

UNIVERSITY COLLEGIALLY  
AND THE EROSION OF FACULTY  
AUTHORITY

# RESEARCH IN THE SOCIOLOGY OF ORGANIZATIONS

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RESEARCH IN THE SOCIOLOGY OF  
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**UNIVERSITY  
COLLEGIALITY AND THE  
EROSION OF FACULTY  
AUTHORITY**

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# FOREWORD

*Research in the Sociology of Organizations* (RSO) publishes cutting edge empirical research and theoretical papers that seek to enhance our understanding of organizations and organizing as pervasive and fundamental aspects of society and economy. We seek provocative papers that push the frontiers of current conversations that help to revive old ones, or that incubate and develop new perspectives. Given its successes in this regard, RSO has become an impactful and indispensable fount of knowledge for scholars interested in organizational phenomena and theories. RSO is indexed and ranks highly in Scopus/SCImago as well as in the Academic Journal Guide published by the Chartered Association of Business Schools.

As one of the most vibrant areas in the social sciences, the sociology of organizations engages a plurality of empirical and theoretical approaches to enhance our understanding of the varied imperatives and challenges that these organizations and their organizers face. Of course, there is a diversity of formal and informal organizations—from for-profit entities to non-profits, state and public agencies, social enterprises, communal forms of organizing, non-governmental associations, trade associations, publicly traded, family owned and managed, private firms – the list goes on! Organizations, moreover, can vary dramatically in size from small entrepreneurial ventures to large multinational conglomerates to international governing bodies such as the United Nations.

Empirical topics addressed by *Research in the Sociology of Organizations* include: the formation, survival, and growth of organizations; collaboration and competition between organizations; the accumulation and management of resources and legitimacy; and how organizations or organizing efforts cope with a multitude of internal and external challenges and pressures. Particular interest is growing in the complexities of contemporary organizations as they cope with changing social expectations and as they seek to address societal problems related to corporate social responsibility, inequality, corruption and wrongdoing, and the challenge of new technologies. As a result, levels of analysis reach from the individual, to the organization, industry, community and field, and even the nation-state or world society. Much research is multi-level and embraces both qualitative and quantitative forms of data.

Diverse theory is employed or constructed to enhance our understanding of these topics. While anchored in the discipline of sociology and the field of management, *Research in the Sociology of Organizations* also welcomes theoretical engagement that draws on other disciplinary conversations – such as those in political science or economics, as well as work from diverse philosophical traditions. RSO scholarship has helped push forward a plethora theoretical conversations on institutions and institutional change, networks, practice, culture,

power, inequality, social movements, categories, routines, organization design and change, configurational dynamics, and many other topics.

Each volume of *Research in the Sociology of Organizations* tends to be thematically focused on a particular empirical phenomenon (e.g., creative industries, multinational corporations, entrepreneurship) or theoretical conversation (e.g., institutional logics, actors and agency, microfoundations). The series publishes papers by junior as well as leading international scholars, and embraces diversity on all dimensions. If you are a scholar interested in organizations or organizing, I hope you find *Research in the Sociology of Organizations* to be an invaluable resource as you develop your work.

Professor Michael Lounsbury  
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# INTRODUCTION: UNIVERSITY COLLEGIALITY AND THE EROSION OF FACULTY AUTHORITY

Kerstin Sahlin and Ulla Eriksson-Zetterquist

## ABSTRACT

*Recent changes in university systems, debates on academic freedom, and changing roles of knowledge in society all point to questions regarding how higher education and research should be governed and the role of scientists and faculty in this. Rationalizations of systems of higher education and research have been accompanied by the questioning and erosion of faculty authority and challenges to academic collegiality. In light of these developments, we see a need for a more conceptually precise discussion about what academic collegiality is, how it is practiced, how collegial forms of governance may be supported or challenged by other forms of governance, and finally, why collegial governance of higher education and research is important.*

*We see collegiality as an institution of self-governance that includes formal rules and structures for decision-making, normative and cognitive underpinnings of identities and purposes, and specific practices. Studies of collegiality then, need to capture structures and rules as well as identities, norms, purposes and practices. Distinguishing between vertical and horizontal collegiality, we show how they balance and support each other.*

*Universities are subject to mixed modes of governance related to the many tasks and missions that higher education and research is expected to fulfill. Mixed modes of governance also stem from reforms based on widely held ideals of*

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*governance and organization. We examine university reforms and challenges to collegiality through the lenses of three ideal types of governance – collegiality, bureaucracy and enterprise – and combinations thereof.*

**Keywords:** Collegiality as an institution; governance modes; university governance; vertical collegiality; horizontal collegiality; governance mix

## INTRODUCTION

The higher education and research system is both accommodating and reproducing a continuous dilemma. On the one hand, following Humboldtian ideals, research and higher education is expected to be run by autonomous interrelated academic communities in a system often described as collegial governance. On the other hand, research and higher education is an instrument for the fulfillment of certain goals external to the academic community, and governance and control are tailored for this purpose, typically in line with bureaucratic or enterprise models. As a consequence of this continuous dilemma, universities and the higher education system of which they are a part become contexts where various governance models intersect. Different ways of governing express different aims of higher education and research and hence different views on what is to be governed, by whom and with what means.

Universities are among the oldest and most sustainable institutions on earth. Since the first universities were established more than a millennium ago, we have seen astonishing growth in higher education and research worldwide, especially during the past 50 years (Frank & Meyer, 2020). At the same time, throughout their long histories, academic systems all over the world have experienced recurrent transformations in the ways they are governed. These transformations have followed societal and political changes, waves of organizational reforms, and shifts in the nature of stratification among faculty, students, and administrators. Research on recent governance transformations has shown how higher education and research have been subject to rationalization and organization according to widely held bureaucratic and enterprise (often also termed as managerial) ideas and ideals (Barnes, 2020; Czarniawska, 2019; Fleming, 2020; Hüther & Krücken, 2016; Krücken, 2011; Krücken & Meier, 2006; Macfarlane, 2005; Marginson, 2000; Marginson & Considine, 2000; Musselin, 2018; Parker & Jary, 1995; Ramirez, 2006, 2010; Sahlin & Eriksson-Zetterquist, 2016b; Tuchman, 2009). These reforms do not seem to have followed a grand plan, but have been introduced piecemeal and have only partly been tied to changed missions, tasks, and roles of research and higher education. Even so, it is clear that changed modes of governance have both been driven by and driven changes in the missions, roles, and tasks of higher education and research. Modes of governance change both what is to be governed and by whom.

Studies of individual universities, national university systems and international comparisons have documented and analyzed governance changes, what

drives them and with what consequences. As is the case more generally in studies of changed and reformed governance, we argue that studies involving universities focus more on what is new than on what is left behind, dissolved, or torn down. Previous and challenged modes of governance are likely to be taken for granted or referred to as well-known. It may even be the case that the lack of clarification and analysis of those challenged forms of governance make them less likely to be sustained. Recent changes to university systems, debates on academic freedom, and changing roles of knowledge in society all point to questions regarding how higher education and research should be governed and what roles scientists and faculty have.

Rationalizations of systems of higher education and research have been accompanied by the questioning or erosion of faculty authority and challenges to collegiality. But what is collegiality, and how can it work in practice? What role does it presuppose for academic faculty and other groups (such as administrators, students, members of broader society, etc.) in governance processes? What conditions are necessary for collegiality to work and how does collegiality as a mode of governance change with changed conditions and when mixed with other modes of governance? We see a need for a more conceptually precise discussion about what collegiality is, how it is practiced, how collegial forms of governance may be supported or challenged by other forms of governance, and finally, why collegial governance of higher education and research is important.

Papers in the two volumes of this special issue develop notions and understandings of collegiality; describe and analyze how collegiality is challenged, but also translated and practiced in different settings around the world; and provide insights into procedures that result from encounters between diverse modes of governing. Articles range from historical accounts of university reforms and the practice of collegiality over time, studies of current governing practices and challenges, and conceptual developments of collegiality, to normative accounts of how collegiality can be practiced in contemporary systems of higher education and research as a way to uphold the integrity and quality of those systems. Both volumes adopt a comparative lens to developments related to university governance and collegiality. While most papers are based on studies in individual countries or individual university settings, comparisons across settings reveal interesting dynamics of globalization, homogenization, and variation.

The first volume concentrates on challenges to collegiality and the erosion of faculty authority. Scholars analyze global waves of reforms, ways in which various managerial modes of organization and control come to reshape universities, and how these interplay with the changing missions of universities. The political context also challenges collegiality and partly erodes faculty authority. The second volume directs our attention to limitations to collegiality and analyzes how collegiality is revised and perhaps even restored. A normative discussion of this volume centers around how collegiality may be revitalized. An argument supporting a return to collegiality – both in the analysis of developments of systems of higher education and research and in the actual governing of universities – runs through this volume.

The authors of this double volume are affiliated with universities in more than 10 countries representing six continents. In addition, several authors have had experiences in several other countries. Contributors have collaborated on this three-year project in workshops, both in real life and over Zoom during the COVID-19 pandemic. In this way, studies and papers have been shaped in a continuous dialogue, ensuring that a thematic comparative perspective runs through both volumes. These thematic comparisons are visible throughout the volumes. Related questions are addressed in several papers, and as the many cross references show, the contributions partly build on each other. We end the special issue with a paper collectively authored by the contributors to both volumes that outlines an agenda for future research on collegiality and discusses practical implications for today's universities.

We continue this introduction with a review of definitions of and motivations for collegiality. We distinguish between two dimensions of collegiality: horizontal and vertical. To distinguish collegiality from other forms of governance, we analyze ideal types and use them to further explore both what academic collegiality is and how it interplays with or is challenged by other modes of governance. We revisit some of the recurrent waves of reforms of academic systems that have swept the globe over several centuries and show how these have led to changes in both what is to be governed, how, and by whom.

These reviews also show that collegiality is seldom clear and precisely defined. Rather, collegiality is often referred to as the old way of governing – that which is challenged. In this way, collegiality has largely assumed its meaning in opposition to the introduction of new ways of governing. To illustrate this further, in the introduction to the second volume, we ask if there ever was a golden age of collegiality. We continue by addressing limitations and often raised critiques of collegiality. We seek to sort out which limitations are related to collegiality and which limitations are typical parts of organizing, regardless of how it is governed. We conclude with a discussion about how academic collegiality can be maintained, updated, and revised to serve the purpose of independent knowledge inquiry.

In this introductory paper, we also present the thematic comparative perspective that runs through both volumes. We conclude by summarizing the papers in this first volume.

## **VERTICAL AND HORIZONTAL COLLEGIALITY**

Collegiality is far from a theoretically specified concept, even if, as we will revisit, important contributions have aimed at specifying its core (e.g., Bennett, 1998; Denis et al., 2019; Lazega, 2020; Tapper & Palfreyman, 2010, 2014; Waters, 1989; Weber, 1922/1978). The word “collegiality” has at least a double connotation. According to the Oxford English Dictionary, the noun “collegiality” refers to (a) “colleagueship, the relation between colleagues”; and (b) “the principle of having a collegium.”<sup>1</sup> Whereas the first definition has thesaurus connections such as “society,” “society and the community,” “social relations,” “association, fellowship, or companionship,” and “colleagueship,” the second is related to society

in the meaning of authority, rule, or government, in the sense of a “deliberative, legislative, or administrative assembly,” among others. Further browsing of dictionaries uncovers definitions including “friendly relationships” between people working together (Cambridge Dictionary<sup>2</sup>), “cooperative relationship of colleagues,” and participating in government, as in “participation of bishops in the government of the Roman Catholic Church in collaboration with the Pope” (Merriam Webster Dictionary<sup>3</sup>).

In research on collegiality, we usually find aspects of both meanings. However, we argue for a need to analytically distinguish between the two. Such a conceptual distinction lays the groundwork for seeing how various aspects of collegiality condition and balance each other. Here, we conceptually distinguish between what we term vertical and horizontal collegiality.

Vertical collegiality concerns decision-making structures within a formal organization and a set of rules. Along the vertical dimension, collegial decision-making is organized around faculty authority. It involves university boards, senates, and committees; the selection of *primus/prima inter pares* as academic leaders (Lazega, 2020, p. 10); and rules for the promotion and appointment of professors, resource allocation, recruitment, new curricula, etc., with faculty participation in these decisions.

Horizontal collegiality involves social relations or companionship and encompasses dynamics among communities of peers in departments and universities, reviewers of academic outputs, conference attendees, and scholarly networks. Hence, horizontal collegiality is not confined to university boundaries, as peer relations span such boundaries. Even though dictionaries list “friendly relationships” as a synonym for collegiality, we want to emphasize that this is not what horizontal collegiality is about. During the collaboration that led to these volumes, the friendly sociable aspect of collegiality was sometimes referred to as “tea room” collegiality, as in having a tea with a colleague during a relaxing break. Instead, in horizontal collegiality, the norms of the institution of collegiality as described below are enacted, activated, and reinforced.

Horizontal and vertical collegiality are interdependent. Peers provide reviews, critiques, and advice that inform decisions about tenure and promotion, recruitment, etc. Moreover, peers are mobilized to elect individuals for formal positions in universities, research councils, and other academic bodies. The vertical collegial structure is also based on legitimacy from the horizontal collegium. In other words, vertical and horizontal collegiality presuppose and balance each other. Formal collegial decision-making in universities draws on the existence and activities of the broader scientific<sup>4</sup> community.

### *Definitions of Collegiality*

Before we return to these two aspects of collegiality and how they relate to each other, we review definitions of collegiality found in research on universities. The sociologist Malcolm Waters (1989, p. 956) summarized the collegial principle as:

Collegiate structures are those in which there is dominant orientation to a consensus achieved between the members of a body of experts who are theoretically equal in their levels of expertise but who are specialized by area of expertise.

He elaborated this definition by spelling out six organizational characteristics of collegiality based on works by Weber and Parsons. First, the organizing of collegiality is based on the use and application of theoretical knowledge. This knowledge is specialized, differentiated, complex, non-routinizable, and requires regular maintenance. Authority, then, is based on expertise. Bodies of experts are expected to control and participate in decision-making. Second, “members of collegiate organizations are conceived of as professionals” (Waters, 1989, p. 956). These members are not regulated by contract, self-interest, or outside interests, but by their vocational commitments. They begin their careers as “apprentices” and are socialized into the collegium. A third principle is formal egalitarianism. Because members of the collegium are specialists within performance-based organizations, comparing performances is “frequently difficult” (Waters, 1989, p. 956). Formally, members are equal in the sense that no field of expertise or competence is subordinate to others, yet they are stratified when searching for prestige in terms of attracting resources and talented recruits. A fourth principle is formal autonomy:

Collegiate organizations are self-controlling and self-policing; that is, they are not subject to direction from any external source once they have been constituted. Formal autonomy has two aspects. The first is freedom of action in relation to the pursuit of professional goals. Groups of colleagues are free to do research, to instruct others, and to communicate findings or other forms of knowledge insofar as these things are relevant to professional standing. Collegiate organizations are ideally facilitative rather than authoritarian systems, in which performance standards are established interpersonally and informally rather than by formal rule. (Waters, 1989, p. 958)

Waters (1989, p. 958) termed the fifth principle “scrutiny of product.” Following the self-policing and egalitarian aspects, “there must be maximum stress on peer evaluation and informal control. The products of the work done by colleagues must be available for peer review” (Waters, 1989, p. 958). Peer review includes, for instance, written opinions and oral dissemination, consultation, and second opinions to ensure collegial deliberation. The last principle, “collective decision making” implies that administrative acts and subsequent decisions by collegial bodies are legitimate only when all members participate in the process, and when it has the “full support of the entire collectivity” (Waters, 1989, p. 955). As every member is highly specialized, no individual has complete knowledge about the problem or issue at hand. Hence, consensus must be achieved, or as formulated by Waters (1989, p. 969), “internally egalitarian and consensus governed and specifies individual autonomy for members.” To accomplish this, collegiate organizations often have complex committee systems. When procedures for democratic voting replace consensus, they function as a means for “the protection of minorities in committees” (Waters, 1989, p. 959).

We find related definitions in subsequent studies. In their study of collegiality in universities, Tapper and Palfreyman (2014) listed four core elements, including: (a) the federal structure between different departments and institutions within the university; (b) the notion that academics – as experts – establish policies and the mission of the university; (c) intellectual collegiality, including the task of understanding the purpose of research, both as it is conducted among colleagues

and how it is disseminated to the wider community; and (d) “commensality,” the process of socialization among faculty and students that creates a sense of community and “long-term institutional loyalty” (Tapper & Palfreyman, 2014, p. 28).

Lazega (2020, p. 11) elaborated definitions of collegiality further, and more clearly related them to:

non-routine and innovative work, formal equality among heterogenous members trying to self-govern by reaching agreements in committee work and – in the absence of true hierarchy – using personalized relationships to create various levels of collective responsibility and make this coordination work. Regularities in such relationships build relational infrastructures, and these relational infrastructures are key for peers to manage committee work, helping them prepare, if not make decisions upstream of the formal meetings.

Collegiality has been defined as a behavioral norm (Macfarlane, 2005, 2007) and a sense of community and commensality – that is, being socialized into a particular setting or community so that members share a long-term loyalty to the work conducted and to the community as such (Tapper & Palfreyman, 2010, 2014), or “the glue that holds an academic community together” (Kligyte & Barrie, 2014, p. 161). Such definitions also connect collegiality to professionalism (Waters, 1989) and to “academic citizenship.” Moreover, collegiality builds upon a nurturing leadership that can contribute to a collegial spirit and foster loyalty among academics beyond their local setting to the whole university and the broader academy (Macfarlane, 2007). A few definitions limit collegiality to respectful behavior at work, but in the contexts of university studies and governance studies, such definitions are rare (see, e.g., Seigel, 2004).

Collegiality also has been defined as a characteristic of the work process of academics (Bennett, 1998) supported by norms and values shared among peers (Chatelain-Ponroy et al., 2019). Emphasizing the relationships between scholars even further, Bennett introduced collegiality as a relational model that challenges individuality on behalf of the community. Scholars are not independent from each other. As Bennett (1998) put it, in the academic world, others are means and ends. This requires self-confidence in terms of individual worth, but also explains how relations with others help to reinforce, expand, and sometimes transform this experience of worth. Bennett (1998, p. 24) wrote:

Challenged by insights of others, rather than isolated from them, the individual absorbs and evaluates these perspectives and finds they may enhance his or her own freedom and creativity. Others are no longer just associated, but companions and colleagues ... Sufficiently secure, one is able to provide others with the conditions that enable them to grow in their diversity and uniqueness, even as they provide these conditions for oneself.

As Bennett noted, this requires an understanding of a relational academic community. Irrespective of the size of this community (ranging from a department to a wider research community), this “collegium is the primary context of connectivity and reciprocity among its constituent members” (Bennett, 1998, p. 27). Within this context, newcomers are socialized in line with “commensality” as expressed by Tapper and Palfreyman (2014) and Waters (1989) second principle of professionalism.

A collegial system is built so as not to give all the power to individual persons, but forms a system where individual leaders and their measures are subject to

questioning and testing, much like the work of scholars and research results. This does not mean that academic leaders in a collegial system are expected to be weak. Quite the contrary, leaders are expected to take action based on scientific argumentation and scientific qualifications (Bennett, 1998; Goodall, 2009; Lamont, 2009). It is truly a meritocratic system designed to be independent of individual interests to protect academic freedom. Knowledge should always come before interests.

While several of the definitions above focus on university settings, definitions of collegiality apply to other kinds of work and organizations as well. Weber (1922/1978) foresaw modern applications of collegiality in supreme authorities, agencies, and advisory bodies – that is, in contexts where there is an interest in limiting the power of specific groups and individuals, and a preference for shared power and cooperation across multiple groups without a dominant leader. Lazega (2020), for instance, highlighted how collegial principles can be applied in the construction of new markets (demanding personalized relationships), the executive suite in large bureaucracies (private corporations and public governments) and the Catholic Church. Waters (1989) on the other hand, documented collegial governance in the context of research centers, cultural networks, and human welfare service fields. Other examples include architecture firms, law firms, and parts of the financial market (e.g., arbitrage) (Sahlin & Eriksson-Zetterquist, 2016a).

As we continue to elaborate our definition of collegiality, we focus on university settings. The definitions above range from formal structures of universities and their decision-making processes to norms that guide the missions and values of universities as well as interactions and work processes. We end our review of definitions with a quote from Kant (1794, p. 1) that captures many of the above-mentioned aspects:

Whoever it was that first hit on the notion of a university and proposed that a public institution of this kind be established, it was not a bad idea to handle the entire content of learning (really, the thinkers devoted to it) by mass production, so to speak – by a division of labor, so that for every branch of the sciences there would be a public teacher or professor appointed as its trustee, and all of these together would form a kind of learned community called a university (or higher school). The university would have a certain autonomy (since only scholars can pass judgment on scholars as such), and accordingly it would be authorized to perform certain functions through its faculties ... smaller societies, each comprising the university specialists in one main branch of learning): to admit the university students seeking entrance from the lower schools and, having conducted examinations, by its own authority to grant degrees or confer the universally recognized status of “doctor” on free teachers (that is, teachers who are not members of the university) – in other words, to create doctors.

What Kant (1794, p. 1) described is the collegial university: a system of self-governance “to handle the entire content of learning (really, the thinkers devoted to it) by mass production,” with a “certain autonomy” based on the cognitive understanding that “only scholars can pass judgment on scholars.” Kant reminds us that collegiality is a mode of governance that puts faculty members in the driver’s seat – that is, it builds on faculty authority.

### *Collegiality as an Institution*

The definitions above use different words and conceptual framings, but together they paint a comprehensive picture of what collegiality is. Collectively, they show