From Elite to Expendable: A Historic Analysis of the Crises Facing Canada's Professoriate

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Abstract

This paper provides a historic overview of the crises that have faced the Canadian professoriate since the 1950s. Historic periodization is used to identify the eras, defined by broader societal movements, in which the nature of academic work in Canada has changed. Key narratives of crisis are identified, including: the post-WWII perspective that professors' work was elite but mundane; the 1970s emphasis on poor working conditions and unionization; and the 1990s emphasis on diversity and inequity. The paper concludes by examining the current crisis in which a fragmented professoriate is facing market-driven working conditions, exacerbated by the uncertainties of the COVID-19 pandemic. This paper argues that crises in academic work are sparked when there is tension between society's expectations of professors and professors' self-perceptions of their role and contributions.

Keywords: Canadian professoriate, grand narratives, history, professional crises

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It is frequently the case that when professors turn the lens of inquiry inward and scrutinize their own profession, they do so from an intersubjective epistemology intended to reveal inequities and spark change. Thus, much of the research on professors' academic work or working conditions has sounded an alarm, calling attention to the particular problem or crisis that defined the academy at the point in time in which the study was undertaken. For example, in Watson's *The Professoriate: Occupation in Crisis* published in 1985, the distinct political climate of the late 1970s and its influence on the academy are brought to life as the authors address the challenges of massification, gender parity, and fiscal austerity. Likewise in the 1990s, the large-scale surveys of Lennards (1990) and Nakhaie and Brym (1999) explore the political beliefs of professors, research that mirrored an era in which the ideological divides that defined the post-cold war had faded into uncertain terrain.

Although the importance of each study is evident in the era in which it is written, most are too quickly forgotten a decade later when the next crisis of the professoriate takes the stage. Individually these studies play an essential role in clarifying time-specific challenges, yet they should also be valued as a collective repertoire of scholarship from which to understand the evolving position of professors in Canada, collectively referred to as Canada's professoriate. This paper argues the past 80 years of scholarship on Canada's professoriate should be viewed collectively to understand the convergence of political, social, and economic events that shaped academic work in each era and contributed to new identities and crises among the professoriate. This analysis is paramount to understanding how professors respond to the external forces that reconfigure their working lives, which features of academic work persist amid change, and where there is evolution or adaptation over time.

Two puzzles from public discourse motivate this historic reflection. First, the dramatic shift in public opinion about the prestige of an academic career in Canada between 1950 and 2007. In the introduction to their book, *Historical Identities: The Professoriate in Canada,* Stortz and Panayotidis (2006) reference a 1942 article in a student newspaper that labeled professors as "rather a sorry lot ... [of] ivory towerists" (p. 3), indicating a perceived detachment or irrelevance to the broader society. The latter author's view is confirmed in several scholarly works in subsequent decades (Porter, 1965; Robson, 1966; Scarfe & Sheffield, 1977). However, this negative perception of academic work changed completely by the end of the century when research indicated an academic career was "too good to leave" (Thorsen, 1985, p. 158) and large-scale surveys confirmed the majority of full-time professors in Canada reported high or very high levels of job satisfaction (Lennards, 1990; Weinrib et al., 2013).

The second puzzle is the recurring theme in the literature and public discourse on professors in the 1990s expressing concerns that there was a professor shortage. Fears that Canadian universities would not have enough PhD graduates to fill vacant positions were common in

scholarly and media publications (Acker, 2004; Association of Universities and Colleges of Canada [AUCC], 2002). However, 20 years later, the trend reversed in several academic fields, particularly the humanities and social sciences. In 2016, doctoral graduates outnumbered the available tenure–track jobs, and many found themselves competing for part–time, contract positions (Cope Watson, 2013; Field & Jones, 2016).

These changing yet interrelated crises that circle the academy are indicators of broader social change in Canadian society—change that leads to uncertainty as to what role professors should take. Within Canada, as in most national and institutional contexts, many expectations are placed on academics. Professors are charged with a myriad of roles from producing new knowledge to instructing young minds and critiquing authority. As such, the changing nature of academic work has deep societal implications and where the grand narratives of professors are in dissonance with those of the society that demands something of them, the crisis emerges. This paper argues that the academic work at Canadian universities is embedded in a societal context that is constantly shifting. Each of the "crises" outlined below has been chosen for the high volume (both quantity and decibel) of scholarship and debate it garnered. By collectively examining these crises, the changing nature of academic work is revealed. The following section conceptualizes the terms "crisis" and "grand narrative," arguing that a call for crisis is indicative of larger society fluctuations. Next, the methodology of historic periodization is outlined, followed by an overview of the loudest crisis themes that are seen in a review of scholarship on Canada's professoriate. The paper concludes by reflecting on the current era in which a fragmented professoriate is facing a new crisis of market–driven working conditions exacerbated by the uncertainties of the COVID–19 pandemic.

Crisis or Change of Narrative?

In order to anchor this historic review of "crises" to a foundational theoretical framework and clarify the concept of crisis used for analysis, this paper adapts the scholarship of Peters (2004) and Readings (1996). Peters (2004) argues that the word *crisis* "has almost lost the theoretical purchase it once had and slipped into a kind of rhetoric that is now consistently invoked by writers and scholars of all political persuasions" (p. 67). Yet, while the term may be under debate, Peters suggests the cry of crisis often points to larger alterations in the nature of the university as a social institution. Simply put, where an individual or group of individuals claim that they are experiencing a crisis, it is important to examine the broader societal context in which they exist. Their concerns may be symptomatic of broad societal shifts. Peters adopts Readings's (1996) use of *grand narratives* as an analytic tool to capture the essence of the university evolution that sparks the crisis:

> Grand narratives are the stories that cultures tell themselves about their own practices and beliefs in order to legitimate them. They function as a unified single story that

purports to legitimate or found a set of practices, a cultural self-image, a discourse or an institution. (Peters, 2004, p. 72)

By pinpointing the grand narrative that legitimated universities in a particular era, an ideal type emerges with which to contrast universities with other contexts or eras. Readings's periodization is an example of this analytic defining of eras. Readings (1996) examines 200 years of the Western university and suggests that three grand narratives can be distilled: "the Kantian idea of reason; the Humboldtian idea of culture; and the techno-bureaucratic idea of excellence" (p. 70). Readings's historic periodization is one example among several important scholarly contributions in which authors seek to bookend the historic eras in which universities, it is argued, have a distinct group of characteristics. Scholars have also pointed to the changing nature of academic identities in historic eras. Most helpful is Neave's (2001) examination of the Western university through a historical analogue in which he describes the identity of scholars in subsequent manifestations of universities and the shifts in the nature of academic work. He distinguishes between the grand narrative of the medieval academy under the Holy Roman Empire and the subsequent rise of the nation-state in Europe when universities were used by the newly formed nations to legitimate their existence. Under the Holy Roman Empire, academics were mobile agents, connected not to a geographic or institutional location, but to each other through their identity as scholars and their pursuit of truth. With the forming of nations, faculty were repositioned as civil servants and universities contributed to "collective awareness [that] expressed itself through a shared consciousness of history, literature, language, science and their institutions ... that is national identity" (Neave, 2001, p. 22). In the past few decades, globalization has again altered the grand narrative of the university and its scholars. Institutions and governments strive for research excellence and undertake international endeavours amid a climate of fiscal accountability and global rankings (Altbach & Knight, 2007; Marginson, 2008). Academics are no longer expected to be medieval scholars, civil servants, or preservers of culture and reason. However, what they are expected to be is only gradually coming into focus.

As each historic shift awaits the solidification of a new grand narrative, there is friction born of a dissonance between the role professors wish to play and the new role society requires of them. In the Canadian context, the cry of "crisis" has been heard recurrently since the 1940s in relation to professors' work and status. Although it is somewhat presumptuous to label recent shifts in Canadian history as "grand-narratives," they still offer an important point of departure to consider the context-specific challenges that have reshaped Canada's professoriate as the nature of higher education is altered by broader societal pressures. This paper adapts the concepts of grand-narrative and crisis, somewhat narrowly, examining instead the micro-narratives or discourses specific to the Canadian context and its university sector. Historic periodization is used to identify the contextual forces that contributed to changes in the nature

of academic work in Canada and led to the sounding of "crisis." Although many of the historic events below fit easily into decennial eras, this paper embraces an "overlapping historiography" that allows historic shifts to be conceptualized as dynamic, simultaneous, and mutually constructive (Sangster, 2010). Thus, the paper has been organized around themes that illustrate the shifting experiences of professors rather than tightly bounded eras describing chronological events.

Data and Methodology

This paper draws on the findings of a review of the literature on Canada's professoriate (Karram Stephenson et al., 2017). This original literature review examined all scholarly writing between 1950 and 2015 that had professors in Canada as the unit of analysis. A total of 150 studies were found and categorized into themes (Figure 1). Adopting the review process of Hart (1998), the review had three iterative phases: (a) search of the literature, (b) classification of themes, and (c) synthesis of the data. The main themes in the literature are illustrated in Figure 1.

Figure 1

*Main Themes From the Original Literature Review on University Professors in Canada*
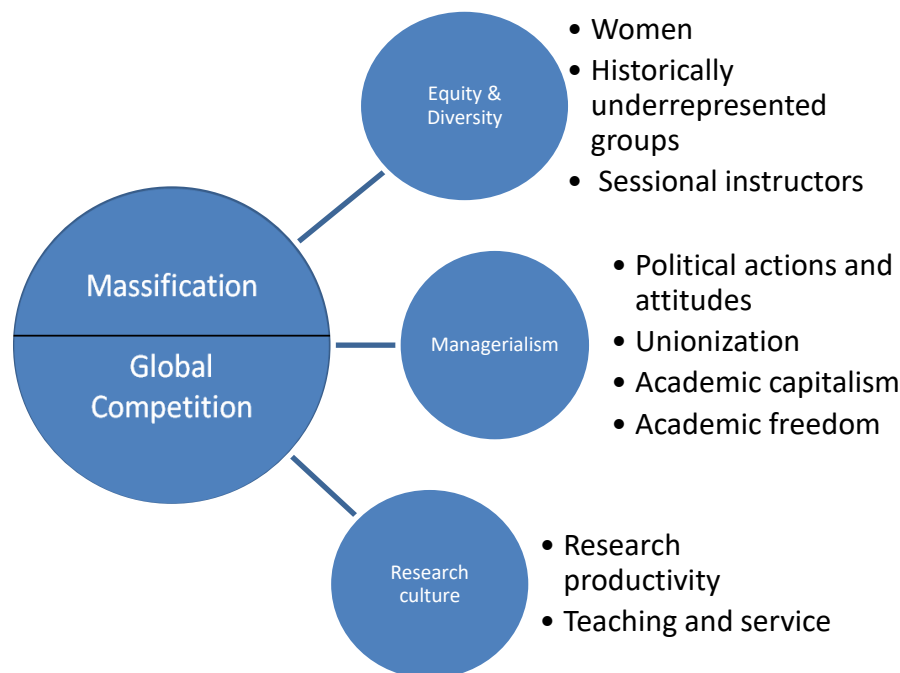
Note. This diagram is used with permission (Karram Stephenson et al., 2017).

The analysis conducted for this article involved a re-coding of the above literature with a particular focus on the crisis discourses or narratives that were concentrated in scholarship and public discourse on academic work in certain time frames. While the individual studies

highlighted in the original review provide an in-depth look at, and often suggested a solution for, the time-bound crisis they examine, this paper analyzes these studies holistically to understand the changing nature of academic work in Canada and the tensions this causes for the professoriate. Figure 1, taken from the comprehensive review, identifies massification and global competition as the main themes in the broader literature on Canada's professoriate. In contrast, this paper focuses on crisis-themes within the broader literature including negative perceptions of academic work, expectations of the public good, inclusion of historically marginalized groups, globalization, and the COVID-19 pandemic. As the analysis below describes, these themes of crisis reveal micro-narratives surrounding the work of professors in Canada including the 1950s' elite university, unionization of the 1970s, struggle of equity amid diversity in the 1990s and market segmentation of academic labour in the 2010s (see Figure 2).

Figure 2

Micro-Narratives and the Processes by Which They Are Shaped
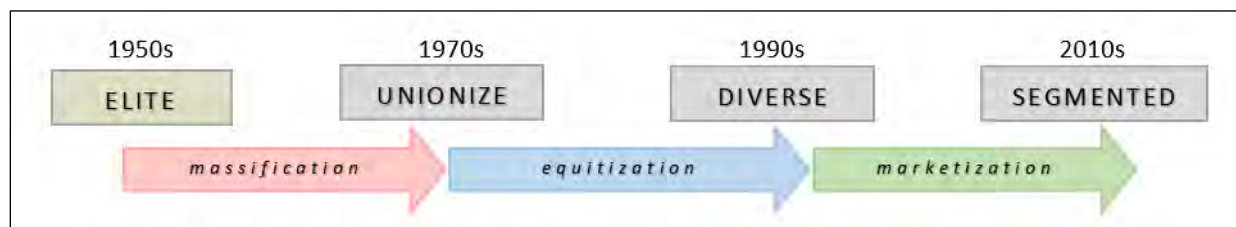
Negative Perceptions of Academic Work in Canada

The first theme of crisis revealed through a review of scholarship and public discourse on Canadian professors is the negative perception of an academic job in Canada until the 1970s. The article referenced above by Stortz and Panayotidis (2006) is used to argue, in their seminal work *Historic Identities: The Professoriate in Canada*, that a critique of professors existed and gradually increased throughout the 1950s and 1960s. This poor view of professors culminated in Porter's (1965) book *The Vertical Mosaic* in which he argued that the social activism of American professors who came to work in Canada was diminished by "the onset of middle age and the quest for respectability, inability to vote in Canadian elections, and the Canadian countryside with its beaver, trout and cottages" (p. 354). While subsequent scholarship sought to challenge the validity of Porter's analysis, the debate surrounding the topic was pronounced and confirms that the negative perception of academic work was prevalent and that many academics felt it needed to be countered (Scarfe & Sheffield, 1977). A survey conducted in the same period found fewer than 40% of PhD graduates aspired to be professional academics (Robson, 1966). This was attributed to the perception that academic work was "pleasant, steady and safe, but not particularly challenging or exciting" (Robson, 1966, p. 269). Neatby (1985), in his scholarship from two decades later, attempts to explain this poor opinion of academic work

arguing the postwar enthusiasm for university degrees had plateaued as the class of veterans graduated. He contends that by the late 1950s, professors' salaries had not increased in step with the cost of living and universities had little money for the accoutrements of the professor career such as private offices or funding for travel and research.

Porter's skeptical view of Canadian professors in 1965 is also a reflection of the Canada–U.S. divide that characterized the "long sixties" (Sangster, 2010). The Civil Rights and Women's Movements, as well as the Vietnam War, were reshaping American culture and unleashing the forces of student activism. Although Canada saw echoes of these movements, this political turbulence, combined with an increasing demand for professors in Canada as enrolment grew, resulted in large numbers of American academics moving to Canada (Lachapelle & Burnett, 2018). Some were draft dodgers, others had politically dissident views, while still others were simply looking for employment. The hiring of more Americans was a distinct contrast to the historically strong ties between Canadian and British academics. Yet this stronger relationship between Canada and the U.S. came with difficulty. American academics were critiqued by the colleagues they left behind for failing in their political activism and mellowing once in Canada. This immigration of American academics also sparked fear among the Canadian academy that "Americanization," a vague term, was occurring through the hiring process. These layered influences contributed to the negative view of academics and academic work in the 1950s and 1960s as described by Porter.

By the 1980s, these negative perceptions of academic work had begun to change. Thorsen's (1985) study of professors' workplace stress, based on interviews with nine chairpersons, revealed strong opinions that academic work was "too good to leave" (p. 158). This was seen as evidence that Canadian full-time professors were a productive, healthy group in 1985, despite the stresses of their work. More recent data confirms the appeal of full-time academic work in Canada and the satisfaction of the professoriate: Lennards (1990) confirmed professors were satisfied with their jobs in 1990 and in 2007 the Changing Academic Profession (CAP) survey found satisfaction continued with more than 70% of Canadian full-time professors responding positively about their job (Weinrib et al., 2013).

The increase in prestige and the reversal of public perception can be linked to three interrelated historic processes: massification and the expansion of the higher education sector as population demographics changed in Canada; the alignment of universities with national or public interests; and the subsequent union activities that improved and standardized employment conditions across sectors, not just higher education.

Massification

First, the period following WWII was a time of immense growth in both Canada's population and the hiring of academics. In 1960, Canada had 17.6 million people, 107,000 of whom attended

university full-time (Fisher et al., 2006). By 2019, the population was 37.59 million with more than 1 million full-time university students. This move to mass and later universal higher education, as defined by Trow (1999), contributed to a dissonance in the working lives of professors in Canada. While professors had previously educated elite males from a relatively insular position (or the ivory tower), by the 1980s their numbers had grown to 30,000 and they were in the spotlight as society expected the formation of a growing percentage of the population was their responsibility. Combined with echoes of American activism and the expectations to challenge authority, the role of professors, previously an unlikely subject of scientific study, was scrutinized and found wanting. The "crisis" was felt deeply as academic work in Canada adjusted to the new context of massification and the new expectations of their professional work.

Shifting Mandates and the Public Good

A significant outcome of massification was the implicit alignment of universities and academic work with the public good. Universities became seen as essential societal institutions charged with sparking economic growth and educating the labour market, rather than ivory towers for elite thought. Prior to WWII, Canada's universities with their British roots resembled what Clark (1983) calls the Anglo-Saxon model or Neave (2001) the Saxon model, in the sense that they remained extensions of local, elite, or religious communities in which they were located with the core values of academic freedom and autonomy from the government. Yet, by the 1960s, Canada's Anglo-Saxon model was on the decline and new secular institutions were founded to meet the growing demand for higher education. Although the mandate of these new universities for teaching and research was similar in form to earlier universities, their very existence was closely linked to massification and their purpose was education for the public good. A comparative reading of the charters of the University of Toronto and York University clarifies this shift in mission. The founding of the two institutions is separated by over 100 years. More important, the founding of the University of Toronto in 1827 occurred at a time of elite detachment from society, while York University was founded during the swell of massification. The University of Toronto's (1992) *Statement of Institutional Purpose* argues professors have the "right to raise deeply disturbing questions and provocative challenges to the cherished beliefs of society at large and of the university itself" (Purpose of the University section, para. 2). In contrast, the founding of York University in 1959 describes an institution much more concerned with the formation of Canada's population and knowledge for societal benefit, not just the pursuit of truth as an end in itself. York University strives for: "(a) the advancement of learning and the dissemination of knowledge; and (b) the intellectual, spiritual, social, moral and physical development of its members and the betterment of society" (York University, 1965, Item 4). This contrast in mandates was no small change for professors. Where previously they had a small, homogeneous collective to educate and were protected by high

levels of academic freedom to ask their "deeply disturbing questions," the shifts of massification brought about student-focused institutions that were concerned with societal "betterment."

Unionization

The increasing importance of academic work within society, while causing significant friction in faculty identity and public opinion, subsequently provided the much-needed leverage for professors to engage in collective bargaining and improve their working conditions throughout the 1970s and 1980s (Butovsky et al., 2015). Augmenting this was a faculty shortage, an interrelated crisis outlined below, which stemmed from the dramatic rise in enrolment. These factors greatly improved professors' advantage in collective bargaining. As the crisis of poor working conditions was brought to light, institutions formed unions and faculty associations to protect academic freedom, solidify pay structures, and determine additional benefits of employment. The Université de Québec à Montréal (UQAM), with its extensive network of local campuses, led the way in 1970 as they accredited their faculty union. The following year, they affiliated with a federal union, the Confédération des Syndicats Nationaux (Gill, 2017), aligning with a growing number of labour movements throughout the country and taking a significant step toward the professionalization of higher education work in Canada (Vidricaire, 1996). By 2010, more than 80% of Canadian universities had faculty unions or associations. This shift was made possible by the growing number of faculty and their increase in importance to the public good (Denis, 1996).

This standardization of working conditions via unionization was successful on many levels in responding to the crisis of poor wages, lack of benefits, and limits to academic freedom. Yet it also revealed growing diversity in Canadian society more broadly. Higher education institutions in Québec were leaders in unionizing the sector; however, this occurred in parallel to growing nationalist sentiment in the province. The "quiet revolution" of the 1960s altered the power structures and leadership of education away from the Catholic Church to the provincial government, and the call for self-determination in Québec was loud and would last until the late 1990s. The union structures that stemmed from this governance change in Québec moved rapidly around the country. Yet other provinces, although inspired by Québec's union movement, were less concerned about provincial authority. Instead, a key outcome of unionization, beyond the tangible employment gains, was a new sense that professors were in fact a collective, distinct from the other interest groups being identified in society. The networking of unions led to standardization of academic working conditions across a very decentralized country throughout the 1970s and early 1980s as this new collective of professors gained more bargaining power and solidified key components of the academic profession, including teaching, research, service, and sabbaticals.

Historically Underrepresented Groups

Unionization tackled the crisis of poor working conditions and public opinion, yet as is often the case, the next crisis arrived both as a result of and challenge to the assumed homogeneity of the professoriate that had been so important to the success of unionization. By the 1980s, it was clear that women and ethnic minorities often held peripheral positions at Canadian universities both as professors and students, despite the collective efforts of unions to represent a homogeneous collective. This crisis of who belonged to the university community, and how faculty from historically underrepresented groups were struggling with experiences unknown to the rest, was an important theme in scholarship as the move to diversify Canada's universities became central throughout the 1990s. Studies were undertaken in several disciplines examining the position of historically underrepresented groups. This scholarship mirrored significant changes in Canadian immigration. By the 1990s, fewer than 20% of immigrants were from European countries, the largest sending regions post–WWII. In contrast, 58% of immigrants were from Asian countries and placed a high value on participation in higher education (Marginson, 2011; Statistics Canada, 2011). While the student body was quickly changing, faculty from racialized groups were noticeably absent and scholars began to highlight the uniquely challenging experiences of these groups in their journey through graduate school and onward to academic employment (Henry & Tator, 2009; Samuel & Wane, 2005; Spafford et al., 2006).

Likewise, women professors raised the cry of crisis throughout the 1990s as research confirmed that they faced different challenges from their male counterparts. Acker is credited with the rapid expansion of this scholarship and her findings suggest women experienced each crisis of higher education acutely and distinctly (Acker, 1997, 2000, 2012; Acker & Armenti, 2004; Acker & Dillabough, 2007). While all professors were impacted by ongoing enrolment increases, women faced the additional challenge of low salaries amid the increasing workload. In conjunction with union activism, wage equity was the main crisis for women in the 1980s. A decade later, Acker found that women professors, despite gaining pay equality, often "take greater responsibility for the nurturing and housekeeping side of academic life," a position that often hinders professional advancement and may be unfulfilling for the women (Acker & Feuerverger, 1996, p. 401). This finding, when understood historically, is a manifestation of the ongoing identity crisis of professors that started with massification and the changing mandates of universities post WWII as outlined above. As universities and society increased the scope of professors' expected activities to include new forms of student services or advising, the new members of the community, such as women and faculty from racialized groups, were pressured to take on these roles.

Faculty Shortage and American Hiring

These ongoing crises regarding who belongs to the university were not just played out along the lines of race and gender. Canada's close proximity and economic relationship to the USA,

which deeply influenced perceptions of professor activism in the 1960s, shaped the debate around the faculty shortage from 1970 to 1990. During this era, the number of PhD programs in Canada was limited and graduates were choosing not to pursue academic careers. The shortage was the source of much concern by professional associations as the hiring of professors did not keep up with student enrolment (Acker, 2004; AUCC, 2002). A related crisis emerged around the same time, with concern about the number of non-Canadians being hired to fill vacant positions. The need to increase the number of Canadian PhD graduates or "Canadianize" the professoriate was called for in public and academic publications from the 1970s and 1980s (Scarfe & Sheffield, 1977). Aware of these trends, Lachapelle and Burnett (2018) undertook a historic analysis of professorial hiring in Canada, comparing the number of professors who were trained in Canada or the USA, in response to the perceived "crisis" of Americanization. They found that the wave of American hires was high until the 1990s as enrolment increased and Canadian graduate programs were not large enough to meet the demand.

The faculty shortage and fears over "foreign" hires disappeared or were reversed by the early 2000s. Instead of a faculty shortage, the new crisis of "too many PhDs" was frequently debated in the media (Charbonneau, 2011; Polk & Wood, 2018) as the number of PhD graduates from Canadian universities increased by 13% between 1986 and 2006 (Charbonneau, 2011). Increases in graduate programming and the creation of new contract-based instructor positions highlighted this trend, discussed in more depth below in our current crisis, which has led to new market-responsive approaches to the hiring of faculty.

Marketization and the Neoliberal Crisis

As Canadian faculty move into the 21st century they can look back over the past 70 years and identify times of flux as well as tangible ways in which their position as academics improved. It can be argued that Canadian faculty came of age in the 1980s and 1990s, solidifying their collective identity through unionization and professional associations, establishing their importance to Canada's development, and working for the inclusion of marginalized groups. Yet in some ways this coming of age was too late because the mode of academic work that was codified into union law by the 1980s was a form that could not be sustained in the 21st century as a new narrative of marketization became the dominant organizing logic for the factors influencing academic work. This section summarizes the historic shifts outlined above, using them to identify four historic movements that have shaped universities since the 1950s.

Figure 2 above illustrated four key historic forms or features of academic work in Canada (elite, unionized, diverse, segmented) and the processes that led to these: massification, equitization, and marketization. The elite university of the 1950s with professors as residents of an ivory tower evolved into the unionized university of the 1970s in response to massification and the

new importance of professors as educators of society. By the 1990s, with their gains in equity and diversity, universities saw an increase in support systems and personnel. Yet, significant tension exists in the transition from one phase to another. For professors who have adapted to the job expectations of one mode of work, the evolution to a new mode of academic work is disruptive.

Over the past 20 years, a new trend in higher education, which numerous scholars have attempted to define, has largely taken shape. Peters (2004) suggests its core value is the irrational pursuit of "excellence," leading institutions to fund high-end research and rush to improve rankings. Jones (2013) describes the "fragmentation" of academic work that results as authority moves away from professors to career administrators and new strategic offices, at the same time as new forms of precarious work increase the disparity among academics. Perhaps the most clearly definable feature of the new grand narrative is its market-responsiveness. Metcalfe's (2010; Metcalfe & Fenwick, 2009; Metcalfe & Slaughter, 2011) assessment of *academic capitalism* in Canada suggests the impact of neoliberal economics is strongly seen in higher education, as new, market-led funding structures increase the competition for resources and shift the role of professors:

> As the market fluctuates, presumably so does the available funding, a point that deserves attention as world markets experience periods of instability. This type of fund management necessitates a business-like orientation, and an atypical focus on the market. (Metcalfe, 2010, p. 506)

Higher education is not the only sector that has been reshaped by the move to neoliberal, global economics. Contract-driven, short-cycle employment has come to define manufacturing, communication, and information technology. In higher education, society now requires a new form of professor, adept at grant writing, efficient instruction, and accountability paperwork (Hayes & Wynyard, 2002).

This market-responsiveness also has implications for the excess of underemployed PhD graduates and the disparity between full-time and part-time professors, major defining features of the current crisis. Rather than the anticipated shortage of professors, the market-led higher education sector requires just-in-time faculty to teach courses on a part-time, contract-based basis (Golhar & Stamm, 1991). These instructors face "heavier teaching loads, insecurity caused by contract status, little input into or control over teaching assignments, lack of time for research, relegation of their research role, and their consequent devaluation as 'teaching-only' faculty" (Rajagopal, 2004, p. 18). Moreover, this current crisis of market-responsive higher education, which is signaled by disparity among academic workers, has disproportionately affected women and others from historically underrepresented groups (Field & Jones, 2016; Rajagopal, 2004).

Playing a New Role or a New Game?

Each of the narratives modeled above holds expectations for professors. In the elite university there were few expectations of societal involvement or political activism. The 1970s to 1990s evolved with new beliefs that professors were key parts of the economic and social institutions forming nations. As the acceleration of globalization created new links between countries and new mobility among the academic community in the 2000s, fragmentation and market–responsiveness have come to define academic work that must pursue excellence in order to contribute to a global economy, often at the expense of its members. Although the larger political–economic context of the world has driven this change in individual countries or provinces, the free market's lack of human protection has driven the public, over the past decade, to elect populist leaders who promise to protect them against the precarious forces of the market. In many cases this had led to further marketization and stratification of the higher education system. Professors, not typically in the voter demographic that elects populist leaders, are thus at risk of being seen once again as dwelling in an ivory tower, aloof from both the leadership and classes that do not access university education.

Implications: Future Crises and the Coronavirus

Society is calling Canada's professors to be many things, most recently changing in response to the market's demands. Within this quickly shifting context, the question of how to successfully weather a crisis is very important. Is the successful professor market–responsive, adapting to each new context in order to survive? Are they, as several studies in the U.S. have suggested, those who cleverly "play the game" by identifying the steps to success in their institutions and following those without hesitation (Airini et al., 2011; Bathmaker et al., 2013)? Or is there perhaps something more important at the core of academic work that continues throughout each decade, transcending all these fluctuating crises and changes in their expected role? In Canada, universities and their professors, while facing these ongoing crises and market–driven changes to their working conditions, still inhabit an institution that can offer an alternative space, contrasting both the neoliberal global economy and populist politics. The presence of a group of intellectuals, not driven by profit (their institutions are less innocent), detached from the political sphere and influencing the next generation of citizens, should not be understated.

The Crisis of Pandemic

It would be ideal if this historic overview of challenges facing Canada's professoriate was successful in illuminating, contextualizing, and solving each crisis. Instead, the only firm prediction this paper can offer is that professors, like personnel in sectors all across Canada, will face future crises, both unexpected and expected. Since the latter category allows for some anticipation of these future events, this paper concludes by outlining current tensions in public discourse that have become and will likely continue to be the focus of professors' self–reflective academic pursuits in coming days (Goedegebuure & Meek, 2021; Norris, 2020).

Foremost on everyone's mind at the time of writing is the COVID-19 pandemic. The ongoing spread of the virus required a rapid shift to online instruction and course delivery for education at all levels in Canada in March 2020. University professors were, once again, asked to take on new roles: the adaptable online instructor and the creative distanced researcher. For many professors at smaller institutions, already engaged with flexible delivery modes, this journey, while challenging was not uncharted. For other institutions, particularly those with large science infrastructures, the shift was unprecedented. Likewise, in professors' research activities, new modes of communication and collaboration were needed to sustain and complete projects virtually. On top of all these elements was the recurring crisis of declining mental health, requiring professors to care for their students, colleagues, and themselves. This global crisis will provide years of subject matter for higher education scholars as the nature and extent of the change to university work is assessed and evaluated.

Using the historic approach in this paper, it is possible to suggest some important themes of inquiry that will need to be explored in order to understand the crisis of the COVID-19 pandemic more fully. First, the experiences of women and historically underrepresented groups will be different than their Anglo or male colleagues and need to be deeply understood. Since most professors are now working from home, the nature of home life and distinct conceptions of "home" among different socio-cultural groups may have implications for differing experiences of academic work. Second, there will likely be criticism of professors' responses and abilities to adapt during the COVID crisis. These discourses will need to be examined, particularly for what they tell us about the expectations society has for the role professors fulfill. Historically, professors were the central governing and producing members of universities. However, the past 70 years have seen a new host of departments and offices within universities at different levels of management (Jones, 2013). In the current crisis, the shift to online instruction and research was in many cases only possible with the technological and advising support of other departments at the university. New research is needed to examine the networks of instruction and research production that allow universities to press ahead and whether this weakened or strengthened professors' influence at universities.

Although COVID-19 has greatly overshadowed many other crises that were brewing in the past few years, it should not be the only one to demand future study. Other crises that will provide significant room for investigation include the polarization of political views, exacerbated by online discourses and social media, which has sparked both a "boycott culture" and loud debates over free speech (Littler, 2005); the decline of public trust in science, particularly interesting in this pandemic phase; the ideological position of professors and their rights as public intellectuals; and finally, the heightened pressure and increased infrastructure that positions professors as chasers of research funding (see Acker & McGinn article in this issue).

Conclusion

A historic analysis of the crises that have faced the Canadian professoriate indicates that these crises emerge when there is a change in society's expectations of professors' role and contribution. In the 1960s, as professors were increasingly expected to educate the workforce, this came into conflict with their past role as elite intellectuals. By the time their new role became codified through union activities in the 1990s, the diverse groups were showing the limitations of identifying professors as a homogeneous group. Likewise, by the 2000s, the narrative of market-responsive higher education once again changed society's expectations of professors. Undergirding these changes were massive social shifts in labour rights, activism, immigration, and more recently market-oriented policies related to academic work. In each era, Canada's professors are reshaped and redefined into new professional roles that meet the changing times. As the professoriate in Canada moves forward, a collective memory of past crises is needed to approach new challenges with the responsiveness and adaptability of the past.

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