

**How university academics respond to the introduction of new quality policies in
South African higher education**

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ABSTRACT

This study explores the consequences for a historically black university (HBU) of the South African state's focus on routine and strategic quality evaluation within a policy framework that views higher education as a lever for social change and economic development. It analyses the changing nature of academic work and probes the motivations and understandings of institutional managers and academics in an attempt to explain their responses to policy requirements.

The theory of the Evaluative State is employed to examine the nature and consequences of overzealous responsiveness by a historically black university in transition in South Africa. It suggests that the changing relationship between state and university is characterised by contradictions and ambivalence, a result of the interplay between a strong sense of loyalty to the state on the one hand and a recognition of the failure of the state to recognise and reward achievements valued by the HBU. This study suggests that state steering, through the use of output evaluation and efficiency-directed performance indicators, has resulted in failure to achieve central policy goals of development, equity and social justice.

The study is guided by one main research question: *How do academics in a historically black South African university in transition engage with and implement internal and external quality assurance processes and policies?*

The literature review reveals significant gaps in understanding the consequences of the rise of the Evaluative State in higher education. A major limitation has been a lack of focus on higher education systems in developing countries and on the consequences of imposing neo-liberal frameworks upon local realities which require redress to remedy historically constructed economic and social disadvantage.

The descriptions of academics and institutional managers that emerge in this study highlight stark differences between the two groups in perceptions of and approaches to quality improvement and university work. Significantly, institutional history, context and mission emerge as strong factors shaping academics' and managers' responses to change, factors that have largely been disregarded by state policy which focuses more on output achievement than on input variables.



Key words:

- 1 Quality
- 2 Evaluative State
- 3 Quality evaluation
- 4 Quality assurance
- 5 Audit culture
- 6 Performativity
- 7 Managerialism
- 8 Performance indicators
- 9 Historically disadvantaged universities
- 10 Academics' responses



DECLARATION

I declare that this thesis is my own unaided work. It is submitted for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy in the University of Pretoria. It has not been submitted before for any other degree or examination in any other university.

Vanessa Brown

21st day of September 2010



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For KELLY-EVE, CLIO and KEENO

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

Chapter One	Approaching the study.....	1
Chapter Two	Describing the context.....	12-42
Chapter Three	Presenting the Argument	43-81
Chapter Four	Controlling for quality through design	82-106
Chapter Five	Reporting on the findings (1)	107-133
Chapter Six	Reporting on the findings (2)	134-174
Chapter Seven	Communicating the findings.....	175-201
Appendix A	Interview protocol: Academics.....	202-203
Appendix B	Interview protocol: Institutional managers.....	204-205
Bibliography	206-223