

FACULTY MATTERS

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Inside one of the prison buildings at Presidio Modelo, Isla de la Juventud, Cuba. Photo Credit: I. Friman

THE EDOPTICON

WOULDN'T C.R.P.D.L. BRING US ONE STEP CLOSER?

Pete Clayton

Jeremy Bentham's Panopticon is a late 18th century architectural design of a high efficiency prison in which surveillance capacity is maximized, while the physical presence of guards is kept to a minimum.

The prison is circular and multi-level. The bars of the backlit cells reach from floor to ceiling, allowing a clear view of inmates from a central watchtower from which guards may or may not be looking out any time in any direction. While guards have a constant 360 degree view available to them, inmates can never see past the windows of the tower's low-lit interior, so, crucially, they never know if or when they're being watched.

The Panopticon is an impressive example of utilitarian thinking and design. Labour cost is minimized because inmates do much of the guard work themselves through self-policing.

It's also an impressive example of control by paranoia given that prisoners know they're never free of surveillance, either active or potential – either way it's real. The intention to instill conformity during incarceration also serves a reforming function, not just psychological but also spiritual, by encouraging inmates to internalize the belief that even after release constant surveillance exists because there's no escaping the eye of God – so called 'soul training.'

The Virtual Panopticon

The Panopticon as a metaphor for the wider society, is an increasing everyday reality. One can easily add to the growing list of technology, such as cell phone id scanners, biometrics, and the application of algorithms designed to monitor, track, and even predict behaviour. It's no surprise, therefore, that our mass surveillance society has been described as a Virtual Panopticon – i.e. people are treated as though they're already criminals, and therefore it's somehow justifiable to target, monitor, and track them through sniffer software.

The Edopticon

One form of panopticism entails the surveillance potential by educational managers of the work of college faculty. When an institution-wide learning management system (LMS) such as Blackboard is the main platform through which teaching content and activity is delivered, faculty-student interaction can be constantly captured, stored, and made available to management either in real-time or rewind.

Management Creep and Sniffer Software

Reminders of the potential surveillance of faculty include briefings from Cortana that supposedly can help one "Prep for meetings" and "Manage tasks" and which can randomly trawl through DC email and send reminders that are neither requested nor needed... ...CONT'D p.2

IS IT TIME TO RETIRE DOUGLAS?



Photo credit: Mike Labrum on Unsplash

Arsineh Garabedian

We have been told by historians for years that the first governor of the Colony of British Columbia, Sir James Douglas, was a controversial figure. The Government of BC has officially acknowledged that in 1862, during Governor Douglas' watch, settlers intentionally spread smallpox in First Nations communities along the coast, killing at least 30,000 Indigenous people - about 60 per cent of the population. According to Dr. Marianne Nicholson, "That was an act of genocide against Indigenous people. ... At that point in time the [government] wanted to be able to claim those lands without having to compensate or recognize Indigenous title." We may not know if Douglas personally planned this genocide but we do know that when smallpox was contained around Victoria, it was left to spread like a wildfire among the Indigenous communities.

What's in a name?

Eight years ago, Indigenous people took action and reclaimed PKOLS, the original name of Mount Douglas. Reclaiming the name brought respect to WSÁNEĆ (Saanich) nations. Fundamental respect is not offered by just reciting paragraphs on unceded territories, it requires meaningful actions. It is time to retire the name Douglas from the transcripts that become part of the identity of our graduates. A mixed-race heritage and some good deeds does not exonerate a man from the heinous acts, referred to as genocide, under his watch as governor of BC.

It took until 2021 to discover the mass grave of 215 Indigenous children buried on the grounds of the former Kamloops Indian Residential School. Perhaps it is also time for us to condemn Governor Douglas's leadership and recognize the mass grave of 1862. Our faculty have worked hard to Indigenize and decolonize curriculum, and we intend to do more. The name of our college does not represent us. Let's come together and rename and rebrand our College and disassociate our institution's name from the controversy and pain it represents to so many over the decades.

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...THE EDOPTICON, cont'd from p.1

such as a line from a recent email I sent to a student: "Yesterday you said, No problem. I'll check my email again later and adjust your grade accordingly". While Cortana states information is "Personal and private to you", it's not very reassuring given it's sent through an email service that isn't private. The college owns DC email, so management could read yours any time they choose--as far as we know, they are not doing this.

Friendly updates through software such as [My Analytics](#) offer other categories of information you never asked for such as 'how my time working with others could be more productive' along with summaries of my 'meeting habits', 'communication habits', 'collaboration efforts', percentage of my time 'available to focus' along with my number of 'quiet days' and how many 'active collaborators' are in my network. The only insight I've gained from these 'productivity insights' is the realization that they serve to groom faculty to believe such work-related data mining is natural, even inevitable moving forward.

The trend to attempt to normalize constant data collection posing as efficiency helpers includes the perpetual course evaluations for every section of every course, every term, for every single year no matter how long it's been since you completed your two-year probationary period. * There's not so much a course evaluation file being collected on every instructor as there is a filing cabinet. A magical thinking attempt to justify what feels like permanent probation (i.e. you're only as good as your last evaluation) is the premise that students evaluate only the course as opposed to the instructor. Given it's impossible to disentangle the two, perhaps institutional research can explain how this claim makes sense.

* At UFV all faculty, including post-probationary contract instructors, are evaluated for a course they teach once every two years, i.e. once out of every six terms. The evaluation is posted for a week (as opposed to two weeks) and doesn't go right up until the final day of the course.

Front-end, Back-end Evaluations

Indeed, now is a good time to get clarification about the methodological problems with current post-course evaluation methods seeing as there's a new process Course Readiness Preparation for Distributed Learning (CRPDL) being proposed for pre-course evaluation by having faculty conform to a long list of online guidelines/requirements described by one of my colleagues as a "textbook dump". While faculty are only encouraged to go through CRPDL to secure preferential treatment for online and hybrid courses, this front-end evaluation process could become the norm for most instructors given the inevitable increase in the number of courses offered in hybrid format. Indeed, hybrid may become the dominant/standard mode given that conventional wisdom in education is proving it the most effective form of delivery. Further, many existing F2F courses could already be classified as hybrid. Isn't subjecting faculty to mandatory front-end evaluation, as well as back-end evaluation overdoing it?

CRPDL, Qualtrics, and In-course Evaluation

As part of the CRPDL process, faculty are encouraged to volunteer/consent to install their Blackboard courses into a multifaceted software package called Qualtrics. Due to Qualtrics' expanding range of functionality, the opportunity exists for increased surveillance and analysis by sniffer software far advanced beyond what's already available in Blackboard, and which, like front-end evaluations, could also become a permanent feature of the DC Edopticon. If one uses their DC Zoom account, might this also be incorporated into Qualtrics?

Wider Discussion

Certainly, during COVID, some instructors were better than others at teaching online, but that was inevitable under the circumstances. It's certainly not adequate reason, however, to try and mandate that going forward all online and hybrid faculty need to be subjected to an extraordinary level of pre/in/post evaluation processes. At some point will all F2F instructors also be required to volunteer for extra and closer routine inspection in order to prove they're qualified to teach? If professional autonomy, along with all the positives it contributes to effective and innovative teaching, isn't honoured, then courses could increasingly become formulaic, measurable pre-packaged units, delivered by interchangeable faculty. It also makes such courses easier to outsource.

TEACH FACE-TO-FACE COURSES ONLINE!

Connie Johl

Don't be too quick to shelve those hard-earned 'online course delivery' skills as we move back into the classroom!

Up to 49% of a face-to-face or 'in person' class can be delivered online.

Incorporate all the best parts of the past year and incorporate them into our classrooms by perhaps holding flipped classroom teamwork on Collaborate, or hosting group presentations on Zoom.

The pedagogical possibilities are exciting!

As long as your course doesn't meet the definition of hybrid or 'Distributed Learning'* delivery you are free to create the best new millennium delivery model for you and your students!

*LOU #4 defines a Distributed Learning course "as a course in which 51% or more of the instructional activities used to meet specific learning objectives are delivered by one or more of the following means: print-based distance education, electronic media, video-conferencing, teleconferencing, video and/or audio tapes." fm

...THE EDOPTICON, cont'd

These new proposed forms of evaluation appear to be less about quality than they are about control, measurement, discipline and punishment. Effective improvement of hybrid and online teaching skills can continue to progress without CRPDL and Qualtrics. Before buying into managerialism masquerading as professional development, consider how healthy the effect of over-surveillance would be on the right to professional space and academic freedom.

COVID has been bad enough for education without it being hijacked and weaponized to undermine hard earned faculty rights. Forensic level surveillance of faculty (active or potential) needs to be put back in its box along with Bentham's equally disturbing head.



Jeremy Bentham, 1748-2021

Or maybe I'm just being too negative. Maybe Bentham isn't so bad looking after all - if you close your eyes.

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STATUS OF WOMEN COMMITTEE PASSES MOTION TO REJECT CRPDL

Kim Trainor

On Friday 28th May, members of the Status of Women Committee met for the last meeting before our annual AGM and passed the following motion:

The SWC encourages all women and men faculty to stand in solidarity to maintain control within their departments, of QTT, course scheduling, and quality control by NOT submitting their courses under CRPDL to the Dean's office.

We came to this decision because the pandemic has disproportionately affected women in society. As women have transitioned to working online from home, we have also taken on a larger share of childcare and domestic responsibilities. The proposed CRPDL adds an unfair PD expectation on qualified academic women who may want to continue to teach courses on-line in 2022 and beyond. The CRPDL certification process takes unfair advantage of the COVID situation to create unjust barriers for women who are already stretched to our limit trying to recover, and help our families recover, from these very challenging times.

SWC recommends that all women faculty strive to pass the same motion within their own departments and strengthen the DCFA's stand against CRPDL until such time when all faculty concerns with certification and process are addressed by management. fm

NEXT MONTH: YOUR EMAILS!!!
WRITE TO US AT dcfapresident@gmail.com