

“Crisis Management” in Higher Education: RCM and the Politics of Crisis at the University of Florida

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By 2005 or so, it had become impossible to ignore the sense of crisis that hung over the American college and university. It had become hard to see higher education in terms other than crisis, and harder to capture its situation in other than crisis terms.

– Christopher Newfield

Among the throngs of staff, faculty, and students protesting across California last year were many with signs reading, “We make the University!” Others bore placards that supplied the complementary commentary: “*You* make the Crisis.” Importantly, this attribution of agency in the creation of economic crisis – and of the crisis itself as manufactured, “socially constructed,” and above all unnecessary – does not deny the reality of budget shortfalls. Instead, it carries the crucial insight that the system responsible for this reality – what commentators call “globalization” or “neo-liberalism,” “capitalism,” “the economy,” or simply “the market” – is itself a human invention and social product.¹

Therefore, while it would be foolish to argue that higher education in the United States is *not* currently in crisis, it simultaneously remains not only possible, as Newfield

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¹ Bill Readings, in his prescient, now classic *The University in Ruins*, clarifies that “globalization is not a neutral process in which Washington and Dakar participate equally,” and suggests that “‘Americanization’ in its current form is a synonym for ‘globalization,’ insofar as “‘Americanization’ today names less a process of national imperialism than the generalized imposition of the rule of the cash-nexus” (2-3). See also Jason Read’s incisive “University Experience: Neoliberalism Against the Commons”; Sheila Slaughter and Gary Rhoades, *Academic Capitalism and the New Economy*; the AAUP’s advice on refuting those who invoke the economy generally and the recent downturn specifically to excuse “dramatic” restructuring of academic employment; and Marc Bousquet regarding the extent to which “managerial values [now] interpellate the faculty and students as well.” Although Bousquet observes that “The knowledge has taken hold everywhere that ‘markets’ are real but ‘rights’ are insubstantial, as if ‘market-driven’ indicated imperatives beyond the human and political” (93), recent protests offer hopeful evidence that this hold may be loosening.

implies, but also necessary to consider the situation in “other than crisis terms.” Confronting crisis requires us to think outside it. A refusal to submit to its terms helps to reveal, among other things, that crisis now marks not a failure of management, but one of its modes. Indeed, in the case of higher education, the sense of crisis no longer indicates a temporary aberration from “business as usual” but has instead become the norm. This normalization of “crisis” – as the governing logic, dominant rhetoric, and ambient structure of feeling in higher education – may be taken to index not the unique mission and significance of colleges and universities in the post-industrial United States, but rather the extent of their absorption into the general operation of a no longer “new economy.”² Crisis, in this context, marks not a point of resistance, but its evident futility – insofar as crisis has come to represent not a weak point in the system, but a familiar and well-integrated mode of its functioning.

My effort in this essay to conceive the current situation in “other than crisis terms” thus begins with the identification of this solidifying form of administration in and of higher education: not the management *of* crises, but management *by* crisis. It is also informed by the local experience of crisis here at the University of Florida, where I have worked for the past 16 years. Because local tactics are conditioned by larger strategies, even as the reverse is also true, it is my hope that an account of events in Florida will prove helpful in coming to terms with the more general situation of higher education in the United States today. Because our experience here has been in many ways extreme and in other ways unique, I suggest it be taken to dramatize and probe the quicksilver strategies of late-capitalist crisis, rather than assumed to simply exemplify its methods. Although a sense of crisis may be ubiquitous on US campuses, its appearances are far from homogenous. I am convinced, however, that these variations in form mean that we have more, and not less, to learn from each other across social and economic locations.

Broadly speaking, the notion of management-by-crisis can be conceived in analogy to the more general strategy of “management-by-stress,” of which it is a symptom, tactic, and variation. “Management by stress” (Slaughter; Weissmann) is the underlying engine of the “continuous quality improvement” philosophy endemic to

² For extensive documentation of this absorption, see Slaughter and Rhoades. Newfield also makes clear that once popular predictions of a “post-capitalist,” “post-managerial” emergent “knowledge economy” have failed to pan out (37-38).

management culture in late capitalism (M. Bousquet 104). The idea is to continually test – or “stress” – the limits of employee productivity, in the service of endlessly increasing efficiency and, thereby, profit. As Marc Bousquet explains, “Key ‘stressing’ strategies include compelling ‘teams’ and individuals to ‘act entrepreneurially’ and compete with each other for raises or continuing employment, the continuing outsourcing of work elements to lower-cost casual employees, and a pyramid of reward that provides jobs for life to a few while the vast majority are consigned to a permanently temporary existence” (105). Wal-Mart is one example, but academics will also recognize these elements in “responsibility center management” (RCM), “merit pay” plans, the expansion of adjunct and grad-student teaching, and the drastic decline in tenure lines.

In Florida, the narrative arc of crisis management includes all of these elements, but is mitigated by the presence of public-employees unions and complicated by the vagaries of Florida labor law and other local particularities. Nevertheless, the story of these past ten years makes clear several critical features of “crisis management” characteristic of its general functioning:

- the practical symbiosis of cultural and economic conservatism
(and the necessity, therefore, of both “cultural” and material resistance)
- the hypocrisy of “efficiency”
- the enormous hidden human costs exacted
- the creative capacity of late capitalism to incorporate and appropriate a wide variety of local forms
- and, finally, the normalization of crisis

To demonstrate how these features sustain and strengthen one another in the context of local circumstances, I will turn now to the example of struggles at the University of Florida over the past ten years.

Higher Education in the State of Florida, 1999-2009

The story of higher education in Florida over the past decade is fraught with crisis and defined by struggle. It began with a napkin and has ended in deadlock. Its lessons are complex and incomplete, but not entirely indecipherable. The most obvious are these: here in Florida, the rhetoric of crisis has been both crutch and corollary to a

sustained and in part successful attack on public higher education, public employees, unions, faculty rights, student access, and academic freedom. Although this attack itself might reasonably be concluded to constitute a “crisis” – certainly I have experienced it that way myself at times – I am convinced that it is better understood as *business as usual*: predictable in all but superficial variations, consistent with the broad-scale privatization of public higher education generally, and at least arguably emblematic of the crisis endemic to capitalism itself. In telling the story of what has happened in Florida over the past 10 years, therefore, I will seek to connect local events to the larger strategy of management by stress. In particular, I read the University of Florida as a kind of case study in “crisis management” by examining the manipulation of crisis rhetoric over the years 2001-2009 in the context of accompanying struggles over the structure of higher-ed administration at both the state and local levels. Because the University of Florida is a partially unionized workplace in a “right-to-work” state, crisis managers – from Governor Jeb Bush to local boards and national think-tanks – confronted relatively empowered but also inevitably divided resistance. Because that resistance has been – in part – successful, it may be taken to offer an instructive example for those engaged in struggle with their own local variations of stress and crisis. I will begin, however, with the story.

1999-2002, Reorganization

In 1998, Florida voters approved a constitutional amendment eliminating the elected position of Education Commissioner and creating a new body to oversee the state’s “free public schools.” Although then-Attorney General Bob Butterworth warned at the time that this change “strengthens the governor immensely,” voters might be excused for failing to predict that Jeb Bush, who took the governor’s office in the same election, would construe the amendment as an opportunity to dramatically reorganize the state’s public *universities*, as well. As then-Senator Bob Graham and others pointed out, the phrase “free public schools” has not, in Florida, traditionally been understood to include the state’s universities – because they are not (regrettably) *free*.

Nevertheless, “The remarkable transformation of Florida’s university system began,” as the *St. Petersburg Times* reports, on this basis. In 1999, Bush and then-

Speaker of the Florida House John Thrasher “began talking over dinner” and wound up “drawing on a napkin.” The resulting sketch outlined a radical re-organization of the state’s system of governance for education, aptly summarized by the *St. Petersburg Times*:

The state Board of Regents would be abolished. New boards at each university would be created. They would have broad powers, including the authority to set budgets, create programs, and hire and fire the school president.

A new Board of Education would oversee the whole public education system, from kindergarten through college.

And Bush would appoint all of the board members, giving him unprecedented control over Florida’s education future.” (Klein and S. Bousquet)

In the parlance of Florida politics, this concentration of power in the hands of the governor was widely referred to as “decentralization.” F. Phillip Handy, “the Orlando multi-millionaire and Bush ally who ran the ‘transition task force’ that recommended these changes” and then served as Chair of the Florida Board of Education, dismissed concerns about top-down management, explaining, “It’s a corporate model, and it works.”³

Initially, both Handy’s seven-member “superboard” and the local boards of trustees were directly appointed by the governor. Subsequent to the success of a rearguard ballot initiative spearheaded by Graham, however, the local 13-member boards now include one faculty and one student representative. The referendum also re-established a statewide higher-ed board, now called the Board of Governors and endowed with (as yet to be tested) Constitutional powers. Except for a single faculty representative, its members are appointed by the governor. The Boards of Trustees are

³ Indeed, “It happens in America every day at Cisco (Internet systems), at Dell (computers), at well-run companies everywhere,” he is quoted as explaining, before going on to claim, “If anybody has the courage to follow us, this will become the model for the United States” (Trombley).

now appointed in part by the governor (six members) and in part by the Board of Governors (five members).⁴

Although the official rationale for this radical overhaul was a perceived need for a so-called “seamless” education system, several observers pointed to powerful legislators’ recent frustration with the Board of Regents, which had declined to construct new medical schools at Florida State and the University of South Florida, for example, preferring to focus on the one in Gainesville. Although accurate, this explanation of the politics underlying the reorganization offers only a partial account, as it fails to fully appreciate the intersection of interests and objectives the new system would be called upon to serve. These would emerge, however, over time.

Before assuming office on January 1, 2003, the first Boards of Trustees were introduced to their responsibilities at a state-sponsored training orientation in which they received instruction from Anne Neal of the American Council of Trustees and Alumni (ACTA), who collected \$5000 from state funds for her services. Although best known for the cultural conservatism exemplified in their attacks on “anti-American” faculty after 9/11, their exploitation of the Ward Churchill plagiarism accusations to disparage area studies and multiculturalism generally, and their insistence that granting an English major without requiring a class on Shakespeare is “tantamount to fraud,” ACTA also does extensive work behind the scenes with governors, other policymakers, and, especially, trustees. ACTA’s “Institute for Effective Governance” (IEG) offers a wide range of “services tailored to the specific needs of individual public and private boards,” including continuing education, annual retreats, institutional evaluations, curriculum assessment, presidential search consulting and assistance, and “individualized consultations.” Their “Advisory Services” focus on student learning assessment, curriculum reform, and “ensuring intellectual diversity” – otherwise known as increasing the representation of conservative viewpoints. Phil Handy is among the prominent conservatives to have served on their advisory board (ACTA, “Institute for Effective Governance”).

⁴ Not surprisingly, the “new” boards looked very much like the old ones. Also, unsurprisingly, the fledgling Board of Governors’ next move, over the strenuous objections of faculty representative Richard Briggs, an M.D. from the University of Florida, was to delegate most of its authority to the local Boards of Trustees.

Cultural conservatism is only part of the story here, however. Another, more public battle was also taking shape on campuses across the state as the new Boards of Trustees began to make clear that they did not intend to negotiate with long-established unions. Faculty, for example, had been represented by a certified collective bargaining agent since 1976. The statewide contract between United Faculty of Florida and the Board of Regents had required that the parties come to agreement on terms and conditions of employment, prohibited unilateral changes, and guaranteed recourse to neutral arbitration in case of disputes over interpretation and implementation. The new Boards of Trustees, however, contended that because that agreement had been signed by UFF and the Board of Regents, the state's obligation to faculty would expire with the contract. In other words, as the *Chronicle of Higher Education* explained, the state "used the reshuffling as an excuse to discard longstanding union contracts" (Gravois). Perhaps the Board of Regents was required to recognize the union, Trustees argued, but the Board of Regents no longer existed. At campuses across the state, locals of the Police Benevolent Association, AFSCME, and Graduate Assistants United, as well as the UFF faculty union, scrambled to protect employee rights against the state's creative interpretation of labor law.⁵

One lesson we can draw from this backstory, I suggest, is to be suspicious of crises invoked to justify dramatic change. The pretext that Florida's problems with preparing high school students for college somehow required this radical reorganization of the state's system of governance for higher education was flimsy at best. Another lesson, however, is that logical consistency is far less important than logistical strategy; in this case, the message clearly mattered less than the means. Because Bush had solid control of the state legislature, the governor's office had little trouble imposing its plan. This history also points to the effective coordination of cultural and economic conservatism: in this case, the conjunction of curricular oversight with union-busting. Although ACTA's Neal denies that her organization was involved in the reorganization scheme, ACTA has played a prominent role in similar efforts nationally. In 2005, for example, the group conducted a case study of the University of North Carolina system in

⁵ Most were eventually recognized, either voluntarily or as a result of the successor-employer decision described below. AFSCME, however, agreed to divide their bargaining unit, resulting in legal limbo and ultimately weakened representation for a large portion of the employees they had traditionally represented.

which it concluded “that the governor should have authority to appoint the Board of Governors, plus all boards of trustees” – a system analogous to Florida’s new structure, and also, as a professor emeritus of public law and government characterized it, “directly contrary to the policy of political independence that historically has characterized our university and that has been a major factor in its achievements” (Sanders).

“Specifically,” the ACTA report suggests, “if UNC could more quickly respond to market forces and needs, develop a statewide strategic plan that is responsive to those needs, and include the private sector as a direct partner, it would operate as a more effective oversight board” (Palmiero 52). Neal put it even more plainly to the press: “The power to appoint is the power to lead,” she explained in the *Lexington Dispatch*. “This [would allow] one person to set the agenda.” Not surprising, ACTA also exercised influence on Capital Hill during Jeb’s brother’s administration, offering invited testimony before Senate committee hearings on “Intellectual Diversity” and in House hearings on higher education accreditation. A March 2003 ACTA roundtable, “Restoring America’s Legacy: What Trustees and Alumni Can Do,” included participants Karl Rove, Ed Meese, and Bruce Cole, Chairman of the National Endowment of the Humanities under George W. Bush.

As Newfield argues and these examples suggest, the culture wars are not merely a distraction from damaging economic policies: cultural conservatism all too often supplies the rationale and the political muscle to inspire, accomplish, and affirm structural changes conducive to market determinism. ACTA, for example, seeks to dissociate federal student aid from accreditation requirements and to open accreditation to free-market competition, on the logic that established accrediting agencies are too focused on “inputs” such as student/faculty ratios and diversity efforts. They prefer to assess measurable “outcomes”; hence, their advocacy of standardized requirements and quantified comparisons. From the establishment of traditional “core curricula” to the “efficiency” of standardized course content to the refusal to recognize academic labor unions, neo-liberal economic organization and cultural conservatism are made to serve one another – suggesting, perhaps, that market determinism is conservatism’s most cherished cultural tenet of all.

2003-2005, Recognition

Meanwhile, in Florida the faculty's current union contract was scheduled to expire on January 7, 2003 – only six days after the new Boards of Trustees assumed power. Determined to ensure that their most recently acquired rights would stay in force at least until legal remedies had run their course, faculty across the state organized certification card drives demanding the chance to vote in a union election for the representation they already had. Although the threshold for requiring an election was signed cards from 30% of the bargaining unit, UFF collected upwards of 70% in only a couple of months. These were submitted and authenticated in the fall of 2002, thus guaranteeing that current terms and conditions of employment could not legally be changed until an election was held or a bargaining agent was otherwise certified.⁶ The University of Central Florida broke the stalemate in January 2003, voluntarily recognizing the union; several other campuses eventually followed suit. The Trustees at Florida State, the University of West Florida, and the University of Florida, however, held out – and the state labor board, called the Public Employee Relations Commission (PERC), ruled with the Trustees, holding that there was no continuity between the defunct Board of Regents and the new Trustees and hence no legal obligation to recognize the unions or negotiate with them. (In Florida, PERC commissioners are appointed by the governor.) In February of 2005, PERC's finding was finally overturned by the First District Court of Appeals, which held that the new Boards constituted a "successor employer," observing that the state cannot "unilaterally terminate its obligations under a collective-bargaining agreement simply by reorganizing the executive branch" (Gravois). At both the University of West Florida and Florida State University, the Trustees insisted on a vote, and on both campuses the union won big: 91% at UWF and 96% at FSU.

At the flagship University of Florida, however, the struggle continued, as the Trustees decided to challenge the composition of the bargaining unit. UF's board petitioned PERC to add as many as 2600 new voters from the Health Science Center, Law School, and Institute of Food and Agricultural Sciences to the roughly 1800 faculty

⁶ Because card-check elections are not recognized, the union remained uncertified despite this demonstration of super-majority support.

from core academic disciplines who had been represented by UFF for nearly 30 years. They also asked that several groups of faculty (including teachers at the developmental research school, counselors at the student infirmary, and many department chairs) who had been *in* the bargaining unit and hence protected by the collective bargaining agreement since 1976 should be removed from the voter rolls and left with no chance of retaining their rights. The motivation for this move was made clear in a leaked email from a UF vice president to a confused faculty member from the Institute of Food and Agricultural Sciences: UF's president at the time, Charles Young, did not want IFAS faculty (or anyone else) to unionize, the VP explained; instead, he "wants IFAS faculty to vote because he doesn't want us or anyone else in the union." That is, "he wants the faculty to vote against certifying UFF to represent the faculty" and "believes that if IFAS, the Law School and Health Science Center are included in a vote the chances of rejecting the union are improved."

In July of 2005, the State Supreme Court declined to hear the Trustees' appeal of the appellate court's successor-employer decision. In August, the *Independent Florida Alligator* reported, "UF remains the only state institution not to acknowledge the faculty union United Faculty of Florida after a July 28 Florida Supreme Court ruling" (Richards). On September 9, PERC ruled against the UF Trustees' petition to change the bargaining unit. And on November 18, 2005, three years after UFF-UF had demonstrated super-majority support and nearly five years after the whole mess started, UF faculty finally sat across the table from the bargaining team representing the Board of Trustees and began negotiating their new contract.

The long struggle over UF faculty's right to union representation underscores the significance of market determinism to the current *political* crisis in higher ed. As Newfield contends, the crux of this crisis is the subjection of cultural knowledge to market logic that has characterized development for much of the past four decades.⁷ In Florida, this has recently taken the form of revisions in the structure of governance meant to render the university more responsive to market demands. The state's brazen attempts

⁷ In Newfield's analysis, interwoven political, economic, and cultural crises "characterized the post-WWII period, but became acute and unresolvable in the 1970s" (23), when "the assault began in earnest" on the emergent cultural vision "of full political, economic, and cultural capability that would be in reach of more or less everyone through higher education and related public services" (3).

at union-busting represent only the most obvious example. Newfield argues that “we need to see society, industry, and the university . . . as experiencing three parallel crises” resolved to the same effect: the dominance of market determinism over cultural development (23). I would suggest, moreover, that this struggle is ongoing, staggered, and scattered; it is staged repeatedly in arenas large and small, local and transnational. Indeed, any easy opposition between market determinism and cultural development risks obscuring the extent to which the rise of market determinism *is* a cultural development.

As the advent of RCM affirms, ACTA’s insistence that UNC subordinate social and intellectual ends “to market forces and needs” is not an aberration, despite its superficial incongruity with high-minded appeals to the importance of studying Shakespeare. By interfering with the ostensibly “free” functioning of market logic, the faculty union threatens both the ideological foundation and the material relations on which the neo-liberal takeover depends. Most crucially, perhaps, academic collective bargaining represents a potential to confront and complicate the superstructure/base paradigm that holds them separate.⁸ It threatens to expose the lie that culture is somehow less real than market relations and does not take material form, that material relations obtain in an objective reality ontologically *prior to* and untainted by “culture.”⁹

2006-2009, Retrenchment

In July 2006, as faculty union negotiations – slowly – proceeded, the UF Provost’s office suddenly announced that they had “uncovered” a significant fiscal deficit in the College of Liberal Arts and Sciences (CLAS), a union stronghold. The Provost

⁸ This is assuming, of course, that the union is not ineffectual, co-opted, or actively complicit. See M. Bousquet for further discussion.

⁹ Newfield is clear in his conviction that “society’s well-being” will require “resubmitting the economy to [cultural development]” (15)—in the University and in general. Oddly, given his illuminating attention to specific legal and political maneuvers that have driven things the other way, he is somewhat less clear about how “culture” might reassert its claim. In a pivotal chapter on “English’s Market Retreat,” for example, he suggests that literary theory of the late twentieth century should be blamed for providing only “weak” models of subjectivity. In arguing that “theory of the Foucauldian period offered only weak, indirect, highly mediated agency and thus little in the way of institutional or market management,” however, Newfield risks confusing a theory of agency with agency itself. In suggesting that English departments look to companies “like Citibank and General Electric” to learn “some new moves,” he points to these corporations’ capacity to “manage, control, engineer, dominate, and subordinate markets to their needs,” but thus offers to scholars a model of “strong agency” antithetical to the anti- and extra-capitalist values to which we might wish to make the market subordinate. (142-158). Neither a new theory of agency nor an imitation of the neo-liberal agency we oppose will make market forces submit to cultural objectives; stronger unions, however, could help.

claimed that CLAS had been accruing “debt” for several years and suggested the college would face “program cuts and layoffs” (Stripling “UF”; “Probe”). The Dean called a College-wide meeting for September 1, at which he unveiled a “Five-Year Plan” to “stem the debt” (Sullivan, email). This plan called for combining some departments and reducing others. English, for example, was slated to lose eight and a half faculty lines by fall of 2010; German and Slavic, six; and Math, six and a half. Moreover, the Department Chairs of Math and English were to be removed – an aspect of the plan the Dean acknowledged privately had no connection to budget concerns (Sullivan, conversation). The proposed cuts quickly became “a flashpoint of controversy” (Stripling “Cuts”), and the local paper editorialized that, “Basically, a five-year plan to reorganize the college, while reducing 54 faculty positions over the next three years, is being foisted on the faculty . . . with little concession to principles of collegial governance” (“Crises”). Chastened by the show of resistance, most of it organized by humanities graduate students working through an ad hoc coalition called CLAS Unite and supported by Graduate Assistants United (GAU),¹⁰ University President J. Bernard Machen sought to distance himself from the controversy. At a meeting of the Faculty Senate on September 21, he insisted, “This is not my plan,” and in an email sent the same day he claimed to “have absolutely no problem with additional dialogue and discussion within the college about this plan.” Nonetheless, Machen confided to journalists, “the existing plan [would] move forward” until and unless faculty could devise an acceptable substitute that produced the same savings (Stripling, “Cuts”); the faculty College Finance Committee quickly discovered that the Provost’s office had imposed conditions that precluded all reasonable alternatives. Indeed, there is evidence to suggest that the plan itself was crafted in the Dean’s office, but directed by the Provost – including an email exchange in which the Provost reminds the Dean that “it’s not as if the decisions are really debatable” and refers to the intended outcome as a “coup” (Fouke).

¹⁰ The coalition importantly included undergraduates, many associated with SDS, and faculty, as well, and the efforts of both CLAS Unite and GAU were well served by the activity of grad students from across the campus. Because those involved worked collaboratively and collectively, my sense that humanities and especially English grads were central to the movement cannot be clearly documented. The exemplary solidarity of these activists obscures the historical record of specific individual contributions; however, the CLAS Unite wiki does identify Joel Adams, Wesley Beal, and Donovan Hulse as committee heads.

Hence, what had ostensibly “started off as a fiscal crisis,” as the *Gainesville Sun* described, quickly “evolved into a crisis of confidence and credibility” (“Crises”). Several departments were merged, but the threatened layoffs did not immediately materialize. The Dean resigned later that fall, and the Provost was forced out 16 months later, when the central administration was restructured “to help make the university more ‘entrepreneurial’” (Stripling, “Provost”). However, despite the facts that the College is back in the black and the “Five-Year Plan” was ostensibly abandoned, the English Department has in fact suffered more extensive cuts than were called for. For the academic year 2009-2010, we are down four lines from the five-year plan’s projections for 2010-2011; without new hires, the department stands to shrink to 44 faculty members – as opposed to the plan’s projected 51 – by the end of 2011 (UF English). Somehow, the “coup” came off even as the “crisis” faded.

Reorganized under a chief financial officer – rather than a chief academic officer, or provost – UF appears well on its way to realizing the Trustees’ “long-standing desire” to “make the university quasi-private in nature” (Stripling, “Provost”). By 2008, Florida’s falling housing market had made talk of fiscal crisis credible, and progress towards this goal began in earnest. The year had begun on a positive note, as faculty union negotiators secured the Trustees’ tentative agreement on new, more restrictive lay-off provisions in January. In May, the union and the Trustees signed a memorandum of agreement providing that the layoff clauses and nearly 30 other negotiated provisions “shall be implemented and shall remain in effect” until such time as the full contract has been completed and ratified by both sides. Dated May 2, the document specifies, “This Memorandum of Agreement shall take effect July 1, 2008” (Memorandum). The Trustees’ bargaining team assured UFF-UF negotiators that the time lag was needed only to ensure that procedures could be properly implemented; they promised that no actions prohibited by the agreement would be imposed in the interim. In June, however, the Trustees issued layoff notices to nine faculty members, seven of them in the College of Liberal Arts and Sciences; four of the seven CLAS faculty served notice were tenure-track, and two were in fact up for tenure that year (Crabbe). Although these layoffs clearly violated the new provisions, faculty were forced to grieve under existing protections negotiated for the statewide union before 2001 and specified in the long-

expired agreement with the now non-existent Board of Regents. Staff fared even worse in the aftermath of the Trustees' union-busting, suffering large-scale lay-offs and a seriously weakened local.

Faculty union negotiations dragged on and 2009 began with the January arbitration hearing on the first faculty layoff case to make its way through the grievance process. On May 14, 2009, the neutral arbitrator found unequivocally in the union's favor, and ruled that the faculty member be reinstated. The other faculty members who had brought grievances were subsequently reinstated, as well. Evidently spooked by the strength of union protections even under the older, weaker contract, the Trustees responded by sabotaging their ongoing negotiations with the faculty union: they put the agreed-to layoff provisions back on the table; asserted they were *not* in effect, despite the signed document of the previous summer; and laid off more faculty in summer 2009, including at least one tenured full professor, whose grievance is now in process. Other provisions that had been settled and signed off on also reappeared – first Conflict of Interest, then articles addressing appointments and leaves. Faced with the Trustees' new strategy of moving backwards, the union declared impasse on September 18, effectively freezing existing provisions before additional faculty rights could be put in peril.

Over the summer and fall of 2009, top administrators engaged in a delicate double-speak, as they attempted to explain the need for continued program cuts and lay-offs in the face of stable legislative appropriations, increased tuition, and upwards of \$80 million in stimulus funds. The University continued to fire existing faculty while hiring others, and to shrink the College of Liberal Arts and Sciences while expanding elsewhere. The upper administration argued that the “crisis” UF currently faces requires not savings *per se*, but restructuring: we must reinvent ourselves now to prevent painful cuts in the future, the rationale runs, even when doing so requires both spending and pain in the present.

The lesson here is not simply that management lies when convenient, nor that universities generally are increasingly top-down, centrally managed corporations more concerned with growth and profit than with academic freedom (or, it scarcely needs to be said, concern for or commitment to its employees¹¹). What's new is the way in which the

¹¹ Thanks to Joe Ramsey for reminding me to say it anyway.

logic of crisis is increasingly normalized – even to the point that the rhetoric of crisis becomes unnecessary. Now the threat of a possible future crisis is itself considered crisis enough to warrant layoffs and program closings. Confronted earlier this year with the evidence of his own rosy optimism about the improving fiscal outlook and the College’s admirable performance, one frustrated dean demanded increased productivity while refusing to identify any specific areas in which performance should be improved. *Faculty* should take responsibility for identifying areas in which we can improve, he insisted – because whatever our resources or circumstances, *shouldn’t we always strive to do more with what we have?* This conception of an infinite capacity for increased production from limited resources has its corollary, of course, in the idea that *current* levels of productivity can be maintained despite ever-diminishing levels of support. Here, Responsibility Center Management reveals its roots in the Continuous Quality Improvement philosophy. Management no longer requires even the rhetoric of crisis: resources will be removed regardless of circumstances. In other words, we are now required to *act* as though the institution is in crisis regardless of the actual situation. *Crisis is the new normal.*

Management Culture in Late Capitalism

The system that Jane Slaughter characterized two decades ago as “management by stress” has evolved today into “incentives-based budget systems” (IBBS) designed to confer “clear rewards and sanctions for performance” (Hearn et al, 286, 288). The goal is not simply “to stretch production arrangements so as to eliminate any slack” (Weissman 1), but, as with management by stress, to recognize that “once the system has been fine-tuned, it can [and should!] be further stressed,” continuously (Slaughter 3). The genius of IBBS is that it shifts responsibility but not full control downward to local “centers,” effectively incentivizing the “team concept” promoted under management by stress. In both systems, “resources can be taken away” (Slaughter 3) in the interest of “maintaining a high level of tension” (Weissman 1), but IBBS is better at compelling workers to take resources away from themselves – increasing “efficiency” in one area, for example, in order to move resources elsewhere (from which they will likely be removed, eventually, in order to encourage further efficiency). As GE management explains in a leaked

directive on “Positive Leadership Development,” deprivation and crisis are critical components of this leadership strategy: managers must continually stress the system by removing resources and/or upping demands because “productivity will fall without that false tension being maintained” (qtd in Weissman 2). Under IBBS, moreover, many tasks of management itself are in-sourced to cheaper labor, forcing faculty, for example, to make the difficult decisions about where and how to compromise quality in the interest of meeting administrative demands. Although Hearn, et al., curiously conclude that “IBBS approaches may well contribute to the success of the [higher education] enterprise,” they accurately identify the systems’ central feature: “local units’ *academic* decisions have direct *financial* consequences for the unit” (288, emphases added). This “consequential link between decisions and unit outcomes,” unfortunately, secures the supremacy of financial interests over intellectual concerns – and induces faculty to act accordingly.

This context makes clear the critical distinction between such “insourcing” of managerial labor to less well-paid faculty members and the “age-old dream of labor” of “post-managerial work” (Newfield 38). The “false tension” maintained by the purposeful provision of inadequate resources creates a “false situation” in which academic values (and cultural development, generally) must be subordinated to economic “necessity.” For the faculty member/managers, however, this tension and situation are all too real: funding is finite; departments must economize; faculty must make cuts or have them made “for” us. Submitting to “crisis terms” entails accepting impossible choices: between trying to teach writing in large lecture sections or entrusting introductory composition courses to inexperienced and exploited incoming MA students; between hiring term-contract lecturers without academic freedom and secure employment or admitting additional graduate student/employees with dismal career prospects; between offering cash-for-credit online classes or laying off junior faculty.

That the introduction of RCM at the University of Florida has followed so closely on the heels of well-publicized “crisis” should come as no surprise: RCM has been billed as a way to “generate new revenue sources” and “increase our self-reliance” in economically uncertain times. In reality, however, RCM represents less the antidote to crisis than its incorporation. Materials provided by the University explain that the system

is expected to increase “risk-taking,” “innovation,” “flexibility and timeliness,” along with “self-reliance” and a “willingness to reduce or discontinue lower priority programs and services” (“Introduction” 12). In essence, RCM is the internalization of the crisis that is late capitalism: the exploitation of risk, flexibility, self-interest, competition, and, especially, disposability under the expanding reach of market logic. David Harvey has recently observed that “Capitalism never solves its crisis problems; it moves them around geographically.” However, just as outsourcing has its complement in “in-sourcing” (including the increasing exploitation of student labor described by Bousquet), “crisis” can be moved both laterally and vertically. RCM is a system for in-sourcing crisis by strategically structuring and then shifting painful management decisions downward in the organization. The “perma-temp” status of most academic labor took root in the context of a putative “crisis” invoked to justify otherwise untenable employment practices. It now has its corollary in the Routinized Crisis Model of RCM – a system in which innovation is driven by deprivation, workers are made to manage themselves, and what is advertised as “decentralization” disingenuously drives standardization, economic stratification, and the consolidation of market ideology.

ADDENDUM

In the time since this essay was completed, the two tenure-track faculty who grieved their 2008 lay-offs have both been awarded tenure; the lecturer who grieved and was reinstated remains employed at the University of Florida. The tenured full professor who grieved his 2009 lay-off also won his case and has been reinstated, along with the two other faculty members who grieved their lay-offs that year (one on the tenure track and one on term appointment). The English Department was permitted in 2010 to fill a longstanding opening in Rhetoric and Composition, but remains significantly understaffed. Elsewhere in the state in 2010, the United Faculty of Florida successfully arbitrated on behalf of twelve tenured faculty members laid off by Florida State University, effectively winning reinstatement for more than twenty tenured professors (Jaschik, Sergent). The nearly simultaneous election of conservative Republican Rick Scott to the governorship, however, has rendered collective-bargaining rights, higher education, and public employees newly vulnerable in the state of Florida.

In our ongoing discussion of this manuscript, Joe Ramsey raises the very real possibility “that the admin[istration] from the beginning saw the layoffs not necessarily as a set goal but as itself a stress test – not just of the production capabilities of the affected departments – but of the faculty’s willingness to roll over.” Indeed, the whole ugly (and expensive) episode has undoubtedly served as what he aptly terms, “a political stress test, in effect.” I am less sanguine, however, about Joe’s conclusion that it amounts to “a test which, from the standpoint of the institution, failed” – even if only, as he wisely warns, “For the moment.” As at the bargaining table, the purpose of such maneuvers is not always or only to force material concessions, but also and often to flush out information, gain political advantage, buy time, or extend and exhaust the opposition. The audacity and sheer tenacity of UF’s war on its own employees temporarily rattled the faculty union and certainly strained its resources, both financial and human, but UFF-UF has emerged the stronger from it. The AFSCME local, in contrast, appears severely shaken. GAU just celebrated its 30th birthday and is going strong.

Postscript: As this essay proceeds to publication, bills recently introduced in the Florida legislature that would have prohibited payroll deduction of union dues for public employees, required recertification if arbitrary membership minima were not met by July 1, and eliminated tenure for community and state college faculty did not pass. Indeed, thanks in part to the governor’s overreach, UFF-UF has doubled its membership this past year.

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