Reviews / Comptes rendus

Multiversities, Ideas, and Democracy

by George Fallis
(University of Toronto Press, 2007, 475 pages)

George Fallis' examination of the plight of the large, Anglo-American, research-intensive universities has recently been reprinted in paperback making it more accessible to many of us who should be reading it. As Fallis notes, most of us in the academic community are "remarkably poorly read" about what is driving the world of the multiversity and what lies in store for us. In *Multiversities, Ideas, and Democracy*, he sets out what he takes to be the most salient ideas that have shaped universities over time and then posits five characteristics of our age that are transforming the multiversity. His *cri de coeur* is that the emerging idea of the multiversity as an explicit service to the economy will so radically change the function of the multiversity that its critical function as an institution of democracy will wither. As members of the academy, whether as presidents, provosts, deans, or faculty members, we share the responsibility for ensuring that doesn't happen.

Five years after it was first published, the book is still essential reading, though not all of us will find all parts of it of equal interest. Fallis's history of various ideas of universities that have been at play over the years, though, is helpful in understanding the tension between the teaching (particularly undergraduate teaching) and research functions that causes so much stress for us both individually and institutionally today. It also helps us understand why we should all care about the plight of the social sciences and humanities, whether we are in arts, science, or professional faculties. However, our interest in his discussions of the five characteristics of our age that he is most worried about—the constrained welfare state, information technology, postmodernism, globalization, and commercialization of research—will vary, depending on how much we already know about these issues. In skimming through these sections, it is important not to miss his real point: to expose the impact those forces have been having on our universities. What makes his analysis compelling reading, though, is his conclusion that we need to make serving democracy an explicit part of the multiversity's mission and his subsequent discussion of the implications for us as academics if that were to happen. While Fallis is disinclined to present the alternative as a "doom and gloom" scenario, he is gravely concerned that something fundamental is threatening to transform the multiuniversity and its role in society, that it is suffering a drift in mission toward becoming an instrument of the economy, putting our inheritance at risk.

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So what is in this book for continuing educators? Perhaps because he is a Canadian, Fallis mentions at several points in his book that multiversities often have continuing education mandates. We are at least somewhat on his radar. However, continuing education units per se are not called upon to play a significant role in addressing any of the issues he contemplates. And while he mentions the Kellogg Commission's *Renewing the Covenant,* he does not make any comments on how engaging more effectively with communities or even students might alter the fortunes of multiversities. So, as continuing educators, we are left to contemplate the impact for our work of his generic recommendations. Some, like his call for professors to become public intellectuals, do fit well with mandates of some extension and continuing education faculties or units, but others might be more of a stretch.

Fallis' arguments for developing an undergraduate minor in citizenship education also provide us with an excellent foundation for reviewing, renewing, and reinvigorating our own liberal studies programs (by whatever name). His final chapter, "A Liberal Education for Our Age," would be well worth discussing in the continuing education/lifelong learning context. We would do well to ground our programs in the proposition that reason alone is inadequate as the basis for being human. We must start from a view of human nature that recognizes that an autonomous individual possessed of instrumental reason cannot be complete. Humans need to be autonomous, but they also need to be connected to other humans. Reason alone is not the means to connect to others and to understand oneself. The experience of joy and love, of sadness and grief, of honour and dignity are part of being human and cannot be approached through reason alone (p. 399).

Arguing for the need to balance the ideals of community, individual responsibility, and the common good, Fallis proposes a form of liberal education that helps us to be more fully human, not solely for our own gratification but to become better citizens of more deliberative democracies—to be able to participate effectively in deliberations about government decisions that affect us.

In other words, we can consider recasting programs that are sometimes characterized as "general interest" courses into citizenship development programs. We might also consider the more extreme proposition that citizenship education can help to develop

> forms of knowledge and social practices that not only make students critical thinkers but also empower them to address social problems in order to transform existing political and social inequalities. (p. 411)

In short, Fallis' final chapter offers us a range of exciting possibilities that we might consider in addressing our own continuing education mandates to meet broader community-based education needs.

Fallis is not alone in championing liberal education. Those who are interested in deepening their understanding of the importance of the humanities would do well to also read Martha Nussbaum, *Not For Profit: Why Democracy Needs the Humanities.* (2010).

Reviewed by Lois Gander, University of Alberta

References

Nussbaum, M. C. (2010). *Not For Profit: Why Democracy Need the Humanities.* Princeton: Princeton University Press.