

POLITICS AND THE PROFESSORiate

Glen A. Jones
Carolin Kreber

Faculty of Education
Brock University
St. Catharines, Ontario
L2S 3A1

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Introduction

While it is generally acknowledged that university faculty play a role in the political process (Altbach, 1991), there continues to be considerable ambiguity in terms of understanding what this role is or should be. This lack of clarity is probably associated with conflicting ideological positions concerning the role of the university and its relationship with society. Those who view the university as an agent of change would undoubtedly argue that faculty should play a very active role within the political system as advocates of social progress. Others would argue that this role should be far more restrained and indirect, that the professoriate has a responsibility to remain impartial before the evidence, and that the roles associated with scholars and political advocates are essentially incompatible (Lipset, 1972).

Our objective in this paper is to present data on the political activities of faculty at two Canadian universities and to use this data as a foundation for a discussion of the role of faculty in the political system. Our discussion will analyze this role using three distinct political perspectives: managerial, pluralist, and class. Rather than advocating a particular role for the professoriate, our emphasis is on analyzing various ways in which this role can be understood.

Politics and the Professoriate

The study of the politics of higher education has generally focused on the forces at work in developing government policy related to institutions of higher education or on the forces at work in the development of institutional policies (Hines, 1988; Hines & Hartmark, 1980). In analyzing the former, scholars have paid particular attention to the structures and policies associated with higher education systems. While most of this work has focused on a particular state, provincial, or national system, there seems to be an increasing interest in international,

comparative studies of higher education policy and a number of contributions to this literature have noted important differences in policy development structures as well as common trends (Goedegebuure, Kaiser, Maassen, Meek, van Vught, & de Weert, 1994; Teichler, 1988; van Vught, 1989). The study of power and influence in the internal decision making processes within institutions has generally focused on university governance and management. The study of university management has generally employed concepts and theories associated with public administration and the broader management literature, while the study of university governance has involved more diverse conceptual foundations including various models or descriptive metaphors of governance (Baldrige, 1971; Baldrige, Curtis, Ecker, & Riley, 1986; Birnbaum, 1988; Goodman, 1964; Stroup, 1966).

While much of the literature on university governance acknowledges the importance of individual and group interests within a complex institutional environment, the study of relationships between universities and government has tended to focus on structures and formal relationships. In other words, when the focus of attention shifts from the institution to what Clark (1983) refers to as the superstructure level of authority, there has been a tendency to view the university as a corporate entity represented by senior administrative officials rather than a complex entity encompassing diverse and sometimes conflicting interests.

An important presupposition of our analysis is that the relationships between universities and government are complex and involve both formal and informal interactions. We view the political activities of faculty as a component of these broader relationships, and argue that the analysis of these activities will contribute to our understanding of the interface between institutions of higher education and the political system.

There is little doubt that faculty do play at least some role in the political system. Studies of the professoriate have noted that faculty sometimes act as paid or unpaid consultants for government (Boyer & Lewis, 1985). In some fields, such as political science, it has been argued that there is a symbiotic relationship between the professoriate and government where each, in at least some way, contributes to the work of the other. Ladd and Lipset's landmark work on the politics of the professoriate has contributed to our understanding of the ideologies and values of American faculty (Ladd & Lipset, 1975). While the majority of research on this topic has focused on the work of the professoriate, the interface between faculty work and the broader society has received considerable attention in recent years as a subset of a discussion of political activism within the university (Bromwich, 1992; D'Souza, 1992; Sykes, 1988).

Political Activities of Faculty at Two Universities

In order to obtain some understanding of the frequency and breadth of faculty participation in the broader political arena, studies of the political activities of faculty were conducted in two very different Ontario universities. University of Toronto faculty were the subject of a study conducted in 1989-90. The University of Toronto is the largest university in Canada. It is a comprehensive research institution offering a wide variety of undergraduate, professional, and graduate programs. A questionnaire was sent to a randomly selected sample of one-third of all faculty in the fall of 1989. Of 1,131 questionnaires distributed, 521 were returned for a response rate of 46 percent, 452 from full-time faculty. Twenty-five respondents with relatively high levels of political activity were selected for follow-up interviews and eighteen agreed to be interviewed. These interviews, which took place between January and March of 1990, were based on a series of structured questions and designed to obtain

information on the careers of politically active faculty, the reasons they participated in political activities, and the specific types of activities they engaged in. A detailed description of this study and its findings has already been published (Jones, 1993).

One of the obvious limitations of the University of Toronto study was the fact that it focused only on the activities of faculty associated with a single university. It can certainly be argued that the University of Toronto is not representative of other Ontario or Canadian universities and that the activities of faculty associated with this institution may not be representative of other Ontario or Canadian faculty. The fact that the main campus of the University of Toronto is located only a short walking distance from the provincial legislature also raises the question of whether its faculty have greater access to the Ontario political arena.

Given these questions concerning the generalizability of the Toronto data, a second study was conducted at Brock University in the first three months of 1993. Located in St. Catharines, Ontario, Brock University is a medium-sized institution with a full-time student population of approximately 7300. In contrast to the University of Toronto, Brock operates a small number of professional programs (including education and business) and its major focus is on undergraduate arts and sciences. There are no doctoral programs at Brock University, though there are a number of small masters-level programs and a relatively large, predominantly part-time Masters of Education program. St. Catharines is at least a one-hour drive by car from Toronto and the seat of the provincial legislature. The same questionnaire that was used in the Toronto study was sent to every faculty member at Brock University. Of the 317 questionnaires distributed, 194 were returned for a response rate of 61%, 191 from full-time faculty.

Both studies focused on full-time faculty. Status-only appointments were eliminated from

the sample and respondents who indicated that they did not currently hold a full-time appointment were excluded from the analysis. Part-time faculty may also be involved in political activities, but since many part-time faculty are also full-time or part-time members of another profession or occupation, it is difficult to separate these roles.

Both studies also focused on interactions between faculty members and the Government of Ontario. Provincial governments are the primary legislative authority for higher education policy in Canada and it was believed that more could be learned by emphasizing interaction with this level of authority than by focusing on either the federal or municipal political arena. The notion of analyzing faculty interactions with all political levels was viewed as too complex and cumbersome, though responses to open-ended questions clearly suggest that faculty are involved in municipal, provincial, federal, and foreign government activities. The focus on faculty activities involving a single provincial government is an important limitation of the study.

Finally, it is important to recognize that the studies emphasized faculty participation rather than faculty influence. It is extremely difficult to measure influence in the political process, but interview data clearly suggests that some faculty believe that they have had an impact on government policy while others are equally certain that their work has had little impact.

Faculty were asked to identify their major field of study using the eight major categories employed by Statistics Canada. Responses to this question are presented in Table 1. These data clearly demonstrate that these two institutions have quite different program mixes and faculty complements. At the same time, the small number of Brock faculty associated with some fields of study, such as health professions and occupations and engineering and applied sciences, and

TABLE 1
Respondents By Primary Area of Study and Institution

Primary Area of Study	Number of Respondents		Percentage of Respondents	
	Brock	Toronto	Brock	Toronto
Agriculture and biological sciences	14	51	7.3	11.3
Education	31	17	16.2	3.8
Engineering and applied sciences	1	35	0.5	7.7
Fine and applied arts	13	4	6.8	0.9
Health professions and occupations	4	159	2.1	35.2
Humanities and related	25	74	13.1	16.4
Mathematics and physical sciences	28	40	14.7	8.8
Social sciences and related	64	59	33.5	13.1
More than one	4	11	2.1	2.4
No response	7	2	3.7	0.4
TOTAL	191	452	100.0	100.0

the small representation of faculty in fine and applied arts in both studies, serves to limit the scope of analysis that is possible using primary area of study as a variable. Where cell sizes allowed, a chi square analysis was conducted to determine whether there were significant differences in responses by field and institution.

The questionnaire asked respondents to indicate whether their research involved the study of some area of Ontario government policy, whether they were members of a provincial political party, whether they had ever been a member of an Ontario government committee or task force, whether they were currently members of a government committee or task force. Responses to these questions are summarized in Table 2.

TABLE 2
Responses By Institution

Item	Percentage of Positive Responses By Institution	
	Brock	Toronto
Research Involves Study of Ontario Government Policy	22	13
Has Been A Member of Government Committee	16	17
Currently A Member of Government Committee	5	7
Member of a Political Party	18	11

It is interesting to note that roughly the same percentage of faculty at both institutions have been and are members of provincial government committees and task forces. In both institutions, a significantly greater number of faculty in the social sciences study Ontario government policy compared to their peers in other fields ($p < .01$). Since the Brock study included a greater proportion of social scientists, it is not surprising that a greater percentage of Brock faculty study government policy. More than ten percent of faculty at both institutions are members of a political party, while national data suggests that fewer than 5% of Canadians give money to a party or a candidate or belong to a political party (Johnston, 1989).

Faculty were asked whether an Ontario government official had asked them for advice or assistance during the previous year, whether they had provided this advice, and the medium through which this advice had been provided. Approximately 17% of Toronto faculty and 16% of Brock faculty respondents reported that they had been asked for advice. Over 90% of those asked at both institutions provided assistance to government officials. The most frequent medium

for providing assistance was through meetings and telephone conversations, though some faculty at both institutions wrote formal reports, received government grants, or entered into paid consulting arrangements.

TABLE 3
Study and Policy Areas of Faculty
Who Attempt to Influence Ontario Government Policy
By University

Primary Area of Study of Faculty Member	Percentage of Faculty Who Attempted to Influence Policy		Area of Policy That Faculty Member Attempted to Influence			
			Related to Area of Study (%)		Related to University (%)	
	Brock	Toronto	Brock	Toronto	Brock	Toronto
Agricultural and biological sciences	21.4	21.6	66.7	54.5	0.0	63.6
Education	48.4	18.8	64.7	66.7	11.1	33.3
Engineering and applied sciences	100.0	17.1	100.0	83.3	0.0	50.0
Fine and applied arts	30.8	50.0	75.0	0.0	25.0	0.0
Health professions and occupations	100.0	34.0	100.0	75.5	0.0	34.0
Humanities and related	45.8	23.0	22.2	35.3	60.0	35.3
Mathematics and physical sciences	21.4	20.0	50.0	37.5	16.7	37.5
Social sciences and related	31.3	25.4	44.4	78.6	29.6	14.3
More than one	75.0	18.2	50.0	50.0	0.0	50.0
TOTAL	36.6	26.3	53.4	63.8	23.7	50.0
	n=183	n=449	n=73	n=116	n=76	n=116

The questionnaire also asked: "Aside from those situations where government officials asked you for advice or assistance, have you, in the last twelve months, attempted to influence Ontario government policy by communicating your interests or concerns to a provincial department, agency, or official?". Responses to this question by primary area of study and university are summarized in Table 3. Significantly more Brock faculty (37%) attempted to influence policy compared to their Toronto (26%) peers ($p < .05$). In analyzing responses by area

of study, a larger percentage of Brock faculty associated with education, humanities and related, and social sciences and related fields attempted to influence government policy compared with University of Toronto respondents. For both institutions, over 50% of faculty who attempted to influence government policy indicated that at least some of these activities were related to their primary area of study. A smaller percentage of Brock faculty (24%) indicated that they had attempted to influence government policies related to their universities compared to Toronto faculty (50%).

To determine the number of respondents engaged in some level of individual political activity with respect to Ontario government policy, all respondents who were currently sitting on government committees or task forces, had responded to an official's request and/or had attempted to influence provincial policy were compared with respondents who had done none of the three. This analysis suggests that 35% of Toronto faculty and 42% of Brock faculty had engaged in some element of individual political activity during the previous year of the respective studies. While there were differences in participation rates by field of study¹, it is interesting to note that over 20% of faculty in all fields of study at both institutions were engaged in at least some form of individual political activity.

These findings support several important conclusions. First, it is clear that the University of Toronto study did not represent a unique case. Faculty at both universities reported similar levels of political activities. Roughly the same percentage of faculty had been or were members

¹ At the University of Toronto, faculty in the health professions and occupations field had a significantly higher level of participation than those in all other fields ($p < .01$) though the small number of Brock respondents in this field (4) made it impossible to conduct a parallel analysis. There were no significant differences in the frequency of participation by field and institution.

of government committees, and had been asked for advice by government officials. More Brock respondents attempted to influence policy through unsolicited contact with government officials than Toronto faculty, though the percentage of faculty who engaged in some form of individual political activity was roughly the same in both studies. Second, while there are differences in faculty activities by field of study, more than one-in-five faculty in all fields of study at both institutions engaged in some form of individual political activity. In other words, despite differences between the two universities related to program offerings, research emphasis, and geographic location, the level of political activities reported by faculty were remarkably similar.

At the same time, there are limitations associated with these analyses that should not be ignored. The fact that both studies focused on universities in a single Canadian province, that data were only collected on faculty activities related to a single government, that the two studies were conducted at different times, and that there was no attempt to assess or evaluate the influence of these activities, all suggest that the generalizability of findings to other institutions and jurisdictions is limited.

Despite these limitations, both studies provide empirical evidence that university faculty are directly involved in the political process. Using the quantitative data collected from Brock and Toronto and the interview data collected from Toronto faculty as a foundation, we will now explore several different ways of attempting to analyze the faculty role in the political process.

Role of Faculty in the Political Process: Three Perspectives

Alford and Friedland (1985) have argued that all political theory and analysis in Western systems can be discussed in terms of three major perspectives or paradigms: the managerial perspective, the pluralist perspective, and the class perspective. Their notion is that these

perspectives serve as macro-categories of political theory, each of which operating as a conceptual umbrella based on common assumptions and approaches to understanding political phenomena.

TABLE 4
Political Perspectives and Faculty Roles in the Political Process

	Political Perspective		
	Managerial	Pluralist	Class
Faculty Role	Contribution to elite capacity of the state through: a) knowledge role b) legitimizing role In some cases faculty become members of political elite	Further individual interests as: a) citizen b) professional academic	Seek societal change through: a) teaching b) social criticism c) political activism

Each of these three perspectives provides a different view of the political system, and, as such, suggests a different way of analyzing what is taking place (Jones, 1994). Each of these three perspectives provides a different way of looking at the role of faculty in the political system, in large part because assumptions concerning the very nature of the political system that faculty are interacting with differ with each perspective. A summary of these different roles is presented in Table 4.

Managerial Perspective

In the managerial perspective it is assumed that "organizations have a significant degree of autonomy from society and the individual and group relationships that compose them. The empirical focus is upon organizational structures - both inside and outside the state - and the

domination of elites that control their relationships" (Alford and Friedland, 1985, p. 5). In essence, the political system is viewed as an essentially bureaucratic structure controlled by an elite. This elite attempts to manage the state, and therefore a central issue for the state is elite capacity: the ability of the elite to create mechanisms for coordination while avoiding the fragmentation associated with organized interests within the society. It is assumed "that corporations, unions, banks, universities, research organizations, and state agencies must each be organized rationally and then coordinated to make resources available for the efficient management of society" (p. 165).

Given this perspective, the faculty role in the political process can be viewed in terms of the ways in which they contribute to the elite capacity of the state, and in terms of the role that at least some faculty may play as part of the political elite. Faculty contribute to the elite capacity of the state in two ways: knowledge and legitimacy.

The knowledge role of faculty refers to the notion that faculty members have expertise in a particular field and they create and disseminate knowledge in the political system. The teaching function of the professoriate represents both a manageable resource for the broader society and, since at least some component of the student population will go on to fill leadership positions in the state, a contribution to elite capacity. The creation of new knowledge can also be viewed as a state resource, and there is little doubt that Canadian governments have attempted to manage this resource through the creation of research granting mechanisms designed to encourage activity in "strategic" areas. Data from Brock and Toronto faculty clearly suggest that at least some component of this research focuses on government policy, and thus professorial research offers the potential for increasing elite capacity by uncovering new policy

options or better ways of coordinating state activities.

While a great deal of the role of faculty in the political process within the managerial perspective is indirect, the teaching of students who will later apply their knowledge in leadership roles and the dissemination of new knowledge through publication that may find its way into the policy process, the Brock and Toronto studies also demonstrate that at least some faculty play a very direct role in the political process. Faculty expertise represents a resource for the elite, and some faculty are called upon to provide advice to the political process. More than 16% of Brock and Toronto faculty had been asked for advice from an Ontario government official during a one year period. Approximately 16% of respondents had sat on some form of provincial government committee or task force. Interviews conducted with University of Toronto faculty suggest that activities involving direct involvement range from responding to occasional requests for assistance to the development of policy as a consultant or government appointee. Studies of sectoral policy in Canada suggest that faculty members often play an important role in terms of direct involvement in these policy arenas (Pross & McCorquodale, 1990; Skogstad, 1990), and one study of provincial legislators noted that faculty are commonly employed as policy consultants and that elected officials valued their informal contacts among the professoriate (Jones, 1991).

The Toronto interview data also suggests that at some faculty actually become members of the political elite. Faculty have considerable flexibility in terms of determining how they will spend their time and how they will employ their expertise, and at least some have chosen to assume positions in which they have been assigned executive powers over certain policy areas by the state (Jones, 1993). It should also be noted that faculty collective agreements often

contain provisions for political leaves so that professors can retain unpaid university appointments while holding elected office, a provision which is obviously designed to support the movement of faculty into the political elite.

Finally, interviews with University of Toronto faculty suggest that faculty may also play an important role as legitimizing agents in the political process. Based on the perception that faculty expertise can be characterized as neutral and objective, at least in political terms, at least some faculty are asked to confirm the appropriateness of government policy decisions or to review the studies conducted by government researchers in order to confirm that these studies followed standard or appropriate procedures. One interviewee noted:

Some of my consulting work is really a matter of evaluating the research work of the (government) people. All they really want is a letter that (states) that they have used the right tests and that the data supports their conclusion. Of course the letter has to be written on University of Toronto letterhead because it will be used to support their decision (Jones, 1993, p. 476).

In at least some situations, therefore, the faculty role includes acting as a legitimizing agent for decisions made by the political elite.

In summary, the managerial perspective suggests that faculty play an important role in the political role by both directly and indirectly contributing to state resources and elite capacity. In terms of their direct involvement in political activities, faculty act as advisors or consultants to the elite, participate in government committees and task forces, and, in at least some situations, assume positions within the political elite. Faculty also play a role as legitimizing agents in relation to elite decision making.

Pluralist Perspective

The pluralist paradigm focuses on individual interests as the basic unit of analysis. Pross

(1986) suggests that "the essence of pluralism is the unorchestrated interaction of individual citizens, each striving through political action to improve or defend his or her position and lot in life" (p. 227). The basic presupposition of pluralist theory is that individuals have interests and that individuals will act in a manner that they perceive will further their interests. They "take action and join groups compatible with their preferences and values" (Alford and Friedland, 1985, p. 35). In many respects the pluralist perspective can be viewed as the antithesis of the managerial perspective; the latter view assumes that individuals have little power or influence within the context of a bureaucratically structured state while the former assumes that public policy represents an attempt to address, often through compromise, the often conflicting interests articulated by individuals and pressure groups in the political arena.

Given this perspective, faculty play two roles in the political process. The first and most obvious role is that of citizen. Like all other members of society, faculty have personal interests and they will act in order to further these interests. Six University of Toronto faculty described political activities that they had engaged in related to the role of citizen that had little to do with their professorial activities. Several had become activity involved in partisan politics, while others devoted considerable time to working with interest groups or campaigning for policy changes related to their personal interests.

The other role, and the one that more closely relates to the question at hand, involves their interests as professional academics. Sixteen of the eighteen faculty interviewed as part of the Toronto study described political activities directly related to their area of study:

Political activities were directly related to their research or to their association with others in the field with similar research interests. Most suggested that they had a "professional responsibility" or a "need to apply (my scholarly work) to deal with policies that impact on our lives." Thus, their motives were both

personal and professional (Jones, 1993, p. 471).

In this role, faculty act in a manner that will further their professional interests.

These professional interests involve a broad range of activities. Faculty who conduct research focusing on some aspect of government policy may take political action in an attempt to ensure that their ideas or policy recommendations are considered in the political process. Over 25% of both Brock and Toronto faculty indicated that they had attempted to influence some aspect of Ontario government policy during a one year period, and of this group over 50% indicated that they had attempted to influence policy related to their area of study. Aside from direct, personal lobbying activities, some faculty are members of and work within political pressure groups which share common interests. The faculty questionnaire asked: "Excluding political parties and university or provincial faculty associations, are you a member of an organization which monitors and attempts to influence Ontario government policy?" More than 20% of respondents from both universities responded in the affirmative. Interview data suggest that faculty may assume important leadership roles in these organizations and, through group activities and lobbying efforts, seek to influence government policy.

The professional interests of faculty obviously also relate to government policies for universities and research. Questionnaire data provides evidence that it is not uncommon for faculty to attempt to influence government policies related to higher education. Interview data suggest that faculty are sometimes actively involved in policy arenas involving research funding and regulation.

Finally, at least some faculty reported that pursuing political activities involved benefits related to their teaching and research (Jones, 1993). Political participation provides up-to-date

information and real-life case studies and anecdotes that can be used in the classroom. Several interviewees noted the importance of developing professional contacts through political activities. These contacts assist in expanding ones professional network and sometimes provide positive benefits in terms of future research activities and the reputation of the researcher.

In summary, the pluralist perspective suggests that the faculty role in the political process is one of furthering the professor's personal and professional interests. In addition to those activities engaged in related to the role of citizen, faculty members may be directly involved in personal lobbying activities or working within political pressure groups in order to ensure that their expert ideas are considered in the political process, and working to further their interests in the area of higher education policy. Some faculty also report that these types of activities further professorial interests by providing benefits to their teaching and research activities. Faculty may obtain up-to-date information on a particular policy issue and increase their range of professional contacts in the field.

Class Perspective

The class paradigm focuses on class as the basic unit of analyses. From this perspective, "individual actions and organizational interests must be understood via the societal contradictions inherent in the class relations comprising a mode of production" (Alford and Friedland, 1985, p. 271). While the paradigm is most closely associated with the work of Karl Marx, it is clear that in recent years the basic tenants of this perspective have been used to form the basis of class-based arguments concerning the inequities in social treatment according to differences in gender and race. The class perspective offers a harsh criticism of state elitism, and this view would suggest that the role for faculty suggested in the managerial perspective leads to little

more than a perpetuation of the inequities associated with the status quo.

The role of faculty associated with the class perspective focuses on attempts to seek societal change. This role involves three components: teaching, social criticism, and political activism. The teaching function involves the dissemination of information on the inequities of our current social structure in the hope that students will demand change. Students are encouraged to assume an activist role in political life. The social criticism function relates to the fact that, given their career flexibility and job security, faculty are in a unique position to offer potent criticism of current societal arrangements. The political activism component involves the direct intervention in the political process in order to lobby for change. Several interviewees discussed their feelings of responsibility to participate in the political process in order to change government policies.

It should be noted that political activism in this perspective does not necessarily imply that faculty are somehow limited in their sphere of political activities by their area of expertise. The class perspective suggests that given the status and potential influence associated with their positions in society, the faculty role includes supporting and providing direct assistance to those causes that are viewed as "right", regardless of the fact that the faculty member may not have expertise in that area. Several faculty members that were interviewed in the University of Toronto study clearly fell into this category: they were individuals who felt that they should use their position to further a cause that was not at all related to their research area.

In summary, the class perspective suggests that the faculty role in the political process is one of seeking social change. The three components of this role include teaching, social criticism, and political activism.

Summary

In this paper we have presented evidence that faculty are involved in the political process. Despite differences in institutional focus and geography, data on the political activities of faculty at the University of Toronto and at Brock University reveal very similar levels of participation. While there are obvious limitations associated with these studies that suggest that it is difficult to generalize about the level of faculty participation in other jurisdictions, it is not unreasonable to assume that some percentage of faculty in almost all jurisdictions are directly involved in the political process.

In attempting to explore the role of faculty in the political process, we have used the three political perspectives associated with the work of Alford and Friedland as a basis for suggesting that the role of faculty can be viewed in quite different ways depending on ones assumptions concerning the nature of the state and the central issues within the political process. We would argue that these three different perspectives essentially subsume the wide variety of viewpoints that have been previously articulated concerning the role of the professoriate, and that the three perspectives provide useful tools for categorizing and analyzing both the activities of faculty and the ways in which these activities are perceived.

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