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Neoliberalism, massification and teaching transformative politics and international relations

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Abstract

'Massification' describes the significant increase in the proportion of the global population seeking tertiary qualifications. It is a defining feature of the global international education sphere and is often seen as linked to negative outcomes such as declining academic standards and increasing managerialism in universities. Massification, however, is not wholly or even mostly a negative for the generations of new students who now have access to tertiary education. Education can still be a transformative experience for students exposed to a rich learning environment. The question this symposium raises is how the disciplines of politics and international relations can ensure they maintain quality teaching and learning for students from subject design to program design. The collection aims to initiate a disciplinary debate in Australia, which has hitherto been missing.

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SYMPOSIUM

NEOLIBERALISM, MASSIFICATION AND TEACHING TRANSFORMATIVE POLITICS AND INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS

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ABSTRACT

'Massification' describes the significant increase in the proportion of the global population seeking tertiary qualifications. It is a defining feature of the global international education sphere and is often seen as linked to negative outcomes such as declining academic standards and increasing managerialism in universities. Massification, however, is not wholly or even mostly a negative for the generations of new students who now have access to tertiary education. Education can still be a transformative experience for students exposed to a rich learning environment. The question this symposium raises is how the disciplines of politics and international relations can ensure they maintain quality teaching and learning for students from subject design to program design. The collection aims to initiate a disciplinary debate in Australia, which has hitherto been missing.

Keywords: Australian qualifications framework (AQF), massification, neoliberalism, teaching and learning

... the miniscule proportion of the world's students who attend the most selective research universities worldwide are already quite capable of learning and intellectual development, regardless of the teaching talent of their professors. For the colossal majority of students ... however, a capable cadre of teachers makes the difference between students dropping out (or graduating, but with minimal learning) versus real mastery of the discipline or the profession that the degree is meant to represent (Bernasconi 2015: 6).

'Massification' is a term coined to describe the significant increase in the proportion of the global population seeking tertiary qualifications (Molloy 2014). It is a defining feature of the global international education sphere and is proceeding apace: '[g]lobal enrollments now stand at more than 150 million, having doubled in just a few decades, and it is likely that there will be another 100 million added by 2020' (Altbach 2015: 4). It is also a primary impetus behind many 'reform' programs for higher education internationally along with neoliberal concerns to tighten public expenditures. The recent attempts by the Australian government to increase student contributions and fees can be attributed to massification. Other effects include declining academic standards (Molloy 2014), the push for increased use of technology in teaching, the increasing diversity of providers, and the growth of managerialism in the university. Education is increasingly seen as a business focused on outputs and customer satisfaction, rather than a place of critical engagement and learning.

Massification, however, is not wholly or even mostly a negative for the generations of new students who now have access to tertiary education. Education can still be a transformative experience for students exposed to a rich learning environment. The question this symposium seeks to start addressing is how the disciplines of politics and international relations (PaIR) can ensure they maintain quality teaching and learning for students from subject design to program design. The collection aims to initiate a disciplinary debate in Australia, which has hitherto been missing.

Many of the pressures outlined here are not new but the combination of challenges mean that it is important to renew disciplinary debate and discussion about teaching. This call is not unique to Australia. The British journal

Politics has long devoted space to teaching and learning, yet in 2014 the editors called for an increased focus on pedagogy in the journal and discipline (Editorial 2014). They argued that despite efforts to promote teaching and learning by groups like the (British) Political Studies Association specialist group on Teaching and Learning in Politics and the annual Teaching and Learning conference of the American Political Science Association, attention, research and publishing on pedagogy in PaIR remains low.

Similarly, the Australian Political Studies Association (APSA) does not have a specialist group on teaching and learning. There have been few panels at recent APSA conferences and only a few articles on the topic in the *Australian Journal of Political Science* or other similar journals (Capling 2010; Ghazarian 2015; Lee-Koo 2015). Further, in contrast to the British and American associations, APSA does not offer an award for outstanding teaching or contributions to curriculum or pedagogic practices.¹

To this end, the symposium provides both macro and micro perspectives on the debate. This opening article sketches the broader context of the challenges to quality teaching and learning by outlining the historical evolution of massification in Australia and how this has linked to key challenges in teaching and learning, with a particular focus on PaIR. Susan Engel's paper explores how PaIR has responded to the curriculum challenges asked by the Australian Qualifications Framework (AQF), which itself was the government's answer to maintaining quality and competitiveness in the sector in the face of massification and related changes. The AQF called for a significant re-thinking of teaching programs. To the limited extent that this took place, it was done with little or no disciplinary discussions. Ann Capling (2010) has called for abandoning the smorgasbord approach to curriculum in PaIR and for increased systematisation in curriculum. The AQF has made this a requirement, but how seriously institutions have responded to this challenge varies widely across the sector. The article analyses the changes in 10 universities in both their PaIR (or international studies) programs. It examines directions in learning outcomes; the structure of programs including the use of cores, cornerstones and capstones; the place of methods and theory; and other developments in the programs.

Dan Halvorson's article switches the focus away from the macro level by examining how large first-year classes can maintain a focus on quality and student engagement. In the wake of the massification, first-year introductory courses are large and challenging to teach effectively. Students come from a diverse range of educational backgrounds and life experiences, and have different learning styles. These classes are the first contact most students have with PaIR disciplines and their first opportunity to reflect deeply and systematically on the broader world in which they live. The quality of the student experience in these courses is, therefore, crucial to the discipline's development, vitality and future success. The article canvasses a range of current strategies for teaching and managing these large introductory courses. Halvorson argues that a successful approach to improving the quality of first-year IR teaching is by running multiple streams, each of which works to enhance the learning needs of its particular cohort of learners.

PAIR IN THE AUSTRALIAN CONTEXT

In Australia, massification started with the Whitlam government's removal of fees for tertiary education and was given significant impetus by the Dawkins reforms of the late 1980s, which saw a whole new group of learners previously excluded enter tertiary education. The 2008 Review of Australian Higher Education (hereafter the Bradley Report), is the most recent spur to massification. It recommended the government introduce a 'demand-driven' system for the domestic student market. The Bradley Report endorsed allowing providers to set their own entry standards and enrolling as many students as they wished into eligible programs according to demand while continuing to receive government subsidies under the Commonwealth Supported Places (CSPs) scheme (Bradley, Noonan, Nugent and Scales 2008: 158). Legislation in June 2011, saw a modified version of the Bradley recommendations take effect from 2012, limiting the demand-driven system to undergraduate courses (with the

¹ There are still national teaching awards, though in the 2016 budget, the government announced the closure of the Office for Learning and Teaching. This has reduced support for scholarship on major improvements to teaching and learning (Moodie 2016).

exception of medicine) at public universities (Australian Government 2011). The 2014 *Review of the Demand Driven Funding System Report* recommended extending the current demand-driven model to sub-bachelor and postgraduate courses (Kemp and Norton 2014: 3).

A further dimension of massification was the opening of the sector to full fee-paying international students from the late-1980s. This saw education rapidly develop into Australia's third-largest export industry (Bradley et. al. 2008: 4). Thus the student cohort is heavily internationalised, with the number of international students increasing to 250,000 in 2007 from 21,000 in 1989. In the 2010s, Australia had the highest proportion of international students in the OECD and accounted for ten per cent of the total world market in higher education (Bradley et. al. 2008: 89). By the mid-2000s, 15 per cent of total tertiary income was derived from full fee-paying international students (Coates, Dobson, Edwards, Friedman, Goedegebuure and Meek 2009: 4). PaIR, like other Arts, Humanities and Social Sciences programs, does not have a high proportion of international students in undergraduate programs, however, at the postgraduate level they are often over half of the cohort. These students present challenges to teaching which are similar, or even more complex, than those of the new generation of Australian learners entering the system. Effectively teaching postgraduate PaIR with the mix of international, domestic, younger and mature age students is an area that deserves more study, though it is not a topic covered in this symposium.

Increased domestic enrolments resulting from the demand-driven system initially helped to offset the decline in international student numbers from 2009, which occurred as a result of the global financial crisis, strong Australian dollar, restrictions on migration policy and negative perceptions of the safety of international students in Australia. In mid-2012, a more favourable migration policy was reintroduced, and as anticipated, international student numbers have recovered (Knott, 2015). Indeed, it is thought they will increase substantially again by 2020 (Group of Eight 2014: 3).

Overall the number of students in Australian higher education has dramatically expanded. Between 2005 and 2010, the increase was around 25 per cent with numbers going from 957,000 to 1.2 million of which 72 per cent were domestic students (ABS, 2012), and by 2014 there were over 1.3 million students. Of those, 29.3 per cent were studying the Arts, which is around the same percentage as in 1962 using the Australian Bureau of Statistics category Society and Culture minus law and economics plus Creative Arts (Norton 2014: 23). The proportion of students studying just in Society and Culture grew by 62 per cent overall between 2005 and 2014, however, the number studying PaIR has grown nowhere near as quickly (Australian Government Department of Education and Training 2015). In the category Political Science and Policy Studies (which includes international relations), there were 8191 undergraduate EFTSLs and 10,736 EFTSLs in total in 2005 versus 8982 undergraduate EFTSLs in 2014 and 12,570 EFTSLs in total, in other words, growth of around 17 per cent on the overall totals, which is much lower than both the university-wide average and that of the Society and Culture category (Australian Government Department of Education and Training 2015).² This suggests there may be some issues in attracting students to the discipline.³

In Political Science and Policy Studies, there were 400 staff members in 2011 (an increase of one third since 1977). It is notable 'only seven universities have 20 or more staff and only four have 30 or more' (Weller and Cowan 2012: 307). The number of staff shows Australian programs are small compared to many Dutch and American universities (Weller and Cowan 2012), but overall Australian public universities are large compared to their overseas counterparts. The world's top universities have less than 20,000 enrolments and high proportions of postgraduate students. All of Australia's universities that are ranked in the world's top 200 have more than 20,000 students, the majority of which are undergraduates (Group of Eight 2014: 28).

² This was calculated using the Department of Education and Training, Higher Education Statistics for the relevant years. The data sheet was 'All Student Load,' whereas for the broad area of study the data sheet was 'All Students'.

³ Some subjects taught by PaIR academics may be classified in other areas of Society and Culture, with the two main issues being gender studies subjects are grouped under the category Studies in Human Society and some regional studies scholarship may fall under Studies in Human Society not elsewhere classified. However, these are small exceptions.

In terms of funding arrangements, the current direction is to diversify university income sources, have students contribute a greater proportion of the costs of their education, improve productivity and efficiency in the sector in part by introducing competitive, performance-based funding and allow private provision (Bradley et al., 2008: 4). With these cumulative changes Norton (2013: 57) argues the 'the publicly funded university system is now much more competitive' and that student 'choices have real and major financial consequences for universities'. This underlines the importance of maintaining the attractiveness of the discipline, particularly given the intensified competition signalled by the Abbott government's 2014 budget, which has not disappeared under the Turnbull government despite the rethink of fee deregulation announced in the 2016 budget.

The Bradley report (2008: 29) also aimed to broaden participation by under-represented equity groups. Thus PaIR, like other disciplines, is facing a larger student cohort from more diverse backgrounds and fewer resources. Data from the Department of Employment and Training (2015) shows that the number of students in Political Science and Policy Studies on a headcount basis is growing substantially across all the equity categories: students from a non-English speaking background; students with a disability; indigenous, low socio-economic status (SES) and regional/ remote. However, given the very large discrepancies in equity group enrolment by institution, discussion of impacts on a disciplinary basis has limited value. Still, it is important to note that the growing numbers of students from equity groups and non-traditional pathways and the broadening of access has not been matched by funds for enhancing and monitoring student success. Further, the limited government support for low-SES students was cut in the 2016 budget (Moodie 2016).

In reality, the broadening of participation has not been quite as great as planned, low SES enrolments have only grown slightly, though again with variations by institution. Instead, 80 per cent of the aggregate increase has come from the middle to high SES cohorts. Thus the growth in student numbers has come more from increased participation of students in the lower ranks of the Australian Tertiary Admission Rank (ATAR) (in Queensland, Overall Position) distribution, whose school attainment would previously not have been considered suitable for direct university entry (Group of Eight 2014: 10). This carries significant implications for student retention and educational quality, especially in Australia's 'recruiting' institutions that are taking larger shares of underprepared students with lower educational capital (Devlin 2013: 939; Group of Eight 2014: 24-25).

The projected growth in student demand may see pressures to increase teaching staff to avoid a notable increase in student-staff ratios to a projected 30:1 in 2030 compared with 22:1 in 2012 (Group of Eight 2014: 3). However, current trends indicate the tendency is to increase student-staff ratios and fill gaps with sessional and casual staff. Tightening resource constraints have already produced a dramatic expansion of casual staff in teaching roles. This often means that the least experienced and most poorly remunerated sessional staff are engaged in the bulk of student interaction and marking (Rothengatter and Hil 2013: 52). The Bradley Review estimated that casual staff undertake 40 to 50 per cent of university teaching (Bradley et. al. 2008: 22).⁴ Given the uncertain funding environment, there is quite a likelihood of further reliance on casual labour. This labour force is quite mobile and there is often a high turnover, meaning that coordinators are frequently using new or relatively inexperienced teaching staff. Thus to ensure quality teaching and learning, permanent staff face added work in preparing tutorial plans for tutors and mentoring them. The pressure to research also means that many casual staff have a limited interest in teaching, thus it can be difficult to find enthusiastic tutors.

In political science departments, casualisation may at least add to students' chances of being taught by both genders as women are only 28 per cent of permanent staff but they are 47 per cent of PhD candidates, which is where many casual staff derive from (Cowden, McLaren, Plumb and Sawyer 2012). Further, and problematically, 'women scholars are more likely to receive a heavier teaching load than their male colleagues' (Cowden et. al. 2012: 21).

⁴ In the sector overall, 50 per cent of staff were employed on a continuing basis in 2013 compared with 60 per cent in 2000 (Lane 2014). The academic workforce is also ageing with a higher proportion of staff in the 45 to 64 age range than in the labour force overall. There is an underrepresentation of academics in the 20 to 30-year old age bracket (Bradley et. al., 2008: 22).

The consequences of massification, competition and cost pressures are also felt in the ubiquitous yet expanding application and institutionalisation of information and communications technologies (ICTs) for teaching and program delivery. Much ICT use in blended learning is superficial and simply an adjunct to traditional institutionalised teaching practices (Hardy 2010: 392, 401-02; New Media Consortium 2014: 3-4). Yet university IT platforms and applications can be useful and highly successful complements to more traditional teaching methods. Many programs are now also designed to be available fully online or in 'flexible delivery' or dual mode (online and on-campus) to meet market demand in off-campus, remote and distance education. There has been little discussion in PaIR in Australia on what works well in the discipline and what does not and whether Australian academics should contribute more to open access education, for example for students in developing countries. There is also little sharing of teaching resources, which could actually make teaching more effective and contribute to the discipline's success.⁵ This is certainly the case in some other disciplines, such as public health, where lecturers will share slides and notes which are free to be re-used and added to, with attribution.

Massification has seen the student profile change in other ways. Most 'full-time' students do not come to campus daily and work a substantial number of hours per week; some are part-time or mature-age with work and family responsibilities and may only occasionally visit the university (Applegate and Daly 2006: 155; Bradley et. al. 2008: 69; Munro 2011; Freudenberg and Samarkovski 2014: 24). In Politics and Policy Studies, around 35 per cent of students are part-time on a headcount basis, though interestingly this percentage has actually declined substantially since 2005 when it was 46 per cent (Australian Government Department of Education and Training 2015).

Around half of all students identify that work commitments adversely affect their university studies (Bradley et. al. 2008: 50-51). Hardy (2010: 396-97) notes that for many, perhaps most 'full-time' students, their studies and university experience are not the primary focus of their life, as they might have been in the past. They increasingly require university timetables to fit in with their work schedules, not the other way round. Educational experts are beginning to suggest that university assessment, in particular, needs to be cognisant of, and designed around student work and family responsibilities (Crosling and Heagney 2009: 16). As Engel and Halvorson's papers in this symposium show, there has been relatively little adaption of assessment and delivery modes in undergraduate PaIR. These issues are more pressing at the postgraduate level where part-time and distance modes of study are even more prevalent—in Politics and Policy Studies postgraduates were 26.7 per cent of students in 2014 (trending up from around 21 per cent in 2005) (Australian Government Department of Education and Training 2015).

To deal with concerns about quality and standards and to enhance Australia's competitive position in the global knowledge economy (Bradley et. al. 2008), Australian tertiary institutions were required to systematically address the Australian Qualifications Framework (AQF). This is a comprehensive post-secondary school qualifications framework, which has been around since 1995, but the establishment of the Tertiary Education Quality and Standards Agency (TEQSA) in 2011 made clear that the government had achieved its goal of being a 'superregulator' of the sector (Vidovich 2012: 253). Thus the outcome of the introduction of TEQSA in Australia, as with quality assurance agencies elsewhere in the world, saw a 'marked transition from internal to external and from outward to upward forms of accountability, as well as a transition from assessment of process to outcomes and from qualitative to quantitative measures' (Vidovich 2012: 252). In short, it means more regulation for Australian tertiary institutions. Engel's paper addresses systematically how PaIR in Australia has responded to the AQF and whether we have used this as an opportunity to create a more systematic, engaging curriculum.

Overall in academia the focus on research has intensified and teaching is more and more a secondary concern. Contemporary university management is obsessed with esteem rankings at national and international level as part of brand enhancement strategies (Parker 2011: 441). For most academics, perceived and actual career progression is tied to research performance measures (Halse et. al. 2007: 729; Freudenberg and Samarkovski

⁵ One exception is the subject Model United Nation's at the University of Wollongong, where the lectures and subject material are fully online and available for re-use under a creative commons, attribute and share alike license, see: <http://course.oeru.org/mun/about/about-the-course/>.

2014: 26). Academic prestige is unequivocally located in research and, all indications are, that pressure to perform in the research area will only increase (Hemmings and Kay 2010: 185-86). The emphasis on research has tended to result in teaching being seen as an impost, or a cost, on precious and limited academic time; a burden which requires 'relief' or 'buy-out', which invariably means offsetting the load to more junior or casual staff (Capling 2010: 479).

By international comparisons, Australian academics have a low reported preference for teaching, which is not surprising given prevailing incentive structures (Norton 2013: 69). For the 'balanced' academic employed as teacher and researcher, there is little incentive beyond intrinsic motivation to put time and effort into teaching beyond a minimum acceptable standard (New Media Consortium 2014: 20). Yet, universities are primarily funded by student fees and government fee subsidies, thus the emphasis on research over teaching seems driven by perverse incentives that directly clash with the need for changes and innovations in teaching to meet the requirements of broadening university participation under a demand-driven system. In Australian universities, politics in particular, has been struggling to attract and retain students. Having key staff either not teaching or not very interested in teaching is likely to exacerbate this issue.

The Australian move to a demand-driven model of higher education funding means student experience is likely to be a growing factor in student decisions. PaIR academics could see this as being about competition for students with neighbouring universities or frame it as a challenge to maintain the attractiveness of PaIR, and the data included here suggest that there is a 'disciplinary' issue with attracting more students. Clearly, the approach in these papers is encouraging a disciplinary engagement. Teaching is a time-consuming endeavour and often an anxiety inducing one, especially for new staff. We suggest it could be less so if we more actively debate changes in the higher education environment, discuss curriculum and shared ideas for innovative teaching strategies and transformative teaching strategies. Some staff in PaIR may (usefully) be engaged in debates about the higher education system through the National Tertiary Education Union, however, many of the challenges outlined here also need to be addressed at a disciplinary level. In the 1970s, APSA actively debated teaching approaches (Ghazarian 2015), yet as noted above, its engagement seems to have declined in recent decades. We would like to see APSA take a much more proactive role, as high level leadership is vital to facilitating staff agency in this field. One specific way APSA could promote cooperation is through an online space for sharing teaching materials.

As discussed in Engel's paper, this reduced engagement has occurred at the same time as regulatory and quality assurance processes for tertiary education have increased in Australia both in research and in teaching. APSA has been involved in research quality assurance but less so in teaching. These processes have very political dimensions, include the possibility of disciplinary biases, thus non-engagement may come at a price.

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