Document generated on 04/26/2024 5:09 a.m.

International Review of Research in Open and Distributed Learning

Going the Distance: Towards a new professionalism for full-time distance education faculty at the University of the Philippines

Patricia B. Arinto

Volume 8, Number 3, November 2007

URI: https://id.erudit.org/iderudit/1071861ar
DOI: https://doi.org/10.19173/irrodl.v8i3.409

See table of contents

Publisher(s)

Athabasca University Press (AU Press)

ISSN

1492-3831 (digital)

Explore this journal

Cite this article

Arinto, P. (2007). Going the Distance: Towards a new professionalism for full-time distance education faculty at the University of the Philippines. *International Review of Research in Open and Distributed Learning*, *8*(3), 1–13. https://doi.org/10.19173/irrodl.v8i3.409

Article abstract

Several constraints influence the formation of a professional identity by full-time distance education faculty at the University of the Philippines. One of these is the marginalisation of distance education (DE) in the academy as a consequence of DE's identification with low status disciplines, as well as with developments in higher education that are undermining traditional academic identities. There are also constraints arising from the social organisation of distance education itself. The paper offers a (re)conceptualisation of academic professionalism for distance education faculty that is more responsive to the challenges that they face, and more empowering for themselves and the academic and other communities of which they are a part.

Copyright (c) Patricia B. Arinto, 2007

This document is protected by copyright law. Use of the services of Érudit (including reproduction) is subject to its terms and conditions, which can be viewed online.

https://apropos.erudit.org/en/users/policy-on-use/

This article is disseminated and preserved by Érudit.

Érudit is a non-profit inter-university consortium of the Université de Montréal, Université Laval, and the Université du Québec à Montréal. Its mission is to promote and disseminate research.

https://www.erudit.org/en/

International Review of Research in Open and Distance Learning
Volume 8, Number 3. *ISSN: 1492-3831*

November – 2007

Going the Distance: Towards a new professionalism for full-time distance education faculty at the University of the Philippines

Patricia B. Arinto
University of the Philippines, Open University

Abstract

Several constraints influence the formation of a professional identity by full-time distance education faculty at the University of the Philippines. One of these is the marginalisation of distance education (DE) in the academy as a consequence of DE's identification with low status disciplines, as well as with developments in higher education that are undermining traditional academic identities. There are also constraints arising from the social organisation of distance education itself. The paper offers a (re)conceptualisation of academic professionalism for distance education faculty that is more responsive to the challenges that they face, and more empowering for themselves and the academic and other communities of which they are a part.

Keywords: Distance education faculty; academic professionalism; faculty development

Introduction

How do faculty of distance education (DE) institutions form a professional identity as members of the academic community when their very status as academics is in question and certain conventions of academic life are absent from the DE setting in which they operate? What models of academic professionalism can they look to, and perhaps emulate, when traditional academics norms and values are under challenge and are far from stable?

My interest in these questions is both personal and professional. In 1999, after 10 years of teaching in the Department of English and Comparative Literature in the University of the Philippines' (UP) flagship campus, I decided to join the faculty of the UP Open University (UPOU), which has the special mandate to deliver degree and non-degree programmes by distance education. Some of my (former) colleagues tried to dissuade me. At the time, UPOU was only four years old. Many in the UP System, especially in the more prestigious colleges, had opposed its establishment. Until recently, I sat on UPOU's Academic Personnel Board (APB), which recommends policies regarding the hiring, retention, promotion, and tenure of UPOU's regular (as opposed to affiliate and adjunct) faculty. My vantage point is that of a mid-level faculty member and administrator who has taught in both conventional education and DE settings. My socialisation into the academy took place in the former. Now I find myself in the privileged position of helping shape the professional identity of distance education faculty.

When it was founded in 1995, UPOU did not have its own full-time faculty. Hoping to spare the new university doubts about the quality of its educational provision, University administrators decided that UPOU should simply rely on the faculty of the more established constituent universities of the UP System. Questions about quality, however, continued to be raised against UPOU by the other UP units. (Considered as the country's premier university, UP accepts only the top 2 percent of the entire college-bound population, chosen through competitive examinations.) At the same time, the development of its programmes was held back as the affiliate faculty on whom it relied, understandably enough, gave priority to their work in their home units.

For this reason, the UPOU administration lobbied to get, and eventually succeeded in acquiring, a core of regular faculty for each of UPOU's programmes.[1] Today, UPOU has 17 regular or full-time faculty members, aside from more than 200 affiliate and adjunct faculty members. Majority of the 17 faculty members are in their 30s and 40s, with the rank of Assistant Professor. Rank-wise, they are in the lower half of the faculty hierarchy in the UP system. Aside from serving as course instructors and tutors, they have instructional design, project management, and program coordination responsibilities. Like other faculty members of the UP System, they are expected to prove themselves excellent in teaching and research in their respective fields of specialisation, and to establish a publication record.

The untenured UPOU faculty members' performance of these various roles and responsibilities is evaluated on an annual basis. The evaluation guidelines include detailed descriptions, checklists, and rubrics for assigning points to each performance criterion. On these bases, we have managed to identify the high-performers and put them on tenure track, and weed out those with below-par performance. Therefore it can be said that the performance evaluation works.

Or does it? Wading through the voluminous portfolios submitted for our scrutiny, I get the feeling that a great deal of what is important in the social formation of faculty members – their values and principles, the way they relate to their students and colleagues, the extent of their growth into their discipline and into university life – is not captured by the detailed documentation. Moreover, there is a sense that the portfolio is a gesture of compliance rather than an act of genuine reflection and self-assessment and, in some cases, that it is merely a product designed for the consumption of the Academic Personnel Board. For Shore and Wright (2000), these are the logical outcomes of audit practices in higher education: On the one hand, "[f]or many university lecturers, all this activity [of producing auditable records] appears superfluous to their real work and, indeed, the whole audit procedure takes on the feel of an artificial and staged performance" (p. 72). On the other hand, audit creates a "culture of compliance" and an "invitation to outward conformity" (p. 73).

Neither 'performativity' (with its suggestion of a valuing of form over substance) nor conformity (or lack of autonomy) seems to be desirable traits in academic professionals. Indeed, they are antithetical to the academic identity because it is traditionally conceived by academics. On the other hand, a number of writers (see Halsey, 1995; Readings, 1996; Trowler, 1998; Taylor, Barr & Steele, 2002) observe that traditional academic values are being undermined and that academic professionalism is under attack. In this light, how faculty members of UPOU (and of DE institutions of this type) are to construct a professional identity is an important question to ask.

The Problem of Low Status

Distance education institutions, like UPOU, tend to be considered inferior to conventional higher education institutions. According to Kirby (1988), distance education is often viewed by traditionalists as being "the ultimate erosion of academic standards" (quoted in Panda, 2004, p. 78). According to Black (1992), "Distance education is often viewed as second-best to classroom, face-to-face instruction" (quoted in Jones et al., 2002, p. 1).

Although UPOU is no longer openly criticized as being of lower quality than the non-DE units of the university, there continues to be doubt regarding the quality of its programs, its students, and its faculty. Recently, a graduate of UPOU's Associate in Arts program was denied admission into a Bachelor of Arts program of another UP unit in the flagship campus (UP Diliman) because DE courses are "not the same as" courses taught the conventional way. Of the faculty, it has been asked at the highest levels of the University administration whether teaching at a distance should receive the same teaching credit units as teaching face-to-face. In the other UP campuses, course development work done by their own faculty for UPOU is either not counted towards promotion or is given fewer points than other publication work.

DE practitioners have taken great pains to put in place a number of quality assurance mechanisms to satisfy expectations of excellence. They have also demonstrated through research and well-reasoned arguments that, for example, it is not physical distance but transactional distance that influences the quality of learning (Moore, 1993). Nonetheless doubts persist, as evidenced above.

It may be argued that the low regard for DE is not because distance education is *inherently* inferior, but because it is associated with disciplines that rank low in the academic hierarchy. First, education is considered "a low-status field" (Lagemann, 2000, p. 234) because it is a "soft applied" knowledge domain (Becher, 1989, p. 161). Second, majority of UPOU's program offerings are in fields that are also perceived to be "soft applied": social work, nursing, public administration, environmental management, and development communication.

Another reason for DE's low status in academia is its implication in the expansion of higher education that is threatening to radically alter the lives of academics in the heretofore elite universities (such as the University of the Philippines). The expansion of higher education, also called "massification," is manifest in the rapid increase in the number of colleges and universities and students seeking undergraduate and postgraduate degrees. The demographics of higher education registrants have changed as well (Henkel, 2000), to include significantly more adult learners and part-timers and/ or working students, for example. According to Enders (2000), this phenomenon arose in a political climate formed by "the [widespread] belief that substantial educational investment is needed . . . to ensure economic growth, the readiness to reduce inequality of opportunities in education, and the radical student protest of the 1960s" (pp. 8-9).

Unfortunately, the expansion took place without an increase in government funding for higher education. In fact, in many countries (including the Philippines) State support for colleges and universities is on the decline. Universities are expected to generate incomes from student enrolments and other private sources. In many institutions, diminished resources have resulted in higher student-faculty ratios (Henkel, 2000; Enders, 2000), reduced research funds (Enders, 2000), negligible salary increases if any, fewer tenured positions and increased hiring of lower-paid part-time staff (Bryson & Barnes, 2000). For academics, these are compounded by loss of status relative to other professions, as evidenced, for example, by lower incomes, loss of "a considerable proportion of its guild powers" due to increasing control of their performance by a

new managerial class in higher education, and public criticism of higher education for its perceived failure to produce employable graduates as well as socially relevant research (Enders, 2000, p. 9).

Distance education is implicated in the massification of higher education in two ways. First, DE – and the associated concepts of flexible learning and lifelong learning – is underpinned by social ideals of equality of opportunity and democratic participation. UPOU, for example, was established "to democratize access to quality higher education." Second, certain conceptions of DE are market-driven: it is touted as a cost-effective strategy for broadening the reach of education systems. Neither of these recommends distance education to *elitist* academics that either fear, or are suffering from, the negative impact of higher education expansion.

In UPOU's case, although enrolments have been kept low by the restriction imposed by the UP System administration against the offering of undergraduate programs, some quarters continue to accuse it of taking more than its fair share of a significantly reduced university budget. At the same time, it is being encouraged to be more entrepreneurial in its operations by offering continuing education programs that appeal to groups who can afford to pay.

The Problem of Alienation

Exacerbating the impact of a negative reputation are the feelings of loneliness and alienation that those who teach at a distance experience because of lack of interaction with fellow academics (Paul, 1987). This is true especially of small DE institutions like UPOU where there is only one full-time faculty member for each program (the remainder of a program's teaching staff are affiliate and adjunct faculty) and faculty members are dispersed in three locations: Manila, Diliman (1.5 hours away by car from Manila), and the headquarters in Los Baños (2.5 hours by car from either Manila or Diliman). Even those based in the same location do not share the same office space, or observe the same office hours.

Thus, for UPOU faculty it is difficult to develop the kind of professional knowledge that comes with interaction with colleagues and participation in complex situations in the workplace. Such knowledge, which is what the old-timers in the profession might have as opposed to the greenhorns or newcomers, would include not only

> the language, tools, documents, images, symbols, well-defined roles, specified criteria, codified procedures, regulations, and contracts . . . but . . . also . . . implicit relations, tacit conventions, subtle cues, untold rules of thumb, recognizable intuitions, specific perceptions, well-tuned sensitivities, and shared world views. Most of these may never be articulated, yet they are unmistakable signs of membership in communities of practice and are critical to the success of their enterprises. (Wenger, 1998, p. 47)

This type of professional knowledge is learned not only during work activities, but also "at coffee breaks, over a beer after work, or at lunch" (Paré & Le Maistre, 2004, p. 7). Here, communal lunches and coffee breaks are a metonym for what Beck and Young (2004) call "the creation of a professional habitus," which is "the intensive socialization into the values of a professional community and its standards of professional integrity, judgment, and loyalty" (p. 9).

Aside from being geographically dispersed, regular UPOU faculty is organized not into departments but into looser and bigger units called faculties. This could pose a problem to the

formation of academic identities, especially for faculty members without prior experience of working (as academics) in a higher education institution. According to Taylor (1999), the key factor in the formation of academic identities is identification with one's discipline as embodied by one's department, and not identification with one's institution. Faculty members are expected to grow into their respective disciplines through formal and informal interaction with peers within departments. As Scott (1995) puts it, "departments . . . are much more than administrative units; they also institutionalise the intellectual values, cognitive structures and social practices of academic disciplines" (p. 160) and they "create the professional structures through which academic careers are realised" (p. 159).

A third reason for the alienation experienced by DE faculty could be the loss of control and autonomy, which is a consequence of the way that teaching at a distance is organized. Usually, a unified activity handled by one faculty member in conventional universities, teaching in distance education institutions is cut up into various phases: "course planning, design and development (writing and editing), preparation of assignments and assessment mechanisms, scripting for audio and video programmes, coordination of design and development processes, tutoring and counseling of students, course maintenance, training of people involved in the process of development and delivery, discipline-based and distance education research" (Panda, 2004, p. 79). These teaching roles are 'distributed' (Guri-Rosenblit, 1999): senior academics plan the courses and write the materials or modules; junior faculty oversee the production of materials, plan the assignment and assessment activities, serve as course coordinators during the course offering, and maintain the course; and mostly part-time lecturers serve as tutors and counsellors. For each of these sets of faculty, the situation is far from ideal.

The senior academics are the acknowledged experts and therefore enjoy considerable prestige. They too, however, have to defer to advice from the instructional designer, editor, and multimedia designer on how to present their subject matter. There is also the 'tyranny' of modularization itself. According to Beck and Young (2004), modularization has the effect of "eroding the intellectual authority of the subject specialists to control the content, sequencing and pacing of knowledge in their 'own' fields" (p. 10). For the faculty respondents in Henkel's study (2000), modularization "represented developments that diminished academics' sense of identity, loss of control or restricted autonomy and reduced expectations in terms of the nature of knowledge acquired by students in higher education" (p. 226).

For course coordinators or instructors, lack of autonomy is manifested in the hesitation to teach the course differently from the way it is written, for the purpose for example of clarifying relationships among ideas and incorporating new developments and concepts. At a recent instructional design workshop for UPOU's regular faculty, one instructor expressed surprise that instructors are 'allowed' to deviate from the original sequence of topics within a course or module and to augment the module with other material. According to Abrioux (2001), the rigid demarcation between course development and course delivery is making it difficult for faculty of single-mode DE universities (such as UPOU) to take advantage of opportunities for increased faculty control of courses, such as those resulting from the use of e-learning or online learning environments.

The part-time tutors are the least autonomous among the DE teaching staff. They are limited to answering students' queries, clarifying what is written in the modules, and marking assignments according to the marking guide given by the course coordinator or instructor. This way of teaching is dictated by a course 'delivery' model that is concerned with standardizing instruction by different tutors in different locations (learning centers). But Garrison and Shale (cited in

Keegan, 1993) object to this equation of instruction with packaging knowledge, and of teaching with telling, as it can all too easily lead to the conclusion that "the [DE] teacher is a utility, a resource that can be used and then dispensed with" (Keegan, 1993, p. 125).

The Question of Expertise

The high percentage of part-time teaching staff (mostly tutors) in DE institutions (Guri-Rosenblit, 1999; Reeves, 2002) also impinges on the formation of academic identities by regular or full-time DE faculty. For one, the increase in size of this "academic underclass" (Taylor, 1999, pp. 103-106) further entrenches the questionable hierarchy within the academy that undervalues regular DE faculty members in the first place, even as it now proposes to place them above the part-timers. This hierarchy, says Taylor (1999, p. 105), undermines "the more egalitarian assumptions of collegiality." Altbach (1997; cited in Taylor, 1999) asserts that the hierarchy is a caste system where, although they have similar research qualifications as the "tenured Brahmins," these "untouchables...[are] hired to teach a course or two, provided no benefits, often given no office space, and expected simply to show up to teach a class" (quoted in Taylor, 1999, p. 105).

Although Altbach insists that they have the same qualifications as tenured academics, it is also true that many of those hired to teach on a part-time basis "possess less knowledge and skills than traditional academics" (Guri-Rosenblit, 1999, p. 91). To address this gap, they undergo a training program that includes sessions with the course developers and course coordinators to familiarize them with the modules, and workshops on tutoring, marking assignments, and teaching online. Staff "trainability" is therefore important. For part-time staff, being valued for their trainability is perhaps less sinister than being considered as "disposable, rootless workers" (Castillo, 1997; quoted in Taylor, 1999, p. 104). It is not, however, more benign. For Bernstein (2000; quoted in Beck & Young, 2004, p. 13), the concept of trainability suggests a 'short-term-ist' concept of life and work. Beck and Young (2004) elaborate: Trainability "declare[s] the inevitable obsolescence accumulated knowledge and prioritize the value of developing the skills and flexibility to acquire and put to use whatever is needed next" (p. 13). This has profound implications for the formation of professional identities:

Older forms of relations to knowledge enabled professional and academic identities to be centred in relatively stable identifications with (and loyalties to) clearly defined knowledge traditions which "partook of the sacred" yet which were linked to practices "in the world". However, as Bernstein observes, "there appears to be an emptiness in the concept of trainability, an emptiness which makes the concept self-referential and therefore excluding" (in the sense of having no intrinsic content that allows self-definition or self recognition). But if the concept is empty how does the actor recognise her/himself and others? Bernstein's answer is that this recognition is increasingly likely to be accomplished through "the materialities of consumption." In other words, relatively stable identities which previously were forged through subject loyalties are being progressively replaced by "temporary stabilities (constructed) out of the products of the market." (Beck & Young, 2004, p. 13)

Macdonald (1995) notes that one of the prerequisites of professionalism is the ability to make an exclusive claim to a knowledge base. Part-time DE tutors will be hard pressed to claim professionalism for themselves because: 1) they lack expertise in their subject areas or disciplines (Guri-Rosenblit, 1999); and 2) they do not have formal training in distance education theory and methods.

Likewise, UPOU's full-time faculty cannot claim expertise. Most have completed only master's degrees; they have little or no experience of teaching at a university; and they have no training in and/or experience of distance education. Following academic tradition, they are expected to redress their lack of disciplinal expertise by engaging in disciplinal research and pursuing doctoral studies. Their lack of university teaching experience and knowledge of DE are supposed to be remedied by attendance in seminars, workshops, and conferences organized by UPOU. Some are given the opportunity to participate in online postgraduate courses (in distance education and technology-based distributed learning) offered by universities abroad.

However, the DE faculty development program outlined above suggests a dichotomy between the formation of disciplinal *expertise* on the one hand, and the development of *competence* (or know-how) in distance education. The former is a long and formal educational process culminating in the conferment of a degree, while the latter is short-term, non-formal training.

Towards a New Academic Professionalism

The foregoing highlights the constraints to professional identity formation for UPOU's regular/ full-time faculty. This section offers a conceptualization of academic professionalism that takes these constraints – and the corollary opportunities – into account.

The academic professionalism that is proposed for UPOU faculty is based on the concept of democratic professionalism recommended by Furlong Barton, Miles, Whiting, and Whitty (1999) – that is, a professionalism founded on alliances between professionals and "excluded constituencies" (p. 175). In UPOU's case, these excluded constituencies consist of distance education students and would-be students, including adult learners and other groups that do not have access to campus-based higher education, and part-time teaching staff. Other important constituencies are academics from other units of the UP System, professional bodies including those seeking continuing professional development for their members, and other higher education institutions in the Philippines.

First, the professional identity of members of DE institutions like UPOU is necessarily based on a commitment to broadening access to higher education. To the charge that distance education has aided and abetted the massification of higher education, DE faculty must plead guilty – but without apology. While in many instances the expansion of higher education provision is complicit with marketization and the neo-liberal agenda, this does not invalidate the social democratic aspirations of broadening access to education, namely, the reduction of poverty and the promotion of equity, democratic participation, and social justice.

These are not antithetical to the concept of academic professionalism. According to Blomqvist (1997; in Taylor, 1999, p. 117), historically there have been two opposing foci for academic professionalism: autonomy and heteronomy. Autonomy refers to "academic freedom" and scholarship "pursued for its own sake, with its own organization, and a system of thought and rules that only academics can judge" (quoted in Taylor, 1999, p. 117). Heteronomy emphasises social responsibility: "teaching and research are pursued in ways which both respond to social needs and are valued in terms of their contributions to the 'social good'" (quoted in Taylor, 1999, p. 117).

Nevertheless, DE practitioners and institutions must disprove the false dichotomy between equity and quality. They owe this first of all to their students. Those who are concerned for genuine equity know that "equality of opportunity' must be accompanied by "equality of outcomes,"

which means that education must develop in individuals the capacity for full participation in social and economic life (Instance, Schnetze & Schuller, 2002, p. 4). This kind of accountability that DE and other academics must espouse differs substantially from the "crude form of accountability" (Becher, 1989, p. 171) that performance appraisals and other new managerial practices in higher education tend to promote.

Closer attention to teaching effectiveness can also help to promote teaching as a worthwhile role for academics. Teaching has traditionally been undervalued in universities, compared to research (Boyer, 1990; Taylor, 1999; Reeves, 2002). Teaching, however, should itself be the subject of research. Boyer (1990) advocates the institution of a "scholarship of teaching" in universities, and its being accorded the same status as "the scholarship of discovery, the scholarship of integration, and the scholarship of application" (p. 16). Taylor calls for the development of a teaching-based identity based on "the development of a shared value-related educational knowledge base for academics" (p. 130). To combat the perception that teaching is 'a "pre-professional" low-level competence which can, and should, be acquired "on-the-job"' (p. 130), he says academics must undergo "a formal process that engages in the task, i.e., identity work, of coming to identify, understand and recognise the values that might underpin it" (p. 128).

UPOU faculty can undertake rigorous research on teaching effectiveness and related topics like adult education, flexible delivery modes, and computer-supported learning. Research needs to be theory-based and not limited to mere data-gathering (Perraton, 2000; Saba, 2000; Anglin, 2002) so that it can help establish distance education as a legitimate area of academic endeavor (Garrison, 2000). UPOU faculty should also be involved in training programs for improving teaching effectiveness in other higher education institutions, as well as in continuing education programs requested by government and non-government organizations. (Note also the growing interest of scholarship of teaching and learning and its capacity to both inform and legitimize DE research).

Having faculty members participate in the organization and conduct of these activities gives them an opportunity to interact with their colleagues and to learn more systematically about distance education (because they must give a lecture about an aspect of it for example). It also gives them a chance to participate in the important task of institution building – that is, in promoting the institution as a centre of excellence. According to Henkel (2000), institutional work or "enterprise," with its function of "structural integration," can combine with disciplinal work to "constitute a strong source of identity for academics" (p. 20). Working on institution-wide projects can also help develop what Kerr (1994) calls "academic citizenship." For Kerr, academic citizenship, which includes "observance of the code of academic ethics" and "willingness to participate in shared governance" of the university (Kerr, 1994, p. 149), is an essential aspect of academic professionalism.

Regarding the development of a discipline-based identity for UPOU faculty, encompassing the development not only of expertise but also of the "relational [academic] values of collegiality, peer-based review and recognition" (Taylor, 1999, p. 119), the way forward appears to lie in establishing collaborative networks, for example in the form of project and research teams, with existing departments in the other UP units. Cross-disciplinal collaboration can likewise be encouraged. That UPOU faculty are organized into "faculties" rather than departments is an advantage in this case. As Scott reminds us, "looser academic structures . . . built around theme categories such as . . . environmental sciences" (p. 159) are "open environment[s] where knowledge producers/ users mingle" (p. 160) and form the alliances required for trans-disciplinary academic work.

An alliance between the regular/ full-time faculty of UPOU and the part-time teaching staff also must be forged for both practical and ethical reasons. The practical concern is that the regular faculty members constitute a minority, not only with respect to the rest of the UP faculty, but even within UPOU where the non-academic staff outnumber them (by approximately 5 to 1). The ethical, and more important, consideration is recognition of the fact that academic work is complex and is the collective effort of everyone in the university, including part-time tutors and non-academic staff (Blackmore & Blackwell, 2003). This is also why University leaders must provide "equal and appropriate support" to part-time staff (Blackmore & Blackwell, 2003, p. 24).

Finally, an important aspect of the professional identities of UPOU's regular faculty might come from "vocational links" (Blackmore & Blackwell, 2003, p. 20) or professional affiliations. For example, the regular faculty member responsible for the nursing program at UPOU is a certified nurse and member of nursing organizations; the clinical psychologist is a member of the national organization of psychiatrists; and some of us are members of the Philippine e-Learning Society.

Conclusion

Because it is a complex undertaking, professional identity formation for UPOU's regular faculty requires collaboration between the faculty themselves and UPOU leaders, who are themselves academics. The academic professionalism described above must be forged from various alliances. Thus, unless faculty and academic leaders work together, there is danger of developing a "fragmented professionalism" that could "divide and weaken the academic community" (Blackmore & Blackwell, 2003, p. 22).

Moreover, developing academic professionalism requires that academics reposition themselves (and find their bearings) in the rapidly changing landscape of higher education. For Nixon and colleagues (1997) academics must

> . . . shift . . .away from "professionalism" as the ideology of service and specialist expertise; away from "professionalism" where the status of the occupation is at stake; and towards a "professionalism" which focuses on the quality of practice in contexts that require radically altered relations of power and control. (quoted in Taylor, 1999, p. 115)

Academics in general can no longer invoke professional privilege. Various challenges to the academy have called into question the validity of academics' claims to autonomy and exclusivity. Once considered to be the "key profession" (Perkin, 1969), academics are now being sidelined.

Faculty of distance education institutions, like UPOU, are twice removed from the centre. Paradoxically, however, i n being in the margins of mainstream academia, academics working in DE units like UPOU are strategically positioned to craft professional identities that are based on traditional as well as emergent academic values, such as expertise, scholarship, collegiality, reflexivity, and engagement. They have the opportunity to form professional identities that take into account the complexities of contemporary university life, and that are potentially empowering for themselves and for the communities of which they are a part.

End Notes

In his study of two Canadian distance universities, Abrioux (2006) found that one of the critical issues in the survival and success of a DE institution is having its own full-time academic staff. "Academics are considered as the primary relationship builders across universities" and the credibility of a university without its own faculty is "severely undermined" (p. 43).

References

Abrioux, D. (2001). Guest editorial. *International Review of Research in Open and Distance Learning*, *1*(2). Retrieved November 14, 2007 from: http://www.irrodl.org/index.php/irrodl/article/view/16/352

Abrioux, D. (2006). *Strategic Issues in Single and Dual-mode Distance Education: The organization blending of two Canadian universities.* Retrieved June 8, 2007 from: http://www.col.org/colweb/webdav/site/myjahiasite/shared/docs/06SingleDualDE_Canada.pdf

Ainley, P. (1994). *Degrees of Difference: Higher education in the 1990s*. London: Lawrence & Wishart.

Anglin, G. J. (2002). Education and Research in Distance Education: Implications for research. In C. Vrasidos & G. V. Glass (Eds.), *D istance education and distributed learning* (pp. 157-180). Greenwich, CT.: Information Age Publishing.

Armstrong, F. (1996). Teaching and Learning at a Distance: Redefining the role of the teacher. In Hedge, N. (Ed.), *Going the Distance: Teaching, learning and researching in distance education* (pp. 77-97). University of Sheffield Division of Education.

Barnett, R. (2003). *Beyond all Reason: Living with ideology in the university*. Milton Keynes: SRHE and the Open University Press.

Barnett, R. (2000). *Realizing the university in an age of supercomplexity*. Milton Keynes: SRHE and the Open University Press.

Becher, T. (1989). *Academic Tribes and Territories: Intellectual enquiry and the culture of the disciplines*. Milton Keynes: SRHE and the Open University Press.

Beck, J., & Young, M. F. D. (2005). The Assault on the Professions and the Restructuring of Academic and Professional Identities: A Bernsteinian analysis. *British Journal of Sociology of Education*, *26*(2), 183-197.

Blackmore, P., & Blackwell, R. (2003). Academic roles and relationships. In R. Blackwell & P. Blackmore (Eds.), *T owards strategic staff development in higher education.* Milton Keynes: SRHE and Open University Press.

Boyer, E. L. (1990). *Scholarship Reconsidered: Priorities of the professoriate*. Princeton, NJ.: The Carnegie Foundation for the Advancement of Teaching.

Bryson, C., & Barnes, N. (2000). The casualisation of employment in higher education in the United Kingdom. In M. Tight (Ed.), *Academic Work and L ife: What it means to be an academic and how this is changing*. New York: Elsevier Science.

Enders, J. (2000). Academic Staff in Europe: Changing employment and working conditions. In M. Tight (Ed.), *Academic Work and L ife: What it means to be an academic and how this is changing*. New York: Elsevier Science.

Fillitz, T. (2000). Academia: Same pressures, same conditions of work? In M. Strathern, (Ed.), *Audit Cultures: Anthropological studies in accountability, ethics and the academy*. London: Routledge.

Furlong, J., Barton, L., Miles, S., Whiting, C., & Whitty, G. (2000). *Teacher Education in Transition: Re-forming professionalism?* Buckingham: Open University Press.

Garrison, R. (2000). Theoretical Challenges for Distance Education in the 21st Century: A shift from structural to transactional issues. *International Review of Research in Open and Distance Learning*, *1*(1). Retrieved November 14, 2007 from: http://www.irrodl.org/index.php/irrodl/article/view/2/333

Guri-Rosenblit, S. (1999). *Distance and Campus Universities: Tensions and interactions. A comparative study of five countries*. International Association of Universities and Elsevier Science.

Halsey, A. H. (1995). *Decline of Donnish Dominion: British academic professions in the twentieth century*. Oxford: Clarendon Press.

Henkel, M. (2000). *Academic identities and policy change in higher education*. London and Philadelphia: Jessica Kingsley Publishers.

Instance, D., Schnetze, H. G., & Schuller, T. (Eds.). (2002). *International Perspectives on Lifelong Learning: From recurrent education to the knowledge society*. Milton Keynes: SRHE and Open University Press.

Jevons, F. (1987). Distance Education and Campus-based Education: Parity of esteem. In P. Smith & M. Kelly (Eds.), *Distance education and the mainstream* (pp. 12-23). New York: Croom Helm.

Keegan, D. (1993). Reintegration of the teaching acts. In D. Keegan (Ed.), *Theoretical principles of distance education*. London: Routledge.

Kerr, C. (1994). *Higher Education Cannot Escape History: Issues for the 21 st century*. Albany, NY.: State University of New York Press.

Lagemann, E. C. (2000). *An Elusive Science: The troubling history of education research*. Chicago and London: The University of Chicago Press.

Lave, J., & Wenger, E. (1991). *Situated Learning: Legitimate peripheral participation*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Leh, A. S., & Jobin, A. (2002). Striving for quality control in distance education. In C. D., Maddux, J. Ewing-Taylor, & D. Lamont-Johnson (Eds.), *Distance Education: Issues and concerns* (pp. 87-102). Binghamton, NY.: The Haworth Press.

Macdonald, K. M. (1995). *The sociology of the professions*. London: Sage.

Moore, M. G. (1993). Theory of transactional distance. In D. Keegan (Ed.), *Theoretical principles of distance education*. London: Routledge.

Morley, L. (2003). *Quality and power in higher education*. Buckingham: Open University Press.

Nedvek, B. P. (1999). Information technology and changing roles in the academy. In J. Brennan, J. Fredowitz, M. Huber, & T. Shah (Eds.), *What K ind of University?: International perspectives on knowledge, participation and governance* (pp. 171-192). Milton Keynes: The Society for Research into Higher Education and Open University Press.

Panda, S. (2004). People: Staffing, development and management. In H. Perraton & H. Lentell (Eds.), *Policy for open and distance learning* (pp. 76-99). London and New York: Routledge Falmer.

Paré, A., & Le Maistre, C. (2004). Learning Through Complex Participation: Distributed mentoring in communities of practice. In P. Tynjälä, J. Välimaa & G. Boulton-Lewis (Eds.), *Higher Education and Working L ife: Collaborations, confrontations and challenges*.

Paul, R. (1987). Staff Development Needs for Universities: Mainstream and distance education. In P. Smith & M. Kelly (Eds.), *Distance education and the mainstream* (pp. 139-155). New York: Croom Helm.

Perkin, H. (1969). *Key profession*. London: Routledge & Kegan Paul.

Perraton, H. (2000). Rethinking the research agenda. *International Review of Research in Open and Distance Learning*, *1*(1). Retrieved November 14, 2007 from: http://www.irrodl.org/index.php/irrodl/article/view/5/338

Readings , B. (1996). *The university in ruins*. Cambridge, MA.: Harvard University Press.

Reeves, T. C. (2002). Distance Education and the Professorate: The issue of productivity. In C. Vrasidos & G. V. Glass (Eds.), *Distance education and distributed learning* (pp. 135-156). Greenwich, CT.: Information Age Publishing.

Saba, F. (2000). Research in Distance Education: A status report. *International Review of Research in Open and Distance Learning*, *1*(1). Retrieved November 14, 2007 from: http://www.irrodl.org/index.php/irrodl/article/view/4/337

Scott, P. (1995). *The meanings of mass higher education*. Milton Keynes: SRHE and the Open University Press.

Shore, C., & Wright, S. (2000). Coercive Accountability: The rise of audit cultures in higher education. In M. Strathern (Ed.), *Audit Cultures: Anthropological studies in accountability, ethics and the academy*. London: Routledge.

Taylor, P. (1999). *Making Sense of Academic L ife: Academics, universities and change*. Milton Keynes: SRHE and the Open University Press.

Taylor, R.; Barr, J., & Steele, T. (2002). *For a radical higher education*. Milton Keynes: SRHE and the Open University Press.

Trowler, P. R. (1998). *Academics responding to change. New higher education frameworks and academic cultures*. Milton Keynes: SRHE and the Open University Press.

Walker, R. (2002). Is There Anyone There? The embodiment of knowledge in virtual environments. In C. Vrasidos & G. V. Glass. (Eds.), *Distance education and distributed learning* (pp. 94-114). Greenwich, CT.: Information Age Publishing.

Wenger, E. (1998). *Communities of practice: Learning, meaning, and identity*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Williams, P. E. (2003). Roles and competencies for distance education programs in higher education institutions. *The American Journal of Distance Education*, *17*(1), 45-57.

Athabasca University