

INTRODUCTION: THE UNIVERSITY UNDER PRESSURE

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ABSTRACT

Universities in both North America and Europe are under substantial pressure. We draw on the papers in this volume to describe those pressures and explore their consequences from an organizational standpoint. Building on the institutional logics perspective, field theories, world society theory, resource dependence, and organizational design scholarship, these papers show how the changing relationship between the state and higher education, cultural shifts, and broad trends toward globalization have led to financial pressures on universities and intensified competition among them. Universities have responded to these pressures by cutting costs, becoming more entrepreneurial, increasing administrative control, and expanding the use of rationalized tools for management. Collectively, these reactions are reshaping the field(s) of higher education and increasing stratification within and across institutions. While universities have thus far proven remarkably adaptive to these pressures, they may be reaching the limits of how much they can adapt without seriously compromising their underlying missions.

Keywords: Universities; organizations; higher education; organization theory; resources; organizational change

The University under Pressure

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Claims of a university under pressure and in crisis go back for decades (e.g., Ridgeway, 1968) and regularly renew themselves. Yet universities as organizations have, so far, proven remarkably adaptable. Nevertheless, the cumulative effects of economic, political, and cultural change lead us to suspect, with Irwin Feller (2016), that “this time it really may be different.” Whether the future brings a steady but meaningful evolution or the organizational collapse that is sometimes predicted, the time is ripe for evaluating the pressures universities are under and how they, as organizations, are reacting.

This volume explores these topics from an organizational perspective, and one that is explicitly comparative of Europe and the United States. The comparative angle helps in distinguishing between global pressures (of which there are many) and locally specific ones (which also proliferate). American and European institutions share a sense of being under threat. But many of their problems are quite different. The cross-national variation across European higher education systems adds to the complexity of the comparison. Nevertheless, broader trends – rising costs and tight state budgets, managerialism and rationalization, internationalization, and a changing sense of the appropriate relationship between government and university systems – affect both continents. They are refracted through different national institutions and regional circumstances, but they originate in shared patterns of change.

Fears about the present situation vary by type of stakeholder, as well as across continents. In the United States, students and their families worry about the cost of college, which is ever-increasing, and whether a degree will be a ticket to the middle class, or leave them with a low-paying job and lots of debt. For more privileged or savvy families, this can mean an escalating competition for admission to a handful of elite schools on the assumption that *they*, at least, can provide a degree that will guarantee security. The families of first-generation college students may share a sense that college has become a necessity, but lack knowledge about how to navigate the system as low-cost options become harder to access and for-profit institutions seek to fill the void.

American faculty see their own role diminishing and becoming less secure, as non-tenure-track positions proliferate and shared governance erodes. They worry about budget pressures that encourage universities to focus single-mindedly on obtaining revenue, sometimes in ways that are incompatible with traditional academic values. And they observe increasing stratification: between tenure-track and non-tenure-track faculty, between the sciences and the humanities, between faculty and administrators, between publics and privates, and most of all between “have” and “have-not” institutions. These

insecurities are amplified by a growing sense that a substantial part of the electorate sees universities (and professors) not just as expensive or irrelevant, but as actively harmful to the national fabric.

U.S. policymakers, too, have their concerns – largely economic ones. How can the ever-increasing costs of higher education be borne when state governments have less and less room for discretionary spending? What is the public getting for its money? Are students learning? Are they graduating? And do they find good jobs once they graduate? These questions are particularly resonant given that U.S. college graduation rates, once highest in the world, are now 19th among 29 OECD countries (OECD, 2014).

Concerns in Europe are somewhat different. Young people in Europe share with their American counterparts fears about their future employability. But costs are less uniformly a major issue for European students and their families, particularly in countries like Germany and France where tuition is still nearly free. The situation is different in places like England, where many universities now charge tuition of £9,000 a year, and where student loans play an increasingly central role in financing higher education.

European faculty, like their American colleagues, also worry about ever-present budget pressures and the rapid expansion of temporary positions. But government efforts to promote a subset of universities to “world-class” status over the last decade give Europeans a distinctive set of concerns. For some, this means pressure to focus their attention on the international stage, and to judge their work based on international (read: American) standards, or risk its being deemed low in value. For others, new metrics for rewarding performance or schemes for encouraging competition reduce the cherished self-directedness of an academic career. Either way, the selection of a handful of institutions for greater investment has produced a sense of bifurcation into “haves” and “have-nots” that echoes that felt in the United States.

Finally, for European policymakers, the place of European universities on the world stage is a central fear. Relatively few European universities show up on the global rankings, due to the continent’s history of broadly distributing resources, rather than concentrating them in a few elite institutions. Policymakers are very actively trying to change this. Cost, too, is always on the horizon for policymakers in Europe, as is also the case in the United States.

Concerns about the future of the university may vary by stakeholder. While some may be shared across continents, others are nationally specific. But they nevertheless emerge from a common set of pressures, and lead to some common organizational responses. Some of the 15 papers in this

volume attempt to diagnose these pressures, and others to understand their effects on universities as organizations or on the organizational fields of higher education. In this introduction, we synthesize some of their findings. We begin with a quick review of the organizational frameworks our authors draw upon to understand universities and highlight some of their theoretical contributions, then identify several broad trends creating pressure on universities in the United States and Europe. Next, we examine how universities are responding to those pressures, before turning to field-level effects: how do those reactions cumulate into broader change? Finally, we conclude with a discussion of work yet to be done given the uncertainties of the present moment.

THINKING ABOUT THE UNIVERSITY AS AN ORGANIZATION

While the papers in this volume are all broadly organizational, they vary in the extent to which they draw explicitly on organizational theory and seek to develop it further. Collectively, however, they contribute to recent theoretical work in organizational sociology, as well as applying established theories to the particular context of the university. At the end of the 1990s, organization theory, reacting to the dominance of neoinstitutionalism and isomorphism arguments, shifted toward explaining change in organizations and organizational fields rather than stability. But more recent years have seen work flourish on the relationship between the two – whether that means understanding how local actors hybridize institutional logics in new ways, or examining how isomorphism and differentiation can sometimes coexist – and calls have been made for more work in this direction (Greenwood, Hinings, & Whetten, 2014). The proliferation of scholarship on these questions, and in particular research on organizational practices, institutional logics, and strategic action fields, are particularly important for thinking about universities, which are experiencing global pressures toward rationalization and managerialism, along with internal competitions between market and professional logics, and which exist in a wide variety of national organizational fields that channel these developments in particular directions. In this section, we briefly discuss some of the concepts and frameworks that authors in this volume use to understand the pressures on universities – moving roughly from macro to micro levels of analysis – as well as their own contributions to theory-building within organizational sociology.

Global Changes and World Society Theory

The most global of the trends we observe – trends toward rationalization, managerialism, and quantification – can be viewed through the lens of world society theory, which suggests not only that such processes create isomorphism, but also that they can explain the expansion of higher education itself (Meyer, Ramirez, Frank, & Schofer, 2008; Schofer & Meyer, 2005). While earlier versions emphasized the decoupling of organizational practices from environmental demands for rationalization (Meyer & Rowan, 1977), critiques that emphasized the extent to which higher education organizations varied from such predictions and looked for sources of that variation (Kraatz & Moore, 2002; Kraatz & Zajac, 1996) pushed some scholars working in the Meyer tradition to address the local instantiation of global trends. More recent work has, for example, emphasized the increasing formal demands of “accountings and countings” (Meyer & Bromley, 2013), such as that produced by university rankings, which in turn suggests a greater attention to the tumultuous process of recoupling (Hallett, 2010). Other research assumes that global pressures on higher education are real, but explores the cross-national variation that nevertheless persists (Drori, Delmestri, & Oberg, 2013; Paradeise, Reale, Bleiklie, & Ferlie, 2009). And work looking at world-society pressures on universities to become “complete organizations” (Krücken & Meier, 2006) takes a similar turn in this volume with Otto Hüther and Georg Krücken’s (2016) paper on how such pressures can result in simultaneous isomorphism (in the European field of higher education) and differentiation (in national fields) (Paradeise & Thoenig, 2015). More generally, themes around global change and local variation and on the ways that rankings and metrics link organizations and their environments – as can be found in papers by Craig Tutterow and James Evans (2016), and Catherine Paradeise and Ghislaine Filliatreau (2016) – more tightly echo these developments, whether or not they explicitly engage with them.

Field-Level Analysis

Field theory has been reinvigorated in recent years with Fligstein and McAdam’s (2012) attempt to link organizational and Bourdieusian field theories while also incorporating politics and insights from the social movements literature. Interest in understanding the relationships between fields, not only stability and change within them, has increased. For example,

within higher education Berman (2012a) has explored how changes in one field (science policy) enabled changes in another, dependent field (research universities) by changing the rules governing the latter field and the resources available to it. Within a single field, Wooten (2015) has shown how the structure of the higher education field drove organizational adaptation by historically black colleges. In the present volume, W. Richard Scott and Manuelito Biag (2016) argue more generally for the value of a field-level perspective on higher education, emphasizing its importance for understanding the full range of higher education organizations (not just universities), for drawing attention to the role of governance organizations, and for understanding how competitive, as well as isomorphic, dynamics play out within it. Mikaila Mariel Lemonik Arthur develops new methods for describing the underlying network structure of fields, with an eye toward better understanding the diffusion of new practices. In their paper on the rise of student loans, Elizabeth Popp Berman and Abby Stivers continue to explore the link between higher education and policy fields, with an examination of why student loans expanded and with what likely effects on higher education organizations. And Paradeise and Filliatreau describe the emergence of a global field of rankings and metrics producers that is increasingly setting the rules of the game for higher education across a range of countries.

Hüther and Krücken, in particular, make a significant theoretical contribution to field theory in their paper on nested organizational fields. Building from their observations about the changes experienced by European universities, in which a subset of universities are becoming more isomorphic with one another while the population as a whole is differentiating, they argue for a theory of nested fields. Universities are simultaneously located in national and European fields, and understanding their actions as responding to pressures in both fields can explain what superficially appear to be contradictory patterns. By demonstrating how organizations' location in multiple nested fields shapes their adaptive processes, Hüther and Krücken identify dynamics that should apply to arenas well beyond higher education.

Institutional Logics and the Linking of Levels

The institutional logics research program (Thornton, Ocasio, & Lounsbury, 2012) has been one of the most vibrant areas of organizational research in recent years. Within it, focus has shifted from explaining how one logic replaces another within an organization or field to an emphasis

on ongoing contestation between logics, the hybridization of logics, and the connection between logics and organizational practices (Battilana & Dorado, 2010; Lounsbury, 2007; Reay & Hinings, 2009). Such research provides a different path toward understanding global change and local variation, with the potential to link broad institutional orders, field-level dynamics, and local instantiations of institutional logics within organizations and in specific practices. Universities are exemplars of organizations in which multiple logics compete and coexist (Dunn & Jones, 2010; Murray, 2010), and past work has shown, for example, how environmental changes can favor the growth of innovative practices based on one logic rather than another (Berman, 2012b). In contrast with a field theoretic approach focused primarily on intentional projects of change, such an analytical strategy highlights the ways in which such local variations can cumulate into field-level change (Berman, 2014).

In this volume, Berman and Stivers link institutional logics and field theoretic approaches by extending Berman's earlier argument about how changes in policy fields – in this case, the field of student aid policy – can provide resources for the spread of market-logic practices – for example, enrollment management practices, which focus on the economic value of students to higher education organizations. Joseph C. Hermanowicz (2016) does not explicitly use the term “institutional logics,” but his paper examining the connection between a field-level shift toward the “valorization of shiny things” – universities coming to value activities based on their economic contribution – and decreasing career satisfaction among science faculty – is quite consonant with work looking at the links between institutional logics and local practices. Daniel Lee Kleinman and Robert Osley-Thomas, while using the language of codes rather than logics, characterize the coevolution of two prominent such codes within the university over several decades. And Daniel Davis and Amy Binder, taking an inhabited institutionalism approach (Binder, 2007; Hallett & Ventresca, 2006), make multiple contributions, showing both how practices based on a market logic can spread from one part of the university to another, as well as how professional communities with allegiances to particular logics and practices compete for dominance at the ground level of the organization.

Resource Dependence

Since financial challenges are a central pressure for universities, it is no surprise that resource dependence arguments (Pfeffer & Salancik, 1978)

underlie several papers in this volume – perhaps even less so given that universities were one of the types of organizations that originally inspired resource dependence theory (Pfeffer & Salancik, 1974; Salancik & Pfeffer, 1974). While Sondra N. Barringer (2016) finds in this volume that new patterns of resource flows to U.S. public universities have not been associated with similar changes in spending patterns, George W. Breslauer describes (in a less theoretical vein) specific actions that Berkeley has taken to replace diminishing appropriations from the state of California with other revenue streams, actions which appear to fit the expectations of resource dependence theory. While resource dependence arguments do have the potential to be purely metaphorical (Pfeffer, 2003), Wry, Cobb, and Aldrich (2013) have suggested that they may also be productively linked with work on institutional logics. This position is echoed in Berman and Stivers’ paper on student loans, which points to potential links between the increasing financial importance of federal student aid to universities and the spread of market-logic-based practices designed to better capture such flows.

Organizational Design

Finally, organization theory has seen recent calls for greater attention to questions of organizational design (Greenwood & Miller, 2010), a call which it appears scholars are heeding. Organizational design scholarship on universities, however, is almost nonexistent (though see Simon, 1967), perhaps because one does not usually think of “designing” universities. The spate of university mergers in Europe, however, along with the emergence of new higher education models (e.g., large for-profit colleges) in the United States, suggest that this is a significant oversight. Séverine Louvel (2016) tackles this topic in the present volume by comparing how pressures for universities to become interdisciplinary – common across France and the United States, the two nations she studies – lead to design strategies that are similar in many regards, but that are more strongly shaped by state preferences in France. Julien Barrier and Christine Musselin (2016) also help to fill this gap with an interview-based study of two university mergers in France. Building on the tradition of Selznick (1957) and Simon (1953), they examine rational, political, and cultural factors that shaped how these mergers were structured. Going beyond that, however, they identify new elements that shaped the design process: for example, the sense of time pressure around executing the mergers meant that many decisions were made because they would avoid creating conflict that could potentially

derail the process. These insights extend our understanding of changing universities, but are also likely to apply to other types of organizational mergers.

SOURCES OF PRESSURE ON THE UNIVERSITY

The authors in this volume draw on these frameworks to think about pressures on the university at a variety of scales. In this section, we discuss how broad social changes have reshaped universities' environment, and then review the pressures universities find themselves under as a result.

It is ironic that universities are experiencing this turmoil even as they have become more important social institutions. As Hüther and Krücken point out, the shift toward a knowledge society increases the centrality of both their educational and knowledge-producing roles. Rising social inequality and declining social mobility also give individuals a greater economic stake in their own pursuit of higher education. Finally, the "massification" of higher education means that any fiscal challenges experienced by the university will be taking place on a very large scale.

In the context of these broad societal trends, universities' relationship with the state has rapidly evolved (see [Stevens & Gebre-Medhin, 2016](#) for a U.S.-focused review). Welfare states in developed countries have become fiscally constrained, as the ever-expanding costs of healthcare, pensions, unemployment, incarceration, and national defense, along with a rising proportion of retirees to workers, has made austerity the watchword of the day. In the United States, as Breslauer notes, the expensive expansion of the prison system has placed additional pressure on state budgets. These widespread changes have limited governments' ability to invest in higher education.

At the same time, assumptions about what the government role in higher education should be are evolving as well. A focus on the economic payoff to a degree has made it seem reasonable for individuals to bear more of the costs of their education, as [Pedro Teixeira \(2016\)](#) observes. This shift has gone furthest in the United States, where even public universities have moved toward a high-tuition/high-aid model, and average student loans are sizable. But English universities have imposed significant tuitions as well, and several countries in Continental Europe have also introduced controversial fees, though at much lower levels.¹

Even as commitment to state-provided access to tuition-free higher education has eroded, the idea that government should hold universities

accountable for their performance has gained ground. This has been most visible in Europe, where “new public management” policies designed to encourage competition and provide incentives for excellence are widespread. These are most extensive in the United Kingdom, where the Research Excellence Framework requires universities to collect a great deal of data on faculty output, and results have significant financial consequences for universities as well as for faculty. The United States has, to date, seen only weak state performance measures implemented (Dougherty & Natow, 2015), though more serious conversations about accountability have begun at the federal level, and Berman and Stivers suggest are likely to continue.

The impact of changing government–university relations is exacerbated by difficulties controlling costs in universities. Observers frequently point to “Baumol’s cost disease” (Baumol & Bowen, 1966) to explain rising educational costs: it still takes a professor roughly the same time to teach a class of students as it did 50 years ago, so given productivity gains in other areas, education has become relatively more expensive. The cost of research increases, too, with more technological sophistication. Other cost contributors, each of them hard to limit, include administrative expansion, greater information technology needs, higher student expectations for facilities and services, and lower teaching loads among faculty.

Finally, all these developments take place against a wider backdrop of internationalization and globalization. In Europe, the intergovernmental Bologna process has worked to improve compatibility between national higher education systems, and Erasmus schemes have made it easier for students from one E.U. country to study in another. Both the E.U. and individual countries have used their governing capacity to introduce or reinforce competitive funding schemes to strengthen research. More generally, the market for higher education is becoming increasingly global, and while only a small proportion of students leave their country to study, students from Asia and especially China are having a growing impact on North American, European, and Australian universities. The emergence of global rankings and metrics, as Paradeise and Filliatreau discuss, has drawn further attention to universities’ places not only in national systems of higher education, but also in a global field.

These broad trends combine to place two major kinds of pressure on universities, and the fears sketched at the beginning of this essay can generally be linked to one or both of these. First, rising expenses combined with a contractionary mood in government lead to strong financial pressures. Second, intensified competition among universities produces stresses of its

own. Some competition is a secondary effect of budget challenges, as universities scramble to secure new sources of funding or to attract high-paying students. But it also results from globalization, as institutions must vie with international peers for faculty, students, money, and prestige. And governments are, in many cases, explicitly encouraging more competition between colleges, whether through competitive research funding schemes, as in Continental Europe, or by channeling more government aid through students, as in the United States and United Kingdom.

UNIVERSITY RESPONSES TO PRESSURE

Universities respond in several ways to these broad changes in society, economy, and government. First, they react to financial pressures – the tension between ever-rising costs and constrained government funding – by looking to cut expenses themselves and to raise money however they can. Since paying faculty is still universities' largest expense, limiting the hiring of new faculty is one effective means of controlling costs. Both Europe and the United States have seen university teaching rapidly casualized, with a growing fraction – most, in the United States – of higher education instructors in short-term, generally low-paid positions (Curtis, 2014; Paradeise, 2011).

Other changes are less consistently effective. In countries where professors' salaries are not tightly bound by civil service rules, the salaries of those in less competitive fields can also be controlled, and the budgets of less favored disciplines, like many of the humanities, can be allowed to erode. Sometimes clerical functions are centralized to save money, as Breslauer (2016) describes in this volume, though the savings are often less than anticipated (e.g., Rivard, 2013). Universities have hoped that technologies like online education would save money by allowing each teacher to reach more students, but so far online classes have introduced costs of their own without reducing the need for labor very dramatically. At moments of budgetary crisis, more drastic measures are sometimes taken, such as the closing of entire departments – often in the humanities – at least in countries where that is possible (Hutner & Mohamed, 2013).

Even more than by cutting costs, though, universities have sought out new sources of revenue. Breslauer identifies four main strategies universities use. Tuition-paying students are, of course, an important potential source of income. If governments allow, tuitions can be raised, and/or higher-paying

students can be admitted. In Europe, this strategy is hotly debated, and countries like France, Switzerland, Norway, and Germany have not instituted significant tuitions for regular undergraduates. But others, including England and Wales, have turned sharply in this direction, and even countries with free undergraduate tuition may charge fees for graduate programs or non-European students. In the United States, private universities can set their own tuition levels, which have been rising above the rate of inflation for years (College Board, 2014). Another response among public institutions is to focus on attracting higher-paying students (out-of-state or international), or on expanding fee-generating master's programs. Major public universities in the United States and a growing number of European countries have increasingly taken this tack.

Beyond tuitions, universities have also intensified their search for research grants, a strategy which may prove successful for some but which is a game that not all universities can win in an era of flat budgets. It does, however, induce redistribution of resources among universities and contributes to more stratification across both the United States and Europe. Private fundraising efforts are a third option that schools pursue with varying degrees of success. Here, elite private U.S. universities have been wildly successful, while public flagships' results have been more moderate but still significant. European universities, as Teixeira notes, are working actively to build fundraising capacity but at present raise limited funds from private donors.

Finally, the search for revenues results in the general encouragement of what Breslauer calls "unit-level entrepreneurialism." Berman (2012a, 2012b) has shown how entrepreneurial activity began to expand among academic scientists as early as the late 1970s as more resources to support such activity became available. More recently such developments have intensified and spread beyond the research enterprise. Davis and Binder's corporate partnership programs, in which campus career centers sell access to their students to large companies, provide one example of the entrepreneurship that administrators welcome in an era of tight budgets. So, too, do the entrepreneurial nanomedical scientists that Louvel studies in both France and the United States. Joseph C. Hermanowicz draws a line between universities' increased valuing of "shiny things" – activities that can bring in revenue – and the declining career satisfaction he finds among American physicists.

Universities have also responded to pressure by increasing administrative control, which has in turn encouraged the expansion of corporate logics in the organization. As Meyer and Bromley (2013; see also Drori, Meyer, & Hwang, 2009) would predict, as universities became larger and

more multifaceted and also faced an increasingly complex regulatory environment, they became more centrally organized. In the United States, this took the form of a gradual drift toward managerialism, as was also the case in Europe till 2000. After that, however, European governments began to demand greater accountability and introduced new public management reforms. This actively pushed European universities – once extremely internally decentralized – to become “complete organizations” (Brunsson & Sahlin-Andersson, 2000), with internal and external accountability, defined goals, formal structures, and professional managers (Krücken & Meier, 2006). The pursuit of mergers, as Barrier and Musselin describe, is one strategy that has been used in Europe to respond to government demands for “world-class” universities while also increasing the power of university leadership.

This change has increased the influence of administration relative to faculty. In the United States, faculty perceive that their role in governance is greatly eroded. European universities, however, were once notably under-managed, so that this shift can be seen as rebalancing at least as much as subordinating academic power. More generally, an increasingly managerial, rather than academic, orientation among administrators helps corporate logics and practices to flourish elsewhere in the university. Such practices include those that focus on the economic value of students, like enrollment management (as discussed by Tutterow & Evans, 2016; also see Kraatz, Ventresca, & Deng, 2010), or on branding and marketing the university (Drori et al., 2013). This shift has generally gone further in the United States than Europe, though it can certainly be seen on both continents (Paradeise et al., 2009).

A final response at the organizational level to these pressures involves the introduction and expansion of various kinds of rationalized tools for organizational management. These may be linked to a greater focus on the bottom line, though not all such devices are. They also require a certain degree of administrative centralization to implement, and can be powerful management tools when successfully implemented. Some rationalized tools, like enrollment management (again, see Tutterow & Evans, 2016), which calculates which students will bring the most value (financial or academic) to the university, have expanded mostly in response to economic pressures (Ort, 2000). Others, like the extensive and highly quantified system for evaluating research output found in the United Kingdom, are the outcomes of explicit government demands. Still others, like the trend in many countries toward rewarding researchers for performance on particular metrics, are implemented in reaction to global competition.

FIELD-LEVEL EFFECTS OF UNIVERSITY RESPONSES

The sources of pressure experienced by universities result from societal trends (e.g., globalization), economic realities (e.g., the challenge of cost control), and government changes (e.g., the renegotiation of the state-higher education relationship). Adaptations to these developments take place mostly at the organizational level, as individual universities seek to compensate for budget cuts, respond to government demands, and survive in an increasingly competitive environment.

Collectively, though, these organizational adaptations can accumulate into field-level changes. In the field of European higher education, Hüther and Krücken note (and Teixeira confirms) two simultaneous, and apparently contradictory, trends: greater isomorphism across countries, along with greater stratification both across and within them. Historically, national higher education systems in Europe have not been highly stratified, and have varied considerably from country to country. But the European focus on creating “world-class universities” has encouraged individual countries to invest heavily in a handful of institutions with the potential for global recognition, and to look to international, not national, models of excellence. This intersection of an emerging European field of higher education with existing national fields can thus produce both (international) isomorphism and (national) stratification. It also produces new forms of stratification between countries, as only a subset of European nations have universities that are real contenders for global recognition.

The U.S. field of higher education – by virtue of its size, its decentralization, and its dominance of world rankings – is less focused on its place in a global system, though this is gradually changing. The pressures and organizational adaptations noted here, however, are driving increased stratification in the United States as well, though as a result of different dynamics. Public universities have become increasingly strapped as state appropriations have been reduced, elite private universities have rapidly built their endowments, and more marginal private institutions struggle to remain solvent. Among publics themselves, a gulf widens between relatively wealthy, sometimes semi-privatized, flagship institutions (e.g., Berkeley, Michigan, Virginia) and their less notable peers, for whom strategies of fundraising, grant-getting, and international recruiting are typically less successful, leaving a reliance on cost-cutting.

As we look to the future of the field as a whole, one question stands out. Will it be one in which current trends simply continue? Or will something more dramatic happen? Some observers have predicted that “disruptive

innovation” – whether in the form of MOOCs (massive open online courses) or alternative educational models, like competency-based certifications – will lead to a massive shakeout in coming decades in which many institutions close their doors (e.g., [Learning New Lessons, 2012](#); [Selinger & Phelps, 2014](#)).

Feller, however, suggests two alternative scenarios, both of which seem to us more likely possibilities. In one, universities will become (or continue to be) “marvelous invalids”: despite their apparent illness, they will somehow continue to perform without much obvious deterioration. To date, universities have been quite adaptable to the environmental pressures they have faced. While the pain of budget cuts has been real, universities have been resourceful in reacting to them. So long as budgetary conditions do not worsen, universities may continue to evolve in ways that do not fundamentally weaken the institution.

However, Feller acknowledges that such adaptation can only work up to a point, and it is not clear what that point is. Should budget cuts continue, eventually they will do serious damage to the institution. In this case, he argues, what we are most likely to see is not massive university closures, but higher education behaving like a “sick industry,” to borrow a term from industrial organization – one in which performance gradually erodes, and contraction gradually takes place, but through a slow, incremental, painful process, rather than a dramatic episode of change.

CONCLUSION

At first glance, our review of the broad pressures on the university – of budget struggles, a changing relationship with the state, and globalization as sources of stress; and a turn to resource management, managerialism, and rationalized tools as organizational responses – may seem distant from specific fears about the future of tenure or runaway student loans sketched at the beginning of this introduction. And the papers in this volume, which do not focus on topics ripped from the headlines, may on the surface appear remote from practical concerns, and perhaps a bit sanguine, at a time when a cherished institution is under threat.

But we believe that direct lines can in fact be drawn between the findings presented in these chapters and the day-to-day concerns of students, faculty, and policymakers. Stories about administrators trying to silence faculty members who fail to toe the line (e.g., at the University of British Columbia and the University of Saskatchewan, see [MacQueen, 2015](#);

University of Saskatchewan Fires, 2014; or at the University of Warwick, see Morgan, 2014) make sense in the context of an organization in which the balance of power between faculty and administrators has shifted. We might see them as reflecting a university leadership that identifies with corporate logics, which would suggest an employee who spoke publicly against an organizational decision should be silenced and perhaps punished, more than academic logics, in which the right to speak out is among the most fundamental.² Similarly, public controversy over whether the United Kingdom will introduce a Teaching Excellence Framework that rewards schools for producing high-earning graduates (e.g., Adams, 2015) can be understood in the context of a changing relationship between government and higher education in the context of ongoing budget pressures and the expansion of rationalized tools. While the dots must be connected, the connections are not hard to make.

Not everything is covered in this volume, of course. We note particularly the decided absence of students and their experiences. Even those papers that touch on issues of relevance to students (e.g., Berman & Stivers, 2016; Davis & Binder, 2016; Kleinman & Osley-Thomas, 2016) are remote both from student experience and from the educational process. Perhaps it is understandable that faculty are more interested in changes that affect themselves, and that organizational scholars emphasize organizational effects. This is nevertheless a major lacuna, particularly since scholarship can clearly take a student-focused approach while remaining quite organizational in approach (e.g., Armstrong & Hamilton, 2013; Binder & Wood, 2013; Stevens, 2007). We hope that the future will see more organizational research that begins with students and emphasizes the educational mission of universities.

The papers in this volume also focus, as does most academic writing, primarily on research universities, which make up only a very small fraction of higher education organizations. To some extent this is governed by our volume theme: the *university* under pressure. And a few of our papers – particularly those by Scott and Biag (2016) and by Arthur (2016), both of which emphasize the entire universe of higher education organizations – do take a wider angle. Recent work (e.g., Kirst & Stevens, 2015) suggests a resurgence of interest in other types of institutions, which we commend, and would like to see spread. But despite the present volume's focus on research universities, many of the insights collected here – particularly those about new government demands and increased stratification – nevertheless have implications for a wide range of colleges, even though pressures and responses may play out differently in other types of higher

education organizations. For example, the growing resource gap between research universities and teaching-focused institutions could produce a scenario in which the former became “marvelous invalids” while the latter become a “sick industry.”

Finally, while we see the Europe–U.S. comparison as a particular strength of this volume, there is of course a whole world beyond those places. Nations like China and South Korea are investing an enormous amount of money in their university systems and Asian countries are beginning to show up on global rankings. One can imagine a future in which the flow of students no longer moves (mostly) unidirectionally from Asia to North America and Europe, but is bidirectional or even reverses. Serious competition from Chinese universities for global leadership might also make other countries look to China for a new organizational model of how to produce knowledge and educate students successfully. Yet at the same time, any global adoption of a Chinese model would have to address aspects of that model – like its severe lack of academic freedom – that most academics would not like to see exported. Though moving beyond Europe and North America makes it still harder to generalize about developments in higher education, we look forward to a truly global sociology of higher education organizations in the future.

One volume cannot do everything. The papers here make a real contribution, individually and collectively, to an organizational sociology of higher education that has been emerging for some time but is finally beginning to consolidate. The collective insights they provide not only map out important topics for future research – on the restructuring of the field of higher education, on the organizational effects of metrics, on organizational design within universities, on the dynamics of nested fields – but also point toward a coherent explanation of why, in fact, the university is under so much pressure and how, to date, it has reacted. Will this time really be different? Only time will tell. But the contributions of organizational sociology can help us think through the situation in which universities find themselves today, and understand the range of possibilities that are likely for the future.

NOTES

1. Universities in England, Wales, and Northern Ireland now charge tuition up to £9,000; fees in Scotland remain substantially lower.
2. It is worth noting, however, that the Saskatchewan case ultimately resulted in administrators losing their jobs due to campus outcry.

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