

STRATEGIC PLANS AND GLOBALIZATION DISCOURSES: PUBLIC UNIVERSITIES IN CONNECTICUT AS AN EXPRESSION OF GLOBALIZATION

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ABSTRACT

This paper intends to study the effects of globalization on American higher education. It assesses organizational priorities of public universities in Connecticut with respect to globalization as represented formally in the institutional direction, goals, mission and values of American higher education. Public universities in Connecticut composed the data set. They were analyzed using the conceptual framework of globalization discourses. The data was quantitatively evaluated. Results revealed significant presence of globalization discourses in the strategic plans. It also evidenced the current institutional coping with decreasing public funds and difficult economy. This research is significant as applicable to social and organizational change in light of globalization in public universities.

Keywords: Globalization, Strategic Plans, Discourses, American higher education, Organizational change

INTRODUCTION

It is contested broadly that the educational institution today is in the process of a significant change as a result of globalization. These changes pertain to what constitutes the university, the creation of knowledge and its relation to the world (Gaffikin and Perry, 2009). Driven by globalization the burgeoning of knowledge economy has further necessitated change in higher education (Young, 2008). Globalization has led to reduction of government funding while requiring greater accountability of higher education institutions. Higher education organizations strategize their efforts to deal with these global pressures to endure and protect their physical and intellectual assets. Future research is proposed in this area (Shumar, 2004). Most evaluation of academies' reformulation within the context of globalization has been anecdotal, or case based. There is a lack of empirical study of the university in the context of globalization (Gaffikin & Perry, 2009).

The purpose of this research is to study the organizational priorities of public universities in Connecticut with respect to globalization as represented formally in the institutional direction, goals, mission and values of American higher education. It will reveal how universities in Connecticut are reformulating themselves as a response to globalization as indicated by them in their strategic plans. The most important brand statement of the university comprehensive of its institutional and structural map is the strategic plan. The commonality of strategic plans merits inter institution comparison to evaluate the presence of globalization discourses (Gaffikin & Perry, 2009).

CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

The conceptual framework guiding this research is globalization discourses. Discourse is defined as a conversation that is an in-depth explanation about the important characteristics

of contemporary society (Gaffikin & Perry, 2009). Discourses form and constitute policy and practice of university leadership and are articulated by politicians, policy makers and commentators at the national and international level (Bolsmann & Miller, 2008). The conceptual framework of discourses of globalization consists of overarching concept of globalization, neo liberalism, diversity, community engagement, post modernism and mixed economy of welfare (Gaffikin & Perry, 2009). A brief explanation of the discourses follows.

Globalization is defined as flows of people, information, culture and capital both financial and physical on various global highways (Dodds, 2008). It is a combination of political, economic and societal forces guiding twenty-first century higher education toward greater international involvement (Cantwell and Maldonado, 2009).

Neo liberalism is “a particular element of globalization in that it constitutes the form through which domestic and global economic relations are structured” (Olssen & Peters, 2005, p. 313). In reference to academy it is manifested in a corporatist approach. This is mirrored in the adoption of business practices which stress on cost effectiveness, increased efficiency, managerial leadership and routine performance measures. The overall shift in university governance is seen anchored in practicality of imitating business practices and the dominance of market principles. In this market driven environment students become consumers who view the college education as the path to a successful career in an increasingly competitive economy. Courses offered are more vocationally oriented, valued for their knowledge intensive human capital yield and tuitions are pitched lucratively (Gaffikin & Perry, 2009).

Mixed Economy of Welfare is defined as increasing privatizations or a mixture of private opportunity, democratic rights, and a measure of social protection. It is characterized by processes of privatization and decreasing public funding. This welfare pluralism causes a reduction of public funds share for public university finances. The knowledge based ventures are recognized as the drivers of economic growth. Universities contribute to public good by promoting economic development in their cities and surroundings (Gaffikin & Perry, 2009).

Diversity encompasses several dimensions. It includes: (a) racial and ethnic composition of student body, (b) effective implementation of affirmative action and policies concerning discriminatory admission, (c) repercussions of improved multicultural curriculum, and (d) need for a less ethnocentric scholarship among faculty (Gaffikin & Perry, 2009).

Community Engagement refers to the university and community involvement that is mutually beneficial which are: (a) Using applied research to solve social problems and to maximize community assets, (c) knowledge, technology and, skills transfer enabling the locals to undertake their own development, (d) networking local organizations into a broader local and international environment improving the social capital, (e) student community service that equips students with real world learning opportunities while connecting theory and practice, (f) institutional leadership in the area of public policy (Gaffikin & Perry, 2009).

Postmodernist Perspectives focus on the impact of information age, consumer society, commodification and multinational corporations (Bloland, 1995). As a result the academy has become the subject of increasing re visioning within the strategic nostrums of interdisciplinarity, transdisciplinarity and mutidisciplinarity (Gaffikin & Perry, 2009).

METHODOLOGY

All the public universities in Connecticut composed the sample. Each of these universities had a strategic plan displayed with evidence of its being current and relevant to administrative decision making. The strategic plans studied in this research are publicly available documents giving information on the university's mission, vision, goals, actions and

values. A meticulous study of the university administrative sections was carried on to assess the most comprehensive and cross departmental strategic plan. Department and school specific strategic plans were not taken into account. Every occurrence of the discourse was accounted for as were the number of times these discourses appeared. A ratio of discourses per page was created as the strategic plans of the different universities differed in page numbers. The strategic plan text was converted to a word document and divided into pages with 500 words. The ratio was then calculated by dividing the number of times each discourse appeared by the number of pages. This method of organizing data was originally created by Gaffikin and Perry for their study (Gaffikin & Perry, 2009).

RESULTS

The results evidenced significant presence of globalization discourses in the strategic plans. Neo liberalism substantiated the strongest presence followed closely by mixed economy of welfare. Globalization, diversity and community engagement were almost at the same echelon. The presence of postmodern perspective was negligible.

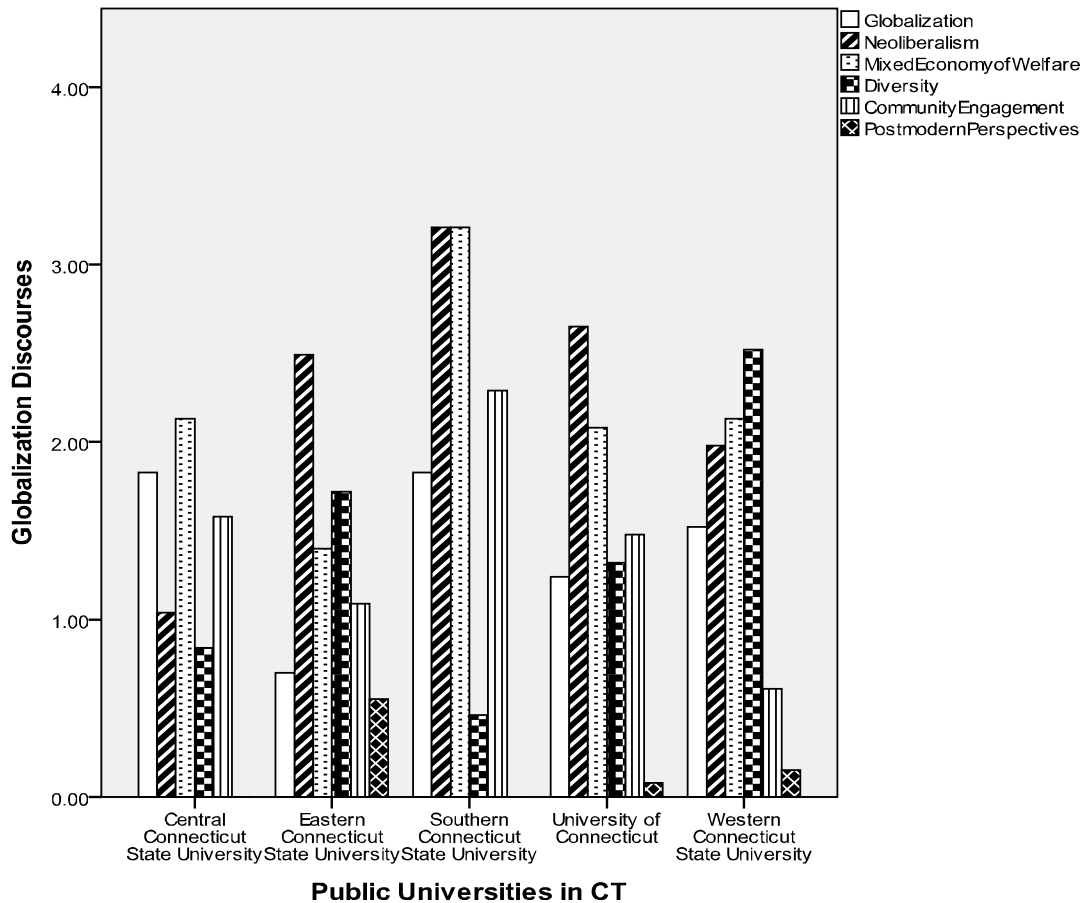


Figure 1: Globalization Discourses in Respective Public Universities in CT

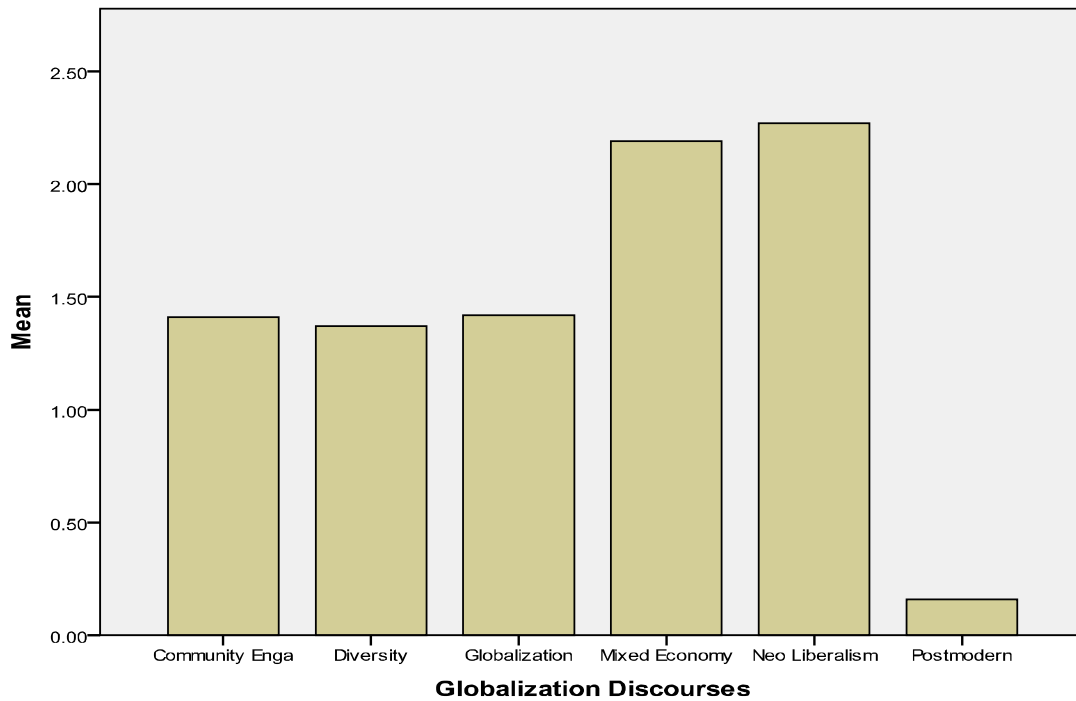


Figure 1.1 Average of Globalization Discourses

Table 1. Representation of globalization discourses in public universities in Connecticut

Public Universities	Globalization	Neo Liberalism	Mixed Economy of Welfare	Diversity	Community Engagement	Postmodern Perspectives
Eastern Connecticut State University	0.70	2.49	1.40	1.72	1.09	0.55
Southern Connecticut State University	1.83	3.21	3.21	0.46	2.29	0.00
Western Connecticut State University	1.52	1.98	2.13	2.52	0.61	0.15
Central Connecticut State University	1.83	1.04	2.13	0.84	1.58	0.00
University of Connecticut	1.24	2.65	2.08	1.32	1.48	0.08
Average	1.42	2.27	2.19	1.37	1.41	0.16

CONCLUSIONS

This research reveals that the strategic plans of public universities are important resources of institutional discourse. The significant presence of globalization discourses in the strategic plans shows that they affect the university mission, values, goals and actions of present-day American higher education. The strongest presence of neo liberalism and mixed economy of welfare evidences the current institutional coping with decreasing public funds and difficult economy.

EDUCATIONAL IMPLICATIONS

This research is significant as applicable to three overarching areas namely (a) educational leadership in public universities, (b) social and organizational change in light of globalization in public universities in Connecticut and, (c) generation and extension of a knowledge base regarding the effects of globalization on American higher education.

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