linkage bids often] researchers basically decide what it is they want to research, and then they go and try and scout an industry partner that has got some money to invest for reasons of goodwill with a possible payoff down the track. (Senior executive).

Part of the reorientation of effort was to change to a more 'proactive' strategy of trying to pre-empt companies' needs:

One of the things we try to do in our initial conversations [with companies] is understand what they're looking for so that we can tailor our proposals to their needs. (Dean)

The case study universities were actively trying to change their internal culture to make their offerings more attractive to private research funders. These changes were reducing the relational autonomy of the institution by making its approach more businesslike and responsive to external needs.

However, these kind of changes also undermined the currency of academic capital in other fields and the status of universities generally:

I think that the role of universities in modern society is kind of confusing now and the way that they are funded has made them different beasts from what they were when I was an undergraduate. I think the drive to seek funding from outside the university has driven behaviors that didn't used to be there. ... This might be some romantic notion of what the past used to be like, but I think that they were able to speak out. They were able to do really good research on important social issues without having to worry whether they would get the funding. My suspicion is that academic standards have dropped. (Senior manager, government-owned enterprise)

I see that there is enormous pressure to raise research funds in universities. A lot of the funds are now coming either from government departments or from

former public activities that have been privatized, and in both cases they think they own the data. They are often contractually insisting that the academics don't comment. Well that's disgraceful - it compromises universities, compromises their research projects and sees fewer and fewer academics prepared to take a critical stance. (Director, non-government organization)

Both these comments explicitly link the pressure to raise external funds to increased submissiveness to external interests and a silencing of academic values like knowledge for its own sake and free inquiry. The generation of economic capital can erode academic capital and autonomy.

A third area of engagement is community or civic engagement. Although a substantial movement in the USA, supported by national organizations such as Campus Compact, in Australia community engagement is nascent, and most often associated with regional campuses. Explicit, structured engagement with local leaders, problems and aspirations occurred most often in the case studies around the universities' regional and outer-urban campuses. The UQ Boilerhouse Community Engagement Centre is the largest centre across the three case study universities dedicated to community engagement, although there is substantial activity at Monash Gippsland and in pockets across all three universities. The Boilerhouse conducts action research and collaborative projects across areas like increasing participation of students from non-traditional backgrounds, improving local governance and service provision, for example in aged care, as well as acting as a resource centre for local community organizations.

This kind of academic work is characterized by blurred boundaries between teaching, different forms of research and service. It draws on Ernest Boyer's model of the 'scholarship of engagement' which has at its core the application of knowledge to real-world problems (Boyer, 1990?, , 1996). Boyer argues for scholarship as a continuum from discovery to teaching, with each activity worthy of equal status. In Bourdieu's terms, Boyer's argument can be seen as an attempt to refract academics' socially responsive work into the logic of the higher education field, while simultaneously broadening the definition of scholarly capital. Such arguments have been made from Dewey onwards, but have never succeeded in transforming the field of academic practice (Benson, Harkavy, & Puckett, 2007).

Naidoo argues that Bourdieu's framework does not easily represent forces that are strong and persistent, but not strong enough to transform the field (Naidoo, 2004). Community engagement can be seen as such a force, a kind of permanent opposition. In the context of the three case study universities, community engagement was strongly associated with their regional and outer urban campuses and with their student equity programs. Political pressure from local representatives and a general sense of obligation drives these programs:

I think the senior people can see a strategic advantage in having the university having a regional centre because [this university] has been very much [wealthy inner] suburbs, young person's university and has a certain reputation for being, some people say, an elitist institution. So having a regional centre is I think politically good for the institution. (Senior academic)

However, the regional campuses are expensive to run, have little research profile and do not attract high-scoring students. They also tend to be located in areas of low cultural capital. This creates conflict with the dominant identity of the institution:

One of our staff reported a conversation they overheard ... where the kids said 'We don't tell our friends that we go to [this campus], we go to [this university].' It's not cool to come to this campus. (Senior academic)

This internal disparity was most evident at Monash, because it has so many campuses. However, it was also present at UWA and UQ, presenting most sharply in relation to student selection. The need to sustain courses and serve the local area by accepting local students was in conflict with the pressure to protect institutional reputation by keeping entrance scores at the same level as the main campuses, despite the lower scores in the local cohort. Each institution had developed different strategies – alternative entry schemes, preparation courses etc – of varying degrees of transparency to cope with this problem.

Several other forms of capital were prominent enough in the data to deserve a brief mention. Social capital in Bourdieu's terms is the 'aggregate of the actual or potential resources which are linked to possession of a durable network of more or less institutionalized relationships of mutual acquaintance and recognition' (Bourdieu, 1986, pp. 248-249). The importance of social capital, embodied in personal networks, at all levels of universities' engagement activities was repeatedly mentioned:

Networks are crucial because it's only if you make connections with people that they're going to think of you as a potential person to do work. Networks are crucial in terms of access to information. So we do have to pay a lot of attention to that ... So it is crucial and it takes a long time to build up confidence, and that's important, that they feel they can trust you, that you're competent of course. Personal association is very important; people develop a sense of obligation to people that they know. (Senior academic)

The substantial and increasing importance of the news media in representing universities' activities was also a repeated theme. Monash and UQ in particular devoted substantial effort and staffing to generating material for the news media, tailored for ready consumption. Increasingly the public impact of the university was framed and assessed largely in terms defined by the media. This has important ramifications which are beyond the scope of this paper but have been identified by other critics (Couldrey, 2003; Lingard & Rawolle, 2004).

Finally, there are some areas of boundary-spanning university activity which are held together as a field more strongly by professional than academic identity. The medical and health professions are the clearest example of this, as senior doctors have joint appointments in hospitals and universities, as well as often running their own private practices. This demonstrates their power within the medical field, and how it translates to the academic field as well. Examples like the UQ Allied Health Clinics, which offer reduced-price consultations to the general public through student-staffed clinics are an example of where teaching, research, practice and commercial activity combine. Although in academic terms these activities are disparate, the structures of the profession integrate them.

## Conclusion

Within Bourdieu's field theory, universities' engagement activities have variable relationships to autonomy and involve different forms of capital. Each university in the study tried to improve its strategic position by deploying its stock of academic, cultural, economic and social capital. These different forms and combinations of capital identified sometimes advanced and sometimes hindered universities' strategies. 'Traditional' engagement activities are conducted on a basis defined by the university serve to reinforce institutional identity and power, aiming to increase the university's symbolic power. Commercial knowledge transfer involves a negotiation of academic and economic capital, where adaptation to the imperatives of industry can weaken the academic legitimacy of the university. These negotiations can involve a reduction in both relational and positional autonomy. Community engagement can also potentially threaten academic capital by fragmenting research performance and weakening student selectivity, however universities must also accommodate to the force of external political interests. Forms of engagement in contemporary Australian universities involve changes to both their positional and relational autonomy. Positional autonomy was altered by hybridization of governance arrangements and involvement of advisory bodies. In terms of relational autonomy, universities are now often required to justify their work on multiple grounds, both academic and non-academic.

As the field of higher education becomes less autonomous and is permeated by the logic of relations of other fields (economic, political, media), this complicates the positioning of both institutions and individual academics, requiring strategies that address multiple forms of capital and making the maintenance of both positional and relational autonomy more difficult.

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