

Book Review/Recension d'ouvrage

Course Correction: A Map for the Distracted University

by Paul W. Gooch

Toronto, Ontario: University of Toronto Press, 2019, 286 pages

ISBN: 978-1-4875-2356-5 (paperback)

Reviewed by/ Revu par

Shari MacKenzie

University of Prince Edward Island

Given the recent news stories regarding celebrities paying for their children's acceptance into prestigious universities, Paul Gooch's book, *Course Correction: A Map for the Distracted University* (2019) is a refreshing read. Gooch writes in a clear-cut style that offers an active call back to the true purpose of universities: the creation, and transfer of knowledge. He points to worldly distractions such as societal pressures and financial needs as part of the ongoing barrage of the University's correct course.

Gooch, who has spent the last fifty years in various roles from undergraduate to the university president, defines his book as "an attempt to explain the university, how it works and why it works the way it does" (Gooch, p. xiii). He states that he aims to describe and justify the functions of a university and offers a definition of what constitutes a university and the criteria that universities must meet to be certified.

Course Correction: A Map for the Distracted University is divided into two parts, with the first section having five chapters covering knowledge, integrity, autonomy, academic freedom and the decision-making process found at universities. The second section is divided into three chapters covering students and the social burden taken on by universities, the knowledge that undergraduates should possess and the definition of what a well-placed university is. Gooch ends with a chapter examining his life as an academic, and administrator and offers a spirited defense of his choice to leave the faculty fold and venture into administrative responsibilities.

Gooch's hard-hitting statement "...what is the relation of the university to knowledge and knowledge claims – especially when society's expectations and the hope of students, seem to be about social and personal issues that are more economical

than epistemic” (p.10), causes one to pause and consider the actual purpose of universities. With students, parents, and governments measuring university success by the employment rate of graduates, it is understandable how the creation and sharing of knowledge can be swept to the side. In chapter one, Gooch defends the need for universities to have academic freedom to continue a purposeful path, which is often obscured by the powerful voices calling for the fulfillment of their agendas, such as government, business, and donors.

Multiple issues face universities today, such as lack of funding, rising enrollment, and differentiated expectations. In chapter two, Gooch offers that to keep focused on their primary function, production of claims to knowledge, universities must focus on the creation and transference of knowledge. While Gooch provides a gripping picture of universities being afloat at sea, desperately bailing water to survive, he does offer a path to redemption. He sends out a rousing call for the various groups involved to talk to each other. He advises that he cannot provide specific advice though he does caution that compromise cannot sustain institutional value; rather it merely quiets the complainers.

In chapter three, Gooch refers to how important reputation is to the university; reputation is based on the perception of the university’s integrity and confers prestige to its degrees. Accountability and transparency are needed for institutional integrity, and it is up to the governing board to ensure that both inside and outside influences are not allowed to sway the direction of the university. Gooch verifies that without a reputation for integrity, the university degrees lose their luster and allure, thus resulting in a loss of enrollment.

Gooch points out the threats to autonomy and academic freedom from government and other interests and provides observations on how to defend against this encroachment. Gooch argues, in chapter four, that one of the main threats is the prevailing attitude towards knowledge; it only has worth if it can be used to improve societal and economic conditions. The government pushes the universities to ensure that their graduates will be employable within specific parameters demanded by mainline businesses, and this put pressure on the universities. Gooch offers that to have genuine autonomy the university governing board must have control over its finances and be free from outside influences regarding their decision making.

In chapter five, Gooch deals with how authority should be exercised at the university level, providing a three-tier layout for decision making and administration as well as looking at peers and how their authority influences decisions made at the higher levels. Gooch states that administration and governing board needs to have an academic background and a full understanding of policies to be able to make the appropriate decisions.

Gooch then introduces how students are at the forefront of the university’s consciousness; he states that universities are expected to step into a parental and community role by providing supports and services that are a new burden. Gooch asserts that we need to acknowledge the difficulties that arise from this. He queries if students

are positioned as consumers of education? Are they developing a sense of entitlement and expectation about the university's obligation to provide an interesting, yet readily available education? Gooch emphasizes that education is not a good or service. He differentiates between the student's primary relationship with the university as that of knowledge seekers and that as consumers and clients when using services such as counseling, residence, and the bookstore.

Gooch reports that the University educational focus has switched from what should be taught in a program, to what the students are expected to know and be able to do as a result of taking the program. Gooch looks at what knowledge undergraduates obtain at university and points to basic skills and critical thinking but also reminds us that "the fundamental knowledge gained in undergraduate education is knowledge about successful knowing" (p.176).

Much of what Gooch covers in the book could also be applied to other institutions and educational situations where an unequal balance of power can misdirect the true path of knowledge and lead to a lackluster attempt at an education. Gooch wraps up with the poignant cry for us to free our universities from distractions and allow them to flourish in their rightful purpose in the creation and transference of knowledge.