

# **A Report on the Politics of Academic Research: Examining the Research Component of a Philippine Higher Education Institution**

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Research is increasingly recognized for its role in innovation, development of critical thinking, and societal progress.<sup>1</sup> In the contemporary higher education landscape, universities face mounting pressure for research productivity as global ranking institutions, driven by quantitative metrics, compound this pressure.<sup>2</sup> Institutions seek higher rankings to attract students and external fundings for research endeavors.<sup>3</sup> Predominantly, research quality is equated with publication in top journals, shaping

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<sup>1</sup> Diego Castro-Ceacero and Giorgetta Ion, “Changes in the University Research Approach: Challenges for Academics’ Scientific Productivity,” in *Higher Education Policy*, 32:4 (2018), <<https://doi.org/10.1057/s41307-018-0101-0>>

<sup>2</sup> Elizabeth Gadd, “Mis-Measuring Our Universities: Why Global University Rankings Don’t Add Up,” in *Frontiers in Research Metrics and Analytics*, 6 (2022), <<https://doi.org/10.3389/frma.2021.680023>>

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*

policies that encourage publication output.<sup>4</sup> This context necessitates a closer examination of universities' research dynamics, motivations, and challenges.

Moreover, uneven research productivity globally persists, particularly in the Global South like the Philippines, influenced by multifaceted factors, including resource limitations and cultural dynamics.<sup>5</sup> This gap bears implications beyond academia, impacting nations' competitiveness in a knowledge-driven global economy.<sup>6</sup> Higher education institutions (HEIs) are under pressure to excel in teaching and research, fueling competition for higher rankings and funding.<sup>7</sup> Funding schemes and actors' positions reinforce historical, social, and cultural power structures, affecting research collaborations. These power dynamics shape the transformative potential of generated knowledge, both globally and even locally.<sup>8</sup>

For these reasons, it is essential to recognize that research is not solely an academic endeavor but also inherently political. By this we mean that we move beyond the conventional and limited understanding of politics as the affairs of government, the actions of politicians, or the formulation of public policies. As South African political scientist Adrian Leftwich (1940-2013) astutely observed, politics is a universal and pervasive aspect of human behavior, manifesting wherever two or more individuals engage in collective activities, whether formal or informal,

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<sup>4</sup> Marton Demeter, Agnes Jele, and Zsolt. B. Major, "The model of maximum productivity for research universities SciVal author ranks, productivity, university rankings, and their implications," in *Scientometrics*, 127:8 (2022), 4336, <<https://doi.org/10.1007/s11192-022-04432-4>>.

<sup>5</sup> Petra Dannecker, "Collaboration in a 'North-South' Context: The Role of Power Relations and the Various Context-Based Conditions," in *European Journal of Development Research*, 34:4 (2022), 1717, <<https://doi.org/10.1057/s41287-022-00550-0>>.

<sup>6</sup> Castro-Ceacero and Ion, "Changes in the University Research Approach," 3.

<sup>7</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>8</sup> Dannecker, "Collaboration in a 'North-South' Context," 1717.

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public or private.<sup>9</sup> This broader and more critical understanding of “politics” and “political” aligns with the conceptualization and development of progressive concepts by scholars such as the politics of education,<sup>10</sup> politics of hope,<sup>11</sup> politics of work,<sup>12</sup> politics of knowledge,<sup>13</sup> politics of hearing,<sup>14</sup> and various other approaches to the subject.

In the context of this study, we adopt the term *politics of research* to encompass a more comprehensive and critical understanding of politics.<sup>15</sup> It emphasizes that research within universities is not a neutral, apolitical endeavor; instead, it is intricately intertwined with power dynamics, vested interests, and ideological currents. Decisions regarding research priorities, resource allocation, and the promotion of specific research agendas are subject to negotiation, influence, and contestation among diverse stakeholders. By *politics of research*, we imply a broader understanding of politics within universities acknowledging that research is not a neutral and apolitical activity but is deeply connected to power dynamics, vested interests, and ideologies.

This setting forms the foundation of our research rationale. Universities worldwide are grappling with mounting pressures for research productivity driven by global ranking demands and national development objectives.<sup>16</sup> This phenomenon affects institutions on a global scale, including those in the Global South, where research productivity often falls

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<sup>9</sup> Adrian Leftwich, *What is Politics? The Activity and its Study* (Cambridge: Polity, 2004), 100.

<sup>10</sup> See Paulo Freire, *The Politics of Education: Culture, Power and Liberation*, trans. by Donald Macedo (New York: Bergin & Garvey, 1985).

<sup>11</sup> See Henry Giroux *Pedagogy and the Politics of Hope: Theory, Culture, and Schooling—A Critical Reader* (New York: Routledge, 1997).

<sup>12</sup> See Brian Martin, *Information Liberation* (London: Freedom Press, 1998).

<sup>13</sup> See Richard Ohmann, *Politics of Knowledge: The Commercialization of the University, the Professions, and Print Culture* (Connecticut: Wesleyan University Press, 2003).

<sup>14</sup> See Lauri Siisiäinen, *Foucault and the Politics of Hearing* (Abingdon: Routledge, 2013).

<sup>15</sup> Castro-Ceacero and Ion, “Changes in the University Research Approach,” 4.

<sup>16</sup> Demeter et al., “The model of maximum productivity for research universities,” 1717.

behind. Moreover, academics respond to these challenges in diverse ways, ranging from resistance to adaptation.<sup>17</sup> Notably, the higher education institution in this study faces these complex dynamics. The politics of research in the university simultaneously shapes and is shaped by the contesting norms, values, and assumptions of both the dominant (centered?) and the dominated (marginalized?) stakeholders of the university.

Consequently, our study critically examines the higher educational institution's research ecosystem, delves into stakeholders' perspectives and values, and illuminates the intricate dynamics shaping research productivity. By contributing insights to the global discourse on research equity and recognizing the inherent political nature of research, this project seeks to provide a critical insight on how research itself operates within dominant political frameworks and ideologies.

The overarching aim of this study is to explore the perceptions and values of various stakeholders towards faculty research in a Higher Education Institution (HEI) in the Philippines (hereafter we refer to the institution under study as HEIM). By "stakeholders," we mean the administration, the faculty-researchers, the teaching faculty, and students. Due to the nature of the investigation, it requires both qualitative and philosophical readings of data. Using interviews, we attempt to uncover layers of dynamics of this "politics" by asking the stakeholders these guiding questions:

- Why do you think your HEI should be involved in research? What makes research in your HEI important?  
*(Sa palagay mo, bakit kailangan ng pananaliksik sa HEI na iyong kinabibilangan? Bakit mahalaga ang pananaliksik ito?)*
- How will you describe the current research environment in your HEI?  
*(Paano mo ilalarawan ang kasalukuyang sitwasyon ng pananaliksik sa HEI na iyong kinabibilangan?)*

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<sup>17</sup> Castro-Ceacero and Ion, "Changes in the University Research Approach," 4.

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- What is your perception of the impact of your HEI's research practices on research, instruction, and extension?  
(*Ano ang iyong pananaw sa impact ng gawaing pananaliksik ng iyong HEI hinggil sa pananaliksik, pagtuturo at pagtulong sa komunidad?*)
  - Will you do research at your HEI if given a chance? Why? (*Kung bibigyan ka ng pagkakataon, gagawa ka ba ng pananaliksik sa HEI na iyong kinabibilangan? Bakit?*)

During the data gathering phase, we collectively participated in conducting the interviews and focus group discussions, with responsibilities shared among members depending on the assigned stakeholder groups. After the completion of data gathering, the researchers worked together in reviewing, organizing, and coding the interview transcripts.<sup>18</sup> Through collaborative analysis, recurring themes and patterns related to research productivity were identified and interpreted from philosophical perspectives.

Based on their responses, we realized that different stakeholders provide unique information and distinct approaches in addressing each question. Hence, we come up with four investigations to examine the underlying philosophical and theoretical nuances that shape perceptions and values of faculty research in each area.

The first is on the administrators' take on what faculty research is. Titled "Research as Pedagogy: Administrative Discourse and the Politics of Knowledge Production," **Franz Guiseppe F. Cortez** et al. draw on university administrators' discourse and insights from educational thinkers such as Paulo Freire and Michel Foucault. They argue that research functions as pedagogy by forming academic identities and expectations. It functions as an ontology by defining what qualifies as an "authentic" university. It is also a performance because it subjects scholars to various procedures of visibility, evaluation, and comparison.

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<sup>18</sup> In compliance with the International Committee of Medical Journal Editors (ICMJE) authorship guidelines on co-authorship and research ethics protocols.

Interestingly, these dynamics are not coercive, but are normalized through policies, incentives, rankings, and evaluations that encourage self-regulation. In this sense, research is a significant factor not only in what a university accomplishes but more importantly in how the lives of its stakeholders are understood and lived.

Second is the faculty researcher's perceptions and values about research is dealt with in detail by the essay "Metrics, Control and the Erosion of Dialogue: A Critical Study of Research Governance in a Philippine Higher Education Institution" by **Rene Luis D. Tadle** et al. wherein metric-driven governance is shown to reshape academic work in a Philippine private university. Read through Freire and Habermas, the essay argues that rankings, audits, and publication counts depoliticize research governance, reduce research to measurable outputs, and narrow spaces for dialogue. Based on interviews with seven faculty researchers and institutional documents, it identifies top-down policymaking, publication pressure, inequitable support, bureaucratic burden, and weak research direction, recommending more participatory, dialogic, and equitable governance.

On the teaching faculty and their research beliefs and viewpoints, the section "Why Does Academia Abstain?: Looking into the Underlying Reasons for Limited Research Participation in a Higher Education Institution," **Rhochie Avelino E. Matienzo** et al. explores two philosophical frameworks to examine why academic staff hesitate to engage in research. First is Axel Honneth's discussion on *love*, *rights*, and *social esteem*, and second, Boaventura de Sousa Santos' notion of *epistemicide* or the death of knowledge. With these, we seek to understand the perceptions and values of faculty who avoid formal research, e.g., publication-oriented, institutionally supervised, externally funded studies, etc. Based on this, we find that the faculty's abstention is not only due to structural barriers but also to an existential plea for meaning-making.

For the student's concept of research, the essay "Research, Ranking, Reputation, Reproduction: Critical Pedagogy and the Politics of Student

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Research in a Philippine University” by **Prince Airick S. Gapo**, et al. examines the *politics* that shapes student research in a higher education institution through the lens of critical pedagogy. Gapo et al., argue that research, an endeavor that is rooted in the pursuit of truth and advancement of knowledge, has increasingly been influenced by neoliberal tendencies as embodied by rankings, metrics, institutional reputation, and the marketization of higher education. Anchored on various interviews with students and analyzed through the lens of critical pedagogy, the study presents an understanding of how research is perceived not as a meaningful epistemic endeavor but as a transactional academic requirement. Ultimately, the paper calls for the recovery of research as an intellectual labor grounded on epistemological curiosity, critical engagement, and the university’s enduring commitment to truth rather than mere productivity, quantification, and prestige.

To acknowledge the politics of research is not to undermine the value of research in the university. Rather, it is to recognize the power relations that affect university life, particularly under the influence of market-oriented decisions and policies. This recognition is indispensable so that university stakeholders can engage in meaningful critique and participate in crafting policies that truly matter to them. By treating research as a contested terrain and a plural practice rather than a fixed and cold commodity ripe for metrics, the university can begin to recover research as a space for genuine inquiry, intellectual risk-taking, and socially responsive knowledge production.

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