

Imperial Partitioning in the Neoliberal University

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This paper tells the story of boundaries redrawn within a public university, specifically between the university and its regional campuses, as well as concerned faculty members' attempts to respond and resist, in part through actions taken by a new advocacy chapter of the American Association of University Professors (AAUP). As with imperial partitioning, the new boundaries pulled some culturally distinct academic units together and severed connections between others. We focus on one example: the creation of a new regional campus division – the College of Liberal Arts and Applied Science (CLAAS) – that differentiates regional students, faculty, and academic units from the university's elite "public ivy" brand. The university established a new set of boundaries between its main and regional campuses, forcing the creation of the new regional division, new departments, and new undergraduate majors, many with an "applied" orientation. We argue that this process of "differentiation," the creation and maintenance of difference, is, in practice, the production of inequality, which disadvantages regional campus students as well as members of the regional faculty.

I. The Imperial Project in Higher Education

The imperial practice of creating colonial states by drawing arbitrary boundaries has found a curious home in higher education. In academe, the creation of new departments, schools, divisions, and research units, as well as the restructuring of relations among campuses, is posed by administration as the solution to various problems, especially those that involve fiscal constraints.

In the colonial case, one aim of imperial partitioning was to establish a new form of governance that disciplines the unruly and civilizes them into "good subjects" more easily managed by colonial administrators. This disciplinary process has parallels with restructuring in the context of *responsibility centered management* (RCM). RCM is a decentralized management model that rewards revenue generation and cost efficiency in academia. In practice, RCM produces an institutional environment of crisis and competition, pitting now-autonomous academic units against one another to contain costs, attract students, and "unleash...entrepreneurship" (Curry, Laws & Strauss, 2013, p. 11).

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This paper tells the story of boundaries redrawn within a public university, specifically between the university and its regional campuses, as well as concerned faculty members' attempts to respond and resist, in part through actions taken by a new advocacy chapter of the American Association of University Professors (AAUP). As with imperial partitioning, the new boundaries pulled some culturally distinct units together and severed connections between others. We focus on one example: the creation of a new regional campus division of Miami University – the College of Liberal Arts and Applied Science (ironically, “CLAAS”) – that differentiates regional students, faculty, and academic units from the university's elite “public ivy” brand. Miami established a new set of boundaries between its selective, residential main campus in Oxford, Ohio and the two open-admission regional campuses. Ohio regional campuses historically specialized in two-year degrees, but Ohio's 2008 Strategic Plan for Higher Education, by calling for a “Network of High-Quality, Low-Cost Campuses Offering Both Bachelor's and Associate Degrees within 30 Miles of Every Ohioan”, pushed Miami to expand bachelor degree offerings at its regionals.² The state mandate offered an opportunity to extend more of the university's capacities to historically disadvantaged students on its regional campuses. However, instead of embracing the chance to improve access to a standard four-year degree from Miami, the new boundaries imposed by senior administration combined with the university's RCM budget model to force the creation of a new regional academic division, new departments, and new undergraduate majors, many with an “applied” orientation. We argue that this process of “differentiation”, the creation and maintenance of difference, is, in practice, the production of inequality, which disadvantages regional campus students during college and beyond, as well as members of the regional faculty.

The process of differentiation – the creation of difference – established two separate and unequal spaces of work and education. Early on, senior administration³ revised its terminology from “differentiation” to “restructuring.” Both are appropriate: through restructuring, the university created difference. In other words, it generated new forms of inequality by establishing new borders that also served to reinforce existing inequalities.

Restructuring at Miami and elsewhere is posed as the solution to problems, following the logic of neoliberal governmentality, which manages and disciplines populations through regimes of “truth” and problem-solving.⁴ The problems themselves remain amorphous – but

² In 2008, there were 24 “regional branch campuses” in Ohio offering mostly two-year degrees. Ohio's regional branch campuses were and are distinct in their mission from public comprehensive universities – some serve as “feeder schools” for main campuses, while many are more like community colleges. Ohio Board of Regents, *Strategic Plan for Higher Education 2008–2017*, 66.

³ By “senior administration”, we refer to those who shaped the charges that directed restructuring: the former president, former provosts, former regional campus dean, and Board of Trustees, hereafter “administration” unless otherwise specified.

⁴ Michel Foucault (2010) theorizes neoliberal governmentality as a “productive” form of biopower in *The Birth of Biopolitics: Lectures at the Collège de France, 1978-1979*.

urgent! and economic! In the case of Miami, the problem is difficult to identify. It was never laid out in clear terms, perhaps because the administration did not want to solicit alternative solutions. The arguments administrators offered do not hold when confronted with reality.

Further, the channels through which restructuring was to solve these supposed problems were not identified. This missing logic means the problems appeared to function more as a justification for restructuring than as concrete, identifiable challenges facing students and faculty members.

What is it then that produced the desire to generate inequality between Oxford and the regionals? The answer lies in RCM, a popular market-oriented financial and organizational management model. The neoliberal logic of RCM produced a series of contradictions that generated new problems – namely market competition among academic divisions and campuses – which RCM was then expected to solve. More perniciously, RCM allowed Miami administration to cement long-held elitist assumptions about regional versus main campus students and faculty into real boundaries with material effects.

In Miami's case, the new border established through restructuring granted – or forced – budgetary and curricular autonomy on the regional campuses. It is as though the imperial state recognized the costs of a colony and withdrew, handing over administrative control. But regional faculty were unlikely to welcome a decentralization that entails "liberation" from the chains of access to resources and shared identity with those on the Oxford campus.

Concerned students and faculty members voiced disapproval of restructuring during the process, and have had ongoing discussions about possible mechanisms for responding to both the new reality of differentiation and the failure of shared governance in shaping this reality. We end by describing limited successes achieved by the AAUP advocacy chapter, as well as challenges and future goals for resisting the neoliberal university.

II. Building a Boundary: Autonomy | Autocracy

Prior to restructuring, Miami's regionals were extension campuses offering associate's degrees and providing a pathway for students to complete Bachelor's degrees on the main campus. Miami University was understood as a single body with multiple campuses, under a single administrative structure, and with single departments, such that faculty members were employed within one department regardless of their campus. Miami Regionals serve a local population that is more diverse and less well-off than the student population on the main campus, which draws many privileged students from across the state and beyond. Regional campuses offer Miami degrees for a fraction of the main campus price, a point of

contention once the regionals were mandated to offer four-year degrees: 2016-2017 annual tuition expenses for in-state students at Miami–Oxford are \$14,736 plus room and board, totaling \$27,190 for the year; at Miami Regionals the total annual cost for an in-state student is \$2,586.66.⁵

Ohio's 2008 "Strategic Plan" for higher education encouraged regional colleges to offer more baccalaureate degrees. In response, Miami's president charged a series of task forces and committees with designing a new curricular structure that would enable regional students to pursue bachelor's degrees. From the start, however, certain options were foreclosed. The simplest and cheapest plan might have been to enable completion of existing degrees on the regional campuses. That possibility was not made available for discussion, despite the fact that the Strategic Plan advocated extending degree offerings on regional campuses as "an efficient expansion of an accessible education" (Ohio Board of Regents, 2008, p. 66). Instead, Miami created a separate regional academic division in which new (and different) degrees would be developed specifically for regional students.

As with many instances of top-down partitioning, restructuring produced resistance from faculty and students at the regionals and in Oxford due to its perceived illegitimacy and potential consequences.⁶ Many saw the changes as a mechanism for deepening the existing class divide between the main and regional campuses. Why did the administration want to develop regional-specific degrees rather than offering existing traditional degrees on all campuses? And why were options for offering four-year degrees off the table *except* those that involved differentiation?

To justify restructuring, the administration identified problems for which they provided little evidence and settled quickly on a curiously limited set of solutions. It is difficult not to conclude that unspoken reasons were decisive in engineering the final result. Faculty and junior administrators charged with redesigning the system were not invited to investigate or propose alternative models that might have enabled existing four-year degrees to be made available across all campuses, and were not given the opportunity to scrutinize, evaluate, or debate the reasons offered for the necessity of differentiation. Feedback from faculty and students was repeatedly invited and offered, but faculty had leverage only over details concerning implementation, not the master plan.

⁵ Figures from Miami University's website (Miami University, 2017) <https://miamioh.edu/onestop/index.html>

⁶ Miami University Senate voted against a separate division for the regionals on April 9, 2012, rejecting, among other provisions, the stipulation that "The new division cannot offer the same degrees offered by other academic divisions" (Miami University Faculty Senate, 2012, April 9, p. 4).

http://community.miamioh.edu/senate/files/senate/01_17_Senate_Minutes_04_09_2012_Full_with_attachments.pdf

Restructuring nevertheless moved forward after the Board of Trustees passed a resolution in favor of it on April 27, 2012 (Miami University Board of Trustees, 2012, June 22).

http://www.miami.miamioh.edu/files/documents/about-miami/president/bot/Minutes_06-22-12.pdf

Some theorists view partitioning as “political triage”, allocating resources so as to maximize the number of survivors and “cutting off...rotten or bleeding limbs that might otherwise kill the patient” (O’Leary, 2006, p. 2). Having already reached the conclusion that the regionals required amputation, Miami’s administration invited only feedback about how best to go about the surgery. Faculty requests for consideration of other models were disregarded, as were concerns that the proposed model would create or perpetuate significant inequities. Justifications seem to have been furnished not to open creative dialogues about how to make baccalaureate degrees available to regional students, but rather to rule out alternatives to differentiation.

The initial impetus for change was state pressure to expand regional baccalaureate offerings, a charge that by no means mandated or encouraged differentiation. In fact, the state’s aim was to make higher education more accessible to a larger population. Miami’s administration leveraged the state charge to carve a new boundary between the main campus and the regionals, claiming that the regionals needed “autonomy” to develop their own degrees. The fact that most of the new degrees now under development strongly resemble traditional Miami degrees (e.g., English Studies, Psychological Sciences, Communication Studies) makes the claim that regional students need entirely new degrees suspect. University analyses did cite the need to increase the speed, efficiency, and flexibility with which baccalaureate degrees could be made available to regional students, a legitimate reason for updating existing procedures and structures.⁷ But the creation of a new academic division was a more extreme solution than the “flexibility” problem warranted. What resulted was a form of independence neither requested nor desired by the regionals population.

Other justifications offered in support of differentiation concerned fiscal risks. First, falling regional enrollments were regularly cited as evidence that the regionals were “not financially sustainable”, implying that the university must act quickly to offer competitive regional baccalaureate degrees.⁸ It was presumed that the regional campuses were losing students to nearby schools such as Sinclair State—but data demonstrating fluctuations in enrollments were never presented. If they had been, it would have been clear that, in the economic environment at the end of the 2000s, *all* local community colleges and regional

⁷ “The Miami regional system...needs to be enabled to offer certain, select ‘traditional’ degrees that will be able to be launched very quickly and use existing faculty resources.” Report from the Presidential Task Force of Differentiation of the Regional Campus (Miami University, 2014, November 21, no page number). <http://miamioh.edu/about-miami/leadership/provost/reports/final-report-of-rc-task-force/index.html>. For context, see the comment by a member of the Academic Policy Committee in section III of this paper.

⁸ “[T]he regional campuses continue to confront significant enrollment and other challenges. Quite simply, the current trajectory of the regional campuses is not financially sustainable nor is it programmatically sufficient to meet the needs of the students and the region.” From President Hodge’s charge to the Task Force – which cites no figures and does not contextualize enrollments – in Report from the Presidential Task Force of Differentiation of the Regional Campus (Miami University, 2014, November 21, no page number). <http://miamioh.edu/about-miami/leadership/provost/reports/final-report-of-rc-task-force/index.html>

universities were losing enrollment.⁹ It wasn't that students were choosing Sinclair State over Miami; it was that fewer people were pursuing higher education at all. In fact, declining community college enrollments remain a nationwide trend (Juszkiewicz, 2016, p. 3).

The administration also warned that the university must guard against "brand confusion", or internal competition among Miami campuses.¹⁰ That is, if students could get a Miami bachelor's degree for less on the regional campuses, the value of the main campus's elite, "public ivy" brand would suffer. But curriculum is only part of what students purchase when they choose a particular institution. Students also choose an experience that suits their needs, preferences and budget. Miami's selective main campus is large and parklike; students live for at least two years on a campus with award-winning food halls, intercollegiate and intramural sports, and one of the highest rates of fraternity and sorority membership in the country. Known as a party school, the main campus has a student body that is on average younger and more privileged than the population that attends the regionals.

In contrast, the regional campuses are open admission, serving students who are historically underrepresented in higher education. They attract nontraditional and commuter students, many of whom do not have the time or money to participate in a residential college experience. Regional faculty report, anecdotally, that regional students frequently express discomfort with the main campus culture, concerned that they don't fit the stereotype of the Oxford student. One student, asked about restructuring, explained, *"I do go up to Oxford sometimes, and when I see students there I get the overall feeling that they're looking down on me for being from a regional campus[....] That's not a very nice feeling."*¹¹ Regional students value the smaller, more diverse, more intimate atmosphere the regionals provide. In short, the main-campus experience is different enough from the regionals experience as to make "brand confusion" unlikely even if curricula were identical.

⁹ Comparing figures for 2015 to 2010, enrollment at Sinclair State fell by 28%, enrollment at the University of Cincinnati–Blue Ash fell 9%, while enrollment at Miami–Middletown fell 0% and Miami–Hamilton fell 15%. For the same period, overall headcount enrollment fell 19% for community colleges and 7% for regional campuses in Ohio (Ohio Department of Higher Education, 2016).

https://www.ohiohighered.org/sites/ohiohighered.org/files/uploads/hei/data-updates/headcount_institution_campus_06-15.pdf

¹⁰ Provost Herbst: "[I]t is important that offering new baccalaureate degrees at the regional campus does not cause 'brand confusion' for Miami degrees." In Report of the Regional Campus Committee, March 21, 2009, Attachment A (Miami University Faculty Senate, 2009, April 6, p. 13).

http://community.miamioh.edu/senate/files/senate/1_Senate_Minutes_4_06_09.pdf

¹¹ See Megan Zahneis (2015b), "Regional students wary of changes," *The Miami Student*, 20th Nov. <https://miamistudent.net/regional-students-wary-of-changes/>.

In the end, Miami's final report on restructuring dismissed the differential-pricing problem, acknowledging that "swirling" (taking classes on a different campus) was not a fiscal risk.¹² Perhaps because evidence to support claims about internal competition was in short supply, an earlier report had characterized the problem as a "perception" of competition between campuses, a soft-focus rendering impossible to prove or disprove.¹³

The new RCM budgetary model was responsible for a third justification, or rather a factor, used to constrain the available options for restructuring. University divisions, now separate "responsibility centers", had to be prevented from competing with one another in detrimental ways. Thus, although the university's Task Force on Differentiation acknowledged that degree duplication on regional campuses was a common practice elsewhere, the Board of Trustees specified when they instituted the new regionals division that "[d]egrees offered on the Regional Campus should be distinct in name and requirements from those on the Oxford campus".^{14,15} This non-duplication rule might seem like a curricular matter, but as it was never approved by Miami's curricular authority, University Senate, it clearly concerned budgetary, not curricular, issues. Under RCM, potentially damaging competition between cost-centers must be reined in by rules such as the non-duplication imperative.

Indeed, it would be counterproductive for different parts of the university to replicate resources and compete. But competition could only exist between the main and regional campuses if and when the regionals were partitioned off into a new division. Because partitioning would *produce* competition, it necessitated a rule *against* competition, which in turn compelled the creation of separate and unequal degrees. The peculiarities of RCM enabled the administration's preference for reserving higher-status traditional degrees for the main campus to be presented as a neutral "rule".

In short, the administration's justifications for differentiation were not substantiated and are in some cases easily refuted – which leads us to assume that other reasons lurked in the background. The unspoken justification, we speculate, is also fiscal, but less publicly

¹² Swirling has "minimal financial impact." In Final Report of the Regional Campuses Process Committee, Attachment A (Miami University Board of Trustees, 2015, May 1, p. 58).

http://miamioh.edu/files/documents/about-miami/president/bot/Minutes_05-01-15.pdf

¹³ "The close proximity of Miami's regional campuses to the Oxford campus has been discussed as both a strength in terms of faculty and student relationships, course offerings, and collaboration opportunities, and as a weakness in terms of the perception of competition if similar degrees are offered on the regional campuses." In Report from the Presidential Task Force of Differentiation of the Regional Campus, Charge Item 1, No. 1 (Miami University, 2014, November 21, no page number).

<http://miamioh.edu/about-miami/leadership/provost/reports/final-report-of-rc-task-force/index.html>

¹⁴ "[D]uplicate or similar degrees are offered on the regional campus"... "[i]n almost all of the models examined at other universities." Report from the Presidential Task Force of Differentiation of the Regional Campus, Charge Item 1, No. 4. (Miami University, 2014, November 21, no page number).

<http://miamioh.edu/about-miami/leadership/provost/reports/final-report-of-rc-task-force/index.html>

¹⁵ Board of Trustees Resolution R2012-2009, Minutes of the Board of Trustees Meeting, April 27, 2012 (Miami University Board of Trustees, 2012, June 22, p. 19). http://www.miami.miamioh.edu/files/documents/about-miami/president/bot/Minutes_06-22-12.pdf

palatable: to increase enrollments on the regional campuses by offering more baccalaureate degrees, while simultaneously signaling through differentiation that regional degrees are not equivalent in status to main-campus degrees. Differentiation would thus increase the comparative value of the higher-status, higher-earning, main campus degree, allowing enrollments to increase at the regionals without decreasing main-campus enrollment (and tuition revenue). Though the latter fear was not, as we have shown, justified, the university went to great lengths to allay it at the expense of regional students and faculty. Differentiation allowed the university to trumpet the benefits of a highly circumscribed autonomy for the regional campuses while quietly reinforcing and increasing inequality among students and faculty.

The administration's commitment to differentiation was rooted in a neoliberal logic of structural adjustment: a market-oriented organizational model that, when imposed on educational institutions, trumps concern for the public good. Market-oriented budgetary models such as RCM are coping mechanisms for public universities that must survive in a world in which public funding for state universities has fallen dramatically.¹⁶ In such a world, it seems, even the most unprovable and unlikely threat to enrollments will stymie the public university's mission to be (as it was once known) a "great equalizer", instead turning it into a mechanism for upholding and exacerbating class difference.

III. Impacts of Restructuring: the Production of Inequality

Although proponents typically frame partitioning as a process that will benefit both of the separated entities, top-down partitions tend to disproportionately benefit the relatively powerful, often at the expense of the relatively powerless. Accordingly, the creation of difference through restructuring at Miami concretizes gender- and class-based inequalities among students and faculty members. For students, differentiation narrows degree options, restricting them to "differentiated" majors and degree programs, potentially limiting their marketability after graduation, and marking them with a separate, devalued "brand" on their diplomas. For faculty members, differentiation severs long-held relationships with Oxford-based divisions and departments; forces the hasty creation of brand-new departments, degrees, and courses; impedes the ability to hire quality faculty; and increases an already demanding service and teaching load.

Compared to full-time faculty members on the Oxford campus, full-time faculty on regional campuses receive lower pay, in spite of teaching more than twice the number of courses per semester, and have more limited access to departmental and divisional resources on the

¹⁶ No exception, Miami's state funding fell from over 70% in 1955 to 13.7% in 2015 (Miami University, 2001; Miami University, 2015). <http://www.units.miamioh.edu/institutionalrelations/MiamiOH.htm>; http://www.units.miamioh.edu/controller/prod/grants_contracts/docs_forms/FY15_A133.pdf

wealthier Oxford campus. Unsurprisingly, inequalities are also present among full- and part-time (adjunct) faculty on the regional campuses and between part-timers on the main and regional campuses.

The vast majority of faculty – almost 70 percent – on the regional campuses are part-time contingent faculty. In 2015, over 65 percent of part-time contingent regional faculty were women, as were 54 percent of full-time regional faculty. Restructuring generates losses for all faculty members on the regional campuses, but it disproportionately impacts women faculty due to the over-representation of women. Salary inequality at the beginning of one's career can establish a lifelong lower-income trajectory for regional faculty.

Formerly, faculty teaching on regional campuses had higher teaching loads than faculty on the main campus; however, those who were tenure-line were tenured as Miami University faculty in university-wide departments and divisions, and had access to research funding and laboratory space. Full-time faculty hired after differentiation have no connection to the Oxford campus at all, which may mean no laboratory space, no performance space, and no studio space in addition to already lower pay, lower start-up funds, and higher course and service loads. For full-time faculty at regional campuses, this inequality can render achieving tenured status more difficult than for their Oxford counterparts. These material conditions are even worse for adjunct faculty, who earn less, get no start-up funds, have very high course loads, and whose appointments are insecure. The severing of regional faculty from Oxford also appears in subtler ways, including (among many others) changing how faculty are listed in the directory. While this may seem minor, it elevates the status of those employed on the main campus and devalorizes those employed on regional campuses, which may impede regional faculty's ability to present and publish academic work. With respect to faculty, then, differentiation serves two purposes. First, it institutionalizes gender and class inequality. Second, it renders these interlocking inequalities less apparent and more difficult to address, as faculty members formerly in the same department are now disconnected.

The top-down nature of restructuring reduced faculty morale by eroding faith in shared governance and generated concern about future hiring. After restructuring, regional faculty were required to form new regional departments separate from those into which they had been hired. Newly hired tenure-line faculty will be tenured into the new departments and division.¹⁷ The disadvantages new hires face may make it difficult to attract and hire tenure-

¹⁷ One faculty member called this change, "by far the worst provision in the Proposal, [because it] has the most opposition, causes the most problems, damages faculty, and damages students [...] All this does is to take [regional] faculty and cut them off and to say that from this point forward [...] you are in Siberia." (Miami University Faculty Senate, 2012, April 9, p. 4).

http://community.miamioh.edu/senate/files/senate/01_17_Senate_Minutes_04_09_2012_Full_with_attachments.pdf

track faculty in the teacher/scholar model. In such a case, restructuring will actually degrade what it might have improved: the access of “time and place bound” students to “the nationally prominent scholars and artists” that compose Miami’s tenured and tenure-track faculty.¹⁸

One regional faculty member, responding to a survey distributed by AAUP before the final University Senate vote, said “[e]specially because the proposed model concerns radical changes to regional faculty’s appointment and tenure home, I believe we have the right to discuss it at length and to vote on it as well. I don’t believe the regional ‘upgrade’, as they are now calling it, has fully taken the views and public comments of faculty, staff, and students into account.”¹⁹ And as one member of the Academic Policy Committee – also a Miami University senator and thirty-year Miami veteran who has worked on both main and regional campuses – stated during a Faculty Senate meeting:

*A simple question, what do the regionals need to do to develop and approve curriculum, could not be addressed [by the committees]. This would have been a reasonable and welcomed charge but the committees could not do that. We had to respond to a document that already defined a major structural change and propose unnecessary changes that will substantially and negatively alter the academic lives of faculty. There was no justification for the changes and no call for these changes was ever expressed. We were in a box.*²⁰

This professor’s frustration reflects the fact that even the task forces and committees charged with researching and implementing differentiation were not offered a clear explanation for why it was necessary, nor were they charged with considering alternatives to differentiation that might achieve the same (unclear) goals. Faculty were “in a box” built by the President’s charge to the committees, even as they were compelled to “substantially and negatively alter the academic lives” of colleagues and students.

In part through its impacts on faculty, differentiation also produces disadvantages for the socioeconomically diverse students on regional campuses. Students can relocate to the Oxford campus from regional campuses, though only about ten percent of them do, citing various reasons such as family (or other geographic attachments), lack of diversity on the Oxford campus, and educational costs. When students do relocate, they benefit from having

¹⁸ See Miami University Mission Statement (Miami University, no date). Accessed January 12, 2017, <http://miamioh.edu/about-miami/leadership/president/mission-goals/>

¹⁹ See Megan Zahneis (2015a), “Senate votes on regional campus restructuring,” *The Miami Student*, 1st Dec. <http://miamistudent.net/senate-votes-on-regional-campus-restructuring/>

²⁰ Meeting minutes (Miami University Faculty Senate, 2012, April 9, p. 4). http://community.miamioh.edu/senate/files/senate/01_17_Senate_Minutes_04_09_2012_Full_with_attachments.pdf

worked with faculty members who are familiar with Oxford departments, degrees, and resources, and who have an established relationship with Oxford faculty and staff.

Whether they eventually complete a degree in Oxford or not, regional students – already at greater risk of non-completion and *“in greater need of support from their instructors”*, according to the American Institutes for Research (2016)—are aware that they do not conform to Oxford’s “public ivy” brand. One regional student, Clemson Attaway, described his fears about differentiation this way: *“I am diverse. I am not rich. And I’m also not white [...] The regionals are my best shot at a Miami degree. If that gets taken away, not only are there going to be a lot of pissed off branch kids, but Miami will have hurt their own image from a diversity standpoint.”*²¹

Attaway’s view of regional diversity is accurate. Regional students (as of spring 2014) were 20% students of color, 42% Pell-grant eligible, 26% non-traditional (age 25 or older), 30% first-generation, and 2% military veteran. As it developed logic for differentiating the regional campus mission from Oxford’s, university administration made a number of classist assumptions. For example, despite originally claiming that the new regional division would provide the same quality liberal arts education as Oxford, including offering the same degrees, as differentiation progressed, regional campuses were prohibited from duplicating main-campus degrees (such as philosophy, psychology, or English) by the non-duplication rule discussed above. Instead, they were told to develop differentiated degrees in response to the needs of the local community and business, which were assumed to be different from the needs of the communities and future employers of Oxford students.

Regional Dean G. Michael Pratt repeatedly emphasized the presumably different, more vocational needs of Miami regional students: *“The regional campus degrees are focused on the local economy and the local job market, so they are unique degrees [...] The students that will gravitate to us are students that are looking for programs that will take them right into the workforce.”*²² In another context, he spoke of the “flexibility” needed to serve regional students with different degree needs from Oxford students: *“[Differentiation] provides greater flexibility in developing our degrees and programs and in flexing those programs and needs towards the students and communities that the Regional Campuses have traditionally served.”*²³ Nor was Dean Pratt alone in assuming that regional students need nontraditional, more “applied” degrees. In a statement to the Board of Trustees on December 4, 2014, President Hodge opined:

²¹ See Kyle Bush (2014, November 4), “Miami’s attempts to split from regional campuses will make it hard for current ‘branch’ students,” *The Miami Student*. <http://miamistudent.net/miamis-attempts-to-split-from-regional-campus-will-make-it-hard-for-current-branch-students/>

²² See Chelsey Levingston (2015, December 1), “Miami Regionals to offer different degrees than main campus,” *Dayton Daily News*. <http://www.daytondailynews.com/news/miami-regionals-offer-different-degrees-than-main-campus/KFBjx15SDkXXvWz9M4YHIN/>

²³ Meeting minutes (Miami University Board of Trustees, 2014, September 19, p. 6). https://www.miamioh.edu/files/documents/about-miami/president/bot/Minutes_09-19-14.pdf

[H]ow do we better blend professional and traditional academic studies? [...] [P]reparing students professionally as well as intellectually is an important part of our tasks. The regionals have, I think, a very unique opportunity to embrace this notion, to put these two together in ways that can create superior outcomes for our students; positioning them not just for that first job, but for the opportunities to have more advancement throughout their career.²⁴

While we acknowledge the unique mission of regional campuses and the unique demographics the regionals serve, we are skeptical of the assumption that regional students want or need fundamentally different four-year degrees and programs from those available to Oxford students. The academic debate about vocational versus liberal arts education is at least as old as the famous early-twentieth-century debates between W.E.B. Du Bois and Booker T. Washington.²⁵ Although the administration took pains not to put differentiation in precisely those terms, the logic is clear. In 2016, regional campuses approved six new majors, including “English Studies” (regional campuses’ English equivalent) and “Psychological Sciences” (regional campuses’ Psychology equivalent). As suggested by the names, these degrees are designed to serve students with the same *disciplinary* interests, but regional students must complete a degree that is “differentiated” from the Oxford equivalent. While regional faculty (including those contributing to this essay) believe that there will be interest in these new majors and want to see new departments and majors succeed, the fact remains that the new regional degrees are separate and unequal by design. The primary logic originally offered for the creation of these differentiated degrees – different students needing different skills for a local market – does not hold up in the case of popular regional liberal arts degrees such as English Studies and Psychological Sciences. Thus the material effect of differentiation is to create a two-tiered credentialing system that may have lifetime impacts on regional students’ future earnings.

In the current post-restructuring, RCM-pressured environment at Miami Regionals, there is immense pressure on new regional departments to attract majors and fill courses. Regional faculty who are forcibly dually appointed in both English and the new regional Department of Literatures, Languages, and Writing (LLW), for example, are anxious to “grow” the new English Studies major so that LLW can make the case to hire tenure-track faculty members, receive funds, and contribute to the new campus environment. In practical terms, this incentivizes such faculty to discourage students from majoring in English (the Oxford-based degree) and to encourage them to major in English Studies (the regional-based degree), actually generating the kind of competition the administration sought to prevent through

²⁴ Meeting minutes (Miami University Board of Trustees, 2014, December 5, p. 13).

https://www.miamioh.edu/files/documents/about-miami/president/bot/Minutes_12-05-14.pdf

²⁵ See W.E.B. Du Bois (1994, pp. 25-36), *The Souls of Black Folk*, especially chapter III, “Of Mr. Booker T. Washington and Others.”

restructuring. Individual faculty members are asked to be “entrepreneurial” and to become newly involved in marketing, recruitment, and other tasks historically performed by Admissions and Communications and Marketing. Ironically, then, the administration’s fear about competition among campuses – presumably a problem to be solved by restructuring – was *created by* restructuring.

In open fora with faculty, staff, and students, regional students spoke out against differentiation. Students also addressed University Senate to argue that differentiation reflected Miami’s low opinion of regional students and faculty. One argument both students and faculty made (verbally and in writing) was that regional students deserve the same quality, marketable degrees that Oxford students receive.²⁶ In other words, if the marketability of regional students’ education was in fact a top concern addressed by differentiation, then it would seem that a recognizable degree – such as a bachelor’s degree in psychology – would best serve those students on the job market. While the regionals have not yet graduated a student with one of the differentiated degrees, it is doubtful that a “psychological sciences” degree with a regional campus designation on the diploma will resonate with employers in the same way as a “psychology” degree from Miami–Oxford.

Materially, regional students *are* different from Oxford students. Miami Regionals are open admission institutions with a mission to serve underrepresented and historically disadvantaged students. Thus, regional students are more socioeconomically diverse. Many of them work full-time and care for families while working toward completing their degrees. Many are first-generation college students. These are students who do not need an additional layer of inequality – “differentiated” degrees and diplomas – that may constrain their future job prospects and earnings.

IV. Mechanisms of Change: CLAAS Struggle

Faculty and students were unable to change the course of regional differentiation, and its effects will be felt for years to come; however, resistance to the top-down partitioning process did bring faculty together. Shared governance had been withering at the university for some time, and the regionals controversy jarred faculty into awareness of their lack of agency and power. As the restructuring process entered its last stages in spring of 2014, a

²⁶ See, for example, the “Open Statement from English” sent to President David Hodge, the Miami Board of Trustees, Provost Ray Gorman and Regional Dean G. Michael Pratt, October 1, 2014: “We are skeptical of one-size-fits-all claims regarding the autonomy of regional campus programs, the service of students from southwest Ohio and the immediate tri-state area, and the desirability of certain types of academic majors for our current Miami students or prospective students. [...] [T]raditional degrees are economic drivers, despite the common misperception that degrees focusing on more ‘applied’ knowledge are automatically more economically sustainable than liberal arts degrees.” In Regionals Task Force, Group Open Letters (Miami University English Department, 2014, October 1). <http://miamioh.edu/regionals/about/leadership-administration/regional-upgrade/task-force/group-open-letters/index.html>.

group of faculty founded an AAUP Advocacy Chapter. AAUP is a national advocacy group with chapters (some of them collective bargaining units) housed at universities across the country.

Regional faculty were the first to invite representatives of AAUP to meet with faculty members in 2014, realizing that allying with a national academic labor support organization could offer useful knowledge and exposure and add to their power. In Fall of that year, a group of professors in Oxford met to discuss their dissatisfaction with shared governance in recent years. The groups recognized their shared goals and an AAUP chapter was formed. With the help of the student newspaper, which published multiple articles about the chapter's activism, membership rose quickly, and the chapter is now the largest in Ohio.

Had Miami's AAUP chapter been formed earlier, it might have had some influence on the future of the regionals, but the Board of Trustees had already voted to establish core elements of differentiation in 2012. By 2014, it was too late for the chapter to do much beyond publicly voicing the dissent and dissatisfaction of faculty. But the chapter's vigorous new presence alerted administration that faculty had awoken from slumber and would be watching governance practices more closely from now on. Amidst public pressure from the chapter, Miami hired a president in 2015 who claims to value an active role for faculty in shared governance. Unlike the previous president, who implemented restructuring, the new president is willing to meet and work with the AAUP chapter. And since the chapter formed, the administration has made efforts to be more transparent and public about university budgeting priorities. It also announced the first raise for part-time contingent faculty – a key concern – in twenty years. To prevent recurrence of the shared-governance failure that enabled restructuring to go forward, the AAUP chapter introduced legislation to University Senate to make the process by which academic divisions, departments, and programs are formed, altered, and dismantled more transparent and to allow faculty more of a voice in pending changes, especially at early stages.

Pressure from AAUP may help to prevent the top-down decision-making process that defined regional restructuring from becoming a blueprint for future changes at Miami. The chapter's membership continues to include faculty from all campuses. Regional faculty – whose hands were tied during the differentiation process – are a valuable source of shared knowledge for main-campus faculty. The chapter, along with its state and national organizations, raises faculty awareness and offers a set of resources, a knowledge base, and a source of shared identity and power that could increase as the chapter grows larger, especially if it achieves collective bargaining rights.

Regional campus restructuring at Miami is part of a larger pattern in which the neoliberal university creates and reinforces inequality. Deprived of public funds that would manifest a state commitment to higher education as a public good, academia is increasingly dysfunctional. It faces, among other problems, corporatization of its mission through market-oriented strategies, sharp decreases in job security for instructors (undermining academic freedom), and a corporate-style management model that weakens shared governance. Tactics such as those used during Miami's restructuring, which borrow from an imperialist playbook to establish, reinforce, and deepen divisions among populations, are one part of a multi-front strategy that disempowers less-privileged communities. While AAUP (and similar) chapters and collective bargaining units are not the only solution to the problem of the neoliberal university, faculty advocacy and activism may raise awareness, leading to the formation of national and international "communities of counter-conduct"²⁷ key to resisting some of the most pernicious effects of neoliberalism in higher education.

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²⁷ See Michel Foucault (2007, p. 210) *Security, Territory, Population: Lectures at the Collège de France, 1977-1978*.

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