

# CHAPTER 1

## Reinventing the University

*Frank H. T. Rhodes*

### INTRODUCTION

**D**uring the course of the next few days we shall examine almost every aspect of the life and the work of the university, asking ourselves the question of what “reinvention” implies. I want, at the outset, to say that I think reinventing the university is at the extreme end of a spectrum of possibilities for changing the institution as we know it. These possibilities go all the way from reinvention – and presumably replacement – through reform, renewal, refocus to retention and reinforcement. Which of these possible changes do we seek? I ask this question, not simply to be pedantic, but to pose the more serious question: Is the university in need of reinvention or renewal?

Reinvention is a radical conception, especially for an institution that has existed for a millennium and is still vigorous, and for which there is no single model or style. And if reinvention implies the replacement of the existing university by some alternative structure, what institution or structure would we propose to respond either to existing needs or to impending needs? “Reinvention” suggests that the existing university is either unwilling or unable to meet those societal needs. Is that really the case?

I propose to limit my comment to the American university. There are in the United States some 3,600 institutions of higher education. That number is doubled or trebled when universities of other nations are considered. The American university, to some extent unlike that of other lands, has no single model, no single membership, no single pattern of organization, no single aim, no single style, no single method of finance, no single method of government. Each of the 3,600 universities and colleges is an individual institution which, although one may identify 8 to 10 institutional categories, has its own distinctive, mission, style and ethos. Though the universities of

other nations are less heterogeneous, each of these, in turn, has a distinctive style and a distinctive history. To speak of “reinventing” the university as though the university were a single institutional type is to underestimate the enormous variability of higher education in responding to the broader needs of society.

It is also worth recalling that the university in its long history of a thousand years has proved a remarkably adaptable and flexible institution. Indeed, it might be argued that, apart from the Catholic Church, it is the oldest institution in the Western Hemisphere. Clark Kerr has reminded us that “taking, as a starting point, 1530, when the Lutheran Church was founded, some 66 institutions that existed then still exist today in the western world in recognizable forms: the Catholic Church, the Lutheran Church, the Parliaments of Iceland and the Isle of Man, and 62 universities. They have experienced wars, revolutions, depressions, and industrial transformations, and have come out less changed than almost any other segment of their societies.”

In an age of rapid corporate openings and closures and of institutional origins and extinctions it is to be noted that the longevity of the university of the Western world reflects not only its immutability of purpose, but its extraordinary skill in adapting and applying its services to societal needs. That adaptability has sometimes been slow and sometimes begrudging; it has frequently been in response to external pressures and threats; it has proceeded both by nationwide change and by individual institutional change, but it has nevertheless been real and substantial. And it still continues. Current changes are, perhaps, as significant as any in the last 100 years.

Though there is no unity of particular programme, membership, governance, finance, or style in the university, there is, perhaps, a broad unity of function. The typical university combines higher education and advanced research and scholarship so as to serve the public good. The balance between those three activities varies greatly from institution to institution and, to some extent, from country to country and from region to region, but their interconnectedness is what is distinctive about higher education.

In considering the possibility of the reinvention of the university it is also worth recalling that the governments of many Western countries have encouraged a target enrolment pattern of some 45-50 % of their college-age population, 18-22 year olds. This reflects, presumably, the general agreement that university education produces not only personal gain, but also contributes to the public good. This contribution to the public good is of immense significance in the contemporary world. It involves not only general education and cultural enrichment, but also professional training and certification, lifelong education, the inculcation of democratic values, the provision of social mobility, the pursuit of fundamental research, the development of

advanced technology, the provision of advanced medical care and public health, support for agricultural development, material resources, conservation and economic development. In each one of these areas the universities play a notable role, some in all these areas, others in a more limited range; but overall the contribution to national wealth and wellbeing provided by the universities is of growing significance in the life of all developed and many developing nations.

What then requires “reinvention”? Is it the university as an institution? Is it the purpose of the university? Is it the performance of the university? Is it the governance of the university? Is it the membership of the university? Is it the balance between its various responsibilities? Is it its responsiveness to public needs and demands, or is it some other aspect of the life of the university? These questions require discussion.

Furthermore, is reinvention and, by implication, replacement, the most responsible method of change for universities? Perhaps a milder form of change involving rethinking, reform, or refocus would be more appropriate. Perhaps we should think of retaining the university, but refinancing its various activities. Perhaps we should think of restoring the universities to the levels of individual support they once enjoyed. Perhaps we should think about reinforcing the university in its role or renewing the ageing facilities of its campus.

All these options are available to us, but only reinvention involves the replacement of the existing broad model of the university by some alternative institutional structure.

Why is it that at this particular time, we face the call for reinvention of the university? It is, I suppose, because societal needs and pressures are now seen by some as so intense that they threaten to overwhelm the structures we have created to respond to them. Let me examine these pressures as they affect the American situation. What, we should ask, lies behind the proposed reinvention of the university? Why is there pressure, or perhaps need, to reinvent the institution?

It seems to me there are four different kinds of pressure, all of them now growing more intense. First, pressures of need and opportunity seem now to be more varied and more intense than those of earlier years. These include not only pressing and growing societal needs, challenges and programmes, but also the scientific, medical and technological opportunities that abound. These latter opportunities exist not simply as mental challenges and intellectual opportunities, but also as direct methods of responding to pressing social needs and contributing to the broader public welfare. Opportunity pressures involve burgeoning society needs, from failing public schools to crumbling physical infrastructures to dysfunctional health-care systems. At the same time, there are growing demands on the expertise of virtually all the major

professions and all this in an atmosphere of litigation and complaint. Furthermore, the growing scientific and technological means and opportunities to respond to these needs place heavy professional demands and obligations on the university. Health care and education, for example, on a national level, involve the employment and professional contributions of people trained in the university's laboratories, hospitals and classrooms. Furthermore, success in grasping these opportunities now results in intense inter-institutional competition, with all the pressures that accompany it because some of these challenges exist on such a scale that smaller institutions are incapable of undertaking the educational and scholarly work required. Only institutions with major resources and facilities can provide the necessary contributions.

Financial pressures are also extreme, both for public and for private universities. For public universities, the budgetary shortfalls being experienced in virtually all the states have led to severe curtailment of state support for higher education. In some cases, the reductions range from 10 % to 20 %, but few institutions have been spared some significant financial loss. In some cases, these reductions have been imposed in the middle of the academic year.

For private institutions, the declining levels of institutional endowments have forced significant reductions in operating budgets. Since most operating budgets are based on the three-year rolling average of the returns on investment, the most severe operating budget reductions are only now beginning to take effect, but they are, in many cases, as severe as those being experienced by public universities. For both public and private universities, the burdens of federal requirements and reporting are also severe, and the general deterioration in the economic and fiscal environment poses significant long-term problems for the funding of higher education. There is also the added complication that federal tax policies that are needed to stimulate the economy, may, or may not, benefit higher education. Congress has still to re-authorize the higher education act that regulates federal student financial aid programmes. The level of support for this legislation is of critical interest to the universities.

In the midst of these pressures, the level of support from donors, sponsors and foundations has also declined, largely as a result of the same reversals in the stock market that have impacted institutional endowment support. Many foundations have now cut back significantly in their support for higher education, and gift levels to universities, though steady in a few cases, are in most cases showing declines.

The impact of these various financial pressures has resulted in two other kinds of secondary financial pressures on the universities. First, demand for student financial aid has shown sharp increases, as the families of under-

graduates have themselves been exposed to financial pressures. Second, local community needs have increased sharply, as a result of lost tax revenues and declining employment, and have placed added demands on the university for local contributions and support.

Accessibility pressures are also playing a part in leading some to demand reinvention of the university. Overall enrolments over the last few decades have increased steadily and the composition of each entering class shows increasing social diversity in the presence of non-traditional undergraduates and of those from previously under-represented communities. This creates two distinct challenges. On the one hand, the increasing numbers of both non-traditional and previously under-represented students means that there are some who, not having enjoyed the benefit of a superior high-school education, are less well prepared than others. On the other hand, there is now a major challenge before the Supreme Court to the University of Michigan's admissions programmes, both at the undergraduate level and in the Law School. The whole future of affirmative action is at present unclear, but the issue is not likely to go away.

The other enrolment pressure involves not admission, but retention and graduation. There is widespread concern at the dropout rate of individuals of all groups before graduating. This is a conspicuous statistic and is widely seen by the public as an example of either instructional inefficiency or academic waste, or both.

Accountability pressures are also a matter of increasing importance. These involve funding-agency pressures, not all of them governmental, pressures for economy in the use of resources and efficiency in the achievement of results. Nowhere are the pressures for accountability more conspicuous than in areas of quality assessment. Traditionally, the universities have enjoyed the privilege of self-regulation, but some are now confronted with the threat of standardized tests imposed by the states, sometimes on graduating seniors, to assure the quality of their product. In contrast to earlier voluntary accreditation, some public institutions are now confronting the prospect of state validation, authorization, regulation and prescription in the award of degrees. Republican leaders of the U.S. House of Representatives are reported to be looking "for ways to hold colleges more accountable for the performance of their students and to curb increases in the institutions' prices." (Chronicle 2003). This would represent a fundamental change in institutional autonomy and one that has the potential for serious damage.

Added to the pressures for economy and efficiency, there is also the pressure, both internal and external, for relevance. One sees, for example, the decline in applicants for admission to courses in science and engineering, both in North America and in the U.K. One sees the same call for relevance in the case of those who argue for less emphasis on the traditional liberal arts

and more on “relevant training”. Even strong departments with established reputations are now facing a lack of sustainability because of a lack of student numbers. The debate concerning targeted research, as opposed to speculative research, is also becoming more sharply defined.

In all these areas the question of balance becomes fundamentally important and this is rarely achieved by external imposition. It tends to be achieved rather by refined and sensitive internal adjustments, and it is these that may be threatened by excessive external control. This is as true in the instructional area as it is in research and development.

One particular area of both public and internal discontent is the subject of inter-collegiate athletics. With increasing frequency, universities, both large and small, have been accused of serious lapses of moral and financial responsibility in pursuing athletic competition. Unless universities show more responsibility in self-regulation, it seems increasingly likely that increased external regulation may be imposed.

In the area of research and development, three particular pressures have recently emerged. The first concerns ethical issues involved, for example, in stem-cell research. The realization that the number of stem-cell lines available for biomedical research is now significantly smaller under federal regulations than was originally supposed, will create increasing ethical issues on many campuses. Furthermore, the whole question of commercialization, not only of research and development, but of such university services as distance learning, imposes both potential hazards and potential benefits. The use of human subjects has also become a matter of public concern in both research and development and in the broader area of patient care, clinical trials and public-health studies. Well-publicized lapses in these areas are likely to bring growing external pressure for reform.

Added to all these issues is that of homeland security. Colleges and universities are now required to implement three significant acts, the U.S.A. Patriot Act, the Border Security Act and the Bio-Terrorism Preparedness and Response Act, each of which has the potential to intrude into areas of traditional campus responsibility. The latter act, for example, strengthens federal oversight over bio-hazardous materials.

It is, presumably, the sum total of these pressures which leads some to call for the “reinvention” of the university.

## **AREAS OF POTENTIAL CHANGE**

As one looks at both these pressures and at the external and internal critiques of the university, it becomes clear that there are at least four major areas of concern: the mission, goals and scale of individual universities, performance, costs and outreach. Let me refer to each of these in turn.

It is now clear that, while each nation and each state has a broad series of goals and aims for its universities, any reinvention of the American university is likely to proceed largely on an institution-by-institution basis. This is notwithstanding the fact that the performance of individual institutions will be greatly influenced by national, state, and even local policies and support. It becomes essential, therefore, for each institution to develop an unambiguous statement of its mission, goals, broad programmes and scale. This statement will require agreement between the institution, its governors, its faculty, and its external constituents, whether those represented by a state legislature, on the one hand, or the major donors who support institutional ventures, on the other. Only by developing clearly articulated and broadly acceptable statements of mission, goals and programmes, can there be any meaningful discussion of the effectiveness of individual institutions. Do those various missions and goals require "reinvention" and, if so, why?

Institutional performance is clearly the focus of many concerns and criticisms that now confront the universities. There is widespread public concern that commitment to research may become less a foundation than a distraction from undergraduate teaching. There is some scepticism that an expensive education at a major research institution is more effective for the undergraduate than the experience at some less prestigious liberal arts institution. Whatever the merits of these questions, there is clearly a need within the universities for sustained attention to the nature and quality of undergraduate education, in which all long-standing dogmas are scrutinized and justified.

The same is true of graduate education which, at the doctorate level, is still chiefly focused on the production of scholars and professorial teachers. At the master's level the situation is rather healthier, but the whole question of graduate education, its duration, its purpose and its costs, needs serious study, as does its articulation to undergraduate education.

Professional education requires, perhaps, the most scrutiny of all. To take but one basic question. How do we justify four years of undergraduate preparation for, say, business, medical, dental or legal training in the United States when our European colleagues, almost without exception, begin these studies at the undergraduate level? Is there a cultural assumption here, or are the educational differences between the high school experiences so great that the difference in professional training is justified? Furthermore, what evidence can we produce that one system or another better prepares practitioners and professionals?

Maintaining integrity in teaching, research and commercialization is a lurking problem for us on the campuses, but emerges, from time to time, with stories of scientific fraud, or lack of balance in teaching or lack of due process

in appeals. The university lives or dies by its integrity and we need to take these concerns seriously, dealing with them promptly as they occur.

Faculty appointments are seen by some informed external observers as particularly indulgent sinecures. Tenure is under attack by some as a shelter for the incompetent or the unconcerned. Do we need to continue to employ and defend tenure? Is a five-year rolling contract something whose time has come?

The third area concerns costs and is related, not only to the quality of product, whether represented by the skills of a recent graduate or the value of a research contribution, but also to the whole question of the roles of state and federal governments in meeting the differing costs of higher education. The role of state governments in financing public universities has declined steadily over the last three decades as a proportion of the total income of the institutions involved. I see no short-term likelihood that this trend will be reversed and some indications that it will not. Coupled to this has been the steady and rapid increase in tuition fees at both private and public universities. At the better private universities and colleges, tuition, room and board now run from \$35,000- \$40,000 a year. Multiplying that by four years, it is clear that even wealthy families face a formidable burden in providing education for their children. For lower-income families, financial aid is available on a substantial scale, but we need to rethink the whole question of tuition and fees in relation to financial aid and public support. Many upper-middle-income or wealthy parents now receive the benefit of state subsidies at public institutions. There is nothing inherently wrong with this, but we need to inquire whether there are better ways of employing public support for higher education.

Linked to the question of the responsibility for financial support is the question of effectiveness of internal management. The revolt of a significant number of Harvard alumni in recent months over what they regarded as inadequate purchasing practices at the university has highlighted what many external critics see as inadequate management within the academy. Because we profess to teach effective management in our business schools, we must also exemplify it in our own practices.

A not insignificant question that continues to arise is the responsibility for supporting R & D on the campus. Although the federal government, foundations, corporations and others provide generous support here, there is still concern that some of the costs of R & D are offset as a portion of the tuition payments. The clarification of funding of research would facilitate the broader debate over higher educational costs.

Outreach is a fourth area that calls for significant review. It has been argued that the problems of contemporary society are such that they call for the development of a newly designed land-grant programme, which would

embrace the range of societal and technological problems in much the same way that the earlier land-grant programme embraced the agricultural problems of the nation. This is clearly a matter of huge significance and involves the question of partnerships between the academy and its neighbouring communities on a significant scale. It may be argued that the creation of broader partnerships will dilute the independence and integrity of the university, but the century-and-a-half of the existence of the land-grant programme scarcely supports such a thesis. Whether or not one accepts the possibility of expanding the land-grant programme itself, the pressing problem remains of how best to harness the expertise and experience of the universities in addressing the myriad social challenges that now confront us, ranging from the deplorable state of the nation's public schools to the inadequate provision of health care in poorer communities.

The nation's universities have already been harnessed in the areas of science and technology, but there is no comparable programme for linking their skills in areas of broader societal need. I believe this is, perhaps, the most urgent priority confronting the universities.

### **WHAT SHOULD NOT CHANGE?**

If we are serious about the need to “reinvent”, or at least refocus the university, we should, I think, be careful to ask ourselves what should not change. Alfred North Whitehead once declared that the art of progress is to preserve order amid change and to preserve change amid order. What, then, should not change as we contemplate reinvention of the university? It seems to me that there are five fundamental powers of the university that should not be eliminated, modified or reduced. These include the power to select, admit, instruct and certify or graduate students in fields that are represented by the institution, power to select what to teach and how to teach, the freedom to study, explore and publish on any topic, the power to accept funds and create partnerships and the autonomy of the institution and the independence of its governance.

Any erosion of any one of those responsibilities seems to me to threaten the idea of the university. This is a topic worth discussion for, although there are clear limits to some of the powers I am describing – for example, the power to accept funds from donors deemed dishonest, or the power to create partnerships with destructive organizations – in broad principle each of those powers defines the identity of the university.

### **IS SIGNIFICANT REFORM POSSIBLE?**

We have analysed the pressures for reform, examined the areas of possible reform and described those powers that should not be reformed. A further

question remains. Is reform possible? Historically, we may take some comfort from the fact that, in addition to the constant internal renewal and reform that universities have shown over the centuries of their existence, public pressures and needs have led to major changes. The Land Grant Act signed by Abraham Lincoln in 1862 changed forever the role of the nation's great public institutions. The G.I. Bill of 1945 changed forever the accessibility of America's universities and colleges. The Vannevar Bush report to President Roosevelt of 1945 changed forever the relationship between science in the academy and sponsorship by the federal government. In more recent years, affirmative-action legislation and the Dole Baye Act had comparable effects. There is no lack of evidence that universities are capable of adaptation in the face of emerging national needs and are responsive to societal programmes.

In our present world, it seems to me that the most fundamental needs of nations and groups of nations depend on the provision of six qualities and services, in each of which the university plays a significant role. A healthy nation requires an educated workforce, effective professional services, economic self-sufficiency, sustainable development, effective health and nutritional programmes, wise governance and national security. In each of these, the university has a role to play, especially in the first five. Indeed, the work of the university is inseparable from the creation of an educated workforce and the provision of effective professional services. Economic self-sufficiency flows from the effectiveness of those two groups and sustainable development and conservation depend, in part, on programmes developed largely within the campus. The same is true for health and nutrition. It seems unlikely, therefore, that the functions of a university will soon be in need of replacement. One might argue, in fact, that they become more urgent as one looks at the future.

Could the university serve society better in performing those functions? Surely it could, though not perhaps when many individual universities are themselves severely underfunded.

The question, therefore, is likely to be one of balance. Balance between the external demand for performance and progress and internal priorities and inertia. Balance between the view of undergraduates as consumers and of the view of them as students. Balance between accountability and autonomy. Balance between knowledge as power and knowledge as enlightenment. Balance between public prescription and the public good.

All this argues for me, at least, that there is not a case for reinventing the university, but rather a case for refocusing and reforming it. The university itself is the greatest invention of the second millennium. It is the most effective institution yet devised for the maintenance of human culture, the advancement of knowledge and the humane service of society. If it is to play a more constructive role in humanity's future, it requires not "reinvention"

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but renewal. That will require internal courage and external support. As Lord Chesterfield once said: “No man should tamper with a university who does not know and love it well.” This is a useful caution as we employ terms such as “reinventing” the university.

## REFERENCES

Chronicle (2003). <http://chronicle.com/daily/2003/05/2003051401u.htm>