

USAf Keynote Governance Webinar Series

Institutional Capture and the South African University

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1. A working definition of institutional capture (IC) in universities (recognizing that it derives from a more familiar South Africanism, state capture)

2. Definition:

“a systematic, deliberate and intentional process of undermining governance and management processes in order to trigger institutional instability, thereby shifting authority to other powers in the university”

3. Let's agree therefore that not every instance of dysfunction in a university is IC, that there are degrees of IC depending on which university one is speaking about, and that key units can be 'captured' while the rest of the institution functions 'normally'

4. We should also note that there are more visible forms of IC—such as the buying and selling of degrees --- while there are also less visible forms such as the ‘capture’ of the research administration process in which the entire chain of academic production has been compromised

- Individuals submitting more than 60 publication units for state subsidy
- Academics publishing with students out of their theses and dissertations that they were paid to supervise
- Academics pursuing predatory journals to clear a very low bar for academic publication and advancement

5. What is different today about IC compared to ten years ago is **the routinization of violence** against those that stand in the way of corruption, the case of UFH being the most disturbing of cases

6. What recent studies show is that we cannot talk about IC inside a university without simultaneously talking about IC in the broader community outside the university—and within the state itself; in other words, **IC is a relational problem**. Put differently, why should universities be an exception among other institutions that shape our lives?

7. How does institutional capture happen? When stakeholders refuse to stay in their lanes. Here are three non-exhaustive but common examples:

- When a vice-chancellor wants to make governance decisions or when a council chairperson (or deputy chairperson) wants to make management decisions
- When students sit on tender committees of a university
- When the institutional forum wants to do more than advise council but wants to usurp council decisions for their own ends

8. Ultimately, IC happens when the quality and integrity of council membership is compromised; it is as simple as that

9. It must be said, though, that sometimes poor management decisions open the door for the kind of disruptive politics that enables IC

10. How can this be resolved? By taking the competitive politics (of the corrupted kind) out of the equation. Here are a few starting points:

- Drastically reduce the number of council members (7 should be sufficient, Harvard's senior governance structure, the Corporation, has 12 members with the President, with a \$6.7 billion operating revenue base)

- Do not pay council members any fees (put differently, do not appoint members who depend on the council for remuneration)

- Remove the influence of the Minister who appoints 3-5 members of a governing body (sometimes that works, sometimes it does not)

- Appoint council chairs and deputy chairs of the highest integrity, women and men of wisdom, who are also fiercely independent (find a mechanism)

- Do not appoint to councils members or heads of municipalities that are corrupt and dysfunctional (a vetting process)