

# What do we know about academic culture? A review of the concept in the field of higher education studies<sup>\*1</sup>

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## Abstract

Academic culture has a long tradition in higher education studies; nevertheless, only a few studies on this concept are available. This article aims to review the use of the concept of academic culture in higher education literature based on a bibliographic review, supported by bibliometric techniques, of studies on this topic in the last twenty years, paying special attention to state of the art in the Latin American context. The results show a growing use of the concept, which has not been yet linked to a clear definition that could conduce to the consolidation of a field of study of the cultural dimension of the sector. Specifically, there are four lines of research on academic culture: the impact of changes in the political economy on the traditional values of higher education institutions, the challenges of international exchange of students and academics, the recognition of implicit biases in the dominant academic culture, and the relationship between tacit regulations and organizational reform processes. This article also addresses how the fundamentally atheoretical character of academic culture studies mirrors the state of research in higher education, particularly in the Latin American context.

## Keywords

Academic culture – Higher education – Universities.

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## **Introduction**

Since the origins of higher education studies, the cultural dimension of universities has received significant attention. As early as the 1970s, it is possible to identify research focused on the ideologies of students and academics and of higher education institutions as a whole (BECKER, 1963; REISMAN; JENSCKS, 1962). In recent decades, the concept of academic culture has come into crisis, questioning its neutral character. Further attention has been focused on the tensions that emerge within the dominant culture of the university, particularly between academics and students (CAMERON; ETTINGTON, 1988).

This article reviews the use of the concept of academic culture in the specialized literature on higher education. First, the field of academic culture studies and its main lines of research are characterized. Second, the research methodology is detailed: a literature review based on bibliometric techniques processed through abductive content analysis. Thirdly, the results are presented. After identifying the uses of academic culture in the specialized literature, the state of academic culture studies is discussed compared to the general field of research in higher education. The article ends with a brief overview and suggestions for lines of study of the academic culture at conceptual and empirical levels.

## **Studies in higher education: the idea of academic culture**

Since the origins of this field of study, the analysis of the cultural aspects of the development of higher education institutions have played a central role. Today it is possible to identify at least three lines of analysis of the concept in the literature: the culture of higher education systems, the culture of professions and disciplines, and the culture of universities.

The first line of studies analyzes how the concept of higher education has undergone radical transformations in recent decades, abandoning traditionally accepted ideas when discussing the attributes of these institutions, which include their understanding as organizations with the main responsibility of training professionals at the service of the State or, in the Latin American context, the definition of their task in terms of social commitment (TÜNNERMAN, 2003). These studies tend to emphasize how the emergence of a knowledge society, along with other dynamics such as the massification of student enrollment and the privatization of funding, has resulted in the reformulation of the purposes of higher education institutions, which have as a result embraced a new ethos (CLARK, 1998). From a more critical perspective, it is argued that the neo-liberalization of higher education systems has prompted universities to abandon their inherent cultural purposes and to become organizations that are driven primarily by financial definitions (OLSEN; PETERS, 2005).

The second line of analysis of academic culture focuses on the level of professions and disciplines. Several studies have shown how changes in the political economy of

higher education systems have promoted a reshaping of the identities of the graduate students of these institutions, with attributes such as flexibility, teamwork, and problem-solving skills becoming more significant (ALLEN; VAN DER VELDEN, 2011). In this particular context, research on how the culture of the academic profession, despite its tradition, has shifted in this direction is important (COLLYER, 2014). Regarding disciplinary culture, some analyses identify the main differences in the self-understanding of academics according to their area of knowledge (XU, 2008), while others question how recent developments, particularly the growing social valuation of interdisciplinarity and practical knowledge, modify the goals attributed to scientific disciplines (BRUNNER *et al.*, 2019b).

Finally, the third line of academic cultural studies addresses the dominant ideologies in various higher education institutions. This approach focuses on the institution as a whole, examining the self-understanding of the organization and how it impacts students, academics, and administrators. This approach focuses on the institution as a whole, examining the self-understanding of the organization and how it impacts students, academics, and administrators. The mission and goals of universities, their historical trajectory, and how they respond to changes in the national system's political economy and governance receive here special attention, as does how the culture of different institutions is internally transformed by global pressures such as competition to adhere to the research university model, the imperative to become a desirable destination for students and academics or, on an internal level, the pressure to consolidate a professional administrative structure in university management (FELDMAN; DESROCHERS, 2004).

This article focuses on this last dimension of academic culture, examining in detail how it has been understood in the specialized literature. The methodology guiding the analysis of the relevant literature on the concept of academic culture is presented below, followed by the main findings of this research.

## **Methodology**

Studies reviewing academic production in higher education have become increasingly relevant in the last decade (BRUNNER *et al.*, 2019a; HUANG *et al.*, 2019; KOSMÜTSKY; KRÜCKEN, 2014; VLEGELS; HUISMAN, 2020). Using bibliometric tools, specifically the publication count (DE BELLIS, 2009), this research conducts a literature review of studies on academic culture in higher education. The literature review consists of a structured analysis of the academic production in a particular area of knowledge, identifying topics and approaches to provide insights into the available knowledge (GÓMEZ-LUNA *et al.*, 2014; NORONHA; FERREIRA, 2000; VOSGERAU; ROMANOWSKI, 2014).

In the case of this literature review, to identify studies on academic culture, indexed articles in the scientific repositories Web of Science (WoS) and SciELO were reviewed. These two repositories allow, on the one hand, to compile publications in

the most prestigious journals indexed in WoS, usually written in English, and, on the other hand, include the academic production of the Latin American region in Spanish and Portuguese, which is mostly indexed in SciELO (VÉLEZ CUARTAS; LUCIO ARIAS; LEYDESDORFF, 2016).

Initially, studies indexed in both repositories were considered if their title, abstract, or keywords included “academic culture” or “academic cultures” in English, Spanish or Portuguese. Related searches were carried out during June 2020: 548 texts were then found (501 in WoS and 47 in SciELO). The titles and abstracts of the 548 research studies were then reviewed, removing studies that did not focus on the analysis of the university academic culture or mentioned this concept superficially; those studies that were repeated in both databases or written in a language other than Spanish, Portuguese or English; or those that had been developed outside the period of analysis between 2000 and 2020.

The result of this selection process was reduced to 207 (163 in WoS and 44 in SciELO). The conceptual perspectives of this sample of studies focused on the analysis of academic culture in the field of higher education were then reviewed reading the introduction, state of the art or conceptual framework, and conclusions sections of the articles, as these are the ones that provide more information on the theoretical approaches employed (BRUNNER *et al.*, 2019a). Following Tight’s proposal (2013, 2014), these articles were then classified into three categories: reflexive essays, consisting of studies proposing a conceptual interpretation of a topic but without presenting an explicit empirical reference (usually lacking methodology); empirical studies, consisting of studies that, while having a clear empirical reference, do not use an explicit theoretical framework to make sense of their findings; and finally, comprehensive studies, consisting of studies that include a conceptual discussion section and present a clear empirical reference. In cases where the research employed a conceptual framework, the selected theory was identified.

Based on the reading of the complete texts, those focused on studying academic culture in universities were then selected, limiting the analysis to 74 research studies, which were examined through content analysis techniques. Guest *et al.* (2013) distinguish two content analysis techniques: deductive and inductive. Combining these two techniques, this study identified the definition of academic culture in the selected documents, then created inductive codes according to the different understandings of this concept and, finally, grouped the different characterizations based upon their thematic affinity. The qualitative software Atlas.ti, which offers the necessary tools to create codes in the articles, was used to establish relationships between academic culture analysis approaches and identify common patterns (CAÍS; FOLGUERA; FORMOSO, 2014). This codification led to the synthesis of four approaches to the concept of academic culture. Table 1 summarizes these perspectives and the items that each includes.

**Table 1 - Perspectives of analysis on academic culture and their definitions and articles**

Perspectives of analysis on academic culture	Definition	Articles
Impact of changes in the political economy	Research that addresses the impact on culture, values and expectations of students and academics of different transformations in the political economy of higher education systems.	Orr and Orr (2016); Coleman (2010); Ziman (2003); Tian and Lu (2017); Liu and Metcalfe (2016); Rhoads and Hu (2012); Lai (2013); Szelényi and Rhoads (2013); Shin <i>et al.</i> (2015); Chou and Chan (2016, 2017); Da Wan <i>et al.</i> (2015); Kuntz, Petrovic, Ginocchio (2012); Nicol (2013); Boose and Hutchings (2016); Schugurensky and Naidorf (2004); Ribeiro and Leda (2016)
Challenges of international student and academic exchange	Research that examines the difficulties that students in international exchange programs encounter while undergoing their studies.	Ivanova (2019); Brown (2008); Tian and Lowe (2013); Warner and Miller (2015); Elliot and Kobayashi (2019); Pastor Cesteros and Pandor (2017); Elliot <i>et al.</i> (2016); Jiang <i>et al.</i> (2010); Yang (2020); Meng (2016)
Implicit biases in the dominant academic culture	Research on the effects of the diversification of undergraduate and graduate student d on the academic culture of higher education institutions.	Mckay and Devlin (2014); Haggis (2003); Habel and Whitman (2016); Read; Archer; Leathwood (2003); Solem and Schlemper (2009); Shacham and Od-cohen (2009); Bhowmik and Kim (2018); Roxå; Mårtensson; Alveteg (2011); Cotter and Clukey (2019); Xu (2008); Read and Kehm (2016); Grant (2010); Skakni (2018); Jiménez Mora; Moreno Bayardo; Ortiz Lefort (2011); Falk <i>et al.</i> (2019); Hemmati and Mahdie (2020); Mendoza (2008); Torres-Olave (2011); Castro Daza; Niño Gutiérrez (2014); Rodríguez <i>et al.</i> (2013); Passos (2015); Böhm-Carrer and Lucero (2018); Fernández and Wainerman, (2015)
Organizational change Processes	Research on processes of institutional reform in higher education institutions and how these processes influence the values that shape the actions of students, academics, and administrators.	Feldman and Desrochers (2004); Bystydziński (2017); Shin and Lee (2015); Mustafa <i>et al.</i> (2018); Cuesta <i>et al.</i> (2016); Yang (2015); Xu and Rees (2016); Bertram Gallant (2007); Kezar, Bertram Gallant; Lester (2011); Eddy; Hart (2012); Harris (2011); Harman (2002); Chilvers <i>et al.</i> (2018); Gizir and Simsek (2005); Álvarez Rojo <i>et al.</i> (2008); Basir <i>et al.</i> (2017); Risk <i>et al.</i> (2012); Landoni (2008); Albornoz and Jiménez (2008); Calderón Hernández and Jiménez Zapata (2018); Gómez Silva and Da Silva Bezerra (2018); Dorantes and Aguilar (2019); Araújo (2019); Carli (2013)

Source: Authors' elaboration.

## Findings

As we will explore in this section, studies on academic culture are becoming increasingly important in the field of higher education research. The search in WoS and SciELO, for instance, resulted in 548 papers, of which 49 were produced between 2000 and 2004, 83 between 2005 and 2009, 110 between 2010 and 2014, and 306 between 2015 and 2020, as mentioned earlier. In other words, more than half of the production has been written in the last five years, showing a continuous growth of interest in this subject.

Considering only those studies on the field of academic culture in universities, the number of articles is reduced to 207. It is interesting to remark that 58.5% of the research (121) are empirical studies with no conceptual approach, followed by reflective essays on the different dimensions of the concept of academic culture without an associated methodology, with 28% of the total (58). Finally, only 13.5% of these studies effectively

combine an analytical framework with an empirical referent (28), the main approaches used being organizational change theory, *habitus*, and structuralist theory.

Selecting those studies that incorporate an explicit definition of academic culture confirms the diagnosis of an essentially atheoretical field of analysis. This operation reduces the number of studies significantly, with the total representing only 10.6% of the studies on university culture (22). The definitions of academic culture used can be found in Table 2.

**Table 2 - Perspectives of analysis on academic culture, its definitions and articles**

Article	Reference
Basir <i>et al.</i> (2017)	A pattern of shared basic assumptions that was learned by a group as it solved its problems of external adaptation and internal integration, that has worked well enough to be considered valid and therefore, to be taught to new members as the correct way to perceive, think and feel in relation to those problems (SHEIN, 2003, p. 5).
Xu and Rees (2016)	As defined by Cortazzi and Jin (1996), academic culture is "the systems of beliefs, expectations and cultural practices about how to perform academically" (p. 251).
Yang (2015)	Academic culture refers to the attitudes, beliefs and values held by academics in relation to all aspects of their work. A variety of highly related terms have also been used widely, such as "integrity," "ethics," "(mis)conducts" and even "corruption." (p. 531).
McKay and Devlin (2014)	Newcomers to university, particularly those from LSES backgrounds, often lack familiarity with the general context of HEIs. This unfamiliarity can apply to the curriculum, courses, tasks, assessments and other aspects with which students are confronted. Compounding this challenge is the 'invisible pedagogy' (BERNSTEIN, 1990), the implicit and unstated expectations of institutions, the specialist discourses (whether across subjects or disciplines), the 'institutional habitus' (BOURDIEU, 1990) and the overall academic culture that students unfamiliar with university can have no way of knowing or understanding without assistance (LAWRENCE, 2005, p. 952).
Szelényi and Rhoads (2013)	By "academic culture," we refer to the norms, values, beliefs, and practices associated with the working lives of faculty members at higher education institutions (CLARK 1987a; TIERNEY, RHOADS 1993, p. 426).
Rhoads and Hu (2012)	Academic culture intersects in important ways with the idea of organizations as cultures – meaning that organizations, like societies, often reveal unique patterns of behaviour, consistent with commonly accepted norms, values, and attitudes (p. 354).
Roxå, Mårtensson and Alveteg (2011)	In this text we will focus on culture as a process (ANCONA <i>et al.</i> , 2009). This approach to culture focuses on the sense-making processes within a group. From this perspective culture is 'a set of meanings, and values shared by a group of people' (ALVESSON, 2002, p. 29). The shared norms, beliefs, values, and traditions of the group guide the sensemaking processes and produces behaviour and products somewhat different from those of other groups (p. 100).
Solem, Lee and Schlemper (2009)	Part I of the survey was designed to collect demographic information from respondents, students' career aspirations, and their reasons for pursuing a graduate degree. Part II of the survey asked respondents to describe their professional preparation by indicating the types of courses, training, and educational experiences they have had to date in their current graduate program. Part III of the survey asked respondents to answer 107 Likert-scale items, 96 of which were adapted from a study by Lee (2004) exploring the values, assumptions, beliefs, and ideologies that faculty have about academic work and institutions. Although the Lee study provides many quantitative measures of academic culture and climate, it was restricted to college faculty and thus does not fully account for student perspectives (p. 273).
Jiang <i>et al.</i> (2010)	Drawing on the two fundamental definitions discussed above, for the purpose of our research, we define 'academic acculturation' as: The processes by which one becomes a part of a group (for example, institution, department, etc.) and integrates with its members, while possibly influencing the host group with one's own life experience and academic expertise, with regard to academic practice such as teaching, research, administration, pastoral duties, supervision and management (p. 157).



Álvarez Rojo <i>et al.</i> (2008)	Synthesizing the approaches of this perspective, culture can be defined as “the set of beliefs that translate into values, symbols, rituals and habits shared by the members of the organization, which determine a specific and differential identity, both with respect to the members themselves, as well as with respect to the environment in which the organization is immersed” (AECA, 1997, p. 144). (AECA, 1997, p. 144).
Cotter and Clukey (2019)	Freedman (1979) stated that faculty members are “conditioned, molded, and influenced—often without their awareness—by the institutions in which they serve” (p. 205). The items within this enculturation include a “complex symbolic apparatus of myths, statutes, precedents, ways of talking and thinking, and even uniforms” (BRUNER, 1996, p. 29, p. 139).
Harman (2002)	Academic culture can be interpreted as historically transmitted patterns of meaning expressed in symbolic form through the shared commitments, values and standards of behaviour peculiar to members of the profession, as well as the traditions, myths, rituals, language and other forms of expressive symbolism that encompass academic life and work (HARMAN, 1989a, p. 36, p. 97).
Böhm-Carrer and Lucero (2018)	Thus, it is valuable to start from the concept of academic culture, configured, according to Carlino (2009), by the representations and institutional practices that with a certain temporal continuity are being carried out in a given space, and alludes to the knowledge and know-how of a particular academic community (p. 5).
Gómez Silva and da Silva Bezerra (2018)	Drawing on Bizzocchi’s (2003) <i>latu sensu</i> definition of culture, we formulate, by analogy, a concept of academic culture for this research as a complex set of processes of production, circulation, and consumption of meanings, realized through academic practices and shared through pedagogical discourses in educational institutions (p. 4).
Mendoza (2008)	Culture in organizations is most commonly defined by the set of shared beliefs, values, and assumptions that guide behavior (p. 111).
Jiménez Mora, Moreno Bayardo and Ortiz Lefort (2011)	From a perspective that conceives culture as the context where people’s behavior acquires and contributes meaning (GEERTZ, 1973; BRUNER, 1990), the purpose of this study has been to access the set of meanings about research and research training that are internalized, constructed or reconstructed by the actors (teachers, students, administrators) involved in the doctoral programs in Education mentioned above; as a way to explore what happens in these spaces in the practices and processes of research training (p. 921).
Schugurensky and Naidorf (2004)	In this analysis, we conceptualize academic culture as the discourses, representations, motivations, ethical norms, conceptions, visions, and institutional practices of university actors (p. 998).

Source: Authors’ elaboration.

The qualitative analysis of the 74 studies that focus on issues of academic culture in universities allowed the identification of four lines of research. The first group consists of 17 studies that examine the impact on the culture, values, and expectations of students and academics of different transformations in the political economy of higher education systems, such as private funding of higher education, the establishment of external quality assurance systems and the urge to publish in internationally indexed journals. In general, these studies underscore how such tendencies have altered the traditional culture of universities, shifting them closer to a business model of management and eroding their intrinsic concern for the common good (COLEMAN, 2010; ORR; ORR, 2016; ZIMAN, 2003). Most of that research is focused on the effects of recent reforms in Asian systems, especially in China (LAI, 2013; LIU; METCALFE, 2016; RHOADS; HU, 2012; SZELÉNYI; RHOADS, 2013; TIAN; LU, 2017;) and South Korea (SHIN *et al.*, 2015), Taiwan (CHOU; CHAN, 2016, 2017), and Malaysia (DA WAN *et al.*, 2015), and in identifying the consequences of academic capitalism and its ‘Publish or Perish’ imperative on the values of students and scholars at U.S. institutions (BOOSE; HUTCHINGS, 2016; KUNTZ, PETROVIC; GINOCCHIO, 2012; NICOL, 2013).

The development of this line in the Latin American context has been especially substantial in Argentina and Brazil. In the Argentinean case, the existing analysis suggests that the academic culture of universities historically focused on their contribution in the country's democratization. However, since the 1970s, in the context of the imposition of neoliberal policies in different areas of social life in this country, the commercialization of academic work was further encouraged, entering into crisis the classical understanding of Latin American universities (SCHUGURENSKY; NAIDORF, 2004). In a similar direction, Ribeiro and Leda (2016) describe how neoliberal policies have rendered academic work precarious, imposing new control systems, resulting in the erosion of academic culture within Brazilian universities.

As reflected in the following fragments, these studies frequently adopt a critical tone, emphasizing the adverse effects of the growing privatization of the field on the academic culture of university institutions.

*Universities have been the stewards of both legacies [knowledge is valuable enough to make sacrifices for, and alternatives to communal norms are important for individual and social life]. We now watch these traditions end and share Plato's tears in losing such a friend in our own lives. The new hemlock is not made from a conscious effort to end the enriching aspects of the spirit of inquiry, intellectual growth and education. But as we have described, managerialism, metrics and bureaucratisation alter the lives of academics, the culture of the university and the mentalities of its academics to the point to which they no longer reflect Socratic values. (ORR; ORR, 2016, p. 24).*

The culture of managerialism permeated by the ideology of excellence penetrates the daily life of the teacher and imposes an unending search for an ever-changing standard of success and the continuous need to surpass oneself and others (RIBEIRO; LEDA, 2016, p. 105).

A second research line, consisting of 10 articles, focuses on how students in international exchange programs must face a series of integration problems during their studies. Although these analyses have been developed at the undergraduate level, their relevance is higher in Ph.D. programs due to the larger participation of international students at this level. Remarkably, much of the research in this line focuses on describing the insertion of students in international programs in countries such as the United States (IVANOVA, 2019), England (BROWN, 2008; TIAN; LOWE, 2013), Australia (WARNER; MILLER, 2015), Denmark (ELLIOT; KOBAYASHI, 2019) and Spain (PASTOR CESTEROS; PANDAR, 2017), among others (ELLIOT *et al.*, 2016). There is an increasingly relevant subset of studies in this line discussing how academics must also handle "culture shock" when teaching foreign students (JIANG *et al.*, 2010; MENG, 2016; YANG, 2020).

Unlike studies on the effects of the political economy on universities, these reviews tend to emphasize the imposing character of academic culture on foreign students and scholars for whom its assumptions are not self-evident. These excerpts illustrate this approach.

Students in transition to higher education (HE) face multiple challenges, including successful adaptation to the academic culture of the host institution (HELLSTÉN, 2002). Academic discourse,



register practices and expectations can function as barriers to learning, as students struggle to decode their new environment. These transitional challenges are particularly marked for English as an additional language (EAL) students in their acculturation to a new HE setting. (WARNER; MILLER, 2015, p. 420).

Friction stemming from unaligned expectations between supervisors and PhD students is widely reported, but such issues are arguably more intense in cross-cultural contexts (HOLBROOK *et al.*, 2014; MCCORMACK, 2005; WOOLDERINK *et al.*, 2015). Winchester-Seeto *et al.* (2014, p. 610) frame these cross-cultural issues as 'intensifiers', i.e. issues that affect the majority of PhD students are deemed to be more pronounced in cross-cultural contexts, thereby requiring adjustment and transition (see also FOTOVATIAN, 2012). (ELLIOT; KOBAYASHI, 2019, p. 2).

A third line of research, composed of 23 articles, analyzes undergraduate and graduate student diversification due to the expansion of access to higher education, representing a challenge for the academic culture of the sector's institutions, especially on how the organization adapts to the demands of new students. Within this framework, particular attention has been given to how the traditional academic culture starts from assumptions that harm the possibilities of integration of students coming from low-income families, mainly because such culture prioritizes that knowledge that is closer to the *habitus* of the upper classes, an aspect reported in Australia (HABEL; WHITMAN, 2016; HAGGIS, 2003; MCKAY; DEVLIN, 2014), England (READ; ARCHER; LEATHWOOD, 2003) and the United States (SOLEM; SCHLEMPER, 2009). There are researches in a similar direction suggesting how the academic culture of higher education institutions' programs should become more responsive to the needs of new students (BHOWMIK; KIM, 2018; COTTER; CLUKEY, 2019; ROXÅ; MÅRTENSSON; ALVETEG, 2011; SHACHAM; OD-COHEN, 2009), especially women (READ; KEHM, 2016; XU, 2008) and students from ethnic minority groups (GRANT, 2010). The process of disciplinary acculturation (MENDOZA, 2008) of doctoral students in the university systems of Canada (SKAKNI, 2018), Spain (JIMÉNEZ MORA; MORENO BAYARDO; ORTIZ LEFORT, 2011), Switzerland (FALK *et al.*, 2019) and Iran (HEMMATI; MAHDIE, 2020), is also considered here.

In Latin America, the academic culture of universities in different countries and the extent to which it hinders or facilitates the learning of students with various socioeconomic, ethnic, and gender characteristics is observed in studies following this approach. There are studies on the characteristics of Mexican (TORRES-OLAVE, 2011), Colombian (CASTRO DAZA; NIÑO GUTIÉRREZ, 2014; RODRÍGUEZ *et al.*, 2013), Brazilian (PASSOS, 2015), Argentine (BÖHM-CARRER; LUCERO, 2018), among others (FERNÁNDEZ; WAINERMAN, 2015), and how these expand or restrain the inclusion of students from socioeconomically underprivileged sectors in each country.

The imposing character of the academic culture is highlighted here, albeit in this case concerning its relation to the new demands of the students, as in the previous line of research. The fragments show this approach.

Newcomers to university, particularly those from LSES [low socioeconomic status] backgrounds, often lack familiarity with the general context of HEIs. This unfamiliarity can apply to the curriculum, courses, tasks, assessments and other aspects with which students are confronted. Compounding this challenge is the 'invisible pedagogy' (Bernstein, 1990), the implicit and unstated expectations of institutions, the specialist discourses (whether across subjects or disciplines), the 'institutional habitus' (Bourdieu, 1990) and the overall academic culture that students unfamiliar with university can have no way of knowing or understanding without assistance (Lawrence, 2005). (MCKAY; DEVLIN, 2014, p. 952).

Training as a researcher is a process of enculturation, of insertion into a community of practice, in this case the academic community (Wenger, 1998; Hasrati, 2005); from this community students must learn not only the specific task that summons them but also its norms, value systems and customs. (FERNANDEZ; WAINERMAN, 2015, p. 160).

A final line of research on academic culture, composed of 24 articles, centers on the analysis of internal reform processes in higher education institutions and how these modify the values that guide the actions of students, academics, and administrators. Under this perspective, emphasis has been given to the processes of internationalization and the third mission mechanisms in American (BYSTYDZIENSKI, 2017; FELDMAN; DESROCHERS, 2004), Korean (SHIN; LEE, 2015), and English (MUSTAFA *et al.*, 2018) universities. An additional issue explored here corresponds to the observation of the impact of new technologies on the academic culture and the relationship between academics and students (CUESTA *et al.*, 2016; YANG, 2015; XU; REES, 2016). Similarly, organizational reform processes in the sector's institutions have also been analyzed and how face resistance from the academic culture of their members in the U.S. (BERTRAM GALLANT, 2007; EDDY; HART, 2012; HARRIS, 2011; KEZAR, BERTRAM GALLANT; LESTER, 2011), Australia (HARMAN, 2002), New Zealand (CHILVERS *et al.*, 2018), Turkey (GIZIR; SIMSEK, 2005), Spain (ÁLVAREZ ROJO *et al.*, 2008; BASIR *et al.*, 2017) and Lebanon (RISK *et al.*, 2012), hindering organizational change and escalating conflicts with their academics.

In the Latin American case, changes in university values have been examined in response to reform processes in Uruguay (LANDONI, 2008), Venezuela (ALBORNOZ; JIMÉNEZ, 2008), and Colombia (CALDERÓN HERNÁNDEZ; JIMÉNEZ ZAPATA, 2018). Following a similar approach to the aforementioned cultural analysis of new technologies, the study addresses the impact of the digitization of teaching and research on academic culture in Brazilian (GÓMEZ SILVA; DA SILVA BEZERRA, 2018) and Mexican (DORANTES; AGUILAR, 2019) universities. A subgroup of these studies examines how academics have played a central role in fostering change in university academic culture through the diffusion, translation, and subsequent adoption of values in Argentina and Brazil (ARAÚJO, 2019; CARLI, 2013).

As the following remarks reflect, academic culture is here interpreted through its relationship with organizational reform processes. Emphasis is placed on how academic culture, especially regarding its effects on students, academics, and administrators' ideas and actions, facilitates or hinders institutional change.

Culture change requires organizational leaders to recognize that the culture is problematic and 'have the motivation and skill to change the cultural process' (SCHEIN, 1991, p. 323). First, such change requires that the leaders understand the values and assumptions that are not working (SCHEIN, 1991, p. 324). Second, effective leaders must introduce and implement new concepts, values, and assumptions (SCHEIN, 1991, p. 325), and do so not in a top-down manner, but using a collaborative, participatory approach whereby organizational members have autonomy, responsibility, and opportunities to provide and receive feedback. (ASTIN; LELAND, 1991). (BYSTYDZIENSKI, 2016, p. 2-3).

The main limitations identified relate to the institutional technological infrastructure and the power relations established between faculty and student learners. Cyberculture practices tend to be constituted through more horizontal and democratic power relations, according to which information and knowledge are produced and shared from all to all in the virtual network. Therefore, the resignification of the curriculum from the horizontalization of power relations seems to us a fruitful point of contact to hybridize academic culture with cyberculture. (GÓMEZ SILVA; DA SILVA BEZERRA, 2018, p. 23).

## **Discussion**

The analysis of the main lines of research on academic culture - the impact of changes in the political economy, the challenges of international exchange of students and academics, the implicit biases in the dominant academic culture, and the processes of organizational reform - reveals the complexity of this concept.

Regardless, it should be pointed out that the analysis of the available literature suggests the existence of a series of consensus among the articles examined. Indeed, the specialized literature review indicates that academic culture is a normatively charged concept, despite being presented as neutral and naturalized in the main activities of universities (teaching, research, and the third mission). The literature on this subject and, especially, literature specialized in the obstacles faced by international students and those coming from socioeconomic contexts with different orientations from those prevailing in the dominant culture, underline academic culture's imposing and potentially restrictive nature.

A second consensus among researchers in this field is that culture could have an empowering effect, especially for university members whose academic values coincide with those of the dominant culture. As the respective literature on organizational changes and guiding values of universities suggests, the culture of institutions facilitates communication among academics, students, and administrators who share their premises, establishing a common ground on relevant issues. The literature on the effects of changes in the political economy on university culture also underlines the advantages of institution members whose orientation coincides with these transformations.

Finally, based on the reviewed literature on academic culture, it is possible to identify a third attribute of academic culture consistent with specialized studies in the area of analysis: its systemic character. The university culture exceeds then the realm of students', academics', and administrators' opinions on the functioning of the institution

to operate instead as a set of implicit rules (and then ambiguous and subjected to interpretation) that serve to enable members of the institution to give meaning to their actions and those of others.

Nevertheless, despite being present in most research on the academic culture of higher education institutions, these analytical premises have not resulted in the generalization of a conceptual approach for the analysis of this type of phenomenon. On the contrary, descriptive studies prevail, distantly followed by conceptual essays and then by empirical research on the academic culture of higher education institutions rather than research informed by an explicit theoretical paradigm.

Research in higher education worldwide and Latin America, in particular, have similar attributes. While their quantity and thematic variety have expanded significantly in recent decades, theoretically guided studies still represent a minor segment of the total number of studies in the field (BRUNNER *et al.*, 2019a; SCOTT; GALLACHER; PARRY, 2017).

As shown by the counting of publications on academic culture issues and the bibliographic review of the definitions of academic culture used in the specialized literature on higher education in the last twenty years, both worldwide and in Latin America, even though this is a field that is receiving increasing interest, it has not been yet associated with a more extensive conceptual debate. On the one hand, the absence of conceptual approaches in this area of study reduces the possibility of advancing reflective approaches to the academic culture of universities. Such an approach is unavoidable to overcome normative approaches that evaluate the adequacy of academic culture to a predefined set of normative expectations. On the other hand, the omission of conceptual discussion hinders the collection of contributions from other disciplines dedicated to studying culture -both within and outside the field of higher education studies- reducing the possibility of developing comparative analyses and, thus, strengthening this research fields.

## Conclusions

This report reviews the definitions of academic culture in the specialized literature, identifying its main analysis perspectives. Four approaches are particularly relevant: the impact of changes in the political economy, the challenges of international exchange of students and scholars, the implicit biases in the dominant academic culture, and the processes of organizational reform. These approaches, despite their differences, share two fundamental ideas: first, academic culture can have a socially enabling or constraining character depending on whether or not its constituents share or not its premises and, second, academic culture has a systemic nature that exceeds its interpretation by one or more groups in universities.

Three research lines seem to be particularly promising in this context. On the one hand, it is necessary to advance case studies in specific areas of knowledge. Since the main differences in academic culture are the result of the dynamic of the disciplines, more attention should be pay to the different norms in different knowledge areas (MARGINSON; RHOADES, 2002).

Second, it is necessary to recognize that academic culture does not operate in a vacuum but varies according to its relationship with the rest of the organizational field

and the political economy and governance of the national system. Acknowledging this would open the door for comparative research to determine whether the academic culture of a particular area of knowledge acquires idiosyncratic attributes due to its relationship to changes in local and national higher education systems or whether there is a greater homogeneity independent of the particular context. This area of study - informed by the proposed concept of the academic culture at the institutional level - allows further exploration of a debate currently underway in the field of higher education studies: to define whether there is a growing convergence between institutions, the organizational and discursive effects of this convergence or whether, on the contrary, even at the level of expectations regarding teaching, research, and dissemination, is it possible to appreciate a greater diversification between national higher education systems and institutions, (LABRAÑA; VANDERSTRAETEN, 2020).

Finally, it is necessary to complement this review of the state of the art of academic culture by considering research in scientific repositories other than WoS and SciELO as well as other publications such as books and book chapters, in non-indexed journal articles, presentations at conferences, and theses. These scientific communication strategies are fundamental in the context of the academic debate in Latin America; they could thus provide more insight into the current discussions about the relationship between culture and institutions of higher education (BRUNNER *et al.*, 2019a).

As we have explored, the study of academic culture has fostered for many decades the development of the field of higher education studies and its relationship with the conceptual reflection in social sciences. While today it is a topic that is receiving increasing empirical attention, especially in Latin America, it still suffers from a lack of a consensual description capable of articulating a distinctive line of research. Hopefully, this article may have contributed in this direction based on the bibliographical review of the use of this concept in higher education studies.

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