

Public Comment to the Clarion University Council of Trustees  
September 19, 2013

Good evening, and thank you for this opportunity to address you.

I am a tenured associate professor of English, based at Venango College. I am the immediate past chair of the Faculty Senate. I am also 2nd from the bottom in seniority in my department, and I expect to receive a retrenchment letter before October 30 of this year.

This evening, you will review the President's 500 Day Plan V.2, almost halfway through its implementation. The workforce plan is not mentioned, though certainly we must consider it as part of the university's overall plan.

I ask you to ask of President Whitney and yourselves: How can the workforce plan be implemented without undercutting and jeopardizing the strategic plan, mission, and core values of Clarion University? So far, in all the discussions, I have not heard any convincing answers to such questions.

I understand the problems at the university. But I believe that there have to be other, better ways to achieve financial stability and secure the university's future. I ask you to ask President Whitney to work with faculty and staff, not just the Vice-Presidents, to find these other, better ways.

The workforce plan is not "bold and ambitious," even though the document says so. Instead, as my colleague Carie Forden (Psychology) has said, it is "small and fearful." And it directly and negatively impacts each of the five priorities of the President's 500 Day Plan V.2.

**Priority #1 is the success of students, faculty, and staff.** How will recruitment and retention of students be affected? And can we succeed in the current climate of deep uncertainty and fear--one that is not going to magically disappear in the next year or two?

**Priority #2 is equity and diversity.** Those to be retrenched include a majority of women, several persons of color, and a full range of diverse backgrounds. As this group leaves and French and German disappear and only a single note of Music is left and Theater is fractured, what sort of "equitable, diverse environments" will Clarion have? How far behind will Clarion fall in terms of a diverse faculty? And how will this impact the university's performance funding?

**Priority #3 is civic engagement.** One goal is to "serve as an economic development leader in the 'Clarion Region.'" I don't think I need explain to you the economic state of this region or the university's role as a major employer, not to mention the business generated locally and regionally by employees and students. The workforce plan operates directly and indirectly against economic development and leadership.

**Priority #4 is leadership.** I strongly support the goal of recruiting and retaining a highly productive team of Vice Presidents and Deans; the revolving door has to stop. However, the

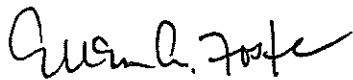
letters, emails, and petitions brought to you should assure you that the leadership described in the 500 Day Plan is not the leadership we have been experiencing. How will that change?

And **Priority #5 is financial**. There is no explicit mention of workforce planning in this section. Why is it not part of the 500 Day plan? How is it embedded into the labyrinth of RCM? Why are the scorecards and other instruments of RCM so murky?

How will the current situation lead to a culture of philanthropy? Will alumni be willing to contribute? Will employees? What confidence do they have in Clarion University at this point? And what will it take to begin to repair that damage?

I respectfully ask you to ask these questions of yourselves, the President, and the Vice-Presidents as the workforce plan is reviewed. I respectfully request that no actions to implement the workforce plan are taken until these questions are answered satisfactorily. I respectfully ask that you use your authority to help faculty and staff AND the administration to find ways to cut non-personnel cuts, to use a scalpel instead of a machete, and to restore funding to public higher education.

Thank you for your service to Clarion University, which is in your trust.



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# THE CHRONICLE OF HIGHER EDUCATION

## Commentary

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August 5, 2012

### College Costs Too Much Because Faculty Lack Power

*By Robert E. Martin*

Surveys reveal that the public believes a college education is essential but too expensive. People feel squeezed between the cost and the necessity. At the same time, public colleges complain that *they* are being squeezed by declining state support and increasing pressure to educate larger numbers of less-prepared students.

Yet society has provided higher education with a river of new real revenues over the past several decades. Since nonprofit institutions of higher education follow a balanced-budget model, expenditures are capped by revenues. Therefore the real cost per student cannot increase without a corresponding increase in real revenues. So the problem has not been too little revenue.

Nevertheless, college affordability has declined. So the crucial question is: Where was all that new money spent?

A common theme among higher education's critics is that shared governance is to blame for colleges' profligate ways, because faculty have too much influence over how money is spent. And the critics are right: Shared governance does play a role. But it is not the "shared" part of "shared governance" that has failed; quite the opposite. The fault lies in the withering away of the shared part. Reason and data alike suggest that the largest part of the problem is that it is administrators and members of governing boards who have too much influence over how resources are used.

The pursuit of self-interest by both faculty and administrators is at work here. Higher education is, of course, a labor-intensive service industry. An institution's labor cost per student is the sum of wages and benefits divided by the number of students. The cost per student goes up as wages and benefits go up, or as the ratio of

staff to students rises. When that ratio goes down, productivity increases, and the cost can go down, even if wages and benefits go up. Staff-to-student ratios, then, are the key to understanding higher-education costs.

A study of those ratios from 1987 to 2008 for research universities, colleges, and public master's-level institutions reveals that the number of faculty and administrators per student actually grew over those years. But we can't lump faculty ratios and administrative ratios together, because they are significantly different. On the academic side, the tenure-track ratio increased modestly at public research universities and to a greater extent at private research universities and colleges. But in both cases, the institutions significantly increased their use of non-tenure-track full-time and part-time faculty. So although faculty-to-student ratios went up, most of the increase was based on the use of contract and part-time faculty.

On the administrative side, the ratios of executives to student and professional staff to student increased—the latter by 50 percent. In 1987, except at private research universities, where administrators outnumbered tenure-track faculty, colleges had approximately as many tenure-track faculty as full-time administrators. By 2008 there were more than twice as many administrators as tenure-track faculty at all types of institutions.

So, during the years studied, costs grew further out of control as administrators and governing boards consolidated their control over institutional priorities—hardly a healthy trend for genuinely shared governance.

Indeed, if it were true that faculty members have too much influence, then all full-time-faculty increases would have been in tenure-track positions, and academic costs would have risen faster than overhead costs. In fact, overhead costs grew faster than academic costs, and institutions economized on the use of tenure-track faculty and spent heavily on overhead staffing. Now, as then, faculty members are part of the cost problem; however, the most significant problem stems from administrators and governing boards, who hold authority over resource allocation. Tenure-track

faculty members' influence on campus priorities has declined steadily, while the number of nonacademic professional staff has proliferated.

In a larger context, this is called bureaucratic entropy. For example, in urban studies one finds that the number of municipal workers tends to grow faster than a city's population. So the ratio of municipal workers to population increases, raising the cost of city services even if wages and benefits are constant (which they are not).

In academe, shared governance is the only natural constraint on the pursuit of self-interest. It is past time for a new campus contract among faculty, administrators, and governing boards to affirm that fact. Communication among those three groups must be open and outside the control of any one of them. Faculty members should independently choose their own representatives, through whom they can speak to the administration or the board.

If the administration controls that communication, or if the board considers it a violation of the chain of command, then the new contract will not work—and the pursuit of self-interest by administrators and boards will lead to the same destructive effects on cost and quality we have observed over the past three decades.

*Robert E. Martin is an emeritus professor of economics at Centre College and author of The College Cost Disease: Higher Cost and Lower Quality (Edward Elgar, 2011).*

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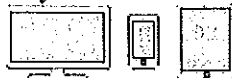
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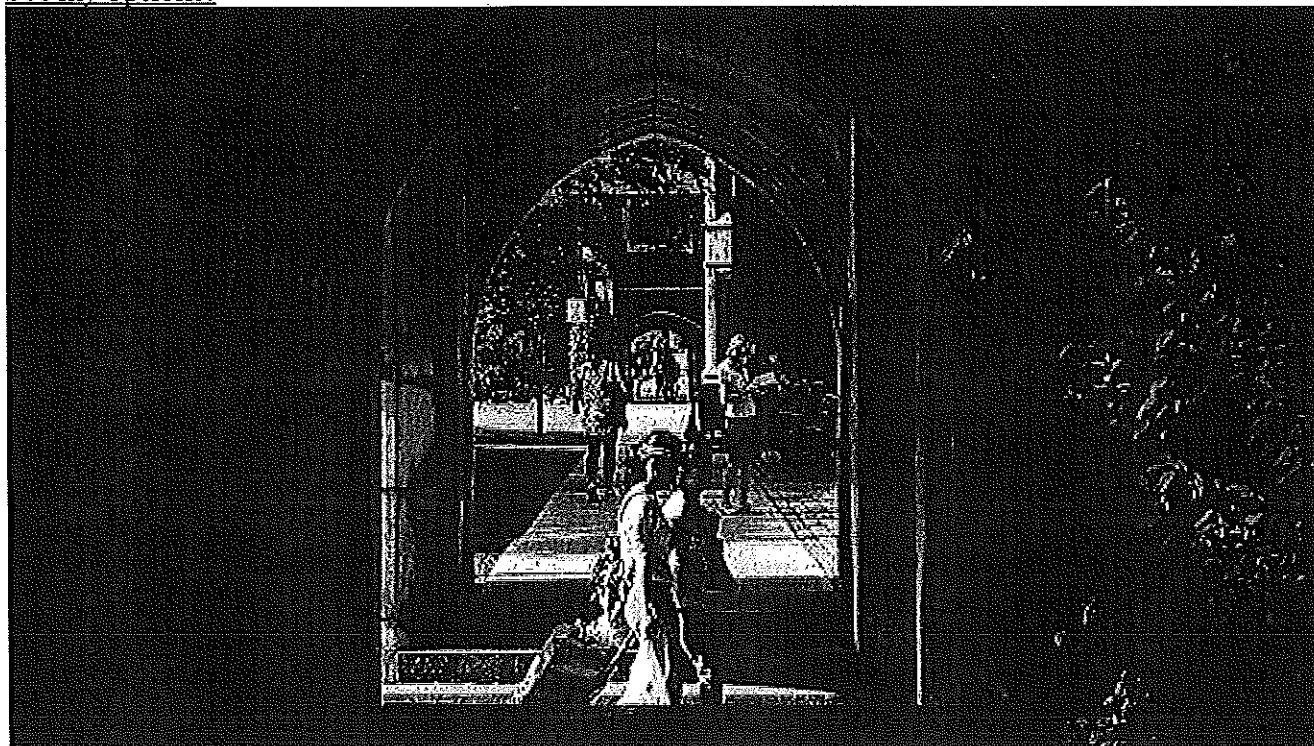


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Victoria University at the University of Toronto, St. George Campus.

For The Globe and Mail

## Universities should educate – employers should train

Max Blouw

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The trajectory of most individuals in their education and careers is seldom linear. Few people at 17 or 18 have a crystal-clear idea of what their job will be at 40. And for those lucky ones who do, it is unlikely they will pursue a linear path to that end point and stay in that career until retirement. This is simply not the pattern of the modern workplace.

Yet there seems to be an increasing – and in my view mistaken – expectation that graduates are entitled to land a high-level and highly relevant job right out of school. This is unrealistic in today's rapidly shifting employment landscape.

Universities are not, and should not be, in the business of producing “plug and play” graduates – workers who can fit immediately into a specific job in which they will spend the rest of their lives.

Rather, universities must provide the kind of broad intellectual and personal development that enables graduates to thrive in a world that is constantly changing, a world that demands innovation and adaptability, a world in which they will change jobs frequently between the time they enter the work force and the time they retire.

Last year was dominated by the discussion of the so-called skills gap, a phenomenon recently found not credible by economist Don Drummond. If indeed the statistics don't bear out a serious mismatch between skills and jobs in Canada, the conversation should move away from turning universities into job training centres and toward the role employers can play in preparing graduates for jobs.

Employers, I believe, have a responsibility to be partners in this process. Specific job training should come primarily from the workplace, building on the broad educational foundation developed through the university experience.

Nearly all of us discover our passions and talents through exposure to ideas and experiences and opportunities, whether educational or employment. The ideal first job is often not readily available at the moment of graduation, but there is plenty of evidence to show that a university education and broad experience frequently lead to a rewarding career.

Universities are primarily in the business of positive human development. They focus on enhancing the abilities of our graduates to communicate clearly and effectively, to analyze, to confront ambiguity with clear methods and confidence, to break down problems into manageable parts, to think critically and to question deeply.

All of this has real value in the workplace. When a university graduate is recruited, the employer has in their new hire an experienced communicator, an adept researcher, a problem solver and a critical thinker – skills that have long been valued. In the past, most employers expected to train employees for job-specific tasks. There would often be orientation, training by human resources or senior managers, a period of job shadowing, a trainee-mentor relationship involving experienced staff, regular feedback and, if necessary, retraining.

But in the modern workplace, more and more employers seem less willing to invest in training new staff. Instead, they call on universities to tailor curriculum ever more precisely to meet specific workplace needs, and routinely advertise for candidates with two or more years of experience in hopes that another employer has prepared a young person for the demands of the workplace.

When employers do this they risk valuing cookie-cutter workers, eventually hurting their own growth. Businesses – and regional and global economies – flourish when fresh, creative ideas are allowed to flow freely and employees at all levels are encouraged to think critically and be innovative. The university experience enhances self-awareness and personal competencies. This breadth of development provides the kind of intellectual flexibility that enables employees to more easily move from this career to the next, and even into careers we can't yet imagine will exist.

Our economic health depends on the critical thinkers our universities are graduating. The next generation of leaders in our knowledge-based economy will emerge from these institutions and can only truly be great if employers understand and value a university degree as a broad education, not specific skills training.

Oversimplification of the line between education and employment does not serve individuals or society well. Employers, universities and governments need to recognize this and invest appropriately in their respective roles in education and job training.

*Max Blouw is chair of the Council of Ontario Universities and president of Wilfrid Laurier University.*



(<http://www.insidehighered.com>)



## Poll: Most Americans and business leaders say graduates should be well-rounded

Submitted by Michael Stratford on September 18, 2013 - 3:00am

A large majority of the American public and nearly three-quarters of business leaders say it is more important for job candidates to be well-rounded with a range of abilities than to have industry-specific skills, two new national surveys released Tuesday <sup>[1]</sup> show.

A July survey of 263 hiring managers and an August poll of 1,000 American adults conducted by FTI Consulting on behalf of Northeastern University show that majorities of the public and business leaders value broadly applicable skills like written communication and problem-solving over specific skills obtained through applied training.

Still, the poll found that Americans overwhelmingly want colleges and universities to focus on integrating practical experience, such as internships, into their curriculums. In large numbers, both business leaders and the general public agreed that students with internship and other work-related experience tend to be more successful in their careers.

On broader questions about the state of U.S. higher education, respondents to the poll affirmed the value of higher education but 62 percent said that the current system is doing only a fair or poor job of preparing college graduates for the work force.

Eighty-seven percent of the American public and 83 percent of business leaders said that U.S. higher education needs to change in order to remain competitive with other countries.

The quality of one major change in higher education over the past couple of decades -- the rise of online programs -- has been met with some skepticism, the poll and survey revealed.

A declining proportion of the American public -- 41 percent, down from 49 percent last year -- said that online education provides "similar quality" compared with traditional colleges and universities.

Business leaders shared that concern about the disparity in quality. But about half of both groups said they expected online programs to become just as accepted as traditional credentials among employers within the next five to seven years. Adults aged 30 to 39 were the most optimistic about the future value of online education, and adults over 60 were the least likely to agree that online programs would be viewed on par with traditional education, the survey found.

Source URL: <http://www.insidehighered.com/news/2013/09/18/poll-most-americans-and-business-leaders-say-graduates-should-be-well-rounded>

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[1]

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