

Neoliberal Sleight of Hand in a University Strategic Plan: Weaponized Sustainability, Strategic Absences, and Magic Time

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This research analyzed the University of Manitoba (UofM) Strategic Plan to both quantify the occurrence of specific keywords and make inferences about the purpose, messages, and effects being communicated by those keywords. In the first section of this paper, we provide an overview of the historical development and purpose of the neoliberal university. Second, we engage with content and critical discourse analysis to understand how academic work and academic identities are established by the strategic plan, a document that few faculty members consult regularly, and fewer still have a hand in developing. The foundational ideals of the UofM, cited at the beginning of the Strategic Plan are tracked through the document, and keywords as determined by frequency count are then similarly tracked. The findings reveal that most of the foundational ideals are not well-represented in the strategic plan; others, like sustainability, are euphemized. Keywords related to increasing workload are found over 60 times in the document, all in the context of decreased funding. We conclude that the strategic plan is a clear mandate for more to be completed with less. We refer to this aspect of workload creep as the need for “magic time.”

Cette recherche a analysé le plan stratégique de l'Université du Manitoba afin de quantifier l'occurrence de mots-clés spécifiques et de faire des inférences sur l'objectif, les messages et les effets communiqués par ces mots-clés. Dans la première section de ce document, nous présentons un aperçu du développement historique et de l'objectif de l'université néolibérale. Ensuite, nous nous engageons dans une analyse du contenu et du discours critique afin de comprendre l'établissement du travail et des identités universitaires par le plan stratégique, un document que peu de membres du corps enseignant consultent régulièrement, et à l'élaboration duquel encore moins participent. La présence des idéaux fondateurs de l'Université du Manitoba, cités au début du plan stratégique, a été suivie tout au long du document et l'emploi des mots-clés, déterminés par le comptage de fréquence, a ensuite été suivi de la même manière. Les résultats révèlent que la plupart des idéaux fondateurs ne sont pas bien représentés dans le plan stratégique ; d'autres, comme la durabilité, sont euphémisés. Les mots-clés liés à l'augmentation de la charge de travail se retrouvent plus de 60 fois dans le document, tous dans le contexte d'une diminution du financement. Nous en concluons que le plan stratégique est un mandat clair pour que l'on fasse plus avec moins. Nous appelons cet aspect de l'augmentation de la charge de travail le besoin de « temps magique ».

In our experience, a university's strategic plan is not something we often consult. We know that there is one. We know when we plan grant proposals or when we draft programme or course

changes, that it is a good idea to determine how our propositions help to support the pillars and actions items on the university's strategic plan. So, we consult the strategic plan—as an afterthought. A quick internet search reveals that strategic plans are corporate documents, intended to establish direction for an organization in terms of vision and mission, establishing long term and short-term goals and action plans, and analysing the strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats (known as a SWOT analysis) to a given organization or corporation. Our interrogation and critique of the expansion of corporate modes of regulating academic subjects may yield a clue to our ambivalent relationship with our university strategic plan at the University of Manitoba. By ignoring documents like the strategic plan unless making pragmatic use of them (e.g., when writing grant proposals), we can postpone our dread that academia is becoming increasingly, ongoingly, corporatized, with all that entails.

Therefore, within our SSHRC Insight Grant on “workload creep” (Kouritzin, 2019) in the Humanities and Social Sciences in Canadian universities, we committed to analyses of various publicly available documents (e.g., Kouritzin, Kolomic, Ellis, & Nakagawa, 2020a) for members of the U15 Group of Universities, including university strategic plans. Due to our proximity to the University of Manitoba (UofM)—all of the researchers teach, study, or recently graduated from there—we decided to begin our analysis of U15 strategic plans (SP) by considering the keywords and emergent themes derived from this plan that may be applicable to future analyses. To this end, members of our research team first read the UofM SP independently, engaging in content analysis to both quantify the occurrence of specific words and terms (hereinafter “keywords”) and making inferences about the purpose, messages, and effects that were being communicated by those keywords in the SP. Our simple keyword counts enabled us to identify main ideas and discover patterns of word use that in later stages we will use to frame our analysis of other university SPs.

In presenting our initial analysis here, we first briefly examine the historical development and purpose of the neoliberal university, following which we look in detail at one specific strategic plan. We are particularly concerned with understanding how academic work and academic identities are established by a document that few faculty members consult regularly, and fewer still have a hand in developing. The keywords here are derived from the value statement within the SP. They are expanded into constellations of related words based on their shared meanings. Because in general SPs are constructed by closed committees and therefore neither the purpose nor intended meanings of these terms is publicly revealed, we chose to use common definitions for keywords found in the values statement. The other option would have been referring to professional advisories regarding the use of language; however, because the purpose of the SP is institutional self-representation to internal and external communities, it seems illogical that familiarity with a body of professional literature would be required to interpret a university SP.

Literature Review

The Corporatization of the University

The ongoing corporatization of higher education exists within a neoliberal episteme (Hadley, 2015; Kouritzin, 2019). One of the key transformations redefining universities is the commodification of academic practice and the pursuit of profit (Slaughter & Rhoades, 2004) with consequences for the core missions of universities. Educational philosopher Giroux (2005) put it most succinctly: “under neo-liberalism, everything either is for sale or is plundered for profit” (p.

2). Rather than simply being able to financially sustain their activities, universities are increasingly positioned—and position themselves—as institutions engaging in wealth creation in a knowledge economy. Within the neoliberal university, research is viewed instrumentally, both as a means of revenue generation and of institutional promotion and branding. Brown (2011) noted that this approach can be encapsulated by asking "what can we study that will sell?" (p. 122). Research is increasingly shaped by corporate interests, as both individual academics and institutions focus on projects that can attract potential sponsors, "which risks overt compromise or corruption by the need to serve, attract, or retain them" (Brown, 2011, p. 122). Within a marketized model of teaching in higher education, students are conceptualized as consumers, who have the ability to select between knowledge products and brands (Ferrell, 2011). They have been encouraged to view education as a private investment, or as a service exchange from which they need to extract maximum value to ensure their own future economic success and stability (Smyth, 2017; Sutton, 2017). In part, this can be traced to ongoing withdrawal of government funding for universities, and to a political/social shift toward belief that universities should become self-supporting (Smyth, 2017; Stein & Andreotti, 2016) mandating a clearly articulated and carefully presented public image. Each university's concern with the pursuit of status and excellence must be carefully managed to ensure compliance with this projected public image, requiring extensive systems of control and maintenance.

One aspect of control and maintenance is the university strategic plan (hereinafter SP), enacted at the level of the institution, speaking to the purpose of the university, and representing ongoing, intentional, and consultative planning on the part of senior administrators. Through replication of institutional SPs at the unit level, and through faculty members' collective adherence to the principles and aims of those SPs, we suggest that "neoliberalism gets into our minds and our souls, into the ways in which we think about what we do, and into our social relations with others" (Ball, 2012, p. 18). Academics become "positioned as technical functionaries and learning product suppliers" (Manathunga, 2017, p. 69), limiting their scope as scholars, students, academics, and imaginaries.

The Historical Purpose of the University

Aronowitz (2000) described the historical development of the U.S. higher education system as emerging from a monastic tradition inherited from Europe. Within the earliest higher education institutions, faculty were hired for their secular focus on educating students; clergy managed spiritual and financial well-being. Public investment in higher education started later with the forfeiture of public land for the founding of "Land-Grant Colleges," whose purpose intended to maintain competing demands. In particular, these institutions aimed "to support and enhance economic development and to encourage the wider attainment of learning through the democratization of learning" (Bowen, Schwartz, & Camp, 2014, p.7). Public investment in higher education changed the historical-economic relationship between higher education and the public good. These ecclesiastical colleges responded by (a) positioning themselves as producers of useful knowledge, (b) leveraging their existing prestige to monopolise the hiring of recognizable scholars, and (c) using their large existing endowments to construct world-class infrastructures. This promoted a tiered system wherein the mid-low tier universities were relegated to knowledge transmission and higher tier universities harnessed to knowledge production. This allegiance to public funds for their financial security, Aronowitz (2000) argued, has contributed strongly to the contemporary university's authoritarian managerial culture.

As public funding for higher education waned at the end of the Cold War, universities scrambled for new sources of revenue. The academic-managerial class became beholden to fiscal constraints determined by the priorities of corporate partners, and many corporate managerial practices were imported into academic settings. Traditional ways that faculty collectively held power within the institution became viewed as impediments to responding to ever-changing demands from unpredictable markets. In response, Aronowitz (2000) described a shift from a collective form of academic freedom, where faculty themselves have considerable control over the communal and curricular priorities of the institution, to an individualistic notion of academic freedom which looks at the potential for individuals to receive or be protected from reprimand for their individual utterances. Coupled with the growing tendency for professors to identify more with their wider disciplinary communities than institutional colleagues (Aronowitz, 2000), policy statements such as SPs provide important rallying points for academic identity positions, a focal point, or mandated ideology, for academics to define themselves in terms of a stated institutional purpose. Aronowitz (2000) focused specifically on the American higher education context; however, similar shifts toward corporatization and branding in higher education are noted in Canada (e.g., Davidson, 2015; Clark, Moran, Skolnik, & Trick 2009), and even more specifically in Manitoba (Smith, 2011) even though (if scarcity of literature is an indication) Canadian scholars appear less concerned with discussing the purposes of higher education (e.g., McKillop, 2002).

Nature, one of the most recognized, revered, and cited journals in the world, published an unauthored essay in 1955 entitled “The purposes of university education.” It raised questions about the increasingly esoteric nature of scientific research, suggesting that it is “not enough for the teaching of specific disciplines like physics and chemistry to take account of the immense advances in their own fields” (p. 709), but rather that the university must be mindful of its “supreme function” which is the democratic “search for truth and the fearless communication of ideas” (p. 709). More recently, Stewart (2010) has echoed this, claiming that

It is unfortunate that the growing specialization and fragmentation of universities has made it all the more difficult to identify and articulate the purpose of a university and even more difficult to create the types of integration that would provide both a liberal education and a solid foundation for a future career. (p. 245)

That is, in adopting economic ends for higher education, the university appears to have largely forsaken its democratic ends, with education for participation in a liberal democracy being supplanted by discourses of production, consumerism, and commodification. At the same time, the line of reasoning supporting the transition appears fundamentally democratic: “the allocation of taxpayer dollars toward developing human capital results in higher levels of productivity, greater profits for private enterprise, and, thus, economic growth...higher levels of employment and eventually an improved quality of life for all” (Ayers, 2005, p. 533).

With these changing purposes of higher education in mind, we here examine the SP of one member of the U15 Group of Universities in Canada. SPs are intended to describe the mission, vision, values, targets, and strategic course for the institution, thus answering the question of its purpose (Aykel, KorkusuzPolat, & Arslankaya, 2012). This article focuses on only one university SP to achieve depth in our analysis; however, we contextualize our discussion in trends observed in the higher education literature. Thus, we hope that readers make connections to ends-means discussions in their own institutions.

Method

The following research question guided our analysis: “how does the language in use in one authentic context (the SP) both reflect and create the academic context of the University of Manitoba and the identities of those who work there?” SP language is an expert language that (a) serves the functions of establishing a distinct sphere of expertise and specialized knowledge, (b) confers membership on a specific group of individuals and is used to socialize new members, (c) organizes knowledge and functioning structures, and (d) authorizes certain speakers and discourses and delegitimizes others (Tonkiss, 2004, p. 375).

Within the analytic framework of critical discourse analysis (CDA) that focuses on the ideological work of language/discourse as it both fashions and is influenced by agency, power, and social norms (Fairclough, 2010; Stibbe, 2021), we first individually analyzed the SP for content and keywords. We looked for keyword patterns to understand how messages were being communicated, hoping to understand the intentions of individuals, groups, or the institution, and how together they position the university and those who work in it. Recognizing that “people may resist, negotiate, modify or refuse positions, thus preserving individual agency in identity construction” (Benwell & Stokoe, 2006, p. 43), we tried to understand those moments “when the ideologies manifest in discourse are opaque, when unjust discourses proliferate uncontested, and when discursive alternatives are not considered” (Ayers, 2005, p. 529). We then compared and contrasted our analytic categories, examining the common sense and implied meanings of various isolated keywords, and the semantic relationships among them. Because CDA encourages us to consider not just what is present, but what is also absent from a text, we made inferences about possible absences to illuminate the ideologies and identities that result from an obvious power asymmetry, that is, institutionally mandated, top-down SP statements.

Findings: Keywords in the SP

In this section, we seek to reposition academic work and identities by illuminating which discourses were legitimized/authorized and which were dismissed.

Keywords in the Foundational Ideals Statement

The UofM Strategic Plan (2015), in its preamble section called “Mission, Vision and Values” stated nine “foundational ideals,” appearing as a common-sense list without explanation: Academic Freedom, Accountability, Collegiality, Equity and Inclusion, Excellence, Innovation, Integrity, Respect, and Sustainability (p. 10). We begin our examination of the SP by tracking the instances of each of the ideals, indicating how and how often each of them is referenced outside of the Foundational Ideals Statement (hereinafter FIS). We note that the first listing of the principles in the FIS list mentioned above is not included in our tally. We then examined keywords, and frequently appearing words that are not part of the FIS list. (see Table 1).

Academic Freedom. Outside the initial FIS, academic freedom is neither mentioned nor defined in the SP, an absence both notable and troubling. However, in the Collective Agreement between the UofM and UMFA, Article 37 describes academic freedom (and the purpose of the University) thus:

The essential functions of a university are the pursuit, creation, and dissemination of knowledge through research and other scholarly and creative activities, and by teaching. Academic Freedom is essential to these functions and ensures the right of Members to teach, investigate, and speculate, and/or to create or perform works of art, without deference to prescribed doctrine. Furthermore, universities are communities in which the right to criticize all aspects of society is valued and respected. These rights are to be understood as central to the protection of the public interest and the pursuit of truth. (Article 37.1)

Article 37 goes on to include faculty’s right to teach, discuss, and/or critique controversial topics and includes protection for both criticizing societies at large and the institution itself. However, academic freedom does not grant legal immunity, nor does it allow university members to speak on behalf of the institution without authorization. Instead, it articulates a collective obligation to pursue truth honestly and ethically.

Accountability. The word accountability is found only twice in the SP body, and one of the instances occurs in a title: Implementation and Accountability (University of Manitoba, 2015). Dictionary.com (n.d.) defined accountability as “the state of being accountable, liable, or answerable” but also notes an educational definition: “policy of holding schools and teachers accountable for students’ academic progress by linking such progress with funding for salaries, maintenance, etc.” Within the SP, the only mention of accountability is in relation to the obligation of the central administration to regularly report their progress towards the strategic goals in the plan to the Board of Governors of the UofM. Explicit accountability to a management structure rather than to students, faculty, staff, and other stakeholders is consistent with the educational definition noted above, and thus to a specifically neoliberal understanding of educational practices.

Table 1

Keyword Frequency from FIS

Keyword	Related Word(s)	Numbers of Uses (outside FIS)	Total Number of Uses (outside FIS)
Academic Freedom	N/A	0	0
Accountability	N/A	2	2
Collegiality	N/A	3	3
Equity and Inclusion		0	16
	Equity	0	
	Inclusion	6	
	Equitable and Inclusive	6	
	Fair(ness) and incorporation	4	
Excellence		14	22
	Quality	8	
Innovation		9	11
	Modernisation	2	
Integrity		0	6
	Integration	5	
	Sincerity	1	
Respect	N/A	10	10
Sustainability	N/A	7	7

Collegiality. Located three times within the SP, collegiality, is described by Dictionary.com (n.d.) as meaning “characterized by the collective responsibility shared by each of a group of colleagues, with minimal supervision from above.” In keeping with the policy statement put forward by the Canadian Association of University Teachers (CAUT; 2010) that demands diversity, inclusivity, and distributed power in decision-making, the first instance of collegiality describes the preference for faculty to engage in collegial decision making (University of Manitoba, 2015, p. 7). In the second instance, it is used to describe faculty member discussions regarding evaluation of research, scholarly works, and creative activities in terms of impact and outcomes (p. 14). Both of these appear to support the idea of collegial governance, albeit only in circumstances related to assessing the academic contributions of various members of the academic community through standardized means, primarily for the purposes of tenure and promotion. In the final instance, collegiality is simply used as an adjective meaning cooperative or agreeable in a list of aspirational qualities of a functioning work and learning environment along with respectful, supportive, and trusting (p.17).

Equity and Inclusion. The ways in which the terms equity and inclusion were used within the SP were used primarily to refer to values of accumulation and preservation of human and social capital. Dictionary.com (n.d.) identified equity as “the quality of being fair or impartial” and inclusion as “the act of including” or “the state of being included.” These two words were grouped together in the SP; therefore, we searched for them both separately and jointly. The pairing of equity with inclusion is interesting in the sense that they are, in some ways, competing ideas. That is, being fair or equitable could mean excluding certain groups, ideas, or speech patterns from public discourse, whereas being inclusive would seem to work against that. The pairing of these words references specific unacknowledged legal and ideological norms. Since the time of the SP being formulated and published (2014-2015), equity and inclusion have become commonly associated with diversity as well: the three are often abbreviated as EDI. We found no instances of this trifecta or its acronym. We found no mentions of “equity and inclusion” together, or the word “equity” alone; in contrast, there were six references to “inclusion” by itself. We also searched for the similar terms “equitable and inclusive” (six mentions) and the synonyms “fair/ness,” and “incorporation” (four mentions). Inclusion is mentioned in a number of contexts throughout the document. Most often it is used in reference to Indigenous peoples, as in being inclusive of Indigenous perspectives (University of Manitoba, 2015, p. 15) or creating an “inclusive and supportive learning environment that promotes Indigenous student success” (p. 16). Inclusive is used to group special interest categories such as “women, Indigenous peoples, people with disabilities, gender and sexual minorities, and racialized minorities” (p. 18) for the purposes of staff, faculty, and leadership diversity (p.18). Notably, however, the term does not include economically disadvantaged people, despite Winnipeg containing R3A, the poorest postal code in Canada identified by Statistics Canada in 2016 (Lupick, 2019). It is in this neighbourhood where poverty intersects brutally with other forms of marginalization (Toews, 2018). “Incorporation” was also used referring to Indigenous people and their knowledges (pp. 4, 13, 16), but in a manner implying institutional accumulation and preservation; this has the potential to disenfranchise Indigenous people from their own knowledges. These mentions are unfortunately reminiscent of a “just add minorities and stir” orientation to institutional inclusivity. Finally, incorporation is used as a caveat, or add-on consideration such as in the admonition that faculty sustainability plans must “incorporate sufficient support for students” (p. 12) or referring to improvements that need to be incorporated in order “to make meaningful improvements to the University’s institutional infrastructure and organizational structures” (p.5).

Excellence. The term “excellence” and its many variants were found 14 times outside of the FIS; its synonym “quality” garnered eight mentions. Excellence is almost exclusively mentioned in relation to faculty work, either through teaching, research, or creative work, often in explicitly promotional discourses. For example, the following passage considers the way that the University plans to exploit the excellent work done to recruit international students, and to promote itself within the international community:

At the same time, it now shares this excellence in education with students from around the world, and actively seeks to engage as part of the interconnected international community, through research partnerships, student and academic exchanges and the pursuit of solutions to challenges faced globally. (p. 4)

Along these same lines, this second passage considers how excellent teaching and scholarly work will be leveraged in order to help promote philanthropic engagement with the university:

Develop and execute a comprehensive campaign to advance the University, that engages students, faculty, staff, Board of Governors’ members, alumni, friends, and governments and raises \$500 million for Indigenous achievement, graduate student support, research excellence, an outstanding student experience and enhanced places and spaces. (p. 21)

The synonym “quality” was almost exclusively used as a way of establishing hierarchies, with the stated goal of only competing for “high quality faculty, staff, students, grant funding, and support” (p. 8), teaching (p. 13), engaging in high quality “research, scholarly work and other creative activities” (p. 14), and publishing in high quality “peer-reviewed journals, presses, [and] exhibitions” while contributing to “policy development and legal opinions” (p. 15). The use of this term signals resource allocation implications because the University is only committed to promoting and funding teaching and scholarship that is of the highest quality, as does its use in reference to a steady improvement of the overall quality of both permanent (e.g., buildings) and cyber infrastructure.

Innovation. Referring to “something new or to a change made to an existing product, idea, or field” (“Innovation,” n.d.), innovation is a value featured nine times in various forms (innovate, etc.) in the text of the SP. A related word, modernization, nets two uses. Innovation appeared strongly associated with technology in the SP; for instance, online learning opportunities for students are considered “innovations in learning” (University of Manitoba, 2015 p. 7), as are experiential learning and job-preparedness as innovations in teaching. On only one occasion innovative research and scholarly work were promoted (p. 14), though new ideas and changes to existing ones would seem to be part of the core mission of the UofM. Innovation also featured in reference to international, national, provincial, and corporate partnerships, especially emphasizing receptivity, flexibility, and providing value to partners (p. 20). Modernization was associated with both technological and infrastructural modernization (p. 5) and also with bureaucratic innovation such as management software systems (p. 6) with some emphasis placed on improved communication to help ease the pain of implementation.

Integrity. Defined by Dictionary.com as “adherence to moral or ethical principles” or “the state of being whole,” integrity is not mentioned outside of FIS, though a related word, “integration” (in the sense of being whole or undivided) is included five times (Integrity, n.d.[a]). The related word “sincerity” has one mention, while “principle” appears four times. The use of

integration rather than integrity appears to emphasize becoming part of an increasingly large, pluralistic whole, in much the same way that both inclusion and incorporation do (see above). Sincerity is referenced in the President's Message: the "sincere willingness of our community to participate in the conversation about the future we are now choosing to create" (p. 3). Principle emerges in multiple contexts throughout the SP, such as "to pursue the principles of environmental, social and economic sustainability, defined by the World Commission on Environment and Development as meeting 'the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs'" (p. 6). Most principles are statements of image-boosting affirmation to confirmed public concerns such as environmental or social justice. One example references a recent UofM land acquisition: "the University's academic principles must not be compromised, and ... institutional resources, whatever their source, should be used so as to maximize their impact in support of the University's mission" (p. 8). Another suggests adherence to reconciliation: the University is "committed to a renewed relationship and dialogue with First Nations, Métis, and Inuit peoples based on the principles of mutual trust, respect, and reciprocity" (p. 9). A third references how the University will maintain relationships with the local community, by demonstrating "the principles of inclusion, consultation and integration in finalizing a long-term vision and implementation plan for the development of the Southwood precinct." (p. 21). Affirmation of principles that reflect public concerns are rendered somewhat meaningless; no institution would set principles of injustice, distrust, non-consultation, or other unprincipled actions.

Respect. Mentioned ten times in the SP outside of the FIS, the inclusions of respect mirror the Dictionary.com explanation, described as the "esteem for or a sense of the worth or excellence of a person" and "deference to a right, privilege, privileged position, or someone or something considered to have certain rights or privileges" (Respect, n.d.) Respect is used with reference to Indigenous or other equity-seeking groups in conjunction with reciprocity or collaboration, implying an ongoing exchange in which the University seems willing to defer to other knowledge forms if the University first incorporates those knowledges, using them for self-promotion. Respect also emerges in contexts of workplace climate, used to promote the ways that the University values its staff, students, and faculty while creating safe working environments.

Sustainability. The word "sustainability" is used seven times outside of the FIS. With its root word meaning "pertaining to a system that maintains its own viability by using techniques that allow for continual reuse" (Sustainability, n.d.), sustainability is used in two contexts in the SP. Least commonly, it is used in relation to justice-based causes, serving as a euphemism for ecojustice. However, its usage allows SP followers to choose instead market-based metaphorical uses of sustainability as a concept to refer to perpetual resource extraction, economic sustainability, etc. Tied into this economic use of sustainability is "institutional sustainability" whose usage incorporates certain concepts which include scarcity as a motivation for prioritised resource allocation decisions such as a commitment to improving cyber infrastructure, recruiting people from elsewhere and lightening academic workload.

Keywords Not in the Foundational Ideals Statement

There are also a number of keywords not listed in the FIS that appear frequently throughout the SP (see Table 2). The University SP is grounded in a "context of stable or diminishing resources" a phrase that is repeated three times (University of Manitoba, 2015, pp. 12, 19, 20) within the goals and supporting actions as well as alluded to several times. Programs of study across the

Table 2

Keyword Frequency beyond FIS

Keyword	Related Word(s)	Numbers of Uses (outside FIS)	Total Number of Uses (outside FIS)
Stable or Diminishing Resources Increase	N/A	3	3
		29	60
	Create	3	
	Establish	11	
	Improve(ment)	9	
Invest	Enhance	8	
	N/A	8	8
Support	N/A	57	57

university are to be “sufficiently” (p. 12) supported, communication and development are to be developed (p. 19), and connections locally and internationally “leveraged” (p. 20) without further resource allocations. Moreover, the preamble to the SP focuses on fiscal constraint, foreshadowing focus on areas of strength, thereby establishing rationalized cutbacks and/or investments only in strategic areas:

Governments across the country have been adjusting their approaches to funding universities, choosing to reduce or constrain the growth of operating grants, establish targeted program funding, change eligibility criteria for research funding, and limit the availability of capital. The University of Manitoba in particular will need to respond to ongoing limits on its provincial operating grant, restrictions to its ability to adjust tuition fees to competitive market rates, and limited provincial funding for the research endeavor, while continuing to make the case for increased government support for post-secondary education. (p. 5)

Despite the emphasis on diminishing resources, simultaneously, the word “increase” appears 29 times in the goals and supporting actions, referring to (among others) numbers of students, wireless communications, student financial support, and student retention (p. 11); opportunities for academic staff to complete ongoing professional development certificates within the University of Manitoba (p. 12); research chairs and professorships to lead research, successful funding applications, collaboration with institutions of global standing, and the UofM position within the U15 Group of Universities (p. 14); engagement with outside communities (p. 16); diversity of students, faculty, and staff, as well as satisfaction with the academic environment (p. 18); opportunities to engage in outreach, and student, faculty, staff, and Board of Governors philanthropic donations to the University of Manitoba (p. 20). There is no corresponding reference to increases in human resource allocations, faculty complement, or capital expenditures. Words describing similar activities together appear 22 times, specifically “create” (three times), “establish” (11 times), “improve/ment” (nine times), and “enhance” (eight times), referring to everything from student mobility to university reputation to capacity to common spaces. In fact, there is no better explanation for the metaphor “workload creep” (Kouritzin, 2019) than realizing that 60 different things are to be created, enhanced, improved, established, or increased all “in the context of stable or diminishing resources” (p. 12). Moreover, suggesting neoliberal sleight of hand in reference to evaluation and assessment of progress on strategic

priorities in the SP, words such as “increase,” “improve,” or “enhance” allow any change at all to be declared a successful step on the path to fulfilling the Strategic Plan. Many keywords are similarly meaningless, because they are unmeasurable and without action orientation: “ensure” (12 times), “pursue” (ten times), and monitor/review (six times) are among these, and “appropriate” (seven times) is simply undefinable.

We also point to variations of the keyword “invest” (investment, reinvest) used in economic and human capital terms eight times in the SP (five times in the preamble). In particular, the SP focuses on the “scope of the investment” (p. 5) that the University of Manitoba will have to make in infrastructure, internet technologies, and student support if it is to continue to attract good students. The SP also speaks to institutional efforts to generate savings in some areas of spending so that they can be reinvested in other, high priority activities (p. 6). The SP says that this will “require choices” about “selective investments,” attributed to the “current fiscal reality” (p. 8). In fact, all occurrences of the keyword “invest” are in the context of being fiscally strategic and appear to support pursuit of a University brand; that is, there is an underlying assumption that other universities make different investment choices so that each university houses a distinctive cluster of high-quality programs. At the same time, without directly stating this case, the SP appears to reference the disinvestment of provincial governments in higher education, a phenomenon which requires universities to make hard choices. This particular usage indicates that the University expects to see a return on these investments. The more that provincial governments disinvest in higher education, the more pressure is exerted on institutions and on their faculty members to become entrepreneurial; Shore and McLauchlan (2012) identified entrepreneurialism as the third pillar of the neoliberal university (along with teaching and research), and profit arising from private investment and the commercialization of knowledge have similarly been redefined as part of the “public good” in university parlance. Research, it appears, is no longer the primary recipient of investment. Ultimately, there is also a gendered element to this framing of investment; some individuals appear more worthy of investment than others, particularly those in STEM fields, which are still today dominated by men and by rationalized forms of knowledge creation and transmission (Wylie, 2012).

The most ubiquitous word in the SP is the word “support” which appears 57 times in the preamble and throughout the SP in noun, verb, and adjective forms, mostly with reference to the provision of administrative support (or just support) to all research, teaching, and learning activities (e.g., p.7). Additionally, support refers to fiscal support from the government (p. 5), financial support for top notch students from the university (p. 5), support for institutional change (p. 6), support in finding employment after graduation (p. 7), support in using technology and social media (p. 7), and support as an outcome of competitive activities (p. 8). Furthermore, support denotes supporting the University mission and priorities (p. 19), and supporting meaningful connections among staff, students, faculty, and communities (p. 20), among other meanings. It is used so often and in so many different ways that it becomes important to ask what explanatory power, much less strategic action-al power, the word “support” has in the SP. What work does the concept of “support” do in practice? Who has the capability or the power to define it? The word appears to have no foundation; in the SP virtually any action, experience, performance, or representation of any role, network or group offers and/or receives “support” from those also identified as “supporting” it.

Discussion

Sustainability Weaponised

The SP of the University of Manitoba includes a number of values previously endorsed by the university in its Mission Statement (University of Manitoba, n.d.). This section considers sustainability. Sustainability functions within neoliberal discourses as an extension of other processes which include privatisation of common goods, establishment of private property rights, and trade of goods and services on a global market (Bumpus & Liverman, 2008). Within the context of the SP, sustainability refers both to institutional and environmental/resource sustainability. The combination of resource and environmental sustainability serves the enclosure and commodification of nature, as well as the processes intended to restore and protect nature such as carbon pricing and the market logic of paying to offset carbon emissions (Bumpus & Liverman, 2008). It does not, however, prioritize centralized climate action policies; the climate emergency is not mentioned explicitly in the entire SP, but rather the continuing value extraction from the commodification of resources appears to be an undercurrent. Specifically, the SP deals with environmental sustainability by categorising it as one of several social justice/advocacy causes, often mentioned alongside the University's pledge to building relationships with Indigenous communities, as in the commitment to creating "a learning and work environment that meets the needs of the University's future, recognizes the Indigenous reality of Manitoba, integrates with surrounding communities, and supports environmental and resource sustainability" (University of Manitoba, 2015, p. 19). Moreover, the University supports environmental sustainability, ironically, by colonizing more space for "a growing learning and research enterprise" (p.19). The link between environmental sustainability, resource sustainability (meaning "extraction") and growth speak to a particular mode of marketing the institution, and how the University constructs its "virtual face" (Wilson & Meyer, 2009). By optimizing this self-presentation (Boyer, Brunner, Charles, & Coleman, 2006), the University of Manitoba affirms allegiance to prominent social justice issues by linking them with environmental sustainability and Indigenous realities. However, self-promoting discourses can only be effective if the narrative is believable; therefore, the SP promises only non-specific, superficial recognition such as making "Indigenous culture, language and symbols visible throughout our campuses" (University of Manitoba, 2015, p. 19). Promises requiring fiscal investment are leveraged only if the resulting self-presentation provides competitive advantage to the university within a saturated domestic and global education marketplace (Boyer et al., 2006).

The other domain of sustainability, institutional sustainability, registers a particular point of concern. Within the SP, institutional and economic sustainability are largely interchangeable with one significant difference. Meaning sustained competitive advantage, recruitment, and ability to fulfill the core mandate of the institution, the concept of institutional sustainability primarily references economic factors within the University; economic sustainability primarily references external factors such as sustainable revenue streams, investments, and economic stability. That is, the discourse of institutional sustainability combines notions of sustainability and scarcity. When combined, these two terms are used in order to justify "strategic" expenditures, which realistically translates into departments either competing among themselves for limited resources at the institutional level, finding external funding in order to remain solvent, being consolidated into larger and more easily managed departments, or being discarded completely.

Scarcity is an important discursive tool in this context as it serves to justify choices that the

university feels are necessary in order to secure its own economic security as public investment in universities diminishes as a share of university revenues. According to Statistics Canada, the public share of university revenues in Canada has dropped from 40.0% in 2012/2013 to 36.8% in 2017/2018 (Statistics Canada, 2019). Student fees must make up the revenue shortfall, a burden shouldered increasingly by international students whose share of undergraduate population rose 30.9% over the same period. Student fees (domestic and international combined) accounted for 28.3% of university revenues in 2017/2018, increasing from 24.1% in 2012/2013 (Statistics Canada, 2019). Total revenues of universities in Canada have been increasing over this period though, from \$35 billion in 2013/2014 to \$39.5 billion in 2017/2018 (Statistics Canada, 2017). Even though revenues are increasing, including at the UofM (University of Manitoba, 2013, 2019), scarcity is mobilized in order to justify both strategic development and placing departments/units into competition with one another.

Classifying departments based on economic sustainability limits, if not denies entirely, social or humanistic justifications for their continued existence. An advantage in this competition for resources exists for departments having intrinsic industrial value, or those best able to market themselves to the student-consumer. This can be seen in the way that sustainability is referenced in the actions to be taken within a commitment to maintaining an acceptable level of intellectual diversity. According to the strategic plan, departments/units must undertake “Faculty program sustainability” planning, finding ways to ensure program sustainability (University of Manitoba, 2015, p. 12), resulting in desire to attract more students in order to secure greater revenues. Suggestions in the SP are increasing experiential learning opportunities (pp. 7, 12, 13, 22), recognising student learning outside of the University (p. 13), Indigenizing the curriculum (pp. 9, 12, 13, 15, 16, 17) and tailoring learning opportunities to success in the labour market (p. 7). Many suggestions target non-traditional university students, those who are mature, part-time, international or Indigenous, demonstrating not only the University’s instrumental view of knowledge, but also the belief that the university can market opportunities that will enhance both domination in the local marketplace and international competitiveness.

Driving competition between departments within the SP is the use of strategic investment, justifying underfunding under-performing programs so as to redirect expenditures to information technology infrastructure, building restoration, and expansion of property holdings. The push for strategic development appears to stem from the University’s competitive insecurity outside of Manitoba, both nationally and internationally. The University’s “commitment to improving and modernizing its institutional infrastructure” is “a key ingredient in attracting and retaining exceptional faculty, staff and students” (University of Manitoba, 2015, p. 5). A need is cited for the UofM to build on and improve its “standing as a leading university” by “increasing both our influence in, and collaboration with communities” (p. 8). This competition for students and staff has the effect of targeting specific communities the university sees as under-represented profit centres, namely Indigenous students and international students who bring, respectively, new knowledge and higher tuition fees to an increasingly globalized knowledge marketplace. In short, combining sustainability with scarcity in relation to institutional economic welfare, the notion of institutional sustainability justifies the University taking an increasingly centralized approach to regulating both allocation of resources and control of programs.

Respect, Integrity, and Strategic Absences

This section examines how two FIS values, respect and integrity, are mobilised for self-promotion,

or ignored entirely. As noted above, integrity, being whole or having a consistent set of values, is not mentioned in the SP proper, a tremendous surprise in a time of eroding public confidence in the integrity of academic research (Oreskes & Conway, 2010) and diminishing respect for the expertise of faculty (Nichols, 2017), but is replaced by “integration.” According to the Online Etymology Dictionary, etymologically the two words are related, deriving in English from the Latin “integer” meaning whole or undivided (Integration, n.d., Integrity, n.d. [b]). The use of integration can be seen to refer to the University’s relationship to nearby communities, positioning itself as being open to deriving its values and principles from those of “the external community” (p. 7), but also possibly signaling intent to colonise those communities and their values, in order to position itself as comprehensive and accommodating (Findlay, 2009). That is, integration can be seen as desperation to build connections with communities in order to facilitate valuable development initiatives such as the acquired Southwood property (p. 21). Moreover, integration implies desire to accumulate, specifically by leveraging the UofM’s position and the partnerships that faculty develop to integrate diversity of cultural opinions into existing university ideological and physical structures. Such a move is useful in university marketing as campus cultural diversity provides an added value to White students (Wilson & Meyer, 2009) who are looking to escape from their often-narrower high school experiences (Boyer et al., 2006).

Materially, integration also references accumulation of land and resources for the promotion of economic domination in a given sector. In particular, community integration is seen as necessary to guide “the development of the Southwood precinct in a manner that promotes its integration with the rest of the surrounding community” (p. 21). In this case integration suggests making design and implementation plans which blend into the surrounding neighbourhood. Integration in this sense is largely instrumental, likely involving community consultation to balance the scale of development against potential hostility of the surrounding community in order to maximise returns on the acquired property.

Integration in all other domains of the SP is non-specific, used in conjunction with dialogue, service to community, and welcoming community participation in University of Manitoba functions, albeit outside of the SP goals and supporting actions. This use of integration to allude to commitment to an institution’s community without specifically referencing ways that the communities in question will be served, or to ways that the university plans to change in order to facilitate this integration of community values within its institutional ones is critiqued as a neoliberal marketing practice (Boyer et al., 2006). That is, the University deliberately chooses the discursive tool of integration which implies that (a) the University seeks to blend into communities, and (b) have members of the community blend into campus life. Successful integration then, enables the University to more subtly move into and dominate social spaces locally and compete globally so as to function in a way that obscures its intentions to extract value from communities either through greater enrolment from members of these communities, through land development deals, or by making themselves appear as desirable employers of world-class faculty and staff.

The SP frequently suggests that respect is useful in relationship building. Within this view, respect serves as a moderating value between integrity and integration, setting boundaries on both cultural integration and relationship building. Of particular concern is respectful engagement with Indigenous communities by the University of Manitoba. A land acknowledgement is included in the SP along with the values of “mutual trust, respect, and reciprocity” (p. 9) that the University wishes to promote in their efforts at reconciliation. There is also a commitment to promote “women, Indigenous peoples, people with disabilities, gender and

sexual minorities, and racialized minorities” (p.18) to positions of authority within the University’s administration. That is, administrative structures are to remain intact but be filled representationally, when mutual respect may require dismantling of existing structures. Cynically viewed, such inclusive leadership principles are based on the neoliberal ideal of representation as enhancing market competitiveness in public organisations (Boyer et al., 2006; Wilson & Meyer, 2009).

Respect is also found in the “Message from the President” at the beginning of the SP, speaking to the relationship enforced between faculty and staff. The discursive function of presidential addresses in the neoliberal marketization of universities is one of “welcoming” and introducing the relational qualities of the University (Saichaie, 2011; Zhang, 2017). In this case the “Message from the President” suggests the UofM aspires to be a respectful workplace; at the same time, it suggests that one role of University administrators is to regulate interpersonal interactions between faculty and staff in order to guarantee respectful relations. This reflects a managerial discourse in which the responsibility for respectful interpersonal relations is coopted by a culture of surveillance in which university administration assumes the role of police and judiciary in the regulation of interpersonal relations. This is a component of the enclosure of common goods wherein the responsibility for good behaviour between faculty and staff lies within the community. The appropriation of this function of community relations alleviates the community of this task, but simultaneously makes the members of the community more dependent on bureaucratic functionaries of the institution in order to guarantee respectful workplace relations.

Academic Magic Time

This is a different section than we anticipated when we began writing this article in late 2019. Now in Spring of 2020, we are in a moment of pause that is not really pause, one requiring incredible emotional and intellectual energy as we adjust to the necessity of pandemic pedagogy, a form of elaborate, complex, ritualistic magic using ceremonial accessories. We are doing things we never considered doing a month ago, testing the limits of the University’s technological infrastructure, discovering that learning platforms were never designed to replace classrooms because they cannot. Human interaction and relationships handled with care in classrooms do not translate well to keyboards, Zoom, and textual-talk, no matter how carefully executed. However, this is our reality, at least until next year. When we upload files, create videos, add audio to our PowerPoint slides, learn to use our digital pens and pads, adjust assessments so that computer-generated guesses cannot complete sentences, and explore channels for establishing and maintaining relationships, we temporarily put everything except our commitments to our students on hold. We worry about them. Some are overwhelmed by caring for children and/or parents; others are alone in this country, worrying about their health care plans, their visas, their standing in class. Those, like us and others referenced in the higher education literature (not to mention our own research) who are complicit in conjuring magic time by working 60+ hour work weeks divided among teaching, research, and service under “normal” circumstances, suddenly find ourselves working more hours than that dedicated to teaching alone. We must be grateful to have jobs; we are the lottery winners who enjoy some semblance of security—at least for now—in global recession.

Yet, at the same time, we are mindful of our productivity and lament. We write careful emails to our administrators in which we not-so-covertly detail the decisions we make, the innovations we attempt, and the intensive labour of teaching online, because we are ever-mindful that

everything must be documented, measured, surveilled, and (ideally) expanded, in order to gain approval. As if in preparation for our personal strategic plans (aka annual reports) that itemize our productivities in research, teaching, and service, we are careful to suggest that we have no time right now for reading, discussion, planning research, writing grants, working on articles, because we have to focus on the core mission of educating our students. In other words, even in this moment, we are focused on the continuous, relentless task of the neoliberal subject: becoming more skilled, smarter, faster, more productive, more industrious, more marketable. No matter how hard we work at it, however, our online teaching will never produce those magic moments in the classroom that are the reason we all love what we do. We feel as if we lack “academic dignity” (Kouritzin, Kolomic, Ellis, & Nakagawa, 2020b).

Moreover, it is at this moment that we become acutely conscious of the expectations placed on us in completing the above-noted 60 different value-added activities (more) in the context of stable or diminishing resources (with less). Even as we have taken getting dressed and driving to work out of the equation, we have added pastoral care for students (and our families) who are distressed about the present and what the future will bring, unnatural-to-us pedagogies, and the need to master unintuitive technologies when, for most of us, relationships are built in real time. For many, the relentless tick tock of the tenure and promotion clock has not halted.

In this particular space, magic time is double entendre. We had intended it to reference the “normal” neoliberal need to magically expand and slow down time, somehow enabling us to work 27 hours per day, in order to complete the ever-increasing tasks that we needed to complete, and still have time for reflection, for intellectual conversations, and for learning. Embedded within this are notions of “magic” expressed by words like “support” or “scarcity and sustainability” which, when stated often enough and with the right intonation, become magical incantations¹, spell-binding, and also binding us together in collegial determination to conjure: more time to take on more work; unlimited reserves of mental health to support ourselves and our students; and endless positive regard for our institutions and administrators so that we may unceasingly become ever more productive, more innovative, and more creative.

We had intended that our reference to magic time include happiness, because working an impossible 27 hours a day without being happy is unthinkable. Nothing is more happy, innocent, and childlike than believing in magic. We had also intended that magic time also reference Van Morrison’s album, meaning longing for the past: nostalgia for a gold standard of academia when university was a way of life not a workplace; nostalgia for a time when we did not need to be so focused on outcomes that we forgot to live the process or consult the past; nostalgia for a time of wonder; nostalgia for magic time in the classroom. We had not intended that we would experience nostalgia for last November.

Conclusion

We are aware that November 2019 was not an ideal time. As our analysis of the University of Manitoba SP makes clear, rapid budget cuts for post-secondary, neoliberal doublespeak and management logistics were already in place long before the pandemic. We also note that universities are unsafe spaces for many people; institutional racism, homophobia, ableism, and misogyny are all well-documented in the academy. Rather, “last November” references our longing to be back in the classroom, mentoring students in person, and having contact with colleagues: the positive social relations in the university that make it a caring place. We are aware that the discursive practices in the University of Manitoba’s SP are not merely local; they are also

national and international, meaning that they position individual institutions and individuals within those institutions locally, nationally, and globally. The institutional isomorphism enacted in SPs maintains foundational and generic academic traits, ultimately keeping academic institutions similar (if not actually the same) and ensuring they collectively remain dominated by hegemonic neoliberal discourses, identities, and practices. Universities are, in fact, ill-prepared and ill-equipped to place under-represented populations and equity seeking groups “front and center” when many (if not most) disciplines within academia have been not only complicit, but in the vanguard, of placing those populations under erasure in the first place (see Tuhiwai-Smith, 2012 who argues that research is the dirtiest word for Indigenous peoples). Rather than disrupting hegemony in the academy, SPs reify those discourses, identities, and practices by locating them within or attaching them as add-ons to existing university structures. Far from disrupting the colonial logic of land/space, nature, differently-valued labour (that is, people are worth more or less depending on who they are and what they teach and research), the university depends on these logics of commodification to maintain its existence.

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Note

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