“Reinventing” Higher Education

Symbolism, Sloganeering, and Subjectivity in the Lone Star State

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Abstract

The authors analyze public higher education policy in Texas during the current era of fiscal austerity in the state through Morgan’s (2006) images of organizations. Scarce resources have led to cuts in educational funding and a refocusing of faculty work using statistical methods designed to enhance the status of teaching over research. In the name of efficiency using “reinventing government” rhetoric, politically appointed Regents and their ideological proponents in the Texas Public Policy Foundation have made attempts to turn what is commonly thought of as a public good into a consumer one. Faculty and their supporters have resisted these initiatives. The authors employ Morgan’s (2006) images of organizations as political systems, cultures, and psychic prisons to explain the conflict and lack of consensus between these affected groups.

Faculty performance data released by Texas A&M University and the University of Texas – the only two major public research universities in the country to have released such detailed data – for the first time shines a bright light on higher education’s faculty productivity gap. The data shows in high relief what anecdotally many have long suspected, that the research university’s employment practices look remarkably like a Himalayan trek, where indigenous Sherpas carry the heavy loads so Western tourists can simply enjoy the view.

- Richard O’Donnell, former consultant to the University of Texas Board of Regents

Introduction

Higher education is part and parcel of a market spectacle (Debord, 1967/1994) that follows the prescriptions of Osborne and Gaebler (1993) – in effect charging these institutions with being inefficient and lacking effective customer-driven service.
Following the “reinventing government” qua business model, any semblance of public service (Denhardt & Denhardt, 2007) – now including public colleges and universities – that ignores “customers” is under attack. While governance values have shifted with these business-based movements (Box, 1999), higher education values, too, have moved universities from producing academic capital to economic capital (Naidoo & Jamieson, 2005).

The professorial ranks, in particular, are being scrutinized as part of a politically charged agenda that makes an explicit assumption that could possibly lead to their employment “restructuring” or elimination if they do not succumb to prescriptions of individuals who, and organizations that, advocate that teaching duties are more important to the general public than research activities. Traditionally, in the academy, these aspects are part of a seemingly equal triumvirate – research, teaching and service. Attacks on higher education throughout the United States, and elsewhere, threaten to kick out important legs of the professoriate responsibility to society and the profession.

One person who advocates the teaching-above-all approach is Richard “Rick” O’Donnell, quoted above, who gained notoriety in Texas for making controversial remarks regarding faculty productivity within the state’s public higher education institutions. The quotation is an introduction to a 2011 report O’Donnell released regarding the costs of higher education in Texas. O’Donnell, a well-known conservative advocate who once worked for the Texas Public Policy Foundation (TPPF) pushing for higher education reform by devaluing research, analyzed faculty productivity within the above-mentioned report (O’Donnell, 2011).

To classify faculty productivity, O’Donnell developed a 2x2 matrix based on teaching (“course load based on credit hours taught”) and research (“dollar value of externally funded research”) (p.1). Labels in the matrix include Coasters (low teaching and research), Pioneers (high research, low teaching), Sherpas (high teaching, low research) and Stars (high teaching and research). The attempt by the TPPF – a non-profit research organization that aims to promote liberty and free enterprise – is to
extract surplus value from the work of the Texas professoriate, categorized as productive laborers (Harvie, 2006).

A special dot on the 2x2 matrix indicates faculty who are dodgers, “the least productive faculty, who bring in no external research funding, teach few students and cost nearly ten times as much as Sherpas to teach one student one class; in essence they’ve figured out how to dodge any but the most minimal of responsibilities” (O’Donnell, 2011, p. 1). As one potential solution, O’Donnell recommended eliminating said faculty dodgers and increasing the student population in a Coaster’s classes by 97 students per year.

He identified these unproductive faculty members within both the University of Texas and the Texas A&M systems, imploring lawmakers to take immediate measures to remove such academics to save students, parents and taxpayers money. Gov. Rick Perry is taking these suggestions and others like them from the Texas Public Policy Foundation before the O’Donnell 2011 report, seriously. For example, the Texas Higher Education Coordinating Board, the state agency overseeing higher education programs, recommended modifying funding formulas for universities, colleges and community colleges to be commensurate with results (graduation) rather than simply enrollment (Texas Higher Education Coordinating Board, 2010).

As such, it becomes prudent to both empirically and theoretically examine effects of business-based interventions into higher education, as business values often run counter to values of higher education (Naidoo & Jamieson, 2005). Our paper, then, explores the following question: How can Morgan’s images of organization (2005) help explain the transformation of higher education policies and organizational practices in Texas?

We focus our analysis on the University of Texas and Texas A&M systems, the state’s largest, and use three images of organization from Morgan (2006): organizations as cultures; organizations as political systems; and organizations as psychic prisons. Each lens can help explain part of the transformation of higher education within Texas, coming together to frame the effects on faculty, students and higher education values in general.
Though the exploration is confined to Texas, other scholars could employ lenses to explore impacts of higher education reforms in other US states.

**Background on the Two Systems**

We begin with a brief background on the University of Texas System and Texas A&M System organizations, understood as people united to achieve mutually agreeable goals. Taken together, each system and its institutions statistically reach most of the state either by directly educating students, interacting with the community (service learning, for example), employing people, or contributing to an overall field (via research).

*University of Texas System*

The University of Texas System (hereafter UT System) is made up of nine universities and six health institutions throughout the state based on a Texas state constitutional mandate (The University of Texas System, 2011a). An appointed Board of Regents supervises the system, with the chancellor reporting directly to the board. An 1876 constitutional mandate established, along with legislative action five years later, an education system to be called the University of Texas, which has since grown to include the branches given above (The University of Texas System, 2011b). UT Austin is the state’s flagship institution, with system universities located at myriad points throughout the state. The system includes more than 18,800 faculty members and more than 68,500 staff members. Student enrollment tops 211,200, with 43,274 students earning degrees (The University of Texas System, 2011c).

The UT System’s overall budget for Fiscal Year 2011 is $12.8 billion, with $2.37 billion going toward research expenditures in Fiscal Year 2010 (The University of Texas System, 2011c.). Within the system, most of the money goes toward the healthcare institutions, followed by instruction and research, respectively. Depending upon the institution, tuition costs remain relatively low, with many students receiving some kind of financial assistance, thus reducing the cost of per-year attendance for
students (The University of Texas System, 2011c). These figures will later play into statistical representations of faculty efficiency.

**Texas A&M System**

Rivaling the UT System is the Texas A&M System (hereafter the A&M System), which comprises 11 universities, seven state agencies and a health science center (Texas A&M System, 2011a). The A&M System reaches more than 120,000 students and employs more than 28,000 faculty and staff. Like its UT System counterpart, the A&M System also has a Board of Regents and chancellor to govern its operations. Though universities date back to 1876, the system was officially recognized in 1948 (Texas A&M System, 2011b).

During Fiscal Year 2011, the A&M System, like all other public agencies in the state, faced mandatory budget reductions, cutting five percent from the system totaled an $80 million loss, supplementing that with only a marginal 2.41 percent tuition and fee increase (Texas A&M System, 2011c). During Fiscal Year 2009, the system spent more than $731 million on research-related activities such as equipment and maintenance (Texas Higher Education Coordinating Board, 2010). Texas A&M University, the largest institution within the system, invests $652 million in research activities (Texas A&M University, 2011).

**“Reinventing” Higher Education**

Cushioned within an overall move of public administration toward commodification and marketization within the public sector is a parallel transformation within higher education. Similar to popular bureaucrat bashing, especially that arose with management movements encouraging governments to run like businesses, arises academia/academic bashing. (The quote at the outset of this paper illustrates this point.)

Many reform movements get lumped under the reinvention umbrella (Frederickson, 1996) – Total Quality Management, New Public Management and Reinventing Government itself. We do not go into nuances of each, or engage in the debate about differences between the theories. The major takeaway from each we employ here is the notion of pushing business practices and
values, especially efficiency, as central tenets of public administration, a notion considered antithetical to a functioning democracy (Waldo, 1948/2007).

Scholars have critiqued market movements in a variety of ways. To illustrate, Fox (1996) argues that reinventing government is internally logically inconsistent (and postmodern). “Market theory is based on atomistic individualism whereas community is based on group solidarity-deeply contradictory social philosophies. Papering over them with an epiphenomenal one-liner [embracing both business markets and community] is at best naive, at worst cynical; either way, it is postmodern” (Fox, 1996, p. 258). The problem with such a “reorganizational” goal, however, is that business values and practices marginalize the organization-public relationship at the expense of public participation and substantive democracy (Box et al, 2001; Zanetti & Adams, 2000).

Within higher education, market-based reform movements also have taken hold. Universities traditionally are structured to provide “available knowledge” (p. Miller, 2003, 898) to interested students, delivered by a professional instructors and administrators. Miller puts in bluntly: “Colleges have transformed into big businesses” (p. 902), thus shifting and morphing the academic organizational culture.

Institutionally, public higher education has a culture and history of engendering trust with the public and members have collectively provided an important service to society. As Carnevale (1995) notes,

For [a public] organization, how it chooses to organize and operate symbolizes its assumptions about how much it trusts its members. An organization makes choices about whether communication systems are open or closed, decides whether jobs allow some measure of autonomy or are carefully regulated, shows confidence in the knowhow of its members by encouraging participation in decision making or devalues the intelligence of staff by ignoring their advice. It reaches for moral involvement and mutual commitment or relies excessively on transactional or contractual means to enforce agreements. It encourages or suppresses voice and
demonstrates a tolerance or resistance of dissent. It drives at ensuring procedural justice or is arbitrary in disciplining members. It earns a reputation for ethical conduct in dealings with employees and clients or is greeted with well-deserved cynicism by both. It favors either explicit formalisms or implicit values (p. 22).

As such, knowledge within many organizations (not only higher education) has become commodified (Suddaby & Greenwood, 2001). Knowledge commodification takes expert-level, managerial knowledge out of its contextual frame and reduces it into transferable goods (Suddaby & Greenwood, 2001), effectively negating the benefits of tacit knowledge. Professionals often are the ones driving institutional change and reform (Suddaby & Viale, 2011), so changing professional culture in academia at the street-level (here, professors) could have profound impacts on knowledge management and knowledge transfer.

Examining the literature regarding reform movements and higher education, several patterns emerge that neatly parallel (perhaps naturally) with critiques levied against reform movements in public administration in general – shifts in service provision, accountability, and equity.

First, service provision values take a new focus from delivering competent students and developing competent researchers to delivering more not necessarily better qualified students to “a citizenry that is ready to produce consumables, as well as become comestible” (Giberson & Giberson, 2009, p.3). Society at large is meant to benefit from higher education pursuits, both from the professoriate producing research and students becoming employees in chosen fields and specialties. “One cannot safely assume that greater emphasis on the utilitarian argument will necessarily lead to factory-like universities adapted to the mass production of candidates or to an increase in ‘applied’ research at the expense of ‘basic’ research” (Bleiklie, 1998, p. 300). Within this context, the utilitarian approaches Bleiklie refers to are students (laborers) and research products (tangible goods) that “contribute to national economic growth” (p. 299).
Second, accountability shifts from the societal to the political only, as performance measures and quantitative data seek to replace societal, less easily measured impacts of higher education. The market-based shift in higher education took place when “public policies combined with market mechanisms particularly in the 1970s and 1980s when political accountability overtook professional judgment in universities as the quality mechanism” (Huisman & Currie, 2004, p. 532). Externally controlled accountability measures take responsibility out of the institution’s hands and place it within political confines, be it to state legislatures or other funding agencies. Institutions are left, largely, at the whim of political shifts (Mclendon et al, 2007). Broadly speaking, students are “customers” who should perceive value for dollars invested (Huisman & Currie, 2004, p. 533; see also Wills, 2009).

Accountability should have many pillars in place, lest one form of accountability overshadow another (Romzek & Dubnick, 1987). Universities are being told to produce more output – graduating students – with fewer inputs – budget allocations, being pushed to do so by government policy makers in the name of increased accountability (ACE, 2010). Overall, reform movements make higher education institutions and employees accountable to political masters alone (Huisman & Currie, 2004; Romzek, 2000), instead of bureaucratic, political, professional and legal (Romzek & Dubnick, 1987). All four together should, ideally according to the authors, help improve democratic decision making.

Finally, equity often is sacrificed in the name of efficiency under the managerialist (or new public management) approach (Rosenbloom, Kravchuk & Clerkin, 2009) – what is efficient is not necessarily effective or fair (Mclendon et al, 2007). To address the equity issue, the World Bank recommends overhauling tertiary education so countries can compete in a globalized, knowledge-based society (World Bank, 2002). The report addresses equity in higher education, noting that most students throughout the globe do not have access to adequate, or any, financial assistance, leaving them behind in the knowledge-driven society – in other words, unequal access to a commonly public good. As the World Bank notes (2002):
Today, this prevailing “culture of privilege” at public expense is increasingly under pressure to change. The sources of the pressure include the spread of economic liberalism, growing political pluralism, and a rising public demand for tertiary education—a result of demographic growth and of increased access at lower educational levels that has outstripped governments’ capacity to pay for provision of education at higher levels. Government funding for tertiary education has declined in relative (and sometimes even absolute) terms, forcing countries and institutions to consider alternative sources of funding and modes of provision (p.69).

If the stated goal of higher education in Texas and in the U.S. is more and better access to public higher education, then the principle of equality of opportunity – the notion of equity without necessarily the equality of result – should be emphasized over the more-dominant value of efficiency – the goal of business and corporations. Equity as a value construct, perhaps tied conceptually to the minds of citizens having elements of the tenets of socialism in the current era of corporatization and globalization, may be taboo as a viable alternative to efficiency and runs counter to American ideals of capitalism (Bellah, 1992). As such, corporate values in the American ideology prevail.

**Organizational Images and Texas Higher Education**

With foundational and background material given, we can now turn to Morgan’s (2006) lenses through which scholars and practitioners can examine organizational development and behavior. For example, when one speaks about organizations as machines, the idea of a closed, rigid system working step by step comes to mind. Contrast this with an organization as organism and one thinks more about a dynamic, open system interacting with, and feeding off of, its environment. Looking at the manipulation of imagery to achieve an organizational point already has precedence within the literature (see Fox, 1996). A similar situation, rooted in rhetoric and imagery, is taking place in Texas due to reinvention movements in higher education.
This paper utilizes Morgan’s images of organizations as cultures, political systems, and psychic prisons to explore how business values change the culture, maneuvering and decision making within academia. Each metaphor is treated one by one but come together to help understand the organizational development and behavioral effects of rhetorical prescriptions noted above.

**Texas Higher Education as Organizational Culture**

The organizational culture lens has many layers, referring to development of organizations as cultural phenomena, societal culture, and culture within the organization itself. It is the latter conceptualization where we focus our attention. Organization culture, naturally, is germane to the particular organization and serves as an overarching guiding principle “created and sustained by social processes, images, symbols, and ritual” (Morgan, 2006, p. 128; see also Bolman & Deal, 1991). Such social cues become institutional myths that guide overall employee and organization practices. Stories become norms. As such, “culture is not something that can be imposed on a social setting. Rather, it develops during the course of social interaction” (Morgan, 2006, p. 132).

There can be cultural divisions within the organization, which often are referred to as sub-cultures. For example, the UT and A&M Systems have cultures, and each system institution has its own organization culture and subcultures. Overall institutional cultures, though, should relate back to respective system cultures. People within an organization might disagree with the culture and could, in some cases, take steps to act against the organization (O’Leary, 2010).

In light of reinvention/business methods affecting higher education service delivery, there is an organizational culture clash taking place within Texas between: 1) business norms favored by Boards of Regents and 2) traditionally more democratic and collegially based norms favored by professors and staff. (We mean more democratic when compared to values of business-based models of higher education that, as we noted, place efficiency first rather than a social contract.)
To illustrate the root of these cultural clashes, we look first at the backgrounds of Board of Regents members. The A&M system board includes a dentist, insurance salesman, a former ExxonMobil executive, a bank executive, lawyer, and accountant (Texas A&M System, 2011d). UT System Regents include former oil executives, a real estate developer, an engineer, and business owners (The University of Texas System, 2010). None, at least according to available biographies, have direct experience in higher education.

What most have in common, though, is a tie to Texas Governor Rick Perry. For example, UT System Regents Chairman Eugene Powell recently came under fire for actively campaigning for Perry’s presidential campaign in 2011. Despite seeming conflict of interest, Regents remain private citizens who can donate to, and actively participate in, political campaigns (Hamilton, 2011a). Indeed, “regents appointed by Perry have given more than $5.8 million to his campaigns over the past decade” (Hamilton, 2011a, para. 7). Such conflicts lead the State of Texas to examine conflict of interest policies governing the Regents (Hamilton, 2011b).

Another set of controversy surrounded UT System Regent Alex Cranberg, an energy company executive who became a Regent two weeks after moving to, and registering to vote in, Texas (Hamilton, 2011c). Cranberg had ties to Governor Perry and other political allies who wished to revamp higher education by making universities operate more efficiently by raising class sizes and devaluing research (Hamilton, 2011c). Moreover, Cranberg was linked to Jeff Sandefer, “a board member at an influential Austin-based conservative think tank known as the Texas Public Policy Foundation – the source of many of the reforms being implemented at A&M that have set the old academic guard off kilter” (Hamilton, 2011d, para. 3). UT Regent Brenda Pejovich also is on the TPPF board.

The second element present in the cultural conflict is professors and professional staff. Considering that universities are diverse in reach and scope, there cannot be one universal definition of academic culture. Several characteristics, perhaps, are shared:
broad, discipline-specific and institution-specific goals are difficult
to measure; internal and external stakeholders are varied;
professional staff, too, are varied and require myriad and varied
training; university environments change frequently; and belief
systems often differ between professors and administrators
(Bartell, 2003). “Professors tend to place a high value on autonomy
and academic freedom, while administrators are oriented to
maintenance of the administrative system and the associated
procedural requirements” (ibid, p. 53).

As such, according to Bartell, universities are not the best
places to implement rigid business-based structures of governance.
Faculty, rooted in traditions of academic values, often are loath to
give into an organizational cultural change that goes directly
counter to those norms and values. For example, within
universities, conceptions and beliefs about what constitutes good
teaching – and how to effectively measure it – are at the core of the
current struggle between university administrators (driven by
external boards and politicians) and higher education teachers
transmitting knowledge in their respective disciplines to their
students (Entwistle, Skinner, Entwistle & Orr, 2000).

As an illustration of the cultural clash manifesting itself in
policy recommendations, the aforementioned Texas Public Policy
Foundation devised what it called Seven Solutions to reforming
higher education. The Seven Solutions are: “measure teaching
efficiency and effectiveness”; “publicly recognize and reward
extraordinary teachers;” “split research and teaching budgets to
encourage excellence in both;” “require evidence of teaching skills
for tenure;” “use ‘results-based’ contracts with students to measure
quality;” “put state funding directly into the hands of students;”
and “create results-based accrediting alternatives” (Texas Public
Policy Foundation, n.d.). Academic research often is the backbone
of academia, generating grant funding and publications in journals
or books that helps professors achieve tenure. The TPFF argues
that separating research and teaching budgets “allows for
excellence in both but others worry [it] merely lays the
groundwork to choose the latter over the former, particularly
because it is less expensive” (Hamilton, 2011d, para. 14).
To reiterate, organization culture is socially constructed; people develop and pass along culture. Those adhering to the culture usually thrive and vice versa. “It means that we must attempt to understand culture as an ongoing, proactive process of reality construction” (Morgan, 2006, p. 136). According to Morgan, once people realize the enacted nature of organizations, organizations become not only physical but also psychological objects of study.

Symbolic elements of each side clash, as showcased by Regents using symbols of wastefulness and professors using symbols of democracy to further their points. (As one TPFF adviser put it: “It is commonplace now for professors to teach only two classes, or six hours a week, per semester, with release time from the classroom to conduct research. And what are we getting? A recent study issued by the American Enterprise Institute reveals, for example, that from 1980 to 2006, 21,674 scholarly articles were published on Shakespeare. Do we need the 21,675th?” (Trowbridge, 2011, para. 4). Texas Higher Education Commissioner Raymund Paredes, who answers to Governor Perry, the state legislature, the Texas Higher Education Coordinating Board (THECB), and works with the politically appointed boards of regents, opines that the state needs to reinvent higher education, making it more efficient, and submits …

"We want to place more emphasis on innovation," Paredes said. In his vision, Texas would also become a leader in areas like cost efficiency, continuous improvement and offering various pathways to degrees — including low-cost options. Paredes has previously said that a $10,000 bachelor's degree, as proposed by Gov. Rick Perry, is "entirely feasible." The actual plan won't be released until closer to 2015 (Hamilton, 2011e, para. 2).

*Texas Higher Education Organizations as Political Systems*

The second organizational lens we employ to understand the higher education reforms taking place in Texas is organizations as political systems. According to Morgan (2006, p. 150), the
political systems image alludes to “the activities of rulers and ruled” within an organization. The image gives credence to power and authority relations between managers and employees, as well as to the supposedly “dirty” dealings between organization members. Overall, this image of organization refers to hierarchical relationships between executives, boards, supervisors and employees, as well as lateral exchanges between members of the organization. Such interrelations amongst various organizational members make it an appropriate lens to employ when examining the Texas higher education case.

Morgan (2006, p. 153) offers several systems of rule within organizations, all the way from autocracy to direct democracy. Within a university, faculty, through the collegial educational model of governance, would exhibit something close to a representative democracy, whereby elected officers act on behalf of the people; the parallel is a faculty or academic senate. Cultural changes noted briefly above threaten to turn that collegial system in a technocracy, whereby knowledge and expert power rule the day (Hummel, 2004; 2006).

Instead of organizations being neat, rational systems, organizations, within the scope of this image, appear as coalitions that “arise when groups of individuals get together to cooperate in relation to specific issues, events or decisions to advance specific values and ideologies” (Morgan, 2006, p. 162). In other words, the metaphor sheds light upon the network approach to governance. Networks come together to tackle issues or concerns, in theory trying to prevent one coalition from dominating and controlling the organization. Within this framework, there is recognition that debate is healthy, that dissensus can emerge (Mouffe, 1999).

Two competing networks fit within the Texas case – politically appointed boards directing policy to administrators and university faculty. Ultimately, it trickles down to students who might not receive personalized attention from professors teaching larger classes. Such is a concrete example of the efficiency versus effectiveness battle – it might be efficient to teach classes of, say, 150 but not necessarily effective in terms of producing, say, writing or critical thinking skills. (Note that we purposefully use
qualifiers such as “could” and “might” throughout so we do not
genralize that ALL professors who teach large classes do not get
to know students. Generally, however, the former has been our
experience and that of our colleagues.)

Politics and higher education are indeed mixing in Texas.
Recently, Boards of Regents for both the UT System and A&M
System released policy changes that are leading to the cultural
clashes. Moreover, ever-closer political ties to Governor Perry
amongst the Regents foster a single-mindedness explored further in
the next section.

It is no secret that Governor Perry is a fiscally conservative
Republican who traditionally derides federal intervention and
extols states’ rights. Not surprisingly, Perry appointed political
allies to each System’s Board of Regents. (We say not surprisingly
because politicians, no matter the party, appoint like-minded
supporters to key positions all the time.) These appointments,
though, have sometimes put the Regents at odds with university
administrators. For example, UT System Regents Chairman
Powell, who donated more than $56,000 to Perry’s past campaigns,

 pledged to cut costs and to do all he can to hold tuition
level or even lower it. That echoes themes sounded by
Perry, whose proposed budget for higher education
essentially mirrors the House and Senate versions. In
contrast, UT System Chancellor Francisco Cigarroa
warned last month that proposed reductions would have
‘immediate and future devastating consequences for our
students, patients, faculty, staff and the communities of
Texas’ (Haurwitz, 2011, paras. 21 and 22, emphasis
added).

Political leanings, and suggestions to reform higher
education based upon them, of Regents also put them at odds with
other lawmakers in the state. For example, State Sen. Judith
Zaffirini is a Democrat who chairs the body’s Higher Education
Committee. Zaffirini took issue with Powell’s assertions that: the
UT System should increase enrollment at system schools,
especially UT Austin; reduce tuition costs by nearly half; and add a
low-cost bachelor’s degree - in the ballpark of $10,000 total - to
current offerings (Hacker, 2011). (The $10,000 degree, though, apparently has been accomplished as of March 2012 (Caldwell, 2012).)

In response, Zaffrini wrote: “I am dismayed by the extensive negative publicity caused by the actions of Chair Powell. Since his election in February he has caused a firestorm of negativity that is detrimental to UT-Austin, to the system, to higher education in general--and to his relationship with legislators” (Hacker, 2011, para. 7).

In terms of implementing these political suggestions, the A&M System produced a report based on the TPPF’s “Seven Solutions” regarding faculty cost-benefit to the university. The report is based on an analysis that looks essentially at salary of the professor versus students taught versus research dollars brought in (Mangan, 2010). When the salary outweighs these supposed benefits, the professor is seen as inefficient. “Critics say the measure is simplistic and doesn't take into account much of the work faculty members do, including advising students, grading papers, and serving on committees” (Mangan, 2010, para. 6).

Such measures reflect the changing culture in academia noted above – to that of a business culture focused on serving customers rather than, perhaps, society at large – thanks to political interventions. Some critics of the A&M report believe that the A&M System has implemented, in spirit or practice, some of the Seven Solutions (Patel, 2010). For example, Patel (2010) reports that A&M embraced the TPFF’s suggestion of merit raises based on student evaluations, which are often anonymous, as well as measuring professor efficiency based on number of students taught.

The more students a professor teaches, the less he or she costs the university, as each student represents a dollar figure – according to the TPFF. One professor quoted in the article “taught 561 students that year in large classes. He generated more than twice his salary in just student tuition dollars” (Patel, 2010, para. 25). The politically inspired economic emphasis of these cost-benefit comparisons amounts to a truncated depiction of the work
of professors and instructors in the academy and their overall value to their institutions and the public.

**Texas Higher Education Organizations as Psychic Prisons**

The final image used within this paper is organizations as psychic prisons, which “joins the idea that organizations are ultimately created and sustained by conscious and unconscious processes, with the notion that people can actually become imprisoned in or confined by the images, ideas, thoughts, and actions to which these processes give rise” (Morgan, 2006, p. 207).

Of course, the image is a direct tie to Plato’s allegory of the cave (Reeve, 2004). Within that story, people are confined within an underground cave, physically bound only to look forward. Light from a roaring fire behind them casts shadows on the wall, which the prisoners perceive as reality. Emergence from the cave upsets this frame of reality, leading to confusion and skepticism about a socially created reality. The metaphor “[explores] some of the ways in which organizations and their members become trapped by constructions of reality that, at best, give an imperfect grasp on the world” (Morgan, 2006, p. 208).

We apply this frame to analyze differences in the relationships and perceptions of the university boards, faculty and other university constituencies. Each group has the potential to get stuck in ideological views, thus casting proverbial shadows on the wall that represent a fictionalized reality and a stalemate toward deciding how to best execute higher education objectives.

Ideas and cultures within an organization can become constraining, preventing organizational growth, at best, and causing organizational death, at worst. “As in the case of Plato’s allegory of the cave, disruption usually comes from the outside” (Morgan, 2006, p. 211). Within a business-minded environment, corporatization reframes higher education’s purpose – attempting to become the new cave reality.

Within this frame, all three images come together to paint an overall picture of the affects of market-minded changes in higher education. Discourse and images from each side, generated within the cultural and political frames, come together. Within the
cave, shadows become reality for the prisoners (Reeve, 2004). Ideologically speaking, the same is happening when higher education is scrutinized, especially through the political systems and culture lenses. Each side – faculty, administration, politicians, students, the community, etc. – has its own view of the world that becomes reality. In this case, we focus specifically on political ideologies clashing with faculty ideologies, thus creating two decidedly divergent views of reality. As with any competing tales, perhaps somewhere in the middle lies the truth.

One Truth being proffered is the lazy academic. As noted above, one insider termed these faculty members Dodgers (O’Donnell, 2011). Dodgers do not bring in much research funding and teach few classes – essentially wasting taxpayer dollars as the narrative goes. Regents for both systems embrace this rhetoric, as discussed above, and try to find data that support their claims of inefficient university operations.

For example, at the request of the Regents, the UT system released a draft spreadsheet reporting faculty compensation, research expenditure, grade distribution and student satisfaction (The University of Texas System, 2011d). Faculty, though, examined the data and uncovered numerous inaccuracies (June, 2011). As one commenter on The Chronicle of Higher Education’s website noted: “Is this exercise in accountability a search for truth or a political tool?” (Hawki72, 2011). The A&M System took similar steps, releasing the faculty report cited above.

To counter these images, faculty within the UT and A&M systems has issued reports regarding efficient operations – the faculty version of Truth. Marc Musick, associate dean for student affairs in the UT Austin College of Liberal Arts (as of this writing), compiled a report (Musick, 2011) detailing that institution’s efficient operations. According to the document, UT Austin is the “second most efficient public research university when considering graduation rates and comparing the amount of public money received to the percentage of students who graduate and the number of professors employed” (Musick, 2011, p. 6). (Topping the list is the University of Florida.) Musick compiled the study based on data from the Integrated Postsecondary
Education Data System. Based on tuition dollars and state funding received, coupled with the number of professors instructing students, UT Austin’s efficiency ranking came out second. One shortcoming noted in the report is the relatively low graduation rate at the institution. Steps are outlined to increase that number.

Interestingly, each side often utilizes the same set of numbers yet comes to wildly different conclusions to further its reality. These brief examples, within this section and throughout, showcase how faculty battle administrators who are in turn combatting political appointees working closely with the governor. Seemingly, image control problems within the state are masking the reality that both faculty and administrators are not necessarily opposed to reducing costs of delivering a service, being more transparent about salary, and increasing quality skills given to students. Images, though, become powerful tools, thus stalling critical debate regarding this issue. In other words, each group gets stuck in its own cave, only seeing the shadows on the wall as reality.

Comments and Discussion

Assaults on higher education, and public service in general, come when there is a (real or perceived) waste of scarce resources. Governments at every level still are striving toward striking a balance between quality and efficiency. It is a never-ending tug of war that has found its way into the higher education discourse throughout the U.S. We focused attention specifically on the situation in Texas, drilling down into the state’s two largest systems – The University of Texas System and the Texas A&M System. To explore the impacts of such rhetoric on the organizations as a whole, and associated institutions, we employed three images of organization: cultures, political systems and psychic prisons (Morgan, 2006).

Each frame is independent but combine to paint a fuller picture of what is taking place in Texas. Politicians and appointees are seeking to deliver services to customers (students) at the most cost-effective price. In turn, professors (specifically tenured or tenure-track faculty) argue they will have less time to focus on research endeavors and pedagogical improvement.
Professors being labeled as inefficient by the TPPF and others are the ones with reduced course loads for reasons that do not appear in, say, the UT system spreadsheet. For example, that data do not reflect: (1) if the person has an additional appointment in addition to being a professor (department chair, dean, other administrator, etc.); (2) student advising and working with graduate students (thesis chair, committee member, etc.); (3) number of publications; (4) departmental, college, university, and community service; and more. In other words, key aspects of the professoriate are left out in favor of dollars in, dollars out data.

Morgan’s (2006) cultural, political systems and psychic prisons images provide a framework for assessing the ongoing public policy debate occurring between organizations in Texas public higher education. Other frames, e.g., organizations as instruments of domination, organizations as brains, etc., could conceivably be used to analyze the clash of Texas public higher education organizations. However, for our examination of the symbolism, political gamesmanship, and subjugation of one group over another, the political systems, culture, and psychic prisons frames best explain the conflict between political actors – the UT and A&M regents – and the university faculty.

Competing visions of what is proper for the university, articulated here as the challenge of the reinventing government movement reflective of the regents and their motivations versus the faculty governance model favored by faculty based on traditional conceptions of the academy, represent the inability of these groups to come to a consensus for the proper way to provide service to students in the universities.

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