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A Measure of Excellence? A Critique of the 1992 Maclean's Survey of Canadian Universities

This paper was written by Imelda Mulvihill, Director of Planning Analysis and Statistics, Carleton University, in January 1993. It is being circulated by CUASA in order to provide a clearer understanding of the University's decision not to participate in the 1993 Survey, and as a way of contextualizing the discussions currently underway to develop performance indicators for universities.

Introduction:

In November of 1992 Maclean's Magazine published its second annual ranking of fifty Canadian universities. This issue is presented as a new, improved, and expanded survey designed after lengthy consultations with "experts throughout North America" to ask the "right questions and deliver precise answers".

The heart of the special issue is a statistically derived ranking of universities, crafted not in the qualitative tradition of journalism but using one of the primary techniques of social scientific (and quantitative) research -- the survey questionnaire. The analysis of the survey is described as a quantitative exercise. A methodology section is included in the issue highlighting Maclean's use of a high-profile statistical analyst.

Hence in their coverage of the quality of university education in Canada, Maclean's chose to conduct their investigations in a mode clearly intended to be seen as social scientific. Even the title of the issue, "Measure of Excellence," underscores the claim that the survey, its analysis and presentation in the special issue constitutes a precise, quantitative, and sophisticated measurement of the quality of universities and the complex reality of university education in Canada.

Whether this claim is merely naive or an expression of the self-promotion and marketing interests of a national magazine, it must be challenged. The "University Project" (as Maclean's terms it) is not a conventional piece of journalism; it must therefore be assessed by the standards of the social science it aspires to be. Judged in this way, the ranking project can only be seen as a deeply flawed, methodologically unsound, and seriously misleading piece of research which is socially regressive in its focus on traditional cohorts as the benchmarks of "quality" within higher education. This is not the measure of excellence claimed by the editors; it does

not deliver either the "right questions" or "precise answers". At best the survey inadequately measures and often distorts important issues. Overall, this survey (and the ranking derived from it) represents a hodge-podge of ideas masquerading as social science.

A Failure of Conceptualization and Research Design:

Survey research is not simply a bundle of questions developed after wide and lengthy consultations on a vaguely defined idea.¹ Such research begins with an effective conceptualization of the phenomenon to be studied -- in this instance the "quality" of a university. As in any type of social research the primary difficulty in conceptualization is capturing the full complexity of the phenomenon under study. This is the first of many failures in the "University Project".²

The stated research objective of the Maclean's survey was to generate data to compile selected indices of "quality" which, in turn, would be weighted and used to compile a summary statistic for purposes of ranking universities. In reality, this objective had a second dimension, for Maclean's seems to define quality in terms of prospective undergraduate students and their families (as opposed to the graduate student, the researcher, the faculty member, the staff member, or any other constituency either inside or outside the university).³

In May of 1992 the magazine editors circulated a five-page outline of their definition of "quality". At first glance, many do not seem unreasonable, yet one is led to ask: Where did this set (as opposed to any other set) of measures come from? How do they relate to the announced research objectives? Why these and not others? What kinds of assumptions and values are embedded in these indices? Can these indices be considered sufficiently comprehensive to be employed as a quantitative basis for assessing the overall quality of fifty different universities and generating a rank order of quality? Do they capture the full complexity of the

phenomenon under study for all universities in the study?

The ranking categories used by Maclean's clearly illustrate the logic of posing such questions about what lies behind or beneath the summary statistics. These categories recognize the differences among three types of institutions: (1) those with medical schools and a major commitment to doctoral programs; (2) comprehensive universities with significant research activity and course breadth; and (3) primarily undergraduate universities. Yet the indices of quality are the same for all categories. In what sense can this be appropriate if the categories truly reflect fundamental and distinct differences among universities. It simply does not make sense to assert that the same indices which measure the quality of a university focusing on undergraduate studies will adequately measure the quality of a university with a major commitment to doctoral programs, and *vice versa*.

At the very least, indices informing the rankings should have been developed in a way sensitive to the major dimensions of the three types of universities. There is little evidence to suggest that the categories were considered when indices of quality were being developed. In fact, the documented history of the project suggests the opposite -- categories were carved out after the fact, empirically, and in a manner quite separate from the selection of indices of quality.⁴

Notably, Maclean's has never provided any documented account of the thinking which governed the selection of the indices of "quality". The selection seems not to be anchored in any well-defined and integrated conceptualization of academic quality. If the editors had outlined a deliberate theoretical approach, the university community might have been able to address more directly several of the most troubling aspects of this project -- the precise linkages between the selected indices and "quality", and, given these linkages, the appropriateness or inappropriateness of specific measurements and techniques for data capture used in the survey.⁵

The absence of an explicit and well-developed theoretical framework does not, however, mean that one is absent -- it may only be other than one might think, intend, or realize. Values and assumptions are embedded and hidden in the selected indices and the questionnaire generating them. When the hard work of conceptualization is not performed prior to the framing of questions and questionnaires, researchers (and journalists) allow bias to inform their work in ways they may not realize. One simply cannot start *in medias res* and make it up as one goes along. Whatever it might be, this approach has no relation to social scientific

inquiry.

Similarly, the weighting scheme used to generate the rankings seems unconnected to any defined conceptualization of quality. Nor does the common weighting scheme appear to be sensitive to the distinct categories. Maclean's provides no rationale for the weights. The selection of weights *may* be reasonable for one or more of the three categories, but an assessment of their appropriateness cannot be made in a theoretical vacuum. How do these weights reflect a concept of quality -- one appropriate to most, if not all, universities? To repeat, the weights do have meaning and consequences for the research objective -- it just may not be the one intended or even understood. We have no evidence that these issues were addressed, either conceptually or empirically.⁶

In fact, the methodology section of the special issue seems to indicate that the weighting scheme was determined *in terms of its effects on the rankings*. "A Rating Road Map" reports that the statistician hired by Maclean's "spent more than a week on sensitivity analysis, evaluating the effect of each criterion and different weighting method on the ranking." This approach may merely test the rigourousness of one or another weighting scheme, but it may also presuppose that one or another ranking is more "correct" than another. Since we are left in the dark about the criteria and their conceptual justification, we cannot reasonably assess the appropriateness of this methodology. Given the many other problematic aspects of this project, it is reasonable to wonder whether the development of the weighting scheme might not have put cart before horse.

Failures of Basic Methodology:

The inevitable results of an underdeveloped conceptualization and research design are failures in basic methodology. All social scientists are acutely aware that methodologies are inextricably bound up in concepts and design. If the former is underdrawn or ill conceived, the latter is compromised. The "university project" is replete with examples of this principle.

The Questionnaire as a Work in Progress:

One of the most serious failures of the project was the use of questionnaire which became a work in progress. Universities received the questionnaire on July 15, 1992, but contrary to the Maclean's claim that "the final package left little room for misinterpretation," some 47 changes in questionnaire wording were made during the six-week period the universities were given to compile responses. This total does not include the 23 new questions added as afterthoughts during the

same period.

Not surprisingly, these changes and corrections (termed "clarifications" in the multiple faxes received) resulted in numerous changes in the measurements underlying the indices of quality -- again with no theoretical considerations being made to ensure appropriate types and levels of measurement continue to be linked to research objectives. Moreover, the procedures for making these changes did not ensure that all universities received all changes and that all changes were incorporated into the measurements in a consistent and clear manner.⁷ Despite requests by individual universities Maclean's failed even to provide respondents with an amended and corrected final version of the questionnaire.

This kind of "hunch and lurch" approach to survey research is inevitable when the researcher does not pre-test the instrument. It is also the mark of a project in which method is divorced from theory. A pre-test is an essential stage of research which tests the clarity, effectiveness and utility of the questions in yielding valid and reliable measures *related to the research objectives*. None of this was done for the Maclean's survey of Canadian universities and, inevitably, the sloppy treatment of the questionnaire seriously compromised the research and its findings.

Invalid Measurement, Bias and Regional Distortions:

A questionnaire statistically measuring the characteristics of students, faculty, finance and services appears to be scientific. Closer examination, however, reveals that several of the indices suffer from invalid measurement, bias, and regional distortions. These failures undermine both indices and the rankings derived from them.

For example, von Zur Muehlen (1992b:4) observes that *operating budget per student* measures only the combined effects of provincial policies of funding and the university's program mix. Universities with medical or dental schools allocate 10-20 per cent of operating budgets to these programs, so that the resulting per-student index of operating monies is inflated relative to universities with no such professional and graduate component to their program mix. Higher per student costs merely measure the mix of disciplines, not anything else. How valid is this measurement? Where is the comparability of measurement in the definition of this index of quality? Is quality not implicitly defined as a particular program mix in this index?⁸

Other examples of invalid measurement include the questions on *institutional mix*. The inclusion of co-

op students without addressing the many differences in practices governing work term registrations results in questionable data. Similarly, inter-university and even intra-university variations in procedures governing part-time enrolments in doctoral programs are extreme; hence this measure of institutional mix is distorted.

Questions on *the value of research grants* focus exclusively on federal granting agencies. This focus has two effects which weaken the indices of institutional quality derived from these questions: (1) it ignores the very large and growing amount of contract research being undertaken by universities as they develop more varied and extensive linkages with the private sector; and (2) it biases the measurement against universities that have actively developed non-traditional, private, and/or international sources of funding for research programs.

Another invalid index is the *proportion of class instruction performed by tenured faculty*. This is presented as an index of the quality of instruction. Setting aside for the moment the question of whether only tenured faculty guarantee the highest quality instruction in all circumstances, the measure itself is invalid. A more appropriate statistic would be the proportion of first year enrolment taught by tenured faculty members since, in many disciplines, tenured faculty typically teach courses with larger enrolments.

The focus on *tenured faculty* also biases the question on class instruction against universities using external experts hired as sessional lecturers or term appointments, or using outstanding graduate students. In many disciplines Carleton University has the biggest pool of experts virtually on its doorstep. Sessional lecturers have included, for example, Gerhard Herzberg, the late Honourable David Lewis, and the late Right Honourable Lester Pearson. In this same vein, the questions on *faculty* exclude part-time faculty, a choice which distorts the reality of universities like Carleton where a growing number of senior appointments are part-time.

Another area of bias is the set of questions on *alumni support*. These questions clearly disadvantage relatively young universities yet no account is taken of this in the methodology or the weightings. In Ontario, for example, there are fifteen universities. Nine of the fifteen were established in the post-war period.

Von Zur Muehlen (1992b:4) also notes that regional distortion occurs with several other questions. He points out that questions on *library holdings and acquisitions* suffer from a regional bias since the Ontario and the Atlantic provinces benefit from electronic linkages of universities and inter-university

loan systems. Similarly, he notes, questions about the numbers of *out-of-province students and international students* also contain this regional bias since the numbers reflect the geographic location of the university and the presence or absence of differential tuition fees (itself a feature of provincial funding policies). Von Zur Muehlen also notes that this index does not take into account the operating language of the francophone universities in Quebec. Because the operating language of these institutions is french the numbers of out-of-province and international students are limited. Even without this linguistic focus, other universities have defined themselves as having a provincial focus (Memorial, the two universities of Saskatchewan), while others (McGill, and Lethbridge) have actively encouraged international students.

In the same manner, *take-up rates* vary from province to province according to rules and procedures governing applications. The measure used by Maclean's contains a clear bias against Ontario since each Ontario applicant can list as many as three universities on the application form. Measurements of *grade averages* also contain provincial variations which result in data of dubious value (there being no standardized tests in Canada).⁹ One very important variation left unaddressed in the index is the use of non-comparable scales for grades in provinces other than Quebec. For example, British Columbia utilizes a four-point scale rather than a percentage grade. Because Maclean's did not specify a method for converting such scales to a percentage, there is no assurance that the data have been consistently treated.

The Mythical Student as Benchmark of Quality:

The Maclean's special issue on ranking universities contains one very fundamental contradiction. In an article entitled, "The Changing Campus," Maclean's seems to recognize that non-traditional students are entering universities in increasing numbers. Yet in measuring the quality of universities Maclean's constructed a ranking scheme completely insensitive to these changes. Instead, the ranking of universities is based on a set of indices which implicitly define the mythical student of old -- 18-24 years old, white, able-bodied male with no social responsibilities and few financial worries, studying full-time and proceeding through his program in an uninterrupted fashion.

It is significant that "The Changing Campus" relies on the student checklist added by Maclean's very late in the project in early September. In other words, "social responsibility", as the article terms it, did not

inform, and was never part of, the conceptualization of quality underlying the ranking of universities.

How serious is this omission by Maclean's? Even a cursory glance at the historical statistics on Canadian universities reveals that all sorts of "others" have entered academe, shaping and reshaping the defining characteristics of the cohort, and challenging both syllabus and the traditional norms of degree programs. In 1960 only 26% of undergraduate degrees were awarded to women; by 1989 this figure had risen to 55%. As universities expanded in the sixties and seventies, so did traditional programs of study -- to accommodate a growing demand for part-time study. Over this period enrolment levels in part-time study tripled.¹⁰ Student bodies expanded to include not only more women, more older students, more students with disabilities, more students working and studying part-time, but also more students from other countries, and more students in professional degree, certificate, and diploma programs. Forms, modes and patterns of study changed dramatically reflecting the changed composition of the student body.

Why, then, does the measurement of the quality of the student body focus so heavily on *high school grade average*? Such measures are clearly biased against universities who have actively recruited non-traditional students under policies and traditions of educational equity. Educational research in Canada and the United States has repeatedly found that high schools effectively replicate the stratification system of the larger society, operating as microcosms of a class-based system of opportunity. Hence the degree to which a university relies on the traditional cohort of high school graduates from "academic-stream" programs is the degree to which it serves a very narrowly defined and privileged stratum of society.¹¹ How can this index be seen to measure quality? In their exclusive reliance of high school grades, Maclean's has penalized universities who have attempted to alter this elitist approach to higher education.

Indeed, within the most heavily weighted set of indices -- those claiming to measure pertinent characteristics of the student body -- quality is measured exclusively in terms of traditionally defined input rather than output. This constitutes a bias in favour of institutions with narrowly defined and class-laden policies of admission.

The same sort of problem confounds the questions on *graduation rate*. In choosing 1986 as the base year, Maclean's restricted the scope of the questions to a span of time tailored to the traditional cohort and discounted everyone who falls outside of this traditional pattern of study. In selecting out this very

large subset, Maclean's selected out the predominantly female and less privileged subset of students.¹² Instead of factoring in the part-time student body through the use of a full-time-equivalency statistic, Maclean's simply eliminated "the changed campus" from the analysis.¹³ With much the same effect, the questionnaire asks about part-time enrolments at the doctoral level but not at the master's level where the larger part of graduate-level part-time study is undertaken -- more often than not by women and financially less secure students.

We must also ask why a survey measuring quality does not include measures sensitive to the types of change in student demand. Issues not included are those that go beyond simple headcounts of part-time students to measure the qualitative (and quantitative) ways in which flexible accessible part-time study has been developed for the expanding range of students and in an expanding range of programs. Others involve ways in which teaching and learning have been redefined to address more adequately gender, racial and cultural issues.

Lack of Verifiability and Comparability:

Two of the most serious failures of this research as a social scientific mode of investigation are the lack of verification this survey permits and the lack of comparability built into the data capture. These failures are traceable to, and compounded by, a poorly designed questionnaire and the weak and confused conceptualization underlying the questionnaire.

As in the 1990 survey, there was seemingly no attempt to *verify* responses to ensure consistency of interpretation for data used in the calculation of the ranking. Self-reporting, and the necessity to interpret the ambiguities of an ever-changing flurry of faxes, undermined seriously the comparability of responses and, consequently, the basis for a statistically derived ranking.

The data requested on faculty serve as a good example of the failure of this methodology to ensure verifiability. The original version of the Maclean's questionnaire required a calculation of the *number of full-time faculty holding Ph.D.s*. Perhaps in response to a valid complaint that this question is biased against universities focusing on disciplines in which a Ph.D. is not the highest or most relevant credential (e.g., fine arts and certain applied areas of study), Maclean's altered the question. The change redefined the measure as Ph.D. or "terminal degree in their field," without providing any interpretive guidelines on what was meant by "terminal degree". Universities were left to interpret

this vague term in a way sensitive to their program mix but not in a way that ensured comparable responses and easily verifiable responses (using Statistics Canada data on full-time faculty).

Perhaps the most extreme example of non-comparable data is the *dollar value of research grants*. The final "clarification" of these questions provided universities with the option of performing the calculation using the federal granting agency fiscal year or the university fiscal year. The questions were also posed in a way that permitted a double counting of monies. This not only rendered the measurements invalid, it eliminated any possibility of meaningfully comparing responses or verifying responses using external data sources.

Similarly, the definition of *classes* did not ensure meaningful comparisons. Institutional variations in how course sectioning is organized seriously distorted the measure. For example, at one university laboratory classes might be treated as separate course sections and staffed in a manner consistent with this approach (depending heavily on graduate students as instructors); elsewhere the laboratories subdivide the enrolment of a lecture course section taught by a faculty member or sessional lecturer. Clearly these two methods of sectioning are going to yield significantly different measures of mean and median section size. More significantly, using Maclean's definition of the class as "the primary meet" does not take account of the fact that the former will have counted the laboratory as the class, while the latter will only have counted the lecture. *These do not measure the same thing*. Much the same ambiguity besets the definition of "Fall" enrolments with parameters for count dates which allowed for as many as five different interpretations.

Such changes and ambiguities, together with unknown weightings and ranking methodology forced universities to perform strategic calculations on the effects of various forms of responses, further reducing any comparability and verifiability. Item by item and measure by measure the lack of verification and meaningful comparison strips away any validity of a composite measure of quality.

Rankings Can Hide More than They Reveal:

One of the major challenges of any quantitative piece of research is the selection of the most appropriate summary statistic to inform, rather than obscure, research findings. The ranking exercise of the "University Project" fails this challenge. The ranking utilize twenty-one statistics compiled using roughly 50 measures taken from the questionnaire results.

Strikingly, for all the claims to analysis made by Maclean's, there is very little attempt to ensure that rankings reflect meaningful differences. Perhaps the clearest example of this failure is the presentation of rankings on grade average. A simple ranking of universities (with no reference to the statistics determining the placement) obscures the fact that the percentage point spread across universities in two of the three categories is a mere ten points, the highest grade average being an A and the lowest being a B-. The third category has a point spread of thirteen points with the same range (B- to A). Can these differences be understood as statistically significant or in any other sense meaningful?

Maclean's chose not to include the measures determining the item rankings in their special issue. Consequently, the reader is left unable to assess whether other rankings similarly obscure more than they reveal.

Inappropriate Treatment of Non-Response:

Beyond all other failures of this project is the inclusion in the item rankings of universities who did not (or could not) provide appropriate data. In their special coverage of the Université du Québec, Maclean's highlights the fact that the multi-campus organization of this university is a "unique network of campuses scattered across the province". Largely because of this unique configuration, the Université du Québec did not "fit" the questionnaire and its indices. Not surprisingly, the university could not answer many of the questions.

Instead of recognizing that this lack of fit had more to do with the inflexibility of the research instrument than anything else, Maclean's chose to interpret non-response as a perverse act, including the university in both item and overall rankings -- in last place. No data were substituted, no statistical technique was utilized to generate a appropriate value. The university was arbitrarily assigned last place in a ranking with no empirical justification.

Such treatment is neither appropriate to the exercise nor is it honest. It reveals the lack of scientific values and an ignorance about research methodology. More importantly, it underscores why many in the university community felt they were being blackmailed by Maclean's to participate.

Conclusions:

The primary problem with the "University Project" is that it is neither fish nor fowl. Trapped somewhere between a journalistic and social scientific mode of inquiry, the project cannot support the claims

to precise measurement it makes, both implicitly and explicitly.

Maclean's has argued that its annual release of the special issue responds to a public anxious for this information. However, as this and other critical commentaries have shown, the flaws in the design and methodology severely compromise the quality of information provided to the public by this coverage.

Other have argued that, despite the obvious failings of the ranking exercise, universities benefit from this kind of national media exposure. This form of media coverage is, however, costly. Estimates of direct costs at Carleton University are roughly \$100,000 -- a large commitment of very scarce resources. More importantly, the costs of this project are not simply monetary. Distorted, biased research depending heavily on very traditional, and some would argue, exclusive notions of quality serves no one and violates the fundamental principles of scholarly research.

The failure of the university community lies in the fact that too many are willing to lend themselves to this pretence to social science, either for narrow institutional gain or out of fear that non-participation will be read (or depicted) as having something to hide or worse -- to be arbitrarily assigned a ranking of last place.

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1. Consultations with Ontario universities by Maclean's (performed via the Council of Ontario Universities (COU) Task Force on Accountability) were based on a research design fundamentally different from the one actually pursued. Discussions with COU were completed before Maclean's decided to shift the unit of analysis to the level of the university rather than Arts and Science programs only. Similarly, the use of categories within which ranking would be performed was a matter decided entirely by Maclean's with no announcement being made to the universities until after the fact. More importantly, as von Zur Muehlen (1992b:3) observes, these consultations seemed not to have included anyone in Canadian higher education with both a scholarly knowledge of Canadian higher education, and an expert knowledge in survey techniques, the development of indices, and the methodological problems of ranking.
2. For a discussion of the many design problems associated with this project see von Zur Muehlen, "A Review of Maclean's 1991 University Ranking: Documentary Evidence and Commentary" (1992a) and "Some Observations About Maclean's Planned 1992 Ranking of Canada's Universities" (1992b).
3. See p. 23 of the Special Issue.
4. The documents and subsequent faxes from Maclean's would seem to bear this out, as does the methodology section of the special issue. No mention is made in these documents of the categories (except in the broadest possible terms) or the criteria to be used to define them operationally. The three categories were not finalized until after the provision of data by the universities, with universities notified about the criteria in mid-September and about their placement only two days before the special issue was released.
5. One of the most problematic indices in this regard is the index, reputation, and its measurement through an invalid survey instrument. This index is misleadingly reported on and the highly suspect results of the separate survey have been misused in a very serious way to generate a ranking.
6. One of the most statistically unsound features of the weighting scheme was the allocation of 20% to the reputational survey results. The reputational index is based on a survey whose measures are neither valid nor reliable. Yet the weight bestowed is equal to the weight accorded to the faculty indices which, for all of their flaws, are at least derived from somewhat more valid and reliable questions.
7. On the verification sheet (sent to universities after all responses had been received by Maclean's) there were half a dozen terms and changes never mentioned in any previous fax.
8. The concentration of international students is also a function of the program mix of the institutions (since disciplines like engineering have a very high proportion of international students).
9. This is one fundamental weakness of Maclean's use of the U.S. model of ranking — their failure to take into account the different data base which informs these statistics on grades.
10. This expansion of part-time study continued well into the eighties. The growth rate in part-time undergraduate study over the period 1972-73 to 1987-88 was roughly double that of full-time study. See AUCC, *Trends: The Canadian University in Profile* (Ottawa:AUCC, 1990), p.16.
11. For a review of this research literature, see Porter, Porter and Blishen, *Stations and Callings* (Toronto: Methuen, 1982).
12. See Secretary of State, *Profile of Higher Education in Canada, 1991 Edition* (Ottawa:Secretary of State, 1992), p.6, and Marion Porter and Gilles Jasmin, *A Profile of Post-Secondary Students in Canada* (Ottawa: Secretary of State, 1987), pp. 48-49.
13. Consider, for example, that just under half of the Carleton University full-time cohort (as defined by Maclean's) studied on a part-time basis in their subsequent years of study. Consider also that in a study of "time-to-degree" at the graduate level using a full-time-equivalency measure of graduate rate, we have discovered that part-time students are as efficient (and sometimes more efficient) than their full-time counterparts. Hence there is no reason to exclude this population from the measure of graduation rate.

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Recently I received an invitation from the University of Toronto chemist and Nobel Prize winner, John Polanyi, to join the new political action committee, Friends of Ontario Universities, and to help in pressing the case for better funding of university education. Dr. Polanyi's request is appropriate. The disproportionate reduction of university funding by successive Ontario governments (grants to universities have declined by 13% over the past thirteen years while grants to schools and hospitals have increased by nearly 40%) has had a palpably harmful effect on university education. The steady reduction of the size of facilities has led to weaker university curricula and the consequent base budget cuts have resulted in many departments not making any new appointments for some years with the result that scholarly freshness - the best antidote to staleness of knowledge and to flagging intellectual energy - is lacking.

The letter from Dr. Polanyi included a questionnaire asking for my opinion on a number of issues. My enthusiasm for the political spirit behind the letter was caught up short by question 3(b): "where do you think universities should place the greater emphasis? On access or on excellence." Sadly, this question confirmed an impression that seems to prevail in universities. The assumption behind the question is that to regard universities as instruments for achieving wider social enlightenment, or social mobility, or diversity, or distributional fairness, necessarily entails compromising excellence. Meaning is seldom given to the concept of excellence; no context is suggested from which one might glean a sense of what university qualities are at risk. It is as if the question were: do I prefer "good" universities or "not so good" universities, the latter class of universities being those that openly pursue policies of wider public enlightenment and social justice.

The Polanyi questionnaire echoes assumptions that have also expressed at Queen's. A year ago, a Senate Committee wrote a response to the Report on Race Relations. The response stated that academic quality "as judged by one's professional peers" and as evidenced by "peer-reviewed publications" must not be compromised by strategies for "furthering the institutional aim for more diversity". It flatly stated "No revision of the notion of academic excellence should thus be contemplated". Evidently, excellence in universities has an established understanding, and diversity is not part of the project of factoring in concerns over social diversity represents "revision" of these standards.

Last fall, the Principal's Advisory Task Force on Resource Issues published a comprehensive paper, one heading of which was "Meshing Equity and Access with Quality". Readers of this document were not left to wonder what negative inferences were to be drawn from the "meshing" metaphor. The text that followed put it bluntly: "Equity initiatives can conflict with initiatives to advance the

quality of the work". This view not only contributes to the delegitimation of people in the university community who are identifiable by social and racial difference, it forestalls a stable commitment of the university community to diversity.

There are many reasons why, in higher education, equity is an essential component of excellence.

- First, universities cannot draw the best possible faculty or students to them when their practices, as well as wider societal practices, shrink the pools from which they draw.
- Second, we don't provide students with an education that helps them meet their civic responsibility as Canadians when the university community so poorly reflects the world in which graduates will be expected to work and perform.
- Third, intellectual perspectives are constructed by cultural experience. We cannot remain intellectually credible when we do not have within our community persons who, with a full sense of security and belonging, bring broadening cultural and intellectual perspectives. Professor Amy Gutmann of Princeton stated at a lecture at Queen's last year that the major intellectual task of universities is not to convey the dominant canons of knowledge but to allow students to understand them critically - to come to understand their place, their value, their gaps and limitations and their failings. The growing cultural pluralism of universities has contributed immensely to this sort of critical understanding of traditional knowledge.
- Fourth, universities must help students develop a sense of the moral obligations that go with the privilege of higher education. The university fails its students when it fails to see, and allows its students to fail to see, the social justice dimension of the distribution of valuable opportunities.
- Fifth, the concern that academic quality will be undermined by equity programs rests on a concept of quality that is limited. Queen's, for instance, makes much of the character of its incoming classes as measured by awards based on high school performance. What is unacknowledged is the extent to which high school performance is affected by the transfer of educational capital and skills between generations within clearly defined socio-economic groups.

If universities fail to implement strong equity programs, they risk slipping in their quest to identify and recruit the best students. The threat to any university's reputation for excellence lies in its failure to overcome the innate tendency to perpetuate social privilege.

The Polanyi invitation to join in saving Ontario universities from loss of vigour and intellectual relevance deserves a positive response from all those who see the connection between intellectual investigation and a strong and just society. Yet, to see the universities' work and practices as not implicated in social justice denies the connection just as forcibly as the most virulent form of anti-intellectualism.