

Academic Matters

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The War on Knowledge

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Harper's attack on science:
No science, no evidence, no truth,
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Good government and Statistics Canada:
The need for true independence



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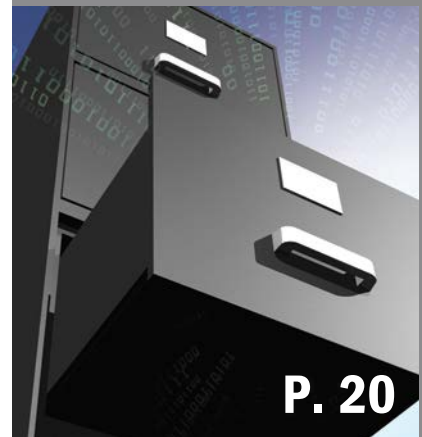
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Academic Matters

OCUFA'S JOURNAL OF HIGHER EDUCATION
LA REVUE D'ENSEIGNEMENT SUPÉRIEUR D'UAPVO

Academic Matters is published two times a year by OCUFA, and is received by 17,000 professors, academic librarians and others interested in higher education issues across Canada. The journal explores issues of relevance to higher education in Ontario, other provinces in Canada, and globally. It is intended to be a forum for thoughtful and thought-provoking, original and engaging discussion of current trends in post secondary education and consideration of academe's future direction.

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Letters to the Editor

Dear Editor,

I read with great interest an excellent article by Prof Ken Coates entitled "The Quiet Campus: The Anatomy of Dissent at Canadian Universities" in the latest issue of Academic Matters [Nov 2012: 23-26]. I am glad that Prof. Coates has raised the issue and has provided such common but illustrative approach and everyday examples that we are all familiar with in our day to day campus life and activities.

His excellent sense of dark humor and explicit style has really caught my attention. Broadly speaking I have not come across such a holistic and scholarly debate on the issue of openness and free thoughts and speech on campus in recent time. I extend my heartiest congratulations to the author and the editorial board of Academic Matters for proving such a reader's delight on the broad context of issues that we grossly under estimate in our daily academic life.

Thanking you

Sincerely yours

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It's no secret that the Harper Government has imposed strict controls on Canada's scientists and cut funding to many scientific organizations. As Carol Linnitt argues, these policies are an attack on science and on democracy itself.

Tout le monde sait que le gouvernement Harper a imposé des contrôles rigoureux aux scientifiques canadiens et a sabré le financement destiné à de nombreuses organisations scientifiques. Tel que le signale Carol Linnitt, ces politiques représentent une attaque menée contre la science et contre la démocratie même.

HARPER'S ATTACK ON SCIENCE:

**NO SCIENCE,
NO EVIDENCE,
NO TRUTH,
NO DEMOCRACY**

Carol Linnitt

Science—and the culture of evidence and inquiry it supports—has a long relationship with democracy. Widely available facts have long served as a check on political power. Attacks on science, and on the ability of scientists to communicate freely, are ultimately attacks on democratic governance.

It's no secret the Harper government has a problem with science. In fact, Canada's scientists are so frustrated with this government's recent overhaul of scientific communications policies and cuts to research programs they took to the streets, marching on Parliament Hill last summer to decry the "Death of Evidence." Their concerns—expressed on their protest banners—followed a precise logic: "no science, no evidence, no truth, no democracy."

"NO SCIENCE"

Since 2006, the Harper government has made bold moves to control or prevent the free flow of scientific information across Canada, particularly when that information highlights the undesirable consequences of industrial development. The free flow of information is controlled in two ways: through the muzzling of scientists who might *communicate* scientific information, and through the elimination of research programs that might participate in the *creation* of scientific information or evidence.

Federal scientists, academics, journalists, and environmental organizations across Canada have complained of increasingly strict communications policies that prevent researchers from relaying crucial scientific information to the media or the public. Such suppression of communication ranges from the laughable—such as Environment Canada scientist Mark Tushingham being prevented from attending the launch of his own book, a novel that explored a future world catastrophically altered by global warming—to the systemic—such as federal scientists with the Department of Fisheries and Oceans being required to obtain permission from high-level bureaucrats to discuss peer-reviewed research with the media.

The problem of muzzling is widespread in federal departments, agencies, and organizations tasked with scientific research. The problem has been endemic since the election of the Harper Conservatives nearly seven years ago.

In 2007, the Harper government established new rules

that controlled Environment Canada scientists' interactions with the media. Under this new protocol, senior scientists are required to obtain permission from the government before speaking with reporters. A leaked internal Environment Canada document revealed the new policy had reduced the department's engagement with media on climate change by 80 per cent. That same document also revealed Environment Canada employees felt the intended design of the new procedure was to silence climate scientists.

In 2008, the Harper government eliminated the position of National Science Advisor, a role that created an important link between the scientific community and top political leaders, including the Prime Minister. Since then, ministerial directives have trickled down throughout federal departments, including the Department of Fisheries and Oceans and Natural Resources Canada, to further limit unmonitored interactions between scientists and the press. These directives usually involve burdensome administrative delays that inhibit the ability of scientists to engage freely with journalists.

Examples of the impact of these directives are not difficult to find. In 2010, for example, Scott Dallimore, a scientist with Natural Resources Canada, was not allowed to comment on his research concerning a northern Canadian flood that occurred 13,000 years ago without permission from then Natural Resources Minister Christian Paradis. In early 2011, Kristi Miller, a scientist with the federal Department of Fisheries and Oceans, was prevented from responding to media inquiries regarding her important research into declining salmon stocks. Orders to keep Miller from speaking with journalists came from the Privy Council Office in Ottawa.

And the list goes on.

In the aftermath of the March 2011 Japanese earthquake and nuclear disaster in Fukushima, Postmedia journalist Margaret Munro was denied access to information regarding Canada's radiation detectors and was prevented from speaking with experts working with those detectors. The information was eventually made public by an Austrian research team working with data from global radiation monitors—including Canada's.





In April 2011, a group of scientists from Environment Canada were prevented from speaking with the media about their paper recently published in *Geophysical Research Letters*. The paper concluded that a two-degree Celsius increase in temperatures worldwide might be unavoidable in the next century. Six months later, Environment Canada scientist David Tarasick was denied the opportunity to speak with the media about his research concerning an “unprecedented” loss of ozone over the Arctic. He told Postmedia News: “I’m available when Media Relations say I’m available.”

That November, scientists from Environment Canada were restricted from talking to media about the results of a study confirming that snowfall near Alberta’s tar sands was contaminated with petroleum-based pollutants. These scientists were directed to either shunt media inquiries to a government spokesperson or refer to a list of scripted statements that claimed a 2010 government study found no toxins in the Athabasca River and, further, that no definitive link had been made between tar sands contaminants and the region’s mutated and cancerous fish—a statement in direct contradiction to Environment Canada’s emerging research.

Last spring, the Harper government sent media relations chaperones to shadow Environment Canada scientists at the International Polar Year Conference in Montreal. Conference participants were ordered to ensure media liaison personnel were present to record all interactions between federal scientists and the media.

In early 2013, the Department of Fisheries and Oceans introduced a new policy that characterized all department research as ‘confidential’ unless released by high-ranking officials, leaving the fate of scientific communication in the hands of bureaucrats rather than scientists.

“NO EVIDENCE”

Beyond tight communications controls, the Harper Government has also constrained or eliminated several high-profile research labs, scientific institutions, and other data-gathering organizations. The effect of these closures is that the very building block of science—evidence—is cut off at its roots.

In 2010, the Harper government cut the mandatory long-form census, the country’s most robust and consistent point of data collection on everything from language to household purchases. Without this type of comprehensive data, there is no reliable and transparent way to monitor government, to demand democratic accountability, or to argue for evidence-based decision-making, according to former Chief Statistician Munir A. Sheikh.

In August 2011, the government announced 700 Environment Canada positions would be terminated in order to pursue “government-wide fiscal restraint.”

By February 2012, only five of Canada’s ten LiDAR (light detection and ranging) observation stations, part of the Global Atmosphere Watch Aerosol LiDAR Observation Network, were still in operation. These ten observation stations had been conducting weekly ozone and fossil fuel pollution measurements since 1966. The closure of the research stations followed the removal of Canada’s CORALnet website which distributed crucial ozone and pollution data to research laboratories and scientific organizations across the globe.

Around the same time, the Harper government announced a forced closure of the Polar Environment Atmosphere Research Laboratory (PEARL) in Nunavut. PEARL participated in groundbreaking climate research and played a pivotal role in discovering an enormous hole in the ozone layer over the Arctic. The closure of PEARL was largely a result of the failure of the federal government to renew funding for the Canadian Foundation for Climate and Atmospheric Studies, which expired in 2011. The agency awarded \$118 million of federal funding to specific climate research endeavours between 2000 and 2011.

In May 2012, the Harper government announced that funding would be cut in 2013 for the National Roundtable on the Environment and Economy (NRTEE), a body seeking to regulate Canada’s carbon emissions. Just recently, NRTEE was prevented from making its documents and research available on a non-governmental website because of government restrictions on information. Also in May, Vancouver Island’s Institute of Ocean Sciences was informed that it would no longer receive funding from the federal government. Peter Ross, the country’s only marine mammal toxicologist, lost his research position along with 1,074 other Department of Fisheries and Ocean employees.

These cuts to funding for environmental research were followed by the infamously anti-science Omnibus Budget Bill C-38 in June 2012. The Bill effectively cut funding to, dismantled, or weakened the following environmental bodies or pieces of legislation: The Canadian Environmental Assessment Act; The Canadian Environmental Assessment Agency; Canadian Environmental Protection Act; Kyoto Protocol Implementation Act; Fisheries Act; Navigable Waters Protection Act; Energy Board Act; Species at Risk Act; Parks Canada Agency Act; Canadian Oil and Gas Operations Act; Coasting Trade Act; Nuclear Safety Control Act; and the Canada Seeds Act. In addition, money was granted to investigate the charitable status of environmental groups while water programs, wastewater surveys and emissions monitoring programs were cut.

Also last summer, the government announced it would cut \$3 million in funding to the Experimental Lakes Area, effectively shutting down Canada’s most unique natural

laboratory where researchers studied the effects of industrial chemicals and pollutants on waterways, fish, and other aquatic life. [Editor's note: It now appears that an NGO, the International Institute of Sustainable Development (IISD) will be taking over operations at the ELA. As we go to press, discussions between IISD, the Ontario government and the federal government are ongoing to finalize the details of this arrangement.]

"NO TRUTH"

In the absence of rigorous, scientific information—and an informed public—decision-making becomes an exercise in upholding the preferences of those in power.

In Canada today, as in most of the developed world, power has become increasingly concentrated in fewer hands—hands which are inevitably attached to the bodies of big business and the state. And in light of Prime Minister Harper's agenda to rebrand Canada as the next energy superpower, it would seem that both the corporate interests and the state are focused on the expansion of the resource extraction industry in Canada.

And yet, scientists around the world have made clear that large industrial states have an urgent responsibility to scale back their carbon emissions if catastrophic global warming is to be avoided. Major scientific organizations have voiced similar concerns regarding atmospheric and oceanic pollution, suggesting contaminants related to the production and consumption of fossil fuels are endangering the health and well-being of human, plant, and animal life.

Yet despite the scientific community's appeal for a wholesale switch from carbon-based fuels to alternative and renewable energy, the growth of resource-based economies like Canada prolong our dependence on costly and unsus-

Science, and the evidence-based discourse it enables, is the foundation upon which the whole democratic mechanism turns.

tainable energy sources like oil and gas. The long-term viability of these resources is becoming increasingly threatened as oil and gas supplies become harder and more costly to access, both in economic and environmental terms.

Demand for these resources—including oil from the Alberta tar sands—depends on our ability to justify their development in environmental and economic terms. The costs associated with developing oil in the tar sands, while only marginally defensible economically, are much more

difficult to justify on an ecological scale. And this is where the work of scientists runs counter to the agenda of industrialists.

Despite evidence to the contrary, industry supporters such as Canada's Natural Resources Minister Joe Oliver and Alberta Premier Alison Redford promote Alberta's tar sands as 'environmentally friendly' and 'green.' And it is likely because such claims contradict a growing scientific consensus that there is a formal effort to suppress scientific opinion.

Calvin Sandborn, legal director at the University of Victoria's Environmental Law Centre, has reviewed the government's role in the muzzling of scientists. He says there is some consistency across the board when you consider what scientific information is regularly silenced.

"It is interesting to see that the topics that require the highest level of ministerial control are topics related to the tar sands, climate change, polar bears, caribou, and the oil and gas industry. Those are all terms used in the federal government policies and on those topics the rules are the strictest. The scientists have to get the highest level of ministerial approval to talk about those topics. I'll leave it to you to decide whether that's a coincidence."

Scientific research plays a crucial role in our ability to knowledgeably engage with the natural world. In many ways, scientists act as interpreters for nature, and for the species, waterways, and ecosystems that cannot speak for themselves. When we sever the link between science and society, we effectively sever the link between society and the natural world. There are facts about our environment that we simply would not know had scientific inquiry not revealed them.

Consider global warming. Without rigorous, long-term scientific observation, we would be ignorant of the massive impact the burning of fossil fuels is having on the atmosphere and geophysical features like the polar ice caps.

Without science, we're walking blind.

Blindness can have a serious impact when it comes to public opinion and decision-making. When we limit the production of scientific evidence, it creates a knowledge vacuum that inflates the power of political influence. If politicians can't point to facts in defense of their arguments then there is little left but ideology to rely upon.

A functioning democracy relies upon the interplay of fact, rationality, and a well-informed public. Within that context, good arguments are incisive political instruments: precise, clear, and informative. But good arguments require evidence, which can only be produced through scientific inquiry.

Science, and the evidence-based discourse it enables, is the foundation upon which the whole democratic mechanism turns.



“NO DEMOCRACY”

The relationship between science and democracy is thus an intimate one. And to the extent that we tolerate the suppression of science in Canada, we can expect a correlative suppression of democracy.

In Canada we are witnessing the muzzling of scientists and the elimination of federal funding that enables scientific research. When scientists are prevented from providing the public with information, there is a reduction in the capacity for democracy.

Without science neither the public nor its leaders can be sufficiently knowledgeable to make informed decisions. Decision-making becomes little more than an exercise in ideology and the use of power.

Nobel Prize-winning climate scientist Andrew Weaver argues that “we have a crisis in Canada.” This crisis, he says, “is in terms of the development of information and science to inform decision-making. What we have replaced that with is an ideological approach to decision-making.”

For Weaver, science doesn’t dictate what policy should be. Science isn’t prescriptive. “But what science is there to do is to inform policy discussions. You make the policy based on evidence as well as opinions of people

around you. What you cannot do in a democratic society is suppress evidence because then you’re into propaganda and ideology. And this is what is happening in Canada. The evidence used to actually inform society, to actually determine whether or not they are in favour of a policy, is suppressed.”

“So,” he says, “we have a problem. [Muzzling] throws a wedge into our democratic process.”

He adds, “This is a crisis of democracy. We need to actually, as citizens, reclaim democracy and there are many ways of doing it. But the first thing we have to demand is access to information because without information we’re ignorant and ignorance actually leads to the rise of these autocratic systems.”

So, when a nation’s preeminent scientists take to the streets, wielding placards that say “No science. No evidence. No truth. No democracy” there is much more than a research institution’s budget at stake.

If Canada is to recover from the serious dismantling of scientific institutions and practices across the country, it will require a sustained effort by scientists, citizens, and policymakers. It is much easier, after all, to tear down than to rebuild. ■

Carol Linnitt is site manager and director of research at DeSmog Canada.



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CONTEMPT FOR VALUES: The controversy over Library and Archives Canada's Code of Conduct

Myron Groover

Library and Archives Canada has introduced a new code of conduct that contains worrying restrictions for its employees. Myron Groover asks how the organization can fulfill its mandate while stifling the ethics and values of the library and archival professions.

Bibliothèque et Archives Canada a introduit un nouveau code de conduite qui comporte des restrictions troublantes pour ses employés. Myron Groover demande comment l'organisation peut remplir son mandat tout en étouffant l'éthique et les valeurs des professions de bibliothécaire et d'archiviste.

Early this March, on a Friday—Friday the 13th, as it happened—a journalist named Margaret Munro uploaded a 23-page PDF to the document-sharing website Scribd.com. The file detailed certain new policies at a beleaguered federal institution. It was accompanied by a brief article in the National Post which attempted

to explain the document's significance—a few talking heads were interviewed, some token analysis was provided—and that looked to be about the end of the story. It seemed to be standard fare for a slow Friday in the newsroom, something which would be of interest to serious policy wonks and not much to anyone else.

The document in question was the new Code of Conduct issued by Library and Archives Canada (LAC), the federal institution tasked with preserving and making available Canada's documentary heritage and the official records of its government for present and future generations. In spite of this seemingly profound mandate, the ongoing difficulties faced by the organization in recent years—such as savage budget cuts and an increasingly de-skilled management culture—had so far generated comparatively little press coverage or public attention outside the professional circles of those most directly affected. There was little reason to believe a leaked code of ethics, however controversial, would prove any different.



Watch out. Critical thinking is not welcome here. Leave your values at the door—anything you say, do, or think might just come back to haunt you.

But then a curious thing happened.

People all over Canada started talking about the Code. Social media and professional listservs exploded with commentary. Follow-up articles appeared in dozens of newspapers and blogs. By the end of the following week, the issue had featured on CBC's *Early Edition*, *As it Happens*, and Jian Ghomeshi's Q. It had become the biggest piece of library-related news in recent memory. Why?

A code like no other

The Code of Conduct issue bridged the gap between professional anguish and public sentiment. Here at last was a direct piece of evidence, straight from LAC's management, which could encapsulate for all readers—for all citizens—how badly things at the institution had gone awry. Concerns over the document tended to center around a few broad issues.

'High risk' activities

In a lengthy section discussing "conflicts of interest," the Code prohibits employees from participating in library- or archives-related professional conferences, teaching engagements, or other unspecified "personal activities" (presumably including publishing in academic and professional journals). The document describes all such avenues of scholarly expression as a "high risk" to LAC—an institution whose legal mandate is "to facilitate in Canada co-operation among communities involved in the acquisition, preservation and diffusion of knowledge." LAC officials have since attempted to back away from this, but the Code itself is quite unambiguous—"personal activities" such as teaching are universally subject to approval, and approval can only be sought for activities which meet *all* of the following criteria:

- The subject matter of the activity is not related to the mandate or activities of LAC;
- The employee is not presented as speaking for or being an expert of LAC or the Government of Canada;
- The third party is not a potential or current supplier to/colaborator with LAC;
- The third party does not lobby or advocate with LAC;
- The third party does not receive grants, contributions or other types of funding or payments from LAC;
- The employee has discussed it with his or her manager, who has documented confirmation that the activity does not conflict with the employee's duties at LAC or present other risks to LAC.

Preventing LAC employees from engaging in professional discourse does a profound disservice to scholarship in fields relating to technology, history, libraries, and archives. It discourages many of the nation's foremost heritage experts from discussing their life's work with the wider world and restricts their access to innovations being developed and shared by their colleagues outside LAC—innovations LAC sorely needs to meet its mandate in a future characterized by rapidly changing technology.

The implications of the Code extend far beyond employees' professional lives, however—they constitute an affront to these individuals' freedom of thought and expression, even at home. An illiberal interpretation of these provisions could be used to intimidate employees, prevent them from participating in conferences and teaching engagements, and discourage them from holding office—or even voting—in unions or professional organizations.

Conflicts of interest—real and imagined

This is not to say that there are no conflicts of interest that the management of Library and Archives Canada should be concerned about. One such is the conflict between LAC's Code of Conduct with the underlying professional ethics of its employees. As information professionals, librarians and archivists are already governed by well-established professional codes of ethics and principles, developed over centuries of service to the public. One such principle, from our own Canadian Library Association, is this:

It is the responsibility of libraries to guarantee and facilitate access to all expressions of knowledge and intellectual activity, including those which some elements of society may consider to be unconventional, unpopular or unacceptable.

It is difficult to see how highly educated and experienced librarians, archivists, and information technology experts could reconcile these core professional values with the spirit and letter of the LAC Code. We don't, for example, expect that accountants will cook the books because they happen to be employed by an institution which might prefer that they do so! Many commentators see these moves to undermine employees' professional ethics and identities as part of a broader attempt on the part of LAC to deprofessionalize and de-skill its workforce.



Duty of loyalty

Much was also made of the document's lengthy insistence that employees have a "duty of loyalty" to the Government of Canada. One passage reads:

As public servants, our duty of loyalty to the Government of Canada and its elected officials extends beyond our workplace to our personal activities. Public servants must therefore use caution when making public comments, expressing personal opinions or taking actions that could potentially damage LAC's reputation...they must maintain awareness of their surroundings, their audience and how their words or actions could be interpreted (or misinterpreted).

While the concept of a duty of loyalty is not new, having been extensively debated in both government literature and the courts, the emphasis on its extension to non-elected officials (such as LAC's managers) and to employees' private lives—and private thoughts—is deeply troubling.

Sweeping scope

The true danger of the Code, however, lies not in any individual clause but rather in its purpose and articulation as a whole. The language of this Code could be taken to imply that the most basic liberties—participating in politics, joining professional organizations, or even discussing one's work with family at home—are subject to the scrutiny and approval of managers. It even implies, as we have seen, that the "duty of loyalty" protecting elected officials from public criticism by civil servants extends to LAC's non-elected management!

Sections pertaining to "personal activities," in particular, display a disregard bordering on contempt for employees' civil liberties. In one passage employees are warned that their private lives and conversations "could become a work-related matter" if they criticize the organization or its management in any fashion. A passage on "wrongdoing" even goes so far as to encourage employees who suspect colleagues of breaching the Code to report on their activities "in a confidential manner and without fear of reprisal" to an individual called the "Senior Officer for

Internal Disclosure." Elsewhere, a definition of "conflict of interest" says that "perceived" wrongdoing is every bit as severe and punishable as actual, demonstrable misbehaviour—and the resolution of all such conflicts is apparently invested in a so-called "COI Administrator." What does this all amount to? Ultimately, it means that should you find yourself accused or even suspected of contravening any provision of the Code, you may be subject to real disciplinary action including termination. This could be motivated by something as simple as a personality conflict with a fellow employee—or a manager feeling that your choice of friends outside of work somehow casts aspersions on the Conservative Party of Canada.

We can all recognize the need for public bodies to balance their duties and functions as government representatives with their employees' right to freedom of expression, but in this case the balance is drastically skewed—taken as a whole, the document represents a stark warning to employees: "Watch out. Critical thinking is not welcome here. Leave your values at the door—anything you say, do, or think might just come back to haunt you."

An institution in crisis

In spite of intense recent media coverage of LAC's difficulties, the institution's travails are nothing new to the nation's librarians, archivists, information technologists, and historians. LAC had been widely criticized in academic and professional circles for increasingly worrisome decisions undertaken since 2009 by new managers who have at times seemed to lack any practical understanding or professional experience of how to run such an institution. The Librarian and Archivist of Canada had been replaced by a career bureaucrat—neither a librarian nor archivist—whose public speaking engagements have provoked vigorous debate as to his understanding of basic principles underpinning technology and information management.

The institution was asked to implement savage budget cuts and has fired a fifth of its workforce. It has cancelled a number of universally admired programs—interlibrary loan, the National Archival Development Program—while spending tens of thousands of dollars on renovating offices reserved for the exclusive use of senior management. Reference and research support services have been slashed, and a new website for the organization appeared to provide less access to LAC's holdings than ever before. Community groups have also been turned out of the building, and the once-lively exhibition spaces on the first floor are now dark. Even the signs bearing the organization's name have been removed from the front of its Wellington Street headquarters.

All these decisions were justified in the context of a "modernization" strategy which was ostensibly geared towards increased online service delivery at the expense of in-person service. Serious questions have since been raised about LAC's ability and even its competence to implement this increased digital focus. Recently, LAC management have taken to the editorial pages of newspapers, and even to paid

marketing services, in order to advertise—or defend—their increasingly embattled vision for the institution's future.

Embarrassment over the Code of Conduct, meanwhile, has seen even Heritage Minister James Moore publicly disavow LAC's current management on the floor of the House of Commons, where he insisted that neither he nor his staff have anything to do with the ongoing changes at the organization. The credibility of this disavowal is up for debate, as it comes from a government that has made a name for itself through heavy-handed and direct control of policy and narrative across the federal public service. However, the effects of negative press coverage like that surrounding the Code of Conduct continue to be felt—most recently, Heritage Critic Pierre Nantel has formally requested that the Information Commissioner of Canada broaden an investigation into the muzzling of government scientists to include LAC.

The bigger picture

In spite of the controversy, the changes at LAC continue unabated. This is a cause for ongoing concern not only for Canada's information professionals and the communities they support—academics, policy analysts, teachers, and students of all kinds—but to the citizenry as a whole. How well are we served as a people by a national library that treats its foundational values with such contempt? What are we to make of a repository that speaks loudly about providing access to its holdings while quietly muzzling its employees and shutting its doors to the world?

There are no easy answers, but the insights provided by LAC's Code of Conduct might help us at least to start asking the right questions. ■

Myron Groover is a Vice President of the British Columbia Library Association and chairs its Information Policy Committee.

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GOOD GOVERNMENT
AND STATISTICS CANADA:
**The need for
true independence**

Munir A. Sheikh



EVIDENCE

The cancellation of the long-form census in 2010 raised serious questions about the independence of Statistics Canada. Munir A. Sheikh, former Chief Statistician of Canada, argues that Statistics Canada needs to be insulated from political interference to ensure good data and good public policy.

L'annulation du recensement détaillé en 2010 a remis sérieusement en question l'indépendance de Statistique Canada. Munir A. Sheikh, ancien statisticien en chef du Canada, soutient que Statistique Canada doit être isolée de l'ingérence politique si elle veut assurer de bonnes données et une bonne politique publique.

On Saturday, June 26, 2010, the Government of Canada announced its decision that the 2011 census would include only the eight questions from the traditional short-form. In effect, this cancelled the mandatory long-form census that included an additional 53 questions on a variety of demographic, social, and economic subjects. The government asked Statistics Canada to undertake a voluntary survey instead, including the original 53 questions from the long-form.

This decision did not go over well with users of census data, including provincial and municipal governments, non-government organizations, academics, the media, pollsters, and many others. According to one count, 370 organizations—representing the whole spectrum of the Canadian population—expressed their displeasure at the decision.

The government's initial response was two-fold: they insisted that Statistics Canada had given them advice that a voluntary survey can produce as good results as a census; and they claimed that Statistics Canada and its Chief Statistician were totally supportive of the government on this issue. This was not the case. I should know; I was the Chief Statistician at the time. I resigned shortly thereafter.

It is useful to quote at length Alex Himelfarb on the reasons behind my resignation as the Chief Statistician:

Let me be clear about what this was not. This was not a public servant substituting his own judgment for that of the government or in any way being disloyal. Quite the contrary: in the face of criticism from colleagues, Statistics Canada seemed poised to implement the voluntary approach and, in the traditions of public service, Munir was and continues to be publicly silent about his advice. Nor was this an instance of a public servant fighting for turf or more resources. This is not about defending big government or public service jobs as some critics of government and public service will immediately assume. Indeed, the voluntary approach will cost more and require more people. Munir himself played a major role in the past in cost cutting and reducing the size of public service, and since becoming Chief Statistician, he has overseen cuts to surveys, cuts which the agency and some of its clients found very difficult and troubling, but which he did nonetheless and with no visible controversy. No, it was none of these things. This was about the integrity of Statistics Canada and of the public service (emphasis added). The decision to replace the long form census with a voluntary version put the Chief Statistician in a difficult position. The way the decision was handled put him in an impossible position.

These events were covered extensively by the Canadian media. The issue was taken up first by a Parliamentary Committee, then Parliament itself. It became an international news story.

But beyond the cancellation of the long-form and the resignation of the Chief Statistician, a third issue emerged which is equally important. However, it did not receive the attention it deserved. This is the issue of Statistics Canada's independence from government interference. The following are the famous words of the Minister Responsible for Statistics Canada, Tony Clement, that appeared in an interview session with Steven Chase of the *Globe and Mail* on July 20, 2010:

Q: Is Statscan an independent agency? I am unclear on that.

A: It operates pursuant to legislation and it does report to a minister who is responsible and accountable to the public.

Q: So it's not independent like [Auditor-General] Sheila Fraser?

A: No. No.

Q: So it's not arm's length

A: No.

Q: Ok I was unclear on this. I think maybe I got the impression it was.

A: Sometimes some of them like to think they are—but that doesn't make it so. They report to a minister.

Clearly, to the government of the day, Statistics Canada was not independent. This has serious implications for the quality and utility of data collected by Statistics Canada, and the public decision-making that this data supports.

This article examines the need for an independent Statistics Canada in order to ensure sound policy decision-making, informed public choice, and good government. First, it examines the importance of evidence-based decisions, and shows that this depends on high-quality data. It then goes on to look at how independence is necessary for Statistics Canada to achieve its goals, and how the current *Statistics Act* does not deliver that crucial separation from government. It concludes by proposing some changes to the legislation to achieve true independence.

The importance of evidence-based decision-making

Decisions based on evidence, rather than ideology, enhance the well-being of citizens both at the personal and public policy levels.

Consider monetary policy. The Bank of Canada has an inflation target and adjusts monetary policy when it believes the target will not be met to its satisfaction. Canada's inflation outcomes, and the Bank of Canada's role in that context, are some of the factors that have contributed to Canada's strong economic performance in recent years, including its ability to cope with the current financial and economic crisis.

Consider corporate tax policy. Two contradictory views are often heard. On one side, the argument goes like this: lower corporate taxes increase investment that, in turn, improves productivity and creates jobs (the conflict between jobs and productivity in the short run is unfortunately forgotten in this equation). On the other side, the argument contends that corporate tax reductions transfer wealth from the poor to the rich, and this carries unacceptable social costs.

Only evidence can bridge the gap between these conflicting views to allow policy makers to follow a policy that enhances citizen well-being. This evidence could show that the outcome may depend on a range of other factors that may shift over time. Thus, it may be hard to determine *a priori* which of the two outcomes to expect at a point in time.

In an article I published in the April 20, 2011 *Globe and Mail*, I made three points based on evidence drawn from a particular time period to argue that Canadian corporate tax

look at the job market in various parts of the country to decide whether to move or not.

Now imagine all of this happening without citizens and governments paying attention to an evidence-based analysis of the issues: the Bank of Canada not interested in understanding why the inflation target is important; the federal government not realizing why it should or should not cut corporate taxes; and citizens not thinking about what high mortgage rates, high food prices, and job opportunities could do to their well-being.

Without appropriate evidence-based analysis, we will all be poorer—in every sense of the word.

The importance of good data

The Consumer Price Index (CPI) provides a helpful example of what data can do for its users.

Data **describe events** as they unfold and thus give us information on things as they change. Every month Statistics

Decisions based on evidence, rather than ideology, enhance the well-being of citizens both at the personal and public policy levels.



cuts did not produce the expected outcomes during this period: first, if we look at the actual investment performance during the 2000s in relation to the 1990s, we find that investment growth did not keep pace with profit growth by a long margin, even before taking into account the reductions in corporate tax; second, using simple illustrative calculations, every one-point reduction in the Canadian corporate tax rate was equivalent to the Government of Canada writing a \$500 million cheque to the US government; and third, with the US corporate tax rate double that of Canada's, we are nowhere in sight of US productivity growth which is the true anchor for any country's rising living standards.

At a personal level, Canadians make decisions every day based on evidence. They look at mortgage rates before deciding whether, and where, to get a mortgage. They look at food prices to determine what to buy and how much. They

Canada releases the CPI describing the change in consumer prices for the past month. It may show that average prices rose or fell by a particular magnitude. This monthly measurement can be compared with previous months to get a sense about inflation rates over different time periods.

Data can also be used to **gain insight** into a phenomenon. The detailed information contained in the CPI release can pinpoint where prices are changing most. For example, data may show that the main reason the average price rose last month was because of significant increases in auto insurance premiums. This would allow citizens to understand the reasons for an increase in their cost of living.

Data allow **analysis** of the reasons behind observed developments. Using other relevant data, such as the frequency and seriousness of accidents, it may be feasible to analyze the causes underlying the increase in insurance

premiums. The understanding provided by this analysis can be helpful in making improvements in outcomes, such as a policy to improve highway safety that helps control insurance premiums.

The analysis made possible by data then allows the provision of a **context for decision-making**. The information contained in the analysis may, for example, show that the increase in insurance costs was driven by factors that may not be around permanently, in which case there may be no need for policy action. Or, this information may show otherwise.

Data help in **decision-making**. Indeed, it is the most important contribution data make to improve the well-being of citizens. Continuing with the CPI example, the increase in the inflation rate, along with the details of where the increased pressure may be coming from, gives the Bank of Canada the ability to relate this information to its objectives and adjust its policy levers to achieve desired results.

Data are also used to **monitor progress** in achieving objectives. For example, the Bank of Canada monitors progress on the inflation front by examining the core rate of inflation, which subtracts the volatile inflation components from the overall rate of inflation, in the context of its inflation targets.

Data are used as well to **build systems**. In the context of the CPI example, inflation is a key variable in the development of economic models that are used for a variety of purposes.

These models, built on data, can be used for **forecasting and predicting**. These predictions allow decision-makers to anticipate adverse events and take action. For example, models may show that the inflation rate could fall below the central bank's target range, encouraging the bank to take preemptive corrective action.

Data are used as well for **evaluation of outcomes**. The evaluation exercise is helpful in determining whether or not objectives have been achieved. If yes, the data can determine whether the goal was achieved satisfactorily, and if it had the desired effect. If not, the data can likewise show *why* not. Such evaluations are a key to making adjustments in public decision-making.

In sum, data provide the foundation for knowing things the way they are and taking steps to making things the way they should be. In this sense, the importance of data in enhancing human well-being must not be underestimated.

The need for an independent statistical agency

In view of the 2010 Census developments and the views expressed by the Minister responsible for Statistics Canada at the time, Canada would benefit significantly by enhancing Statistics Canada's independence through changes to the *Statistics Act*.

Despite problems with the existing legislation, Statistics Canada was considered among the best statistical organizations in the world. Some would have rated it as the very best.

There were three key reasons for this reputation: its centralized structure allowed it to gather data for the whole country in a cost-efficient manner; its governance and management structure allowed it to be innovative; and it enjoyed a tradition of operating at arm's length from all governments.

The decision by the government to abolish the long-form census, and the Minister's very public description of Statistics Canada as subject to political control, have damaged this long-held tradition.

Both of these factors—the cancellation of the long-form census and the Minister's view—have negative consequences for the quality of data Statistics Canada produces.

First, it will affect the long-form survey data.

It is a statistical fact that a voluntary survey cannot hope to act as a substitute for a mandatory census. A voluntary survey will inevitably result in uneven response rates from different population groups and different geographic areas. Increasing the sample size cannot offset this problem. If there is a bias in the original sample, that bias will be magnified in a bigger sample if it continues to mimic the properties of the earlier, compromised sample. Suggesting that a voluntary survey with a larger sample size can replace a mandatory census is like saying that if you take a wrong turn, you should drive faster in the wrong direction to get to your destination. With a voluntary survey, many data users who depend on the long-form census—including the federal government—will lose the data quality they need.

Second, to the extent that the long-form census data provide a benchmark for other Statistics Canada surveys, the quality of data from these other surveys will also deteriorate.

If the government persists in the view that Statistics Canada is not independent, data quality—or at least the perception of data quality—will further suffer. Keep in mind that the vast majority of data users are not in a position to determine for themselves how good or bad the data are. They use them, and base their decisions on them, only to the extent that they can trust the organization that produces them. Trust in the organization depends on two critical factors: how good the organization is in technical matters, and how independent it is from government control to produce data that accurately reflect reality. Take away the independence of and trust in the organization, and even good data become less useful.

The Statistics Act and suggested changes

Section 7 of the *Statistics Act* gives the Minister wide-ranging powers on technical matters:

The Minister may, by order, prescribe such rules, instructions, schedules and forms as the Minister deems requisite for conducting the work and business of Statistics Canada, the collecting, compiling and publishing of statistics and other information and the taking of any census authorized by this Act...

Section 8 of the Act defines voluntary surveys as a technical matter, and states:

The Minister may, by order, authorize the obtaining, for a particular purpose, of information, other than information for a census of population or agriculture, on a voluntary basis...

On the issue of what questions should be asked in a census to collect data to satisfy the most important data needs of the country, the Act gives the authority to the government generally, in Section 21:

The Governor in Council shall, by order, prescribe the questions to be asked in any census taken by Statistics Canada...

Many other examples of the government and Minister's role in managing Statistics Canada can be found in the Act. Overall, it is clear that despite its long tradition of independent action, the *Statistics Act* gives little protection to the autonomy of Statistics Canada.

There are three broad areas where I would suggest a change in the existing Act.

First, the Act should give the authority for all technical and methodological matters to the Chief Statistician. David Dodge, Mel Cappe, Alex Himelfarb and Ivan Fellegi—four eminent former senior public servants—also advocated for this proposal in a September 2010 letter addressed to the Prime Minister of Canada.

Second, give the authority to determine census questions to the Chief Statistician, as is the case in Australia. The census is a constitutional responsibility. However, given the way the Act currently reads, the government of the day can control the contents of the census. In the extreme, a government may ask as little as one question in the census, on any topic, to meet the constitutional requirement. There should obviously be a process where the Chief Statistician must base his/her decision about what questions to ask in the census on input received from citizens and data users. Statistics Canada currently follows a strict process that, as events have shown, can be overridden by political imperatives. A citizen- and researcher-driven model, or some other independent mechanism, should be protected in law.

Third, given the nature of the responsibilities of the Chief Statistician (particularly if the law is amended as I have suggested), and the fact that Statistics Canada is a department of the government, the current mechanism for the appointment of the Chief Statistician should be replaced. At present, the Prime Minister appoints the Chief Statistician at his or her pleasure. Ivan Fellegi, a former Chief Statistician, has proposed the establishment of a committee of senior former public servants to put forward a list of appropriate candidates for the consideration of the Prime Minister. I support this proposal.

Concluding remarks

In this article, I have argued that evidence-based decision-making is essential to the enhancement of the well-being of citizens. Such decision-making is obviously not feasible without good evidence.

We are fortunate in Canada to have Statistics Canada as our data collection agency. However, comments from the Minister Responsible for Statistics Canada in the context of 2010 census developments have brought to the fore a serious problem in the *Statistics Act* regarding the independence of the agency.

Trust in Statistics Canada is crucial for evidence-based decision-making. To ensure that that trust in the agency is not put at risk, we must amend the Act to enshrine in law what previously was a strong tradition of independence and autonomy. The cancellation of the long-form census highlights how this independence is currently vulnerable. To ensure the best outcomes for the citizens of Canada, we need to protect Statistics Canada from outside interference. ■■

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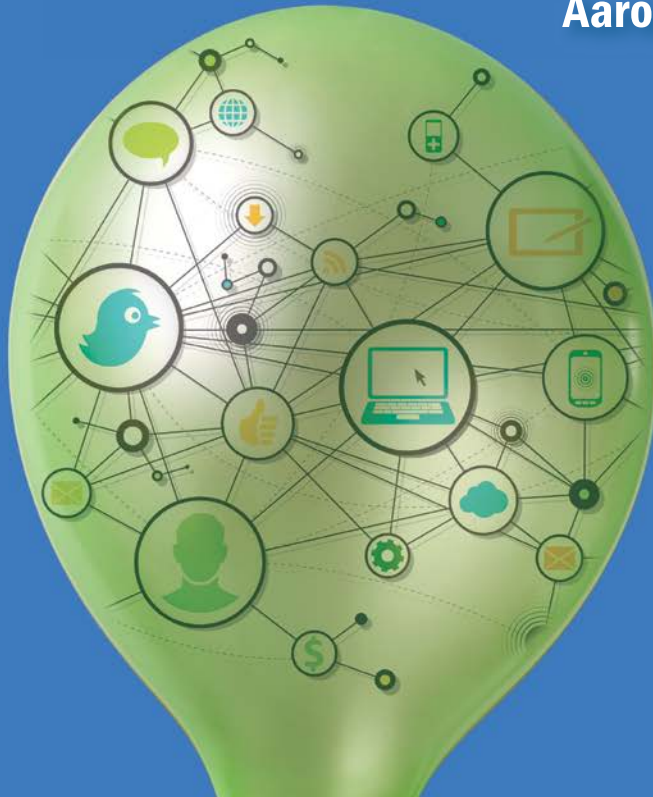


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The MOOC bubble and the attack on public education

Aaron Bady



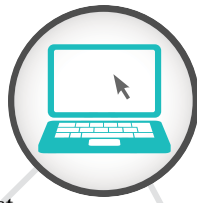
MOOCs are the hot new educational trend, garnering headlines around the world. But the hype conceals a speculative bubble, a gamble where public higher education has everything to lose and business interests have everything to gain.

Les cours en ligne massifs et ouverts (MOOC) sont la nouvelle tendance en matière d'éducation, faisant les gros titres partout dans le monde. Mais toute cette attention cache une bulle spéculative, un pari où l'enseignement supérieur public a tout à perdre et les intérêts commerciaux ont tout à gagner.

In the last year, MOOCs have gotten a tremendous amount of publicity. Last November, the *New York Times* decided that 2012 was “the Year of the MOOC,” and columnists like David Brooks and Thomas Friedman have proclaimed *ad nauseum* that the MOOC “revolution” is a “tsunami” that will soon transform higher education. As a *Time* cover article on MOOCs put it—in a rhetorical flourish that has become a truly dead cliché—“College is Dead. Long Live College!”

Where is the hype coming from? On the one hand, higher education is ripe for “disruption”—to use Clayton Christensen’s theory of “disruptive innovation”—because there is a real, systemic crisis in higher education, one that offers no apparent or immanent solution. It’s hard to imagine how the status quo can survive if you extend current trends forward into the future: how does higher education as we know it continue if tuition fees and student debt continue to skyrocket while state funding continues to plunge? At what point does the system simply break down? Something has to give.

At the same time, the speed at which an obscure form of non-credit-based online pedagogy has gone so massively



mainstream demonstrates the level of investment that a variety of powerful people and institutions have made in it. The MOOC revolution, if it comes, will not be the result of a groundswell of dissatisfaction felicitously finding a technology that naturally solves problems, nor some version of the market's invisible hand. It's a tsunami powered by the interested speculation of interested parties in a particular industry. MOOCs are, and will be, big business, and the way that their makers see profitability at the end of the tunnel is what gives them their particular shape.

After all, when the term itself was coined in 2008—MOOC, for Massively Open Online Course—it described a rather different kind of project. Dave Cormier suggested the name for an experiment in open courseware that George Siemens and Stephen Downes were putting together at the University of Manitoba, a class of 25 students that was opened up to over 1,500 online participants. The tsunami that made land in 2012 bears almost no resemblance to that relatively small—and very differently organized—effort at a blended classroom. For Cormier, Siemens, and Downes, the first MOOC was part of a long-running engagement with connectivist principles of education, the idea that we learn best when we learn collaboratively, in networks, because the process of learning is less about acquiring new knowledge “content” than about building the social and neural connections that will allow that knowledge to circulate, be used, and to grow. This first MOOC was anchored by what Dave Cormier has called “eventedness”—the fact that it was a project shared among participants, within a definable space and time—but its outcomes were to be fluid and open-ended by design. The goal was to create an educational process that would be as exploratory and creative as its participants chose to make it. More importantly, it was about building a sense of community investment in a particular project, a fundamentally socially-driven enterprise.

The MOOCs that emerged in 2012 look very different, starting with their central narratives of “disruption” and “un-bundling.” Instead of building networks, the neoliberal MOOC is driven by a desire to liberate and empower the individual, breaking apart actually-existing academic communities and refocusing on the individual's acquisition of knowledge. The MOOCs being praised by utopian technologists in the *New York Times* appear to be the diametric opposite of what Siemens, Downes, and Cormier said they were trying to create, even if they deploy some of the same idealistic rhetoric. Traditional courses seek to transfer content from expert to student in a lecture or seminar setting. The original MOOCs stemmed from a connectivist desire to decentralize and de-institutionalize the traditional model, creating fundamentally open and open-ended networks of circulation and collaboration. In contrast, the MOOCs which are now being developed by Silicon Valley startups Udacity and Coursera, as well as by non-profit initiatives like

edX, aim to do exactly the same thing that traditional courses have always done—transfer course content from expert to student—only to do so massively more cheaply and on a much larger scale. Far from de-institutionalizing education or making learning less hierarchical, some of the most prestigious institutions of higher learning in the world are treating the MOOC as a lifeline in troubled economic waters, leveraging “super-professors” to maintain their position of excellence atop the educational field, and even creating new hierarchical arrangements among universities. The edX initiative, for example, is the effort by universities like Harvard and MIT to market their own courses to other universities. Trading on the Harvard and MIT name, edX is creating new revenue streams on the backs of less prestigious institutions.

Coursera and Udacity MOOCs are not really “connectivist” in the sense by which Siemens and Downes meant the term. For the post-2012 MOOC, learning is to be a process that focuses on the individual learner, who acquires new knowledge or skills, and is individually responsible (and graded) on how well he or she puts that learning into practice. As a fully marketized commodity, this MOOC is only legible at the level of the individual.

Given these realities, I would suggest that MOOCs are simply a new way of maintaining the status quo, of *re*-institutionalizing higher education in an era of budget cuts, skyrocketing tuition, and unemployed college graduates burdened by student debt. If the MOOC began in the classroom as an experimental pedagogy, it has swiftly morphed into a process driven from the top down, imposed on faculty by university administrators, or even imposed on administrators by university boards of trustees and regents. For academic administrators and policymakers, the MOOC phenomenon is all about dollars and cents, about doing more of the same with less funding. And while MOOC-boosters like to deride the “sage on the stage” model of education-delivery—as if crowded lecture halls are literally the only kind of classroom there is—most of the actually-existing MOOCs being marketed today are not much more than a massive and online version of that very same “sage on the stage” model. Through edX, for example, San Jose State University is incorporating videos of lectures by Harvard professors into its own curriculum in an explicit attempt to build a model that can then be expanded throughout the California State University system, the largest public university system in the world. But that model is simply a massive expansion of the lecture-based content delivery that the MOOC boosters claim to despise. And what could be more hierarchical than a high prestige university like Harvard lecturing to a less prestigious institution like SJSU?





To put it quite bluntly, MOOCs are a speculative bubble, a product being pumped up and overvalued by pro-business government support and a lot of hot air in the media.

Indeed, for those of us in California, the “MOOCification” of public higher education looks more like a land-rush than a tsunami, a massive give-away of public assets to private corporate interests. San Jose State University is literally located within Silicon Valley, so it’s not surprising that it has taken the lead in building bridges between educational startups and public higher education, outsourcing some of its own teaching to edX on the one hand and partnering with Udacity to offer online courses on the other. But if California is where everything happens first, as we are so often told, then we should be watching very closely how this state’s government and Silicon Valley are using MOOC fever as a cover to privatize public higher education. There is currently a bill pending in the California legislature—SB520—which will require California’s public universities to accept course credit from selected online course providers, in hopes of eventually outsourcing as much as 20 per cent of their curricula. Much of this outsourcing will likely go to for-profit online institutions, the sector of the education industry which consistently produces the worst results at the highest cost. Student retention in this sector is low, fees are high, and the quality of learning outcomes is poor.

To put it as simply as possible, the California legislature proposes to solve a real systemic crisis—collapsing public resources, diminishing affordability, and falling completion rates in the state’s higher education system—by sending its students to MOOCs. To the bill’s sponsor, Darrel Steinberg, and to Governor Jerry Brown, MOOCs seem like a win-win solution to an intractable fiscal crisis. On the one hand, students who are locked out of over-enrolled core courses can complete their degrees by taking those classes with an online provider, possibly even at a lower cost to students and at no extra cost to the state. On the other hand, allowing Silicon Valley start-ups like Coursera and Udacity to offer courses for transfer credit in the California State and University of California systems will give those companies a legitimacy in the education marketplace that they have never had before.

As UCSB professor and higher education commentator Chris Newfield put it recently in a blog post, this bill—and the associated MOOC frenzy—is “a straight business play”¹:

MOOC momentum is being driven not by educational need or proven technological achievement but by a business lobby with connections and resources as good as Wall Street’s, and with a better social cause.

The movement’s systematic exaggerations, the lack of concern for impacts on the public university ecosystem, the staged benevolence towards a hostile customer—all are hallmarks not of technical or pedagogical progress but of a carefully designed business strategy.

If this bill passes, the winners will be Silicon Valley and the austerity hawks in the California legislature: the former will have privileged access to the largest student market in the state, while the latter will be relieved of the financial burden of having to educate the state’s young people.

To put it quite bluntly, MOOCs are a speculative bubble, a product being pumped up and overvalued by pro-business government support and a lot of hot air in the media. Like all speculative bubbles—especially those that originate in Silicon Valley—it will eventually burst. Columnists, politicians, university administrators, and educational entrepreneurs can all talk in such glowing terms about the onrushing future of higher education only because it hasn’t happened yet; the MOOC can still be all things to all people because it is, in the most literal sense of the word, a speculation about what it might someday become. While students and professors invest their time and energy, Silicon Valley is betting that MOOCs will be the next big thing in higher education, and politicians like California Governor Jerry Brown are aggressively pushing the state’s public universities to incorporate MOOC’s into their curriculum, gambling that massive, open, and online courseware will be the solution to the state’s continual crisis in higher education funding.

Ontario’s higher education system, as with many other jurisdictions around the world, shares many challenges with California: unsustainable student costs, declining public investment, and austerity-focused politicians. California is often held up as an example for Ontario to emulate. So, if the MOOC frenzy has not fully hit Canada yet, it is safe to bet that it will be there soon. Like California, Ontario may be tempted to take its chances on a speculative bubble, one that dismantles the public university and privileges private interests.

It’s a gamble we can’t afford to lose. ■■

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¹ Available at <http://utotherescue.blogspot.ca/2013/03/moocs-have-become-straight-business-play.html>



THE EVOLUTION OF FREEDOM OF INFORMATION IN ONTARIO:

From reactive to proactive disclosure

Ann Cavoukian, Ph.D.

Much progress has been made in improving access to government information. But much more must be done; governments should embrace the ideas of Open Data and automatic disclosure to ensure accountability and citizen participation in public life.

D'importants progrès ont été réalisés pour rehausser l'accès à l'information du gouvernement. Mais il reste beaucoup à faire; les gouvernements doivent adopter les idées des données ouvertes et de la divulgation automatique afin d'assurer la responsabilisation et la participation des citoyens à la vie publique.

The modern era of Freedom of Information (FOI) in Ontario began when the Williams Commission on Freedom of Information and Individual Privacy was appointed in March, 1977. The three-volume set of recommendations the Commission presented to the provincial government in August, 1980 were ultimately used as the foundation for Ontario's *Freedom of Information and Protection of Privacy Act* (FIPPA) which came into effect on January 1, 1988. Three years later, the *Municipal Freedom of Information and Protection of Privacy Act* (MFIPPA) also came into force. Both of these Acts give individuals the right to request access to information held by their governments, including general records and records containing their own personal information, and it requires that these organizations protect the privacy of the personal information that they hold.

Since then, Ontario has made many significant strides in the direction of greater transparency and accountability. This includes measureable improvements to the province's access to information regime established by FIPPA and MFIPPA. Similar to other freedom of information legislation, these Acts require government organizations to make a decision about an access to information request within 30 days. Back when I first became Commissioner in 1997, the number of requests that were being responded to within that 30-day period was unacceptably low, at around 48 per cent. However, through the hard work of my office and the increasing acceptance of FOI by Ontario's public servants, that response rate has risen to an average of over 80 per cent. I admit that this is not perfect; however, some requests are complex and may require an extension based on the nature of the request. Nevertheless, real progress has been made in Ontario with a growing and demonstrable appreciation by our public institutions for the importance of an access to information regime.

My office has pushed for greater response rates to FOI requests, and to have more and more organizations covered by the Acts. As far back as 1994, my office submitted proposed changes to Ontario's Legislature calling on the government to extend access laws to cover a wider set of public organizations in order to make them more accountable to the public. In 2003, Ontario's energy utilities, Hydro One and Power Generation, were brought under FIPPA. Ontario's universities were finally placed under FIPPA in 2006. And in 2012, Ontario became the last province in Canada to bring its hospitals under freedom of information legislation, giving citizens the right to make a request for access to a range of general records.

However, the evolution of FOI in Ontario is not simply a question of improving response rates and increasing coverage of public institutions. Indeed, the concept of the public's right to know now extends far beyond the requirements of FIPPA and MFIPPA. For over two decades I have been repeatedly calling on our government to make itself more transparent and accessible in response to the public's growing expectations for access to government-held information. And there has been some success—for example, it is now a requirement for Ontario's ministers and senior civil servants to proactively disclose their expenses. A number of municipalities in Ontario and other government agencies have also adopted this practice and proactively post their expenditures on their websites.

My office has been dealing with the issue of proactive disclosure and open government since it first opened its doors in 1987. However, a lot has changed since then, namely the advances in information and communications technology that we now call the Internet. It is certainly much easier to disseminate government information now than when I first started at the Office of the Information and Privacy Commissioner of Ontario (IPC). The dominant practice now, as in the past, is

known as *Routine Disclosure*, whereby access to general records was granted on a routine basis as the result of a specific request. However, I feel that we are entering an age where *Routine Disclosure* will soon be a thing of the past. New technologies are ushering in an era that will allow for *Automatic Disclosure* to be the norm, and not the exception.

Further, I believe that governments are beginning to recognize that public sector information is a public resource with valuable economic and social benefits that can make positive contributions to a healthier economy, society and democracy.

As every year passes, more and more jurisdictions around the world are moving towards "Open Data"—an initiative that began with the idea that certain types of *non-personal* government-held information should be made freely available to everyone to use and republish. The ubiquity of the Web and accompanying technologies has driven dramatic new increases in public demand for government-held information, providing a new dimension to civic participation, and redefining the significance of freedom of information legislation.

With so much data now available, and in so many different formats, individuals, community groups, and researchers have the power to use public information for a variety of purposes—for example, to spot inefficiencies in

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access are not
in conflict, they are
complimentary to
each other.

government services, and make recommendations directly to the offices responsible for those services. Our economy also benefits by giving businesses access to a wealth of new information from which to improve or create new products and services. There is now the potential to create entire new industries and economies where none existed before. Just one example is the rapid growth of applications, better known as “apps.” People can now download apps onto their mobile devices that utilize government information such as public transit schedules, traffic reports, flu maps, and health inspector restaurant reviews, just to name a few.

Around the world, a number of governments have joined the Open Data movement to take advantage of the economic and social benefits. In the United States, President Obama has ordered government officials to release more information to improve the amount and quality of data offered online, in addition to requiring every government agency to provide at least three datasets of high quality value. The results in the United States are commendable, with Data.gov offering thousands of datasets which can be put to use by individuals and businesses alike. The United Kingdom has also embraced Open Data with their Data.Gov.UK website which also offers hundreds of datasets and a substantial offering of apps.

The Government of Ontario joined the Open Data movement in 2012, with its own Ontario Open Data website as part of its commitment to a more open government with an array of datasets covering topics such as transportation, infrastructure projects, and tourism. There are also a number of municipalities in Ontario featuring Open Data portals, with the City of Toronto setting a world-class example. The Toronto Open Data site is a clean and efficient one-stop website where anyone can find and download datasets that cover an unbelievable amount of information covering almost every subject matter relevant to the city. By eliminating the practice of *Routine or Reactive Disclosure*, the City not only provides service to its citizens and industry in the form of valuable information, it also saves time and money in the process—truly a win-win scenario.

Being in a unique position where I serve as both the Information and Privacy Commissioner, I am often asked whether I find a conflict in what appears to be a contradictory situation—having to defend the right to privacy while ensuring the right to access and freedom of information. The answer to that question is, simply, no. In the former, you hold the data back and let the individual decide what to release; in the latter you push it out the door.

Privacy and access are not in conflict, they are complementary to each other. Both guarantee the fundamental

freedoms that we enjoy in our free and democratic societies: the right to hold our governments accountable and the right to preserve our privacy. That is why free societies around the world seek to protect both. This is exemplified by the statutes that I oversee in my jurisdiction, which play the dual role of providing a right of access to information under the control of government organizations *while* equally protecting personally identifiable information and providing individuals with a right of access to their own personal information.

While I would be among the first to sing the praises of Open Data, we must also acknowledge that Open Data has hazards and pitfalls that need to be addressed, namely the protection of individual privacy. If personal information is not respected and protected by jurisdictions implementing Open Data programs, those programs will suffer. A prime example is a story that is now well known. Near the end of 2012, the *Journal News* in New York published a map showing the home addresses and names of handgun owners in two New York counties using data acquired from government sources. In retaliation, a lawyer in Connecticut published the addresses and phone numbers of the newspaper’s staff. To make matters worse, it was later discovered that much of the information used to identify gun owners was found to be inaccurate or outdated. These experiences, as well as being traumatic for those involved directly, can undermine public support for Open Data.

This story contains a very clear message for government. It is of course understandable that law enforcement agencies should want to collect personal information on gun permit holders. However, this data is not collected in order to create a public database, and should not be used for that purpose. Not all data should be free and open, especially if it is associated with personally identifiable individuals. We need to distinguish clearly between data that is useful for the public and presents few privacy risks, and data that should be considered private and subject to restrictions. Such clarity is needed before potential confusion grows and brings unnecessary challenges to the protection of privacy and to the growth of Open Data.

Despite these potential challenges, the concept of Open Data has such merit that it inspired me to create *Access by Design* (AbD)—a concept that encourages public institutions to take a proactive approach to releasing government-held information.

I see the concept and principles of AbD as the next logical progression for governments looking towards the disclosure of government-held information and moving into the future of Open Data.



Privacy by Design (PbD), a concept now considered an international standard in privacy protection, embeds privacy into the design and operation of information technologies and systems. In other words, it addresses the privacy issue in the development process of a policy or program, rather than as an afterthought or after-the-fact addition. AbD is the flip side of that very same concept. Governments should always be taking a more proactive approach to disclosure, but AbD embraces much more than simple proactivity. It calls for a more responsive and efficient government that engages in collaborative relationships with individual citizens, the private sector, and other public institutions.

The first principle of AbD is, naturally, to be proactive and not reactive. Although it is important to have a formal access-to-information regime governed by clear rules, it can be a slow and cumbersome process. It can also be used by some organizations to delay the release of data. Instead, the formal access-to-information regime should be reserved for those situations where government has a legitimate and legislatively recognized reason for withholding information, while data openness is the default.

The second principle is what I call *Making Access Truly Accessible*. Simply releasing more data is not enough. AbD requires that public information be easily found, indexed, and presented in user-friendly formats. The point of the exercise is not to bury people in information—it has to be formatted in a way that makes it truly accessible. There is little value in proactively disclosing public information if it is quietly placed online in obscure locations, using uncommon software, and to which very few people have access.


This leads me to the third principle: *Quality of Information*. There is very little value in gaining access to poor quality data. Information has been called the lifeblood of the 21st century. This is particularly true when it comes to meaningful citizen participation in public life. Not only is it essential for government institutions to place public data in public databases, they must also ensure that the information is accurate, reliable, and current. Quality control and assurance protocols are vital to ensure that public participation in our society remains possible and relevant.

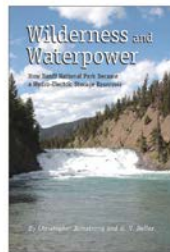
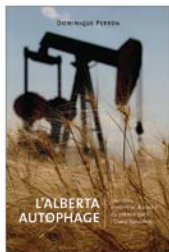

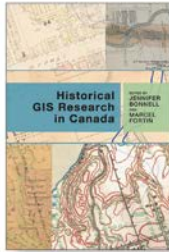
While privacy is not a central principle in AbD, it is still critical in the application of AbD. When governments are designing new data sets or programs, consideration should be given at the conceptual stage to how privacy will be protected in any access to information regime. Rather than approaching privacy and access as an issue to be dealt with down the road—perhaps in response to FOI requests—governments should be looking at what information they are collecting and how they can effectively make it available to the public without compromising privacy. By building privacy *and* access into programs at the beginning, we can achieve the greatest benefits of open government and Open Data.



The advent of the Internet has brought explosive growth in the amount of information available to the average

citizen. While formal freedom of information regimes remain relevant, they are no longer sufficient as the primary means of managing government-held information. Public institutions need to accept the fact that public expectations surrounding access to information will never be the same. Our governments need to embrace the new culture of Open Data by making data readily available to the public as part of the social contract to serve their citizens. Transparency and access to information are vital components of a free and functioning democracy. Citizens must be ensured the right to government-held information in order to participate meaningfully in civic life—something that is not possible if government activities are shielded from public view. Scholars must be able to access government data to critique current activities and design the evidence-based policies of the future. When information is freely available, citizens and researchers alike can question the actions of their government and participate meaningfully in policy decisions. Transparency creates a culture of accountability, and accountable government is the very foundation upon which our free and open society is built. ■■

Ann Cavoukian is the Information and Privacy Commissioner for Ontario.


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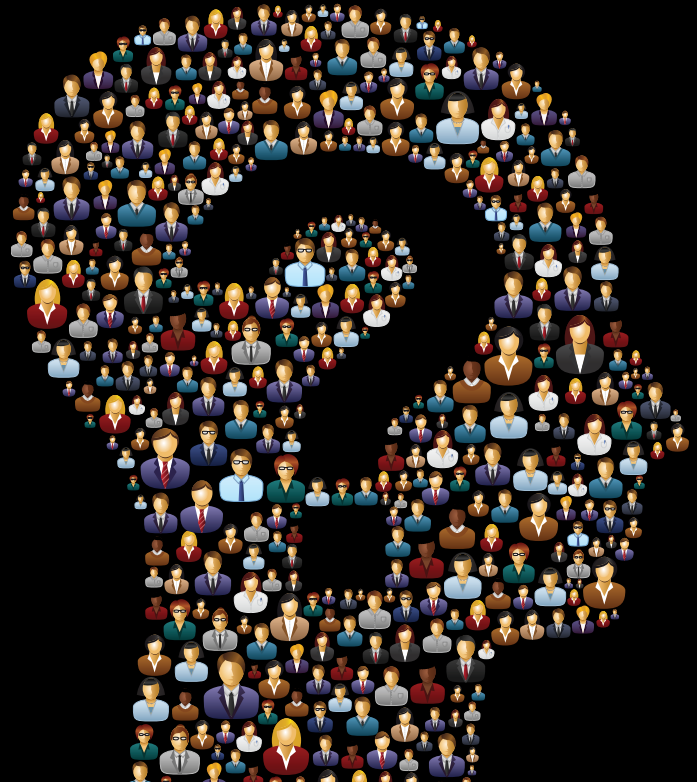
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Canada's universities and the loss of UCASS data: Scrambling for an alternative

Felice Martinello

UCASS was an invaluable tool for collective bargaining and research into universities. Now that Statistics Canada has cancelled the dataset, faculty and administrators will need to find a trustworthy replacement.

Le SIPEUC était un outil précieux pour la négociation collective et pour la recherche sur les universités. Maintenant que Statistique Canada a annulé cet ensemble de données, les professeurs et les administrateurs devront trouver un remplacement fiable.



In early 2005, the Ryerson University Faculty Association (RFA) was in the last stages of a massive contract arbitration. Faculty salaries were the last major issue to be resolved. The stakes were high—faculty had already gone two years without a contract and two more years of increases were to be determined. The arbitration award would dictate salary increases for four years, accounting for more than ten per cent of a typical faculty member's career. The administration argued that Ryerson faculty were already well compensated and earned substantially more than similarly ranked faculty at other Ontario universities. The faculty association argued that the administration's salary comparisons were flawed and should not be used as the basis for the arbitration award. The faculty association also argued that controlling only for rank—as the administration had done—was not sufficient to produce good salary comparisons. Faculty salaries increase with experience, even after controlling for rank, so one must control simultaneously for both rank and experience to produce valid comparisons. The salary comparisons at Ryerson were also complicated by several different faculty career paths, a consequence of Ryerson's transition from a polytechnic

institution to a university. The faculty association contended that Ryerson faculty were actually earning substantially less than comparable faculty at other Ontario universities after controlling for the appropriate factors.

What is important here is not the outcome, but the nature of the process that underscored the RFA arbitration. This process was able to function because both sides had access to data on faculty salaries and other faculty characteristics that they used to make reasoned, evidence-based arguments about the salary increases that faculty should or should not receive. This kind of process, however, will be much more difficult to follow in the future. In early 2012, Statistics Canada announced that it had discontinued the University and College Academic Staff System (UCASS) survey, which up until then was the most accurate and comprehensive set of data on faculty in Canada. Both the Ryerson administration and faculty association had used the UCASS data to make their arguments in 2005. Future negotiations will no longer be able to rely on this crucial data set. The last round of data released from the UCASS survey covered the 2010-11 academic year and are therefore already out of date for any current or future negotiations.

UCASS was an incredibly important resource for the entire university sector, providing reliable and comprehensive data that made crucial research and analysis possible. The UCASS survey required all Canadian universities to submit data on their full time faculty by October of every year. The institutions were required to submit, among other things, data on the age, rank, gender, subject taught, year of appointment, and years since last promotion for every full-time faculty member. It also included information on faculty salaries and any administrative stipends paid. Statistics Canada worked with the universities to reconcile differences in definitions or faculty classifications across universities and resolve any other difficulties that might compromise the quality of the data. The result was a dataset that could be used to produce meaningful profiles of faculty characteristics and salaries that allowed for useful comparisons across schools. Perhaps most importantly, the fact that the survey was conducted by Statistics Canada provided two important benefits. First, it meant that universities were legally required to submit accurate and complete faculty data. Second, it meant that the output was seen as impartial by both faculty and administrators because the data were collected by a neutral third party.

While the data collected by Statistics Canada for the UCASS survey were indeed crucially important and used extensively, in practice the system was not perfect. For example, many universities failed to meet the October submission deadline, often by several months, which meant their data were unavailable and any attempted salary comparisons suffered as a result. Further, the official Statistics Canada hard-copy publication of the data, *Salaries and Salary Scales of Full-time Teaching Staff at Canadian Universities* was not itself terribly helpful for collective bargaining or other research on faculty. Average and median faculty salaries were reported by rank, but there was no information on levels of experience or any other faculty characteristics, and the publication included a confusing set of categories and exclusions. In practice, faculty associations needed to work with the raw dataset; something that was not available publicly and often exceeded the in-house capabilities of faculty association bargaining teams.

The Canadian Association of University Teachers (CAUT) and the Ontario Confederation of University Faculty Associations (OCUFA), however, filled in some of the gaps left by the *Salary Scales* publication and provided useful data for collective bargaining. Both organizations obtained custom compilations of the Statistics Canada data and made them available to member faculty associations. The CAUT compilation included data on faculty age, rank, responsibilities, and average and median salaries for Canadian universities. The OCUFA compilation reported similar breakdowns of the data but only for faculty at Ontario universities. More recent OCUFA compilations also included tables covering subject taught, promotions, and detailed measures of experience. Both the OCUFA and CAUT compilations were aggregated and randomized to maintain

Data on faculty characteristics and salaries will only be useful if both university administrations and faculty associations believe it is credible and trustworthy.

the confidentiality of faculty. This made analysis of the data more challenging, but it was still possible to extract good information from their data tables.

University administrations would also obtain their own custom compilations of the UCASS data from Statistics Canada. Unfortunately, their compilations often specified different parameters, inclusions, and exclusions than either the OCUFA or CAUT releases. The differences between the compilations, combined with the randomization and aggregation of the OCUFA and CAUT runs, often led to discrepancies about salary comparisons. But, despite these differences, the data provided an important, mutually agreed-upon factual basis that was used to resolve conflicts at the bargaining table.

Beyond the context of collective bargaining, the UCASS data were also used by a variety of researchers interested in Canadian higher education. Researchers can access the raw, unaggregated data on individual faculty members, for the years that the survey was conducted, by submitting specific project proposals to Statistics Canada. If the project is approved, researchers can only access the data from specific Statistics Canada sites and all output has to be vetted by Statistics Canada staff to maintain confidentiality. The unaggregated data on individual faculty members allow more detailed and complex examinations of all aspects of faculty covered by the dataset. For example, data on the age profiles of faculty have been used to predict faculty retirements. The retirement predictions are then paired with future enrolment projections to consider faculty requirements and future hiring needs. Other work has used the UCASS data to estimate the effects of the changes in mandatory retirement laws on faculty retirement decisions.

The data also allow a close examination of the status of women within academe. Several papers compare the salaries of men and women faculty and track the changes in the salary differential over time. See, for example, Warman, Woolley and Worswick's 2010 paper on the evolution of gendered pay differentials at Canadian universities. Another line of inquiry compares differences in time to promotion for men and women faculty, as in Stewart, Ornstein and Drakich (2009). My own work used the UCASS data from OCUFA and CAUT to look at the relationship between university revenues and faculty salaries and the effects of unionization versus special plan arrangements in Ontario.

Now that the UCASS survey has been cancelled, however, we will no longer be able to track the progress of women academics, predict faculty age distributions and

retirements, or examine the composition of faculty and faculty salaries by subject, age, gender, or rank. It will be much more difficult for faculty associations to identify groups within their memberships who require extra attention (e.g. junior faculty) and to present compelling arguments, both to the university administrations and to the other faculty association members, that special provisions are required to help them (e.g. lump sum versus percentage salary increases). More importantly for collec-



tive bargaining, there will no longer be a mutually agreed-upon pool of information about faculty characteristics and salaries that may help identify settlements that are acceptable both to university administrations and faculty associations. University administrations will surely argue that faculty are already well compensated compared to faculty at other schools. Faculty associations will likewise argue that faculty should receive salary increases. Without the data, however, the arguments will be far less credible. Neither group will be able to convince the other side without a comprehensive and credible source of evidence. As a result, it will be much more difficult to make progress in collective bargaining.

Without the UCASS data set, there are no other comprehensive sources of data on faculty in Canada. For Ontario universities and faculty associations, salaries published under the Public Sector Salary Disclosure Act provide a starting point for faculty salary data, but this source has significant limitations. The names and salaries of all broader public sector employees—including those at universities—who earn \$100,000 or more are posted on a provincial government website commonly known as the Sunshine List. The data can be downloaded and parsed to make salary comparisons, but it requires a significant amount of effort. Some researchers have used data from the Sunshine List to study trends in administrators' salaries; determinants of faculty salaries and their relation to the migration of faculty; and whether salary disclosure discouraged the growth of senior administrators' salaries, or encouraged their growth by enabling more comparisons across institutions. The fundamental difficulty is, of course, that the disclosure only reports salary data for faculty who earn \$100,000 or more, which leaves many faculty uncounted and unavailable for analysis. Researchers have struggled with this limitation. Given current salaries, nearly half of Ontario's faculty are excluded. This is particularly true for sessional or contract faculty. For collective bargaining purposes, it is possible to make an

assumption about the distribution of salaries based on earlier data and impute the missing salaries. But I doubt that the results would be convincing at the bargaining table.

A preferable option would be for all of the interested parties—primarily faculty associations and administrators across Canada—to get together and create a dataset of faculty characteristics and salaries that is roughly equivalent to UCASS. There are clearly benefits for both university administrations and faculty associations and, in theory, it should not be difficult to do. All universities use the same information on faculty members for their everyday human resources responsibilities, so the data are already easily accessible to universities and in common formats. In fact, most administrations already provide copies of these data to their faculty associations on a regular basis. Confidentiality would not be a serious obstacle since, again, the data are

already provided to faculty associations and more than half of Ontario faculty already have their salaries published under the Public Sector Salary Disclosure Act. The data could easily be aggregated in a manner similar to Statistics Canada's process, to preserve confidentiality if or when it is required. Aggregated data does make analysis more difficult since it contains less information than the raw data, but it would still be very useful to university administrations and faculty associations for salary comparisons and other analyses.

Data on faculty characteristics and salaries will only be useful if both university administrations and faculty associations believe it is credible and trustworthy. With Statistics Canada no longer collecting the data, both university administrations and faculty associations need to be included as equal partners in the creation, maintenance, and dissemination of the data set in order to promote confidence and trust. In Ontario, a partnership between the Council of Ontario Universities (COU), which represents university administrations, and OCUFA, which represents faculty associations, could be established to collect, process, and disseminate data. Given the existing institutional structures and functions it would not be difficult nor expensive. It would also create benefits at the bargaining table, and in our overall ability to understand higher education in Ontario.

In a better world, Statistics Canada would be given the mandate and funding required to continue conducting the UCASS data survey, the long-form census, and the other discontinued surveys that will be sorely missed. UCASS provided the best vehicle for impartial, high-quality data on faculty. In its absence, faculty and administrators are left to piece together a second-best solution. ■■

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References cited can be found in the web-version of this article at www.academicmatters.ca

Humour Matters

Steve Penfold

Massively Open Online Embarrassment



MASSIVELY OPEN ONLINE

COURSES (MOOCs) may be the way of the future, but they show every sign of disrupting my intricate bargain with humiliation. For ten years, I've managed to contain evidence of my incompetence to the small number of students who had the misfortune of wandering into my lecture hall. But online lectures on YouTube? Virtual office hours through FaceTime? Interactive tutorials through video conference? These can hardly be good news.

Case in point: my recent attempt to teach a lesson about local customs in a global age by telling a story about Nova Scotian skyscrapers. Some years ago, I moved from Toronto to Halifax, only to discover that complete strangers would talk to each other on elevators. Like, *really* talk. Not, "nice weather out there," "damn government," and "bloody in-laws"—the kinds of superficial topics that Torontonians use to avoid actual conversation (and then only if looking up, looking down, or re-pushing the button fourteen times hadn't served to avoid speech entirely).

No, Haligonians would really get into things. Where are you from? Where are you headed? You seem nice, why aren't you married? What do you think of Heidegger? What are the key challenges for the public sector in these times of neo-liberal austerity? Don't you think that Battlestar Galactica is the all-time greatest parable about humanity's struggle for meaning? (Well, er, maybe that last one was me, but no matter).

Now, if you're a scholar interested in the structure of everyday life, such differences say something about local practices in a connected world. Canadians watch the same shows, read the same blogs, experience the same social influences, and brag constantly about convergence, synergy, and interactivity. Yet elevator culture is strikingly different across the country.

Well, thanks to the brutal honesty of my teaching assistant, I now know that—owing to some sort of unconscious Freudian or Beevisian slip—I spent the whole lecture saying "urinal" instead of "elevator." I suppose, in a broad sense, that didn't matter. The point still holds, after all, since the survival of local urinary practices in a global age can be highly revealing. But what was supposed to be a lesson in the complexities of local custom became, alas, another entry in my growing *Humiliatum Vitae*.

So you can see how I might be a bit reluctant to "scale up" and join the emerging MOOC revolution. I mean, the only saving grace in that urinal story was precisely its limited audience. The class had just fifty students to begin with, and since it was late March, about half of them weren't there at all. And to be honest, it was about forty minutes into a one hour lecture, so at least a third of the students had trickled out, another third had dozed off, and a few more seemed to be playing solitaire on their computers. So, really, very few people actually heard my embarrassing slip, and at least one of them was my

brutally honest T.A. Surviving pedagogical humiliation is all about limited scale.

Alas, in the MOOC era, my bumbling incompetence will know no geographic bounds. Worse, my humiliation will survive on the Internet somewhere, indelible, fully recoverable for generations of undergraduates across time and space. Thousands and thousands of students—as far as, say, Germany or Indonesia—might witness my embarrassing attempts to relate to young people through hangover jokes; students in 2025 might share befuddlement at my compulsive Star Trek references; and who knows who will be wondering whether that strange Canadian's story about Halifax bathrooms owed to drunkenness or outright incompetence.

I mean, seriously, MOOC U just wasn't designed for guys who mix up urinals and elevators, and I have a sneaking suspicion that the new age of open education is just another way for good looking people to get attention. How about this: Moderately-Sized Off-Line Courses? MSOLC might not be a good acronym, but through it I will maintain my fragile peace with small scale humiliation. ■■

Steve Penfold is Academic Matters' humour columnist. He moonlights as an Associate Professor of History at the University of Toronto.

Editorial Matters

Graeme Stewart



Sometimes it feels like we're standing on a battlefield.

MILITARY METAPHORS are tired, no question. Orwell cautions that we should never use clichés that we are accustomed to seeing in print, as they will “construct your sentences for you—even think your thoughts for you.” But with all respect to George—one of the clearest, if not greatest, prose writers of the 20th century—sometimes an old cliché is the best way to describe what’s going on.

The truth is that academia is under attack. Not by a single aggressor, nor made with a singular objective, but the attack is very real. Scientific evidence is derided and dismissed. Institutions charged with researching controversial topics are denied critical funds. Governments stop collecting the data needed to support informed policy decisions. And almost every day, some newspaper or another will run an Op-Ed questioning the utility of universities, the relevance of their work, and whether we even need them at all. Research? Inquiry? Critical thought? No thanks, say the critics; all we want our universities to train the next generation of workers.

Some of the attacks are driven by the so-called austerity agenda—in an age of public restraint, some believe we can no longer afford “luxuries” like basic research and the humanities. Other attacks are the result of political expediency, where facts and academic freedom are an inconvenient impediment to the goals of certain politicians or well-funded lobbyists. Still others come from a desire to change the (albeit tenuous) public nature of our institutions, to open higher education to markets and put them at the service of private interests.

No matter the motivation, all of

this adds up to something that looks very much like a war on knowledge. Both the institutions and substance of academia are being pressured in unprecedented ways. Citizens, students, professors, and academic librarians are all unwilling combatants in this fight, but it is one that they can’t turn away from. We need data, facts, ideas, theories, and knowledge—not to mention the institutions that sustain them—to feed our democracy, to make informed decisions about public policy, and to solve the urgent and complex challenges we face.

This issue of *Academic Matters* has explored some of the elements of this war on knowledge. Carol Linnitt reviews the Harper Government’s attempts to muzzle federal scientists and shut down climate change research, while Myron Groover examines the stifling new Code of Conduct at Library and Archives Canada. Munir A. Sheikh looks at how the cancellation of the long-form census will affect our ability to make informed public policy decisions. Also on the Statistics Canada front, Felice Martinello laments the loss of the University and College Academic Staff System (UCASS) database, a trusted source of salary data used by both university administrators and faculty associations in collective bargaining. Ontario’s Information and Privacy Commissioner, Ann Cavoukian—whose office exists in part to defend access to information and knowledge—calls for public organizations to release information as a matter of course, not just by request, in order to improve accountability and transparency. Finally, Aaron Bady looks at how the

hype behind Massively Open Online Courses (MOOCs) obscures a push to obscure the public goods of universities and privatize higher education.

Worrying stuff, but our contributors also offer solutions. They call for us to join the protest against attempts to muzzle, starve, or dismiss knowledge and knowledge institutions. Others argue that a truly open approach to data is needed to improve the health of our democracy. Knowledge can also be defended by giving our research organizations true independence from government, or to replace lost datasets with new collaborative arrangements. The battle is not lost; if we act now, we can help keep knowledge at the heart of public life.

This issue of *Academic Matters* has particular resonance, as it will be distributed at the 2013 Congress of the Humanities and Social Sciences in Victoria, BC. If you’re reading this at the conference, take note: many aspects of the war on knowledge are aimed squarely at the disciplines you work in. And what better place to talk about our response to the attacks, than at a conference dedicated to the pursuit of knowledge?

We also know that many readers will not share our assessment, or have a different take on the issues we’ve explored in these pages. Please take the time to send us your thoughts in a letter or as a comment on our website, www.academicmatters.ca. If there’s one thing that open, unfettered knowledge supports, it’s reasoned debate.



As always, thanks for reading. ■■




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DFCMOPEN



A VISIONARY STEP FORWARD

When our faculty members – 1,400 family doctors  – asked for **a way to share tools** and **resources for primary care**, we built them a website. But we didn't limit access to our faculty; we did the opposite and opened access to the world. 

We believe that we, The Department of Family and Community Medicine (DFCM) at the University of Toronto, are the **first academic family medicine department**  **in the world to create and open such a repository to the world.** By doing so, we are providing resources locally and globally, and at the same time fostering a next-generation approach to creative professional activity. This form of e-publishing  promises **wider dissemination, accelerated evolution** and **broader collaboration**  for scholarly work that would otherwise rarely find a home in traditional publication formats.

It also offers an opportunity to make scholars of our front-line clinicians for work they are already doing. It's a dissemination of practical academia. It's where academia needs to go and our innovation, the DFCM Open website, is leading the way...

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WORLDVIEWS 2013

Global Trends in Media and Higher Education

Toronto, Canada – June 19–21, 2013

WorldviewsConference.com



Gain new insights – Join the debate:

Worldviews 2013 exists on the cutting edge, featuring the most innovative, forward-thinking ideas emerging in academia on the intersection of higher education, media, and digital technology.

Education plays a crucial role in the world, and given the explosive demand for higher learning, stakes are high for the academy and societies it serves. This is a time of tremendous change for both higher education and the media.

This conference is a must-attend for academics, communications, and journalism professionals that are interested in higher education and technology.

Sessions at Worldviews 2013 will consider a range of important themes, including:

Shifts in Journalism and Higher Education

- A different kind of gatekeeping: What can we expect of higher education and of journalism in the next ten years?
- Unlocking the tower. How trends in media, citizenry, and government are altering the academy.

Internationalization of Universities

- International students and campus integration: Institutional strategies and media interpretations.
- The breadth, depth, and diversity of coverage in China and India as emerging (major) players in higher education.
- The cultural impact of western-centric hubs and branch campuses in Asia and the Middle East.

The Digital World and Higher Education

- The sustainability of open access in news media and higher education, and the impact of massively open online courses (MOOCs).
- Branding and the sophistication of the communications culture in universities.
- The under-reported story: The role of university campuses in the Arab Spring.

Academic Freedom and National Security:

- Academic freedom and freedom of the press: Old tenets, new interpretations.
- National security, social media and the publicity of academic findings.

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