

The Third University: reformulating principles and priorities to create new places of learning

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This paper argues that in many cases a campus as “a quintessential place of learning - a place for contemplation, conversation, reflection, and creating and disseminating knowledge” - does not reflect the reality of the contemporary university. We examine the effects of several powerful forces at work within the academy that create tensions and constraints on teaching and learning. These include socio-economic compulsions that result in university policies that embrace a business model and accept a managerial approach to administration, and increasingly, to curriculum. We challenge the unreflective embrace of the neoliberal idea of ongoing economic growth as an unchallenged positive. This tendency furthers the interests of university-as-business, while detracting from the interests of the university as site of pedagogy and research. We question the wisdom that has universities measure and express their own value almost exclusively in quantitative terms, a calculation that fails to address academic purposes in general, and fails in particular to describe achievements within humanities disciplines, which require qualitative approaches and analyses. We consider directions the education ‘industry’ has taken, with a particular focus on the problematic use of different ‘dialects’ in common use – whether scientific, or overly-specialised, or corporate. We propose speaking in clearer language and inventing other narratives. Universities are currently embracing the narrative of growth-as-essential and of the economic imperative as the only reality. However, a story is just a story, not an immutable fact, but a perception, subject to change.