

Employment Relations in the New American Academy

Panel Proposal for the Annual LERA conference, June 1-4, 2017
("Jobs, Opportunity and Equality in the New World of Work")

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Focus/Fit of Panel

This panel explores the consequences of rising contingent work arrangements on employment relations across the American academy in order to develop ideas about potential improvements in labor practices. The structure of the panel is that of a **workshop among practitioners, facilitated by academic analysis**. As such, it serves LERA's core mission of bringing together different stakeholders to discuss how research-based practices can facilitate better work environments for everyone. Moreover, it probes head-on the conference theme of the new world of work.

Background

Forces of disruption have engulfed American higher education, increasing the contingency of work arrangements and strengthening polarization. Broader trends in the country's political economy – including the financialization of economic activity and the privatization of public authority – have deeply affected the sector. By altering the distribution of power in the academy, they have underwritten a turn away from shared governance toward managerial leadership.

The academy's labor system is increasingly tiered, including tenure-track (TT), non-tenure-track (NTT) and adjunct faculty, as well as graduate students (Betensky 2016; Daniel 2016; Greenberg 2014; Weinbaum and Page 2014). The panel focuses on the interests of different groups of employees, their strategies for collective interest representation, and the conflicts that emerge between them. While the emphasis will be on the contemporary United States, historical comparisons and references to other rich democracies will provide additional analytical leverage.

Crucial questions include: How can new conflicts be addressed in sustainable ways? How can the interests of different groups of workers be aligned, so as to let them see their class interests rather than merely follow their individual producer preferences (Streeck 1992)? How can practitioners bring together broader publics, workers, students and management behind broader strategies to pursue the common good (Eaton 2017; Eaton and Weir 2015; Lybarger 2017)? How can solidarity be sustained organizationally?

This discussion is of great significance, because higher education has arguably moved to the center of rich democracies' efforts to sustain economic growth and provide social investment. Policymakers never tire of emphasizing universities' crucial contributions to innovation and social inclusion as the sector has come to serve evermore students.

Internally, however, universities are deeply challenged. Beset by Baumol's cost disease and suffering from public authorities' failure to increase funding in line with growing enrollments,

cost pressures have risen. Tuition fees and student debt have reached new record levels. While disillusionment with inherited delivery models has spread, hopes for technology-powered productivity increases through flipped classrooms and massive open online courses (MOOCs) have also waned.

Contributions/Outline

Tobias Schulze-Cleven (Rutgers-SMLR) will moderate the panel.

Political scientist **Susanne Lohmann (UCLA)** launches the discussion by reporting her research under the heading of “**IT Doesn’t Matter ... in the Research University.**” Her presentation will use comparative geographic and temporal leverage (the “Privatdozentenelend” in the German research university of the 19th century) to probe the rise of contingent faculty employment in the American university of today. According to her, academic labor is expensive (not only because professors research and teach, but also because they are involved in various governance and service activities), and it becomes ever more so (Baumol’s cost disease). But there is no alternative. If the American university does not solve its labor problem (i.e. doesn’t not use more regular faculty and find a way of paying for them even if it’s ever more expensive), it will become dysfunctional in (roughly) the same way the German research university eventually became dysfunctional. Moreover, according to her, information technology won’t solve the problem, given that as going online (etc) won’t save money, won’t scale up, and so forth. At the end of the day, research university teaching is expensive and labor-intensive, and will remain so. The matter is different if your goal is for students to get empty credentials, then of course you can have a factory that creates massive amounts of credentials on the cheap. But if your goal is for students to actually learn something that will lead to them being productive citizens and professionals, there is no alternative to the expensive and labor-intensive kind of teaching we do currently.

The panel will then turn to representatives of three groups involved in employment relations:

- **John Cioffi**, elected Vice-Chair of the Academic Senate at UC Riverside will speak from the vantage point of tenure-track faculty;
- **Robert Samuels**, President University of California-AFT (NTT Faculty & Librarians) will speak for non-tenure-track faculty;
- **Steven Brint**, outgoing Vice Provost for Undergraduate Education at UC Riverside, will speak based on his experiences in university administration.

Academic specialists in the sector’s employment relations will respond: **Adrienne Eaton (Rutgers-SMLR)**, **Daniel Mitchell (UCLA)** and – via Skype – **Ron Ehrenberg (Cornell-ILR)**.

Thereafter, a productive discussion will develop with the audience. The room for high-quality reflections is extremely high, because many participants have experience serving in multiple roles.

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