BRINGING EDUCATION ONLINE:
INSTITUTIONAL LOGICS IN THE LEGITIMATION OF AND RESISTANCE TO ONLINE
HIGHER EDUCATION

A dissertation presented
by
Lauren A. Nicoll
to
The Department of Sociology and Anthropology

In partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of
Doctor of Philosophy
in the field of
Sociology

Northeastern University
Boston, Massachusetts
April, 2016
BRINGING EDUCATION ONLINE:
INSTITUTIONAL LOGICS IN THE LEGITIMATION OF AND RESISTANCE TO ONLINE
HIGHER EDUCATION

by

Lauren A. Nicoll

ABSTRACT OF DISSERTATION

Submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy in Sociology in the College of Social Sciences and Humanities of Northeastern University
April, 2016
ABSTRACT

The field of higher education is undergoing significant technological change, most notably in the rapid expansion of online education over the last two decades. Policymakers and other supporters have proposed that online learning will solve many of higher education’s most pressing problems. Scholars addressing online education often take for granted either that technology will improve higher education or bring about the decline of the professoriate. A sociological understanding of online education is needed to better understand how the growth of online education fits within the shifting logics guiding the field of higher education.

Theories of academic capitalism explain how universities have become increasingly entrepreneurial in order to attract new streams of revenue, but do not consider how different types of universities may affect the market logic or enable resistance to take place. Drawing from the broader institutional logics perspective allows for a fuller understanding of how both market and professional logics have shaped how key stakeholders judge the legitimacy of online learning, why faculty have embraced or resisted online education, and how the characteristics of different types of universities structure this process.

This dissertation consists of three studies. To assess the dimensions of online learning salient to its legitimacy to key stakeholders over time, a content analysis was performed on the arguments in favor of or against online learning in The Chronicle of Higher Education. To understand the institutionalization of online learning within academic departments, in-depth interviews were conducted with 61 department chairpersons and academic administrators that oversee online programs. Finally, to highlight the factors that enable resistance to online
learning, a case study was performed of the successful campaign to block Rutgers University’s partnership with Pearson, a for-profit company, to develop online programs.

   Academic capitalism theory states that mechanisms like the development of online programs displace professional logics, but my findings demonstrate that when opening up new markets is equated with democratizing higher education, or when faculty see online education as a way to serve students as consumers, the market logic has assimilated the concept of education for the public good from the professional logic. Another way that this dissertation extends academic capitalism theory is in its attention to public and private regional universities alongside elite research universities. This research adds empirical insight into the very different ways that online programs have been developed at different types of universities, and how these organizational contexts mediate and moderate field-level and individual-level market and professional logics. The implications of this research for policies that both serve students and reinforce professional autonomy are discussed in the conclusion.
ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

Thinking about writing these acknowledgements kept me going during some of the harder stretches of this dissertation. When I reflect on all of the individuals who have helped me along this journey, I am filled with immense gratitude.

First, I must thank the numerous individuals who made this dissertation possible, especially all those who were willing to be interviewed for this dissertation. To maintain their confidentiality, I cannot name them, but I appreciate how generous they were with their time and experiences. Embodying generosity, my committee gave me their unflagging support and patience, allowing this project to come to fruition. Gordana Rabrenovic’s enthusiasm for my topic and good cheer always gave me boost when I needed it most. I give thanks to Daniel Kleinman for his thoughtful and detailed feedback. His perspective undoubtedly made my dissertation stronger. I have to acknowledge Laura Senier as more than a committee member, but as a mentor. Beyond the dissertation, I have learned much from Laura about research, publishing, and what it takes to be successful in academia. Finally, I am deeply indebted to Steven Vallas, my dissertation advisor. I feel fortunate to have benefited from his theoretical insight, encouragement, and wisdom.

Before the dissertation, there have been many faculty members who were important influences on my work. Jonathan Reader inspired my love of sociology as an undergraduate at Drew University. I am grateful for Shelley Kimelberg, who has served as a role model and a source of invaluable advice. Thanks also go to Judy Perrolle for helping me lay the groundwork for my dissertation proposal. Finally, some of my most valuable experiences at Northeastern have come from working with Barry Bluestone at the Dukakis Center for Urban and Regional
Policy. As a mentor and friend, Barry’s commitment to my success has never wavered. I am so grateful.

This dissertation would not have been conceived without my experience working at Eduventures and the College of Professional Studies at Northeastern. Richard Garrett’s expertise in the field of online learning contributed to the development of this dissertation topic. I also have to thank Andrew Magda for his research that I’ve cited here. I owe many thanks to Bill Boozang and Doug Flor for being so supportive while I balanced working at CPS and my dissertation. Doug deserves an extra thank you for not only being a great mentor, but for helping me reach the finish line.

Thank you to my cohort for creating such a rich (and fun!) intellectual environment in Holmes Hall. Justin Betz, Sean Brown, Meghan Doran, Jill Eshelman, Kat Fabel, Matt Judge, Amy Lubitow, Eric Madfis, Trish Morris, and Leandra Smollin have inspired me with their accomplishments and commitment to social justice. Thank you to Rachael Lee, Mike Shields, Danielle Falzon, and Boris Templeton, my RA colleagues. I have appreciated all of your feedback over the last two years. Outside of Northeastern, Owen McLean and my friends at Trinity have been my refuge in Boston. I especially have to thank Andrea Hill, Sarah Nicksa, Yingchan Zhang, Corey Bower, and Chase Billingham for being there every step of the way.

My mother told me many times growing up that completing a doctoral degree was more about determination and perseverance than intelligence. I think I’ve proven her right the hard way. All my gratitude to Joy and Douglas Nicoll for their love and support. Bill, Shirley, and Nathaniel Nicoll offered many welcome breaks, and a special thanks to Kay Larsen for her expert proofreader’s eye. And finally, I’ve written my way across the libraries of southeastern Massachusetts with Jeff Webb. I’m a better person and a better scholar because of him.
# TABLE OF CONTENTS

ABSTRACT OF DISSERTATION ........................................................................................................... 2

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS .......................................................................................................................... 5

TABLE OF CONTENTS .......................................................................................................................... 7

Chapter 1: Introduction ...................................................................................................................... 10
ONLINE EDUCATION’S BROADER CONTEXT: CHALLENGES AND THE ROLE OF TECHNOLOGY .......................................................................................................................... 11
Costs .................................................................................................................................................. 11
Efficacy/Quality ................................................................................................................................. 14
Access ............................................................................................................................................... 16
The Role of Technology ...................................................................................................................... 19
WHAT IS ONLINE LEARNING? .......................................................................................................... 20
HISTORY OF ONLINE EDUCATION .................................................................................................. 21
THE STATE OF ONLINE LEARNING TODAY ...................................................................................... 25
CURRENT ONLINE EDUCATION RESEARCH .................................................................................. 26
RESEARCH QUESTIONS ...................................................................................................................... 30
SIGNIFICANCE OF TOPIC .................................................................................................................. 31
DISSERTATION OVERVIEW ............................................................................................................... 33

Chapter 2: Theoretical Framework .................................................................................................. 33

Chapter 3: Online Education through the Lens of Professional and Market Institutional Logics ........................................................................................................................................... 34

Chapter 4: Embedded Logics: The Legitimation of Online Learning across University Types ........................................................................................................................................... 34

Chapter 5: Resisting Online Education, Resisting Corporatization .................................................. 34

Chapter 6: Conclusions ....................................................................................................................... 35

Chapter 2: Theoretical Framework .................................................................................................. 36
INSTITUTIONAL LOGICS .................................................................................................................. 36
Institutional Logics and Neoinstitutionalism ....................................................................................... 37
The Initial Concept of Institutional Logics .......................................................................................... 38
The Institutional Logics Perspective .................................................................................................... 39
Multiple Logics and Institutional Change ........................................................................................... 40
Challenges to the Institutional Logics Perspective .............................................................................. 43
LEGITIMACY ................................................................................................................................... 44
Elements of Legitimacy ...................................................................................................................... 46
Chapter 1: Introduction

On June 10, 2012, the University of Virginia campus community, and later the field of higher education, was stunned to find out that Teresa Sullivan, the university’s first female president (de Vise 2010), announced her resignation due to a “philosophical difference in opinion” after being pressured to step down by the university’s Board of Directors (Rice 2012). Announcing the decision to the vice presidents and deans, the head of the board, Helen Dragas, stated that the speed of change in higher education and the financial environment of higher education are an “existential threat to the greatness of UVA” (Dragas 2012). Though few specific reasons were given at the outset for what caused this drastic move just two years after Sullivan, a sociologist of labor force demography, had been hired as president, Dragas (2012) went on to explain, “We also believe that higher education is on the brink of a transformation now that online delivery has been legitimized by some of the elite institutions.”

Building on the idea that Sullivan’s removal might have had been caused by her unwillingness to have the school make a major move online, the student newspaper and other news outlets obtained emails sent among the board members that show just how influential this belief was to the board (Jaschik 2012a). An editorial in the Wall Street Journal on how replacing expensive labor with technology through Massive Open Online Courses (MOOCs) was shared with the subject line, “[W]hy we can’t afford to wait” (Jaschik 2012a). Similarly, one alumnus donor emailed the board members with a link to a video on Stanford’s MOOCs offered through a for-profit spinoff that “signal that the on-line [sic] learning world has now reached the top of the line universities” (Tyson 2012). He goes on to ask, “How might it lower our costs, improve productivity and link us to a group of students we couldn’t afford to serve (maybe more kids
from the state to please the legislature)...?” (Tyson 2012). Though Dragas, who spearheaded the resignation, claimed that online learning was not the real focus but rather a symbol of higher education’s rapid pace of change, Sullivan later signed a contract with Coursera, another education technology company spun off from Stanford. Sullivan – and not an interim president – signed the contract, because the story has a (somewhat) happy ending for Sullivan: faculty, students, and alumni protested the forced resignation, and the board reinstated her presidency just 16 days later.

ONLINE EDUCATION’S BROADER CONTEXT: CHALLENGES AND THE ROLE OF TECHNOLOGY

This incident highlights the central role of online education in the debate about the future of higher education. At UVA and throughout the field of higher education, rising costs, the need for efficacy, and accessibility all challenge universities in a complex and often unfriendly environment. In this section, I will discuss a brief history of each of these issues in higher education and relate it to the ways that technology has been perceived as solving these problems.

Costs

Rising college costs and extreme student debt are a near constant fixture in the news, particularly in this presidential election cycle, as several of the candidates have policy proposals for both reducing the cost of attendance and improving the efficiency of our system of higher education. Hauptman and Merisotis (1997) outline five common reasons that have been used to explain why tuition and college costs have grown so rapidly since the 1980s: (1) that faculty salaries and other costs have gone up without concurrent increases in productivity, so tuition prices have to increase; (2) that students have greater needs and demands for services and amenities, so spending has had to increase, paid for through tuition increases; (3) that state
funding has decreased, and there is increased competition for philanthropic funding, so tuition becomes an increasingly important source of revenue; (4) that the expansion of student aid has allowed colleges and universities to raise their tuition in response, and (5) competition for students has led to increases in tuition to signal quality. They note, however, that none of these factors fully explains increases in tuition. For example, the theory of Baumol’s cost disease (Baumol and Bowen 1968), that faculty are paid more over time without any increase in the productivity of teaching students, is an extremely popular explanation for increases in tuition (e.g., Jaschik 2012b), yet current research indicates that the increased availability of student loan funding that has allowed colleges and universities to increase tuition may be a more likely explanation (Gordon and Hedlund 2016). This is a controversial position to take, since student loans have been used to create access to higher education (Wexler 2016). In a more accepted challenge to the idea of rising tuition stemming from rising faculty salaries, Barnshaw and Dunietz (2015) point to declines in state funding by over 16% nationwide and found a statistically significant connection between increases in state appropriations and decreases in net tuition for students. Illustrating this through a case study of Virginia (Mulhern et al. 2015), declining state appropriations and increases in tuition costs have disproportionately affected low-income students, as their net tuition costs have risen faster than higher income students since the Great Recession, and they are less likely to enroll in four-year universities or graduate with a degree. Overall, high tuition costs from declining state support and universities able to raise tuition to match available federal financial aid debt contribute to higher education reproducing and worsening class inequalities.

Ballooning student loan debt, now over $1 trillion dollars (Federal Reserve Bank of New York 2015), has been one way that students have coped with rising tuition costs. Loans are the
primary form of financial assistance that the federal government provides to students to create access to higher education (Gross et al. 2009). Even when low-income students qualify for federal Pell Grants, these grants only cover about 30% of tuition at the average four-year public university, so low income students often have to rely on student loans (Reich and DeBot 2015). About 20% of households have college debt, again affecting lower-income households more than any other group, even though they are less likely to attend or complete college (Fry 2012). Bachelor’s degree graduates in 2014 finished school with an average debt of $28,950, up 56% since 2004 (TICAS 2015). In addition, underrepresented minorities, lower-income students, students attending for-profit institutions, first-generation college students, students with dependents and students who do not complete college are more likely to default on their student loans (Hillman 2014). Defaulting on student loans has serious consequences for students, so policymakers are interested in ways for both students and universities to both have lower tuition costs and default rates.

Technology has often been viewed as a way to reduce costs in higher education, though with little empirical evidence to support these claims (e.g., Cowen and Tabarrok 2014). William Bowen, former president of Princeton University, writes that though he formerly believed that he saw little hope for online learning increasing productivity and saving money, advances in technology and “changing mindsets” have made him a believer that online learning “can lead to good learning outcomes at lower cost” (Bowen 2012:26). Deming et al. (2015) find that universities with higher proportions of online students charge lower tuition for undergraduate students, but acknowledge that these institutions are more likely to be for-profit or less-selective institutions, questioning the quality of the education that these online students receive. So, even
if online learning can be proven to reduce costs, it needs to be able to do so while maintaining quality.

Efficacy/Quality

In the example of the University of Virginia, the quality of the institution was not questioned, just the efficiency of reaching that level of quality, but for many other institutions of higher education, the quality of their offerings are questioned. Challenges to the quality of higher education did not emerge until the 1960s and 70s, as the global economy emerged and the United States competitiveness began to be questioned (Mayhew, Ford, and Hubbard 1990). These challenges continue to this day:

As other nations rapidly improve their higher education systems, we are disturbed by evidence that the quality of student learning at U.S. colleges and universities is inadequate and, in some cases, declining. A number of recent studies highlight the shortcomings of postsecondary institutions in everything from graduation rates and time to degree to learning outcomes and even core literacy skills. (Spellings 2006)

The report goes on to say that it is no longer acceptable to use traditional measures of quality.

Defining quality has been an ongoing exercise in higher education research. Given the number of dimensions of quality, it is no surprise that different groups of actors in the field of higher education define quality in different and conflicting ways. Quality both depends on the beholder and the situation. Multiple scholars have developed similar typologies of these dimensions (e.g., Biggs 2001; Harvey and Green 1993; Mayhew et al. 1990; Ruben 1995). In one of the first, Mayhew et al. (1990) review how Garvin’s (1988) industrial definitions of quality can be applied to the educational setting: quality measured by performance on standardized tests is a “product-based” approach; quality measured by students as consumers is a “fitness for use” approach; quality measured by meeting standards, even if those approach to education are different for different universities is a “conformance to requirements” approach; quality
measured by the value of education for the tuition paid is a “value-based” approach, and quality that is not able to be measured because it is about reaching the highest standards is a “transcendent” approach. These measures often are at odds.

Davies (1991) makes the important point that quality is “whatever the prevailing cultural and economic hegemony defines it to be” (p. 41). As institutionalized by accreditors and U.S. News and World Report rankings (Suskie 2014), the past prevailing definition of quality revolved around the inputs into that education: the level of a university’s endowment, the SAT scores of incoming students, the percent of a faculty with terminal degrees, the amount of library holdings, and other physical and financial resources (Bergquist 1995). However, a new hegemony, made up of state governments, the federal department of education, wealthy foundations, and educational technology companies have prompted universities to place more of an emphasis on output measures. In light of research such as Arum and Roksa’s (2011) study of student learning that found that 45% of undergraduate students made no gains in critical thinking, complex reasoning, and writing, student learning at colleges and universities has been placed under the microscope. Output data has started to be federally regulated at career colleges in the form of “gainful employment” rules; that is, that student loans do not exceed a certain proportion of the graduate’s discretionary income or total income (U.S. Department of Education 2014c). Outcome data are increasingly the emphasis of accreditors, and the Obama administration has developed a new “College Scorecard” that includes the median salary after graduation for each school college rankings system using outcome measures (Zhou 2015). Federal and state policymakers have also expressed an interest in value-added measures of quality, which would be fairer to less selective colleges and is able to incorporate a broader range of outcomes, such as the ways that college graduates have grown socially or morally, in addition
to measuring what they’ve learned over the course of their degree (Bergquist 1995). The Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation funded research using data from public colleges and universities in Texas to determine value-added performance measures (Cunha and Miller 2014). Following trends of K-12 education, it is likely that higher education will see an increase in these measures.

As demonstrated by this mix of market-oriented quality measures, such as giving students information on outcomes in order to choose a university and administrative quality measures, that strengthen accountability measures, there are growing demands on universities to prove quality (Schmidtlein and Berdahl 2005). At a basic level, public universities are accountable to the public, particularly through the budgeting process. In an increasing number of states, this budgeting process relies on the performance of the university across a number of different indicators, including graduation rates and student learning (McLendon and Hearn 2013). In addition, accreditation also is requiring a greater emphasis on the assessment of student learning outcomes (Ewell 1993). Within this environment, online education’s quality has been defended in its equality in learning outcomes to face-to-face courses (e.g., Russell 1999). The critique of online learning on other, less measureable aspects of quality have so far had little access to either its growth or the certification of its quality through accreditation.

**Access**

The history of higher education in the United States is a history of the expansion of access to higher education. Historians typically lay out the transitions from an elite education system developed during the colonial period to an expansion of a variety of types of religious, proprietary, technical, and public institutions between the Civil War and WWII, punctuated by the Morrill Acts in 1862 and 1890 which created a system of public “land grant” universities focused on practical education (Johnson 1981). This laid the foundation for the expansion of
mass higher education following WWII and desires for universal access in the post-industrial period (Trow 1974). Trow (1974) describes the challenges faced within the field of higher education during this shift from elite education to mass education in the 1950s and 1960s. The growth in the number of students, the expansion of state and community college systems, and the expansion of the number and size of academic departments in this era strained the existing structure, culture, and politics of existing universities. He also writes about how, as the field demanded more and more federal and state resources, “higher education comes increasingly to the attention of larger numbers of people, both in government and in the general public, who have other, often quite legitimate, ideas about where public funds should be spent, and if given to higher education, how they should be spent” (Trow 1974:4).

Nonetheless, because the need to absorb educational aspirations, promote political participation and economic growth, and because the strength of the nation following WWII was attributed to the quality of its educational system (Kerr 1991), access to higher education has been a major focus of public policy. Eaton (1997) outlines how public policy to provide access to higher education shifted over time. Starting with the G.I. Bill in 1944 and the Higher Education Act of 1965, these programs were intended to help qualified students overcome financial barriers to college attendance. In the 1960s and 1970s, enrollments in community colleges with open admissions policies vastly expanded (Brint and Karabel 1989). Access to higher education was now about overcoming financial and academic barriers. In the 1970s, the focus was not just on expanding access to higher education in general, but expanding access for women and minorities that faced past discrimination (Eaton 1997). The 1980s brought policies to increase the diversity of elite schools that underserved women and minorities as well as trying to motivate more students to be interested in attending college. In 1986, the U.S. Secretary of Education called for
an educational “Marshall Plan” to increase the number of adults with college degrees and, in order to do so, state colleges and universities would need to “restructure their modes of delivery of instruction and services. We’ll need to use cooperative models, including work-study, instructional television, instruction at the work place, and faculty/computer approaches” (Bell 1986 as cited in Hall 1991:57).

This early call for increased access to higher education through technological innovation was written at a time when the U.S. had the highest percentage of its 18-to-29-year-old population enrolled in postsecondary education of all the OECD countries (OECD 2008). By 2006, however, the Spellings Commission report indicated concern that the United States had dropped to 12th in the rankings of postsecondary education attainment (Spellings 2006). Access has lagged for several reasons: climbing tuition rates, federal student aid amounts that have not kept up with tuition increases, less state support for public universities, and greater federal funds being directed at for-profit universities of lower quality (Mettler 2014). This exacerbates income inequality. For instance, only 29% of low-income students that had high math test scores completed a bachelor’s degree, while 74% of high-income students with the same test scores completed college, and 30% of high income students with low test scores still completed college (Fox, Connolly, and Snyder 2005). Similarly, while 42% of White females and 33% of White males ages 25 to 34 had achieved a bachelor’s degree or higher, only 23% of Black females and 15% of Black males, and 16% of Hispanic females, and 11% of Hispanic males had attained a bachelor’s degree or higher (Ross and Kena 2012). Because of this persistent inequality, particularly for low-income, adult, and minority students, the Department of Education again recommends that “colleges remove barriers to student mobility and promote new learning paradigms (e.g., distance education, adult education, workplace programs) to accommodate a far
more diverse student cohort” (Spellings 2006:18). Gumport and Chun (1999) recognize that online education can provide access to higher education to those who have been left out, but ask the question, “[A]ccess to what?” (p. 388). The need for greater educational opportunity is inextricably tied to quality.

The Role of Technology

One example of the way that online learning has been proposed to be a solution to higher education’s many problems is through Clayton Christensen’s theory of disruptive innovations. Christensen et al. (2011) propose that online learning is disrupting higher education because of the growth of online student enrollments as well as the growth of new models for organizing higher education via online learning, such as for-profit universities, autonomous divisions of universities focused on online offerings, and new ways of structuring learning, such as massive open online courses (MOOCs) or competency-based programs. In this theory, because traditional universities are ill equipped for adjusting to current technologies, they will be subject to creative destruction (Schumpeter 1942). Firms that are able to innovate and offer lower-cost education to a mass audience will disrupt the market for higher education, and this will force universities to follow suit. Christensen et al. (2011) write:

Although the absence of an upwardly scalable technology driver has rendered higher education impossible to disrupt in the past, we believe that online learning constitutes such a technology driver and will indeed be capable of disruptively carrying the business model of low-cost universities up-market. This is vital in order to make higher education fundamentally affordable to both students and society—especially if universities see themselves as being in the business of knowledge proliferation rather than knowledge creation and prioritize teaching and learning over research and prestige, as we have traditionally thought of it. (p. 28)

In response to this formulation, they call for policymakers to let these disruptors gain market share, rather than protect traditional colleges and universities, such as by encouraging programs
that move away from courses and towards competency assessments, and allowing universities to access federal funding without being accredited for meeting certain quality measures. Elite universities will be largely unaffected, but all others will have to compete in this new environment. While it remains to be seen if this theory is correct, since the new business models highlighted in this theory have been struggling under investigations for predatory practices (e.g., Staples 2014) and compliance with federal financial aid requirements (e.g., Fain 2016), Christensen’s ideas are influential with policymakers (e.g., Rice 2012).

WHAT IS ONLINE LEARNING?
Alternatively referred to as online education and e-learning, online learning is a form of distance learning, now the most common form of distance education offered (Parsad and Lewis 2008). Distance learning is “education that uses one or more technologies to deliver instruction to students who are separated from the instructor,” so that there is substantive communication with the instructor on an ongoing basis, either synchronous, “simultaneous or ‘real-time’” or asynchronous in credit-bearing courses (National Center for Education Statistics n.d.). In studies of online education, the most consistent definition of online learning is offered by the Online Learning Consortium in their annual survey of universities. They define an online course as “one in which at least 80% of the course content is delivered online” (Allen and Seaman 2016:7). These courses would typically not have face-to-face meetings, but use the 80% measure to account for times when students might be required to come to campus, such as a weekend lab session or clinical experience. This definition also allows for a continuum between traditional courses, web-facilitated classes that use a Learning Management System or course website, blended/hybrid courses that combine a mix of online and face-to-face meeting times, and courses offered wholly over the internet.
Massive Open Online Courses (MOOCs) are a subset of online learning courses, though often conflated with online courses offered for credit from traditional universities. The term MOOC was coined in 2008 for a University of Manitoba course that enrolled over 2,000 online students for free (Parr 2013). These early programs were extremely flexible and student-directed, but today’s MOOCs can be differentiated from “traditional” online programs in the following ways: “Those participating are not registered students at the school. They are designed for unlimited participation and open access via the web – no tuition is charged. There is typically no credit given for completion of the MOOC” (Allen and Seaman 2015: 8). Currently, while universities (often, but not always) design MOOCs, they are most often offered by an outside platform, such as Coursera, a for-profit organization spun off from Stanford, or EdX, a non-profit partnership between Harvard, MIT, and other universities.

HISTORY OF ONLINE EDUCATION

Online education is an outgrowth of both the distance education movement and the movement to bring more technology into teaching. Earning a degree outside of the physical structures of the university has been happening for over a century. Moore and Kearsley (2005) describe five different generations of distance education. The first, the correspondence model, uses print materials mailed back and forth between teacher and student. Non-credit correspondence courses spread through close of the 19th century, particularly among women and those influenced by the Chautauqua movement (Casey 2008). Correspondence study was highly profitable at the numerous proprietary schools of the time period and allowed anyone who could pay for it the ability to direct their own learning. As early as 1874, Illinois Wesleyan University was the first American institution to award nonresidential degrees (Watson 1950). Soon after,
institutions like the University of Chicago, Columbia University, and the University of Wisconsin offered correspondence courses to those who could not travel to campus in both vocational and liberal arts subjects (Edelson and Pittman 2008). Correspondence education had its critics – Thorstein Veblen (1954:11) characterized it as “edification of the unlearned” and the “encouragement of amateurs,” but its supporters saw it as a fundamental tool for creating true democracy in the United States (e.g., Harper 1905).

The second and third generations of distance education began with the use of recorded media like television broadcasts, audio and videotapes and some early forms of computer-aided instruction (Moore and Kearsley 2005). Attractive because of its ability to mimic classroom lectures, radio broadcasting in the 1920s and 1930s reached wide audiences (Casey 2008). Early experiments with televised courses by the University of Iowa in the 1930s caught on in the 1960s through the expansion of televised courses nationwide (Casey 2008). The late 60s ushered in the third generation of distance learning, a model that combines broadcast and correspondence approaches. The Open University in the UK has been seen as a true innovator in the way that it has mixed study through textbooks, highly-produced television broadcasts and videotapes, study guides, audio recordings, and sessions with tutors (Curran 1997). Open University, initially criticized as “just the sort of cosy scheme that shows the Socialists at their most endearing but impractical worst” (Times Higher Education Supplement 1966 as cited in Stabler 1987), now enrolls over 170,000 students (The Open University 2015), making it the largest university in the UK.

Advances in telecommunications like two-way satellite transmissions and the possibility of fiber optic cables led to the fourth generation of distance education, which provides more interactivity between students and instructors through audio and videoconferencing. Public
universities in the U.S. often reached rural populations through offering live broadcasts in remote locations, giving students the ability to participate in discussions through teleconferencing. In a parallel to online education today, in 1983, Nova Southeastern University (then Nova University) was one of the first institutions to offer computer-mediated distance education. They designed a UNIX-based system of e-mail, bulletin boards, online databases, and file transfer for information science and computer science graduate programs (Dringus and Scigliano 2000). In the early 1990s, the federal government funded millions of dollars of grants for experiments with distance learning using satellites and other forms of technology to rural areas (Gonzalez 1995). These technologies made distance learning more interactive than ever before, in an attempt to capture the experience of students in the classroom.

The fifth generation of distance learning is online learning. Distance education using networked computers initially grew slowly without students having the benefit of widespread access to federal financial aid, due to fears about diploma mills (Piña 2010). However, the growth of the internet led to increased interest in harnessing its possibilities for education on a larger scale. The congressional Web-Based Education Commission featured two core ideas in a report released in 2000: that technology is transforming learning and that learning should be centered on the student. At the same time, the Department of Education began to experiment with loosening the regulations on financial aid for distance education with the Distance Education Demonstration Program in order to increase access to quality distance education (Casey 2008). Between 1999 and 2005, over 100 institutions were involved with the program (U.S. Department of Education 2014a). While participating universities could clearly demonstrate increased access to education via huge enrollment growth, most participants had great difficulty calculating academic outcomes like retention and completion rates. Nonetheless,
in 2006, the restrictions on financial aid for distance learning programs were lifted, despite opposition by traditional universities and those who noted that the head of the higher education arm of the federal Department of Education was a past lobbyist for the University of Phoenix (Dillon 2006).

Throughout the 2000s, the annual growth rate of the number of students enrolled in at least one online course was in the double digits, growing far more quickly than the overall higher education population (Allen and Seaman 2014). At many institutions, online education grew out of distance education units on the margins of universities, but it also emerged from academic departments at the center of the university (Feenberg 1999). Narratives of the “lone ranger” faculty member pushing for online course development in the early days of online education are common (Bates 1997; Oblinger and Hawkins 2006). Similarly, the aforementioned University of Phoenix is associated with online education because of its success online in the last decade, but elite universities also experimented with online learning -- albeit non-credit online programs -- in the early dot-com era of 2000 and 2001. Some of the most high-profile programs at the time, such as Columbia’s Fathom and Stanford, Oxford, and Yale’s AllLearn, were spectacular failures (Walsh 2011), and ushered in the dominance of online programs at two- and four-year public colleges and universities. Currently, only 30% of students enrolled exclusively in online programs are enrolled in for-profit universities -- over half are at public universities (Allen and Seaman 2016). However, while most universities use their own internal resources to develop online programs, a small but growing minority is partnering with outside firms to develop and manage online programs. Between 2003 and 2007, the market for organizations that help colleges and universities develop online courses and programs grew from $103 million to $183
million (Ross 2012). Compared to earlier forms of distance learning, the growth of online education has been unprecedented.

THE STATE OF ONLINE LEARNING TODAY

Though the explosive growth of the 1990s and 2000s has slowed considerably, Allen and Seaman (2016) report that almost 6 million students took at least one online course in 2014, and 2.85 million are enrolled in exclusively online programs, a 7% increase over 2013. The majority of students online are undergraduate students. While online education has historically been associated with for-profit universities, between 2012 and 2014, distance enrollments grew by 26% at non-profit universities and enrollments in the for-profit sector dropped by 10%.

However, online enrollments are somewhat concentrated – almost 70% of universities offer online courses or programs, but just 247 colleges and universities have over 5,000 distance students each, representing almost half of all online enrollments for credit.

Despite the ubiquity of for-credit online programs, 2012 was declared “The Year of the MOOC” by the New York Times (Pappano 2012). These free, non-credit online courses were notable for their large venture capital investments, involvement by elite institutions, massive numbers of students enrolled, and seemingly constant publicity. The backlash to this publicity came just as quickly; after the failure of an experiment of MOOCs used to replace traditional courses, Sebastian Thrun, the founder of one of the first MOOC companies, Udacity, admitted that his company had a “lousy product” and that MOOCs were not suited for low-income or underprepared students (Chafkin 2013). The rapid hype that MOOCs received and their subsequent failure to live up to that hype so far shapes how online education as a whole is perceived, despite the continued growth of for-credit online education at the vast majority of colleges and universities.
CURRENT ONLINE EDUCATION RESEARCH

Thus far, sociology has offered little empirical research about online education. Selwyn (2014) characterizes much of the commentary as coming from “boosters” and “doomsters,” either cheering the growth of technology as a natural and beneficial evolution, or fearing and critiquing the use of technology for its negative effects on an imagined past. For example, even in one of the more thoughtful pieces on what she describes as a paradigm shift in higher education, Harasim (2000) writes, “Our new understanding of the very nature of learning has affected the definition, design, and delivery of education. It will alter global civilization as educators and learners worldwide adopt and adapt networked collaborative learning” (p. 42). Or, in a more recent article, economists Cowen and Tabarrok (2014) “see online education as having several advantages that will help shape the future of the higher education industry…as the value of a course comes from software and less from live teaching, productivity will improve, thus removing the cost disease” (p. 519). Whether for the purpose of radically opening up access to higher education worldwide, or simply to lower the cost of learning, this discourse sees online education as fundamentally transforming higher education in a positive way.

The “doomster” perspective, on the other hand, takes a critical view of this transformation. Characteristic of this genre is David Noble’s (1998) take on online education, deeming them “digital diploma mills.” His ideas about the mass production of higher education seem prescient, since he anticipates the rise of educational technology companies to commercialize teaching using the internet. Indeed, one of those vendors, Knewton, an adaptive learning technology company that “personalizes online learning content for individual students” and partners with many of the major publishing companies, sees digital education as a seven
trillion dollar industry (Daniels 2011). Just as Braverman’s (1974) deskillng thesis outlines the
ways that technology is used to divide skilled labor into mental and manual work, he argues that
converting courses to be taught online fragments the creative process, decreasing the role of
faculty by “unbundling” parts of the process to less-skilled technicians, which subjects them to
more monitoring by administrators, ultimately reducing faculty autonomy and making them
redundant (Noble 1998). Noble’s vision of the future is extreme, but the reality is more
complicated. He saw students aligned with faculty against online learning, underestimating their
demand. While analyses of online learning and digital technology in higher education as a social
phenomenon rather than a technological development are sorely needed (e.g., Kleinman 2005),
we still need to understand what is actually happening in the field of higher education, in
colleges and universities, in academic departments, and in the professional lives of faculty in
relation to online learning.

The research that does guide the study of online education is often atheoretical or aimed
at practitioners (Saba 2007). Most theories of online learning are focused on the individual and
how they learn.1 For instance, Moore’s (1993) theory of transaction distance is a typology of
how learners and teachers interact based on the structure of the learning program, the amount of
purposive communication, and the level of self-directedness of the student, creating a continuum
that can be used to describe all types of teaching and learning situations. Similarly, Anderson
(2008) offers a model of online learning and the multi-layered interactions it engenders,

1 One notable exception is Otto Peters’ (2010) theory of distance education as “the most industrialized form of
education” first published in 1967 in German. Drawing on Habermas, he writes that distance education is
fundamentally different from education in a classroom, the same way that industrial production is different from
craftsmanship, having the same benefits and dangers of mass production to society. Though Peters is considered one
of the founders of distance education theory, his work has received relatively little attention outside the narrow field
of distance education studies.
highlighting what is unique about learning over the internet: that it has a cultural context different than a physical classroom, that it has the possibility of connecting students more deeply to knowledge, that it can be more assessment-centered than traditional courses, and that it offers more opportunities for both independent and community-based learning. While studying learning and interaction at the individual level is important, these models are untethered to any institutional or field-level contexts, so they lack an explanation for the huge variety of online courses and programs currently found within and outside of the field of higher education.

Empirical studies of student learning outcomes online reflect this heterogeneity to some degree. On one hand, an early meta-analysis found no significant differences in student learning based on the mode of delivery (Russell 1999). This was reinforced by a U.S. Department of Education meta-analysis (Means et al. 2010). While they located over one thousand articles between 1996 and 2008 on the topic of online student outcomes, just 99 studies were rigorous enough to be included in their analysis. Means et al. (2010) found that online students performed slightly better than students in campus-based courses, but offer the caveat that the treatment conditions of the online course could be causing the effect, such as students spending more time with the material online, or because of differences in curricula. On the other hand, in an analysis of online course performance for over 40,000 community and technical college students in Washington State, Xu and Jaggars (2013) found that younger students, Black students, males, and poorly prepared students performed worse than other students in online courses, and the gap is wider than in face-to-face courses. Courses in the social sciences and applied professions also were more difficult for students online. As the authors note, “This is troubling from an equity perspective: If this pattern holds true across other states and educational sectors, it would imply that the continued expansion of online learning could strengthen, rather than ameliorate,
educational inequity” (p. 23). Similarly, in a 10-year longitudinal study of students who took online courses at one university, Cavanaugh and Jacquemin (2015) noted a very small but cumulative difference in the performance of students in online classes compared to face-to-face, meaning that good students did better in online courses and struggling students did worse than they would have in a face-to-face class. This also shows the potential for online learning worsening inequality, particularly if students have no choice but to take a course online.

Besides an overwhelming focus on students, online education research at the individual level often focuses on faculty perceptions as a barrier to the expansion of online learning with the intention of prescribing ways to overcome those barriers (e.g., Perry and Pilati 2011). In a meta-analysis of past research, Maguire (2005) found that faculty members’ resistance to change, belief in the lack of quality and adequate interaction with students, heavy workload, and a lack of administrative support were some of the barriers to teaching online. Motivators included a personal motivation for teaching online and recognition from peers. Another study on motivators clarified that a personal motivation comes from a teaching philosophy that incorporates an openness to technology and feelings of self-efficacy using technology (Zhen, Garthwait, and Pratt 2008). Though these studies cover a wide range of factors, they only focus on individual characteristics related to the prospective idea of teaching online, not contextualized decisions to teach a course or develop a whole program online. Parthasarathy and Smith (2009) did analyze faculty perceptions of those who actually taught online and found that those who viewed online programs as enhancing the image of their school and allowed their institution to meet market needs contributed to the decision to teach online. This is important because it brought in organization factors to the faculty’s attitude towards online learning, but it only focuses on faculty in a business school at one institution. In a comprehensive literature review of faculty
barriers to teaching online, Reid (2014) includes process, administrative, and environmental barriers, improving on past studies. However, these types of studies listing barriers or motivators are inadequate because the purpose of these studies is to help administrators get more faculty to teach online. They don’t consider the meaning of faculty resistance or adoption, and they do not take seriously the idea that faculty not teaching online might be as rational a choice as the decision of faculty to use this technology. Finally, thousands of academic departments do have online programs, and this line of research does not fully explain why faculty in these departments have been able to overcome barriers to develop and teach online programs.

RESEARCH QUESTIONS

In order to navigate between the excessively optimistic and polemical and develop a critical, research-based understanding of what shifts have actually taken place in the field of higher education with the growth of online learning, I seek to explore the meanings of online education over time, and the complex ways that faculty have responded to online education. To do so, this study will address multiple research questions.

First, in Chapter 3, I ask, how has the broader higher education discourse constructed the legitimacy or illegitimacy of online education over time? This analysis will shed light on the contours of the debate about online learning and the consequences of technological change for the field of higher education. The field-level discourse will provide the foundation for each of the next research questions, because it gives insight into how those within universities draw from that discourse or make sense of online learning in alternate, local ways.

Second, Chapter 4 asks, what factors contribute to the acceptance of online learning at the department level, what are the institutional processes and practices that shape those perceptions, and what have been the consequences for academic departments that offer online programs? Too
much of the research on faculty perceptions of online learning focuses only on their prospective views on teaching online and not about their actual experiences with online learning. Existing research often does not address how the decision was made to go online or the institutional context that encouraged or discouraged them from making the shift online. Because this research is often aimed at giving insight into how best to motivate faculty to teach online, it misses the opportunity to examine the organizational constraints and enablers of online learning.

Third, Chapter 5 addresses the question, what factors contribute to the resistance of online learning? Surveys indicate that a majority of faculty are resistant to the development and teaching of online learning, but there are very few documented cases of organized resistance to the development and teaching in online programs. I show how both the discourses that faculty opponents draw from and organizational structures impact the successful movement. I aim to fill the gap of a sociological understanding of online learning in higher education.

SIGNIFICANCE OF TOPIC

The analysis of these research questions makes several contributions to development of a sociological understanding of online education and what shifts have actually taken place in the field of higher education. First of all, this research responds to the need to better understand the legitimacy of online education in the field of higher education. Returning to the example of Teresa Sullivan at UVA, the Rector of the Board stated in her remarks justifying the resignation, “We also believe that higher education is on the brink of a transformation now that online delivery has been legitimized by some of the elite institutions” (Dragas 2012). While some commentators take for granted that online education has been legitimized, evidence of legitimacy among faculty suggests the opposite. After over a decade of surveys of provosts asking if faculty at their school accept the value and legitimacy of online education, no more than a third of
provosts indicated faculty acceptance (Allen and Seaman 2016). My research explores this discrepancy and why online has been able to grow despite a seeming lack of legitimacy from faculty, and also updates theoretical understandings of the legitimation process in fields guided by multiple logics.

This research also aims to correct a tendency of higher education research to focus on only elite research universities. By interviewing department chairs across the spectrum of four-year, non-profit universities, we are able to gain a better understanding of how institutional logics interact with different types of organizational structures. Furthermore, little evidence exists about the process of decision-making for online learning, and how it may differ at different types of universities. Researchers have outlined four models for the implementation of online learning: an independent or distance education unit that has no connections to traditional departments, the “lone wolf” model (Bates 2000) of faculty developing online courses or programs on their own, a siloed model where departments, schools, or faculties control the development of online programs, and an integrated approach that centralizes online program development for the whole university (Laird 2004; Paolucci and Gambescia 2007; Smith and Rhoades 2006). However, these models do not address the locus of decision-making. For instance, Johnson (2012) studies perceptions of technology use by faculty and found that very few faculty actually used technology in their instructional activities, but he only interviewed faculty at research universities, where faculty are likely to have more autonomy than at less elite institutions. Looking at the legitimation process at elite and non-elite institutions will address the influence of organizational structure and status on online education’s legitimacy at the field level.
Finally, many critical analyses of the growth of online learning are incredibly bleak, offering little way out for faculty (e.g., Noble 1998). I challenge this notion, because the literature does not tell us enough about how faculty have actually experienced the growth of online learning and any changes that have resulted from a more widespread use of the technology. I also challenge the idea that the expansion of online education is inevitable. While there may be some benefits to continued growth of different forms of online learning, this research emphasizes the social and political factors that have influenced its growth thus far and in its resistance. Exploring one case where the meanings and practices of technology were contested can help others to identify other situations and locations within the field of higher education where these lessons can be applied.

DISCUSSION OVERVIEW

This exploration of the construction of the legitimacy of online learning in the field of higher education in the rest of the dissertation takes the form described below. Because each chapter uses a different research methodology, each empirical chapter will include its own methodological discussion.

Chapter 2: Theoretical Framework

This chapter provides the theoretical framework that shaped how I approached the study of the legitimacy of and resistance to online education. Specifically, this section discusses organizational theory, focusing on the institutional logics perspective and theories that can be used to explain organizational change and how a subject gains legitimacy. I make a theoretical contribution by synthesizing the institutional logics perspective with academic capitalism theory, an important way to understand change in higher education. This chapter also discusses the theoretical significance of my research questions.
Chapter 3: Online Education through the Lens of Professional and Market Institutional Logics

The first of the results chapters sets the stage for the next two chapters by describing and analyzing the results of a content analysis of articles about online education in the *Chronicle of Higher Education* over time. After reviewing the content analysis methodology and giving a descriptive overview of the data, I explore the discursive elements of the text. I examine the arguments made about online education, who makes those arguments, and how the statements connect to underlying institutional logics, particularly around arguments of access, quality, and the future impact of online education.

Chapter 4: Embedded Logics: The Legitimation of Online Learning across University Types

This chapter brings the analysis to the department level to explore the decision-making and development process for offering an online degree, and the consequences of making the move online at different types of universities. I interviewed department chairpersons and academic administrators as a window into this process and their perceptions of online education’s legitimacy. Using the institutional logics perspective as a framework, I discuss how important the microfoundations of institutional logics are for online education’s acceptance in the way that department chairs make sense of their online programs through the narratives they use. I also demonstrate how different types of universities have different constellations of logics as well as organizational structures that embed those logics in ways that influence the legitimacy of online education.

Chapter 5: Resisting Online Education, Resisting Corporatization

Because the last chapter discusses the acceptance of online education, this chapter examines the possibilities for resistance. This chapter is a case study of the Rutgers University Graduate and Arts and Sciences faculties’ successful movement to block a partnership with
Pearson Education to develop online master’s degree programs. After outlining the case study methodology, I suggest the union’s strength, Rutgers’ decentralized organizational form, and the ways that each side marshalled institutional logics contributed to the success of the campaign. Faculty members connected their concerns to market logics and used tactics that adhered to the technical processes of shared governance, rather than its typical symbolic role. The broader implications of the case for the ways that institutional logics are used in the act of resistance are discussed.

Chapter 6: Conclusions

The conclusion summarizes the findings from each of the results chapters and discusses the findings around decision-making processes, access, and the market logic that bridge the chapters. After delineating the dissertation’s contribution to institutional logics theory, I discuss the implications of the study for policy and future research.
Chapter 2: Theoretical Framework

As stated in Chapter 1, the institutional logics perspective provides the primary theoretical framework to analyze the growth of online learning in higher education. Drawing broadly from organizational theories of legitimacy and institutional change, this chapter will discuss how institutional logics shape the judgment of legitimacy, and how changing logics are marshaled to create change. Finally, this chapter will address the gaps in how the institutional logics perspective has been applied to the field of higher education and how my research can extend both the institutional logics perspective and academic capitalism theory.

**INSTITUTIONAL LOGICS**

The institutional logics perspective is a metatheory, a way to make sense of and orient social theory (Zhao 2001). It brings together sociological and organizational theories that address individuals, organizations, and institutions and both the macro- and the micro-levels, and connects them into one framework that can explain both individual agency and institutional change (Thornton, Ocasio, and Lounsbury 2012). Its core concept is that a society is an interinstitutional system, made up of many different subsystems of institutions, such as capitalism, the state, democracy, the family, and religion, marked by different and often contradictory symbolic and material practices, (Friedland and Alford 1991). So, the rationality, or logic, of organizational and individual actions can only be determined in the context of the institutions in which they are situated. These institutional logics are the “socially constructed, historical patterns of material practices, assumptions, values, beliefs, and rules by which individuals produce and reproduce their material subsistence, organize time and space, and provide meaning to their social reality” (Thornton and Ocasio 1999:804). My examination of the
growth of online education in higher education is specifically concerned with the shift in logics influencing the field. With this focus, this section will present an outline of the theory, its development, and the role of institutional logics in institutional change.

Institutional Logics and Neoinstitutionalism

Neoinstitutional theories of institutionalization provided the foundation for the institutional logics framework to emerge. Early studies of organizations focused on the technical operations of the firm, ignoring the impact of the environment on organizations, bringing about institutional theory (Scott 2014:21–22). Later institutionalists advanced neoinstitutionalism as an alternative to the “old,” functionalist institutionalism that focuses on political processes like cooptation (Selznick 1948) instead of the cultural and cognitive forces that constrain conflict (DiMaggio and Powell 1991). Rather than the structures or practices of organizations being determined by technical necessity (Weber 1946) or politics, Meyer and Rowan (1977) argued that organizational fields were isomorphic, that is, firms adopted characteristics of successful firms, in hopes of receiving legitimacy within their institutional environment. DiMaggio and Powell (1983) built on this perspective to explain the mechanisms of isomorphism: coercive isomorphism occurs through the regulatory environment, mimetic isomorphism occurs through legitimacy-seeking, and normative isomorphism occurs through the influence of the professions. At the individual level, another important aspect to neoinstitutionalism is that institutionalization is not a process of internalizing norms and values, but a cognitive process where culture is “external” to the actor (Zucker 1977), and institutions are enacted through scripts and schemas (DiMaggio and Powell 1991; Meyer and Rowan 1977).

These concepts come to bear on the later development of the institutional logics perspective. For instance, by writing off the importance of values, neoinstitutionalism lacks the
ability to identify conflict between different sources of legitimacy and in how that legitimacy is defined (Selznick 1996). Also, since the bulk of neoinstitutional theory focuses on the institution, neoinstitutionalism cannot address multiple levels of analysis, and how the individual and organization are linked to environmental change (Hirsch and Lounsbury 1997). These are key characteristics of the institutional logics perspective. Finally, neoinstitutional theory, with its focus on stability and field-level institutionalization, does not sufficiently address power, agency, and organizational change (Abbott 1992; Hirsch and Lounsbury 1997; Perrow 1985; Vallas and Hill 2012). Though it arose out of neoinstitutionalism, Friedland and Alford’s (1991) theory of institutional change contained the seeds to overcome the constraints of these issues through the institutional logics perspective.

The Initial Concept of Institutional Logics

The central premise of Friedland and Alford’s (1991) theory of institutional logics is that one cannot understand organizations by only analyzing individual self-interest (e.g., Williamson 1975) or organizational goals (e.g., Pfeffer and Salancik 1978) without understanding how the organization is situated within society. Expanding beyond organizations in a market context, they also highlight the role of institutions like democracy, the family, and Christianity in shaping both interests and action. Because these institutional orders have different definitions of rationality – different logics – they hold the potential to conflict, which can be exploited to create change. They argue that when you take for granted that individuals are rational, and that the category of individual was not created by institutions, institutional logics become invisible (Friedland and Alford 1991:240). Rather than Meyer and Rowan’s (1977) focus on the macro-level or Zucker’s (1977) focus on the micro-level, a theory of institutionalization must cross and connect levels of society by considering the symbols and material practices of individuals, organizations, and
institutions, all at the same time (Friedland and Alford 1991). Friedland and Alford (1991) point out that while isomorphism is the process for how organizations become more similar (DiMaggio and Powell 1983), the theory does not explain where new institutional structures or practices come from. The rules and symbols of institutional logics can be internalized, or enacted through mindless cognition, but “sometimes they are resources manipulated by individuals, groups, and organizations” to create institutional change (Friedland and Alford 1991:254). The logics of one institution can be transported to another. Because symbols can have multiple meanings under different logics and at different levels of analysis, institutions might limit organizational action, but not fully define them (Friedland and Alford 1991). Though their work has been criticized for its Western focus on democracy and Christianity (Greenwood, Suddaby, and Hinings 2002) and its underdeveloped connections to other related theories (Thornton et al. 2012), much of Friedland and Alford’s framework became part of the institutional logics perspective.

**The Institutional Logics Perspective**

Thornton and Ocasio (1999) expand Friedland and Alford’s (1991) theory of institutional logics by adding the mechanisms of institutional logics, such as processes of shaping the definition of power, being embedded in social identities, and directing attention and decision-making. Thornton (2004) remakes earlier typologies of interinstitutional systems by making each system distinct and more complete, adding corporations, the professions, and later the community (Thornton et al. 2012). Thornton et al. (2012) defines institutional orders as “composed of elemental categories or building blocks, which represent the cultural symbols and material practices particular to that order” (p. 54). This recognizes Swidler’s (1986) conception of culture as a “tool kit” that provides “strategies for action.” The connection between culture
and action comes from cognitive schemata that provide mental shortcuts for processing information and focusing attention (DiMaggio 1997), keeping the neoinstitutionalist focus on the cognitive. Because individuals are situated within multiple institutional orders, with multiple social identities and goals, individuals have multiple cognitive schemas from which to draw, allowing them to apply institutional logics from one order to another (Thornton 2004). At the organizational level, conflicting logics can be managed by loosely coupling or decoupling technical function and organizational structure (Meyer and Rowan 1977; Weick 1976).

Institutional logics focus attention on how and what issues are identified as problems, how actors make sense of those problems, and what potential solutions to those problems might be (Thornton 2004). Institutional reproduction and change occurs because organizational decision-making is enabled and constrained by these sets of institutional logics (Thornton et al. 2012).

**Multiple Logics and Institutional Change**

One key insight of the institutional logics perspective is that institutions are “increasingly exposed to multiple and contradictory, yet interconnected, institutional arrangements and prescriptions” which creates the opportunity for change when these contradictions are exposed (Seo and Creed 2002:228). Goodrick and Reay (2011) build on the idea of multiple logics by analyzing how the changing work of professionals fit constellations, or patterns of logics within a field. The pharmacists they studied dealt with competing logics by segmenting their work. The researchers also discovered cooperative logics. In this case, the professional and market logics added to the strength of the other, so one set of work practices advanced both logics, meaning that change can occur from both contradictory and complementary or additive logics. This dissertation extends their analysis to a new and complex field, the field of higher education.
Thus, institutional logics have an important role to play in institutional change. Cultural entrepreneurs (DiMaggio 1982; Lounsbury and Glynn 2001) create new organizational forms by taking aspects of culture from one logic and combine them with other logics to create change (Thornton et al. 2012). Similar concepts include DiMaggio’s (1988) “institutional entrepreneurs” or Fligstein’s (2001) “skilled actors.” Though I am sympathetic to Fligstein and McAdam’s (2012) critical characterization of cultural entrepreneurship as an explanation for institutional change as a “great man” theory of agency (p.28), Hardy and Maguire (2008) emphasize that cultural entrepreneurism is institutionally grounded because it is how an actor is situated within an institution that gives rise to their ability to use social skills to create change. For instance, typically it is the peripheral actors who are motivated to be institutional entrepreneurs because they are least rewarded by the dominant order, but Greenwood and Suddaby (2006) found that elite actors were motivated to prompt institutional change when their connections to other organizations and misalignment of processes and resource asymmetries lead to inconsistencies and contradictions in logics.

Hoffman (1999) takes on institutional change and the way that environmental jolts (Meyer 1982) or external shifts in the environment make institutionalized practices or organizations unstable. This causes organizations to evolve based on the way that those events are socially constructed (Berger and Luckmann 1967), bringing us back to entrepreneurship. Logics are represented through theorizations (Gumport 2000), strategic frames (Benford and Snow 2000; Goffman 1974) and narratives (Zilber 2007). The meaning of new organizations or practices and how it is translated to others matters (Zilber 2002). Both Tolbert and Zucker (1999) and Greenwood, Suddaby, and Hinings (2002) bring in the concept of theorization as the step between those jolts and the diffusion and institutionalization of new organizational practices.
Defined as “the self-conscious development and specification of abstract categories and the formation of pattered relationships,” theorization creates “cultural categories” and aids diffusion (Strang and Meyer 1993), which simplifies differences that impede cognitive and/or normative legitimacy. Greenwood, Suddaby, and Hinings (2002) make the important point that the theorization stage of institutional change is especially important in fields that are highly structured with boundaries set by professionals, since professionals attempt to protect their jurisdiction and autonomy (Abbott 1988).

Communication is the link between institutional resources and changing logics (Lounsbury and Glynn 2001). “Vocabularies of practice are key building blocks linking semantic representations and practices in the emergence of field-level logics” (Thornton et al. 2012:158). Furthermore, logics are not only represented by communication, but reproduce and create new logics (Ocasio, Loewenstein, and Nigam 2015). For example, in a field with shifting logics, Lok (2010) finds that rhetoric and discourse mediate institutional logics and practices, so individuals adapt to the new logic by changing how they talk about their identities in ways that allowed them to protect their identity that aligned with the old logic. Actors either translated the new logic in a way that supported the previous logic, used rhetoric in support of the new logic but continued their same practices, or used rhetoric that supported their existing identity but took on practices guided by the new logic. In each of these cases, individuals were able to take advantage of the contradictions within and between logics using speech and practices that simultaneously accepted and resisted the changing logics. Thus, actors can mobilize vocabularies and rhetoric by using specific frames, categorizations and names in order to create or change meaning and practices (Thornton et al. 2012). This in turn can create new logics, or exploit conflicting logics, through the use of discourse.
In addition to conflicting logics, whether a field is emerging, mature, stable, or unstable also creates opportunities for cultural entrepreneurs (Fligstein 1993). As Greenwood and Suddaby (2006) explain, “Underlying these dynamics is the trade-off or tension between market discipline and the need for social legitimacy. When market forces become more pronounced, it is not surprising that institutional forces may become less salient” (p. 35). When institutions face political, functional, and social pressures, there is more of an opportunity for deinstitutionalization of old practices (Oliver 1991) and the opportunity for cultural entrepreneurs to create institutional change. Colyvas and Jonsson (2011) differentiate the diffusion of new organizational practices (Rogers 2003) from institutionalization (Jepperson 1991) based on its ability to self-reproduce, which is key for institutional change. Overall, individuals, organizations, and institutions can adapt and transform institutional logics, which provides a mechanism to respond to previous criticisms of neoinstitutional theory that it does not focus enough on agency, power, or change.

Challenges to the Institutional Logics Perspective

The explanatory power of the institutional logics perspective has been challenged by scholars within the neoinstitutional paradigm, and my work addresses those concerns. Fligstein and McAdam’s (2012) theory of strategic action fields also challenges the institutional logics perspective. The scholars contend that institutional logics are “too broad and too amorphous to really capture the set of shared meanings that structure field dynamics” (Fligstein and McAdam 2012:10). They state that strategic action fields have a consensus about what is at stake, agreement on status hierarchies and norms, and sensemaking depends on the actor’s position within the field. In their view, the institutional logics perspective conceives of too much consensus within fields, does not give enough attention to how positions within field status
hierarchies shape sensemaking and the use of power. Since they do not cite Thornton and her colleagues, I believe that they have missed current formulations of the institutional logics perspective, particularly in relation to concepts of power. Actors and organizations exist within several fields at the same time, each with its own status hierarchy, conception of power and cognitive schemata. Thus, power alone does not explain institutional change, because power is shaped at the macro-level by the environment for resources, and at the micro-level by opportunities to challenge conflicting logics (Thornton et al. 2012). My research addresses this concern about the institutional logics perspective by offering mechanisms for how multiple logics with different sources of power support online education.

Second, my research responds to Greenwood and Miller’s (2010) call to bring back the study of organizational design characteristic of organizational theory prior to neoinstitutionalism to institutional theory. Gill (2014) describes the mechanisms of organizational logics as black boxes, so incorporating the study of organizations helps to bring these mechanisms to light. Thornton and her colleagues have identified the need for more research on institutional logics embedded in organizations via the structure of that organization. My research analyzes the characteristics of departments and universities in order to understand how embedded market and professional logics affect the perception of and decision-making around online learning.

LEGITIMACY

Legitimacy is a core concept in sociological and institutional theory related to institutional change (Colyvas and Jonsson 2011), and a key element of the institutional logics framework because of its importance for institutional change. Theories of legitimacy stem from Weber’s (1990) concept of legitimate authority, domination that is accepted by the subordinate members of a group. The basis for legitimacy can come from tradition, in which individuals
accept the rule of another party because that is the way it has always been; laws, in which individuals obey authority because of an acceptance of the office having authority over them, without regard to the person holding that office; and charisma, in which individuals accept authority because that person is presumed to have extraordinary qualities. A structure’s legitimacy can also come from its material or social benefits (Weber (1946 [1921])), but recognizing the legitimacy of authority that reflects one’s values is more stable (Turner, Beeghley, and Powers 1989). Giddens (1979) notes that Parsons (1937) incorporates Weber’s conception of legitimacy into his structural-functionalist theory, but critiques Parson’s interpretation because he perceives that Weber does not imply that legitimacy means all must agree with the “value-standards,” just that they recognize its validity (p. 102).

This shows that the definition of legitimacy has two components, a recognition that others see authority as valid, as well as individual belief that it is also appropriate. In other words, while Suchman (1995) defines legitimacy as “a generalized perception or assumption that the actions of an entity are desirable, proper, or appropriate within some socially constructed system of norms, values, beliefs, and definitions” (p. 574), Bitektine and Haack (2015) clarify that both individual actors evaluate legitimacy as well as collective actors who offer the generalized assumption. Thus, they divide legitimacy into two components: propriety, or the appropriateness of an entity, and validity, the consensus judgment. Legitimacy is important within neoinstitutional theory and this research because of the role it plays in institutional stability (DiMaggio and Powell 1983) and change (Suddaby and Greenwood 2005). Using Bitektine’s (2011) review of the organizational theory literature, there are three main threads to the work: definitions and typologies of legitimacy, the processes of evaluation, and processes of legitimation.
Elements of Legitimacy

In addition to the definitions outlined above, institutional theory has developed many typologies of the elements of legitimacy. Building on Weber’s study of bureaucracies and legitimate authority, Meyer and Rowan (1977) used the concept of legitimacy as a way to explain how the environment influences organizational form. According to Meyer and Rowan (1977), organizations take on policies or practices that those in the environment see as rational and effective, regardless if they actually serve that purpose. What matters is that those external to the organization view it as legitimate, so it serves as a myth or ceremonial function to enhance survival. Legitimacy comes from practices that give the perception of successful, adherence to laws, or the reflection of collective values (Deephouse and Suchman 2008). As a result, legitimate practices exist because of the decoupling of symbolic structures and the actual technical work activities that are necessary to accomplish organizational ends.

Though they do not explicitly invoke institutional logics theory, Ruef and Scott’s (1998) study of hospital organizations proposes that legitimacy is determined by alignment between an organization’s goals and the institutional logics of the organization’s broader institutional field. They outline two coexisting dimensions of legitimacy that align with institutional logics: managerial – governed by the value of efficiency, and technical – governed by the quality of patient care. In time periods driven by competition and maximizing profits via market logics, the salience of managerial legitimacy created a crisis of legitimacy for nonprofit hospitals. Hallett and Ventresca (2006) hone in on the importance of meanings for legitimacy, and outline the difference in legitimacy for external audiences and internal stakeholders. They stress the importance of internal legitimacy and that meanings are constructed through “inhabited” institutions.
The Evaluation of Legitimacy

Each of these characteristics relates to how actors evaluate the legitimacy of an organization or practice. As Hallett and Ventresca (2006) highlight, within institutions, actors interacting and negotiating generates multiple meanings for organizational practices, which creates multiple vantage points from which to evaluate legitimacy. Deephouse and Suchman (2008) raise this same issue, and note that the legitimacy of those evaluating legitimacy depends on both the institutional field and the location of the actor within networks, since being connected to other legitimate organizations makes that evaluator more legitimate. As different evaluators base their judgments on different aspects of legitimacy, it is not possible to satisfy all audiences (Suchman 1995). Without knowing something about the institutional logics of each audience, however, it is difficult to tell from these typologies what aspects of legitimacy might be most salient to them.

In an even more nuanced model of the legitimacy judgment, Bitektine and Haack (2015) outline two separate processes for the evaluation of legitimacy during times of stability and times of institutional change. They explain that individuals assess legitimacy against a set of norms (e.g., Ruef and Scott 1998). When an institution is stable, the norms are taken for granted and legitimacy judgments themselves become institutionalized (cf. DiMaggio and Powell 1983). Evaluators with differing propriety judgments are subject to social control, reinforcing the institutional order (Bitektine and Haack 2015). The validity of the consensus judgment from the media or judicial system becomes much more important and requires little cognitive effort compared to times of institutional instability, when the influence of collective judgments of legitimacy become much weaker (Bitektine and Haack 2015). Because there is no consensus, individual evaluator judgments become much more important, influencing the media and
regulators, and shaping discourse and actions. Overall, Bitektine and Haack (2015) offer a step forward in disentangling when specific aspects of legitimacy become important to whom.²

_Seeing Legitimation_
To understand organizational legitimacy, both the process of how actors evaluate legitimacy and how organizations and institutions influence legitimacy judgments are important. Incorporating agency into their theory of legitimating strategies, Aldrich and Fiol (1994) describe cognitive and sociopolitical methods of gaining trust, how institutional entrepreneurs show reliability and develop a positive reputation in order to reshape social contexts so that their innovation gains legitimacy. Just as institutional logics and institutions, changes in legitimation are achieved through communication and rhetoric (Bitektine and Haack 2015; Suchman 1995; Suddaby and Greenwood 2005). A key point from Tolbert and Zucker’s (1996) analysis of institutionalization includes that technological adoption before institutionalization is based on resource dependency or political processes, but later, champions, or cultural entrepreneurs, must promote a theory that diagnoses a problem and justifies a solution. This leads to a greater likelihood that evaluators will grant legitimacy to the new structure. They add that diffusion occurs when evidence provides support that the new organization or practice is successful (Tolbert and Zucker 1996). To gain cognitive legitimacy, actors must use “encompassing” language and appeal to broader social values (Aldrich and Fiol 1994).

² This is similar to Swidler’s (1986) theory of the connection between culture and action in “settled” and “unsettled lives,” in which ideologies can legitimize social action. While Swidler is talking about societal-level transformations unsettling lives, Bitektine and Haack (2015) takes the more narrow focus on institutions facing exogenous or endogenous change, in which actors are more reliant on “independent judgments” because of conflicting macro-level judgments of legitimacy in the media or legal system. Independent judgments could be based on ideologies, but in my estimation, individual judgments of legitimacy could also be based on less articulated, coherent beliefs.
Sociopolitical legitimacy comes from the use of narrative (e.g., Zilber 2007), since storytelling helps to guide individuals to make positive assessments of organizations and their actions based on their benefits to the individual and society that align with a field’s norms and regulations (Bitektine 2011). Narratives are also an important social movement tactic (Snow and Benford 1988), so mobilizing collective action through narratives speeds legitimacy (Aldrich and Fiol 1994). Similarly, Lounsbury and Glynn (2001) studied business entrepreneurs and the narratives they use to legitimate new businesses, finding that narratives are used to reduce uncertainties by aligning with the logics held by key audiences. Stories that resonate with investors are more likely to attract material resources, especially if those narratives align with the norms and values of the industry, creating legitimacy and the opportunity for cultural entrepreneurship to occur (Lounsbury and Glynn 2001).

Whether the tactics used are meant to influence cognitive or sociopolitical legitimacy, Suchman (1995) outlines three methods organizational actors use to gain legitimacy: conforming to expectations within one’s current field (e.g., Dowling and Pfeffer 1975), selecting a different environment to find support, or acting to change the environment so that legitimacy is more amenable to stakeholders. Selecting a different environment is analogous to selecting a field governed by different logics, and changing the environment runs parallel to mobilizing to change logics so legitimacy is more attainable. The success of one type of legitimacy or a particular logic becoming dominant relative to other logics in a field is both historically contingent and dependent on the agency of institutional entrepreneurs who offer narratives, frames, and theorizations that are consistent with the most salient societal or external logics, especially those offering symbolic resources, and material resources in the resource environment (Thornton et al. 2012).
Challenges to Legitimacy Theory

Despite legitimacy being such a widely used concept, several questions remain unanswered or undertheorized in the literature. First of all, there seems to be an artificial distinction between cognitive and sociopolitical ways of evaluating legitimacy (Deephouse and Suchman 2008). For instance, Suchman (1995) breaks down legitimacy into pragmatic, moral, and cognitive types, and breaks down moral legitimacy further into consequential, procedural, structural, and personal logics. Current research doesn’t consider whether each of these four logics for moral legitimacy have cognitive and sociopolitical elements. For example, a judgment of consequential legitimacy evaluates the goals or ends of an organization or practice. Rather than focusing so much on the analytical dimensions of legitimacy, Deephouse and Suchman (2008) suggest that scholars further investigate the stakeholders granting legitimacy using social movement theory and how actors marshal institutional logics across levels. My work will explore the framing of online education by its stakeholders and how those frames are interpreted by department chairs and faculty involved with online programs. A second gap is found in Bitektine and Haack’s (2015) theory of the legitimacy process. They explain that the media validates legitimacy judgments by adjudicating debates, but during times of institutional instability, there is a lack of consensus and multiple validities at the macro level. Among all these individual and institutional evaluators, Bitektine and Haack (2015) discuss the suppression of deviant legitimacy judgments and strategies to promote legitimacy, but their process model does not inform us what the relative strength is of each strategy – how important is coercion? How does the power and place within organizational hierarchies affect the legitimacy process for different types of evaluators? In what situation is suppression of deviant judgments more powerful than
rhetorical strategies to promote legitimacy? All of these questions are important to understanding legitimacy in contested fields.

INSTITUTIONAL LOGICS, ACADEMIC CAPITALISM, AND THE LEGITIMACY OF ONLINE EDUCATION

It is clear that online education programs have diffused widely throughout higher education, but it is less clear why this has occurred from an organizational perspective. To approach this question, this section first applies theories of institutional logics and legitimacy to understand how online learning has become so widespread. I then connect these literatures to that of academic capitalism to better understand why the logic of higher education has shifted from education for the public good to a market-driven system.

Beginning with neoinstitutional theory, some scholars see the current growth of online education as evidence of mimetic isomorphism – universities copying other universities with large online programs, since an increasing number of colleges and universities adopt online offerings despite having little evidence of successful outcomes (Marshall 2010; Pratt 2003). However, even though starting online programs may be a way for universities to deal with an uncertain environment for higher education, this explanation does not fully match how online learning has grown. First, DiMaggio and Powell (1983) state that institutional isomorphism occurs because organizations model more legitimate or successful organizations. However, the earliest innovators with online learning were not the most legitimate or elite universities, but ones operating on the fringes of the field. Similarly, they explain that the central organizations in a field act as models for others around them, but as we learned from Walsh (2011), the earliest elite university online initiatives were noncredit courses which failed, or MIT’s online repository of course materials, which were only adopted by a limited number of other universities. Instead,
there is a great variety in how online programs are structured at universities. Finally, even when universities have similar online forms, neoinstitutional theory does not account for diverse mechanisms in how these forms came to be. For instance, in a study of higher education, Kraatz and Zajac (1996) challenge the role of institutional resources and isomorphism in organizational change because they found that technical demands led liberal arts colleges to introduce more professional programs rather than imitating the high status institutions in the field. Making these illegitimate changes did not have negative consequences despite being opposed to the traditional liberal arts mission (Kraatz and Zajac 1996). I argue that their case viewed through the lens of institutional logics shows a growth in market logics that reflects not just the material demands of the technical environment, but a growing market emphasis in the institutional environment during their time period, suggesting that the move towards professional programs by liberal arts colleges may not be as illegitimate as they suggest.

Online education’s growth could also be seen as due to the successful institutionalization of certain myths about its benefits (Cox 2005). Using Meyer and Rowan’s (1977) neoinstitutional theory, Cox (2005) provides evidence of the institutionalized myths around online education by studying community colleges. For example, she found that online education was legitimated on the basis of increasing access to higher education, despite finding no evidence to suggest that a more racially or socioeconomically diverse set of students actually enrolled. This work should be extended beyond the community college level, and also examine not just that the myths are in fact myths, but why the myths exist in the first place.

The institutional logics perspective does offer an explanation for the way that online education diffused through the field of higher education and why it might have had different pathways at different types of universities. The institutional field of higher education is a prime
example of an institution governed by multiple logics, which may account for why online learning has grown the way that it has. Multiple studies have examined various institutional logics in higher education, including the logics of activist and bureaucratic boards of higher education (Bastedo 2009), the logics of economic rationality and managerial production in academic restructuring (Gumport 2000), the logics of science and care in medical education (Dunn and Jones 2010), the logics of science and the market in academic science (Berman 2012), competing logics of teaching around service-learning (Lounsbury and Pollack 2001), and the professional and market logics in higher education performance appraisal (Townley 1999). While none of these studies addresses online education specifically, they all detail a shift in logics within different segments of higher education that contributed to institutional change, and some of the studies (e.g., Townley 1999) describe how this shift in logics was resisted. This research provides a template for studying the logics that have enabled and constrained the growth of online learning.

Though many of the logics listed above are located at the organizational or field level, many of them align with or blend characteristics from the broader professional and market logics associated with interinstitutional systems at the societal level. Because of their significance in higher education research even outside of the institutional logics framework, the logics of the professions and the market deserve further detail. The professional logic draws from both the sociology of work (e.g., Abbott 1988; Freidson 2001; Light 2000) and studies using institutional logics theory (e.g., Glynn and Lounsbury 2005; Goodrick and Reay 2011; Thornton 2004; Thornton and Ocasio 1999), defined as the ethos of organized professionals who have knowledge and expertise and whose status is protected by the state in return for social benefit. However, Sauerman and Stephan (2013) provide an important caution to the study of institutional logics of
professionals. In their examination of the academic science and commercial science logics in active scientists, they found more heterogeneity within sectors than between the university and industrial settings. Therefore, the qualities of the work setting within a sector are related to both qualities of the work itself for scientists as well as their preferences. This highlights the role that location within the different sectors of higher education might play in how and why online learning is accepted or resisted.

The market logic has been defined in sociology both within the institutional logics framework (e.g., Glynn and Lounsbury 2005; Thornton 2004; Thornton and Ocasio 1999) and without using institutional logics theory explicitly (e.g., Fligstein 1993; Scott et al. 2000). The market interinstitutional system is guided by profits, rational self-interest, and conceptualizes social interaction as market transactions. For example, Gumport (2000) describes how colleges and universities have acted to gain legitimacy within a market logic, which is an example of legitimization by selecting a different environment of business and market-oriented stakeholders, which can cause a loss of legitimacy related to the traditional values of higher education for those institutions. Institutions can manage these conflicting logics through “superficial conformity, loose coupling, or buffering” so as not to lose legitimacy (Gumport 2000:87). Nonetheless, it is an open question how these conflicting market and professional logics inform online programs at universities, and with the growth of online, how the fear has been managed “that something of irreplaceable value may get lost in the relentless growth of commercialization” (Bok 2003:17).

Outside of the institutional logic theoretical framework, others have identified a shift in the logics that guide higher education underlying these changes, from that of education for the public good to the conception of education as a private good (e.g., Kleinman, Hbinek, and
Vallas 2011; Labaree 1997; Slaughter and Rhoades 2004; Stevens, Armstrong, and Arum 2008). Sheila Slaughter’s work with her colleagues on academic capitalism exemplifies this idea. Activities previously done for the benefit of the community or the disinterested pursuit of knowledge are now done for revenue gain (Slaughter and Leslie 1997; Slaughter and Rhoades 2004).

Coming from a critical perspective, Slaughter and Rhoades (2004) outline the ways in which research universities have reorganized themselves to align better with the neoliberal market in order to access new streams of funding. The mechanisms they outline for this include the creation of new networks connecting universities to corporations and the state that create new flows of knowledge and capital, and an increased reliance on managerial governance structures to better matter neoliberal markets. Unlike other studies that portray the growth of market logics as an external force, Slaughter and Rhoades (2004) note that actors within the university, including faculty, have contributed to this market reorganization. Slaughter (2014) states, “All of the players develop, elaborate, and articulate the narratives, discourses, and social technologies that justify and normalize these changes” (p. 13). This mirrors the ways that logics have been elaborated, yet academic capitalism theory and the institutional logics perspective have rarely been combined in research (see Mars and Lounsbury 2009 for an exception). As colleges and universities cope with the rapidly transforming political and economic environment, my research pays attention not just to how market logics are growing, but also to meanings of that growth for different stakeholders, and the ways that growth has been legitimated and resisted within the field.

Academic capitalism theory, however, offers little explanation for how resistance occurs, since the benefits to those within universities locating opportunities for new revenue is
widespread. Slaughter and Rhoades (2004) discuss ways that markets can be used for good, but offer little in way that the influence of academic capitalism has been lessened, or even avoided. They do acknowledge that some actors are able to choose not to participate, but not why. Indeed, Vallas (2016) suggests that workplace resistance is undertheorized. Marquis and Lounsbury (2007) provide one avenue for how institutional logics and the study of resistance can be brought together. They showed how communities were able to resist the expansion of national banks by founding local banks tapping an opposing, community logic. I extend this work by showing how both discourse and structure enable resistance to institutional change in higher education.

CONCLUSIONS
Online education, part of the major shift occurring in higher education, has received scant attention from organizational theorists. In fact, Scott (2013) writes that a future question he wishes to explore is, “How do we systematically study changes in the institutional logics underlying curricular and program design decisions by colleges?” (p.15). The ways in which the growth of online education has been legitimated and resisted and why faculty as the most prominent professional occupation in higher education have responded in the ways that I will present is an important question theoretically and empirically. The literature on institutional logics would suggest that cultural entrepreneurs, actors with financial resources and the goal of promoting the growth of online, and the overall strength of the market logic at the societal level have contributed to the legitimation of online learning at the field level by stakeholders who can use online education to access new sources of revenue. How this works across different types in institutions within the field is undertheorized. By exploring the way that broader field logics operate in unique organizational contexts, this research has the opportunity to expand both our understanding of the process of legitimation in a field with contested logics as well as its
mechanisms for institutional change. Finally, my dissertation will contribute empirical findings on the differentiated ways that organizational context structures decision-making regarding online degree programs in four-year non-profit colleges and universities and its consequences for stratification in higher education. Institutional theory provides the theoretical foundation for both the research questions found in chapter one and the three empirical chapters to follow.
Chapter 3: Online Education through the Lens of Professional and Market Institutional Logics

In 2013, the president of MIT wrote a feature article for *Time* headlined, “Online learning will make college cheaper. It will also make it better” (Reif 2013). As student loan debt tops a trillion dollars (Federal Reserve Bank of New York 2015) and the quality of higher education is under fire (e.g., Arum and Roksa 2011), “disruptive” change has been promoted as the solution to the fields’ problems (Christensen and Eyring 2011). Often, the change being promoted is online education, with over seventy percent of chief academic officers stating that online education is critical to their institution’s long term strategy; the highest proportion since the Babson Survey Research Group’s annual online education survey was launched in 2002 when fewer than half of the provosts surveyed at institutions of higher education (IHE) stated that online education was important to their institution’s long-term strategy (Allen and Seaman 2015). Distance learning was once seen as a marginal form of education. But now, a third of all students take at least one online course each year (Allen and Seaman 2014) and it is estimated that in 2012 over three million students were enrolled in fully online degree programs (Garrett 2012).

Only about 30% of senior administrators, however, agree with the statement that faculty at their institutions “accept the value and legitimacy of online education;” a number that has not grown in the last ten years (Allen and Seaman 2015:6). The majority of faculty (58%) report feeling more pessimistic than optimistic about the expansion of online higher education (Allen et al. 2012) while only 26% of faculty believe that online courses can have student learning outcomes equivalent to in-person courses (Jaschik and Lederman 2014). As student financial aid
policies, regulations that encourage academic research for commercial purposes, and other state policies have hastened the shift from a perspective of higher education focused on the public good to one wherein higher education is focused on revenue generation and consumerism (Slaughter and Rhoades 2004), the importance of online education to most institutions is unlikely to decrease.

While faculty are framed as consistently skeptical of the merit and quality of online education (e.g., Allen and Seaman 2012; Noble 1998; Seaman 2009), over 80% of online four-year IHEs have full-time faculty teach online as part of their regular course loads (Aldridge, Clinefelter, and Magda 2013; Clinefelter and Magda 2013). As such, what are the organizational and institutional processes that account for the increasing utilization of online education?

The goal of this chapter is to provide the foundation necessary to answer this question by first seeking a broad understanding of the ways that online education is constructed as legitimate or illegitimate within the field of higher education. I analyze the discursive constructions of online education’s legitimacy or illegitimacy over time, using *The Chronicle of Higher Education*. These constructions provide the perspectives of three main factions in the debate about the technology: faculty, college and university administrators, and external groups, such as employers, the state, and education technology companies.

This analysis will provide the contours of the debate about online learning and the consequences of technological change for the field of higher education, by addressing three research questions: (1) how has the legitimacy of online education been evaluated in *The Chronicle of Higher Education*, (2) how do key stakeholder groups frame online education, and (3) how do institutional logics inform these framing choices? The next section will describe the
research methodology for the chapter, followed by the results, and an analysis of how institutional logics frame the debate.

METHODOLOGY

In order to better understand the range of meanings given to online education, which meanings are salient to different stakeholder groups, how these meanings may have changed over time as online education has grown, and how these meanings relate to institutional logics within the field of higher education, a content analysis was performed. “Texts are by-products of ongoing conversations,” therefore the debate that has raged about the legitimacy of online learning within higher education can be analyzed by examining how that conversation has progressed in higher education media (Krippendorff 2004:75). Media coverage captures legitimacy judgments that can be measured directly (Baum and Powell 1995; Schneiberg and Clemens 2006; Vergne 2011). The media does more than reflect legitimacy however, it amplifies preexisting perceptions of legitimacy, guiding framing (Pollock and Rindova 2003).3

Furthermore, Bitektine and Haack’s (2015) theory of the legitimation process postulates that during times of institutional stability the media plays a key role in evaluating macro-level legitimacy. Conversely, when institutions are unstable, the micro-level legitimacy judgments of individual actors are much more significant, and the media follows, reporting on the legitimacy debate. Individuals or collective actors share and contest understandings about the reason for its existence, the distribution of power, and most importantly for my research, the norms and rules of legitimacy within an organizational field (Fligstein and McAdam 2012). This makes a content

3 This chapter takes the perspective that the media analyzed is socially constructed, so while there are concerns about selection bias in what in any news organization chooses to report, that reporting constitutes the reality of a field (Johnson-Cartee 2005).
analysis of arguments about online education reported in higher education media is an appropriate method to explore how key stakeholders weighs the legitimacy of online education. Thus, the discourse surrounding the growth and spread of online education was examined over the last two decades using *The Chronicle of Higher Education* (hereafter, *The Chronicle*).

*The Chronicle* was selected because it is the most prominent higher education news publication in the United States. Published since 1966, it allows for comparisons over time, and a print readership of over 315,000 for its weekly print edition and an online monthly visitor count of 1.9 million (The Chronicle of Higher Education 2015) indicates a broad scope of acceptance and extensive influence in the higher education field. In a study of portrayals of international students, *The Chronicle* was chosen for its “major role of re/producing and changing cultural discourse about higher education” (Rhee and Danowitz-Sagaria 2004). Indeed, as a for-profit mass media organization, *The Chronicle* not only reflects but also shapes the debate about online higher education, influencing the logics that guide perceptions and decision-making within the field of higher education.  

Reay and Jones (2015) advocate for the inductive coding and qualitative analysis of texts to study changing institutional logics, and Weber, Patel, and Heinze (2013) advocate for the use of content analysis to study institutional logics. Thus, the methodology and source for the topic are appropriate.

---

4 *The Chronicle of Higher Education* has one main competitor, *Inside Higher Ed*, a free online-only daily news outlet. A past competitor, *Lingua Franca*, was shuttered in 2001 (Shin 2005). *Inside Higher Ed* was founded by ex-*Chronicle* employees in 2004 to offer an alternative viewpoint on higher education. Though *The Chronicle* has been accused of being biased toward the status quo (Miller 2005), I selected it for study for three reasons. One, precisely because it aims to be the paper of record for higher education, it will try to portray a more balanced picture of online education than *Inside Higher Ed*, which is more oriented towards technology, frequently publishing reports sponsored by online and for-profit education technology companies (also, a venture capital firm that owns for-profit colleges purchased a stake in the company in 2014). Second, since *Inside Higher Ed* did not start until 2004, it misses the key early years of online education’s development. Third, *The Chronicle*’s articles are indexed and searchable in multiple academic databases.
Using the ProQuest online archive of the periodical, a relevance sampling methodology was selected and an exhaustive search was conducted for all articles about online education. For all articles between 1996 and 2013, the search terms “online education,” “online degree,” “online higher education,” “distance education,” “virtual education,” “online instruction,” “on-line instruction,” “virtual learning,” “online learning,” “distance learning,” “e-learning,” or “MOOC” resulted in the article sampling frame. Because the nomenclature for online learning has changed over time, these terms were selected to ensure that as many articles were captured that referenced the use of networked computers in the education of university students at a distance (Keegan 1996). The search resulted in 857 articles, of which 66% were news articles, 21% feature or cover stories, and 13% first person accounts which included commentaries, interviews, and letters to the editor.

Lacy, Robinson, and Riffe (1995) researched ways to obtain an accurate inference of a year’s population of weekly newspapers and found that a random sample of 27% was representative. So that my sample was representative of the population of articles that mention online education, 27% of the articles were randomly selected for each year between 1996 and 2013, resulting in a total of 231 articles (see Figure 1). Even though online instruction was mentioned in *The Chronicle* as early as 1988, the sample period was limited to 1996-2013 due to the sparsity of articles published prior to 1996, so there would not be any years without coverage after that point.

After sampling the articles, the articles were analyzed to identify and record coding units (Krippendorff 2004). The unit of analysis is defined as the evaluation of the legitimacy of online education for each article. Each article often included several arguments about online education, resulting in 955 coding units identified. Though opinion pieces like commentaries and letters
made up only 13% of the articles, 22% of the arguments were included in editorial articles. Similarly, 29% of the coding units were found in feature or cover stories, while 49% of the coded arguments were in news stories. Following the precedent of past research, each coding unit was weighted equally in the analysis (Brown and Deegan 1998; Deephouse and Carter 2005).

Figure 1. Population and Sample of Articles Mentioning Online Education in *The Chronicle of Higher Education*

Both quantitative and qualitative coding techniques were used. First, the speakers for each argument, whether supporting or opposing online education, were identified. If the person quoted, the author of an op-ed, or letter to the editor was identified as a professor, instructor, or represented a faculty professional organization (e.g., the AAUP), the argument was coded as a faculty argument. Arguments from deans, presidents, or other IHE administrators were coded as
administrators. Arguments from the five percent of speakers in this category described as both faculty and administrator were coded under the administrator category because that role often gives individuals an understanding of online education that differs from those who primarily interact with online learning through teaching. Finally, persons from accrediting bodies, education technology companies, governmental organizations, think tanks, policy organizations, foundations, higher education trade associations, and employers were coded as external stakeholders. These organizations were grouped together because they operate in the field of higher education without granting degrees and are engaged in the process of setting policy for IHE. Representatives from one of these organizations who had previously served as a professor or administrator were coded as an external stakeholder if their position outside of a university was their most recent.\textsuperscript{5} Table 1 contains the argument counts for each stakeholder category in The Chronicle by position towards online education’s legitimacy.

To measure online education’s legitimacy to key stakeholder group, each coding unit was rated as either favorable, unfavorable, or neutral (Deephouse and Carter 2005; Janis and Fadner 1965). A coding unit was defined as a phrase, sentence or set of sentences that comprise an argument for or against online learning. Table 2 gives examples of those units. A statement was coded as unfavorable towards online education’s legitimacy if it questions or challenges the values behind the technology, the outcomes of online education, equates it to something negative, or compares it unfavorably to other forms of education. Comments supporting online education were rated as such because they promoted its benefits, positive outcomes, or compared

\textsuperscript{5} I also recorded other types of speakers – students, generalized speakers (e.g., “supporters”), and The Chronicle reporters themselves. They made about 20\% of the arguments, so I excluded them from the study to focus on the three main stakeholder groups.
it favorably to other formats of higher education. Comments were coded as neutral or mixed when they stated that online education has both positives and drawbacks, that its benefits or positive outcomes depended on specific conditions, or that there were unknowns that prevented a judgment of online education’s legitimacy.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Stance</th>
<th>Faculty</th>
<th>Administrators</th>
<th>State</th>
<th>Accreditors</th>
<th>Higher Ed Professional Orgs</th>
<th>Industry</th>
<th>Education Companies</th>
<th>Foundations</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Favorable</td>
<td>76</td>
<td>152</td>
<td>59</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>48</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Unfavorable</td>
<td>137</td>
<td>49</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Neutral</td>
<td>46</td>
<td>56</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Other Stakeholders Not Included in Analysis (N=181)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Favorable</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Journalists</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Unfavorable</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Neutral</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
### Table 2. Selected Coding Examples

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Original text excerpt</th>
<th>Coding Example</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>An Israeli company that specializes in computer-programming instruction is</td>
<td>The grounds for a social-justice case against MOOCs are even stronger within the Catholic tradition.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>adapting its courses for the Internet and marketing them to American colleges. The</td>
<td>In his 1981 encyclical on work, Laborem Exercens, Pope John Paul II acknowledged that technology can aid our work, but he also warned that it can become an &quot;enemy&quot; by displacing workers and robbing work of its rightful meaning. The threat is that technology will depersonalize both the work and the worker, who is, the pope argued, &quot;the primary basis of the value of work.&quot; MOOCs undercut that value for academic workers. As the historian Jonathan Rees has argued convincingly on his blog, the endgame for MOOCs is the supplanting of local, in-person labor by technologically mediated remote labor. The human educator, who is the source of education's greatest value but also its greatest expense, is meant to become dispensable. As colleges encounter trouble balancing their books (as many small Catholic colleges are), they will be tempted to grant academic credit for completing MOOCs. If that happens, MOOC providers will profit at the cost of faculty jobs. The dignity of faculty as workers will be damaged.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>company, the Sela Group, has spun off a subsidiary it calls You-Niversity.com, which</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>will offer high-level courses in subjects such as Java scripting, Web-page design,</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>and Unix networking. &quot;We have identified a lack of practical content in many university computer courses,&quot; says Alice Salpeter, the new company's vice president for marketing. Many colleges' computer-science departments are strong on theory but weak when it comes to teaching students to deal with the hands-on issues they will encounter when they enter the job market, she says.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>will offer high-level courses in subjects such as Java scripting, Web-page design,</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>and Unix networking. &quot;We have identified a lack of practical content in many university computer courses,&quot; says Alice Salpeter, the new company's vice president for marketing. Many colleges' computer-science departments are strong on theory but weak when it comes to teaching students to deal with the hands-on issues they will encounter when they enter the job market, she says.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Year: 2000 (Era 1)</td>
<td>Year: 2000 (Era 1)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Stakeholder: External Organization</td>
<td>Stakeholder: Faculty</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Position coding: Favorable</td>
<td>Theme coding: Future impact</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Theme coding: Quality</td>
<td>Stakeholder: Faculty</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Year: 2013 (Era 3)</td>
<td>Year: 2013 (Era 3)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Original text excerpt</td>
<td>Original text excerpt</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>She doesn't know of any data showing that disabled students prefer distance education. But she says it is a good idea for Congress to help colleges experiment with the idea. &quot;I see where it makes a lot of sense for students with disabilities to take distance learning, but we don't know if that's where they're going,&quot; Ms. Humbert said.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Why this disconnect between the rhetoric of MOOCs and open-access policies? Bryan Alexander, a senior fellow at the National Institute for Technology in Liberal Education, explores some potential explanations, including MOOCs' relative novelty and their top-tier-university cachet. But the obvious answer is, as it nearly always is, money. For many institutions, MOOCs are viewed as a potential revenue stream, higher education's business model of the future. Of course, here in the present, MOOCs require investing expensive technological and labor resources to create experiments of questionable educational value to be given away. I'm no economist, but that plan seems to violate some basic business principles.

Sean Gallagher, a senior analyst for Eduventures who was one of the authors of the report, said the growth indicates that online education is gaining wide public acceptance. "It's gone from something that's experimental to not just mainstream, but something we think is driving the growth of higher education," Mr. Gallagher said.
In addition to the positions that the stakeholders take towards online education, I qualitatively analyzed how these arguments were framed (Goffman 1974; Snow and Benford 1988), the way that these statements define the meanings of online education and connect them to different goals and ideologies within higher education. Table 2 illustrates the inductively-coded themes of the statements that were categorized into five major themes: (1) the effect that online education would have on the future of higher education, (2) the quality of online learning, (3) the role of online learning in the accessibility of higher education, (4) the economics of providing online education, and (5) statements explicitly about its legitimacy.

Drawing on Bitektine and Haack’s (2015) theory of the legitimacy process, individual actors confer legitimacy based on two judgments: approval of a practice or an action as desirable and appropriate, as well as a ‘validity belief,’ a belief about field-level generalized approval (Suchman 1995). *The Chronicle* aggregates and validates these individual and collective values around the appropriateness and approval of beliefs about the way that the field of higher education should change and be governed, what is an appropriate level of quality for students and institutions, how accessible higher education should be and in what way, and the role of the market in higher education, all contributing to judgments of whether online learning should be a legitimate form of higher education or not.

To understand how these values and beliefs may have changed over time, affecting how stakeholder groups assess online education’s legitimacy, I recorded the year each article was published and divided them into three equal time periods for analysis: 1996-2001, 2002-2007, and 2008-2013. As a robustness check, I also divided the time periods so that there would be an equal number of arguments in each: 1996-2001, 2002-2009, and 2010-2013. While this captured the historical events in each time period better because MOOCs were in their own separate category, this division did not alter the results significantly.
time and roughly correspond to three different eras in online education. In the first era, 1996-2001, online education experienced its first large period of growth, interrupted by the dotcom bust in 2001. Era 2, 2002-2007, corresponds to a time period of resumed growth, culminating in acceptance by the federal government for financial aid purposes in 2006. Era 3, 2008-2013, represents the point where degree-granting online education is widespread, and MOOCs capture the public attention from 2010 onwards.

For the purposes of this paper, the largest three categories – the future of higher education, quality, and accessibility were selected for analysis because combined, these themes made up 82% of the arguments. The coded and analyzed arguments from *The Chronicle* are used as data in the following section.

**FINDINGS**

*How Has the Legitimacy of Online Education Been Evaluated in The Chronicle?*

Table 3. All coded arguments by position on the legitimacy of online education and time period

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Favorable</td>
<td>148 (50%)</td>
<td>137 (54%)</td>
<td>182 (45%)</td>
<td>467 (49%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Unfavorable</td>
<td>94 (32%)</td>
<td>78 (31%)</td>
<td>135 (33%)</td>
<td>307 (32%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Neutral/Mixed</td>
<td>52 (18%)</td>
<td>39 (15%)</td>
<td>90 (22%)</td>
<td>181 (19%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td>294 (31%)</td>
<td>254 (27%)</td>
<td>407 (43%)</td>
<td>955 (100%)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 3 shows that between 1996 and 2013, *The Chronicle of Higher Education* presented a fairly balanced, but slightly more positive than negative portrait of online education. Studies of media bias have used the Janis and Fadner (1943/1965) coefficient of imbalance to evaluate bias. The coefficient of imbalance is one way to measure “the relative proportion of favorable to unfavorable articles while controlling for the overall volume of articles” (Deephouse 2000:1102). In addition to articles, the coefficient can also be used for portions of articles.
divided into recording units, which is what Deephouse (2000) uses as the unit of analysis. He codes mentions of banks in newspaper articles as favorable or unfavorable and then uses the coefficient to measure organizational legitimacy in the media. This suggests it is appropriate for this study since I hope to establish a measure of online education’s legitimacy in the media. The equation is as follows:

\[ C = \begin{cases} \frac{(f^2 - fu)}{(total)^2} & \text{if } f > u; \\ 0 & \text{if } f = u; \\ \frac{(fu - u^2)}{(total)^2} & \text{if } f < u; \end{cases} \]

A coefficient of 1 means that all of the coding units were positive, 0 is balanced, and -1 indicates unfavorable coverage of the subject. In this case, the coefficient of imbalance equals .08 for the overall time period, .09 in 1996-2001, .13 in 2002-2007, and .06 in 2008-2013. This shows that the coverage is only slightly balanced towards supporters of online education for each of the time periods. A chi-square test of independence was performed to examine the relationship between time period and the favorability of online learning. The relationship between these variables was not significant, \( \chi^2 (4, N=955)=6.845, p>.05 \), indicating that The Chronicle has not significantly changed the balance of favorable to unfavorable arguments for online education over the 18 year time period.

Each stakeholder group, however, is comprised of a different makeup of online education’s supporters and detractors. As shown in Table 4, faculty have a very different

---

7 In comparison, Deephouse’s (2000) study of Minneapolis-St. Paul banks found a mean coefficient of favorableness of .22, which indicates that in local newspapers, local banks were viewed more favorably on the whole than unfavorably, and more favorably than online education in The Chronicle.
perspective on the legitimacy of online education when compared to administrators and external
groups; as only about 30% of faculty arguments present a favorable view of online education,
compared to about 60% of arguments from administrators and external groups. The difference
between faculty ($M=1.78, SD=.88$) and administrator ($M=2.37, SD=.82$), and faculty and external
group ($M=2.38, SD=.82$) arguments about online education is statistically significant using a $t$-
test for the equality of means, $t(514)=7.92$, $p<.001$ and $t(515)=8.06$, $p<.001$ respectively. Across
the three time periods, it is difficult to pinpoint any clear trends regarding changes over time
because there are no significant differences between each of the time periods for any of the
individual stakeholder groups. Numerically, it appears that faculty arguments have gotten more
negative over time, and that arguments about online education from external groups have
become more nuanced over the past 18 years, meaning that there are more arguments that are
mixed, offering a conditional statement about online learning. For the purposes of this chapter,
however, I will analyze the arguments for the time period between 1996 and 2013 as one bloc.

While *The Chronicle* allows a wide variety of stakeholders within the field of higher
education to participate in the debate about online learning, the percentages above show that no
consensus exists among each stakeholder group. Each represents a heterogeneous mix of
individuals in different occupations and at different institutions. For arguments in reference to a
specific school, or made by an actor identified in the article by that institution, 57% come from
highly ranked institutions, including those that make up the top 100 nationally ranked
universities and liberal arts colleges in the U.S. News and World Report rankings.
To compare how faculty and administrators from different types of institutions support or oppose online education, Table 5 shows the percentages for each category, which supports the assertion that elite institutions are most represented in arguments about online education in *The Chronicle*, with the exception of favorable assessments of the legitimacy of online from faculty, which are most likely to come from faculty at regional colleges and universities and national universities ranked lower than 100. A chi-square test for independence shows that there is a statistically significant relationship between the type of institution and a position on the legitimacy of online education for both faculty and administrators at the $p \leq 0.05$ level.

Though online education grew dramatically between 1996 and 2013, the balance of favorable to unfavorable positions did not meaningfully change, indicating that *The Chronicle* continues to present the legitimacy of online learning as a debate within the field of higher education.\(^8\) Past studies most often measure legitimation by alternately connecting the presence

---

\(^8\) The media has a stake in issues appearing controversial in order to attract more readers, so while I do provide a critique of *The Chronicle*'s presentation of the debate on legitimacy in my analysis, I do think that there is an
or absence of media coverage with greater legitimacy (Deephouse and Suchman 2008). I argue, however, that what matters ultimately is not the amount of press coverage, but how key stakeholder groups argue for and against the legitimacy of online education, and what the support or opposition for different groups means for collective legitimacy at the macro level. The next section will discuss how key stakeholder groups are differentiated not only by their position towards online education, but the types of arguments they make about it.

Table 5. Institution Types Associated with Faculty and Administrator Arguments by Position

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Institution Type</th>
<th>Faculty</th>
<th>Administrator</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Favorable</td>
<td>Unfavorable</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Highly Ranked*</td>
<td>23 (31.9%)</td>
<td>49 (48%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Liberal Arts Colleges</td>
<td>11 (15.3%)</td>
<td>9 (8.8%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Regional**</td>
<td>25 (34.7%)</td>
<td>31 (30.4%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Not Ranked</td>
<td>3 (4.2%)</td>
<td>9 (8.8%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Community College/Technical/Tribal College</td>
<td>4 (5.6%)</td>
<td>2 (2%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Unaccredited/Closed</td>
<td>6 (8.3%)</td>
<td>2 (2%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>72 (100%)</td>
<td>102 (100%)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Highly ranked institutions are defined as the top 100 national universities in the 2016 *U.S. News and World Report* ranking.

**Regional universities are defined as institutions ranked as regional in the 2016 *U.S. News and World Report* ranking as well as national universities ranked lower than 100.
How Do Stakeholder Groups Frame Online Education?

**Faculty**

More often than any other stakeholder group, faculty members argue that online education is illegitimate in *The Chronicle*, reflecting existing survey findings. Just over half (53%) of faculty arguments are negative, mostly questioning technology’s role in the transformation of higher education and the erosion of faculty professional autonomy. Perceptions of online learning’s low quality is another source of its illegitimacy accounting for just over a third (35%) of faculty’s statements about online education in the periodical. Some 29% of faculty’s arguments about the quality of online are favorable, the majority from lower status institutions.

The one dimension of online education that is judged positively in a majority of faculty arguments across all three time periods is online learning’s contribution to the accessibility of higher education. Nonetheless, the proportion of negative faculty arguments about online education was stable over the entire time period. Overall, faculty make up a separate discourse community, distinguished from other stakeholder groups, in the ways that they frame online education’s illegitimacy by focusing on arguments related to quality instead of access and the way that the future impact of online education is framed as a threat to faculty governance instead of enhancing an educational product through technology.

Faculty concerns about the future impact of online learning on the field of higher education were the most common theme in articles about online education in *The Chronicle*. In arguments taking an opposing stance, faculty contend that the typical style of decision making for the development of online programs contributes to an erosion of shared governance in the academy. In an example of an early online initiative, Cornell University launched e-Cornell, a
for-profit spin-off in 2000. Despite a committee of administrators and faculty recommending that a nonprofit corporation should manage Cornell’s online offerings, the Board of Trustees approved a for-profit subsidiary instead. The article goes on to say,

*Professors and administrators agree, however, that what some faculty members are most uncomfortable with is the speed at which the e-Cornell project is moving—that, and whether traditional faculty-governance procedures can be adapted to accommodate such a rapid schedule for getting the project up and running.* (Carr 2000)

Rather than focusing on the pedagogy or the philosophy of online learning, Cornell faculty were concerned about what this online endeavor meant for faculty participation in the decision-making process.

Though reports regarding the decline of faculty governance have persisted for at least the last 30 years (e.g., Baldridge 1982), to the faculty members quoted in *The Chronicle*, online education represented a tool for administrators to circumvent the checks and balances that shared governance offers and contributes to the corporatization of the university (Slaughter and Rhoades 2004). As education becomes more focused on revenue generation, “unbundling” the faculty role is seen as a way to reduce labor costs and gain power over the professoriate. Gehrke and Kezar (2015) outline three dimensions of unbundling in higher education, including (1) the separation of teaching, advising, and assessment to different professions within the university; (2) the division of teaching, research, and service to different faculty roles; and heightened by the introduction of technology into instruction, (3) the partitioning of instructional responsibilities to separate experts in course design and course content.

Faculty discourse in *The Chronicle* connected unbundling via the introduction of online education to faculty deskilling. Even in a letter to the editor that gives a positive appraisal of online learning overall, the author, a professor at the now-closed Dana College in Blair, Nebraska notes,
IT-support structures often provide an expert to design course materials, reducing the role of the professor to technology consumer and subject-matter expert. (Stensaas in Anon 2004)

Faculty discourse demonstrated a belief that the growth of online education would contribute to an increase in professors as managed professionals (Rhoades 1998).

Table 6. Themes of Faculty Arguments and Position on Online Education by Time Period

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Accessibility</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Negative</td>
<td>12.8% (12)</td>
<td>13% (6)</td>
<td>5% (6)</td>
<td>9.3% (24)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Neutral</td>
<td>0% (0)</td>
<td>16.7% (1)</td>
<td>33.3% (2)</td>
<td>12.5% (3)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Positive</td>
<td>75% (3)</td>
<td>83.3% (5)</td>
<td>50% (3)</td>
<td>70.8% (17)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Effect on Higher Ed</strong></td>
<td>45.7% (43)</td>
<td>37% (17)</td>
<td>48.7% (58)</td>
<td>45.6% (118)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Negative</td>
<td>62.8% (27)</td>
<td>58.8% (10)</td>
<td>60.3% (35)</td>
<td>61% (72)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Neutral</td>
<td>9.3% (4)</td>
<td>17.7% (3)</td>
<td>20.7% (12)</td>
<td>16.1% (19)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Positive</td>
<td>27.9% (12)</td>
<td>23.5% (4)</td>
<td>19% (11)</td>
<td>22.9% (27)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Efficiency</strong></td>
<td>7.5% (7)</td>
<td>2.2% (1)</td>
<td>5.9% (7)</td>
<td>5.8% (15)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Negative</td>
<td>57.1% (4)</td>
<td>100% (1)</td>
<td>42.9% (3)</td>
<td>53.3% (8)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Neutral</td>
<td>14.3% (1)</td>
<td>0% (0)</td>
<td>28.6% (2)</td>
<td>20% (3)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Positive</td>
<td>28.6% (2)</td>
<td>0% (0)</td>
<td>28.6% (2)</td>
<td>26.7% (4)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Legitimacy</strong></td>
<td>0% (0)</td>
<td>4.4% (2)</td>
<td>5% (6)</td>
<td>3.1% (8)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Negative</td>
<td>0% (0)</td>
<td>100% (2)</td>
<td>66.7% (4)</td>
<td>75% (6)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Neutral</td>
<td>0% (0)</td>
<td>0% (0)</td>
<td>16.7% (1)</td>
<td>12.5% (1)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Positive</td>
<td>0% (0)</td>
<td>0% (0)</td>
<td>16.7% (1)</td>
<td>12.5% (1)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Quality</strong></td>
<td>34% (32)</td>
<td>43.5% (20)</td>
<td>35.3% (42)</td>
<td>36.3% (94)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Negative</td>
<td>50% (16)</td>
<td>45% (9)</td>
<td>54.8% (23)</td>
<td>51.1% (48)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Neutral</td>
<td>18.8% (6)</td>
<td>10% (2)</td>
<td>26.2% (11)</td>
<td>20.2% (19)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Positive</td>
<td>31.3% (10)</td>
<td>45% (9)</td>
<td>19.1% (8)</td>
<td>28.7% (27)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Grand Total</strong></td>
<td>100% (94)</td>
<td>100% (46)</td>
<td>100% (119)</td>
<td>100% (259)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

On the other hand, other faculty arguments are less concerned about the faculty role when online education is introduced. Slightly more than one in five faculty arguments about online
education’s future impact were in support of bringing technology into education. These arguments often revolved around the chance to rethink education -- rather than making incremental improvements, whole courses could be restructured or even the idea of a course as a necessary construct could be rethought. As one professor at Bridgewater State University writes,

> Within our lifetimes, technology has fundamentally changed the way we get the news, make purchases, and communicate with others. The Internet provides a platform for learning about and interacting with the world. It should be no surprise that students line up for courses that make the best use of technologies that are so integral to their lives. It's not just the economy. It's not just the convenience. It's the integration of technology within society that's driving the development of online courses. (Brooks 2009)

Though these comments did not draw parallels to the ways that professional occupations changed in other industries that have been reshaped by changes in technology, these arguments show an awareness that the field of higher education is subject to the same forces as other industries.

For many of the faculty members expressing their voice in *The Chronicle*, though the effect of online education on their profession and the institution of higher education is their primary concern, the quality of online education was also a significant concern. While the majority of faculty arguments about quality (51%) were negative, 29% were positive; with each perspective using different facets of academic quality to support their claim.

According to faculty opponents, online learning’s quality should be judged on the quality of its teachers and students and a substandard learning process that reduces faculty-student interaction. To proponents, the quality of online learning could be demonstrated by its outcomes, that research has indicated no significant difference in learning in distance courses compared to those in a classroom, and that online education’s learning process enhances student interaction with the learning materials through technology. Not surprisingly, since control of the curriculum is part of the faculty’s professional jurisdiction (Abbott 1988), arguments about the quality of
online courses were more common for faculty than administrators or external organizations. Just over a third (36%) of faculty arguments were for or against the quality of online learning, compared to 21% of administrator arguments and 24% of arguments from external organizations. Arguments about the quality of online education are inextricably linked to its legitimacy for faculty.

Faculty members’ critiques of the quality of online education in *The Chronicle of Higher Education* clustered around three broad themes: (1) that the conditions for the development of online education at most institutions are not conducive to academic quality, (2) that students are missing something essential in an online class, and (3) that there is less personal contact in an online class than a traditional classroom-based class. For instance, two professors stress the importance of inputs to higher education for quality when they write:

*Three major features have characterized higher education in this country, have insured its quality, and have established its pre-eminent position in the world. Those features are what distinguishes higher education from other postsecondary endeavors, such as corporate training centers, proprietary trade schools, and continuing adult-education courses that do not lead to a degree. The three defining features are: a guarantee of academic freedom; the existence of a functioning system of collegial governance; and the presence of a group of scholars and students engaged not only in teaching and learning, but also in advancing the frontiers of knowledge.* (Perley and Tanguay 1999)

In line with other faculty stakeholders in the sample, online courses that were not developed under these ideal circumstances are likely to suffer from poor pedagogical design and unlikely to encourage students’ critical thinking. According to their arguments, the environment described above creates something unmeasurable that is lacking in an online class. Faculty write that online learning is missing “a sense of shared humanity to students and instructors” (Bunge 2011), that “a professor working online will never be able to make any pedagogical magic” (Edmunson 2012 quoted in Marovich 2012), and that MOOCs specifically fail to “reassert the belief that education is a moral enterprise that develops human dignity and promotes social justice”
The quotes above argue that quality education is transformational, not transactional. Finally, an example of the importance of personal contact for quality follows in this professor’s letter to the editor in response to an article about teaching online:

> When I was a lad, many years ago, one of my first tasks was to introduce five-day-old calves to a galvanized bucket with a big rubber nipple (this was long before the age of plastics). They were quick learners and soon accepted me and the galvanized bucket as their "udder mudder." Now, whenever I read about the virtual university -- with students hooked up to a computer, a television monitor, the Internet, etc. -- I think of those beautiful Holstein calves hooked up to that galvanized bucket. As far as I know, it still takes four years to get from age 18 to age 22 -- a time in which educators ... need to be supportive, caring, and nurturing. The virtual university may be short in all three areas. (Kuhlman 2002)

This perspective on quality is supported by recent research that indicates if college graduates had a professor that cared about them as a person and made them excited about learning, and the graduate had a mentor, they were more likely to have positive work and life outcomes (Gallup 2014).

On the other hand, over a quarter of the faculty arguments about quality stated that there is nothing inherent in the online learning format that would prevent this conception of quality from extending to classes taught online. For example, one community college psychology professor who embraced online education was quoted in an article that stated,

> The personal interaction and cultivation that he can provide in the classroom aren't much different from what happens in a good online course, Mr. Pelz says. “What makes a heart-and-soul professor is the passion they bring to the job. That passion extends online or in the classroom.” (Arnone 2002)

Some faculty argued that online courses are actually more interactive than a traditional classroom because rather than hiding in the back of the classroom, students had to engage through discussion board posts and the proof was in the assessments that demonstrated student learning equal to that of face-to-face courses. Particularly as technology becomes more common throughout all aspects of life, faculty that evaluated online learning as legitimate felt that
pedagogical innovations stemming from the process of reimagining programs for online delivery
could not just meet the quality of traditional education but improve it. Faculty supporters of
online learning often called upon their own experiences teaching online when quoted in The
Chronicle, suggesting that their willingness to teach online relates to their positive opinion of the
format.

Though faculty did not discuss the relationship between online education and access to
higher education as frequently as other stakeholder groups regarding the arguments in this
category, 71% of faculty statements about accessibility were in favor of the way it creates access
to higher education. Furthermore, the theme of those arguments was different than the way that
other groups talked about access, as will be shown in the sections to follow. For instance,
virtually none of the faculty quotes mentions that a benefit of online education is the ability of
universities to create access for new markets of prospective students; one of the most common
arguments made by administrators and external organizations. Faculty members were much more
concerned about the benefits of access to education through online learning accruing to
individual students, not the university as a whole. They discussed how online learning made
higher education more welcoming to shy students or those with different learning styles:

"Face-to-face is not the gold standard that it's held up to be," says Chris Dede, professor
of learning technologies at Harvard University's Graduate School of Education. "Many
people find their voice in distance media in a way that they don't in face-to-face
sessions," he says. A shy student, for instance, might never participate in a classroom
environment, but the student might frequently speak up in online forums where students
have more time to think before they comment. (Young 2002)

The emphasis in arguments like this is on how to make the experience of learning better for the
students. Even when faculty discuss the benefits of online education for rural students or those in
developing nations, the emphasis is on how these students benefit from this mode of education,
rather than how the institution benefits from increased enrollments.
For faculty, the accessibility of higher education can be facilitated through online learning but they argued that it depends on the characteristics of the student, not some universally beneficial characteristic of technology. One chemistry professor who developed an online chemistry course at a community college stated,

*If the students are highly motivated and focused, I think distance education does wonders, but I also think that it is difficult for the average student to get as much out of it on a conceptual level as students who have direct access to other students and professors.* (Zikopoulos in Anon 2000)

Fully online courses do make education accessible for many types of students who would not otherwise be able to commute to a campus or commit to being in a classroom one or more times a week, but the faculty arguments about online learning’s accessibility demonstrate a realism in their approach to this benefit to online education because of the experience that comes with a career facing the demands of the real or virtual classroom. The small minority of faculty arguments that questioned online education’s ability to create access to higher education doubt if its reach is as far as supporters claim.

Examining any changes in the focus of faculty arguments about the future of higher education, quality, and accessibility over time, the faculty perspective represented in *The Chronicle* demonstrates a consistent concern for the future of their professional roles and the quality of online education. Between 1996 and 2001, when online learning initiatives were in their infancy, faculty overall were critical of online learning’s potential role in the transformation of higher education and critical of the quality of the courses developed using the technology of the time. In the next time period (2002-2007), the overall number of faculty arguments dropped.9

---

9 One can only speculate why this might be. For instance, *The Chronicle* may have deliberately sought out more comments from external stakeholders. Or, if the majority of faculty that were unaffected by online learning saw the era’s growth in online enrollments and revenue, and decided not to speak out.
Despite less representation in the debate, faculty were still skeptical about the future of higher education, but now an equal number of faculty were quoted supporting the quality of online courses as the number of faculty arguments that spoke out against the quality of online learning. This echoes research that indicates that faculty who have taught online are more accepting of it (Jaschik and Lederman 2014). By 2008-2013, the proportion of faculty arguments returned to the 1996-2001 level, and they were even more convinced of the illegitimacy of online education as a reaction to the new form of online learning, MOOCs. Despite that faculty have more negative arguments about online education than any other group, and the proportion of their negative arguments grew over time, a full 47% of the overall faculty arguments fully support or concede that online learning may be right for certain students or institutions. This indicates that though faculty arguments address different themes than the other stakeholder groups, there are points of commonality among them. Nonetheless, rooted in the themes that faculty arguments addressed is a concern with the material – the material ways that their profession will be impacted both in relation to the university’s power structure as well as the physical act of teaching, and the concrete benefits or losses to students online.

*College and university administrators*

Compared to faculty, administrator arguments in *The Chronicle* portray online education as legitimate, though leaders from certain types of institutions are not without reservations about the technology. Almost 60% of arguments about online learning from college and university administrators were positive. Administrators focused optimism on the promise of online learning to alleviate higher education’s problems of cost and access, being most divided about the quality of online education. During the third time period (2008-2013), the growth of online education in
the form of MOOCs stirred debate about its future impact on higher education, and administrators were more likely than in other periods to comment on its negative possibilities for the future of higher education. As this section will show, this reliance on arguments about accessibility shapes the administrator rationale for online learning across the argument themes.

Just as the faculty quoted in *The Chronicle* are not a monolithic group, the variety of college and university administrators who voiced their opinions about online education are mixed about the role of online learning in the transformation of higher education. Half of the arguments are positive about the future impact of online education, and the rest of the arguments from administrators are neutral or negative. For example, despite the dot-com bust in 2001 that tanked the early online experiments of many elite institutions (see Walsh 2011), the perspectives presented by administrators were generally optimistic. This is exemplified by a quote from a former chancellor of the University of Maryland system:

*Though we are still only in its early stages, the e-learning revolution is surely coming.*

(Langenberg in “Slow Progress…” 2004)

To online learning’s supporters, its early failures at prestigious universities and growth at more non-traditional institutions showed that online learning would benefit those institutions designed around a concern for students.

This attitude was particularly prevalent in the more mixed or neutral comments about online learning the future of higher education from administrators. Some cautioned that institutions should be going online for the “right” reasons, such as when the president of Pennsylvania State University and the CEO of UMassOnline were quoted as saying,

*Online learning programs stray from the traditional values and identity of their founding universities at their own peril.* (Carlson and Carnevale 2001)
One of the reasons why online education was able to take off at public universities, especially land grant institutions like Penn State and UMass, was that it is part of serving the general good of the state. At public institutions like these, access for working students or those in geographically remote places is part of their core mission (Newfield 2008; Priest and St. John 2006). Thus, for many of the administrators cited in The Chronicle, the development of online education programs aligned with a pre-existing mission related to access to higher education promoted by the organization. Online learning’s detractors among college and university administrators shared many of the same concerns as faculty, including that it is driven by a profit motive, and increases the corporatization of the university. These viewpoints, however, were outnumbered by those who could see the potential for cost-savings and revenue generation thought online education, while also transforming pedagogy in higher education.

Administrators made fewer arguments about online education’s quality than about its prospects for shaping the future of higher education. In addition, the way that quality was framed differed between its supporters and opponents. Arguments from supportive administrators made up 45% of those in the theme, and online education’s quality was often framed in terms of its value. Some 40% of administrator arguments disputed that online education could be high quality, framing quality in terms of contact with faculty and hands-on learning. Arguments from administrators at institutions that have been slow to adopt online education, such as liberal arts colleges and universities, were much more likely to highlight that online education is missing something essential for students. Despite the existence of fully online programs for over 20 years, very little empirical evidence is presented by college and university administrators in The Chronicle that would give readers the opportunity to evaluate the quality of their programs.
Favorable arguments about quality thus relied on other characteristics in their promotion of online education.

Table 7. Themes of Administrator Arguments and Position on Online Education by Time Period

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Accessibility</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Negative</td>
<td>16% (4)</td>
<td>27.3% (3)</td>
<td>6% (2)</td>
<td>14.8% (9)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Neutral</td>
<td>16% (4)</td>
<td>9.1% (1)</td>
<td>0% (0)</td>
<td>8.2% (5)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Positive</td>
<td>68% (17)</td>
<td>63.6% (7)</td>
<td>92% (23)</td>
<td>77.1% (47)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Effect on Higher Ed</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Negative</td>
<td>14.3% (4)</td>
<td>15.4% (2)</td>
<td>30.2% (13)</td>
<td>22.6% (19)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Neutral</td>
<td>42.9% (12)</td>
<td>15.3% (2)</td>
<td>20.9% (9)</td>
<td>27.4% (23)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Positive</td>
<td>42.8% (12)</td>
<td>69.2% (9)</td>
<td>48.8% (21)</td>
<td>50% (42)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Efficiency</strong></td>
<td>12.4% (10)</td>
<td>9.5% (6)</td>
<td>14.4% (16)</td>
<td>12.6% (32)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Negative</td>
<td>0% (0)</td>
<td>50% (3)</td>
<td>12.5% (2)</td>
<td>15.6% (5)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Neutral</td>
<td>40% (4)</td>
<td>0% (0)</td>
<td>0% (0)</td>
<td>12.5% (4)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Positive</td>
<td>60% (6)</td>
<td>50% (3)</td>
<td>87.5% (14)</td>
<td>71.9% (23)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Legitimacy</strong></td>
<td>6.2% (5)</td>
<td>20.6% (13)</td>
<td>8.1% (9)</td>
<td>10.6% (27)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Negative</td>
<td>0% (0)</td>
<td>7.7% (1)</td>
<td>0% (0)</td>
<td>3.7% (1)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Neutral</td>
<td>40% (2)</td>
<td>38.5% (5)</td>
<td>33.3% (3)</td>
<td>37% (10)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Positive</td>
<td>60% (3)</td>
<td>53.9% (7)</td>
<td>66.7% (6)</td>
<td>59.3% (16)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Quality</strong></td>
<td>16.1% (13)</td>
<td>31.8% (20)</td>
<td>16.2% (18)</td>
<td>20% (51)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Negative</td>
<td>23.1% (3)</td>
<td>45% (9)</td>
<td>44.4% (8)</td>
<td>39.2% (20)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Neutral</td>
<td>15.4% (2)</td>
<td>5% (1)</td>
<td>27.8% (5)</td>
<td>15.7% (8)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Positive</td>
<td>61.5% (8)</td>
<td>50% (10)</td>
<td>27.8% (5)</td>
<td>45.1% (23)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Grand Total</strong></td>
<td>100% (81)</td>
<td>100% (63)</td>
<td>100% (111)</td>
<td>100% (255)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Often tasked with managing costs, some administrators supported online learning based on idea that the consolidation of courses via online education would allow the highest quality courses to rise to the top. An article about an online collaboration between three top business schools states:

*Berkeley’s business dean, Laura D’Andrea Tyson, said the three business schools are taking advantage of technological advances that allow them to combine their strengths*
and offer students more choices. “These joint courses may be a window into the future of management education, a future in which schools regularly team up or co-brand to offer their best courses to students and executives who are located at multiple sites around the world and who need and want such training now,” she said. (Mangan 2000).

It is presumed to be more efficient and effective to offer a few courses to students worldwide, rather than having many different courses offered on local campuses. In these arguments, the legitimacy of online education is tied to quality relative to the cost savings obtained by consolidating the courses and offering them online.

Evaluations of quality also depended on the model of the online program. While there is a long history of research supporting equal student learning outcomes for distance learning programs and on campus programs (Means et al. 2010), the new model of online learning, MOOCs, attracted vocal critics among some college and university administrators within the pages of The Chronicle. In this third era, 2008-2013, the vast majority of unfavorable arguments about online education were actually about MOOCs, not credit-bearing courses or programs. For example, the president of Franklin and Marshall College, a small liberal arts college, writes about MOOCs:

[I]n terms of holistic development, students on the cusp of adulthood grow far more from being engaged and valued by a professor they respect than from being lectured to as an anonymous mass and then graded by digital assessment tools. This is obvious, but we’ve forgotten it. And the greatest teachers can serve for decades as responsive mentors and touchstones of integrity—but only if students first get to know them authentically, face to face and mind to mind. (Porterfield 2013)

By not making a distinction between MOOCs and online programs primarily populated by adult students, these arguments show that the supporters of online education have unresolved issues related to quality that affect judgments of its legitimacy that are not suppressed by a focus on accessibility.
Unlike quality, administrators are much more unified about the benefit of online education for the accessibility of higher education. Over three quarters (77%) of the statements from college and university administrators are about how online education creates increased access to higher education. They argue that online learning programs not only open up new markets for institutions, but serve the greater good. For example, early in the development of online learning programs, alumni were targeted as a potential new student base. Two administrators wrote,

> At Cornell, where we work, the dean of the faculty recently recommended “serving the lifelong educational needs of our alumni as a primary audience” in a series of distance-learning initiatives designed to generate “a major new revenue stream,” to “slow tuition growth,” and “supplement faculty salaries.” (Altschuler and Janis 2000)

Spread out across the country, alumni might not be able to move back to Ithaca for additional courses, but Cornell’s administrators thought they would be a good target for online programs. The administrator arguments for online’s accessibility, however, are not just framed as a way to bring in more revenue, but a way to bring in revenue while benefiting traditional students and faculty.

Beyond the benefits for the institution from increasing access through online education, administrators claim societal benefits. The argument is tightly linked to equality and social justice. In an article about a new proposal for online learning within the University of California system, the Dean of UC Berkeley’s law school is described as follows:

> Mr. Edley believes demand for degrees would be “basically unlimited.” In a wide-ranging speech at Berkeley last month, Mr. Edley, who is also a top adviser to Mr. Yudof [the president of the UC system], described how thousands of new students would bring new money to the system and support the hiring of faculty members. In the long term, he said, online degrees could accomplish something bigger: the democratization of access to elite education. “In a way it’s kind of radical—it’s kind of destabilizing the mechanisms by which we produce the elite in our society,” he told a packed room of staff and faculty members. “If suddenly you’re letting a lot of people get access to elite credentials, it’s going to be interesting.” (Keller and Parry 2010)
Again, new markets are a benefit, revenue is another benefit, but the democratization of education is the result. Online education, then, is seen as a win-win – it achieves good and opens up new markets at the same time. The role of online education in promoting equality is a powerful message for administrators looking to legitimize online learning:

*WGU Texas is laser-focused on a student population that is typically underserved. We see ourselves as a good fit for adult learners who need an affordable, quality, and flexible learning model, particularly working students who want to attend full time. We are especially focused on the more than three million Texans who have some college and no credential—students like Jason Franklin, a striving adult learner in a high-demand IT field who had gone as far as he could in his career without a degree. He earned a bachelor’s and a master’s degree through Western Governors, and is now working on a master’s degree from WGU Texas. We’d like to help these students reach their goals and get on a solid career and lifelong-learning path.* (Milliron 2012)

Because equality and democracy are societal values, this justification makes it difficult to argue against the benefits of serving students who wouldn’t otherwise have the opportunity to participate in higher education.

The discourse of college and university administrators portrays a group that is mostly convinced of the legitimacy of online education on the basis of a positive effect on the future of higher education due to increased access and revenue generation. During the first time period (1996-2001), the most reliable argument for online learning was accessibility. The middle time period (2002-2007) was characterized by a great divide in perspectives on the quality of online education. That quality was primarily defined as fitting the purpose of working adults, while those challenging the legitimacy of online education claimed that it could never meet the level of excellence achieved by on campus courses.

With the advent of MOOCs in the third time period (2008-2013), most administrators quoted in *The Chronicle* relied on arguments of accessibility and the need for a transformation of higher education to support online learning with an increasingly untenable status quo, without
tackling the thorny issue of quality online. Though a minority of administrators spoke out against online learning, particularly those from liberal arts institutions, the belief in the legitimacy of online education from the majority of higher education administrators was matched only by the external stakeholder groups represented in the periodical.

**External stakeholders**

A belief in the power of technology to improve education by reducing costs and increasing efficiency weaves together many of the arguments from external stakeholders. This group of state legislatures and higher education boards, regional and national accrediting bodies, professional organizations, think tanks, policy making organizations, and foundations all play a role in creating, influencing, or enforcing higher education policy, and 60% of their arguments about online education were favorable. Similar to administrators, external stakeholders spoke of the benefits regarding online education for access to higher education and the way that online learning will have a positive impact on the future of higher education as their primary arguments. Unfavorable assessments of online education’s legitimacy made up only 21% of the statements made by external organizations. Over half (53%) of the illegitimacy claims from external stakeholders focused on quality, specifically the role of online learning in fraud and diploma mills. External stakeholders grew slightly less positive over each time period, with 64% of the arguments in favor of online learning’s legitimacy in 1996-2001, dropping to 57% in 2008-2013. Nonetheless, the statements from external stakeholders represent a strong belief that technology will transform higher education for the better.

The accessibility of online education made up almost a quarter of all arguments from external stakeholders. The concept that technology gives everyone a chance to attend college was
compelling to external groups; 100% of the arguments about accessibility were positive in the first era of online education leading up to the dot-com boom in 2001. The number of positive arguments somewhat declines over the subsequent eras to 85%, but accessibility is an important cause for external organizations over the length of the study. External stakeholders framed online education as a way to fuel the economy, since students would not have to drop out of the labor force to obtain education full-time, necessary in a knowledge economy. One analyst stated,

*Online programs give employees the freedom to work on course material during their own time, allowing for “flexibility and new types of delivery that keep the employees productive.”* (Porter 2006)

The emphasis of arguments about accessibility from external stakeholders was the working student and the idea of lifelong learning.

External stakeholders also engaged in discourse that connected arguments for the accessibility of higher education to disenfranchised groups to social justice. In an article about MITx, Massachusetts Institute of Technology’s MOOC offered through edX, Kevin Carey, an education think tank director stated,

*Most important, MITx is animated by a sense of obligation to maximize human potential. Great research universities have vast abilities to distribute knowledge across the globe. But until recently, they have been highly limited in their ability, and willingness, to distribute authentic education. Before the information-technology revolution, the constraints were physical—you can fit only so many people in dorms and classrooms along the Charles River. The Internet has ripped those barriers away. As MIT's provost, L. Rafael Reif, observes, "There are many, many learners worldwide—and even here in the United States—for whom the Internet is their only option for accessing higher education.* (Carey 2012)

A statement like this aligns with many societal values: innovation, globalization, the betterment of humankind, and social justice. Despite initial exuberance about universal access to higher education through technology as exemplified by this quote, once empirical evidence about student success in MOOCs was revealed to be low, benefiting mostly those with degrees already,
even one of the founders of Coursera, a MOOC company, was willing to admit that online education is “not right for all students” (Gardner and Young 2013).

Table 8. Themes of External Stakeholder Arguments and Position on Online Education by Time Period

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Accessibility</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Negative</td>
<td>0% (0)</td>
<td>6.7% (2)</td>
<td>0% (0)</td>
<td>3.2% (2)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Neutral</td>
<td>0% (0)</td>
<td>0% (0)</td>
<td>15.4% (2)</td>
<td>3.2% (2)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Positive</td>
<td>100% (20)</td>
<td>93.3% (28)</td>
<td>84.6% (11)</td>
<td>93.7% (59)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Effect on Higher Ed</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Negative</td>
<td>30% (6)</td>
<td>6.3% (1)</td>
<td>17.1% (7)</td>
<td>18.2% (14)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Neutral</td>
<td>20% (4)</td>
<td>25% (4)</td>
<td>29.3% (12)</td>
<td>26% (20)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Positive</td>
<td>50% (10)</td>
<td>68.8% (11)</td>
<td>53.7% (22)</td>
<td>55.8% (43)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Efficiency</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Negative</td>
<td>12.5% (1)</td>
<td>22.2% (2)</td>
<td>0% (0)</td>
<td>9.4% (3)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Neutral</td>
<td>0% (0)</td>
<td>22.2% (2)</td>
<td>40% (6)</td>
<td>25% (8)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Positive</td>
<td>87.5% (7)</td>
<td>55.6% (5)</td>
<td>60% (9)</td>
<td>65.6% (21)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Legitimacy</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Negative</td>
<td>0% (0)</td>
<td>14.3% (2)</td>
<td>44.4% (4)</td>
<td>25% (6)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Neutral</td>
<td>0% (0)</td>
<td>28.6% (4)</td>
<td>11.1% (1)</td>
<td>20.8% (5)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Positive</td>
<td>87.5% (1)</td>
<td>57.1% (8)</td>
<td>44.4% (4)</td>
<td>54.2% (13)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Quality</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Negative</td>
<td>41.7% (10)</td>
<td>60% (15)</td>
<td>28.6% (4)</td>
<td>46% (29)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Neutral</td>
<td>16.7% (4)</td>
<td>16% (4)</td>
<td>28.6% (4)</td>
<td>19% (12)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Positive</td>
<td>41.7% (10)</td>
<td>24% (6)</td>
<td>42.9% (6)</td>
<td>34.9% (22)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Grand Total</strong></td>
<td>100% (73)</td>
<td>100% (94)</td>
<td>100% (92)</td>
<td>100% (259)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

External stakeholders commented on the future impact of online learning in almost 30% of their arguments in The Chronicle. In these arguments, they promoted two main ideas: that education needed to be transformed through technology and that a philosophy of student-centered learning should inform those changes. For example, when explaining guidelines developed by the six major higher education accrediting bodies for the evaluation of distance
education, the director of the New England Association of Schools and Colleges’ Commission on Institutions of Higher Learning justified the benefits of online education through the changes that the regional accreditors promoted:

“The focus of attention, I think, has changed,” he says. “It’s focused on the learner.”
(Carnevale 2000)

Embedded in this way of framing online education is that universities traditionally have been focused on the needs of the faculty to the detriment of students. Online education, which attends to student needs of flexibility and convenience, is thus a way to improve higher education to these stakeholders. This discourse connecting student-focused, individualized learning and technology was a consistent theme throughout the study. The CEO of eCollege, a company that helped college campuses create online courses stated,

The holy grail of online education is to be able to provide personalized instruction for every student. Every action is captured in the data. We can learn how students learn and what makes them successful. So you might learn, for example, that if one student spends more than 10 hours in the discussion thread, they're more likely to fail out of the class. That's data you can use. "Triggers for intervention" is the jargon in the industry, and eCollege provides the tools to identify these triggers. (Moran 2008)

Inherent to this perspective on education is that the local, embodied knowledge of faculty is seen as less valid than measurable, quantifiable data. To many of the external stakeholders featured in The Chronicle, a technology-driven transformation of the higher education industry is necessary.

To external stakeholders, MOOCs are an even better form of online education than programs that mirror their on-campus counterparts. For instance, Georgia Institute of Technology partnered with AT&T and Udacity, a for-profit MOOC company, to offer a low cost master’s degree in Computer Science, using Udacity’s course platform. To explain this partnership, a Human Resources executive at AT&T stated,

"By harnessing the power of MOOCs, we can embark on a new era for higher education and for the development of a highly skilled work force." (Young 2013)
The call for a new era in higher education was so common in the discourse from external stakeholders because the belief in technology’s role in improving efficiency and lowering costs has shaped these organizations that play a role in the field of higher education.

Despite the majority belief that technology would positively improve higher education, the quality of online learning was the only theme that the majority of external audiences questioned. Only 34% of external stakeholder arguments about quality were positive. About a quarter of all arguments made by external groups about online learning focused on quality, giving it equal weight as accessibility concerns, which were far more positive. Online education framed in relation to fraud or diploma mills persisted throughout the timeframe of the study, contributing to the 47% of arguments that question online learning’s quality from external organizations. Favorable assessments made up over a third of statements about of online education’s quality. External stakeholders connecting the concept to the idea that technology makes learning more interactive and student-focused, improving the quality of higher education, in line with how they framed online education’s future impact on the field. Justifying the quality of online classes by questioning the quality of face-to-face classes was a common tactic supporting the legitimacy of online learning. This bifurcated approach to online education – that the technology of online education improves the quality of higher education but also creates a greater opportunity for fraud and diploma mills to flourish – has implications for online education’s macro-level legitimacy.

Even though the quality of online courses is relative in the framing by external stakeholders, it is still problematic if that level of quality is not measureable, particularly if that quality can be indexed to costs. William Bowen, a past leader of multiple institutions of higher education demonstrates this dilemma:
How effective has online learning been in improving (or at least maintaining) learning outcomes achieved by various populations of students in various settings? Unfortunately, no one really knows the answer to either that question or the important follow-up query about cost savings. Thousands of studies of online learning have been conducted, and my colleague Kelly Lack has continued to catalog them and summarize their findings. It has proved to be a daunting task—and a discouraging one. Few of those studies are relevant to the teaching of undergraduates, and the few that are relevant almost always suffer from serious methodological deficiencies. The most common problems are small sample size; inability to control for ubiquitous selection effects; and, on the cost side, the lack of good estimates of likely cost savings. (Bowen 2013)

Here, Bowen questions the merits of online learning because there is very little robust evidence on its academic quality. Rather than focusing on the student learning aspect of quality, however, he goes on to connect it to the lack of evidence about online learning’s costs, suggesting that the quality of online learning should be judged relative to how cheap it is for universities to run.

The primary framing of online education in external stakeholder discourse was that it provides access to higher education, filling an important need in our society. When the technology was just being introduced to the field between 1996 and 2001, external groups talked about accessibility more frequently than administrator or faculty groups, and they were the most positive about the possibilities for online learning. During the exponential growth of the number of online students and programs, between 2002 and 2007, there was a concurrent increase in statements about online learning from external stakeholders in The Chronicle, rather than faculty or administrators. The majority of external arguments continued to promote the benefits of online learning’s accessibility for students, but fraud and online diploma mills were also a concern in this time period. Between 2008 and 2013, the debate shifted dramatically to the future of higher education. The majority of external stakeholders saw MOOCs as an avenue to transform higher education through cost savings and more efficient learning. Among external groups, even if there was debate over the form that online learning should take and who should offer it, the importance of technology in education was rarely questioned.
DISCUSSION

The manner in which *The Chronicle of Higher Education* presented arguments from faculty, administrator, and external stakeholders about online learning demonstrates how professional and market logics interact within the field of higher education through the framing of arguments related to accessibility, quality, and the technology’s future impact. During times of institutional change, competing logics become more influential in shaping micro-level evaluations of legitimacy because there is no field-level consensus on the propriety of an organization’s actions (Bitektine and Haack 2015). Therefore, this section will discuss two influential logics in higher education and how they have shaped the rhetoric about online education by its supporters and detractors.

During the time period addressed by this study, arguments about the illegitimacy of online education never subsided, but opponents have largely failed to alter the path of online learning’s development thus far for three reasons. First, the market logic of academic capitalism has co-opted the conception of education for the public good. Because access to higher education has been defined by the same stakeholders as both creating new markets of prospective students and creating opportunities for social justice and the democratization, the meaning of serving the public good is changed in a way that makes faculty arguments about online education come across as short-sighted and self-serving. Second, the definition of quality under the logic of the professions is increasingly incompatible with broader logics of accountability and measurable outcomes. Third, by faculty basing their critique of online education in its threat to professional jurisdictional and autonomy, the historical role of the professions serving a higher purpose is lost, and the arguments from a market logic have filled that void. In this section, I will address each of these three points, discuss the rise of MOOCs in 2010 as a touchpoint that shifted
perceptions of online education, and conclude by connecting this chapter to the next two chapters and the overall theme of the dissertation.

**The Professional Logic**

The professional logic is most evident in faculty arguments about online education, as well as within a minority of the arguments from college and university administrators. Professions are widely regarded as self-directed, high status, have a monopoly on expert knowledge and tasks which comprise their professional jurisdiction (Abbott 1988; Freidson 2001). An important component of the professional logic is professional autonomy, the ability and belief that professionals should be able to act and make decisions according to their judgment without the influence of others not part of the profession (Hall 1968). This aspect of the professional logic is behind the concern for the erosion of faculty governance through the introduction of online learning.

What framing these arguments in this way fails to do, however, is extend their diagnosis of problems related to online education to incorporate the concerns that other stakeholder groups have diagnosed in higher education (Snow and Benford 1988). While arguments about professional control may influence other faculty’s legitimacy judgments of online learning, it has had little effect on those actors who seek to weaken faculty’s jurisdiction and organizational control (Abbott 1988), due to the asymmetries in the ability to draw on the authority of powerful actors, broader societal-level logics, or relying on coercion and inducement (Bitektine and Haack 2015).

One example of these asymmetries has been the inability of online education’s opponents to align their framing of online education with broader societal-level logics. When professional logics inform faculty and administrator definitions of quality and define quality in higher
education as a transformational experience that cannot be measured, this meaning is incompatible with societal values related to accountability and performance measurement (Power 1999; Espeland and Sauder 2007). The nature of arguments that highlight that the moral and interpersonal development of the student or that state online learning lacks the intangible element that sparks learning that comes from face-to-face interactions is that what takes place in an educational setting cannot be fully measured. This does not align with accreditor, foundation, and policymaker demands to measure and standardized learning, putting these stakeholder groups in conflict.

Because the broader public often equates academic quality with the job obtained post-graduation or with salary increases, opponents of online learning have difficulty bridging their framing of higher education to others. Overall, faculty frame the quality of online education around the process of education, rather than the output, which reflects the aspects of the professional logic that treat its work as craft and that authority comes from personal expertise. The approval of influential actors contributes to the validation of an organizational form (Bitektine and Haack 2015). Accrediting bodies, state legislatures, and foundations all have power that comes from their ability to regulate and fund higher education, so they have the ability to promote their ways of perceiving quality through the media as well as their actions. When they use The Chronicle to support output-oriented measurements of learning for online education, their position of power relative to faculty makes faculty arguments about online education become less credible.

Furthermore, access to higher education is another place where the professional logic is potentially a poor fit with societal values. Traditionally, high status higher education has been associated with resources, autonomy, and the ability to have high admission and degree
requirement standards for students (Trow 1984). Professions seek both social and economic capital (Macdonald 1995), so according to the profession logic, faculty would seek to limit access to ensure the highest quality students to reinforce their own status. Indeed, Bergquist (1995) notes that quality is often in conflict with access in American higher education. On the other hand, the professions have a long association with serving society through knowledge for the greater good (Brint 1996; Larson 1978). Accordingly, online education framed as a method of obtaining access to higher education is the only aspect of online education that faculty overwhelmingly supported.

Brint (1996) argues, however, that the historical basis of professional autonomy has shifted from upholding a social good to claiming expert knowledge. Because the primary critique of online education from faculty concerns the future status and identity of the academic profession, this frame exposes the self-interested nature of professions and undermines an interest in access to higher education. The professional logic behind these arguments comes across as tone deaf in society where those without a college degree struggle and those who have graduated are increasingly vocal about student loan debt and their own precarious employment. Ironically, due to their experience in the classroom, faculty support for online education’s ability to create access is actually more realistic than the “boosterish” claims that online education will democratize education. Nonetheless, by conceptualizing the accessibility potential of online education more narrowly than other stakeholders, the professional logic is not able to bridge to the “meta-logics” or society-level values of equality and social justice.

The Market Logic

The market logic was represented most often by the arguments from external groups and college and university administrators in the ways that they discussed the positive future impact of
online education on the field of higher education, and the way that these arguments framed quality and access. The market logic is an ideal type of the logic related to the market institutional order (Friedland and Alford 1991). Characteristics of this logic include a strategic interest in increasing efficiency and profit and legitimacy derived from value obtained through return on investment (Thornton et al. 2012).

Several scholars have addressed the growth of market logics in higher education, including Thornton and Ocasio’s (1999) mapping of the logics in higher education publishing, Slaughter and Rhoades’ work on academic capitalism (2004), and Berman’s (2012) study of the growth of market science. The common thread throughout these studies is the relationship between the growth of the market logic and field-level change. Supporters of online education are advocating for change because of their desire to bring efficiency to teaching, what they perceive as a very inefficient institution as seen through the lens of the market logic. The benefit of framing their arguments for online education in this way is that the market logic aligns with other, related societal beliefs, such as technology as the means of solving society’s problems (Segal 1985). This helps administrators and external stakeholders, already is a privileged position of power, to appeal to broader society as evaluators of legitimacy.

Administrators and external stakeholders also made the case for online education by arguing that it increases access to higher education. This is related to the market logic because the majority of these arguments defined access in terms of the creation of new markets of potential students. However, these claims were almost always framed in relation to a broader social good – online education is a “global force” to “educate the world.” Largely an institutionalized myth (Meyer and Rowan 1977) since very little evidence has been produced that shows that online education improves access for racial and socioeconomic underserved groups
(e.g., Cox 2005), it nonetheless sends the message that the market is responsive to the public good, rather than faculty and universities entrenched in a status competition. Under the norms of market logics, based on the assumption of self-interest, individuals are solely responsible for their own success (Brown 2002). Thus, the concept of the public good subtly shifts from that of education as a communal benefit to education benefiting individual consumers and their employers.

The meaning of quality also shifts under the vocabularies of practice of the market logic (Meyer and Rowan 1977; Suddaby and Greenwood 2005; Thornton et al. 2012). This logic, however, is so broad that quality ends up being framed by online education’s proponents in multiple and sometimes contradictory ways. The belief in the power of technology to improve the efficiency of education is so strong under a market logic (e.g., Bowen and Tobin 2015), that there is an almost unquestioning support for the quality of online education from external stakeholders (Selwyn 2014). Since institutions of higher education are using state and foundation resources to gain revenue, they have to show evidence of a return on that investment through student learning outcomes. Thus, the quality of education comes to be partially defined through performance accountability measures (McLendon, Hearn, and Deaton 2006).

Because the outcomes for online programs are mostly mixed, administrator and external stakeholders in The Chronicle often relied on defining quality through the value it provides to cost-conscious students or the way it meets student needs. Letting the student decide what level of quality they required was a tightrope act for external stakeholders, because one of their primary concerns was stamping out online diploma mills and fraud. In order to legitimate online education in the field, external organizations had to ensure that illegitimate credentials were not available to devalue what legitimate institutions were doing. Slaughter and Rhodes (2004) write
that academic capitalism, drawing on the market logic, moves beyond the student as consumer rhetoric to conceptualize the institution as marketer, and both college and university administrators and external organizations seek to market online education in the best possible light.

**MOOCs**

Online education’s opponents might have been much more limited in their ability to delay a macro-level collective judgment of the legitimacy of online education were it not for the growth of MOOCs in 2010. Between 2002 and 2007, arguments from external stakeholders played a much more significant part in the debate about online education in *The Chronicle* than faculty members. The number of arguments from faculty members and administrators rose in relation to the growth of MOOCs in the third time period of the study. Though universities have been impacted by the growth of digital technologies, credit-bearing online courses thus far have not transformed the work of faculty in the way that online education’s opponents feared they would in the technology’s early years. MOOCs were a new threat since the fundamental model was so different than traditional courses, on campus or online.

As an organizational form, MOOCs drew from the market logic in the way that it exposed faculty to greater competition, and that they relied on external, often for-profit, partners. The advocates for MOOCs, however, opened themselves up to criticism by relying on old, transactional definitions of quality – the idea that since the best institutions and the best professors were leading these courses, quality was guaranteed. Quality was doubly guaranteed by all the data they were collecting on student learning. Having already been attacked for defining quality based on “inputs,” faculty were easily able to critique MOOCs on their ability to produce...
good student outcomes and questioned the data’s ability to measure what matters for learning, particularly for underserved populations.

The backlash to MOOCs that closed out 2013 often did not differentiate between online learning in the form of MOOCs and mainstream, degree-granting online courses, reigniting the legitimacy debate that had a lower profile during the second era (2002-2007). Since 2013, it has not seemed to slow down investment in MOOCs by elite universities, though their rhetoric around access has changed a bit, now that they charge for verified credentials. Those who believe that underserved population are best served not by MOOCs, but by other policy solutions such as free community college, have the opportunity to marshal the professional logic and counter the claim that a greater social good underlies the work of the corporate MOOC providers.

Legitimacy and Institutionalization

Though this chapter focuses on discourse, and not actions directly, the findings suggest some possibilities to clarify the relationship between the process of legitimation and field-level institutionalization. Universities and their external partners have sought to legitimate the growth of their online programs through appeals to widely held values of social justice and equality. Though not accepted by the majority of the faculty represented in The Chronicle, online education has clearly been granted legitimacy by a broad swath of powerful actors, such as regulators, the legal system, and influential field actors. In certain sectors of higher education, online education is highly institutionalized.

Returning to the question that Berman (2012) leaves open in her study, on why the growth of commercialized science and market logics within the university proceeded apace without widespread legitimacy, a few responses are possible, substituting the growth of online
learning for the commercialization of science. One, it is possible that online education and the market logic are actually seen as more legitimate by faculty than represented by *The Chronicle*. As the newspaper of record for higher education, who they choose to interview and quote allows them to both shape and record history. Surveys of faculty on their perspectives of online learning and technology, however, indicate similar levels of illegitimacy.

The findings in this chapter demonstrate that elite universities are overrepresented in the proportion of arguments made about online education compared to their proportion in the field. This makes sense because faculty and administrators at elite colleges and universities are widely seen as opinion leaders, the views of those from high status institutions would contribute to the status of the publication. Because the media collectively is an evaluator of legitimacy (e.g., Deephouse and Carter 2005), the data and findings here still accurately represent how online education has been debated within this publication. Second, it is possible that because this is a time of institution change, characterized by insecurity and multiple sets of logics competing to structure higher education, stakeholders are able to more freely criticize online education or the status quo, creating the appearance of illegitimacy (Bitektine and Haack 2015). But, as Bitektine and Haack (2015) highlight, during these circumstances individual evaluations of legitimacy become more valid than media judgments, so those organizational actors with the power to act can override more widespread evaluations of illegitimacy inside or outside of the organization. Both of these possibilities will be addressed in the next chapter which addresses faculty department chairs who have worked directly with online degree programs in their own departments, highlighting both the ways that *The Chronicle* is representative and non-representative of their views, and how legitimacy judgments are made when faced with the decision to go online.
CONCLUSIONS

The purpose of this chapter was to examine the portrayals of online education, often based in hyperbole and polemics, in order to analyze how and why its framing varies across stakeholders. Stakeholders primarily focus on issues of access, quality and online learning’s future impact to higher education, with faculty primarily exhibiting framing that represents professional logics that varies significantly from the framing evidenced by administrator and external stakeholder groups, most often drawn from market logics. This discourse is important because it influences policy and university practice.

One of the main ideas of academic capitalism theory is that universities partner with external organizations to create interstitial organizations for the purpose of better access to new revenue streams (Slaughter and Rhoades 2004). The close alignment of arguments and attitudes about online learning between the administrators and external organizations quoted in The Chronicle shows that the alignment of the discourse between these two groups is recursive – it is both a mechanism that enables interstitial organizations to form and is enabled by this process of new network formation around online learning. Thus, even though The Chronicle portrays faculty as having a key role in debating a judgment about the legitimacy of online leaning, maintaining traditional status hierarchies, because faculty arguments make sense of online learning using a professional logic, they lack the ability to bridge to the broader societal logics that could truly challenge its legitimacy in the ways that it is viewed by those in the field with power. Online a minority of arguments against online learning focused on its questionable cost savings, efficiency, or the meaning of access to higher education through online learning.

This chapter has set the stage for examining the actual changes resulting from the growth of online learning, compared to what is heralded or feared by online education’s friends and foes.
By examining the arguments for or against online learning in one of the most widely read trade publications in the field, I was able to explore how professional and market logics have influenced perceptions of online education over time. In a society where the president of one of the most elite institutions in the world is calling for online education because it is cheaper and better, it is important to understand why this is seen as the solution by many of the most powerful actors within the field of higher education. The next chapter builds on this work by examining the causes and consequences of the growth of online from the perspective of department chairs at different institutional types: elite public and private research universities, and regional public and private teaching colleges and universities. This will demonstrate how rhetoric and structure interact in how faculty grant legitimacy to their own online programs.
Chapter 4: Embedded Logics: The Legitimation of Online Learning across University Types

The previous chapter discusses the institutional logics of online education as found in the arguments, both for and against the practice, made at the institutional field level and expressed in the pages of *The Chronicle of Higher Education*. This discourse comes from an elite perspective, heavily influenced by stakeholders external to the higher education field. The techno-utopian view that online learning will democratize higher education and transform the field is contested by faculty arguing that online education is not rigorous enough, does not include enough faculty-student interaction, raises concerns about academic integrity, and would negatively affect their professional role. Since faculty made the majority of arguments against online, and surveys indicate that the majority of faculty members view online education as illegitimate (Allen and Seaman 2015), this chapter will examine the ways in which department chairs came to accept online learning within their departments. Because there is such heterogeneity within the institutional field of higher education, the chapter will first situate the practice of online learning at the department level across different organizational types.

Faculty are generally portrayed to be reluctant to incorporate technology into their pedagogical practices (e.g., Johnson 2012). Different types of universities, reflected in their organizational design, have different structures and constellations of logics that may impact when and how faculty become involved with online learning (Greenwood and Miller 2010). A better grasp on the causes, processes, and consequences of the institutionalization of online learning can contribute to theories of the changing logics of higher education at the micro level and how the logics of the profession and the market coalesce at the level of the department chair. Because department chairpersons hold both an administrative and faculty role (Gmelch and
Parkay 1999; Hubbell and Homer 1997) yet are more likely to identify as a faculty member rather than a pure administrator (Carroll and Wolverton 2004), they are an ideal group to study how they perceive the decision making and impact of online education in their departments. Studies of faculty resistance to or satisfaction with online education have focused on the teaching of courses and not the initial decision of whether to create online programs (e.g., Bolliger and Wasilik 2009; Lloyd, Byrne, and McCoy 2012). Second, given that online courses are taken by a third of all students in the U.S., the vast majority of colleges and universities are engaged with online education (Allen and Seaman 2015). This chapter will explore the ways that the changing use of technology through the development and offering of online programs impacts the social organization of academic departments.

The interview results indicate three main findings that will be highlighted in this chapter. First, both market logics and professional logics are instrumental in the acceptance of online learning, but have different mechanisms at different types of universities. At regional universities, market logics are influential because they constitute practitioner identities of faculty and are embedded in university structures. Market and professional logics are mutually reinforcing, particularly at research universities. Second, a focus on those elite universities in past research has obscured that at the majority of universities with online programs, faculty are not making the decision within their department that their discipline should develop online programs. Nonetheless, because of the practitioner identities of the faculty, the orientation to education of their discipline, and experience teaching and interacting with students online, the majority of interview subjects fully embraced online learning. Third, in addition to this change in their view of the legitimacy of online learning, department leaders noticed only a few changes in the social organization of their departments caused by the growth of their online enrollments,
though they did mention several aspects of teaching online that may be an issue for future concern.

By doing so, I hope to make a contribution to the sociology of education, which has been slow to study technology in higher education (Selwyn 2014), and empirical studies of online education, which have mostly utilized survey research to describe faculty attitudes and student outcomes online. Qualitative analysis allows for a more complete picture of not only faculty perceptions of online learning itself, but also the organizational designs that structure the acceptance of online programs and the consequences of its embrace in academic departments.

Overall, the chapter aims to analyze the dynamics of institutional logics within the higher education interinstitutional system. The chapter addresses three research questions: (1) Under what conditions have department chairs and administrators accepted online education? (2) How do they perceive the decision-making process to develop online programs within their academic department? (3) What are the apparent outcomes of the adoption of online programs within academic departments? These questions are important to ask empirically because there has been so much prognostication about the future of higher education without data to back up either the doomsayers or the devotees of educational technology.

METHODOLOGY
To provide a window into judgments about online education’s legitimacy and the decision-making processes that universities have for the development of online degree programs, I conducted interviews with 61 department chairs and administrators who oversee online degree programs in an academic department. To obtain a representative sample of four-year non-profit colleges and universities (N=1,576), in December 2013, I took a random sample of 157 colleges and universities, stratified by Carnegie Classification and public or private status. Out of this
sample, to identify universities with online degree programs, I visited the website for each institution to see what online programs they offered, since no complete directory of online programs exists. Of the sample, 55% (n=87) had fully online programs, another 17% (n=27) had online courses, and 28% (n=43) had no online courses or programs, or at least not one that could not be discerned from its website. In order to create a sampling frame, of those 87 schools with online degree programs, I identified 492 individuals that oversee online programs housed in traditional departments named on the universities’ websites. Most often they were department chairs, but in some cases, no chairperson was listed on the website, so a dean or program director was included instead. I then purposively contacted individuals from each institution so that there would be interviews distributed across university type and program discipline (see Table 9). I contacted individuals from 58 colleges and universities by email, and completed phone, Skype, or in-person interviews with 61 individuals from 34 institutions, representing a 59% response rate by university (see Appendix A).

The focus on departmental administrators across a range of institution types was motivated by a gap in the literature. Most research on technological change in universities focuses on elite research universities, but many of the universities that were early innovators and rapidly grew their online programs were regional public and private universities. Slaughter and Rhodes (2004) describe their focus on public research universities only as a “best-case test” of their research questions, but because so much of the sociology of education literature focuses only on the most elite type of university, I argue that it is vital to look at the less-prestigious colleges and universities that may be more motivated by market pressures, because it gives a more realistic view of the academic landscape. In addition, by including some elite cases, the sample allows for comparisons. Academic departments, where they existed, were a focal point of
the study. This enables a better understanding of how the online programs coexist with on-campus, traditional programs, since there is a demand for a better organizational understanding of academic departments (Hearn 2007). Out of necessity, I did have to interview other types of academic leaders, including deans or program directors when the institution either did not have department or chairperson structures, or when I was directed to speak with a person who had more knowledge about the online program, but this too allowed for comparisons across leadership type.

The interviews sought information on the subject’s understanding of how the online program(s) in their department got started, how they were developed, their perspective on the quality of and rationale for online education, details about their own background, and the structure of the department and university (see Appendix B). Each interview lasted around one hour, and was audio-recorded, transcribed, and coded using nVivo qualitative research software. Because this was exploratory research, I was not seeking to prove or disprove theory, but I did use an iterative coding process to analyze the data, first coding the responses to my questions based on the themes that emerged in the data using a grounded theory technique (Charmaz 2006), but also then by identifying and grouping themes related to institutional logics using the “pattern inducing” technique outlined by Reay and Jones (2015). Though institutions with online programs were identified using probability sampling techniques, the decision to participate in the interviews by department leaders had the risk of selection bias, because it is possible that only those individuals with a positive bias would be interested in participating. The findings indicate, however, that the academics had a range of opinions about online education, from strongly negative to strongly positive, with most subjects somewhere in between. In order to understand these opinions and how they have been formed, the next section outlines the conditions that led
to the acceptance of online education, how the decisions to develop online programs were made, and what the perceived outcomes have been.

Table 9. Sample Composition by University, Title, Field, and Gender

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Category</th>
<th>Number of Interviews</th>
<th>Title</th>
<th>Number of Interviews</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Discipline</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Agriculture</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>Chair</td>
<td>32</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Business</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>Coordinator</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Communications</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>Dean</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Computer Science</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>Director (Program)</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Criminal Justice</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>Director (School)</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Education</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>Professor</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Engineering Technology</td>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>English</td>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Health Sciences</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>41</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>History</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Human Services</td>
<td>2</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Library and Information Sciences</td>
<td>2</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Interdisciplinary Studies</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>Public Regional</td>
<td>18</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ministry</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>Private Regional</td>
<td>23</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nonprofit Administration</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>Public Research</td>
<td>13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nursing</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>Private Research</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Professional Studies</td>
<td>2</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Psychology</td>
<td>3</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Public Administration</td>
<td>2</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
FINDINGS BY UNIVERSITY TYPE

In the section that follows, the findings are presented to highlight differences between four university types: public and private examples of both regional and research universities, as defined by Carnegie Classifications. “Regional universities” refer to those institutions with a baccalaureate, master’s or doctoral level classification, and “research universities” refer to institutions with “high” or “very high” research activity. This section outlines perspectives on online education, the decision-making process, and outcomes of the development of online learning programs within academic departments at four-year, non-profit universities. Following the findings section is an analysis of the role that institutional logics play in the way that online learning programs have been accepted that bridges the four university types presented. For a summary of some of the descriptive characteristics of these categories, see Appendix C.

Private Regional Universities

At the private regional universities in the sample, online education was accepted for two main reasons: that faculty were able to make sense of online based on their identities as a practitioner in a professional discipline outside of higher education and that the organizational structure of these universities constrains resistance. Market logics primarily shaped how these institutions approached online learning, though other logics also played a role. The market logic is so important because with an average endowment of $58,443,295, private regional universities are highly dependent on tuition. Online education was seen as a quick way to add more students and bring in operational revenue:

The new president, he came in 1993 or 1994, and there were 400 day students so it was a very small school. He’s looking for 1,500 students on campus, but he realized that he

---

10 I chose these designations to try to avoid a reliance on normative language, such as non-elite and elite universities (Trow, Forest, and Altbach 2007), or communitarian, pluralistic, and elite universities (Hermanowicz 1998). Of course, regional universities engage in research, and research universities serve their regions, so it is not a perfect fit, but it helps to consolidate unwieldy Carnegie Classification categories.
wasn’t going to make too much money with a day program. I think online has always been a money maker. This is my take, and I might be overgeneralizing and not giving enough credit to the possibility that there was a real need to be filled, but the talk in the hallway is that’s how we survive. That’s what put us on the map and made us a bigger school. We’re dependent on the online program. (Interview 48, 3/13/2015)

Online programs have enabled not only survival, but growth at universities that, due to demographic patterns in their region, would be unlikely to increase substantially in size. These universities were most often located in the Midwest (50%), and the other half of the sample are divided among the rest of the country.

Revenue growth, however, is not the only rationale for online learning, it also is a way for universities that have not had access to traditional sources of prestige like PhD programs and prominent research agendas to gain reputation in the field:

So we actually had a dean who was an accounting PhD, and my understanding is that they were looking to grow our graduate enrollment in accounting because our on campus Master’s of Accountancy has always been relatively small, and also to enhance the nationwide profile of the university by getting our name out across the country...so we wanted to be innovative and kind of be the first adopter, and of course, along with that it generates some revenue, although I’ve been told by multiple parties that that was never the intent, that online motivation was not revenue. It really had more to do with reputation and reach. (Interview 57, 2/24/2014)

Online education has typically been seen as primarily a market-driven activity, but it has served as an alternative way for organizations to enhance their status in the field, particularly by other institutions that accept online learning.

Department chairs’ social identities and cognitive schemata also provided the framework necessary to accept online learning. Online programs at private regional universities were most likely to be in professional disciplines, including business (38%), healthcare (31%), and education (25%), and all but one of the interview subjects had practitioner experience in a career before entering higher education, with an average of 14 years of work experience outside of
academe. The following interview except demonstrates how a chair’s view of work from a previous career influenced his view of online education:

*I think it helps that our faculty come from media jobs. You know, I worked in TV; we have another professor who has done newspaper work. So we’re already wired that you have to go with the flow and change as things demand it. So, the media faculty, I don’t think any of us feel like we’re out of our comfort zone and having to change in ways that don’t fit our knowledge base or our skill set. It’s just part of our discipline and so we roll with it.* (Interview 4, 3/31/2015)

His identity was that of somebody who has already proven that he can weather technological changes that changed the entire journalism field, so the introduction of online learning into education was nothing new. He already had the cognitive schemata that allowed him to adapt. Others who were previously in business, healthcare and K-12 education voiced similar reasoning.

In addition to hiring faculty willing to accept online learning because of their practitioner backgrounds, private regional universities constrain resistance to online learning through their organizational structures. First of all, a quarter of the sampled institutions do not offer tenure to faculty, and the average percentage of faculty with tenure at the rest of these institutions is 34% due to the reliance on part-time and adjunct instructors. Only 2 of the 23 interview subjects in the private regional category stated that faculty made the choice for their programs to be developed online. The rest stated that the university made the determination. Significantly, at all of the institutions without tenure, the decision to develop an online program was made by administrators. Since tenure protects, at a minimum, the right of faculty members to disagree with administrators, one major consequence of universities without tenure is the inability to speak out against decisions that affect one’s work. Simply put by an English department chair at a private university without tenure:
When faculty members have no say in the decision-making process and no tenure, they have to accept administrative decisions to go online or risk losing their jobs. Though this description came from a faculty member with a department chairperson title, the title is mostly symbolic since they were not allowed to exercise their professional autonomy about whether online learning is an appropriate pedagogical method for a full English bachelor’s degree.

Five out of the 16 institutions partnered with for-profit companies to develop, market, and manage online programs at their school. This entailed a division of labor that varied depending on the university’s experience with technology and the style of the company. Some gave the faculty member designated as a “content expert” a template to fill in with their lecture notes, PowerPoints, discussion questions, and tests, while an instructional designer at the company uploads this information to the learning management system to create an online course. Others educate faculty about their instructional choices, such as discussion boards, narrated PowerPoints, or video clips, and have the faculty consult with an instructional designer employed by the company while the faculty member creates the course. Curriculum and course development is the main way that faculty members shape these online programs:

> It was definitely a university-driven decision. It was one of those things that was announced...there hadn’t been discussions or anything like that, unless the previous chair had been discussing it [laughs]. There’s a possibility he was, but I don’t think so. It was the university that decided we would do it and that was that. I wasn’t really privy to how that all started, but I know that’s when we started developing the first courses to be put into an online format, and then the first one launched in the fall of 2009. We created it kind of on the fly so that we knew these courses were scheduled and we would get them done just in time for the launch. The last couple of years, we’ve been going through a revision of every single one of them, making them even stronger. (Interview 42, 3/7/2014)
Many of these institutions signed contracts with online program management companies because the outside firm has the resources to launch online programs at the required scale, which the university would not be able to achieve with their own resources. Chairs at small private universities without outside partnerships often noted that they had to develop online courses with little support, either financial or technological. Several chairs noted that online course development and teaching responsibilities were being written into new contracts for faculty and adjuncts.

The development of online learning programs and teaching online was an adjustment for faculty who already felt spread thin, yet were driven by the connections they made with students in the classroom:

*I think at first I was very resistant, and I think, in more absolute terms, I still think that face-to-face is the better way to go, I like human contact. I was very resentful that it was imposed on us. But then I went ahead and signed up to develop a couple of courses, and I’m in the middle of developing a third. I think it was in the middle of the first class that I taught online, as part of the course, they had to send in something about their educational background and what they’re hoping to accomplish and some of them were more forthright about what their circumstances were. They had a lot of jobs and they were trying to find something that was going to be a little more permanent and a little more satisfying. I guess my heart really went out to them. I think there’s still a lot of things to be worked out. I feel pretty sure we don’t have the most beneficial way of dealing online, but I’d sure like to be a part of it because I think it’s what we stand for and what it has to offer people. So, for me, that was kind of a revelation, and I thought, doggone it, let’s give it a shot and let’s give it our best shot. (Interview 22, 10/7/2014)*

These chairs had to redefine what interaction and quality meant for them, but in most cases, they could overcome their reservations through the value they placed on the service that online learning provides to students.

*Public Regional Universities*

Department chairs at public regional universities accepted online education primarily because of the strength of this sector’s mission for promoting access, and also because of the
ways that their own identities are shaped by this mission. For instance, public regional
universities in the sample were more likely to be located in rural areas than any other type of
university. Historically, these institutions have helped rural students gain access to higher
education, but technology is seen as shifting the demands of these students:

*I think because of competition, we don’t have a choice, especially in the area we’re at. We’re rural. If we want to capture those students, we’re going to have to meet their needs, which means online. Otherwise, they’re just going to go somewhere else.* (Interview 17, 10/7/2014)

There is a market aspect to this mission – it is not just serving them, but capturing them in a
highly competitive market. Moreover, online programs could give universities with little name
recognition outside of their region the opportunity to achieve national recognition. Thus, student
demand for online learning means that face-to-face graduate programs are no longer seen as viable:

*These students seek out these programs more because they are online possibly, but in this field of study, you cannot be competitive if you only offer face-to-face. You look around at other programs, and the first program was converted to online when I was teaching in the program. But it was converted to the online world. They tried to run both programs together, face-to-face and online, and the face-to-face died. Classes would never fill up, and so I think it’s really become an expectation more than anything else based on, “Other universities do it, why don’t you?”* (Interview 20, 3/13/2015)

Public regional universities have an average endowment of $35,266,270, so in an era of
declining state support, new sources of funding are required to continue to serve this accessibility
mission. As such, these institutions had the highest average exclusively online population at 20%
of all students, though other types of universities have a greater numbers of online students.

Faculty are sympathetic to online learning not only because of their practitioner
backgrounds, but because of their own experiences as an online or distance learning student.
Over a quarter of public regional department chairs have taken a distance learning course or
earned a master’s degree through distance or online education. These courses can be a model, both good and bad, for how to teach online:

*Almost every class I took in the program was either blended or 100% online, so I got a taste of what it was like as a student, which made me rethink how I was delivering classes. I guess I have a blended outlook on online learning from both giving and receiving and so it really helped me change my thought process on what was good, what was bad, and what were the expectations.* (Interview 18, 10/20/2014)

They could relate to the demands of online students, because they themselves had chosen these programs so they could balance work and family responsibilities with school. A subset of those who had taken online courses in the past had had a bad experience, one of whom was at a public regional university. He described the online courses as “time-consuming” and “stupid” (Interview 1, 10/1/2014). Nonetheless, he was still willing to become involved in the development or teaching of online programs because it helped his department “do more with less.” This negative example of online courses primed him and the others who had bad experiences online to be prepared to develop a quality online course that improved upon their earlier experiences.

Public research universities occupy an intermediary space between the faculty autonomy that is demanded at research universities and managerial forms of governance at small, private regional universities, which results in a mix of constraining and enabling structural factors for the acceptance of online learning. Unlike private regional universities, all of the public regional institutions in the sample offer tenure, and an average of 49% of their instructional staff is tenured or on the tenure track. Additionally, 66% of the institutions have collective bargaining units that represent faculty. However, the online programs resulted from a decision by the faculty of the department only 56% of the time. Consider two starkly different ways that departments began offering online programs:
When the Continuing Ed Department said, “Hey, we want to do more online stuff. We want to venture into that world,” they put together a program. If you were to take a course that currently existed and put it online, one, they would offer you training to do it, and two, they would give you a development stipend to do it as well, basically pay you off once you taught the course once. So we had a couple faculty years ago who said, “You know what? I think we can put this fully online.” (Interview 37, 4/8/2014)

When the provost came here five years ago, she was trying to figure out a way to get more students. Somewhere along the line, she decided that psychology should have an online major and I don’t know if it came from casual conversations with people, she never actually talked to me. Then she started to announce to the university that we have psychology as an online major, and I had to say, “Well, that’s interesting, because I don’t know anything about that, and I’m the department chair.” So she jumped the gun in that way. (Interview 49, 10/8/2014)

In the first case, the university solicited departments to develop online programs, and provided a financial incentive to do so. In the second example, the department chair had no choice but to develop an online program.

For the most part, however, even when a department itself did not initiate an online program, individual faculty within it were able to choose whether to participate. About half of the department chairs interviewed were initially skeptical about online learning, but after teaching online, close to three-quarters thought online learning was a legitimate form of education. This did not come without some bumps in the road, however. For instance, at institutions where positive student feedback is highly valued, online courses could be problematic:

Part of the problem is for faculty’s willingness to teach online is when it seems like the online classes are getting lower student evaluations. A lot of us go into teaching because we like the face-to-face interaction, we like to see people learn things, and I mean, actually see them go, “Ah-hah, I now get it!” That’s a reward we get for teaching. It doesn’t come through as much online. Plus online, that if you don’t get it, if you’re at home, you get frustrated a lot quicker and you’re less likely to phone a friend. In a classroom, if your student is engaged, and we have to assume we are dealing with engaged students, if a student is engaged they are going to ask, they are going to collaborate, they are going to say, “I don’t understand.” The minute they say that in a face-to-face world, most good faculty members are going to sit down and say, “Ok, what
didn’t you understand? How can I explain it differently?" The quickness of the interaction does not occur in online, it’s an email, discussion board, so the fact that the interaction has such a drawn out timeline causes grief for online. (Interview 33, 3/23/2015)

The growth of online has changed what it means to teach and gauge if students are learning. Faculty members have to learn new techniques, and the faculty-student interaction that is so important to them is much more time intensive. Some have overcome their hesitation because of the extra funding that comes from teaching online in the summer, or as an overload, and others choose to opt out. It is important to note that full-time faculty have this option, but for adjunct faculty, they face more competition than ever for positions, because departments can hire instructors for online courses from a nationwide pool, not limited to the individuals in their geographic region with the qualifications they need.

In addition to administrators making the decision for a department to go online in so many cases, department chairs at public regional universities listed other consequences for their professional autonomy and shared governance. At several institutions, online courses had to be submitted to an online support unit for quality checks, which they felt was an encroachment on academic freedom. Another consequence of the shift to online programs was that fewer faculty were around to participate in the life of the department:

If you’re not present, things happen at a university that you just find out about after the fact, and I think that especially when universities are hiring faculty for the purpose of developing and teaching in online programs, you’re creating this younger generation of tenure track faculty who are disconnected from a lot of decision-making that’s happening on campus. (Interview 34, 3/20/15)

Online’s supporters emphasize that the learning outcomes of online programs are no different than campus-based programs, but for the faculty workers, tenured or not, the decisions made about how online programs are organized affect the nature of their job; i.e., what the faculty role
entails, and how the job is performed.

*Private Research Universities*

Private universities accepted online learning for several reasons, including its alignment with the market logic, its service to the public good, and its alignment with the logics of individual disciplines online. The three universities in the sample had an average endowment of $660,179,333, making them far less dependent on tuition than any of the regional universities in the sample. Instead, online learning was a way and provide employers with skilled workers to serve the labor market:

> We are always looking at what is happening in industry and the dean relies on faculty and an advisory board to help constantly look at what’s going on, what’s happening out there in industry, how technology is moving, and what courses, programs, offerings, what we have that aligns with where the industry is going. We’re in a good position when what we’re doing now fits with what a lot of businesses and organizations want. If not, and things are changing, and they’re like, “Wow, it would be great to have certain courses combined in a certain way, and other courses combined in another way, then we can sort of figure out where the market is going. We also look at what new degrees are being produced by other institutions or new courses. (Interview 36, 3/18/2015)

This is a variation on serving student needs, but presented from a more market-oriented perspective. All of the private research universities are located in urban or suburban settings, so it is likely that they have a history of being connected into employment trends. However, serving broader societal needs is still an important aspect to programs at private research universities:

> We really do believe that this is a program that is great for our university as well as for the world at large, given the broad need for data scientists. (Interview 55, 3/20/2015)

Academic leaders at private universities made sense of online learning first through its market benefits for the university and second for the way it serves markets more broadly.

The six online programs in the sample are in the field of computer science, business, health sciences, and public administration. Five out of the seven interview subjects had
practitioner experience before entering higher education, with an average of 11 years of experience. This gave them a strong practitioner orientation:

*I have an ability to understand what the students need to do from a practice perspective, as opposed to just a scholarly perspective. I tend to always have one foot in the healthcare world, as opposed to just having an academic mindset.* (Interview 40, 3/16/2015)

To her, students seem to appreciate hearing about her experiences and her practical approach. All but one of the private research institutions in the sample offered online programs at the master’s degree level or higher except for one university with computer science bachelor’s degree programs. Thus, in these programs, workplace experience was highly valued.

This practitioner orientation can be strong enough that it shapes the view of the university as a business:

*So, trying to convince administrators that, “Hey, guess what? This is a business, and not just another department that we need to deal with.” We need to run this differently, not just “Hey, this is a department, let me suck all the money out of it so they can’t do anything more.” We kind of have a dual view on that within the administration, because it’s a lot of people going “Hey, from an academic perspective this [online program] is great. Oh yeah, it’s going to make money, let me suck that out. Hey, our football team sucks, let’s go spend more money on scholarships and better coaches.”* (Interview 55, 3/20/2015)

By seeing the university as a business with the potential to create revenue, this online program director reveals the contradictions in academic capitalism and promotes a purer form of market logic, which is that the online learning “profits” should be reinvested in the “business,” not spent on unprofitable activities.

Managerial university structures allow private research universities to constrain any faculty resistance to online education. These universities have more freedom to hire new individuals specifically to manage online programs, which enables online programs to be built without building widespread faculty buy-in. They have this freedom because of a low rate of
tenure at the three private research universities in the sample: one does not offer tenure to faculty and the other two have an average of 36% of the instructional staff either tenured or on the tenure track. As such, half of the online programs were started by faculty members and half were a decision of the university administration. At private research universities, three of the programs were offered at the university without tenure whose department chairs did not have full budgetary and personnel decision-making power. Two of the online programs were started outside of the department structure, drawing faculty from multiple departments and led by a director. One online program was started within a traditional department structure with a chair with full responsibilities, but the program later changed structures and began reporting directly to the dean instead of the chair. Also, two of the three institutions worked with a for-profit vendor to create and manage these online programs.

Nonetheless, even though just three of the seven interview subjects initially found online education to be a legitimate form of learning, and after experiencing online education, five of the online leaders maintained that belief in legitimacy or grew more favorable towards online learning. Part of this was due to the quality they found in the online courses:

"There are, I think, 21 students that we have right now in two different sections, so there are basically 10 and 11 students in each section and they will sit down for an hour and a half each week in the synchronous section with one of the faculty members that we have here. I think at that scale, we would only be able to do 150 students in cohorts at any given time. It's not a massive online program. We're big on small class sizes, and that's not something we really wanted to give up with the online section, and it's not something you could convince me would translate well if we were trying to take on 1,000 students in a section. That, you would have a much tougher time selling me on. I don't think it's impossible, and it might work for some courses, but probably not an entire master's degree." (Interview 10, 3/10/2015)

Quality came from both the small class sizes and the interaction with a faculty member that live online sessions afford. However, the level of excellence of an academic program; it also helps universities market their programs in a crowded marketplace:
Our biggest challenge is that the competition, the marketplace is everyday getting more and more saturated. Institutions that at one time, if you would have said online learning, they would laugh you out...How do we distinguish ourselves? Obviously, we can’t compete against state tuition rates, there’s a big dollar difference between private and public institutions. All of those public institutions are now doing online classes. Now, what we consider to be an online course and what they consider to be an online course is many times two different things. This is where we try to distinguish ourselves, trying to provide online courses that are not just Blackboard or some online tool, it’s having rich content with faculty members that are phenomenal facilitators of that content, while some of the state universities and other groups simply load up Blackboard. They tell faculty members, “Here, you’re teaching online now, good luck.” Now, the consumer doesn’t always know the difference. It’s our job to distinguish online courses and we promote our school so that it’s not just online, it’s the best of online. (Interview 36, 3/18/2015)

This dean’s concern for quality here expressed as “rich content” and “phenomenal facilitators” supports both to the standards of the university and the differentiation of the online programs from others, highlighting the importance of faculty in the process.

Balancing quality and growth online is a fraught process. On one hand, these universities consider that these courses need to be designed by full time faculty to truly reflect the university. On the other hand, they felt a pressure to standardize their online courses in order to grow. This has led to a change in intellectual property rights for course materials:

The courses would now be owned by the university, not the faculty member. You have to sign a contract to that effect...their view is that you are paid to develop the course; you’re paid extra, so in my case, I’m developing a course now. I wasn’t actually paid extra dollars but I got a course release so effectively was paid. So they’re arguing that they paid you extra to do it; they own the course; you sign a contract. (Interview 46, 2/24/2014)

All three of the private research universities in the sample owned the online course materials that faculty created by paying them for their work products. Despite the fact that intellectual property rights for online courses are commonly cited as a barrier to faculty acceptance of online education (e.g., Bolliger and Wasilik 2009), the interview subjects accepted these arrangements because of the benefits that online programs brought to themselves or the university. These faculty had either designed courses expressly for adjuncts to teach, or they had taught all the
courses they had designed, so the issue of intellectual property was more of an abstract concern than an urgent issue to them.

*Public Research Universities*

The acceptance of online learning at public research universities reflects the importance of the professional logic through research and serving the public good, though market logics do play a role in both the identities of the department leaders and the organizational structures of the universities. Because these universities are so large, wholly online students make up only 7% of the overall student population, that is, an average of 1,891 students. Thus, online operations are only a small function of the overall university. These universities had an average endowment of $2,968,015,591, so online programs are not necessary for survival, but feed into the mission of the university around access and research.

The 13 programs at public research universities in the sample were situated in several professional disciplines. By far the most common discipline online was education (61%), followed by agricultural and natural resources-related science programs (15%). Public research universities in the sample were more likely than other types of universities to offer doctoral programs: 38% of the departments offered online doctoral programs and 54% offered master’s degrees as their highest online degree. Online programs made sense because of the ways that they could be tied into research interests:

*If I were to reflect on any early thoughts about online education, they would have been framed primarily by my own curiosity around virtual environments. I spend a lot of time reading research and then actually doing some research utilizing the computer as a tool with students. I always saw them as a learning tool, and as the internet grew into its present state, I’ve only seen it as more and more valuable, and then more and more challenging with respect to helping students understand how to take advantage of it.*

(Interview 16, 12/9/2014)
Beyond education technology and the scholarship of teaching and learning, several department chairs described how online learning fit with their disciplinary interests. These interests could revolve around research as in the above example, or in how the needs of students in the field are met.

Similar to the other categories of universities, all but one chair had practitioner experience in their discipline. This experience averaged 12 years before entering higher education as a full-time faculty member. Several department chairs, particularly in agriculture and other practical sciences, had a long history of providing distance education or extension services to individuals across their state. After driving hours to meet with a small group of students, or working with old technologies such as VHS tapes of lectures sent to distance students, online learning was seen as a clear improvement, and a way to continue to fulfill the mission of the university to provide access. The following quotation describes how one chairperson felt his past work influenced his acceptance of online learning:

> It has a lot of influence on the customer service side of things, in terms of, are we treating the students the best we can, are the programs adjusted to what they need to have for getting jobs and employers and things like that? Because what I’ve done in the past was extension-oriented, and that’s all about making sure the university knowledge and experience is shared to a wide range of people. So I’m not a basic scientist doing genomics or something like that, I’m much more of an applied person and interested in making sure we do good outreach. (Interview 19, 12/11/2014)

Particularly for those at land grant institutions, teaching online felt like a responsibility to students in their region, especially given that student seem to live in an “electronic world” today (Interview 13, 3/4/2014).

There are several aspects to the organizational structure of public research universities that contributed to the acceptance of online learning. First of all, like the public regional universities in the sample, all of the public research universities offer tenure. These universities
also had the greatest percentage of tenured and tenure track faculty, an average of 54%. Unlike
the public regional universities, only one of the research universities has faculty represented by a
collective bargaining unit. Nonetheless, faulty generally had more autonomy at public research
universities than any others in the sample. Over three quarters (77%) of the initial decision to
develop online courses or programs was made by faculty, not the administration. In some cases,
faculty became involved with teaching online because of the individual financial rewards of
doing so:

At my previous institution, we were feeling pressure from upper administration to start
offering distance courses and distance programs. I have not felt that at all here. Most of
it seems to be generated by the entrepreneurial opportunity for faculty being able to make
some extra money above and beyond their base salary by offering these types of courses.
So it’s a very different type of motivation that’s been creating these types of degree
programs. (Interview 21, 3/4/2014)

In addition to faculty benefitting financially from venturing online, departments typically
benefit as well at public research universities. At research universities, a portion of the tuition
revenue from online programs was frequently returned back to the departments to add to their
general budgets to use as they like. This was a major incentive for departments to initiate online
programs. The following quotations show the ways that online tuition revenue influenced the
acceptance of online learning:

We bring in a lot of revenue from some of these other online courses that serve non-
majors, and that enables us to pay for faculty travel, graduate student travel, buy
equipment…I have the funds that I can allocate to develop people, and I don’t have to ask
anybody whether it’s a good idea or not. (Interview 12, 3/14/2014)

We get $100-$150 per student credit hour, and that money comes to the department and
that helps pay the bills here. E-campus has become a very, very important way to just
turn the lights on and keep things running. The additional funding enables [faculty] to
generate “a profit” off of their e-campus activity such that they can pay for help to do the
teaching, and still have money left over to help fund their RAs to bridge between a low
point or between grants that come in. So it has been seen as very positive by them, at
least that is my understanding of their view. (Interview 19, 12/11/2014)
These funds smoothed over any faculty opposition, because it benefits the traditional operations of the department – research, conference travel, and funding graduate students, all activities that the increasing austerity in public universities have squeezed. Similarly, because the departments at these public research universities were larger than the others in the overall sample, faculty who did not want to be involved with online teaching were able to opt out.

Besides the direct benefits of increased funding, department chairs accepted online learning because of the other benefits it brings, including the growth of the size of the department and an intensive focus on teaching that often improves traditional courses. Those benefits had several caveats as well. First, new faculty and staff add to the size of the department, but not necessarily the number of tenure lines:

> We have good people, good professionals. The faculty, we have a really supportive dean, and a supportive administration beyond that. Now, online has changed some things, I think. We have, for example, added a number of adjuncts for each course. We’ve added a couple people who are not tenure track, they’re term positions, but they teach primarily online for us, and I think added to people’s areas of expertise. Another change is we’ve hired a program assistant who takes care of the administrative-type tasks that at times advisors might do. She takes care of all that. She maintains contact with our students. I think those are some of the changes that have taken place. (Interview 2, 3/11/2014)

Only a few interview subjects mentioned adding tenure track faculty as a result of the increased enrollments in the department, and this was more common at public regional universities.

Another department chair at a public research university described looking into adding teaching faculty with online teaching responsibilities written into their job description.

Others saw that the intense focus on developing online courses had actually helped their face-to-face teaching, but offered a warning about its cost:

> Seeing the way it’s done here has given me at least a good idea of how it can be done well and how it could actually supplement the brick-and-mortar type of education. But people who think that this can be done cheaply are kidding themselves. If it’s going to be done well, it may cost us just as much and in fact, be charged a little bit more for those courses for the online students than we do the brick-and-mortar courses. So, my attitudes
Though departments with online programs were bringing in more money than ever, this department chair and others stated that they were not actually saving any money, one of the major claims of online education’s supporters. Another is online education’s increased access, which was most often discussed in terms of access to those in remote locations or for working students, not in terms of race or socioeconomic status. Overall, though department chairs at public research universities perceived online learning’s most important benefit as allowing them to serve both new and traditional students effectively, it was also seen as time-consuming and taking time away from research.

ANALYSIS

The previous findings demonstrate that the organizational design of each university represents a different constellation of logics, each with a different balance of professional, market, and other logics salient at the organizational level. Rather than viewing multiple institutional logics as dominant and subordinate, or in transition with one logic gaining dominance and the other losing influence in a field, Goodrick and Reay (2011) provide an alternative theory in their study of the professional work of pharmacists that logics exist together in constellations, or patterns, that constrain or enable action in a facilitative or additive way. In other words, logics can be cooperative in influencing behavior, rather than only being in conflict. The market and professional logics of the department chairs are fused, and the acceptance of online education results for reasons driven by both the market and professional logics together. This recalls Stark’s (2003) concept of “heterarchy”, organizational forms that are neither market
nor hierarchy, which have multiple worldviews and in which entrepreneurs can exploit inconsistencies among the multiple logics.

Market logics, present in all of the cases, were consistently significant to the acceptance of online learning. First of all, the organizational design of the universities allowed them to hire individuals that are culturally embedded in market logics because they are not solely academics. The microfoundations (Thornton et al. 2012) of the importance of market logics to the growth of online learning stem from the social identities of the department chairs, their cognitive schemata, and a focus of attention on revenue and growth. Faculty in professional fields like nursing have social identities (e.g., Townley 1997) and cognitive schemes (e.g., Seo and Creed 2002) that are grounded in the experience of working in industries that have historically been more subject to market practices than higher education. In addition to this practitioner experience, having experience as an online student also contributes to one’s social identity and focus of attention (Thornton and Ocasio 1999). For instance, historically, there has been a significant divide between traditional and distance education because of the latter’s stigma (Keegan 1996). However, because practice-oriented disciplines are often more attractive to nontraditional students seeking education for their career prospects, these departments valued hiring faculty members who held dual social identities, as practitioners in their career field as well as academics. Thus, because of their own identities, online faculty could identify with the need for online programs in their disciplines. The experience of so many department chairs as online students themselves, along with the experience of faculty who had taught in older types of distance learning programs, creates a positive cognitive schema for distance education and online learning, which may indicate that the divide between traditional and distance/online education will continue to narrow, particularly in practice-oriented disciplines.
Second, market logics are embedded in university structures, which explains how the organizational design of the universities contributes to the acceptance of online learning. Greenwood and Miller (2010) call for bringing back the study of organizational design to institutional theory and highlight the value of the institutional logics perspective for this purpose. The majority of universities in the study offered some combination of individual and departmental financial incentives for the development of online courses and programs. These incentive programs were offered by university-level offices such as the provost’s office or a continuing education division, which enabled the acceptance of online learning for its market benefits. Universities that do not offer tenure or have faculty chairpersons with decision-making power, those with a centralized leadership structure that can hire faculty specifically to develop online programs, and those with a heavy reliance on adjunct faculty to teach online contribute to the acceptance of online learning by constraining opportunities for resistance. Figure 2 provides a summary that outlines the predominant ways in which the authority relationships at the different types of institutions shape the decision to go online.

Figure 2. Typology of Online Program Decision-Making by Institution Type

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Faculty decision to initiate online program</th>
<th>University decision to initiate online program</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>No clear trend; both faculty and university decisions to initiate online programs</td>
<td>University decision to initiate online program</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Public

Research University

Private

Regional University
Finally, the narratives that department chairs and administrators presented to legitimize their involvement with online degree programs link market logics with online practices. Thornton et al. (2012) define narratives as giving “meaning to specific actors, events, and practices” though stories that “reflect specific organizing practices, their development, and their outcomes” (p. 155). Often, stories are used to legitimate change (Suddaby and Greenwood 2005). Online education was cited as a necessary response to the increasingly competitive environment for higher education where all universities rely on increasing tuition revenue to maintain operations and public universities must cope with the decline in state support. In addition, the majority of interview subjects noted that responding to student or employer needs motivated the development of their online programs. Student and employer needs were often one and the same, since online students are primarily working adults, and both groups valued students being able to continue working while taking classes. Narratives are also important because they are the mechanism that links practices and how they are constructed symbolically (Thornton et al 2012). Overall, market logics in the growth and acceptance of online learning are reinforced at both the individual and organizational level.

Market logics, however, do not act alone in leading to the acceptance of online learning. Professional logics, though more prominent at regional public and research universities, also contributed to the acceptance of online learning. For instance, while faculty are also culturally embedded in professional logics by the nature of their career, these logics also can support online learning. Professional logics align with the growth of online learning when educational technology is a research interest. This creates a social identity related to the importance of technology and a positive cognitive schema for the development of online learning programs. An interest in serving the public good creates a focus of attention on online education’s benefits for
access. Where professional logics are dominant in university structures, the organizational design of online education programs and their support structures cannot undermine professional logics in order for the acceptance of online learning to occur.

Universities with structures that enable faculty participation in decision-making, such as a process for faculty to obtain tenure, department chairs that are empowered to make curricular, budgetary and personnel decisions, and faculty choice for whether to become involved with the development or teaching of online courses all enable online learning to grow without threatening professional autonomy. Rather than feeling that the new online learning technical specialists hired to develop online instructional materials were encroaching on their professional jurisdiction, these department chairs saw these individuals as support personnel, not as competing professionals. In addition, financial incentives to departments willing to develop online programs in particular support the professional logic because they allow department chairs and other faculty to legitimate online learning based on its ability to fund traditional activities that bring departments prestige, such as conference travel, research, and graduate students.

The narratives these department chairs told legitimated online learning from both the market and the professional logic. At research universities, department chairs described online learning as a boon because it allowed them to continue to engage in prestige-generating activities like conference travel or funding graduate students at a level that would not be possible without online revenue. Secondly, narratives emphasizing that personal interaction with students is possible in online courses, and that quality is as good or better than face-to-face courses, address concerns about quality that are characteristic of the professional logic. This was a common perspective because they felt that students could not sit in the back of the classroom and opt out of participating. The professional logics outlined in the last chapter provide many arguments
against online learning, but when situated in organizational environments that use online learning to reinforce professional autonomy and prestige-seeking practices, professional logics can be marshalled for the support of online learning as well.

Online program leaders often have dual identities as academic faculty and representatives of a practice-oriented field. The narratives department chairs tell make multiple logics coherent in the support of online learning whether it is because of the practice’s convenience and flexibility that serves students’ needs, or because it brings in funding that allows the university or department to continue its traditional practices. When department chairs reflect on the drawbacks to online learning, such as the feeling of powerlessness that results from not being included in the decision-making process at private regional universities, or the frustrations of its time-consuming nature and difficulties connecting with students at public regional universities, they make sense of online based on the service it provides to students. Even when it created a less fulfilling professional experience for themselves, they were willing to make that sacrifice for the greater good of students. Thus, online learning programs emerging out of very different decision-making processes could be accepted at very different types of universities based on both market and professional logics.

DISCUSSION

This research is important because it helps us to understand the ways that the market logic is redefining the work of traditional academic departments. By analyzing the perceptions and experiences of 61 department leaders and administrators who oversee both campus-based and online programs, the discussion that follows will relate what the trends in the data regarding the institutionalization of online learning mean for stratification in higher education.
Institutional Logics and the Acceptance of Online Education

The first research question asks what characteristics contribute to the acceptance of online education by academic department chairs. The findings suggest that prior research on faculty identity is biased because it primarily focuses on faculty at research universities (e.g., Austin and Wulff 2004; but for exceptions see Hermanowicz 1998). Research centered on elite institutions obscures the influence of the market logic in constituting dual identities as faculty member and practitioner for faculty with extensive career experience in professional and vocational disciplines prior to entering higher education. In addition to the microfoundations of market logics, a focus of attention on serving student needs contributes to the embrace of online learning. Historically, this goal has been associated with the logic of education for the public good, but the use of this rationale to justify the growth of online learning has contributed to its assimilation into the market logic.

To these chairs, online education enhances the employment opportunities of students and the economic well-being of society, providing a basis for the public good logic to fit into a market logic. The logic of education for the public good can no longer stand on its own, because the benefits of online learning that can be conceptualized as a public good are also those activities that meet the demands of the market logic. The public is the labor market, not a community. There is a broad need for social workers, for example, but we do not see a subsequent rush to develop online social work programs because it is such a low paying profession, so it is much less attractive from a market perspective.\footnote{For instance, education has been a popular field online because of a steady supply of teachers who pursue master’s degrees to obtain salary increases. However, these online programs may struggle if states follow the lead of North Carolina and decouple automatic pay increases from degrees earned. More broadly, enrollment in teacher preparation programs nationwide has declined (Sawchuk 2014).} Serving the public good is
no longer exclusively about meeting the needs of all the citizens of a state, but about attracting the most profitable customers and teaching them in the most cost effective way.

It is clear to see that faculty at different types of institutions have different levels of power, based on how embedded the professional logic is within the university. This depends on, in part, whether they have tenure systems, strong departmental leadership, shared governance, and structures for technical and financial support for online learning. Though all of the interview subjects made sense of online learning through their social identities and cognitive schemas that draw from market logics, different levels of embeddedness of the market and professional logics within the structures of their universities led to different rationales for accepting online education.

Faculty at research universities had more power because their universities were designed for more protection of their professional autonomy, which enabled them to segment online learning work from other faculty activities by limiting it to only those faculty or instructors interested in the technology. Just as Goodrick and Reay (2011) describe the work of pharmacists as segmented by professional educational standards and managerial workplace standards as a way to manage competing logics, departments manage conflicting logics by segmenting it, isolating the work from those who view it negatively. The faculty and departments who do participate have received relatively generous financial incentives to develop and teach online courses, so the market benefits flow back to the individuals and the departments. The market logic, however, is also cooperative with the professional logics of faculty at research universities because the revenue that online learning brings in supports prestige-building activities.

On the other hand, department chairs at regional colleges and universities were less likely to get substantial financial incentives, if any at all, and the revenue from online learning flowed
back to the university, leaving these faculty only the psychic benefits of serving students. Nonetheless, at both elite and non-elite institutions, serving the public good has been grafted onto the market logic. These differences between types of universities and the conditions under which online education is accepted shows major heterogeneity in how university conditions structure the acceptance of online learning, even though all are subject to the same environmental discourses described in Chapter 3.

*Decision-Making Processes about Online Education*

I next considered how department chairs perceived the decision to develop online programs. Thomas’s (1994) study of technological change in organizations provides a useful framework for analyzing the processes found in each of the case studies. We have to pay attention to how the choice to go online was made, because this decision sets off the process for the development of online programs. Without looking at differences in how universities make this choice, we will not have a clear understanding of what changes result from the growth of online learning. These cases provide evidence to support the notion that despite differences in how the department chairs experience technological change depending on the decision-making process, similar logics inform the differing methods.

For instance, fears that online education causes faculty’s loss of professional dominance within the university could be overblown. At many elite institutions, faculty made the ultimate decision to go online and reaped the rewards from their efforts. At non-elite institutions, those fears may come too late, since many faculty members in the sample had already lost the primary aspects of professional dominance, like academic freedom, tenure, and participation in shared governance before the introduction of online learning. University administrators drove the decision to go online at the majority of sampled institutions. Associated with a managerial style
of leadership, these institutions were more likely to hire faculty specifically to manage online programs, thereby ensuring acceptance. Non-elite, administrator-driven programs were also more likely to partner with a vendor to help develop online programs.

Researchers like Noble (1998), who assume a top-down decision-making process for online learning, miss the many institutions where faculty made the decision willingly to support their discipline through online learning. Thomas (1994) stresses that organizational change occurs in a social and historical context, and my findings show that institutions with structures to support faculty power offer a decision-making process that is more consistent with traditional shared governance practices. At the majority of departments led by chairs with budgetary and personnel responsibilities in universities with tenure that are led, faculty are not made to develop online programs without first giving approval, and are offered extra monetary incentives to participate. Taking advantage of these incentives allowed faculty to do the activities that are a source of traditional prestige.

Whether the decision to go online is made by universities or departments, faculty and administrators share logics about the problem that online learning solves. Within the market logic, online programs have been framed as a solution to the need for more resources. As serving the public good has been assimilated into the market logic, online higher education has been framed as creating access for a broader array of students. Even though what it means to view students as consumers differs for faculty and others, as shown by the previous chapter, it still comes from a market perspective. The majority of faculty may indeed be guided by a different set of logics that lead them to be against online education, but because of the two different ways that online has been implemented, it has not mattered. When a university has a managerial decision-making style, those faculty who do not support online can either find a way to accept it
or leave. At institutions that include faculty in the decision-making process, those who are against online learning often do not have to be involved in the teaching or development process, because the choice is offered. The professional logic values professional autonomy and academic freedom, so this logic actually enables faculty interested in participating in online education because it gives the autonomy to be entrepreneurial. It only takes a few faculty supporters to establish online programs within academic departments.

When the decision to go online comes from administrators, faculty do not passively accept this change, even though very few chairs reported outright opposition among their faculty. Instead, faculty who had to teach online reshaped the meaning of the online programs from revenue generators to service to students. This reframing process allowed the department chairs to prevent the professional logics that shape their identities and teaching practices from being totally subsumed by the market logic. By making sense of their involvement with online learning with the reason that they teach – to serve their professions and create access to higher education, they could take part in online learning but still protect their sense of self. They viewed online education as creating opportunity, but opportunity for whom? Many of the department leaders did not discuss access beyond working students, and seldom referenced access for underserved socioeconomic or racial groups. Additionally, some also revealed that completion rates were lower in online programs than in a comparable face-to-face program, so online students were accessing higher education but not earning the credential. Meaning-making around access to higher education should be explored further in future research, since it is such a prominent explanation for the growth of online learning.

No matter who makes the decision to go online, at the sampled institutions, faculty played a large role in the design and implementation of courses. Though some institutions
completely separate the development of online programs from full-time faculty in academic departments, the proportion of schools that do this are the minority and not the focus of this research. In designing online programs and courses, faculty have a lot of say over the content of those programs. They have some say over the structure of the program, such as if students need to come to campus or participate in live online sessions. However, they often do not have the opportunity to provide input into the architecture of the online courses, since the LMS technology is a fairly standardized product. This rigid format changes the teaching process. Developing courses and teaching becomes much more time intensive as whole courses need to be completed before the beginning of the term, and email and message board communication takes more time and coordination than meetings during office hours and in-class discussions. While some found that this increased time creates value for improving teaching, most found it to be a burden. It is possible that with real coordination between those who teach and those who design the LMS technology systems, a system could be designed that allows for online teaching in a way that feels like an improvement instead of a hindrance to faculty. For that to occur, technology companies would have to value the faculty perspective of teaching, which is questionable given the rhetoric from technology companies in the previous chapter.

Discussions about online learning focus on the extremes – on one side, Stanford and MIT are the focus with MOOCs, and on the other side, for-profits like University of Phoenix get all the attention. In reality, the bulk of online courses and programs are taken at non-profit institutions like the ones described here. Thomas (1994) outlines three implications of his research, which apply here. First, an organization’s goals and environment structure how strongly the logics of the technology influence the social system of that organization. I found that department chairs at universities with an explicit teaching mission, and in an environment of
scarce resources were more likely to have an administration directing them to start an online program. At institutions with more prestige derived from research, which also brings in other sources of funding, the decision to go online might be incentivized by the university, but it is the choice of the faculty. Second, it is important to look at the process of how decisions about technology are made. Thomas (1994) notes that technology can appear to drive organizational choices rather because technological change is experienced as an external force. Indeed, many interview subjects used a language about technology reflecting an evolutionary view; the adoption of online programs was inevitable. Finally, since new technologies can be used as a tool to change the power structure of an organization, online learning programs should be seen not just as a tool of managerial university administrations, but a way for departments to gain power through resources, growth, or alignment with university logics. My findings show the range of how departmental online programs have been implemented with different decision-making and organizational structures, yet the similarity in logics underpinning these online programs leads to a similar embrace of online learning.

The Apparent Outcomes of Adopting Online Programs in Academic Departments

The findings show that the acceptance of online education in academic departments has several consequences, some more recognizable than others. One of the primary changes associated with developing or teaching an online program is a more positive judgment of online education’s legitimacy in the eyes of the chairs I interviewed. Online learning gained legitimacy for two reasons. Either the interview subject strongly believed that the quality of online learning was as good as or better than face-to-face classes, or they viewed it as only appropriate for certain types of situations where it would be acceptable that the learning is more transactional.
For both of these groups, the experience with online learning changes the meaning of quality. It changes what it means to be interactive or rigorous changes.

In addition to these perceptions, the social organization of the department and university shifts in at least five significant ways. While these changes are more dependent on the locus of power within the university – faculty or administrators – each institution experienced them to some degree:

First, the growth of online led to the hiring of faculty, in some cases tenure track, but more often instructors or adjuncts were hired specifically for the online classes. Second, several chairs reported spending more time at home, since online teaching does not require faculty to come to their office on campus. This meant that faculty were less likely to be present on campus, potentially disconnecting them from university culture and decision-making. Third, because universities generally paid faculty to develop online courses, they were doing work for hire and gave up the rights to their intellectual property to the institution. Nonetheless, at many institutions, the issue of control over intellectual property had never come up as a concern, either because it was a given that the university owned their work, or that faculty had a culture of sharing and did not perceive that their university would take advantage of them. Fourth, the increase in revenues provided a sense of security. At institutions where the funds went to the university, it provided stability since many of these institutions were tuition-driven. At institutions where departments received some of the revenue from online enrollments, they had the security of being able to fund the activities that bring prestige. Finally, online programs often create more embeddedness for the department with internal partners like online service units or external partners like online vendors. The impact of the partner on the department depends on how involved they are with the construction of the courses. Though many of the interview
subjects felt that the changes occurring in the department were a natural evolution, they were the result of human choices.

It is important to note that many of the faculty did not feel that the introduction of online programs dramatically changed the structure or culture of their department. However, the choices that are being made now may reshape the structure of higher education in the future. For instance, because teaching online leads to acceptance of the technology and a belief in its quality, and quality is one of the main components for legitimacy to faculty, I suspect that the level of faculty acceptance will shift upwards. Especially in light of how many future faculty members will have experience with taking online courses and be required to teach online as a condition of employment, online learning will continue to be institutionalized within colleges and universities. In fact, very few chairs described outright resistance to the development of online programs and a market logic that is embedded in the way that departments are led. Because new programs often have to maximize enrollments and revenue in order to be approved, it would be rare at many institutions to consider a new program that would not be at least partially online. Thornton et al. (2012) theorize that parts of institutions change faster than the overall logics of the institution. The traditional values of the field of higher education are decoupled from the actual practices within the vast majority of academic departments within the practice-oriented disciplines.

Higher education has always been governed by multiple logics. The push for education for the public good has balanced out market practices, particularly as education expanded in the post-WWII era. Now that the market logic has assimilated service to students by changing the conception of students to customers, the public good logic is less able to serve as a check on market demands. Several chairs admitted that while they were doubtful that their discipline was
best learned online, it was what the students wanted and that they needed to serve their needs. The assimilation of the ideal of serving students into the market logic also comes into play with the online vendors, who do things to maximize enrollments like shortening terms to five weeks or standardizing course formats, basing decisions on what keeps students enrolled, not what maximizes learning. The market logic is well entrenched at the department level in these departments, but online learning brings more people into the decision-making process who view students as customers, changing the meaning of serving the public good.

Another way that serving the public good has been subverted is through the funneling of online student tuition revenue back to traditional students. Rather than investing increased revenues into scholarships for online students or actions that would continue to improve the quality of online programs, many department chairs discussed how the new funding was used to fund on campus graduate students. This creates more stratification between those online students who often pay full tuition, especially those created through contracts with external partners, and those campus-based students whose tuition is subsidized. Based on the findings from institutions where early adopters of online programs once received generous portions of the online enrollment revenue or other incentives which were later cut, there are signs that as universities come to depend on online funding, instead of treating it as “extra” revenue, they see it as necessary income, which will mean that they will have to attract even more online students to pay for “extras” like Ph.D. student funding. This will create an even greater stratification of students as well as stratifying faculty, as more and more are hired, tenure track or not, to teach online, and are distinguished from the select few faculty who can choose not to be involved in online teaching.
Finally, the last implication of these findings relates to the theory of isomorphism (DiMaggio and Powell 1983). Usually the copying of structures from one organization to another moves from high prestige to lower prestige organizations, since mimetic isomorphism is intended to enhance legitimacy. Online education is an interesting case, however, because online education programs for credit have largely spread from low prestige institutions like for-profit universities and small, regional private colleges to higher status colleges and universities, so adding online programs would not improve one’s status in the field under traditional models. In a field governed by multiple logics, I argue that online is actually serving to enhance status, by appealing to external audiences operating under a market logic, to whom online programs show that a college or university is innovative, flexible, and attuned to the needs to students. This type of research shows the importance of multilevel studies that include extra-field, institutional, organizational, and individual contexts, so that it is possible to make sense of organizational behavior.

CONCLUSIONS
Overall, this research contributes to our understanding of technological change in higher education. Most writers on the subject extrapolate from their fears or fervent technological dreams about the transformation of higher education without systematic research to investigate the meaning of that change for the academic profession. By focusing on department chairs who have undergone the development of online programs already, we can observe how market logics shape the legitimacy of online education at the individual, organizational, and environmental level. One way has been the assimilation of the concern for serving student needs into the market logic. Theoretical work on the growth of the views of students as consumers portrays this
sentiment as something pushed on higher education from the external environment, rather than faculty responding rationally, based on their social identities and organizational constraints.

For instance, Elizabeth Popp Berman (2012) finds that the market logic grew in higher education because of government decisions that encouraged universities to engage in market practices. At the micro-level, she states that most faculty were guided by the science logic (analogous to the professional logic) but some did get market benefits from experimenting with commercialized science. Because she is primarily examining elite research universities, she does not address the mechanism for how the market logic spreads at non-elite universities. Also, because she examines the influence of the state, the market logic at the individual level is underexamined. The growth of online learning as a market practice has parallels. At elite institutions, faculty and mid-level administrators have typically been the ones driving the decision to go online, but instead of justifying online courses as a market engine, it is presented as an access engine. At these research universities, faculty can keep operating internally with a science or public good logic, because only those who are interested in online learning have to get involved. Those who do, get market rewards. At non-elite institutions, however, more faculty have to get involved even if they are skeptical of the technology; most are accepting of online learning because of an already-held market logic and the assimilation of the logic of serving student needs into academic consumerism.

I emphasize the contribution my research makes in its focus on non-elite four-year institutions, which are typically absent in higher education research. By paying attention to the ways that colleges and universities are stratified, my work helps to de-center mainstream views of academic professional autonomy. For example, the view of faculty from The Chronicle of Higher Education, as presented in the previous chapter, focuses on concerns about the loss of
professional autonomy and academic freedom, which barely existed for many full-time faculty at less-prestigious institutions prior to the implementation of online learning. I argue that because departments in elite institutions have enough organizational power that their universities are willing to remunerate faculty and departments for participating in the development of online programs, the ability for these institutions to use online revenues to pursue greater prestige-building activities will create a wider gap in the full-time faculty role between high- and low-status universities. In addition, by showing the difference in the process of decision-making about online programs, I reinforce that the constellation of institutional logics at non-elite institutions emphasizes service to students because they are not receiving personal and departmental financial benefits beyond maintaining their employment.

These results are different from previous research studies because my focus on non-elite institutions highlights the ways that power mediates technological change. For instance, Johnson (2012) writes about the impact of educational technologies on professional autonomy. He outlines the ways that instructional technologies can potentially erode professional control. Due to his focus on research universities, he argues that faculty are not required to use technology in the classroom and thus faculty see the technologies as irrelevant to learning. My research indicates that faculty at non-elite institutions already have little professional autonomy and in cases of departments selecting to develop online programs, faculty are required to engage with online course technologies. Johnson also notes that when an administration creates an environment that necessitates the use of instructional technology, it can engender job dissatisfaction. Though I did find that some department chairs were unhappy with the heavier workload, most were highly satisfied with the funding received from online programs, the survival of their institution, and the knowledge that they were serving student needs. The subset
of my research on external partners does support the notion that the unbundling of the faculty role is subtle, and external intrusion into the curriculum can occur without radical change experienced by the department chairs. The chairs probably do not feel that faculty roles have been “unbundled” since the technological skills necessary to create online courses was never “bundled” with the faculty role to begin with.

Future research that begins to explore some of these hypotheses created by my work for causal relationships between the growth of online learning and change to the faculty role can begin now that the federal government has recently released quantitative data on online enrollments by institution. Because I have revealed extensive differences in how the market logic is marshalled across different institutional types, in-depth case studies would also allow more detail into that process of change and its consequences. Ultimately, department chairs at elite and non-elite institutions alike see no other option for expanding access to higher education and the survival of their way of being than implementing online learning. This risks creating an “online” treadmill of production, however, where universities must keep expanding their online offerings in order to maintain the rest of their university offerings. Rather than professional logics being a source of resistance to online learning, online programs prop up prestige-building practices, which negates any contradiction in market and professional logics. In the next chapter, I explore the organizational design characteristics and institutional logics that do contribute to resistance to the development of online learning programs.
Chapter 5: Resisting Online Education, Resisting Corporatization

This chapter is a case study of Rutgers University’s Graduate and Arts and Sciences faculties’ rejection of a contract to develop and market online degree programs with Pearson, a for profit education technology and media company. The case study narrative explores how the faculty were able to exercise shared governance in the contract’s rejection, and the analysis explores why the faculty were able to be successful. This is an important topic for analysis because the previous chapter demonstrates why faculty embrace online education and offered few examples of strong faculty opposition. By examining an instance of resistance to the expansion of online education, it reveals some potential causes for why faculty have had so little impact on the diffusion and institutionalization of online learning. This case is also significant because it was not only a reaction to online education, but to the spread of public-private partnerships and the influence of corporations in higher education. In addition, the analysis of the outcomes of the case has policy applications as a model for other institutions. It is important research because it fills a gap in the sociological understanding of online education and resistance to the growth of the market logic in higher education. The means and outcomes of faculty resistance to online learning has not been studied in any detail (cf. Mitchell, Parlamis, and Claiborne 2015).

The objective of this chapter is to provide a foil to the previous chapter’s study of online education within traditional departments. The interviews with department chairs identified numerous instances of college or university administrations dictating participation in the development of online degrees despite faculty objections, or cases where departments felt that they could not object to incorporating online learning into the degrees offered in their department. In this chapter, institutional logics theory (Thornton and Ocasio 2008) will be the
foundation for the case analysis. The methodology of the case study will be discussed, followed by an outline of the relevant history of Rutgers University and Pearson to introduce the two main organizations studied. Finally, a narrative of the case and its analysis will present the process of the faculty’s rejection of the contract with Pearson with an exploration of how that rejection was able to occur. A broader objective of this chapter is to contribute to the theoretical discussions of institutional logics, discursive power in organizations, as well as extend academic capitalism theory to the study of education public/private partnerships around the core academic function, teaching.

This particular form of online education, the partnership between Rutgers University and Pearson, a for-profit corporation, is a classic example of a public-private partnership, the collaboration of philanthropist, NGO, or corporate entities with educational institutions in some aspect of the provision of education (Robertson et al. 2012). These partnerships are typically seen as a win-win because they allow public entities to do work that they wouldn’t otherwise be able to do, and the private organization is motivated to fulfill a social good efficiently. For example, textbook publishers are looked to for help with student success goals (Lyman 2013), partnerships with hotel chains can bring in revenue and experience for students (Jordan, Shorter, and Weinshall 2013), and public-private partnerships are seen as being able to increase access and quality at the same time (Patrinos, Barrera Osorio, and Guáqueta 2009).

However, Slaughter and Rhoades (2004) criticize public-private partnerships in education because these partnerships are a form of academic capitalism, part of the movement of knowledge and learning generating within colleges and universities from public to private. Once for the public benefit, now the benefits of that knowledge and the profits it generates are distributed unevenly across society. Other downsides of these arrangements are found within the
field of academic science, where Vallas and Kleinman (2008) describe how public-private partnerships result in asymmetrical convergence. This is the phenomena of university laboratories taking on some of the worst business practices, such as putting heavy entrepreneurial pressure on academic scientists in a structure that constrains communication, while industrial scientists benefit from a work environment characterized by flexibility and autonomy that was previously associated with university life. Newfield (2008) implicates the privatization of public universities as a tool of the conservative elite to reduce the cost and status of the middle class in our society. Despite all the rhetoric about the role that public-private partnerships can play in improving learning outcomes, Aronowitz (2000) paints a picture of the middle- and working class that cares little about learning in recognition that attending college is necessary to obtain any job. With all of these possible critiques, this study will explore the way that faculty chose to frame their criticisms of the public-private agreement to launch online programs.

METHODOLOGY

I conducted a case study of the incidences that occurred following Rutgers’ contract with Pearson to develop managed online programs and its subsequent rejection by graduate and arts and sciences faculty. Data came from 11 in-depth key informant interviews with Rutgers and Pearson employees by telephone, triangulating their narratives with meeting minutes and newspaper articles published about the case and online education at Rutgers. I also reviewed other documents related to the campaign shared with my by the interview subjects, including the contract itself, emails sent by the union to Rutgers faculty, a petition, and comments prepared about the contract. I recruited interview participants via personal emails to individuals listed in meeting minutes, newspaper articles, and asked in those emails to be referred to other individuals.
knowledgeable about the case. In total, I interviewed five individuals associated with the administration of Rutgers University, one person employed by Pearson, one person employed by the union, and four faculty members. I also shared one extensive email exchange with one additional faculty member who declined to participate in a telephone interview. Faculty members represented a variety of disciplines across the arts and sciences, the school that rejected the contract, and administrators came from both faculty and non-faculty backgrounds.

Table 10. Key Informant Interview Data

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Interview Number</th>
<th>Position</th>
<th>Date of Interview</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>AAUP Staff Member</td>
<td>6/24/2014</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>Faculty Member</td>
<td>6/24/2014</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>Administrator</td>
<td>6/25/2014</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>Administrator</td>
<td>6/26/2014</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>Faculty Member</td>
<td>6/27/2014</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>Pearson Employee</td>
<td>7/1/2014</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>Administrator</td>
<td>7/2/2014</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8</td>
<td>Administrator</td>
<td>7/10/2014</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9</td>
<td>Administrator</td>
<td>7/10/2014</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10</td>
<td>Faculty Member</td>
<td>7/17/2014</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11</td>
<td>Faculty Member</td>
<td>10/7/2014</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Using a semi-structured interview guide, I collected background information about the careers of each individual. The main subject of the interview was their recollection of the sequence of events leading up to and after the faculty rejection of the Pearson contract, and their interpretation of those events. I also asked about their personal experience with and perspective on online education, and their thoughts on the programs and future of higher education. The interviews were transcribed, and the qualitative data was coded based on categories and themes from neo-institutional theory as a “sensitizing framework” (Patton 1990:384) and analyzed after conducting within-case analysis by writing a detailed case history (Eisenhardt 1989).
particular, I followed Suddaby and Greenwood’s (2005) model of understanding institutional logics by examining the rhetoric of the university administrators and faculty. In order to protect the confidentiality of the participants, the only individuals that are named are those that were quoted or described in the newspaper accounts of the events. Only broad categories of employment are used to denote the interview subjects when referencing interview data.

On its own, the generalizability of a case study of a single university is constrained by the unique historical, political, and social context of that university. Based on the research conducted for the rest of my dissertation, however, organized faculty resistance to online education is relatively rare (for exceptions, see Rivard 2013a, 2013b), so an exploration of the dynamics that led to the success of Rutgers’ faculty can contribute to the generation of theory that challenges and extends theories of institutional entrepreneurs and institutional logics. For this purpose, a single-case design is appropriate in exploratory research (Yin 2009). Each successive comparison between similar cases and theory will test the conclusions and refine them as to make the results more generalizable (Glaser and Strauss 1967). Overall, I undertook a holistic understanding of how the Pearson contract was rejected by Rutgers’ graduate and Arts and Sciences faculty and why they were able to reject the contract, and seek to have the conclusions of this case be transferable (Lincoln and Guba 1985) to universities pursuing the growth of online education in a similar manner.

A BRIEF HISTORY OF RUTGERS UNIVERSITY AND PEARSON PLC

To better understand the main players in the case, the next two sections contain a description of the two institutions and highlights from their histories that are relevant to the deal made between Rutgers University and Pearson to develop online degrees together. Rutgers’
history has been ably told in depth by historian Richard McCormick (1966) and university archivist Thomas Frusciano (2006), so this section will focus on the important themes of this history, including constant reorganizations, institutional expansion, and tensions with the faculty and the state.

*Rutgers University*

Rutgers, The State University of New Jersey, was chartered by the Dutch Reformed Church in 1766 as Queen’s College, with a curriculum more classical than religious (Frusciano 2006). Small, struggling financially, and plagued by conflict between faculty and church leadership, Queen’s College, later renamed Rutgers College, finally obtained a steady source of funding after the Morrill Act was passed in 1862 (McCormick 1966). Over the years, the number of schools multiplied. After the turn of the century, the balance of enrollments shifted from the liberal arts in Rutgers College to pre-professional programs like teaching and agriculture. The faculty across these different colleges then proposed a reorganization, becoming Rutgers University in 1924. The President at the time, William H. M. Demarest, resigned due to his unhappiness that the dual university he envisioned of a classical, private college and state university together was morphing into a public university (McCormick 1966).

Public university status meant increased oversight by the State, which led to tensions among the academic leaders of the university, the university’s Board of Trustees, and the New Jersey higher education Board of Regents (McCormick 1966). By 1930, Rutgers University was comprised of seven schools and colleges, most with independent leadership and separate faculties (Frusciano 2006). Faced with poor conditions during the Great Depression, faculty improved their status through the establishment of the Graduate Faculty in 1932 and an increasing focus on research to support the war effort, which helped defuse tensions with the
state. The University as a whole was designated as the State University of New Jersey in 1945 (Frusciano 2006). This shift led to changes for faculty: the Trustees established a new organizational structure for faculty, instituting divisions across colleges, faculty-elected chairpersons, a new recognition of tenure, and an increase in over 200 faculty members to respond to the return of veterans under the GI Bill (McCormick 1966). The University added two major campuses, growing in size and influence across the state (Frusciano 2006). The schools and colleges continued to be run independently, but for the first time, a Provost was appointed in 1949 to oversee academic affairs for all of the parts of the University (Robbins 2001).

The 1950s through 1970s were turbulent decades for Rutgers. The state asserted more control of the University (Frusciano 2006) and the faculty saw further attempts at reorganization and unification as the number of students and programs continued to grow. In 1970, the state approved collective bargaining for university employees, and the faculty made the American Association of University Professors its collective bargaining unit (Rutgers AAUP-AFT 2014). It enjoyed an active voice, credited with advancing faculty salaries through its contract negotiations (Robbins 2001). Reorganizations in the latter part of this 30 year period were contentious but more successful, culminating in the formation of the Faculty and Arts and Sciences across all of the colleges at the New Brunswick campus in 1980 (Frusciano 2006).

The university continued to experience enormous growth in students and status throughout the 1980s and 90s. The AAUP union began to represent more types of employees, including part-time lecturers, non-tenure track full-time faculty, graduate and teaching assistants, and other staff, uncommon at universities (Rutgers AAUP-AFT 2014). After state funding expanded in the 1980s, it contracted again in the 1990s, creating a difficult environment. Foreshadowing Rutgers’ involvement with online education, in 1997, President Francis
Lawrence chaired a subcommittee of the Kellogg Commission on the Future of State and Land-Grant Universities advocating for distance education, and in 2000, Rutgers was one of the first research universities to connect to Internet2, part of a $100 million RUNet project (Rutgers 2013).

Meanwhile, the university was undergoing a major transformation. In 2005, the AAUP affiliated with the American Federation of Teachers (Rutgers AAUP-AFT 2014). In 2006, all of the liberal arts colleges across the multiple campuses in New Brunswick were combined into one single college of arts and sciences with one set of entry standards. President McCormick undertook Rutgers’ biggest fundraising campaign yet, a $1 billion campaign, reaching $800 million in 2013. State funding rebounded, indicating that the tide was finally shifting on public support for Rutgers, no doubt in some small part due to successes on the football field which led to joining the Big 10 conference the same year. In addition, Rutgers finally reclaimed medical education through a merger with the University of Medicine and Dentistry of New Jersey, considered a major status boost for the university.

Following these developments, Rutgers began the strategic planning process, the first university-wide plan since 1995. This strategic plan, In a 250-Year History, A Singular Moment in Time...Our Moment: A Strategic Plan for the New Rutgers, was published in 2014, after the agreement with Pearson had stalled, but offers insight into many of the fears faced by Rutgers and its justifications for making a push to centralize and expand online education. The plan identified a need to be entrepreneurial to respond to increased costs and decreased funding, particularly because Rutgers has been less successful than some of its peers in finding alternative sources of revenue, such as raising research funds, fundraising per student, and attracting out-of-state students. The report cites online education as a way to respond to these concerns. It also
finds its “bureaucratic inability to respond in a timely manner to economic, disciplinary, and educational changes” as a weakness (Rutgers 2014:5). In response, a priority stated in the report is to embrace risk and new organizational forms, particularly partnerships and those enhanced by technology, in order to provide a student-centric educational product. According to the report, Rutgers’ complex bureaucracy keeps students from having a positive student experience and these inflexible structures hurt the ability of the university to “withstand the disruptive drivers changing higher education” (Rutgers 2014: 37). At the same time, programs for nontraditional students help bring in revenue that is best spent on reaching their strategic priorities, which includes “transforming the student experience” (Rutgers 2014). This history and Rutgers’ summation of its strategic environment inform its choice to expand online education using Pearson and the events that followed that decision.

Pearson PLC

Pearson PLC is an UK-based multinational media and education company, and the largest publisher and education company in the world, with over 40,000 employees worldwide (Pearson plc 2013). North America is Pearson’s biggest market, and its U.S. headquarters is based in New Jersey. In part to respond to declining textbook sales, Pearson underwent a massive restructuring in 2013, focusing on digital learning products and services, and describes itself in its annual report as “putting the learner at the heart of everything we do.” Key acquisitions to support its online education business included eCollege in 2007 for $477 million (Nagel 2007) and online program management provider EmbanetCompass for $650 million in 2012 (Swanson, Mays-Smith, and Goldsmith 2012). Over 200 colleges and universities partner with Pearson to develop online degree programs, recruit students, and provide enrollment,
support and technology services (Pearson 2013). Other areas of growth for the company include testing and assessment and education in developing nations.

RUTGERS AND PEARSON: A CASE STUDY

By the time Rutgers University first ventured into online education in 1999, an estimated 62 percent of four-year colleges already offered online courses (Council for Higher Education Accreditation 1999). At this point, Rutgers had no overall online learning strategy and put no pressure on departments to go online. As a result, online offerings had the feel of a grassroots movement. Some interested faculty members developed individual courses, and other courses were offered through continuing education. The School of Communication, Information and Library Studies was an early innovator in online distance education, offering a full graduate certificate, and later a master’s degree online. Because each course and program was developed independently, every department had a different financial arrangement, and different technology systems were used across colleges. As one administrator explained,

*I think in large part because Rutgers came rather late to this game, the faculty who were interested in doing online education negotiated or discussed or arranged individual agreements with their chairs, deans, and so forth, and different faculty and different academic units arranged things differently. So some academic units would have a faculty member teaching an online course as part of their regular course load; others might give them course release; others might, to a very lesser extent, pay them a little bit extra or provide them with additional teaching assistance or something like that.... The real decision-making on curricular matters is at the departmental level.* (Interview 9, 7/10/2014)

Online education at Rutgers was still an insignificant portion of its overall offerings by the mid-2000s. During the fall semester in 2005, 220 students were enrolled in 16 online courses (Krueger 2006). To put that in perspective, Rutgers University had over 34,000 students enrolled across all three of its campuses that semester. Furthermore, around the same time, university
administrators calculated that half of the online enrollments were existing on campus students, not new students who would bring in new revenue.

A few years later, as one administrator remarked, “The University decided this won’t do, and ‘we really need to get with it’” (Interview 4, 6/26/2014). To encourage the development of online programs that would bring in new enrollments and revenue, the university offered incentives to departments for the creation of online courses and programs by cutting the overhead rate that units were charged based on tuition revenue, effectively increasing the dollars received per student flowing back to the participating schools. Not surprisingly, online course enrollments began to take off in 2008 (Sikorski 2010). In 2009, with 3,200 students online, President McCormick addressed online education in a university speech, citing the goal of increasing online and off-campus revenue from $20.5 million to $65 million by 2014 (Hopton 2009). In order to do this, the university realized it needed better infrastructure and more resources to do online education well and achieve this revenue goal.

Efforts were made to centralize online operations through the leadership of the Division of Continuous Studies. This included RutgersOnline, the university-wide unit that managed Rutgers’ initial relationship with Pearson through its eCollege course management system (CMS). As opposed to the CMSs used at the university already to organize course materials on the web, including WebCT, Sakai, and Blackboard, eCollege provided additional services to schools such as course development and instructional design, which could help to build online programs (Nagel 2007). Nonetheless, the standardization efforts were limited. One faculty member reflected, “We had access to eCollege, but that basically was if someone wanted to offer an online course. They could use eCollege and it was their choice. There wasn’t any encouragement; there wasn’t discouragement” (Interview 2, 6/24/2014). Faculty continued to use
the CMS that was the norm in their particular department, which limited the university’s ability to achieve economies of scale in any one technology format. In 2011, Rutgers had close to 7,000 online enrollments (Ruggeri 2013), and it created The Center for Online and Hybrid Learning and Instructional Technologies (COHLIT) to support online education’s rapid growth.

Multiple push and pull factors contributed to the perception that increased centralization was necessary. The push factors include increasing demands from ADA compliance, state regulation of distance education, and accreditation requirements. Improved technologies pulled Rutgers towards offering more online programs, but the main pull factor was, of course, increased enrollment growth and revenue. “With the pressures from the state in terms of budget revenue, we saw it as a way to generate additional revenue because the university incentivized that schools got to keep a higher percent of online revenue. So it fit with our core values in terms of educational access and serving adults, and it was a good mechanism to do that,” stated one university administrator (Interview 3, 6/25/2014). Not only were “grassroots” online courses and programs now seen as disadvantageous, but coordination with Rutgers’ online unit was seen as absolutely necessary for online learning to grow rationally, serve student needs, and be in accordance with multiple layers of regulations.

Also in 2011, Rutgers had to decide if it was going to continue to grow incrementally, or if it was going to bring online education to the scale of some of its peer institutions by launching more wholly online programs. One of the university leaders described the decision making process:

*We considered both to be viable, but our take on the rate at which things were changing in higher education was that there was a window of opportunity where a few players, Arizona State being the most prominent example of having done this well, were able to elevate their status by partnering with someone [i.e., a corporation or non-profit] that would enable them to grow online in a quality way much more quickly than they would do themselves. Basically, given that we weren’t getting a lot of new money from the state*
and that we were viewed as a profit center within the university, the only way to grow it ourselves was through our own regenerated surplus, so it was going to be an incremental process. So we made the decision that if Rutgers was going to move into the top tier of online, that we needed to do it with a partner. (Interview 3, 6/25/2014).

A committee of 17 administrators and faculty members was named to evaluate a formal Request For Proposal (RFP) for “E-Learning Technology Infrastructure and Administrative Support Services” (Swalagin 2012). A Rutgers dean elaborated, “They looked at a group of six different vendors. They received formal proposals so it was a regular closed bidding process and the decision was made to go with Pearson” (Interview 7, 7/2/2014). Pearson was seen as a company that could help Rutgers attract out-of-state students, and make the type of investment in “marketing, recruitment, coaching, all of the technologies, and any of the Pearson digital assets,” that Rutgers could never afford, “all while respecting the intellectual property rights of Rutgers,” (Interview 8, 7/10/2014). On top of that, they offered the best deal, stated one administrator familiar with the committee. Another consideration, according to the Senior Vice President of Lifelong Learning and Strategic Growth, David Finegold, was that the other bidders “included startups, but in an industry which is changing so quickly, it’s useful to have a partner who you know will still be around in a decade” (NJBIZ 2012). A seven-year contract with Pearson was signed September 17, 2012.

The perceived lack of faculty involvement in the process and the agreement with Pearson quickly drew the scrutiny of the union and faculty. The contract was leaked to the AAUP-AFT in August (McKenna 2013), and upon reading the details of the agreement, they realized that a contract to co-develop online programs with Pearson would affect the faculty contract and collective bargaining, so they attempted to begin negotiations with the administration. The deal was not announced widely until a December press release, after the AAUP-AFT had notified
faculty, which was the first point at which many in the Rutgers community came to learn about the deal.

What exactly was in the contract? The joint Rutgers/Pearson press release stated that this was “a new public/private partnership with Pearson, provider of educational technology, content and services, which positions the university to significantly expand lifelong learning opportunities…while maintaining access to the same level of academic quality that is offered in the traditional Rutgers classroom” (Aspey and Miranda 2012). The “Managed Programs” would be online degrees developed in collaboration, starting with master’s degrees, with the goal of reaching over 22,000 fully online enrollments by 2019. In exchange for Pearson providing access to its Course Management System, integrating it with Rutgers’ Student Information System, tracking and reporting data related to course performance, providing access to a repository of digital content, faculty training, exam software, technical and operational support, student recruitment, course development, student retention support, and career services for online students, Rutgers was to pay half of the tuition dollars received from each student enrollment to Pearson. In each subsequent year of the contract, as enrollments increased and met certain thresholds, the tuition split would become more favorable towards Rutgers. For example, if Rutgers meets its 2019 enrollment goal, it would be able to keep 55% of the revenue for those online students (Straumsheim 2013a). The contract was similar in content and style to the contracts that other universities have made with online service providers like Pearson, but it is rare that such contracts become public (cf. Hill 2014).

The earliest objections to the contract had to do with how it would impact faculty work, but the faculty critique also grew to include arguments that directly addressed the goals of the university – whether the terms of the agreement were favorable enough for Rutgers. To raise
broader awareness about the contract to faculty members, David Hughes, a professor in the Department of Anthropology and a co-chair of the Organizing and Communication Committee of the AAUP-AFT New Brunswick executive council, circulated a memo outlining the objectionable points of the contract to his colleagues, and the union sent an email to AAUP-AFT-represented faculty. Both raised concerns about fraud, academic freedom, the contribution of online teaching to an increased reliance on contingent labor, and the corporatization of the university. Hughes wrote that the greater ability of online students to cheat would cheapen the value of a Rutgers degree. Significantly for faculty members, the Pearson contract prohibits its products to be used to “transmit, display or store infringing, obscene, threatening, indecent, libelous, slanderous, defamatory or otherwise unlawful or tortious material, including material that is harmful to children or violates third party rights.” Pearson later clarified that the clause only existed to protect itself if Rutgers was sued, but faculty did not trust putting academic freedom in the hands of a corporation (Straumsheim 2013a). “We don’t want a third party to intervene to determine what is libelous or what is indecent and basically, we are at the mercy of Pearson’s judgment,” stated Deepa Kumar, an Associate Professor of Media Studies and Secretary of the Rutgers AAUP-AFT Executive Council (Chokkattu 2013). This comment hints at the broader issues of corporate influence within the university.

One of the reasons why the memo points out that this public-private partnership “leaves less and less space for the Academy we inhabit” is that it the contract facilitates the growth of “a cheap workforce of course managers,” since a subsequent contract developed by Rutgers gave the university the right to have other people teach and modify online courses developed by tenured faculty. These faculty members saw this incursion into intellectual property rights as unacceptable. However, since they knew that Rutgers had high hopes for raising revenues and
enrollments through this program, they went beyond their own professional concerns and questioned if this contract was the best avenue for Rutgers to maximize profits. In an article in the student newspaper on campus, Kumar states, “This contract, financially, gives departments only 50 percent of the income, whereas Pearson takes the rest. So we do all the work, and instead of the money being used to improve education to funnel it back into our students and our faculty, it goes to make Pearson a profitable company” (Chokkattu 2013). Though their arguments exhibit a concern for the corporatization of the university, arguments like these also show that revenue growth is an acceptable goal. Both types of arguments were present in their statements in meetings and to the press.

Over the course of 2013, as faculty began to speak up, they were able to impact the trajectory of the agreement with Pearson. One early way that faculty were able to be heard was at the January 2013 online learning conference sponsored by Rutgers’ Center for Online and Hybrid Learning and Instructional Technologies. Among others, three Pearson representatives presented sessions throughout the day, attended by 400 faculty and staff members (Heyboer 2013). One Pearson employee remarked after the fact,

_The administration, I think, was caught with trying to do what’s best for the students versus what’s best for the teachers. In this case, it wasn’t necessarily the same things. And that conversation did start...people said, “If we have one system, you’re going to be able to check on us. We don’t want that level of accountability; we don’t want anyone looking over our shoulders.” All of those normal defensive comments started coming out, and that really led to a very watered down version of what originally was intended by both Pearson and the administration. Ultimately, the entire thing was designed to mimic the success that Pearson and Arizona State had had. That’s also when a big change to the contract happened, when they said, “Okay, well, we’ll let faculty opt in rather than demanding it. We will just give them the option.” And that was a very big deal, at least from a financial perspective. For the relationship between Pearson and Rutgers, that was a big deal, for that comment to be made and that changed what took place. So they changed it, they said, “All right, Faculty, you can opt in,” and not a lot did._ (Interview 6, 7/1/2014)
This quote provides a corporate perspective on the debate about the Pearson contract at Rutgers, showing the contours of a debate framed around the university looking out for student interests while the faculty are looking out for faculty interests. The stakes were high for both the university and Pearson, because without a large number of new master’s degrees developed with Pearson through mandatory participation, it is unlikely that Rutgers would be able to reach the enrollment goals set in the contract.

The other way that faculty members mobilized is by looking for leverage. One faculty member described these sites of leverage as “those little chinks where we actually have power, not where we can just plead and demonstrate a complaint, but where we actually have control over something” (Interview 11, 10/7/2014). That turned out to be when the dean’s office asked the graduate directors of each department to approve two online master’s programs in a very informal manner over email. Normally, the graduate directors would have emailed back yes or no on behalf of the faculty in their department, but since the AAUP was organizing around the Pearson contract already, they took this as an opportunity to exercise shared governance. In May of 2013, a petition went out to faculty members stating,

*Whereas the secret deal between Pearson, Inc. and Rutgers University calls into question the faculty’s rights to academic freedom, intellectual property, fair compensation, and to a role in governing the University. We, the undersigned, are petitioning for a meeting of the Graduate Faculty in the Graduate School in New Brunswick (Rutgers University) to be held in October 2013. The main agenda item of that meeting would concern the proposed online, Pearson-managed Masters of Science and Business in Drug Discovery and Development, as well as the Pearson contract itself. This meeting would culminate in a vote – or a decision to defer the vote – on whether the Graduate Faculty approve or reject the proposed Masters. Should a "yes" or "no" vote be required before October 2013, please register our signatures as "no" votes.*

---

12 Rutgers AAUP-AFT, internal email, May 16, 2013.
The petition received 160 signatures of faculty members who did not want to approve the online degree programs, and forced a special meeting of the graduate faculty October 9, 2013. While 160 faculty members out of over 2,000 members of the graduate faculty is not a lot, it was enough to induce greater faculty involvement in the future of managed programs at the school. The AAUP-AFT Organizing and Communications Committee crafted a resolution to reject all current and future Pearson managed online programs, that the faculty have authority over contracts that would alter the curricula or instruction, and that the Rutgers AAUP-AFT have the right to bargain when contracts impact the conditions of employment. According to one of the Rutgers AAUP-AFT leaders, the resolution was seen as a traditional right of faculty to put something on the agenda in faculty meetings when you get the requisite number of signatures (Interview 1, 6/24/2014).

Although faculty meetings are traditionally seen as an instance of shared governance, historically, graduate faculty meetings at Rutgers had very little participation from faculty. Since a typical graduate faculty meeting only draws around 20 to 30 faculty members out of the hundreds on the faculty, one administrator characterized the meeting attendance as “an indicator of the low level of interest” (Interview 8, 7/10/2014). Another elaborated that the activist faculty members knew they would be able to pass the resolution because nobody ever comes to meetings. He stated,

That’s just the nature of graduate education. None of the business of any significance ever really gets done at faculty meetings. It all happens very quietly, indirectly, in the background through the programs. The faculty meeting is largely a pro forma exercise that we have to do once each semester. And so if a voting block comes in to vote to launch a rocket to go to Mars tomorrow, they could pass it if they wanted to. Just bring 40 people with you. (Interview 7, 7/2/2014)

Over 75 faculty members showed up to support the resolution (Chokkattu 2013) and after listening to presentations from the administration on the rationale behind and the benefits of the
Pearson contract, the faculty voted in favor of the resolution to block the Pearson contract, 39 to 22 (Straumsheim 2013a). The passage of the resolution meant that while the contract was not voided, no new graduate programs could be offered online with Pearson in the School of Arts and Sciences, the School of Environmental and Biological Sciences, and the Professional Science Master’s Program.

During the same meeting, faculty members also discovered the true extent of what they saw to be the lack of inclusion of faculty members in the Request for Proposal (RFP) process. One faculty member explained how the group was told not to worry about how Pearson was selected, because the committee was balanced between faculty and administrators from all three campuses (Interview 11, 10/7/2014). It took a NJ Open Public Records request to obtain the names of the committee members, and it revealed that out of the 16 participating members, only two were primarily faculty members, one of them non-tenure track. Many were critical that faculty and even deans were not consulted during the RFP process, but administrators defended the committee:

_Eight or nine are, in fact, tenured faculty members at Rutgers. So the majority of the committee were tenured faculty members at Rutgers. Now, were they union representatives? No. Did some of them also hold administrative positions? Yes….So, if the union comes back and says, ‘Well, you didn’t have enough faculty representation, how do you interpret that?_ (Interview 8, 7/10/2014)

While it is debatable whether university-level administrators can fully represent the values and workplace concerns of active faculty (e.g., Del Favero and Bray 2010), the faculty felt that since the RFP deliberations and votes were confidential, the faculty members that were involved in the process did not have the opportunity to consult more broadly with their peers, which led to the need for the resolution. While some individual faculty members may have been against online education itself, the passage of the resolution was also a referendum on shared governance.
Immediately after the resolution was passed, the Rutgers-Pearson contract got national publicity from stories published in the two main higher education daily trade publications, *The Chronicle of Higher Education* and *Inside Higher Ed*. The graduate school administration did not believe that the proper protocol had been followed in passing the resolution, so it was sent to the four area committees for review: graduate faculty in the biological sciences; humanities; physical and mathematical sciences and engineering; and social and behavioral sciences. In the meantime, in December 2013, around 70 School of Arts and Sciences faculty members also voted to reject the Pearson contract, meaning that now in addition to no new graduate programs, no new undergraduate arts and sciences online degrees could be created with Pearson (Straumsheim 2013b). In May 2014, the next full graduate faculty meeting was held. The result of the area committee discussions had been taken up by the graduate school’s executive council, who proposed an investigation of the partnership with Pearson. Faculty responded by passing a resolution to refuse to consider the proposal (Straumsheim 2014). One union member described it as “the Pearson zombie; that the administration tried to come back and renege on the decision that the faculty made in the fall, and so the faculty basically had to come back and defeat them again this spring” (Interview 1, 6/24/2014).

As of this writing, the resolution binds the Graduate School New Brunswick and the School of Arts and Sciences from proposing new online programs managed by Pearson, though an administrator characterized the current situation as “a little dance” because a couple online programs already in the works have been approved since the resolution. Nobody stopped the approval of these online programs because faculty did not want to interfere with the choice of other faculty members (Interview 4, 6/26/2014). The resolution also does not impact other schools or campuses who award their own degrees outside of the Graduate School. As of
December 2014, the union is still bargaining collectively with the university; presumably when negotiations are settled, the next contract will address the issues raised around online teaching. Compared to the positive reception of the faculty’s victory by faculty colleagues at other universities, the contract has cast the university in a negative light to other university leaders. One administrator illustrates his experiences at a national conference:

*Part of what was covered at this conference was faculty resistance to online and distance education, and everybody else at that conference, even with faculty resistance, was much farther along than we were. In fact, the publicity about the vote from the Graduate School faculty or the AAUP section of the Graduate School faculty about the Pearson contract, subjected us to a bit of ridicule for being so far behind the curve and having such “Neanderthal” views about online education. So it doesn’t position the institution well.* (Interview 9, 7/10/2014)

Nevertheless, while the administration reports that they are moving ahead via other campuses and schools, the faculty and union describe their efforts as winning a battle – maybe not the whole war – and that the consciousness of a greater proportion of the faculty has been raised to these issues.

DISCUSSION & ANALYSIS

In this section, I argue that the faculty union, the structure of the university, and the institutional logics of the faculty and administration explain why the faculty were able to successfully resist the implementation of the contract for the managed online programs. The decentralized distribution of power throughout the university aided by the representation of faculty in a collective bargaining unit was important to the power of the faculty to have their voice heard. In addition, the discursive choices faculty made arguing against the contract also contributed to their success.
The Union

Though framed as a faculty movement in the media, the fight against Pearson was clearly facilitated by the work of its faculty union, the Rutgers AAUP-AFT. Rutgers faculty benefit from the university being located in New Jersey, one of a handful of states that supports faculty collective bargaining at public universities. While faculty unions have grown since the 1960s and 70s to cover approximately 368,000 college faculty at 519 higher education institutions or university systems, still only about 25% of the academic workforce are represented by a collective bargaining agent, most at public institutions (Berry and Savarese 2012). There is a dearth of research on the faculty union and its effects (but for exceptions, see Rhoades 1998 or Porter 2013), so this section contributes to the role that faculty unions can play in the debate about online education (cf. Julius and DiGiovanni Jr 2013). The faculty union at Rutgers allowed the faculty to reject the contract with Pearson because of its size and strength, broad mission, and resources to protect the role of faculty in the decision-making process.

As alluded to in the background section on the history of Rutgers, the AAUP-AFT is a unique type of faculty union. Founded in 1970, it was one of the first American Association of University Professors (AAUP) collective bargaining units (Begin 1978), which distinguishes it from other faculty unions which are affiliated with more traditional public teacher unions. It has an unusually large membership, representing full-time tenured/tenure track faculty, non-tenure track faculty, teaching and graduate assistants, part-time lecturers, postdoctoral associates, winter and summer instructors, and Education Opportunity Fund counselors all in the same union via multiple collective bargaining units. This “wall-to-wall” union of almost 7,000 members is described by one union staff member as giving them “certain leverage and certain power and certain flexibility to mobilize our members” in ways not possible when different employee
groups in the same institution are in different unions (Interview 1, 6/24/2014). Though each of these employment categories and occupations may have differing goals, since each group ultimately reports to the same institutional leaders – the president, Board of Governors, and Board of Trustees, this broad coalition speaks to the interconnectedness of academic labor issues. Finally, the operating style of the union contributes to its strength. Over time, the issues that it organizes around have expanded from traditional issues such as terms of employment and grievances to broader issues relating to the corporatization of the university. All of these factors – its identity as part of the AAUP, the breadth of its membership, and its progressivism all come together to give it clear vision in its mission to protect academic quality.

The way that the union has grown and changed has contributed its involvement in the Pearson case. In its early days, rather than having a faculty member lead the union, it hired a labor organizer as president. One faculty member describes the union between the 1970s and 1990s as a traditional union, “where the emphasis is on longevity, equality of pay, equal pay for equal work” and grievances (Interview 10, 7/17/2014). This comment picks up on the sentiment of some faculty members who do not see themselves as “workers” - that unionization is not appropriate for those with status and professional responsibilities (DeCew 2003). Over the past 15 years, as new leadership has come from within the ranks of faculty, that same faculty member now perceived that the union “thinks of itself a little bit more like a screenwriters’ guild or an actor’s union or professional major league baseball union,” since those groups represent their profession’s views while also recognizing that members will have “radically different salaries and individual contracts” (Interview 10, 7/17/2014). At the same time, as administrative ranks have grown, and the percentage of tenure and tenure track (T/TT) faculty has declined, faculty may identify a greater need for union representation in the university. Most recently, the union is
also seen as speaking out on a greater array of university issues beyond those that are bargainable, including “the corporatization of the university and shared governance” (Interview 11, 10/7/2014). The Pearson agreement was such a successful catalyst for action because it incorporated issues of academic freedom, intellectual property, contingent labor, faculty governance, and academic capitalism.

Though the Pearson contract did not include specifications about teaching beyond that Rutgers would supply the online instructors, the union could argue for their role in the debate since a subsequent contract created by Rutgers for online teaching arrangements following the Pearson deal would have affected the terms of work for faculty. Since the union was already involved in contract negotiations, it also gave them an avenue to more fully address online teaching in their discussions beyond the Pearson contract, and to draw in more faculty with a broader array of concerns. It is important to note that Rutgers administrators did not agree with the way that the union portrayed these issues and the fact that the union was moving beyond its traditional boundaries of contract negotiations only. As one administrator explains,

_The fact that Rutgers was partnering with the world’s largest global education company at the same time that the university was doing other things to stem some of the budgetary bleeding that we have going on, such as supporting public-private partnerships and outsourcing different services. Things like that led to an objection to the so-called corporatization of Rutgers because we were partnering with this large corporation. There was a misrepresentation as well...that Pearson would own the intellectual property that was developed and they could then sell it to any other institution if they wanted to. None of that. First of all, none of it is accurate but also, none of it is in the contract. The contract clearly, clearly states that any intellectual property belongs to the organization that created it. That is, that Pearson’s belongs to Pearson; anything that’s Rutgers, belongs to Rutgers, and so the real issue was an internal Rutgers’ issue: how is Rutgers treating faculty intellectual property? That, really, I think is the heart of the issue and the root of the issue and pre-existing union management discussions and subsequent labor negotiations have been around that issue. So we’ve been negotiating with the union and it has nothing to do with the Pearson contract._ (Interview 8, 7/10/2014)
This quote demonstrates how the administrators and the union view their jurisdictions in this matter, that the union sees itself as having the right to address corporatization more broadly, and that the administration has to address issues that they do not believe are true issues of concern in the Pearson contract, such as intellectual property rights. Importantly, both parties see themselves as protecting quality – the university leadership through shoring up the finances of the institution through partnering with corporations, and the union through protecting the conditions of teaching from being defined by a corporation. Because union leadership sought to protect academic quality, and not simply faculty interests, they were able to stake a bigger claim in the debate than if they had been narrowly focused on the terms and conditions of employment.

Beyond protecting the terms of work for faculty, the union played an important role in arguing that more faculty should have had a say in the online education deal. The union was especially important in the rejection of the Pearson contract because the Rutgers administration did not widely agree on the appropriate role that faculty should have in decision making about online education. On the one hand, the faculty was seen as so large and unwieldy that nothing would ever get done if faculty had to be consulted for every urgent decision. University administrators saw the RFP committee as sufficiently representative, even though only two out of the 16 members were faculty members only. One administrator explains,

_The very act of consultation is fraught and it can also paralyze. If, as an institution, we consult until everyone who thinks they needed to be consulted has been heard, we would never do anything. I’ve been involved with a number of very large RFPs and my experience and what others shared with me is they can’t point to another RFP that had such widespread and large representation on the RFP committee. I mean, we typically don’t do that. Typically, you’re looking at maybe five people on the RFP committee because it can be a paralyzing process._ (Interview 9, 7/10/2014)

To these administrators, when decisions need to be made quickly, it is not a given that faculty members should be included in the process beyond representation on a committee, even though
that representation was actually questioned by the union. On the other hand, some members of
the administration did recognize that the RFP committee did not represent faculty well: “There
wasn’t enough discussion or thought that went into this about where Rutgers ought to be going.
It seemed like a small group of academic leaders…and it seemed like a decision was being made
that had a pretty significant impact on something that is near and dear to a faculty member’s
heart, the role of who they are and what they do that hadn’t been chewed on enough” (Interview
7, 7/2/2014). Within a large and complex university, the number of faculty interest groups that
cut across the campuses and schools is expectedly large. Other groups do exist on campus that
have a claim to representing faculty views, such as faculty councils and senate groups. Yet
because the deliberations were confidential, none of these groups were informed about the
decision until after the contract was signed. Had the decision-making process included more
opportunities for faculty input before the contract was signed, despite the risk of a longer
turnaround time, the university might have been able to avoid the negative publicity that resulted.

Overall, the union is a mechanism for faculty participation and shared governance (Porter
2013) in a time when it is well documented that faculty governance at the institutional level is
declining (Finkelstein, Ju, and Cummings 2011). Part of the work of the Rutgers AAUP-AFT
was to raise awareness and interest in the conflict, because the union and administrators saw
most faculty members as either uninterested or unaware that they could influence the outcome.
Because Rutgers is a research university, the administration viewed the majority of faculty as
indifferent to online education because it does not impact their day-to-day work. To research
faculty, one administrator described online education as “some little ripple in the ocean, way,
way over on some other side of the planet. It doesn’t affect them” (Interview 7, 7/2/2014). In this
line of thinking, if a faculty member is focused on bringing in research grants and minimizing
teaching time, online education, particularly if their department is not trying to start a new program, was not seen as a priority. With increasing pressure on faculty to bring in revenue through research funding (Slaughter and Rhoades 2004), the disciplines that are least likely to be able to bring in grants are more likely to consider online education as one avenue to generate tuition dollars for the department. As opposed to uninterested faculty, however, the union perceives some of these faculty as intimidated or unaware of their ability to effect change. One union leader described her challenge as “to locate those faculty, educate them about faculty governance and about what they are capable of doing collectively. That’s an ongoing process because institutions can be quite fierce and very intimidating, and different departments can be run almost as if they’re little dictatorships,” and that because the culture of faculty is so individualistic, it can be difficult for faculty members to see the ways that they can exercise their power (Interview 1, 6/24/2014). Both of these reactions to the conditions of work for faculty members – one of indifference or one of conformity – are understandable in a neoliberal academic environment, but the presence of a strong union offers a different avenue.

Unlike a faculty council or senate, the union is undergirded by resources that allow it to hear faculty and spread its message. With paid staff, communication structures like an email list of all members and an up-to-date website, an ability to get information from the administration, and resources and training in organizing, they are able to focus their efforts on the support of faculty leaders. The union does research, organizes faculty, and communicates with members, all “help[ing] to amplify the voices of our faculty members,” states one union staff person (Interview 1, 6/24/2014). They are effective communicators because their status as a collective bargaining unit affords them certain privileges, such as facilitated information requests. One faculty union leader explains how they obtained a copy of the Pearson contract: “I think that
when the union requests information from the administration, contractually, they have to come up with the information….So if the faculty of the graduate school had asked for it, they probably would have gotten it but sometimes it’s just quicker. You say to the union, ‘Listen, could you get us a copy of the contract?’ We make a request and there’s an obligation to give it to us” (Interview 2, 6/24/2014). This aids in transparency and provides weight to a request that might not be answered without an organizational body behind it. Finally, both staff members and certain faculty representatives of the union have extensive experience with the practice of organizing. By framing the issues that faculty face as similar to “virtually every other social justice or economic justice issue and movement in the world over” (Interview 1, 6/24/2014), union leaders are able to take experience with activism in other areas and use it in the workplace to fight for their rights.

Similar to the way that there is no universal agreement on what shared governance entails, there is also no universal agreement on the appropriateness of faculty participation in activism, so the union provides a degree of protection for this activity. An illustration of this attitude can be found in this quotation from an administrator describing how they saw faculty taking the issues out of context, partly because the union leaders were doing it to be alarmist. “There are people who do this within their professional career, they describe themselves as activists as opposed to people who are grounded in a discipline or something. I mean, their issue is to make an issue” (Interview 9, 7/10/2014). While this administrator’s concern about whether faculty members should engage in activist or participatory research is not new (e.g., Frideres 1992), as an extra protection for academic freedom, the union offers a place for faculty engagement in activist activities alongside their teaching and research duties.
Thanks to the Rutgers AAUP-AFT union, faculty members had a vehicle to successfully question the university’s decision to partner with a for-profit corporation to create online programs. The union was broad enough to take on the corporatization of higher education and the rights of faculty to participate in that debate, and had the resources to do both. It is relatively rare to find a successful example of faculty resistance to online vendors, and the union provided the structure and facilitated the rhetoric of that resistance. As public institutions become more intertwined with businesses through public-private partnerships, more of the university will become unanswerable to traditional forms of shared governance. While faculty unions and online education do coexist at many institutions, more research is necessary to better understand how and when the union has been involved in decision-making about online teaching. The faculty was the driving force behind the campaign against Pearson, but it is unlikely their voice would have been heard without the union.

*The Structure of the University*

Rutgers University is part of an elite group of research institutions, ranked in the top one percent that receive almost two thirds of the federal government’s research funding (The Center for Measuring University Performance 2013). So, Rutgers is already unique by virtue of having the organizational infrastructure necessary to support being one of the nation’s top research universities, but its history as a hybrid private college/public land grant university with outside schools, colleges, and campuses added and removed over its lifetime makes its structure even more unique. While Lombardi et al. (2002) note that all universities are a product of their state’s political environment, I argue that Rutgers’ long history and exceptionally complex organizational structure has contributed to its decentralized distribution of power and faculty
empowerment, which allowed it to reject the central administration’s contract with Pearson in the Graduate School and the School of Arts and Sciences.

Though major efforts have been made to centralize disciplines that previously had been spread across multiple campuses and autonomous colleges from the 1980s to the early 2000s, the organizational leadership remains distributed across multiple colleges, campuses and degree levels. This emphasis on a decentralized structure permeated almost every interview I conducted. One administrator even acknowledged that he lost count of how many professional and graduate schools exist within the university. Variously described as “byzantine,” “an enormous beast of a thing,” and “all over the map,” the resulting culture gave autonomy to departments. One administrator explained that historically, there were numerous arrangements for online programs, “We have a very decentralized culture and operating structure. The real decision-making on curricular matters is at the departmental level. So, for instance, Arts and Sciences has over 35 departments. You would get 35 different views of how [online education] should be arranged with the faculty” (Interview 9, 7/10/2014). Since many colleges in addition to Arts and Sciences have had a long history of making decisions locally, central administration was seen as quite distant from the faculty.

By signing the contract with Pearson centrally, and not bringing it out to the colleges, the administration lost an opportunity for building buy-in because they did not seek out what could have created a common interest in developing online education with the assistance of an outside provider. One Pearson employee understood the case thusly:

*I think faculty were basically told, “You will do this,” and in fairness, I don’t think it would have mattered if they were asked. That’s not the part of the equation that matters. I think what was basically said was, “You’re going to do this. This is now an initiative. It’s going to make Rutgers bigger, more money, whatever,” and faculty were saying, “That’s not my currency. I don’t care about that. I don’t care if Rutgers is bigger. I don’t care if Rutgers has more students. I don’t care if Rutgers has an online footprint. I only care*
about what I care about,” which is different for every faculty member. No one really did a good job trying to figure out what that currency was for faculty. (Interview 6, 7/1/2014)

The distance between administration and faculty beliefs about the role of online education in their mission as a university grew with the exclusion of broad faculty input to the decision.

While administrations and faculty commonly have different visions about a university’s strategic direction, Rutgers has had a long history of debate about its identity. Stemming from its founding as a colonial college that later capitalized on funding from the state to create science and agricultural colleges, Rutgers has always differed from other land-grant institutions. One long-time faculty member characterized Rutgers as a major public research university now, but when he first joined the faculty in the late 1960s, “It was still a wannabe Ivy League-type place. I think it has been very slow and difficult in making that adjustment, but I think it has turned a corner” (Interview 10, 7/17/2014). Because of this history, I argue that access to higher education has not been universally adopted as the driving mission of the university the way that it has at other land grant institutions, which might have facilitated greater acceptance of Pearson’s role in online education among the faculty.

The autonomy of the schools was reinforced by the introduction of a model of budgeting called All-Funds Budgeting (AFB) in 2005. In this budget model, the school or college receives a portion of the tuition and research overhead revenue brought in by the students or faculty of that unit. As schools and departments began to better understand the way that this system incentivized bringing in new revenues, online courses became a way that they could “game” the system. One faculty member explained the benefit of offering online courses:

*The way you raise money is you have lots of students take your courses. Some units have figured out that, if you give an online course, you can get a lot more students. So, for example, courses that were traditionally taught by the School of Arts and Sciences (SAS) are now being taught by Mason Gross School of the Arts. For example, they have an online course in dance appreciation. So all this money is flowing out of SAS because*
people are using online instruction as a way to compete economically. (Interview 5, 6/27/2014).

Though individual departments benefit, the competition created between units when all are vying for the same pool of students is an unintended consequence of attempts to make schools more entrepreneurial. The Pearson contract was expressly designed to draw in students from outside the existing student body, but the already-existing association of online courses with the goal of increasing revenues rubbed many faculty members the wrong way.

Further galvanizing the distrust of faculty, another obstacle Rutgers faced with the Pearson contract related to its distant and many-tiered administration was the university’s diluted focus on online education, as exemplified by its dabbling with Massive Open Online Courses (MOOCs) during the same time period. Lacking a unified online strategy, rather than focusing all of its attention on ensuring that the Pearson contract would be a success, the university got swept up in the MOOC hype, and joined the Coursera online platform in February 2013, soon after signing the deal with Pearson (Miranda 2013). Despite high hopes of converting students in the free courses to on campus or online degree programs, the university failed to do so. Following that, a faculty member remarked, “The president himself said he didn’t want to hear about any more MOOCs, that they’ve got two of them, and they invested too much money and they didn’t make any money” (Interview 10, 7/17/2014). Though a multi-pronged online strategy should have made sense for Rutgers as a multi-layered university, partnering with for-profit entities like Pearson or Coursera introduced a level of suspicion about corporatization that potentially would have been less pronounced, had the strategy relied more on internal or non-profit resources.

This suspicion was heightened by a general level of mistrust between both the faculty and the administration and the faculty and the state government. “We’ve gotten to this position of staring across a chasm at each other and that just is not going to help advance our common
purpose,” lamented one administrator (Interview 7, 7/2/2014). This distance and the perception of working at cross purposes hurt the image of the Pearson contract, since the contract was associated with the administration. At the same time, since the state and Rutgers were seen as battling, any association with the governor would not benefit the chances of the contract gaining the faculty’s approval. Explains one union staffer, “The governor of the state, Chris Christie, not too long ago gave Pearson a tax-free gift of 66 million dollars so that they could relocate their headquarters over in Hoboken from New York. People here at Rutgers are all too aware that the president of the university is basically an appointee of the governor of the state, who is not a friend to unions” (Interview 1, 6/24/2014). While this is implicating the decision of Rutgers to sign the contract with the state’s relationship with Pearson, hostility directed towards the administration and the state government have spilled over onto Pearson’s role in online education.

As an antidote to that mistrust and to maintain legitimacy with faculty members and other elite peer institutions, Rutgers does offer multiple layers of faculty governance. As scholars have noted about many colleges and universities, however, shared governance often tends to be ceremonial (e.g., Birnbaum 1989). Since the actual work of faculty members is only loosely coupled with what administrators do in a university (Meyer and Rowan 1978; Weick 1976), symbolic activity is able to flourish. For example, one faculty member illustrated the point where this previously-acceptable symbolic form of shared governance became illegitimate to faculty members:

*The graduate school is run in this very offhand, I wouldn’t say opaque, but it results in a kind of casualness. I’ve been on one committee where you sort of sit around the desk of the dean and he flips through papers and asks people where we stand on various things. The meetings in the graduate school usually have a bunch of administrators and two or three faculty members….So it took us all rather by surprise when the dean sent this message around to the graduate program directors saying, “Hey, I forgot to mention at*
the last meeting, we need to approve this Masters of Business and Science in Drug Discovery and Development as an online master’s program. Can you just e-mail me back saying yes or no? That’s literally what it was like. (Interview 11, 10/7/2014)

Typically, by involving faculty in decision making in this ritualized way, the leadership is free to do what they need to do but also give the impression that faculty share in the process. But asking over email for approval of an online program to be developed with an outside entity proved to be an illegitimate form of shared governance to faculty. By insisting that shared governance fulfill its manifest function in addition to its symbolic function (Birnbaum 1989), faculty were able to strategically force their inclusion in a reconsideration of the decision that they believed was made without them. The other way that they forced participation in decision-making was when the faculty in support of the resolution against Pearson “took over” the graduate school faculty meeting. They knew that even though most in the school treated those meetings symbolically, there was the potential for real power in their ability to pass resolutions. The union and the faculty against the Pearson contract used the tools available to them and took these symbolic forms of governance and made them real.

Finally, to put the complexity of Rutgers’ organizational structure in relief, one Pearson employee compared its unsuccessful partnership with Rutgers to their successful partnership with Arizona State:

It was essentially the same kind of concept as Arizona State. If you’ve been watching them, they’re growing by leaps and bounds, because of the relationship they’ve had with Pearson for the last five years. Michael Crow, their president at Arizona State University, said, “This is what we’re going to do. This is the way it’s going to be. If you don’t like it, you can leave.” The school made a lot of money and so did Pearson and it was a very win/win kind of amicable situation. But at Rutgers, again I’ll go back to Michael Crow. When the Arizona State faculty said, “We want to see the contract,” his response was, “It’s none of your business. You don’t get to see the contract. You just teach.” Whereas at Rutgers, and I’m guessing this is a union thing, the union said, “We want to see the contract,” and so they were allowed to and then they started to pick it apart. At Arizona, Michael Crow said, “I don’t care what you think of it. It’s none of your concern. You’re going to get your money. You’re going to get paid the way you’re supposed to get paid, it
doesn’t affect or impact you. Stay out of it,” and that certainly didn’t happen at Rutgers. (Interview 6, 7/1/2014)

Leadership at Rutgers corroborated this portrayal of Arizona State’s ability to manage top down, while Rutgers is simply not built to do that. They pointed to a much more straightforwardly pyramid-style hierarchy at ASU, compared to Rutgers’ matrix-style organizational chart; a population that’s growing in the Southwest, reducing some of the budgetary woes; and they also noted that the Arizona legislature enables them to act, rather than treating the institution with distrust as it does in New Jersey. By having power distributed throughout the organization, Rutgers faculty were able to act in a way that would not be possible in an organization that concentrates power at the top.

If each university’s structure results from a confluence of politics and environment, Arizona State and Rutgers represent two ends of the spectrum for state flagship universities. At Rutgers, faculty had a lot of freedom to act – even if they did not always act on it, compared to how ASU is characterized. The Rutgers faculty and union were able to take advantage of multiple factors: a decentralized powerbase, reinforced by a budget model that encourages using online education as a revenue generator; a distant administration that did not take the time to build buy-in, instead diluting its efforts across multiple online strategies; and an environment where the state is often at odds with the university. Faculty were able to transform symbolic power into political power by making symbolic forms of faculty governance consequential in ways that are not possible in top down institutions. Rutgers’ structure is unique but meaningful faculty governance does not need to be. At a typical public university, some 17% of the T/TT faculty member’s workweek is spent in meetings (Ziker 2014), so the solution is not to pile on more service and committee work for faculty, but to allocate the service work of the university more fairly so that participation can go beyond the superficial. One way to achieve this would be
to compensate contingent faculty for committee work, since over 76 percent of all instructional staff are non-tenure track academics and this practice would reinforce faculty governance and academic freedom (American Association of University Professors 2014). A union also helps faculty members navigate a complicated bureaucracy and let them know that they do have the power to challenge unpopular proposals, like the Pearson contract. The next section will describe the way that the ideas from both the administration and the faculty about online education were influenced by their position within the university’s social structure.

Institutional Logics

The structure of the university is important, but the discourse of the social actors that constitute the institution are also important to understanding why the Rutgers faculty union was able to stand up to the administration and successfully push back against the contract with Pearson, compared to so many other higher education institutions that have instituted online learning programs despite faculty protest. This section is informed by the work of Thornton and Ocasio (1999, 2008) on institutional logics. In their study of leadership succession in the higher education publishing industry, they found that economics and structure were not enough to explain changes within the industry. In this section, I argue that Rutgers faculty members, rather than only making arguments based within a professional logic, appealed to market logics to explain why the Pearson contract is a bad deal for the university. Even though faculty were protecting the status quo, they used the language of their opponents to make their critique, appealing to a broader audience. Prior research indicates that institutional entrepreneurs exploit contradictions in logics to create change (Suddaby and Greenwood 2005). In this case, the administrative supporters of the Pearson contract were the entrepreneurs, yet it was the
contradictions in their logic that were revealed. In addition, by drawing on market logics, they challenged the external legitimacy of the online education contract because the administrators were sensitive to how Rutgers was perceived among its peers that have larger and more centralized online programs as well as those within the field that value more business-like universities.

During the outcry about the contract and the subsequent meetings that resulted in the resolution rejecting the Pearson contract for managed online programs, the Graduate and Arts and Sciences faculty employed arguments that were in line with the logic of the profession. Abbot (1988) and Friedson (2001) have clearly defined the professions, those experts who distinguish themselves from other occupations based on their ability to apply specialized knowledge, giving them the right to authority and autonomy. The professional interinstitutional system (Thornton and Ocasio 2008) is shaped by institutional logics that are characterized by legitimacy derived from the expertise of professionals, identity based on the quality of one’s craft, norms enforced through professional association membership, and status and reputation are its most important currencies. Academic faculty members are the primary profession within higher education and the professional logic is the ideal type of logics that guides the profession.

Many of the arguments made by Rutgers faculty during the debate did align with traditional professional logics, including concerns about academic freedom and intellectual property. For example, Rudy Bell, a professor of history, is quoted as saying, “There is much concern about academic freedom with the ‘no obscenity’ clause, and stating that while Pearson doesn’t intend to enforce that doesn’t change the reality that faculty don’t support signing on to a contract of anyone else defining what is obscene” (Straumsheim 2013). Here, Bell is saying that because faculty members are experts in their disciplines, it is within their jurisdiction and professional
judgment to decide what they teach. The tenet of academic freedom protects their professional autonomy. Another common faculty concern about the deal was the fear that online courses would be taught by an increasing number of contingent faculty members, an “unbundling” of the faculty role. The fear was not just a concern for the conditions of labor for that group of workers, but more importantly a protection of the jurisdiction of the profession – a protection against “an uncreative workforce disseminating pre-recorded lectures and pre-written exams.”\(^\text{13}\) Control over one’s intellectual output is an important part of a professional logic. One faculty member explains,

> People were very concerned that they put all that information up there and then Pearson just takes it and gets somebody else to be the facilitator. Yeah, a lot of people were concerned about that because we use a Blackboard-type program or Sakai, which is internal to Rutgers, and faculty put their homework up there....They figure it’s just for the students to use. But this idea of you put [a whole course] up there and then it kind of is permanently there and they can hand it off to somebody else, that’s troubling. (Interview 2, 6/24/2014)

To professionals, whose reputation is based on the quality of their work and teaching, if that teaching can be divided into work that is done by various teaching assistants, course designers, and graders, the faculty member can no longer control the quality of the course as a whole. Information can become out-of-date if not maintained by someone who is an expert in the discipline, and if the person teaching the course is different from the person that designed it, they may lack the implicit knowledge that gives necessary context to the course materials. These arguments are aligned with the faculty arguments against online learning found in chapter three. They affect the legitimacy of online education programs internally to the profession.

The rhetoric used by the faculty at Rutgers to fight the online education contract with Pearson is significant because rather than drawing solely from professional logics when making

\(^{13}\) David Hughes, Internal Rutgers memo, December 6, 2012.
their arguments, they draw from a broader market logic which affected the external legitimacy of the agreement. A market logics was particularly strong in the remarks given in support of when the resolution passed by the School of Arts and Sciences. The union and the faculty challenged Rutgers, not because they necessarily opposed online education (though some did), but because they did not think the Pearson deal was a good business deal. One faculty member explained the problems of the contract explicitly using the market logic:

> So, one of the things that a lot of us can’t figure out is what Pearson is actually doing to earn 50 percent of tuition. I didn’t raise this initially because I didn’t really want to focus on the money, but the money is actually central here. If you read the contract, you know that for the first 4,000 students, Pearson gets 50 percent of gross revenues. I’ve talked to people at other universities that have made these kinds of contracts, they’re very surprised at that figure. I mean, 50 percent seems awfully high, especially when we get the platform for $100 per student, which is 10 percent, and the student actually pays extra for that, so if you think the usual rate is $1,000 for a three-credit course, if it’s online, the student pays $1,100 for a three-credit course. So that means, basically Pearson is getting 50%, not for the technology, but the advertising and lead development and for the vetting of students and the pre-qualification or pre-admissions that they do….We have all of these things in-house, but you know, it’s a high rate to pay for advertising. It’s sort of like Mercedes takes a full page ad in the New York Times to sell a $50,000 Mercedes car, and they’re so grateful to the Times, they say, “Well, we’ll give you 25 grand for every car we sell.” You know, most people would say that’s kind of a stupid business plan. (Interview 11, 10/7/2014)

Instead of staying within the professional logic with arguments about protecting their professional jurisdiction, this critique highlights how the contract will fail to earn Rutgers the type of profit it should be making if it used its own in-house advertising and admissions staff. This makes it harder to for the administration to dismiss them because it shares the same logics in which they operate. To be clear, faculty in the Graduate School and the School of Arts and Sciences voted to pass the resolution rejecting the Pearson contract for a number of reasons, and those guided by a market logic are only one portion. However, out of the approximately 200 colleges and universities that have signed contracts with outside vendors like Pearson for online degree programs, only a tiny percentage have ever had their contract exposed in the media. With
a broader range of stakeholders able to evaluate the terms of the online learning contract, this created a dialogue informed by more sets of logics, and faculty could raise questions about how much money online programs actually generate for a university, and if it is worth it. By engaged with the broader market logic, it allowed faculty to not only demonstrate that they are not oblivious to the financial pressures the university faces, but question the conventional wisdom that online education is an easy way to bring in millions of dollars in new revenue. This challenged the external legitimacy of online education so that those who did not share the professional logic would have a reason to question the contract.

The other discursive strategy the Rutgers faculty and union used to reject the Pearson contract was to reveal the inherent contradictions of the logic of academic capitalism. In their study of institutional change, Seo and Creed (2002) describe the way that institutional actors pick up on contradictions in logics and use them to create change. For Rutgers, using online education to underwrite activities intended to increase the university’s status and reputation creates a contradiction. One administrator recognizes the contradictions of a capitalistic system based in prestige:

_The biggest challenge right now for us is the same challenge that we’re all having within the big community of research universities….Do we maintain the status quo, and if so, how do we do it because of the ever increasing costs and the withdrawal of support? Where’s the money going to come from?...We’re all doing soul searching at the moment about the value of this sort of never-ending and always expanding venture into PhD education as the thing that we do. Is that really where we should be focusing or should we be spending more time responding to other demands? ...To be quite frank, we can’t justify continuing to put out huge cohorts of PhDs when employment out there is, in some fields, close to zero. It’s just unconscionable to keep doing that._ (Interview 7, 7/2/2014)

Rutgers cannot back away from offering PhD programs, lest it lose a major source of prestige, so it has turned to new sources of revenue like online education to keep the programs that do not generate revenue afloat. A staff person for the union, however, questions whether this narrative
of budget crisis and demands for austerity due to a decline in state funding is reality. She stated, “If the university has 47 million dollars to subsidize football, why don’t they have the money for this?” (Interview 1, 6/24/2014). Since the narrative of the need for universities to increase revenues because of decline state funding is so accepted, questioning the contradictions that result from revenue seeking behavior allowed the faculty to expose the holes in the logic of expanding online education.

Does online education actually hurt the prestige of an institution? While little research exists in this domain, some supporters of online education could potentially hurt the prestige of an institution by pointing out the flaws of traditional education at that school. For example, the Vice President of Continuing Education at Rutgers stated in a news article that “the face-to-face experience is not perfect either” compared to the online experience (Otero and Schroer 2013). One administrator remarked that online education improves upon “400 student lecture classes” (Interview 8, 7/10/2014). While critiques of traditional pedagogy often focus on these issues, it does seem contradictory to defend the quality of online courses by denigrating on-campus courses at one’s own institution. It also shows the contradictions of multiple logics within higher education. In the market inter-institutional system, the practices that gain status in the market determines organizational attention (Thornton, Ocasio, and Lounsbury 2012), which creates a contradiction because there are two relevant domains for status and legitimacy. One domain exists among stakeholders who actively encourage universities to be more business-like, and the traditional prestige-driven domain for higher education. Universities have to appeal to both at the same time. Increasing commercialization of a university may impact the prestige to the traditional domain, but this requires further research.
If not to increase a university’s prestige, online education has another justification – increasing access to higher education. Many supporters of online degree programs are quick to point out the ways that online education allows working professionals to participate in the education to which they might not otherwise have access. One early article about online education in Rutgers’ student newspaper states, “But the point of an online course is not to generate revenue for the University,” Furmanski [the EVP for Academic Affairs] said. “Rather, it provides students with an online-learning experience to enhance life-long skills” (Sikorski 2010). This does not ask who gets the opportunity to enhance their skills with online education, however. One professor explains, “If you go back to square one, why would you ever want to have an online campus? That’s a question no one has really asked, but I could see good reasons for it. One would be that education is too expensive, and if we have students who aren’t taxing the buildings, we could charge them much less tuition and increase access” (Interview 11, 10/7/2014). He goes on to add that since a technology fee makes online courses more expensive, the courses are not more accessible for students with income barriers. Access within the logic of academic capitalism is a contradictory notion. A strict market logic would entail open access to maximize profits. Access within a strict professional logic means maintaining academic barriers to entry to ensure the highest quality students, but lowering financial barriers so that anyone qualified can attend. So, within the framework of academic capitalism, an uneasy tension exists between the goals of expanding the student market and profits without lowering the quality of students so that prestige suffers.

Undoubtedly, even though the Rutgers-Pearson contract is still in effect for the professional schools, and new online courses and programs developed with Pearson are on the way, the faculty “won” the rhetorical battle with the administration by using the weapons of
market logic and the public exposure of the contradictions inherent to academic capitalism to affect the external legitimacy of the Pearson contract for online programs. The professional logic certainly has its own internal inconsistencies (Abbott 1988; Suddaby and Greenwood 2005), but the activist faculty members more effectively found sympathy in the media and support among their fellow faculty than did the administration and Pearson. This case study presents a novel twist to Suddaby and Greenwood’s (2005) work. Suddaby and Greenwood (2005) found law firms to be institutional entrepreneurs because they tried to start a new organizational form for accounting firms that incorporates business consulting. At Rutgers, the administration was the institutional entrepreneur with their contract with Pearson for a new organizational form for the management and creation of online programs. While they theorize that institutional entrepreneurs are the ones to expose contradictions in institutional logics, in this case it was those who were defending the status quo – the faculty – who exposed those contradictions. At Rutgers, it was the faculty who connected with broader social values and utilized a market logic to its benefit. This case demonstrates the power of appealing to the dominant logic when trying to resist institutional change, even if that logic is antithetical to the logics held by the actors at the individual level. Future research can expand upon this study to create comparative cases at institutions with and without unions and different organizational structures to create a typology of ways that institutional logics can be applied.

CONCLUSIONS

In October of 2013, Rutgers University found itself in the spotlight when its graduate faculty passed a resolution to block departments from utilizing Rutgers’ contract with Pearson to develop online master’s programs. This act received so much attention because it is so rare for the expansion of online education to be formally resisted, and it was a public embarrassment for
both the corporation and the university who signed a multi-million dollar seven-year contract. This case study analyzing this event is necessary because online education is an understudied form of academic capitalism, and online learning as a public-private partnership affects the core of the academic mission – teaching and learning. As the faculty in this case emphasized, these types of corporate relationships, made in the name of access and efficiency, have the potential to threaten the faculty ideals of academic freedom and intellectual property rights. Moreover, rather than going towards reducing the cost of education for prospective online students or adding to the ranks of tenured faculty members, half of the revenue generated from online programs would be used to enrich the for-profit partner, which contributes to educational inequality for students and institutions. Thus, this work has both policy and theoretical implications.

The purpose of this chapter was to describe what led up to and what happened afterwards when the Graduate and Arts and Sciences faculties passed resolutions banning the use of the contract Rutgers had signed with Pearson to develop online degrees. It also sought to explore why these faculty were able to successfully prevent this partnership with Pearson from expanding. The specific objective of the chapter was to use neoinstitutional theory, particularly institutional logics theory, as an analytical lens to examine the case narrative in order to understand the social structures, institutional logics, and symbolic actions that facilitate and constrain faculty governance and institutional change. By triangulating data from news articles, meeting minutes, interviews, and documents related to the campaign to pass the resolution, I was able to construct a narrative of the event and use that narrative as a basis for an analysis of why the faculty were able to successfully resist institutional change. As recounted by the sources, after a late start to the development of online learning at Rutgers, a committee signed a contract with Pearson to build their online degree offerings at a large scale. Working with the resources of
the union in a university structure characterized by a decentralized distribution of power and a largely symbolic form of faculty governance, the faculty used school-wide faculty meetings as a tool that rarely had resulted in such far-reaching consequences in its traditional use. Faculty passed a resolution preventing new online programs in the Graduate and Arts and Sciences schools from being developed with Pearson. To support the passage of that resolution, not only did faculty employ logics traditionally oriented with the professions, with concern about professional boundaries and autonomy, but utilized a market logic to highlight what a bad business decision the Pearson deal was, connecting professional concerns with those of the broader institutional field operating in the logic of academic capitalism.

The major findings of this case study include the importance of the role of the union, the structure of the university, and the institutional logics used by the faculty to reject the Pearson contract. First, the union facilitated the faculty having a voice and its ability to impact a contract that was already signed and underway. Because the AAUP-AFT is big, broad, and has a clear mission, they had the resources to protect faculty representation in decision-making and more importantly, they saw the fight about the agreement with Pearson as within their jurisdiction. This finding is significant because the role of unions in higher education has been understudied. In his literature review of faculty union research, Cain (2013) quotes Gary Rhoades’ argument in his 1998 book, that “one can read much higher education literature and not discover faculty unions exist” (p. 10). While union contracts were an important data source for his later work on academic capitalism (Slaughter and Rhoades 2004), as public-private partnerships become more commonplace in core academic functions, more research on the effect that unions have on these agreements will be important for policy and theories of higher education.
Second, Rutgers’ history has made it relatively less well-funded and more decentralized than some of its peers among the ranks of the top research universities. Even though it is a land grant institution, because it was founded as a private college, access to higher education has not been historically embraced as its primary mission, the way that land-grant universities in states historically underserved by higher education institutions have. With a central administration that is distant from the departments, the university had a much more difficult time gaining buy in from faculty for the Pearson contract, compared to universities with hierarchical structures. In response to what faculty saw as a decision made without their input, the faculty and the union purposefully created a tighter coupling between the symbolic function of the faculty meetings and the technical purpose of the meetings as a movement strategy. Tighter coupling between the symbolic and actual work functions is often portrayed as imposed by external forces (Meyer and Rowan 2006). This case, however, demonstrates that tighter coupling can be used as a tactic by organizational actors seeking to resist change.

Finally, in an analysis of how the institutional logics held by the actors were used in each party’s rhetoric, I found that through the choice to appeal to market logics instead of relying only on arguments grounded in the professional logic, faculty increased their probability of success in the debate over online education via public-private partnerships. By questioning the revenue potential of the deal, the faculty showed that they were looking beyond their own self-interest of professional autonomy to the interests of the university. Following Hallett and Ventresca’s (2006) “inhabited” institution approach, this methodology demonstrates that the use of market logics departs from the ideal type of professionals and thus contributes to a reconciliation of the role of structure and agency in this case. This finding suggests that there is a need for more research that combines theories of institutional logics with the social movement literature on
framing. Also, by the faculty revealing the contradictions of the academic capitalism logic, they were able to get their message to the media and were portrayed in a more sympathetic light than the administration. This is another site for more research, since prior studies that focus on actors revealing contradictions in logics looks to the institutional entrepreneur as the one making the revelations, rather than it being used as a defensive tactic against institutional change (e.g., Suddaby and Greenwood 2005). Overall, the case of Rutgers’ online education contract with Pearson contributes to the debate on public-private partnerships, forms of resistance to institutional change, and the literature on online education, and should be the basis for future research on these topics.
Chapter 6: Conclusions

I started this dissertation by presenting the problems that policymakers have imagined that online learning will solve, especially the high costs and lagging efficacy of higher education. But my research shows some of the ways in which online education has allowed universities to continue “business as usual.” This dissertation contributes to an understanding of online education’s exponential growth, and the role that faculty and academic departments play in encouraging or resisting this growth. This concluding chapter has four parts. The first section summarizes my research findings and draws connections across the three empirical chapters. This leads into a discussion of three theoretical contributions of the dissertation: (1) a discussion of the possibilities for a synthesis of the institutional logics perspective and academic capitalism theory, (2) an extension of research on the assimilation of institutional logics, and (3) added nuance to the mechanisms that link field-level logics to the organizational level. From there I will discuss the policy implications of my findings. Ensuring that online education fulfills its promise of improving access and affordability will require substantial institutional reforms. Finally, I elaborate on the limitations of my analysis and the possibilities for future research.

RESEARCH SUMMARY AND SYNTHESIS

Field-Level Discourse on the Legitimacy of Online Education

To obtain a fuller understanding of how the legitimacy of online education has been defined and debated, I outlined the viewpoints of faculty, administrators, and external stakeholders in *The Chronicle of Higher Education* between 1996 and 2013. The number of positive to negative and neutral statements is balanced, indicating that *The Chronicle* is careful to offer a two-sided debate. With the data disaggregated, however, not only are faculty more critical of online learning than administrators and external actors, but even when they are supportive of
it, they use a different vocabulary of practice to speak about different aspects of online learning than other stakeholders. In arguments about the future impact of online education, faculty are concerned about how their professional autonomy will be affected, while the majority of arguments from administrators and external organizations present a positive transformation of higher education through technology that they predict online education will bring about. In judgments of online education’s legitimacy, the quality of instruction online is most frequently discussed by faculty. Furthermore, faculty in *The Chronicle* define quality differently from the other groups: a program’s quality comes from the way it transforms students and is inherent to the quality of the students, faculty and institution that constitute the program, rather than defining quality narrowly as measureable student learning outcomes. Finally, although faculty share other stakeholders’ positive perspective on the ability of online education to increase access to higher education, faculty focus on different aspects of access. For instance, faculty emphasize how current students with different learning styles might be better served by online learning, whereas administrators and external stakeholders claim that it will both create new markets and democratize higher education. Faculty use different frames and a vocabulary of practice when talking about online education’s impact on the field, its quality, and its role in making higher education accessible because their perspectives are informed by different institutional logics.

The mechanisms that allow field-level market and professional logics to shape individual judgments of legitimacy are the microfoundations of the actors’ institutional logics, including social identity, goals, and their focus of attention. *The Chronicle* identifies each individual that it quotes by their occupation and place of work, allowing one to consider how social identity influences goals, viewpoints, and what aspects of online learning might draw their attention. Faculty, administrator, and external stakeholder claims about online education indicate different
goals, such as serving students, generating revenue, and protecting educational quality. These goals and identities focus attention, guiding each group to focus on the aspects of online learning most salient to them. While many faculty members may care deeply about social justice, faculty arguments against online learning in *The Chronicle* tend to frame their primary concern as how online learning will affect the faculty role; in this respect they appear self-interested. Because administrators and external groups frame online education in terms of democratizing education, they are able to connect with broader societal values. Overall, the majority of faculty arguments about online education in *The Chronicle* fit squarely within the professional logic, while those of administrators and external stakeholders reflect a market logic.

*The Acceptance of Online Learning at the Department Level*

*The Chronicle* presents an image of faculty in which the majority reject the legitimacy of online learning, but among faculty department chairs who oversee online programs, most have come to accept its legitimacy. These department leaders drew from market logics in how they made sense of their online learning programs, but did so in different ways, based on the embeddedness of the market logic in the structures of their universities. The interviews revealed that across the board, department leaders of online programs have professional work experience outside of higher education, past experiences with distance education, and values that prime them to accept online education. Market logics were salient at research universities because faculty and departments often received relatively generous financial incentives to develop and teach online courses. However, because of the dominance of the professional logic at these universities, these incentives were used to encourage departments and faculty to opt in to teaching online by enabling traditional prestige-seeking practices, such as research, conference travel, and the funding of graduate students. Market logics were much more embedded at
regional colleges and universities, since department leaders in this group were more likely to be subject to managerial control. A higher proportion of these departments did not have a choice regarding whether to go online or not, particularly if an external partner was used. Here, faculty might have received some funding for course development, but their justification for online learning was the financial stability of the university as a whole and the belief that online learning was serving student needs. Chairs across all university types were impressed with the level of quality and student-teacher interaction in their online courses. Many attributed that quality to their own faculty’s effort, comparing their online programs with other, less rigorous online programs.

Despite all the talk in the media of online education transforming higher education, it was difficult for chairs to isolate changes that had occurred in their departments resulting from offering online programs. Most departments hired more instructors – mostly adjuncts, some tenure track, but department spaces often felt emptier due to more faculty teaching from home. Once they had experience with online learning, department chairs accepted the technology, and were generally more concerned about the heavy workload of teaching online than some of the other common concerns found in prior research, such as the unbundling of faculty roles or the loss of intellectual property. Unbundling did not surface as a concern because the technological skills that instructional designers and marketers have, which chairs saw as necessary for online program development, were not skills historically expected as part of the faculty role.

These chairs overseeing their own online programs saw online education so differently from the faculty presented in The Chronicle because of the types of institutions where they work, their likelihood of being in a professional discipline, and their experience developing and teaching online courses. At regional institutions, professional autonomy was already highly
circumscribed before the advent of online learning. When universities made top-down decisions instructing departments to develop online programs, there was little expectation for faculty to hold intellectual property rights for the online courses because faculty were paid extra to develop them. Furthermore, several of these universities either did not have tenure protection for faculty, or only had one or two tenured faculty members per department, so most faculty were given little choice but to accept online learning. On the other hand, because departments at research universities were often able to channel revenue from online programs to prestige-building practices, the professional logic was reinforced by market practices. Thus, market logics are not only imposed by external forces onto academic departments, but in departments with online programs, the market logic is constituted from within.

Regional and research universities share the view of students as customers. Among my interview subjects, even those initially skeptical of online education have come to accept it based on the desire to meet student needs. The value of serving students historically has been associated with a public good logic, and was reinforced by universities with a mission to provide access to higher education. It has now been assimilated into the market logic because serving the community’s needs has become individualized. What I mean by this is that the good that is served here is that of the individual student improving their job prospects. Larger community or civic benefits are not part of the meaning given to online education. Faculty played a key role in the assimilation of the public good and market logics by relying on the claim that online education increases access to higher education to legitimate their involvement in online learning, even when they had lingering concerns about quality. Faculty did not frame access to higher education through online learning by increasing the racial and socioeconomic diversity in their programs. The public good becomes further defined by the market logic when lower levels of
quality are accepted for those who have no other option. Even though market logics are at work at both research and regional institutions, different processes for online learning’s development and university structures affect the mechanisms for how institutional logics influence the acceptance of online education and the social organization of the department.

Resistance to Online Learning

A clear example for the importance of university structures and the process for how online programs are initiated comes from my case study of the graduate and arts and sciences faculties at Rutgers, who rejected a contract signed by the university with Pearson to develop online graduate programs. After an analysis of departments that have embraced online programs at both research and regional institutions, the last empirical chapter goes in depth at one elite public research university where faculty successfully resisted one form of online education - online programs developed in partnership with a for-profit corporation. Faculty objected to their lack of participation in the decision-making process to sign this contract, as well as the contents of the contract itself, which stated that any new online master’s degree programs would be developed through Pearson and in return, Pearson would receive half of the online enrollment tuition revenue. The faculty union assisted in organizing against the contract. Faculty, drawing on a professional logic, asserted that online courses developed in this way would infringe upon their academic freedom and intellectual property rights. However, they also utilized the market logic by contesting that the contract would be a bad financial deal for Rutgers. The graduate faculty and then the arts and sciences faculty used a school-wide faculty meeting as a tool for shared governance to pass resolutions blocking the development of Pearson-managed online programs for any graduate or arts and science program. The events attracted attention in the local
and higher education media, because so few external contracts of this type have been made public, let alone faced resistance and been defeated by faculty.

The Rutgers faculty were successful in defeating the Pearson contract because they were able to marshal both market and professional logics. They used market logics in their protest discourse, but they also capitalized on university structures shaped by the professional logic. First, the fact that Rutgers, one of the top research universities in the country, has a union to represent its faculty, gives faculty exceptional power. The Rutgers faculty union is particularly strong because of its broad membership, mission extending beyond bargaining and grievances, and level of resources. Second, because of its history and complex university structure, the university-level administration is relatively weak compared to other universities. By more closely coupling faculty meetings that had formerly been symbolic sources of power with the actual function of shared governance through the resolutions they passed, Rutgers faculty were able to resist change. Finally, rather than solely using arguments that stayed within the discourse of the professional logic, the protesting faculty members exploited the contradictions in the market logic as a tool to defeat the contract. By speaking in the same language as the administrators and saying that the online programs would not be profitable enough, Rutgers faculty challenged the external legitimacy of the online programs. Beyond pointing out that the contract was a bad financial deal, the faculty deployed a market logic in emphasizing that online programs, which are supposed to expand access to higher education, could actually prove more expensive than face-to-face courses, thereby failing to achieve the goal of increasing accessibility. This case study shows the benefits of faculty appealing to the dominant logic in resistance to online learning and the commercialization of teaching. It also reveals a larger point
that will be discussed in the next section: faculty are opposed less to online education itself than to the way that decisions are made to create, develop, and implement these programs.

Decision-Making

Across all three empirical chapters, one of the most significant findings is that the primary barrier to online education’s legitimacy comes not just from doubts about program quality, but also emerges from concern over how administrative decisions are made about online learning. When faculty decided for themselves that online programs are appropriate for their discipline, chairs are less likely to have quality concerns than their counterparts at universities that engaged in top-down decision-making. This finding suggests that, even though debates over online education tend to focus on the technology itself, struggles over governance structures play a key role in this debate. This comes across in the arguments made in The Chronicle by faculty, who tended to express heightened concern about the future of higher education and faculty’s role in it. By comparison, at most of the universities outside of the public research segment, faculty have very little shared governance, not just in online education decision-making, but in most university matters. Because faculty at these institutions often did not have many tools within their institutions to formally raise concerns, university decisions to grow online went unopposed. These decisions were supported by faculty who did not have many expectations for involvement in decision-making. Rutgers is an example of how formal opposition can occur when tools for shared governance are present, like tenure and faculty governing bodies. At Rutgers, the protesting faculty members specifically noted that they were not against online education in general, but instead opposed the lack of transparency and involvement of an external corporation in the decision-making and development process. Once they had taught online, however, chairs praised many aspects of the courses. The results of this research suggests that with adequate
financial incentives, support for workloads given the increased time requirements for online program development, and faculty engagement in online decision-making, online learning could be a fully legitimate form of education for many types of academic programs. It is clear from the interviews, however, that many online programs are run with little support, which is troubling because it may lead to greater stratification both within the academic profession and within and among universities themselves.

The use of online program management companies also highlights the boundaries of shared governance. Though these services come with assurances of faculty control over curriculum and course content, greater interdependence with these companies does affect course content in subtle ways. First, because of very real issues with quality and cost, education technology companies, foundations, state legislatures, and other non-university policymakers have played a growing role in the higher education discourse, as shown in the results of Chapter 3. The subset of interviews with chairs at institutions with these partnerships in Chapter 4 offers examples of how some of these companies have influenced course content, by pushing institutions into offering accelerated schedules, or balking at instructional design for online courses involving greater complexity than discussion boards and multiple-choice tests. Pearson’s contract with Rutgers stipulated that Pearson had the right to remove objectionable content from online courses, even though Pearson claimed they would never prevent a faculty member from teaching something that could potentially be labeled obscene. Though the contract was stopped before this claim could be put to the test, this clause could have impacted academic freedom. When universities partner with profit-motivated organizations, disciplines that do not

---

14 Not all of the program management aim to keep online programs easily standardized. Some target a niche market and charge a premium to use highly sophisticated instructional design technologies.
lead to high-paying jobs, that attract large numbers of students, or that are too complex to be
offered efficiently online can lose out. As shown by the recent case of the University of Florida
canceling its eleven-year contract with Pearson because its online programs failed to meet
enrollment goals (Jaschik 2015), the expectations for what these companies can do often outstrip
their abilities. For example, my interviews with department chairs identified two institutions that
previously had partnered with an online program management company, but have since scaled
back or canceled their partnership after not reaching enrollment goals set for the program. In
these partnerships, online programs that do not meet performance expectations put universities in
a difficult position because the services provided by the external partner still need to be offered
to students, who face potential disruption to their education if a contract is ended. This result
reflects poorly on the university, not the external partner.

Access

A second finding that bridges each of the chapters is the importance and various
meanings of access to higher education via online learning within the field. Access was the only
legitimate rationale for online education for faculty quoted in *The Chronicle*, though they most
often framed it in terms of how current students of different learning styles would benefit, rather
than creating access through new markets. The department chairs that I interviewed strongly
supported the idea that online learning increases access, and it was a particularly important
justification for those who were initially skeptical about the quality of online learning programs.
They made sense of online learning by framing it as “better than nothing” for working students,
and that was enough to allow them to set aside their other concerns. The Rutgers administration
also defended their contract with Pearson because it would allow the university to reach new
markets. Faculty opponents critiqued this argument by noting that technology fees made online
programs more expensive for students. They questioned the logic of using online programs to create access to higher education since they were more expensive for students than evening or weekend programs. They also stated that access to higher education is not a valid rationale if it is creating access to an inferior degree, thereby bringing back the quality concerns. But access in the context of online programs seems to be of a specific type: interviewed department chairs did not often mention serving underrepresented minorities or low-income students when they described access. By and large, the only dimensions along which online programs introduced greater diversity were the widening of the geographic area from which students were drawn and the admission of greater numbers of working students. Even though their claims about access were not as grandiose as those from external stakeholders, department chairs, whose departments benefit in other ways from being online, may have an incentive not to question the institutionalized myth that online learning democratizes higher education (Cox 2005).

Profit

Serving student needs and creating access to higher education are the main frames promoting online learning in The Chronicle, helping to present an image that the revenue earned from online programs is a distant concern in this elite discourse. Arguments for online education’s cost savings or revenue generating abilities did not even crack the top three most common arguments for any of the stakeholder groups, and the argument barely registered for faculty. But department chairs overseeing online programs freely discussed how important online revenue was to either their acceptance of or decision to develop online learning programs. The Chronicle presented a faculty discourse that stayed within the professional logic, making faculty appear out of touch with the demands of the market economy, but the chairs I interviewed felt and responded to the need for departments to be entrepreneurial, and counted on the additional

207
funding received by their department or university. Even the Rutgers faculty who resisted the Pearson partnership could see the benefit of online programs from this perspective. They stated that if the profits from the expansion of online programs went to the hiring of more tenure-track professors, the contract with Pearson would have been more tolerable. The purpose of revenue-generating programs within a non-profit university are ostensibly different from those of a business, because there are no shareholders or owners to enrich. Instead, tuition revenue is often reinvested in university operations. At all types of universities, profitable programs are used to subsidize programs that are expensive to run, yet are deemed worthy of retaining nonetheless. Universities should have a more extensive conversation about the ethics of claiming that their online programs create access for underserved students to higher education. The funds they create are often diverted to research, graduate students, or keeping a more exclusive residential campus afloat. To truly create access, that money would be used to provide scholarships for deserving online students, hire additional full-time faculty instead of adjuncts, or reduce course loads for teaching faculty so they can effectively create and teach online courses while mentoring students. Instead, the cumulative advantage obtained by research universities with online offerings reproduces a system where high-status institutions can use online funds to further increase their status and lower-prestige universities have no choice but to be online in order to survive.

What happens, though, if the financial benefits of online programs decline? Chairs at several of the small private institutions in the sample described how their tiny residential campuses were supported by online enrollments. Undergraduate students are able to take classes from full-time faculty on campus because a larger body of students take courses online with adjunct instructors. These universities are thus dependent on their online programs. Even at
research universities, departments that received a percentage of their online tuition revenue depended on that money both to stay afloat and to do the types of things that austere budgets do not cover. If enrollments decline, the revenues that originally seemed like “extra” funds now become a necessary part of a normal operating budget. These institutions would then need to amplify their online recruitment efforts to fund the less-profitable programs that online programs underwrite and to support the increased marketing and technology costs of the online programs, leading to a treadmill of production. When institutions cut off the financial incentives to departments or faculty that were granted to encourage the development of online courses, as some of the institutions in this study have done, faculty lose part of their motivation for participating in online learning. New employees often have online teaching responsibilities written into their job descriptions, eliminating the need for additional financial incentives. The coverage of online education sampled from *The Chronicle* does not give insight into this situation. When the faculty role is described only from the perspective of the professional logic, the degree to which money is a motivator for many participants is missed. Just as the treadmill of production in manufacturing creates environmental havoc, the treadmill of production in online higher education creates a rupture in its ability to serve students in a sustainable way.

THEORETICAL CONTRIBUTIONS

The institutional logics perspective has burgeoned over the last 15 years, migrating from the field of sociology to prominence within the organizational research happening in business schools. This has occurred in part because it has created a way to talk about changing values and discourse in a neutral, non-moralizing way. The institutional logics perspective can add value to critical sociology in its ability to explain how shifts in logics occur. In essence, Slaughter and
Rhoades’ (2004) academic capitalism theory is a theory of shifting logics, but thus far the link between the two perspectives has not been made, and these two bodies of theory remain separated. My research highlights the possibilities for a synthesis of the critical perspective of academic capital theory with the mechanisms of institutional logics theory, in an attempt to see evidence of the market logic in higher education, and how this logic has grown.

Theories of academic capitalism and institutional logics explain the process of the growth of the market logic in higher education through online learning better together than they do individually. Academic capitalism theory’s critical perspective draws out the important role of the state, technology, and the restructuring of faculty work, but it misses how institutional logics are behind each of those institutions in a way that my research reveals. Slaughter and Rhoades (2004) demonstrate the importance of the state for the growth of academic capitalism since universities are seeking state resources in order to create networks that merge state, corporate, and university interests in order to bring in new streams of revenue. From the perspective of institutional logics theory, however, the use of state resources via federal financial aid as a new revenue stream from online programs is not necessarily causal, because departments could get tuition revenue via financial aid from new on-campus programs. Additionally, while partnerships with organizations on the boundary of higher education and other institutions are an important mechanism to create these new streams of revenue, only a minority of universities in my sample used this tactic to develop online programs, most choosing to use internal resources. Thus, the majority of sampled institutions relied on the faculty with identities that would support the market logics behind online education and market logics embedded in university structure to enable online growth, instead of public/private intermediating networks. Within academic capitalism theory, the important role of the state is supposed to show that the changes happening
in higher education are not solely a result of a growing market logic. But, if the state itself is shaped by the market logic, as in a neoliberal state, then the distinction between the state and market logics is blurred in the resulting federal and state policies impacting higher education, rendering the distinction between the state and market in academic capitalism theory less significant.

Another important focus of academic capitalism theory is the way that it restructures the professorial class so that faculty are increasingly contingent to lower costs and increasingly managed to supervise these new flows of resources. Online learning is a mechanism for this. What institutional logics theory adds is nuance about how this restructuring happens differently at different types of universities, especially since there is very little evidence for online education lowering costs. Because academic capitalism theory draws on research primarily from elite research universities, it overlooks how the decision to develop online programs is less of a response by entrepreneurial faculty and more of a university decision that faculty must comply with at regional colleges and universities. The institutional logics perspective’s strengths are found in its cross-level analysis of logics. It lays out how the logics at the individual level, found in an individual faculty member’s identity and cognitive schemata, can align or contrast with the logics at the organizational level. Online education may be hastening the unbundling of faculty roles, as predicted by academic capitalism theory, but my results indicate that department chairs do not experience it as such. Academic capitalism theory underestimates the amount of entrepreneurialism and the influence of the market logic among department chairs at regional universities in professional fields, who may expect a managerial structure because of their practitioner background, and may accept the use of technology to make the circuits of knowledge more accountable.
Overall, academic capitalism theory stresses the importance of networks among university leaders, foundations, and education technology companies that shape the growth of online learning. Non-elite universities, however, are not necessarily participants in these networks, particularly at the department level. Therefore, the acceptance of online learning and the logics behind it must have their roots outside of this network. Slaughter and Rhoades (2004) state that “the ascendance of the academic capitalist knowledge/learning regime requires us to rethink the centrality and dominance of the academic profession” (p. 10). That statement presumes, however, that there is one and only one “academic profession,” thus ignoring the possibility that the field of higher education could have multiple centers based on different constellation of logics within the field. Their idea is reinforced by the notion that academic capitalism is dangerous because it undermines public support for higher education, but the institutional logics perspective suggests the opposite, that public support depends on universities participating in academic capitalism to a greater degree because of widespread market logics.

While academic capitalism theory contends that the market logic dominates but coexists with the logic of education for the public good, I argue a position more extreme: that the market logic has assimilated the logic of education for the public good. The market logic has been so ingrained in the cognitive schemata and identities of online’s supporters among external stakeholders, administrators, and the department chairs interviewed, that conceiving of students as customers to serve is seen as the primary way to serve the needs of the public. Thornton et al. (2012) highlight the recent focus in institutional logics research on how logics are combined. They describe assimilation as when “elements of one logic are combined into a prevalent logic” in which “the core elements of the original logic prevail, with new practices and symbols made part of the prevalent logic” (p. 165). One gap that they name is an explanation for how and why
logics change. In this case, the logic of serving the public good was assimilated into the market logic, rather than being totally replaced or segregated from other logics of higher education; this assimilation occurred because it left the status order of the higher education field unchanged.

Finally, one critique of the institutional logics perspective comes from Fligstein and McAdam (2012), who claim that the institutional logics perspective implies consensus at the field level. My work helps alleviate the confusion over how there can be broadly held institutional logics at the field level yet great variation in practices and beliefs at the organizational and individual level within a field. Institutional logics are embedded in organizations to varying degrees. For instance, research universities tend to have structures of shared governance, embedding professional logics. However, they also have strong structural sources of the market logic, as evidenced by the importance of commercial science and athletics for elevating institutional prestige and attracting further resources. Small, private universities were found to have fewer structures that embedded the professional logic, limiting their ability to counterbalance the market logic embedded in managerial structures. These structures filter and amplify institutional logics in discourse by constraining the field level logics to which actors like department chairs have access. Since so much of the discourse is generated at the elite level, we miss how the same market and professional logics are drawn from in different ways at other types of colleges and universities.

POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS
While my research findings give me reason to doubt that online learning will be the solution to higher education’s problems of cost and quality, it is possible for online learning programs to be a positive addition to the field of higher education without increasing
stratification within the higher education system. First, in a survey of adults interested in participating in post-secondary education, 62% claimed that they would prefer to attend a face-to-face or mostly campus-based program (Eduventures 2012). This indicates that despite the significant growth of online enrollments, the majority of students still prefer a classroom experience. With 44% of online undergraduate students and 63% of online graduate students employed full-time (Clinefelter and Aslanian 2015), it is likely that some of these students chose online programs because of their need to work full-time. In response to this, proposals for “free college” should be supported so that the burden of paying for college does not contribute to students working so many hours, leading to some students choosing online programs even when it is not their ideal learning environment. Students would not necessarily need to work full-time, which has been shown to negatively affect academic performance (Kalenkoski and Pabilonia 2008; Pike, Kuh, and Massa-McKinley 2008). Examples of these programs come from President Obama’s 2016 State of the Union address, where he called for “two years of community college at no cost for every responsible student” (New York Times 2016) or Bernie Sanders’ presidential platform on higher education. Sanders goes further, proposing to eliminate tuition at all public colleges and universities. Plans like these should be supported, because these students would be able to select the education format that best fits their preferences, not what fits around their work schedule.

Another beneficial outcome of free public college would be a reduction in the number of students leaving college with no degree yet still responsible for student debt. Since online programs have lower completion rates than traditional programs (WICHE Cooperative for Educational Technologies 2013), online students are more likely to be saddled with student loan debt for a program they did not complete. Furthermore, if public colleges and universities offered
free tuition, students would likely choose public universities, which in my sample, tended to have better shared governance practices and protections for tenure than many of the private universities. That shift in enrollments would potentially put pressure on institutions with poor employment practices, thereby improving employment conditions for the field as a whole. With a system of free public college, online programs could be strategically targeted to those programs or students that benefit pedagogically from the online format, such as the online ministry graduate program in my sample that requires students to be actively engaged with their church community during the course of the program, or programs that serve active military students who frequently move locations. I recognize that the danger of the free college proposal is that public universities could cope with an influx of new students by expanding online offerings. This would put students who already face gaps in access to higher education at higher risk, such as Black and male students, who have been shown to perform worse in online courses at the community college level (Xu and Jaggars 2013).

Second, faculty should take every opportunity possible to fight for their right to unionize as a way to counteract the assimilation of the market and professional logics in the field of higher education, and they should work to incorporate contingent faculty members into their unions. This will be difficult, because of the perception that tenured and tenure-track (T/TT) faculty do not see their professional role as having enough in common with contingent faculty (e.g., Casey 2011), but it is not impossible. Chapter 5 demonstrated that not only is it possible for T/TT faculty and contingent faculty to stand together in the same union at Rutgers, but it was a strength in the resistance to Pearson because the union had a broader mission of fighting corporatization in the university, rather than just the protection of tenure rights. With T/TT faculty making up only 42% of all instructional staff at four-year, non-profit universities in the
U.S. (U.S. Department of Education 2014b), others have recognized that joint T/TT and contingent unions can provide a means for providing resources, shoring up tenure lines, and responding to a lack of shared governance in the working conditions of both types of faculty. For instance, the University of Minnesota, a major research university, filed for an election in January 2016 for a union that would represent both tenure-line and contingent faculty (Lerner 2016). Currently, only about 25% of faculty are represented by a collective bargaining agreement (Berry and Savarese 2012). As “managed professionals,” unionized faculty have established protections to professional autonomy, such as a measure of transparency for salaries and the use of time (Rhoades 1998). The ability to negotiate the terms and conditions of online teaching benefits contingent and T/TT faculty alike. As an example, among my interview subjects, the majority of whom were non-union faculty, very few were aware of the intellectual property policies and how they related to the development of online courses at their universities; others believed that even though the university owned their work products, because they were situated in a collegial department, they anticipated no negative results from ceding control of their courses to the university. Furthermore, several department chairpersons shared that they experienced increased workloads and a loss of funds over time for the redevelopment of online courses. With many of the chairs stating that new graduate program proposals are almost always considered to be online first, these types of issues could be addressed by collective-bargaining agreements so that faculty might have a voice in setting strategy for online learning.

Proposing the expansion of unions might seem like an antithetical response for a professional occupation, but due to the growth of the market logic, unions are a more viable option for change than other methods of regaining power more typical of professional fields. Professions often gain their status from the state (Brint 1996), but many lawmakers are
unsympathetic to the professoriate and encourage universities to become more market-oriented. Faculty could become more visible public intellectuals in order to promote professional autonomy, but with heavy workloads to gain tenure and seek status, it is unlikely that many would feel they would be able to take the time on speaking and writing that does not “count” as much towards tenure and promotion, nor do I think it would make much of an impact within the management of universities. To reverse the decline of shared governance, unions have been shown to strengthen the role of faculty in decision making (Porter 2013). As Gary Rhoades (2016) stated in a recent presentation, “Faculty unions are neither a panacea nor a silver bullet – they are a vehicle through which faculty can democratically advance an agenda that re-centers the academic/public good.” Regional public universities were most likely to be unionized in my study, and faculty in a few instances mentioned that they were able to make online teaching conditions better through collective bargaining. Individuals at private colleges and universities have historically been least likely to be represented by a union and would be difficult to organize because of past legal precedents. However, as greater numbers of adjunct faculty organize and gain bargaining rights, it is possible that full-time faculty will be encouraged to seek the same rights.

Finally, while it is important that faculty are included in decision-making about online learning programs on campus, it is just as important that faculty are included both in the decision-making that comprises the technology development process and the development of language that guides those processes in the broader society. Designers of new technologies are often far removed from those who are tasked with implementing technological innovations (Thomas 1994). Engaging faculty groups, rather than isolating and marginalizing them, could potentially create a more inclusive development process and online course “platforms” that are
better aligned with the pedagogical techniques that faculty find most effective. Even faculty-designed technologies can be caught up in the forces that they were designed to overcome, however, as demonstrated by the original Massive Open Online Courses (MOOCs), which were designed by a radical collective of faculty in Canada and quickly usurped by corporate revenue-generating models by organizations spun off from wealthy universities (see Selwyn 2014). In this environment, the design of new educational technologies is a billion dollar industry (Wan and McNally 2015), and the logics that guide educational technology firms leads them to view education as a product. This clashes with the educator-driven view of education as a process (Dewey 1897), which has been drowned out by the market logic commodifying online education.

As a response, both Thomas (1994) and Selwyn (2014) suggest that changing the way technology is talked about can create change in the ways that technologies are used and implemented, aligning with the view that discourse and rhetoric both constitute and change institutional logics (Ocasio et al. 2015). The results presented in Chapter 3 show that educational technology companies, foundations, state policymakers, and college and university administrators often share a common set of logics and language about the benefits of online learning, thus supporting Selwyn’s (2014) contention that “[t]he words, phrases, and terms used within higher education to describe digital processes and practices are highly charged and value-laden – conveying a definite sense of what should be happening, and often silencing other possibilities” (p. 129-130). When faculty adopt market-oriented language, using phrases like “capturing students,” or “delivering content,” or when they straightforwardly refer to the university as a business, they invoke values that alienate themselves from their own position as professionals within higher education. By working to reveal the political nature of this discourse, and choosing language that allows for a more honest conversation about online technology, those
hoping to stem the marketization of the university may find more success. For instance, because
the faculty-created and termed “MOOC,” later appropriated by education technology
organizations, includes “open” as part of its acronym, critics have a space to question whether
those courses are truly open now that Coursera has started charging for courses (Straumsheim
2016). Similarly, the Rutgers faculty were able to reveal the contradictions of the market
rationale for the Pearson contract, because of the way that they used language. The success of the
Rutgers faculty was also partially attributable to the structural environment in which they were
situated, which is why I advocate for both material and symbolic change to engender a future
academic environment characterized by decreasing educational stratification.

FUTURE RESEARCH

This study examined the discourse of the debate over the legitimacy of online learning at
the field level, and the discourse and material structures that led to the acceptance or rejection of
online learning at the organizational level. This research is both timely and necessary, because
the existing online education empirical literature lacks an attention to power and differences in
organizational context. Even so, there are limitations to the generalizability and applicability of
the results presented in this dissertation. In this concluding section, I examine a few of those
limitations and provide a guide for future research.

The most significant limitation to the conclusions I have presented is that the research
design relies on perceptions of online learning, its development processes and structures, and its
consequences within the university. Though these perceptions are important for the social
construction of online learning within academic departments, the material impact of online is
harder to analyze. For instance, one of the strongest arguments for the growth of online learning
is that it is more efficient than traditional forms of education. However, both the responses of my
interview subjects and the results of past research indicate that the connection between online programs and cost savings is not entirely clear-cut. Online programs cost more to develop (Meyer 2006; Program Evaluation Division - North Carolina General Assembly 2010; Weidemann 2015), a significant portion of universities do not know how much revenue online learning actually generates (Green 2010), and at about a fifth of universities, online students pay more than residential students (Aldridge et al. 2013; Clinefelter and Magda 2013; Green 2010; Parry 2010). A fuller understanding of the benefits and drawbacks to online learning will require more in-depth studies of the financial impact of such programs.

Another argument for the legitimacy of online education is that it creates increased access to higher education. The evidence for this claim, too, is mixed. While Black and White students tend to be overrepresented in online programs, compared to their representation in campus-based programs, Hispanic and Asian students are less likely to be enrolled in fully online programs (National Center for Education Statistics 2012, author calculations). Furthermore, online students have higher incomes, on average, than other students, due to their higher average age and employment rate. Studies at the community college level demonstrate that the widely held view that online education creates access for underrepresented minorities is, in fact, a myth (Cox 2005); and online learning may actually hurt the performance of African American and male students (Johnson and Mejia 2014). The recent mandate by the National Center for Education Statistics requiring the collection of online enrollment statistics will facilitate future research to better understand the role that online education plays in creating access to higher education, which may ultimately work to limit worsening educational inequality.

In Chapter 3, I suggested that the federal government and state legislatures have viewed online education as a tool to reduce inequality in society and combat cost and quality problems in
higher education, but there has been little systematic research that traces the history of the state’s role in the growth of online education. Comparatively, there are much more extensive histories of correspondence and distance education than narratives of the growth of online learning (Moore 2013). Moore and Kearsley (2011) outline the history of online education as the history of advances in technology with some mentions of innovative university projects, but their brief mention of online education policy is totally separate, as if federal and state policy has no influence on the ability of universities to experiment with online learning. They do, of course, mention the Department of Defense’s role in setting up ARPANET, a precursor to the internet that connected several research universities. Beyond developing the technology itself, however, there is no mention of the ways that the Department of Education has funded the development and evaluation of online technology programs, generated policy that encourages online program development, or has regulated those programs in more or less favorable ways over time.

Haughey (2008) also notes a lack of research on the development of online learning policy. If online learning is indeed a new paradigm for education (Harasim 2000), it is important to know the ways in which state and federal government bodies have hastened the coming of that paradigm shift. Berman (2012) was able to do so in her analysis of the ways that the state supported the rise of the market logic in academic science, showing that technological breakthroughs were not enough and that the state was necessary for commercial science to grow. Similarly, it is important to contextualize why online education was able to grow so rapidly in the 2000s in order to understand why it was politically important that colleges and universities transform themselves through technology.

Finally, more in-depth research into the organizational structures of online learning, particularly at those colleges and universities that have partnered with online program
management firms, will provide a deeper understanding of the consequences of online learning for the university and academic professions. Further research is also needed on the management and organization of online learning programs, especially research that is theoretically based and recognizes the important of organizational culture (see Paul 2014).

In my research, I focused on the faculty viewpoint through the department chair, because this is an important and underrepresented voice in online education research. However, the perspective of department chairs is limited, as the administration of online programs is incredibly complex. Department chairs are well poised to explain the sense-making process for online education within their departments, since either they or their colleagues serve as the link between university administrators and faculty, and have some sense of the process of development. Universities, however, are constantly reorganizing the management structures for online learning – in 2010, almost three-quarters of universities had restructured the management of their online programs, and 59% expected to restructure in the next two years (Green 2010). In my research, I saw evidence of trends towards the decentralization because of the need for faculty to be more involved in the online learning development process to ensure quality. Further research would be able to determine if this is a more widespread trend or not.

As universities reorganize their online operations, however, a countervailing power is that of rationalization and standardization of processes for efficiency. Online program management firms offer this as a selling point to universities, yet they have been virtually unexamined in research. An in-depth comparative case study could fill this gap, examining the role that organizational design plays in shifting logics directly. In an educational field that is likely to be characterized by the continued growth of online offerings, care must be taken to
ensure equity and efficiency. A theoretically driven, critical, and empirical approach to the study of online education is needed and is the goal of my future research.


233


Lombardi, John V., Diane D. Craig, Elizabeth D. Capaldi, and Denise S. Gater. 2002. *University Organization, Governance, and Competitiveness: The Top American Research*


247


250


(http://chronicle.com/article/Ga-Tech-to-Offer-a-MOOC-Like/139245/).


(http://www.westga.edu/~distance/ojdlafall113/zhen113.html).


(https://thebluereview.org/faculty-time-allocation/).

## Appendix A. Interview Data

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Interview Number</th>
<th>Position</th>
<th>Discipline</th>
<th>University</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Interview 1</td>
<td>Chair</td>
<td>Business</td>
<td>Regional Public A</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Interview 2</td>
<td>Chair</td>
<td>Education</td>
<td>Flagship Public A</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Interview 3</td>
<td>School Director*</td>
<td>Nursing</td>
<td>Regional Private A</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Interview 4</td>
<td>Interim Dean*</td>
<td>Education</td>
<td>Regional Private B</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Interview 5</td>
<td>Chair</td>
<td>Nursing</td>
<td>Regional Private C</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Interview 6</td>
<td>Chair</td>
<td>Business</td>
<td>Regional Private B</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Interview 7</td>
<td>Professor</td>
<td>Education</td>
<td>Regional Private D</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Interview 8</td>
<td>Division Dean*</td>
<td>Business</td>
<td>Regional Private E</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Interview 9</td>
<td>Department Director of Graduate Education</td>
<td></td>
<td>Regional Private F</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Interview 10</td>
<td>Professor</td>
<td>Computer Science</td>
<td>National Private A</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Interview 11</td>
<td>Program Director**</td>
<td>Health Sciences</td>
<td>Regional Public B</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Interview 12</td>
<td>School Director*</td>
<td>Human Services</td>
<td>Flagship Public A</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Interview 13</td>
<td>Chair</td>
<td>Education</td>
<td>Flagship Public A</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Interview 14</td>
<td>Chair</td>
<td>Education</td>
<td>Flagship Public B</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Interview 15</td>
<td>Chair</td>
<td>Education</td>
<td>Flagship Public C</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Interview 16</td>
<td>Dean*</td>
<td>Education</td>
<td>Flagship Public D</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Interview 17</td>
<td>Program Coordinator**</td>
<td>Health Sciences</td>
<td>Regional Public C</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Interview 18</td>
<td>Program Coordinator**</td>
<td>Engineering</td>
<td>Regional Public C</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Technology</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Interview 19</td>
<td>Chair</td>
<td>Agriculture</td>
<td>Flagship Public D</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Interview 20</td>
<td>Program Coordinator</td>
<td>Education</td>
<td>Regional Public D</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Interview 21</td>
<td>Chair</td>
<td>Psychology</td>
<td>Flagship Public A</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Interview 22</td>
<td>Chair</td>
<td>English</td>
<td>Regional Private G</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Interview 23</td>
<td>Dean*</td>
<td>Business</td>
<td>Regional Private H</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Interview 24</td>
<td>Program Director**</td>
<td>Health Sciences</td>
<td>Regional Private H</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Interview 25</td>
<td>Chair</td>
<td>Business</td>
<td>Regional Private I</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Interview 26</td>
<td>Chair</td>
<td>Public Administration</td>
<td>Regional Private J</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Interview 27</td>
<td>Chair</td>
<td>Nonprofit</td>
<td>Regional Private J</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Administration</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Interview 28</td>
<td>Chair</td>
<td>Communications</td>
<td>Regional Private B</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Interview 29</td>
<td>Graduate Dean</td>
<td>Business</td>
<td>National Private B</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Interview 30</td>
<td>Chair</td>
<td>Criminal Justice</td>
<td>Regional Private K</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Interview 31</td>
<td>Chair</td>
<td>Library and</td>
<td>Flagship Public B</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Information Sciences</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Interview 32</td>
<td>Chair</td>
<td>History</td>
<td>Regional Public E</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Interview 33</td>
<td>Chair</td>
<td>Library and</td>
<td>Regional Public E</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Information Sciences</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Interview 34</td>
<td>Interim Program Director**</td>
<td>Interdisciplinary</td>
<td>Regional Public E</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Interview 35</td>
<td>Chair</td>
<td>Nursing</td>
<td>Regional Public E</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Interview 36</td>
<td>Dean*</td>
<td>Computer Science</td>
<td>National Private C</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Interview No.</td>
<td>Title</td>
<td>Department</td>
<td>Institution Type</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>--------------</td>
<td>------------------------</td>
<td>--------------------------</td>
<td>------------------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>37</td>
<td>School Director*</td>
<td>Nursing</td>
<td>Regional Public B</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>38</td>
<td>Chair</td>
<td>Nursing</td>
<td>Regional Public C</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>39</td>
<td>Program Director</td>
<td>Health Sciences</td>
<td>National Private C</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>40</td>
<td>Program Director</td>
<td>Health Sciences</td>
<td>National Private C</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>41</td>
<td>Chair</td>
<td>Agriculture</td>
<td>Flagship Public D</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>42</td>
<td>Chair</td>
<td>Business</td>
<td>Regional Private I</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>43</td>
<td>Program Director</td>
<td>Health Sciences</td>
<td>Regional Public F</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>44</td>
<td>Professor**</td>
<td>Criminal Justice</td>
<td>Regional Public G</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>45</td>
<td>Program Director**</td>
<td>Human Services</td>
<td>Flagship Public A</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>46</td>
<td>Department Graduate</td>
<td>Public Administration</td>
<td>National Private B</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>47</td>
<td>Chair</td>
<td>Professional Studies</td>
<td>Regional Public H</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>48</td>
<td>Chair</td>
<td>Psychology</td>
<td>Regional Private L</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>49</td>
<td>Chair</td>
<td>Psychology</td>
<td>Regional Public F</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>50</td>
<td>Program Director**</td>
<td>Communications</td>
<td>Regional Private M</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>51</td>
<td>Chair</td>
<td>Health Sciences</td>
<td>Regional Private M</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>52</td>
<td>Chair</td>
<td>Agriculture</td>
<td>Flagship Public C</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>53</td>
<td>Dean</td>
<td>Ministry</td>
<td>Regional Private N</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>54</td>
<td>Chair</td>
<td>Criminal Justice</td>
<td>Regional Public I</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>55</td>
<td>Co-Program Director**</td>
<td>Computer Science</td>
<td>National Private A</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>56</td>
<td>Chair</td>
<td>Education</td>
<td>Regional Private D</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>57</td>
<td>Chair</td>
<td>Business</td>
<td>Regional Private O</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>58</td>
<td>Program Director</td>
<td>Nonprofit</td>
<td>Regional Public J</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Administration</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>59</td>
<td>Chair</td>
<td>Agriculture</td>
<td>Flagship Public C</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>60</td>
<td>Dean*</td>
<td>Professional Studies</td>
<td>Regional Public K</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>61</td>
<td>Program Director**</td>
<td>Health Sciences</td>
<td>Regional Private P</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*These deans and directors were interviewed because they were the functional equivalent of a chair; no departmental organizations below them were headed by chairs.

**These program directors and coordinators were interviewed because they were the functional equivalent of a chair; they reported to the dean or the head of their school/college.
Appendix B. Interview Guide

The questions at the first list level will be the primary questions asked during the interview, and subsequent questions will be used as prompts as necessary. These questions are worded for department chairpersons but will be modified as needed for deans or online administrators to align with where their position is within the structure of their particular institution.

Introductory Questions

1. Let’s start with an overview of your own history in academia, leading up to you holding this position at this school.
   a. Where did you go to school?
   b. What did you study?
   c. What is the highest degree that you’ve earned?
   d. Were you at any schools before this one or hold any other careers?
   e. Do you have tenure?
   f. How long have you been at your current school?
2. Now, tell me about your position as Chair (or Dean, program director, etc.).
   a. How long have you served?
   b. How were you selected?
      i. Had you held any previous leadership positions?
   c. How is the role organized at your institution?
      i. Were you elected or appointed?
         1. Were you an external hire?
      ii. Do you hold a fixed term?
      iii. What are you major responsibilities in this position?
   d. In a typical week, how do you divide you time?
      i. Do you have to teach as chair?
      ii. Is your time mostly spent doing administrative activities?
3. I’d like to understand your department (program/school/etc.) better.
   a. How is the department organized?
      i. How many faculty are in the department?
         1. Are there many different areas of focus?
            a. Are they formal or informal?
      ii. Besides the chair, are there any other leadership positions?
      iii. What are the standing committees?
   b. How does the department fit into the overall structure of the school?
      i. How about in terms of power or prestige?
      ii. Is there a strong pressure in your institutions for departments to raise revenue?
      iii. Is adult or distance education a focus of your institution?
The Online Program

4. Tell me about the history of the online program(s) that your department has been involved with.
   a. How did it come to be?
      i. Where did the original idea come from within your institution?
         1. Was there a champion internal to your department?
         2. Was there pressure from the university administration to create an online program?
         3. What motivated you to go online?
         4. Are many of your peer or competitor programs at other institutions online?
      ii. What type of opposition did it face, if any?
          1. What was the reason for the opposition?
          2. Who was the source of that opposition?
          3. Why do you think it was overcome?
      iii. What was the timeline for its development?
           1. When was it proposed, developed, and finally launched?
           2. Did it experience any major delays or was it “fast-tracked”?
   b. How was the program actually developed?
      i. What parts of the college/university did you need to engage in the process of its development?
         1. Who “owns” the program?
            a. Your department, an online unit, continuing education, something else?
            b. What was your role as department chair in the process?
            c. How were the curriculum and the courses developed? Did faculty have to interact with staff or did they do it on their own?
      ii. Did your program work with outside organizations?
          1. Which ones? (for-profit or non-profit)
          2. What activities did they do?
             a. Market research
             b. Enrollment management
             c. Marketing for program
             d. Consulting
             e. Technology services
             f. Instructional Design
             g. Content Development
             h. Program administration
             i. Student support
      iii. What alternatives were considered and rejected?
           1. Program topics
           2. Partnerships
           3. Models, etc.
   c. What do you think about the way the program was developed?
5. How is the online program performing?
   a. What does the performance of a program mean to you?
   b. What goals were set for the program when it was developed in terms of students, revenue, etc.?
      i. How were they picked? How have they been measured?
      ii. Has the program been meeting those goals?
   c. What types of students have been enrolling in the program?
      i. How have they been doing?
      ii. What do they do when they graduate?
   d. If there is a comparable on campus program, how does this program compare?
      i. Students
      ii. Financially
      iii. Faculty
      iv. Curriculum/Content
   e. How do you measure program quality?
      i. How does your institution evaluate quality?
      ii. How does your program fare?

6. How has online education affected your department and university
   a. How has your department benefited by having an online program?
   b. What has the motivation of the overall college/university been to go online?
   c. How has your institution changed since online education was introduced?
   d. How has your department changed since the online program was introduced?
      i. Structure of the department
      ii. Power of individual faculty
      iii. Use of adjuncts
      iv. Faculty workloads
      v. Interaction with outside units
      vi. Interaction with outside organizations
      vii. Control over the curriculum
      viii. Control over other decision-making
   e. How well have the different parts of the institution and/or outside organizations interacted?
   f. If raising revenue has been a goal, what other methods does your department engage in?
      i. Research (seeking grants, instituting new centers or partnerships)
      ii. Entrepreneurial activities (continuing education, offering other delivery formats, professional development, etc.)
      iii. Marketing programs (trying to attract more majors, more students for courses)
      iv. Should departments have to be concerned about revenue?
      v. How has your department resisted entrepreneurial action?
   g. What do you think the mission of your college/university should be?
   h. Consider the changes that have occurred to the structure of your department since the online program was introduced. Do you see those changes as positive?
i. Consider the changes that have occurred to the structure of your college/university since online education was introduced. Do you see those changes as positive?

7. Let’s talk about online education in general.
   a. Have your perceptions changed over time?
   b. How have they changed over time?
      i. Do you see online education as a legitimate form of education?
      ii. Was there a person or group that was particularly important for influencing your perspective?
      iii. Were there any particular organizations or groups whose involvement in online education caused you to evaluate online differently?
         1. Peer organizations
         2. Prestigious institutions in your field
         3. Elite institutions
         4. Foundations
         5. Government
      iv. Other than the reasons you’ve listed already, why have your perceptions changed?
         1. What is the role of the following organizations in your perception of online?
            a. Government regulations
            b. The media
            c. The public
            d. Your discipline’s professional organization
         2. What is your perspective now on these issues:
            a. Online education increasing inequality between students
            b. Faculty members having less personal contact with online students
            c. The increasing creep of business interests and a focus on revenue generation within academia
            d. Faculty members are deskilled and the use of contingent faculty is increased
            e. Increased monitoring and oversight
            f. Students of lower quality than face-to-face students
            g. A loss of intellectual property rights

8. How do you think online will fit into the future of higher education?
   a. Is the technology that is used for online education today the right technology?
   b. Should education be making use of technology more than is used currently?
   c. Is online inevitable? Is it possible to imagine an alternative?

Closing Question

9. Is there anything else that you think I should know that we haven’t discussed today?
### Appendix C: University Type Characteristics

#### University Characteristics

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Private Regional Universities</th>
<th>Public Regional Universities</th>
<th>Private Research Universities</th>
<th>Public Research Universities</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Number of Universities in Sample</strong></td>
<td>n=16</td>
<td>n=11</td>
<td>n=3</td>
<td>n=4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Carnegie Classification</strong></td>
<td>Baccalaureate Colleges, Master’s, Doctoral</td>
<td>Baccalaureate Colleges, Master’s, Doctoral</td>
<td>Research (High), Research (Very High)</td>
<td>Research (High), Research (Very High)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Religious Affiliation</strong></td>
<td>75%</td>
<td>n/a</td>
<td>33%</td>
<td>n/a</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Average Endowment</strong></td>
<td>$58,443,295</td>
<td>$35,266,270</td>
<td>$660,179,333</td>
<td>$2,968,015,591</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>100% Online Enrollment Percent and Population</strong></td>
<td>19% (698)</td>
<td>20% (1,257)</td>
<td>17% (4,143)</td>
<td>7% (1,891)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Location</strong></td>
<td>Suburban (56%)</td>
<td>Suburban (9%)</td>
<td>Suburban (33%)</td>
<td>Suburban (25%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Urban (31%)</td>
<td>Urban (45%)</td>
<td>Urban (67%)</td>
<td>Urban (75%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Rural (13%)</td>
<td>Rural (45%)</td>
<td>Rural (0%)</td>
<td>Rural (0%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Region</strong></td>
<td>North (13%)</td>
<td>North (18%)</td>
<td>North (33%)</td>
<td>North (25%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>South (25%)</td>
<td>South (27%)</td>
<td>South (33%)</td>
<td>South (0%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Midwest (50%)</td>
<td>Midwest (27%)</td>
<td>Midwest (0%)</td>
<td>Midwest (25%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>West (13%)</td>
<td>West (27%)</td>
<td>West (33%)</td>
<td>West (50%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Offers Tenure</strong></td>
<td>75%</td>
<td>100%</td>
<td>67%</td>
<td>100%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Average Percent of Faculty T/TT</strong></td>
<td>34%</td>
<td>49%</td>
<td>36%</td>
<td>54%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Program Characteristics (Source: Interview Data)</td>
<td>Private Regional Universities</td>
<td>Public Regional Universities</td>
<td>Private Research Universities</td>
<td>Public Research Universities</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>---</td>
<td>---</td>
<td>---</td>
<td>---</td>
<td>---</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Number of Programs in Sample</td>
<td>n=23</td>
<td>n=18</td>
<td>n=6</td>
<td>n=13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Top Three Fields Online</td>
<td>Business (38%) Healthcare (31%) Education (25%)</td>
<td>Healthcare (22%) Vocational (22%) Liberal Arts (17%)</td>
<td>Comp Sci (33%) Healthcare (33%) Business (17%)</td>
<td>Education (61%) Science (15%) Psychology (15)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Highest Degree Level Offered Online</td>
<td>Bachelor’s (22%) Master’s (74%) Doctoral (4%)</td>
<td>Bachelor’s (50%) Master’s (44%) Doctoral (6%)</td>
<td>Bachelor’s (0%) Master’s (50%) Doctoral (50%)</td>
<td>Bachelor’s (8%) Master’s (54%) Doctoral (38%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Average Year Online Program Started</td>
<td>2008</td>
<td>2005</td>
<td>2004</td>
<td>2007</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Decision to go online made by Faculty</td>
<td>9%</td>
<td>56%</td>
<td>50%</td>
<td>77%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Percent of Programs Partnered with For-Profit Online Vendor</td>
<td>26%</td>
<td>0%</td>
<td>33%</td>
<td>0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Percent of Programs Housed in Departments with Traditional Chair Role</td>
<td>22%</td>
<td>61%</td>
<td>17%</td>
<td>85%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
## Interview Subject Characteristics

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Interview Subject Characteristics (Source: Interview Data)</th>
<th>Private Regional Universities</th>
<th>Public Regional Universities</th>
<th>Private Research Universities</th>
<th>Public Research Universities</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Number of Interviews</td>
<td>n=23</td>
<td>n=18</td>
<td>n=7</td>
<td>n=13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gender</td>
<td>Female: 30%</td>
<td>Female: 44%</td>
<td>Female: 43%</td>
<td>Female: 15%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Male: 70%</td>
<td>Male: 56%</td>
<td>Male: 57%</td>
<td>Male: 85%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Average Age</td>
<td>40s</td>
<td>50s</td>
<td>40s</td>
<td>50s</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Percent with Practitioner Experience</td>
<td>96%</td>
<td>100%</td>
<td>71%</td>
<td>92%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Average Years of Practitioner Experience</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>