

PTSP Fall 2023 Retreat, Boulder, CO (11/3/23)

“The Discrepancies between the Neoliberal Marketing of the University and its Academic Realities”

Andy Martin, CU Boulder

I wrote a very short description about the cost of higher education when I was chair that helped me frame some of my thinking about how to "personalize" the professional expectations of individuals in the department. I do think there are some interesting nuggets here that I thought might elicit some perspective from you.

https://docs.google.com/presentation/d/1-4Q5793_vFA66aCOIYsPgO10h18n_nQfdqibVPnvH9Y/edit?usp=sharing

Curious about your thoughts..

<https://docs.google.com/document/d/1gbnG9Ke96U02dNDiuJANTK2azhC37HFzEZanDBuLPhI/edit?usp=sharing>

I have arrived at similar numbers taking two different paths that follow the money, so I think my numbers are close to the truth. As you might imagine, I have a whole bunch of numbers that reveal systemic and buttressed inequity.

Thanks for sharing this well-researched document (for which students' tuition paid \$98...). I have two questions associated with this: first, who is the audience? second, why do you reduce the attendance costs of CU Boulder students to instructions?

Explanation for the first question: your report sounds like a grievance, and if it is, it may be at paying for white privileged males (administrators) or researchers among the faculty what you frame as inequitable salaries. Do students and their families care who gets paid what amount? Where is the waste here? Though structural in its analysis, the report may be misread as a grievance of some faculty members against others... so, it seems to address the lack of transparency for what students and their families should know about Boulder, but in fact addressed to the President and Board of Regents.

Explanation of the second question: this relates to the first question as well: is the running assumption of this report that CU Boulder is a teaching institution (like a community college or small liberal arts colleges where research isn't expected)? Wouldn't you agree that research undergirds faculty teaching (even for those who do not teach at all but contribute to the production of knowledge others teach)? Aren't students and their families paying for the "brand," which if marketed well includes the reputation of the faculty because of their research? Moreover, all the tangibles associated with college education aren't calculated or even calculatable... finally, one could argue that scholars in training (graduate students) who teach and get paid pitifully little gain valuable experience and are paid to receive their MAs and PhDs. The abuse of part-time and precarious faculty is another matter and to achieve that we'd need to reduce non-academic services on campuses drastically to achieve some modicum of fairness.

I don't know if this is helpful at all. If you are interested, we could devote an hour at the next retreat to have a session on this report (or a variant of it)?

Thanks for your comments.

I agree with everything you wrote and my intention was not to write this as a grievance. Instead, I was motivated to try to calculate or estimate, in \$\$\$, the social value of teaching and research at an institute where, at face value, teaching and research are valued identically, at least for faculty engaged in scholarship (i.e. we have a 40:40 contract). It also highlighted for me that some of us, based on historical decisions, end up teaching more than others, and rather than being compensated more (using the SCH formula that defines our budget), we are paid less. (The we is rhetorical.) Moreover, at CU, students in A&S are paying faculty in Engineering through a subsidy program that is unfair and departs from the "SCH-anchored" budget model.

I don't have an audience, and I don't see a compelling reason to create a document with an audience. I shared this because I mentioned it to you two happy hours ago and last week's happy hour reminded me of it.

One of my goals when I was chair was to create opportunities for research active faculty to teach enough students that it paid their salaries (which it turns out is not that many, in the neighborhood of 50 per year) and that they teach in ways that maximize the synergy between teaching and research. For this to work, we need to have well trained teaching professors teaching our core "survey" courses, and ideally, we need to make it evident to everyone that being able to be in the productive envelope of synergy between teaching and research depends on having well trained and well valued teaching professors teaching the large, tuition-grounded population of students. So, when I was chair, I strongly advocated for hiring well trained teaching professors at higher salaries to teach our 1000 and 2000 level class with class sizes that range from 50-100. The subsidy of our research mission would be clear, but less inequitable. Currently, I have individual faculty who teach 1500 students a year and do so poorly, a situation that maintains the status quo flow of resources and continues a culture of devaluing the students who make it possible for us to live. Additionally, the faculty who do carry large SCH loads are paid a low salary relative to area high schools.

Also, as you note, the financial burden of the administration is not explicitly included. One of the things that has always bothered me is that departments do not receive an equitable cut of the revenue they generate. If the model is really SCH-based, then each department should be compensated at a level consistent with their overall workload determined by number of students taught (and other related things) and that departments should have incentives (largely financial) to collaborate and revenue share. But alas, the food chain is inverted, and the money flows to the top and then trickles down. The last trickle down financial structure was disastrous (Reaganism); trickle down does not do good things for democratic and collective function that is essential for higher education (IMO).

At any rate, because I do not have any power to enact change (and this was no different when I was chair), my attempt at following the money helped me clarify where I fit in the University ecosystem and caused me to better calibrate time and value assigned to particular tasks, and to remind me that the only reason I have the job I do is because of the students that pay tuition.

Also, I don't reduce the cost to instruction; there is a division of cost in our budget model: roughly half of tuition goes to admin/infrastructure etc and the rest funds instruction. That's a division of flow evident in the CU budget. Also, regarding your question "Do students and their families care who gets paid what amount? Where is the waste here?"

My short answer is I doubt it. And I am not implying there is waste. I am implying that the campus' claim of transparency of cost is not fully transparent, and that my issue is about equity. One example is the campus implementation of the EPEWA cost adjustment. Our department went from gender equity (no difference in average pay between genders by rank) to extreme gender inequity and increased compression. But what was perhaps even worse was that the budget model assigned a value of zero to assistant professors (regardless of gender), and the campus refused to provide any data (only the models). There were assistant professors who were well under market value who watched the most senior (and well paid) faculty in the department receive raises that were more than 33% of their (asst professors) salary. I made these data public to the department; this was something the chair did rather than the folks who crafted and implemented the inequitable "equal pay for equal work act" action.

Finally, you raise some very important issues. " Aren't students and their families paying for the "brand," which if marketed well includes the reputation of the faculty because of their research? Moreover, all the tangibles associated with college education aren't calculated or even calculatable... finally, one could argue that scholars in training (graduate students) who teach and get paid pitifully little gain valuable experience and are paid to receive their MAs and PhDs. The abuse of part-time and precarious faculty is another matter and to achieve that we'd need to reduce non-academic services on campuses drastically to achieve some modicum of fairness."

Regarding your first question, I am not sure. The only data I have seen come from exit surveys of students, and academics did not appear in the top 10 list of benefits gained from attending CU. Not sure about CS campus.

I would argue that we have actively resisted quantifying all the intangibles, but some can be quantified. One of the most glaring is that the cost of higher education is exclusive, so one of the intangibles is reinforcing socioeconomic norms and supporting the success of individuals with inter-generational wealth. This is probably the intangible with the largest effect size.

The graduate training issue is a hot mess and amazing depending on the program. Lots to talk about.

It seems like it would be great to have conversations about any or all of the questions that come up when we think about the cost of higher education and whether our revenue is being spent in ways that make things better or simply prop up the status quo.