



Academic Working Lives: Experience, Practice and Change

Gornall, Lynne; Cook, Caryn; Dauton, Lyn; Salisbury, Jane; and Thomas, Brychan, eds.

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Book Review

Tags: balancing teaching and research | balancing teaching and scholarship | faculty well-being

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This compendium presents the reader with a myriad of international studies featuring methods of analysis on topics as varied as U.K. governmental policy regarding postsecondary education to the email habits of academics. Despite the disparate nature of the topics, methods, and analyses of these chapters, they each orient themselves around a central axis . . . that of the academic's working life. The editors/research team assembled these short, seemingly splintered studies into the weighty tome that sits before me. The book itself exemplifies the momentum behind the project; it effectively registers the impact that thirty years of ideological, economic, technological, and political change has had on the work life of the academic. Long gone are the seemingly halcyon days of the lone academic researcher plumbing the depths of musty texts in the library. Many of these studies touch on the nature of academic work and how regulating agencies around the world (although these studies focus on the U.K., U.S., Japan, and a few other locations) have attempted to quantify the work (research, teaching, grant writing, administrative tasks, and so forth) done by academics. These various authors do not shy away from addressing how issues such as social class, gender, and social and political hierarchies continue to play out within academic worlds. A particularly compelling chapter highlights some of the divergent as well as shared problems among researchers in a number of institutions in African countries and Ireland.

While other texts and studies have focused on the success or failure of educational reform in regard to student or institutional success, these studies look to the effect (good or bad or nil) these changes in educational policy, administrative practices, budgetary restrictions, technological innovations, and political and economic social narratives (such as

commodification of education) have on the quotidian aspects of academic life. A few especially compelling chapters stuck out from the rest. One of these is Kelly and Boden's "How Management Accounting Shapes Lives," which explores the problem of the university-as-business ethos by tracking a professor seeking to combine outside research and teaching responsibilities and the skewed accounting which blocks him from doing so.

On a more philosophical note, some authors wrote about what it means to examine, evaluate, and audit academic work, and others asked how grants, contract work, and contingency in academia create less than desirable conditions not just for academics but also for the research they produce. In her chapter on learning technologies, Alison Hudson utilizes Pierre Bourdieu's theoretical nomenclature (symbolic violence and social capital, for example) to illustrate the changing dynamics in the fields of education and governance. She pinpoints the beginning of the radical shift in academics' lives to the moment when "practice became increasingly influenced not by fundamental values and ethics, but by technologies of control aimed at changing the characteristic of the field" (248).

Encyclopedic and topical, the editors have grouped these writings into five themed parts each of which contain a set of short, readable studies. Although the text is over three hundred pages, it is arranged in a reader friendly manner. These studies provide valuable reading for administrators, policy makers, academics, and anyone interested in the working lives of academics around the globe.

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