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US professor of higher education reveals business-like attitudes behind university goals

14 March 2016, London, UK

At a lecture on higher education this evening (14 March), Gary Rhoades, Professor of Higher Education and Director of the Center for the Study of Higher Education at the University of Arizona, revealed the extent to which university marketing strategies are driven by business-like assumptions in the quest for global competitive advantage.

Rhoades was speaking at the inaugural Burton R. Clark lecture on higher education in London. The annual lecture has been established by the UCL Institute of Education on the basis of a donation by Adele Clark, widow of the late Bob Clark. Clark was the United States' leading scholar in the field of higher education studies and a notable contributor to the comparative understanding of higher education, particularly in an international context.

Rhoades worked as a postdoctoral research scholar with Bob Clark. In his lecture, entitled 'Managing to be different? Strategic imagination or 'strategic' imitation?', Rhoades used comparative case studies of universities in the UK, the US and South Africa to reveal the similarities and variations among universities in different countries.

Among the UK and US universities he studied, the recruitment emphasis was on student 'lifestyle' rather than academic development, personal growth and skill formation, implying a bias towards an affluent target student market. At the same time, subjects demonstrating an instrumental connection to business, engineering and science (the preferred subjects of students from the dominant international student markets of China and India) featured heavily in recruitment campaigns, at the expense of a broader subject mix. The message seemed to be: you can coast as a student consumer while investing shrewdly in your future at the same time.

Both UK and US universities marketed their cities, regions, and countries as tourist-like destinations for students. They focused on this message over a university's contribution to improved quality of public life in its own, as well as in wider, locations.

Notably, the two South African universities studied were exceptions to this pattern. They had a greater focus on the university's public responsibility and commitment to community, country, and continent-building, as well as to future generations.

Yet even so, the South African universities – like their UK and US counterparts – were very much embedded in goals attached to rankings and league tables, positioning the university as an independent enterprise seeking to maximize prestige and revenue as opposed to a public entity committed to public benefit.

Rhoades also found considerable differences in the strategies and sophistication of the institutions among the UK and US universities he studied. He found that universities in the UK featured a much stronger infrastructure of staff and activities in recruiting and supporting international students than was evident in US universities.

Rhoades concluded that at a time of relative public disinvestment in higher education, the challenge – both for universities, and the countries in which they are situated – is to effectively balance a university's entrepreneurial work with broader public purposes and contributions, and to leaven the messages about student consumption with a deeper commitment to student growth.

Professor Michael Shattock, Visiting Professor of Higher Education at the UCL Institute of Education, a project leader at the Centre for Global Higher Education, and a long-time friend of – and collaborator with – Bob Clark, introduced Gary Rhoades. The lecture was chaired by Professor David Price, UCL Vice-Provost (Research), and was organised by the Centre for Global Higher Education at the UCL Institute of Education.

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Notes to Editors

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About the Burton R. Clark lecture on higher education

- The annual Burton R. Clark lecture on higher education has been established by the UCL Institute of Education on the basis of a generous donation by Adele Clark, widow of the late Burton R. ('Bob') Clark (1921-2009). Clark was the United States' leading scholar in the field of higher education studies and a notable contributor to the comparative understanding of higher education. After completing a PhD in sociology at the University of California, Los Angeles (UCLA) in 1954, he taught at Stanford University (sociology, 1953-1956), Harvard University (education, 1956-1958), UC Berkeley (education, 1958-1966), and Yale (sociology, 1966-1980), where he served as chair, returning to UCLA as the Allan M. Cartter Professor of Higher Education in 1980. Clark's ideas continue to shape the outlook of students and university leaders across the world. His principal works include *The Higher Education System* (1983) and *Creating Entrepreneurial Universities* (1998).

About Professor Gary Rhoades

- Gary Rhoades is Professor of Higher Education and Director of the Center for the Study of Higher Education at the University of Arizona. From January 2009 to June 2011 he served as General Secretary of the American Association of University Professors. Rhoades' research focuses on the restructuring of academic institutions and professions. His books include *Managed professionals: Unionized faculty and restructuring academic labor* (SUNY Press, 1998) and (with Sheila Slaughter) *Academic capitalism and the new economy* (Johns Hopkins University Press, 2004). Rhoades is working on an updated book on faculty, tentatively entitled, *Organizing 'professionals': Negotiating the new academy*. He

is also beginning a book on management, tentatively entitled, *Managing to be different: Strategic imagination or strategic imitation*.

About the UCL Institute of Education

- The UCL Institute of Education is a world-leader specialising in education and the social sciences. Founded in 1902, the Institute currently has more than 7,000 students and 800 staff. In the 2014 and 2015 QS World University Rankings, the Institute was ranked number one for Education worldwide. It was shortlisted in the 'University of the Year' category of the 2014 Times Higher Education (THE) awards. In January 2014, the Institute was recognised by Ofsted for its 'outstanding' initial teacher training across primary, secondary and further education. In the most recent Research Excellence Framework, 94% of its research was judged to be world class. On 2 December 2014, the Institute became a single-faculty school of UCL, called the UCL Institute of Education. For further information see www.ucl.ac.uk/ioe.

About the Centre for Global Higher Education (CGHE)

- The Centre for Global Higher Education (CGHE) is the largest research centre in the world specifically focused on higher education and its future development. Its research integrates local, national and global perspectives and aims to inform and improve higher education policy and practice. It is funded by the ESRC and HEFCE, and is a partnership led by the UCL Institute of Education with Lancaster University, the University of Sheffield and international universities including Australian National University (Australia), Dublin Institute of Technology (Ireland), Hiroshima University (Japan), Leiden University (Netherlands), Lingnan University (Hong Kong), Shanghai Jiao Tong University (China), the University of Cape Town (South Africa) and the University of Michigan (US). For further information see www.researchcghe.org.