Academic boards: less intellectual and more academic capital in higher education governance?

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A historically informed analysis of the academic board or senate in Australian universities, and in the wider higher education environment, particularly the UK, indicates that the role and function of academic boards has fundamentally changed in the past 30 years. Within the context of universities being repositioned to serve global knowledge economies, a comparison between contemporary university governance structures and those from the 1960s and the 1990s provides evidence of a significant diminution of the power and status of boards relative to executive management, and a heightened focus on the functions of academic quality assurance. As Bourdieu would suggest, academic boards continue to hold more symbolic than real power, due to the rise of academic rather than intellectual capital. Consequently, academic boards have become a key site of struggle over the role and function of the multinational corporate university and academic work.

Keywords: governance; organisational change; Bourdieu; management; quality

Introduction

Within the context of the contested role and function of universities in knowledge-based economies (Barnett 2011), academic boards (also known as academic senates) are arguably assuming new roles. Universities are increasingly corporate and multinational businesses expected to serve knowledge economies (Peters 2011), and this has put pressure on university governance, and in particular on the role and function of academic boards (Blackmore, Brennan, and Zipin 2010). University academic boards are unique in organisational governance (Shattock 2006). In addition to their long-standing role advising on and overseeing teaching and research (Emmanuel and Reekie 2004), academic boards have served as symbols of collegiality and academic participation in university-wide governance (Marginson and Considine 2000). More recently, they have become key sites for the intersection between executive management and academia, and are, therefore, symbolic of the struggle between the multiple roles of universities as entrepreneurial businesses and places of intellectual endeavour, both historically and contemporaneously.

Legislative and policy moves, by both government and executive management, to redefine academic boards’ role within the increasingly corporatised university are evidence of the growing interest in university governance, and therefore in how academic boards are comprised and what they do. While there is much research on the changing role of the university, particularly with regard to the knowledge economy (see, for example, Barnett 2011; Hentschke, Lechuga, and Tierney 2010; Marginson, Murphy, and Peters 2010; Peters 2011), there is little research on university academic
boards specifically. The following Bourdieuan analysis of academic boards is located within the context of global changes in higher education governance. It tracks the long-term shifts in academic governance within wider changes to the higher education sector that have seen universities become commodified sites for the implementation of national economic policies. Second, the article undertakes a historically informed analysis of the governance structures of Australian universities to argue that, in the past 30 years, academic boards have been disempowered and that their role is increasingly focused on quality assurance.

Bourdieu and the field of higher education

The usefulness of Bourdieu’s thinking tools of field, capital and habitus to explore institutional change within the field of higher education has been well demonstrated by Kloot (2009) in South Africa and Zipin and Brennan (2003) in Australia (see also Marginson 2008; Naidoo 2004; Reay 2004). In particular, Kloot draws on two opposing forms of capital within the university field, corresponding to the two predominant forms of power that Bourdieu (1988a) described in Homo Academicus, these being academic power and intellectual power. Thus, academic capital refers to position taking within the management hierarchy of the institution, and intellectual capital derives from a scholarly reputation primarily on the basis of research (Kloot 2009). Kloot focuses on the related concepts of organisational change and power, consistent with Grenfell’s reading of Homo Academicus as an ‘example of social processes as they change and the consequences of their evolution’ (2004, 67).

Bourdieu’s theoretical framework explores the active relationship between ‘the individual and their social environment’ (Grenfell 2004, 27). It is, therefore, appropriate to define the three central organising concepts or thinking tools of field, habitus and capital ‘only in the context of the theoretical system they constitute, not in isolation’ (Bourdieu and Wacquant 1992, 96). To this end, Bourdieu described an agent’s habitus, or mental structures through which the world is perceived (189), as being established in response to contact with bounded space in the form of fields (Grenfell 2004). Central to Bourdieu’s theory are the concepts of power struggles and position taking within a field over the particular types of capital or resources that are effective within that field (Bourdieu 1985; Bourdieu and Wacquant 1992).

Bourdieu’s habitus can be characterised as a ‘system of acquired dispositions functioning on the practical level as categories of perception and assessment, or as classificatory principles, as well as being the organizing principles of action’ (1990a, 13). Habitus includes ‘knowledge and understanding of the world’, and so, while an individual’s habitus is formed in response to their experiences, one’s habitus also contributes to the ‘reality of that world’ (Maher, Harker, and Wilkes 1990, 11), in that it is both constituted and constituting. An agent’s habitus is informative of where they are placed in the social hierarchy, and of where others are placed in relation to them (Bourdieu 1989). However, although social structures are constantly developing and changing, habitus predisposes relatively stable and somewhat predictable physical and mental responses in the face of external stimuli (Grenfell 2004). Of necessity, habitus is a product of history; one’s habitus can, therefore, result in a tendency to persist with behaviours or responses even though they may no longer be useful or appropriate (Bourdieu 1990b). In that sense, habitus facilitates understandings about why individuals, including those in higher education, may resist change despite manifest shifts in the field or fields around them.
For Bourdieu, a field is ‘a separate social universe having its own laws of functioning’ (1993, 162). Fields are of varying sizes and they exist in relation to one another – there can also be ‘fields within fields’ (Grenfell 2004, 28). Bourdieu understood individual universities as being positioned within a broader university field or field of higher education (Bourdieu and Wacquant 1992; Maton 2005; Shelley 2010), although one that is arguably being repositioned if not subordinated relative to other fields, such as politics and economics, with moves to align the work of higher education more closely to priorities of the nation-state. While habitus can be described as subjective, a field is an objective, differentiated and structured physical or social space or territory with a generally recognisable boundary (Grenfell 2004). ‘The effect of a field on an agent … is dependent on their habitus, their position in particular fields and the strength of the field relative to other fields in which the agent is active’ (Rawolle and Lingard 2008, 732). Habitus and field are therefore homologous, in that they share common ‘founding principles’, are ‘mutually constituting’ and ‘always evolving’ (although not necessarily in the same direction) (Grenfell 2004, 27). It is habitus that enables the transfer of attitudes and practices from one field to another (Bourdieu 1984), such as when processes from the business community are imported into higher education, a concept described as ‘cross-field effects’ (Rawolle and Lingard 2008, 733). Thus, students can be known as clients, university councils have adopted practices from corporate boards, and university vice-chancellors are chief executive officers rather than the ‘first amongst equals’ they once were.

Fields produce difference, both between agents within a field and between those within the field and those without it (Bourdieu and Wacquant 1992), and within this context higher education is distinguished from other fields, and universities are distinguished from each other, through the products of ‘credentialing of knowledge-intensive labour, and basic research’ (Marginson 2008, 303). Definitions of a university, the rules around what constitutes a university award such as a degree, and which institutions are ‘authorised’ (or not) to confer such awards or compete for research funding, are often hotly contested because they establish, in part, the boundaries of the higher education field. However, while there are clearly national fields of higher education, Marginson argues that the impact of globalisation means there is now also a global field of higher education, and that the boundaries for that field are defined by international ranking scales (2008, 2010a). This leads to intense competition between universities worldwide as they seek to be included on those lists, or to improve their relative positions, thereby establishing or consolidating themselves within the global higher education field.

Critically, Bourdieu also described a field as a set of power relations in the form of multidimensional space which defines agents or groups of agents according to their relational positions within that space (1985). The positions assigned to agents are determined on the basis of the form and degree of capital they possess, which in turn affords varying levels of power or status (Maton 2005). Bourdieu has characterised social activity as being like an implicit game between agents as they struggle to secure a greater share of (or if possible a monopoly over) the particular form or forms of capital that are effective in the relevant field (Bourdieu and Wacquant 1992; Kloot 2009; Naidoo 2004). Within Bourdieu’s theory there is a direct relationship between field, habitus and capital, with the value ascribed to the capital being derived from the social and cultural characteristics of the habitus of the relevant agent or agents within a particular field or fields (Bourdieu1984; Maher, Harker, and Wilkes 1990).
In this way, capital can be characterised as being symbolic; it has value only when it is perceived as such (Bourdieu 1985; Grenfell 2004). Bourdieu conceives of capital:

as economic capital, which is immediately and directly convertible into money and may be institutionalized in the form of property rights; as cultural capital, which is convertible, on certain conditions, into economic capital and may be institutionalized in the form of educational qualifications; and as social capital, made up of social obligations (‘connections’), which is convertible, in certain conditions, into economic capital and may be institutionalized in the form of a title of nobility. (1986, 243)

In particular, cultural capital relates to the distribution of knowledge and information, education and its formal qualifications, books, skills and art, music and other cultural pursuits (Bourdieu 1986). Social capital includes social or family connections or networks (Grenfell 2010). The definition and distribution of capital depends upon the field or fields in which it is located, although there may be intense competition for the available capital both within and between fields, with the relative value being influenced by its scarcity (Grenfell 2004). Thus, universities both possess and create cultural capital (Bourdieu 1988a, 1993), although individual academics and universities may compete with each other for other forms of capital, such as economic capital in the form of external grants, or social capital in the form of prestige or reputation.

However, although Bourdieu did not always distinguish between the forms of capital operating within universities in this way (to which Naidoo [2004] refers), in Homo Academicus Bourdieu described two predominant species of capital within the university field: academic and intellectual capital (1988a). These two forms of capital are polar opposites and are visible as two different power regimes within the university setting (Bourdieu 1988b), where academic power refers to the power of management and is hierarchical and temporal in nature, ‘enabling domination of other positions and holders’ (Bourdieu 1988a, 84). By its nature, academic power is ‘aligned with economic and political power’ (Kloot 2009, 474). Intellectual power, on the other hand, is established by virtue of renown or reputation attained on the basis of scholarly or intellectual achievements (Bourdieu 1988a). This distinction is important for this analysis because of the continuing role that both forms of capital play in the contemporary academic board.

The use of Bourdieu’s theoretical framework within this article and others to explore organisational change in the field of higher education is contrary to criticisms of his work, which allege that the notion of habitus is overly deterministic (Jenkins 2002; Reay 2004), and that it leaves too little room for self-determination or agency (Marginson 2008). Thus, ‘[t]he concept of habitus fails to capture the varying degrees of incongruity between hopes, plans, and chances for different groups’ (Swartz 1997, 111). That is to say, it is argued that Bourdieu cannot adequately explain self-transformation (Lukes 2005) or creative practice (Reay 2004) within a field (Marginson 2008). However, Swartz also posits that, although the concept of habitus by itself does not ‘account for change’, changed practices occur arising from the interaction between habitus and field (1997, 213). This reading is consistent with Bourdieu’s wish that his conceptual tools be considered together and not individually, and responds directly to Bourdieu’s assertions that charges of determinism reflect an inadequate understanding of his overall theoretical framework (Bourdieu and Wacquant 1992). The issue of the extent to which Bourdieu’s theory allows a consideration of change will be considered further in the conclusion to this article, within a context of envisioning the future of the academic board.
The changing nature of university governance and the implications for academic boards

The governance structure of Australia’s 37 publicly funded universities (together with that of other Commonwealth nations) was originally derived from the bicameral structure of the civic universities (Amaral, Jones, and Karseth 2003; Shattock 2006), founded within the United Kingdom from the late 1880s (Moodie and Eustace 1974). Under this model, both the council, or its equivalent as governing body, and the academic board are established by the university’s enabling legislation or statute (CHEMS Consulting 2004). From approximately the 1900s until the end of the 1970s, this UK civic university governance structure provided for a university governing body or council comprising a ‘lay’ or external majority, but with little influence over academic decisions (Moodie and Eustace 1974), while the academic board was the sovereign academic authority (Shattock 2006).

The peak of academic board influence and power in the mid-twentieth century is a useful comparison for current academic boards, and a benchmark of change. While there is a dearth of research literature on Australian university academic boards prior to the 1990s, in *Power and Authority in British Universities* (1974), Moodie and Eustace report a detailed empirical study of university government in the UK in the late 1960s. They describe the academic board at that time as generally comprising all of the professors and the vice-chancellor, together with a very small minority of others in non-professorial leadership positions – this being a combined grouping of all those ‘with the heaviest and most specific responsibilities for the essential work of the university’ (1974, 76). Accordingly, many boards had between 150 and 200 members, and were therefore large but elite professorial bodies, whose agendas included a mix of academic, management and resourcing matters, and did not separate governance and management as is customary within the contemporary corporate university.

The period between the 1900s and the 1980s has been characterised extensively within the literature as the time of collegial governance or academic self-governance, primarily governance by and from the professors (see, for example, Musselin 2005; Tapper and Salter 1992), exemplified by Moodie and Eustace’s description of the British university in the 1960s (above). It can, therefore, be inferred that the dominant form of capital within the university field during this period was intellectual capital, and that the status and authority of the professors within universities had accrued due to their substantial holdings of that capital. By virtue of their universal membership of it, the academic board was the primary site for demonstration of the power wielded by the professors in their capacity as holders of this intellectual capital, in keeping with the internal institutional hierarchy of the field within which collegial governance was the dominant mode. Thus, academic boards not only oversaw the academic affairs of their universities, but effectively ran them. Academic boards also held significant symbolic power because their composition and the scope of their business represented what it meant to be a university at that time.

The traditional academic identity characterised by membership of a discipline-based community of scholars, with shared values relating to teaching, research and collegiality, has been well documented (see, for example, Deem 2003; Henkel 2000; Trowler and Knight 2000). The application of Bourdieu’s theory to academic identity has led to the notion of an academic habitus arising from an interplay between the cultural capital held by the academic and that valued by the field (see, for example, Jawitz 2009). Until the end of the 1970s academic habitus was, therefore, constituted
around the language of collegiality and internal hierarchies of professorial leadership that produced a particular discourse of the role and function of the university but also ensured an uneven distribution of the intellectual capital. This resulted in the marginalisation of those staff (such as women) who were ‘not part of the favoured group’, and also meant key decisions were ‘typically arrived at by a small cadre of decision-makers’ (Ramsden 1998, 23).

Prior to the 1980s, higher education was also a relatively autonomous field, which was able to refract external influences in accordance with its own specific logic (Bourdieu 1993; Maton 2005). Thus, education was held to be a public good and investment in higher education was considered necessary to promote national growth (King 2009). National policies prioritised cultural and intellectual values over political and economic ones, enabling universities to be largely self-governing and self-directed (Blackmore, Brennan, and Zipin 2010). This confluence of the dominance of intellectual capital and national priorities, which facilitated and enabled autonomous universities, therefore served to elevate academic boards within universities to a level that had arguably not been seen before (or since).

The impact of changes within the field of higher education on university governance and academic boards

The field of higher education within western anglophone nation-states has changed inexorably since the beginning of the 1980s. Substantial shifts in government policy, commencing in the UK but spreading quickly to other nations, including Australia, have seen higher education move from being a public to a private good in the form of an economic resource (Tapper 2007). Government responsibility for delivering higher education has been replaced by demands for increased accountability and assessment (Blackmore 2009; Rhodes 1997), where policy and financial control is used as a means of ‘steering from a distance’ the direction of universities in a global policy environment that has impacted on the university sector cross-nationally (Rizvi and Lingard 2010).

Increased demands for access to higher education, together with reduced government funding (van Vught 1989), have forced universities to become more entrepreneurial and market-driven both nationally and internationally (Blackmore 2009), and the focus has shifted to those educational outcomes that support the social, political and economic goals of knowledge-based economies (Braun and Merrien 1999; Shore 2010). These changes have been prompted at least in part by neoliberal ideologies in response to globalisation (Bansel and Davies 2010; Marginson 2010b), symbolised by managerialism or new public management premised on a fundamental belief in the superiority of the private sector in terms of efficiency and effectiveness (Bleiklie and Kogan 2007).

Within this rapidly changing higher education environment, university governance has become the focus of a great deal of attention (Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development 2007), stimulating widespread governance reform with common trends in Anglo-Saxon derived higher education systems, despite variation within and between nation-states. In turn, this has impacted on the role and function of the academic board. First, the role of the academic board has been substantially reduced through a shift in the balance of power to the university council (Lapworth 2004; Shattock 2006), partly because the focus of some university business has necessarily shifted away from internal, academically-driven matters to external issues, at both
national and global levels, relating to financial viability and public accountability (Bargh, Scott, and Smith 1996; Brown 2009). Second, there has been a rise in public-sector management practices, such as managerialism and streamlined management-led decision-making processes, and an equivalent (and some would say necessary) decline in those slower and more cumbersome collegial governance processes traditionally associated with the academic board (Bleiklie and Kogan 2007; Mora and Vieira 2009). Third, greater pressure on individual academic staff with regard to student outcomes and research outputs (Blackmore 2009) may have decreased both the time available to academic staff and their trust in management, and so reduced the extent to which they might wish to participate in academic governance processes (Lapworth 2004). Furthermore, the divisions between academic and intellectual capital, and between academic and administrative work, are being eroded as academics move into line management positions, creating for those academics a significant sense of ambivalence and contradiction as to their role (Blackmore and Sachs 2007; Whitchurch and Gordon 2011).

**Charting changes to Australian academic boards**

The governance structure of Australian publicly funded universities commonly comprises the governing body or council; the vice-chancellor as chief executive officer; and the academic board (or its equivalent), responsible to the council for the academic affairs of the university. In a number of Australian universities the academic board is established by the institution’s enabling Act as a body in its own right, but with responsibility for advising and recommending to council when required, whilst in others, the academic board is a sub-committee of the council. Australian universities also tend to operate an extensive committee system, with both the council and the academic board frequently having a substantial set of standing committees. However, some have argued that academic board committees in particular may have been overtaken, in terms of power and influence, by a newer (and sometimes parallel) set of advisory committees established by the vice-chancellor (Marginson and Considine 2000).

Stoddart’s *The structure of academic boards at selected Australian universities* (1994) is one of the very few historical Australian studies of university governance, and reports on the composition, functions, powers, and in some instances, committees of five Australian academic boards (or their equivalents). Of those, one was from a university established prior to 1914, two were from universities established between 1915 and 1985, and two were from universities established after 1986. It is not possible to infer that the five academic boards reported in this edited collection are representative of all Australian university academic boards at that time. However, it is useful to compare the 1994 academic boards to their 2010 counterparts using publicly reported data, because this highlights specific shifts in academic boards during this period.

The case histories suggest that, in general terms, Australian boards of the mid 1990s were smaller than they had formerly been, with a greater number of elected and ex officio members and fewer professorial members than in the past (Stoddart 1994, v). Thus, by 1994 the academic board from the pre-1914 university had changed from a full professorial board to a more representative board comprising 150 members, including an elected chair, a significant number of senior managers and some elected professors, non-professorial staff and students (Rosenman 1994, 1). By 2010 this academic board had shrunk further to approximately 135 members. In 1994 the role of this board had also changed from that of “running” the University … [whereby
managed resource allocation within the University, determined staff and equipment budgets and allocated positions to budgets’, to being ‘the leader of academic developments … the representative of the collegium, and representing the opinion of the collegium to [the university council]’ (Rosenman 1994, 1). The resource allocation and other functions previously undertaken by the academic board had become the responsibility of the (comparatively recently established) senior executive, deans and heads of departments. This change was characterised as having stripped the academic board of ‘much of its perceived power in the University’ (Rosenman 1994, 1). Further changes to the reported powers and responsibilities of this board by 2010 included the addition of specific responsibility for academic and research standards, and the addition of such quality assurance matters as reviews of academic programs and policy. These changes are consistent with developments in the broader national and international higher education sectors noted earlier.

The academic boards in the second-oldest (or the middle group) of universities were comparatively small in 1994 (28 members and 37 members respectively), comprising elected academic members, ex officio members and some students, and both were chaired by members of the university senior executive (Cox 1994; Loxton 1994). By 2010 the size of one had increased to 33, and the other had decreased to 21 members, but with an elected chair. The academic boards in the two post-1986 universities had also adopted a more representative composition, although being somewhat larger than the middle group universities, comprising 50 and 46 members respectively and with an elected chair. In 1994 both boards had some responsibility for academic planning and budget development, at least as regards academic matters (Garnett 1994; Randle 1994). However, by 2010 all references to budget development and resource allocation had been removed from these boards’ publicly listed powers and responsibilities, and from their list of academic board standing committees. Specific references to academic quality had been added. The issue of these five boards’ responsibilities for resourcing appears to be crucial. For the academic board in the oldest university, the loss of its resourcing function may have contributed to a perceived diminution of power and place (Rosenman 1994; Stoddart 1994). This reflects a widespread trend in Australia commencing in the 1990s (Marginson and Considine 2000; Woodhouse and Baird 2007), and is central to the shift in power to executive management. However, the case histories also report that some of the newer academic boards, which had never had these functions, appeared instead to have experienced some difficulty carving out a meaningful and genuinely independent role in academic governance (Cox 1994; Loxton 1994; Randle 1994).

These changes in academic board function are supported by a web-based analysis of the 37 academic boards of publicly funded Australian universities in 2010. Data were collected about the name, size, composition and key powers/responsibilities of each academic board, together with information about the place of each board in the governance structure of each university, the basis upon which each board was established and the number and names of board committees. To ensure accuracy and currency, information on each university academic board website was cross-checked against provisions relating to that academic board in state and university legislation, university policy and other formally approved university documents. However, it should be noted that there may be significant differences between the official responsibilities of university academic boards and what it is that they actually do.

For ease of comparison with the case-history data, universities were divided into the same age groupings, i.e. those established before 1914, those established between 1915
and 1985 and those established from 1986. The findings indicated that academic boards in the newest universities were much more likely to be committees of the university council, rather than statutory bodies established by legislation in their own right. For example, almost half of the academic boards in universities established after 1986 were committees of council, a much greater proportion than was seen in universities established prior to 1914, and those established between 1915 and 1985. Theoretically, academic boards that are committees of their universities’ governing bodies may have less autonomy and status than other boards. This supports the evidence that in the oldest universities collegial governance (integral to the traditional functioning of academic boards) would once have played a considerable role, while within the newest universities, by virtue of age and institution type, there can be no long-standing tradition of either collegial governance or of academic boards.

In general, the academic boards in the newer universities were also considerably smaller and were less likely to have an elected chair than was the case at the older universities. For example, five of the six boards in the pre-1914 universities had more than 100 members, whereas none of the boards in universities established after 1986 had more than 100 members, and only three of those boards had more than 50 members. Moreover, while there were no non-elected chairs of academic boards in the six oldest universities, five of the 17 academic board chairs in the newest universities were either appointed by council or were members of the senior executive. Although all of the boards comprised a mix of elected or appointed and *ex officio* members (these generally being senior executive and senior management positions), the *ex officio* members comprised at least half of all board members in a significant proportion of instances. This means that, in many contemporary Australian university academic boards, approximately half (or more) of all members are there by virtue of the position they hold on the senior executive or in senior management. Moreover, while the older universities were more likely to have a specific category of membership for elected professors than were the newer universities, only three academic boards automatically included all professors as members.

There was very little difference in the spread of officially stated academic board responsibilities between the three categories of universities, although there were variations in the extent to which those responsibilities had been conferred upon or delegated to the board or were undertaken on an advisory basis only. Additionally, while very few academic boards’ formal terms of reference (or their equivalents) referred specifically to financial or resourcing matters, the majority explicitly included reference to academic policy, academic strategy, academic standards, quality assurance and program or course approval. However, there do not appear to be any significant differences between the categories of universities with regard to the number or purpose of academic board committees. Thus, almost all academic boards had reportedly established committees which addressed, in one form or other, the common areas of teaching and learning, higher degrees by research, academic programs and academic quality. In part, these committee systems are governance structures which reflect the priorities of national higher education policy, particularly with respect to the quality of teaching and research (Blackmore 2009).

The growth of management power and academic quality assurance

These data suggest that, on average, Australian academic boards have become smaller within the past 20–30 years, and are now more likely to have explicitly stated
responsibilities for academic standards and academic quality assurance. However, although some of the oldest universities appear to have undergone a transition from professorial to representative and partly elected academic boards, this is not necessarily the case for the newer universities, where academic boards may well have been established as smaller and more representative bodies from the outset. Similarly, while resource allocation and budget development may once have been tasks to which the academic boards in the oldest universities had substantial input, as was the case in the 1960s British universities, a split between academic and resourcing responsibilities appears more likely to have always existed within some of the newer universities, many being the product of post-1989 amalgamations with, or conversions from, institutes of technology or colleges of advanced education, themselves having more managerial modes of governance.

Notwithstanding this differentiation between universities, there are some striking similarities between the Australian academic boards, including the apparent growth in the proportion of board members who are senior managers or executives, when compared to the professorial academic boards in Australia and in Britain in the 1960s. Combined with the lack of resourcing authority and strategic planning functions in contemporary Australian academic boards’ terms of reference, these trends would appear to indicate that the balance has shifted from intellectual to academic capital, consistent with progressive changes within the broader higher education field that have led to the domination of managerial and entrepreneurial modes of governance over the collegial forms historically practised by the academic board (Blackmore, Brennan, and Zipin 2010; Marginson and Considine 2000).

This is not to suggest that intellectual capital as scholarship and research is no longer important to universities. Indeed, their relative levels of intellectual capital position universities on the various rankings scales that dominate the national and international higher education markets (Marginson 2010a). However, in recent years universities have worked hard to increase their holdings of academic capital relative to their levels of intellectual capital, through the shift from elected academic leaders to appointed executives, and in the substantial growth in the numbers of such appointments, both in Australia and internationally (Blackmore and Sachs 2007; Salter and Tapper 2002). Such appointments serve to harness the economic and political capital that universities need to survive in the corporatised higher education market.

Moreover, Bourdieu argues that agents can optimise their power by seeking to increase the value of the capital they hold, relative to that held by their opposition (Bourdieu and Wacquant 1992). To this end, the importance of academic capital within individual universities would appear to have grown substantially in the past 30 years, in response to the shifts in the broader social, political and economic environments at national and global levels. Research suggests that this is reflected in the increased power of university executives and, ultimately, vice-chancellors (Marginson and Considine 2000; Slaughter and Leslie 1997), which has led to a corresponding decrease in the authority of grass-roots academics (Coates et al. 2010). The appointment of increased numbers of academics to what are now managerial roles serves to further reinforce the relative value of academic capital. This disjunction between academic capital and what it is that universities actually do on a day-to-day basis – teaching and research – also means that, within the broader community, universities continue to hold more symbolic than real power, consistent with the dismantling of the welfare state and the valuing of higher education for other than cultural reasons.
However, it is arguable that nowhere has the corresponding decrease in the value of intellectual capital been felt more sharply than at the academic board, where Australian boards (and perhaps to a lesser extent those internationally) are at risk of being left in the paradoxical situation of overseeing universities’ core business of teaching, scholarship and research, but, at the same time, being considered by their own university communities to do nothing of any great significance. This is evidenced in the case-history reports when, as boards lost their resourcing functions, they were perceived to have either lost their primary position within the university or, in the case of some of the newer universities, to not have had one in the first place. Thus, by virtue of their greater academic capital and their increased numbers (both within universities generally and on academic boards), senior managers and executives could be expected to dominate academic board meetings. However, inconsistencies between the changes that have occurred in the university field and the habitus of agents within it, grown out of the history of that field, have enabled the importation of managerial governance practices from the commercial world, whilst at the same time retaining historical and symbolic aspects of collegiality such as complex committee structures.

The other significant trend with regard to the role and function of the Australian academic board is the frequency with which phrases such as ‘academic quality assurance’ and ‘academic standards’ are now included in the terms of reference (or equivalent) and the list of standing committee names. In the 1994 collection of academic board case histories there were few references to these phrases, and little explicit mention of quality assurance-type activities such as monitoring the implementation of academic policy; the emphasis instead appeared to be on the generation and approval of these policies. However, by 2010 all but three of the 37 publicly funded Australian university academic boards explicitly listed academic quality assurance or standards as being amongst their reported primary responsibilities, and many academic boards had established a standing committee specifically for this purpose. This trend is reflected in the literature, which suggests that, while universities (and by extrapolation, academic boards) had traditionally been concerned with enhancing the quality of their academic and research activities, quality assurance for the purposes of internal and external accountability appears to have only become a specific issue in Australian higher education in the early to mid 1990s (Sachs 1994), arising in part from the implementation of private sector management practices, including the need to demonstrate ‘value for money’ and accountability to government, combined with the desire for a measurable product in a bid to attract fee-paying international students in the context of national higher education funding constraints (Blackmore 2009; Vidovich 2002, 395).

This followed earlier international developments (Harvey and Williams 2010), particularly those in the UK, where quality had emerged from its industrial origins to become an issue in higher education policy in the 1980s as an integral part of managerialism or new public management, a movement aimed at exposing higher education to international market forces to improve the internal management and accountability of universities (Harvey and Newton 2004; Sachs 1994; Vidovich 2002). The ensuing subjugation of higher education to the quality assurance movement is now attributable to a range of complex and interconnected developments, including market pressures associated with globalisation, the knowledge economy and the risk society (Morley 2003). Increased demands for accountability and performance measurement against key performance indicators (Rizvi and Lingard 2010), associated with quality assurance, contribute to a decrease in autonomy within the university field (Blackmore, Brennan, and Zipin 2010; Maton 2005). They are also performative tasks (Morley 2003) and play a
part in what some describe as ‘policy as numbers’, wherein statistics have become a primary tool of governance and management (Rawolle and Lingard 2008; Rizvi and Lingard 2010). Although academic quality assurance and academic standards related tasks have been added to Australian academic boards’ roles and responsibilities, it is not possible to determine from these data whether boards are actually controlling these functions or whether by virtue of their real and symbolic holdings of intellectual capital, academic boards merely add credibility to universities’ efforts to meet externally driven accountability requirements. Zipin and Brennan (2003) appear to suggest the latter, arguing that performativity has become part of the habitus of university management, which in turn uses academic boards as a vehicle. Quality assurance activities may also have assisted in filling the void reported in the 1994 case histories, with regard to the need to identify a primary role for the academic board. That is to say, quality assurance might potentially have provided a proportion of academic boards with an officially sanctioned role in a world where university affairs would appear likely to remain dominated by management and government (Bansel and Davies 2010; Blackmore and Sachs 2007; Henkel 2007; Kogan and Marton 2006) for some time to come.

Conclusion
This Bourdieuan theoretical analysis of changes to Australian academic boards since the 1980s has applied the concepts of habitus, capital and field to explore shifts in power relations within Australian universities. It has demonstrated that radical changes within the university field have facilitated domination by managerial modes of governance. At the same time, the more historically-based habitus of university staff has enabled the retention of vestiges of collegiality such as committee structures, whilst also accommodating a drift from substantive to performative quality mechanisms. The resultant valuing of academic capital over intellectual capital has effected a substantial decrease in the power of Australian academic boards, and perhaps academic boards more generally. That is to say, Bourdieu’s theories have been useful in exploring why Australian academic boards have less power than was formerly the case.

Conversely, these changes also raise questions about whether corporate modes of governance and management will continue to dominate universities, or whether the disjunction between academic capital and teaching, scholarship and research (and indeed between academic and intellectual capital themselves) will create pressures sufficient to enable the generation of new modes of governance and management that are more appropriately aligned with real university work. Indeed, some have argued recently that managerialism and its variant, neoliberalism, have failed universities (Marginson 2010b; Peters 2011). For example, Marginson states that, although managerialism filled the more obvious gaps in collegial and bureaucratic governance forms, it is intrinsically unsuited to ‘communicative globalization … the diversity of knowledge goods and … the predominantly public good nature of knowledge’. He calls for the development of a ‘new set of techniques of reflexive modernization for organizing knowledge-related institutions’, involving a ‘diversity of knowledge goods’, and a ‘gift-based … knowledge exchange’ which moves beyond the ‘Anglo-American university culture’ (2010b, 145). This suggests a time and place in which the free exchange of ideas and knowledge is considered to be more important than money and institutions, or indeed nations.

However, it is perhaps here that the limitations of Bourdieu’s framework become apparent, for is argued that Bourdieu does not allow for the ‘creative imagination’
(Marginson 2008, 312) which is needed to envisage the kind of radically new course of action that might be life in universities after neoliberalism. Thus, exactly what it is that these new governance and management regimes may involve, or what the longer-term future of academic boards might be, appears yet to emerge.

In the meantime, for Australian academic boards at least, it appears likely that the immediate future will involve greater direct or indirect involvement in managerialist-driven academic quality assurance regimes. Unfortunately, academic boards risk becoming the ‘straw man’ by providing intellectual credibility to these externally driven exercises, whilst not controlling either their means or outcome.

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