Expanding University Audit Cultures and Opaque Metrics: The New Technologies of Control

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Abstract: Prompted by a new managerialism whose roots lie in neoliberal economic policies, the rise of university “audit cultures” over the past three decades has increased the potential for administrative control of the work of professors. In this talk, I explore how the new data and analytics systems that have become ubiquitous in the everyday work of professors are well poised to expand university audit cultures by enabling the rising quantification that measures, monitors, and controls professors’ work performance. After summarizing literature that documents the emergence of audit cultures in universities, I will describe the various data and analytics systems currently available for university and professor use in each area of professors’ work: teaching, research, and service. I will discuss current features of these systems and the potential back-end analytics that could be performed with the data that system use generates and suggest how these analytics might prompt new metrics as additional control mechanisms over professors as administrators face increasing pressure to run universities in a corporatized manner. The talk will conclude with consideration of possible outcomes of and responses to such an expansion of university audit cultures.