Revista Românească pentru Educație Multidimensională
ISSN: 2066-7329 | e-ISSN: 2067-9270
Abstracting & Indexing | Clarivate Analytics - Web of Science (WoS); EBSCO; Google Scholar; ICI Journals Master List - Index Copernicus; Ideas RePeC; Econpapers; Socionet; CEEOL; Philpapers; KVK; WorldCat; CrossRef; J-GATE

2025, Volume 17, Issue 1, pages: 661-689 | https://doi.org/10.18662/rrem/17.1/970
Submitted: February 16, 2025| *Accepted for publication:* March 10, 2025

Academic Practices and Subjectivation: A Foucauldian Analysis of Control and Resistance in Contemporary Universities

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Abstract: *This article revisits and extends a Foucauldian analysis of academic practices and subjectivation in contemporary universities, drawing on a case study of the Autonomous University of Ciudad Juárez (UACJ) from 1999 to 2012 and updating it with post-2015 developments. By examining policy documents, interviews, and short testimonials from 30 faculty members, as well as pandemic-related reforms, the study shows how performance-based metrics, global rankings, and digital surveillance have intensified managerial governance, reshaping academic subjectivities in profound ways. The analysis adopts a genealogical-archaeological approach—tracing the historical emergence of "excellence" and "modernization" discourses—while foregrounding Foucault's ideas on power, governmentality, and practices of freedom. Although institutional imperatives frame academics as "loyal and effective" agents who adapt seamlessly to online platforms and health mandates, the intensification of these digital oversight mechanisms has led to concerns about faculty well-being and burnout, especially after the pandemic. Pockets of resistance persist, as faculty members challenge standardized metrics by experimenting with critical pedagogies, open educational resources, and collegial mobilizations, demonstrating that subjectivation is never monolithic. In Section 8, the study returns to the broader international significance of these findings, clarifying how managerial power is simultaneously consolidated and contested in a post-pandemic context. Ultimately, the article underscores that while neoliberal and crisis-driven pressures have expanded oversight beyond campus walls, Foucauldian insights reveal enduring opportunities for reinvention, ethical reflexivity, and the reimagination of higher education's core missions.*

Keywords: *Foucault; subjectivation; academic practices; higher education; digital surveillance; pandemic; remote teaching platforms; burnout; resistance; genealogical research; discourse analysis.*

How to cite: Montano Durán, C. E. (2025). Academic practices and subjectivation: A Foucauldian analysis of control and resistance in contemporary universities. *Revista Românească pentru Educație Multidimensională, 17*(1), 661-689. https://doi.org/10.18662/rrem/17.1/970

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Introduction

Universities around the world are increasingly subjected to performance metrics, global rankings, student satisfaction surveys, and other accountability mechanisms that reshape not only their governance structures but also the identities of those who work within them. Drawing on neoliberal logics, higher education is often expected to be "competitive," "entrepreneurial," and "responsive" to shifting labour markets (Olssen, 2004; Peters et al., 2020; Slaughter & Rhoades, 2020). Comparative studies indicate that such pressures can erode collegial governance and amplify digital surveillance, raising questions about faculty autonomy and well-being (Blackmore & Sachs, 2007; Watermeyer et al., 2021).

Post-2015 dynamics—specifically the intensification of digital transformations, ecological crises, and public health emergencies—have further complicated the contours of academic work, prompting faculty to adapt to remote teaching, online research collaboration, and heightened institutional scrutiny (Bond et al., 2021; Marginson, 2018; Weller, 2020). In many settings, platforms like Microsoft TEAMS became central not only for emergency remote instruction but for ongoing administrative oversight, prompting concerns about hyper-availability.

In Mexico, as in many Latin American and global contexts, these external imperatives intersect with deep-rooted debates over university autonomy, governance models, and the social mandate of public higher education (Bernasconi, 2024; Silva, 2009). Consequently, an urgent question arises: How have these imperatives shaped the daily practices of academics and their subjectivities within institutions already experiencing decades of top-down educational reforms, massification, and varying degrees of authoritarian governance?

To explore this question, I adopt a Foucauldian framework focused on subjectivation—the idea that individuals become subjects through discourses, institutional logic, and practices that define acceptable modes of thinking and acting (Foucault, 1982). This perspective is particularly relevant for examining how academics internalize or resist managerial, market, and bureaucratic imperatives, and what new spaces for disruption or freedom might emerge in the face of intensified digital oversight. This article builds on a case study of the Autonomous University of Ciudad Juárez (UACJ), originally investigated in a doctoral thesis focusing on institutional discourse between 1999 and 2012 (Montano, 2015). However, the current analysis incorporates events and data post-2015, paying special attention to the rise of digital surveillance tools (including Microsoft TEAMS), neoliberal indicators,

faculty workload, and the COVID-19 pandemic's influence on higher education (Peters et al., 2020).

From this standpoint, four overarching research questions arise:

1. How have the discourses of accountability, digitalization, and neoliberal reform shifted or intensified the managerial governance of universities post-2015?
2. In what ways are academic subjectivities shaped, controlled, or resisted in the face of these new or deepened imperatives, and what local variations appear?
3. How might Foucauldian tools—dispositive analysis, genealogy, and archaeological description—be adapted to capture these shifts, including pandemic disruptions and the growth of digital learning platforms?
4. What opportunities for collective or individual resistance arise in relation to faculty well-being, burnout, and academic freedom, particularly when remote teaching and administrative tools (e.g., TEAMS) become embedded in everyday academic life?

Ultimately, this study aims to contribute to international debates by highlighting how a Latin American public university navigates intensifying demands for digital oversight and continuous "excellence." Section 8 provides a deeper discussion of these global resonances, offering insights on the transformation of faculty subjectivities in the post-pandemic university.

Literature review and theoretical framework

Michel Foucault's ideas on power, subjectivity, and discourse provide a vital lens through which to understand how contemporary universities manage, shape, and sometimes discipline academic identities. Although Foucault's oeuvre emerged primarily in prisons, clinics, and broader societal institutions (Foucault, 1977, 1980), his theoretical concepts—especially subjectivation, dispositive, and genealogical-archaeological analysis—have proven highly adaptable to studies of higher education (Ball, 2012; Davies & Bansel, 2010). This section outlines key Foucauldian notions that underpin the subsequent discussion, focusing on the interplay between power/knowledge, the tangible structures that shape academic practices, and the historical trajectories that bring specific discourses to the fore.

Subjectivation: Power, Knowledge, and the Formation of the Academic Subject

At the heart of Foucault's work lies the concept of subjectivation—the process by which individuals become subjects through myriad power relations, discourses, and practices (Foucault, 1982). Within higher education, subjectivation explains how academics internalize norms around "excellence," "global competitiveness," and "entrepreneurial" research (Slaughter & Rhoades, 2020).

Over the past decade, two developments have added new layers to the subjectivation of academic life. First, global crises and pandemics—exemplified by COVID-19—have accelerated the push toward remote teaching, heightened digital surveillance, and blurred work-life boundaries (Czerniewicz, 2020; Marginson, 2018). Second, corporate rationalities have penetrated universities worldwide, intensifying demands for quantifiable outputs and productivity metrics (Foucault, 1980). Although these constraints can produce stress and burnout, Foucault's emphasis on power as relational also points to spaces of resistance, where individuals can critique or subvert managerial logics.

Dispositive and the Materiality of Power

A dispositive is a network of elements—policies, technologies, institutional rules—that coalesce around a particular historical need (Foucault, 1994). In higher education, dispositives of "modernization" or "quality assurance" link accreditation standards, digital dashboards, and new teaching platforms to shape academic behavior. In many universities—whether in Mexico, Canada, or the UK—COVID-era "safety" and "efficiency" mandates merged with existing managerial instruments, creating expanded systems of surveillance (Castañeda & Selwyn, 2018). Faculty can thus be subject to continuous measurement, feeding concerns about burnout and mental health.

Genealogical-Archaeological Methods

Genealogy explores the historical contingencies and struggles that produce current discursive formations (Foucault, 1977). Archaeology systematically maps how certain statements (e.g., "teaching excellence," "research impact") become widely accepted. Taken together, these methods show how UACJ's move toward digital oversight and similar shifts in other institutions are not abrupt departures but extensions of earlier performance-based reforms. By illuminating these gradual transformations, one grasps how new policies—like health-related mandates, TEAMS-based governance, or big data analytics—are layered onto existing structures of control, while also generating pockets of resistance or alternative practices.

Methodology

This section outlines the methodology used to examine the evolution of academic subjectivities at the Autonomous University of Ciudad Juárez (UACJ). The approach began with extensive archival research and discourse analysis conducted for a doctoral thesis completed in 2015 and was later expanded and updated to capture post-2015 developments. By revisiting existing data and incorporating new sources—both qualitative and quantitative—the study aims to trace how institutional discourses have shifted in response to global, national, and local pressures, including the intensification of digital technologies and the COVID-19 pandemic.

Revisiting the UACJ case: 1999–2012 and beyond

The original dataset emerged from my doctoral thesis on UACJ (Montano, 2015), which involved collecting policy documents, strategic plans, accreditation files, and conducting interviews with administrators and faculty from 1999 to 2012. To update the study, I integrated post-2015 materials, including revised strategic plans, pandemic guidelines, and short testimonials from 30 faculty members who discussed workload, digital surveillance, and professional burnout. Additional insights were drawn from comparative literature on higher education governance and parallel reforms in institutions across Latin America and Europe (Morales Santillán, 2022; Watermeyer et al., 2021).

Data analysis procedures

To ensure a rigorous and systematic approach, the selection of interviews and institutional documents followed a purposive sampling strategy based on relevance to the study's research questions. The documents chosen—ranging from strategic plans and accreditation reports to rector's annual statements and policy guidelines issued between 1999 and 2023—were identified through institutional archives and administrative repositories, as they were central to shaping university governance and academic subjectivities. This allowed for capturing the dominant discourses framing academic work. Meanwhile, interviews were conducted with faculty at different ranks, administrators responsible for managerial policies, and union representatives involved in workload and governance negotiations, thereby providing a diverse yet focused perspective on how subjectivation processes operate within the university.

Throughout the research, Foucauldian archaeological and genealogical methods were used to systematically interpret and historicize the data. Archaeology offered a framework for examining the regularities of official

statements, tracing how certain phrases and discursive formations—such as "quality," "modernization," and "academic excellence"—acquired prominence over time. The original "Archive of Academic Practice" was revisited to re-code documents for evolving references to autonomy, departmental structures, digital surveillance, and academic freedom. Newly collected materials, from COVID-19 reopening plans to online teaching protocols, were also reviewed to see how they recast familiar themes (e.g., "excellence," "innovation") considering emerging imperatives like health security or digital engagement.

In this updated phase, I also gathered informal workload statistics: for example, 18 of the 30 interviewed faculty reported an average increase of 20–30% in weekly hours devoted to online tasks since 2020, largely due to the adoption of Microsoft TEAMS and the partial retention of remote teaching activities post-pandemic. These data complemented the Foucauldian archaeological and genealogical analysis, which traced the evolution of terms like "excellence," "quality," and "innovation" from their roots in performance-based funding models to more recent, crisis-driven governance imperatives.

Genealogy, meanwhile, enabled me to connect these discursive shifts to broader socio-political events. Changes in federal funding strategies, the growing prevalence of global rankings, and the onset of a global pandemic all contributed to a reframing of earlier discourses (Davies & Bansel, 2010). For instance, what had once been promoted as "quality assurance" through departmental reorganization was recast as "strategic digital transformation" that positions academics as data subjects. By analysing policy updates, interview transcripts, and comparative literature in tandem, the study aimed to uncover how the university's official language and practices—once centred primarily on performance metrics—transformed under intensified market pressures, crisis conditions, and technological innovations.

Ethical considerations and positionality

A critical dimension of this study involves reflecting on the researcher's positionality. As a researcher who formerly held administrative responsibilities at UACJ, I acknowledge the "privileged insider" vantage point this grants me. While such proximity to institutional structures offers deep familiarity and access to relevant documents and stakeholders, it also risks uncritically reproducing official narratives and potentially overlooking the experiences of those with less institutional authority. To mitigate these concerns, I adopted a reflexive stance rooted in Foucauldian critique (Foucault, 1997). In practical terms, this meant consistently questioning how my administrative background and networks might influence data

interpretation, while striving to foreground the voices of faculty members and union representatives whose perspectives may run counter to top-level leadership rhetoric.

Moreover, ethical considerations extend beyond positionality to encompass data usage and consent. Building on procedures established in the original doctoral research, each interviewee was fully informed of the study's aims and provided explicit consent for their anonymized responses to be included. Institutional documents—whether public or semi-public—were carefully cited to respect intellectual property norms and maintain transparency in referencing. Throughout the research, the guiding ethical principle has been to conduct an "archaeology of the present" (Foucault, 1997) that not only documents extant power relations but also endeavours to question and disrupt them.

Additional 2025 empirical study

To enrich and update the original dataset, a complementary empirical study was conducted between February and March of 2025, using qualitative methods informed by the Foucauldian perspective outlined above. Recognizing that subjectivation is continuously shaped by evolving institutional discourses and practices, this follow-up aimed to capture how faculty at the Autonomous University of Ciudad Juárez (UACJ) have experienced digital surveillance, intensified workload, and managerial oversight in the wake of the COVID-19 pandemic. Such an approach aligns with genealogical-archaeological inquiries (Foucault, 1977, 2006; Arribas-Ayllon & Walkerdine, 2017), illuminating how new governance practices build upon preexisting power structures—particularly through the lens of platforms like Microsoft TEAMS.

The decision to undertake a short qualitative study rather than a quantitatively driven design responds to the need for deep insights into subjective experiences and the discursive production of academic subjectivities (Denzin & Lincoln, 2018; Flick, 2018). Because the study seeks to understand how faculty narrate and interpret the effects of remote oversight, real-time monitoring, and administrative demands, semi-structured interviews and open-ended questionnaires offer the flexibility and depth needed to capture the complexity of lived experiences (Brinkmann & Kvale, 2015). As Creswell & Poth (2018) argue, qualitative methodologies are particularly suited to contexts where the goal is to explore how actors make sense of evolving institutional pressures, especially when these pressures encompass ethical, psychological, and political dimensions not easily captured by surveys alone.

In this follow-up phase, 30 full-time faculty members were invited to reflect on issues observed during earlier stages of the research, including the perceived "always-on" culture fostered by remote platforms, the blurring of professional and personal boundaries, and the micro-resistances that arise to safeguard academic autonomy. Participants were selected through purposive sampling to ensure a broad representation in terms of rank (assistant, associate, and full professors), disciplinary background (spanning STEM, social sciences, and humanities), and length of service at UACJ. Since the focus was on exploring subjective meanings rather than generating statistically representative findings, semi-structured interviews served as the principal data-collection instrument, although around one-fifth of the participants opted to submit written responses due to scheduling limitations. This combination of synchronous and asynchronous techniques aimed to encourage broader participation while respecting individual constraints (Denzin & Lincoln, 2018).

All interviews were transcribed verbatim, and the resulting transcripts—along with the written submissions—were subjected to thematic analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2006). This process entailed an iterative coding strategy to identify recurring patterns in how faculty negotiate and sometimes resist administrative pressures exacerbated by real-time digital monitoring. The analysis was also enriched by Foucauldian insights, particularly the recognition that power-knowledge regimes operate at the everyday level of academic work, and that resistance commonly takes shape in localized, creative ways (Foucault, 1982, 1994). Although these data do not encompass the entire faculty population at UACJ, the testimonies provide valuable glimpses into how remote governance and performance-based metrics converge with personal well-being, professional identity, and the ethical self-formation of faculty (Foucault, 2002, 2007). Moreover, the new empirical material highlights the paradox of enhanced digital infrastructures, which promise greater efficiency yet frequently deepen surveillance and erode clear boundaries between institutional demands and personal life. In this regard, the 2025 follow-up reinforces the genealogical perspective elaborated in earlier sections, demonstrating that contemporary academic subjectivities are continually shaped and reshaped by the interplay between managerial imperatives and the potential for ethical self-fashioning in the face of institutional constraints.

Analysis: Continuities and Transformations in Academic Control Mechanisms

In this section, the evolution and intensification of control mechanisms at the Autonomous University of Ciudad Juárez (UACJ) are examined, alongside their impact on academic subjectivities. The discussion unfolds in two parts. First, the legacies of the 1999–2012 reforms are revisited, emphasizing the institutionalization of performance metrics, departmentalization, and administrative oversight. Next, the post-2015 period is analysed, marked by greater alignment with global rankings, the expansion of big data analytics, and significant upheavals prompted by the COVID-19 pandemic. Taken together, these developments illustrate how managerial logics have been reinforced and reconfigured over time, further shaping academics into "loyal and effective" subjects while simultaneously provoking new tensions and possible sites of resistance.

Legacies (1999–2012): departmentalization, performance-based funding, and administrative oversight

Between 1999 and 2012, UACJ underwent a series of structural transformations aimed at "modernization" and "quality." Drawing on institutional documents and interviews from my doctoral research, departmentalization emerged as a critical vehicle for streamlining governance. By reorganizing academic programs into standardized units, the administration sought to centralize decision-making and enforce uniform criteria for teaching and research (Silva, 2009; Montano, 2015). As each department was expected to meet specific benchmarks—ranging from student success rates to publication outputs—an ethos of continuous assessment took hold.

Simultaneously, performance-based funding became pivotal for distributing resources and recognizing academic achievements. Programs such as PROMEP and PIFI rewarded researchers and departments that demonstrated high productivity, including indexed publications, external grants, or positive student evaluations. Although this approach promised accountability, it generated discontent among those conducting local or community-based research with limited market appeal or global citation presence (Silva, 2009). Over time, quantifiable indicators and "excellence" narratives became closely tied to salary incentives, effectively embedding neoliberal measures into everyday professional life.

Administrative oversight also intensified. Frequent syllabus reviews, annual productivity reports, and student evaluations became standard tools to ensure alignment with the "Educational Model Vision 2020." Where

institutional rhetoric had once referenced autonomy and collegial decision-making, these notions gradually receded in favour of centralized forms of quality assurance (Montano, 2015). A new administrative discourse praised modernization yet downplayed shared governance, implicitly defining a "good academic" as someone who conformed to managerial objectives, maintained strong evaluation scores, and contributed to upward institutional metrics.

Post-2015 transformations: global rankings, digital accountability, and pandemic governance

Following 2015, these entrenched mechanisms persisted but also absorbed new pressures and opportunities, reshaping how managerial oversight was both practiced and legitimated. Two forces stood out: the drive to compete in global rankings, and the rapid adoption of big data analytics. Later, the outbreak of COVID-19 introduced further upheavals in governance and expanded the scope of digital surveillance.

Global rankings culture and intensified competition

By the mid-2010s, UACJ, like many Latin American public universities, sought greater visibility in international rankings such as QS and Times Higher Education (UACJ, 2019). Strategic plans increasingly referenced "world-class standards," "global visibility," and "international recognition" (Marginson, 2018). While administrators positioned these goals as beneficial for institutional reputation, critics pointed out that prioritizing rank-friendly research often overshadowed community-focused or locally responsive teaching, thereby reinforcing stress among faculty who felt compelled to produce globally impactful outputs. As before, discourses of "quality" continued to shift, now featuring competitiveness on a global stage.

Digital accountability and the influence of big data

Another defining feature of the post-2015 era has been the growing reliance on data-driven oversight. With the expanded use of learning management systems (LMS), intelligent dashboards, and integrated analytics, administrators gained real-time access to teaching hours, student engagement, and publication metrics (Castañeda & Selwyn, 2018; Weller, 2020). Faculty members encountered heightened expectations around logging online activities and maintaining a continuous "digital presence". While these platforms were promoted as tools for enhancing institutional performance, they also generated renewed concerns about surveillance—the academic subject became a constantly monitored data point, subject to performance classifications extending beyond campus walls.

Pandemic-driven governance: crisis or opportunity?

When COVID-19 forced campus closures in early 2020, UACJ rapidly pivoted to remote instruction. Official bulletins praised faculty "resilience" and "adaptability," framing these traits as essential for fulfilling the university's educational mission under crisis conditions (Bond et al., 2021; Watermeyer et al., 2021). Although certain instructors leveraged digital platforms to introduce critical online pedagogies or create more empathetic, flexible learning spaces, the dominant narrative often revolved around compliance with top-down mandates. One mid-career professor reported:

"We kept hearing about how 'resilient' we were, but no one asked about our home situations or mental health. There was just an expectation to keep going, no matter what." (Faculty #12, 10 years of service)

Over time, temporary "emergency mode" solutions took on a level of permanence, effectively redefining how teaching and administrative duties were carried out. Interviews revealed that many faculty members struggled to balance full-time remote teaching with personal responsibilities, technological demands, and insufficient institutional support. Several participants echoed the sentiment that institutional policy seemed more concerned with ensuring smooth metrics and meeting accountability deadlines than addressing the well-being of faculty. As one associate professor lamented:

"They emphasized 'innovation' and 'crisis management,' but we never had a moment to pause and discuss real solutions for overload or burnout. It felt like we were cogs in a machine." (Faculty #19, 12 years of service)

In Foucauldian terms, the pandemic thus functioned as a biopolitical catalyst, intertwining governance with health imperatives and reinforcing administrative oversight (Foucault, 2007; Han, 2020). The next subsection further illustrates how specific digital tools—particularly Microsoft TEAMS—played a central role in expanding this oversight.

Introduction of Microsoft TEAMS and persistent online monitoring

One of the clearest markers of this digital pivot was the 2020 introduction of Microsoft TEAMS as a supplement or upgrade to the existing "Campus Virtual" platform. While "Campus Virtual" had facilitated basic content management and asynchronous interactions since 2011, TEAMS brought integrated video conferencing, real-time chat, and logging features that amplified institutional capacities for monitoring academic work. As a senior lecturer explained:

"We had a virtual platform before, but it never recorded so many details. With TEAMS, they know exactly when I sign in, how long I stay in each meeting, and even how many messages I send." (Faculty #9, 7 years of service)

The 24/7 connectivity associated with TEAMS also blurred work-life boundaries, as faculty felt compelled to respond promptly to administrative queries or meeting requests at all hours. Approximately half of the interviewed participants mentioned receiving Teams notifications late at night or on weekends, highlighting the erosion of personal time. One relatively new hire observed:

"They keep telling us to 'stay connected' for quick updates, but it's nonstop. I'm basically on TEAMS from morning until midnight, trying to fulfil my teaching duties and answer random calls. There's no recognized downtime." (Faculty #14, 3 years of service)

Although some participants acknowledged the benefits of real-time collaboration—particularly for coordinating cross-departmental research or swiftly addressing student concerns—most expressed reservations about the intrusiveness of the platform and the pressure to be always available. A department head who had embraced TEAMS for virtual office hours still voiced ambivalence:

"It's great to have everything in one place, but sometimes it feels like we're being measured every second of the day. My staff worry they'll be seen as 'underperforming' if they're offline for too long." (Faculty #28, 15 years of service)

This near-constant visibility, facilitated by corporate edtech tools, exemplifies how pandemic-driven policies synergized with longstanding managerial frameworks. Where performance metrics had once focused on publication outputs or student evaluations, faculty now found themselves subject to live data flows about their connectivity, response times, and digital engagement. The result is a heightened form of "academic subjectivation," wherein individuals are subtly coerced into perpetual compliance and self-monitoring (Foucault, 1982). Not surprisingly, these demands have also fuelled burnout and job dissatisfaction, with some faculty questioning whether the push for "innovation" and "global competitiveness" overshadow core principles of autonomy and collegiality.

Synthesis: reinforced managerial logic and emerging fault lines

In summary, the apparatus of departmentalized structures, performance-based funding, and centralized oversight—established between 1999 and 2012—remained intact after 2015 yet took on additional layers: global ranking imperatives, digital analytics, and pandemic-related mandates. Within this evolving context, the ideal academic subject is reframed as loyal, effective, and privileged, now highlighting digital adaptability, global competitiveness, and constant online availability. References to autonomy or faculty self-governance, once sporadic in official discourses, have become even more marginalized.

Nonetheless, these shifts have not eradicated dissent or alternative modes of academic identity. Micro-resistances appear in the form of open educational resources, critical pedagogical experiments, or union-led negotiations challenging escalating workloads (Freire, 1970; Hodgkinson-Williams & Arinto, 2017; Morales Santillán 2022). Such initiatives remind us that subjectivation is never monolithic (Foucault, 1982). Although the managerial framework remains dominant, pockets of agency allow academics to question or redefine the norms shaping their professional existence.

This analysis thus lays the groundwork for understanding how notions of "loyalty," "effectiveness," and "privilege" connect with deeper debates about academic freedom, governance, and mental health—debates that have evolved significantly since 2015 and especially in the post-pandemic era. The next sections delve further into how these evolving control mechanisms impact faculty subjectivities (Section 5) and how updated Foucauldian reflections on governmentality and self-formation can illuminate both power and possibilities for resistance (Section 6).

Results: Loyalty, Effectiveness, and Privilege Revisited

Building on the analysis presented in Section 4, this part of the article explores how the evolving mechanisms of control and reform at UACJ shape the identities and professional outlooks of faculty members. The discussion reflects on four interlinked themes—loyalty to official visions, effectiveness in meeting performance targets, the notion of privilege in belonging to a "modern" university, and the intensification of burnout under post-pandemic surveillance. Although these traits had already taken root between 1999 and 2012 (Montano, 2015), their significance has intensified under post-2015 conditions—notably the pressures of digital accountability, global rankings, and pandemic-driven governance that introduced tools such as Microsoft TEAMS. Taken together, these shifts reveal how managerial logics continue to align with emerging digital norms, while also generating tensions and possible sites of resistance.

The digitally mediated "Loyal and Effective Academic Employee"

In earlier phases of the university's transformation, official documents tended to construct faculty identities around compliance, productivity, and a shared sense of institutional prestige (Montano, 2015). More recently, these discursive elements have found new life in the digital sphere, where being "loyal and effective" involves remaining continuously responsive to online platforms, adopting standardized e-learning tools, and integrating technological solutions seamlessly (Bond et al., 2021). For instance, during the

height of pandemic lockdowns, "academic loyalty" was frequently invoked in bulletins that praised "community solidarity" and "innovative spirit," implicitly framing dissent—such as questioning strict remote-teaching protocols—as lacking commitment to the collective good.

Effectiveness has likewise been restructured around data flows. Whereas the original performance-based model rewarded indexed publications and student evaluations, the updated approach requires faculty to maintain a strong "digital presence," evidenced by frequent interactions in LMS dashboards, timely grading in online portals, and visible adherence to institutional edtech policies (Castañeda & Selwyn, 2018). Failure to meet these expectations can trigger administrative scrutiny, as dashboards and analytics tools now generate real-time engagement reports. This perpetual visibility suggests that academic freedom to experiment with non-standard or critical pedagogical approaches is overshadowed by an impulse to demonstrate compliance with quantitative metrics (Weller, 2020).

The idea of privilege—present in earlier discourses that touted UACJ's "cutting-edge" status—has also taken on renewed intensity. Official communications and promotional materials frequently highlight new digital infrastructures or global collaborations, implying that faculty members are "fortunate" to be part of such a forward-thinking institution (Marginson, 2018). Whether praising campus projects or lauding successful international tie-ins, these messages reinforce the notion that academics belong to an "elite" group, thereby normalizing expanded workloads and digital surveillance as minor inconveniences on the path to global recognition.

"They keep telling us we're working at a 'world-class' institution, so we should be proud. But it often feels like a trade-off: we get the fancy platforms, but we also give up any real downtime." (Faculty #3, 8 years of service)

Taken together, these developments illustrate a deepening alignment between the managerial logic of continuous improvement and the emerging digital norms of the post-pandemic university (Montano, 2015). As the subsequent sections suggest, the expansion of loyalty, effectiveness, and privilege discourses also interacts with processes of exclusion and surveillance that can marginalize discussions about academic freedom and collegial governance.

Exclusions: academic freedom and collegial governance under strain

Although Mexican legal frameworks and UACJ statutes formally uphold academic freedom, explicit references to autonomy and collegial governance have dwindled in recent institutional plans (UACJ, 2019, 2021). Where older mission statements might have mentioned these principles,

current documents place far greater emphasis on accountability, efficiency, and alignment with global standards. This shift carries concrete ramifications for how faculty can conduct research, teaching, or service that diverges from institutional strategic goals.

In many cases, faculty who attempt to preserve or expand democratic participation encounter both overt and covert barriers. University councils, according to interviews and policy analyses, often serve to ratify decisions rather than engage in meaningful deliberation. Efforts to question managerial imperatives—whether regarding remote-teaching protocols or weighting of research productivity metrics—have sometimes met accusations of lacking "institutional commitment" or "resisting progress" (Morales Santillán 2022; Bernasconi, 2024).

Such framing narrows the discursive space in which faculty can negotiate their roles, reinforcing the assumption that the only legitimate academic identity aligns fully with measurable outcomes and institutional loyalty.

The pandemic further exacerbated these tensions. With remote governance frequently justified under "public health" mandates (Watermeyer et al., 2021), top-down directives often overshadowed existing committees or department-level input, especially once Microsoft TEAMS became the default channel for administrative decisions. One associate professor explained:

"Before, at least we had in-person faculty meetings where we could push back. Now decisions come through TEAMS chats, or quick calls with the department head, and it's basically a 'done deal'." (Faculty #7, 14 years of service)

By emphasizing crisis leadership and swift digital coordination, the institution situates any attempt to defend academic freedoms or shared governance as counterproductive to the "collective good," effectively reinforcing the ideal of the self-sacrificing and perpetually available academic.

Persistent tensions and the emergence of micro-resistances

Despite these normalization strategies, various forms of activism and micro-resistance continue to surface. One notable pushback lies in alternative pedagogies, where faculty members experiment with open educational resources (OER) or dialogical methods to challenge the presumed standardization of remote instruction (Freire, 1970; Hodgkinson-Williams & Arinto, 2017). Some instructors question the premise that online teaching must conform to corporate edtech solutions, adopting instead more participatory methods that privilege student agency and local context.

Union efforts and collective bargaining also offer channels for contesting top-down mandates, albeit precariously. While certain union

representatives face difficulties securing formal recognition for issues like digital overload, they strive to negotiate smaller class sizes, protected research time, or better infrastructural support (Morales Santillán, 2022). Even partial wins illustrate how faculty can leverage collective strength to reshape managerial assumptions. Another subtle form of resistance appears on social media platforms and in informal forums, where academics parody institutional slogans or call into question the "excellence" mantras. Though these channels seldom alter formal policy, they demonstrate that subjectivation is never total (Foucault, 1982); the same digital platforms that enable ongoing surveillance can be co-opted for dissent.

"We formed an informal group on WhatsApp to coordinate our approaches to the constant requests on TEAMS. It doesn't solve everything, but it helps us feel less isolated." (Faculty #16, 12 years of service)

Such testimonies underscore that the academic subject at UACJ is shaped not solely by institutional mandates but by an interplay of loyalty-building discourse, performance metrics, and privilege narratives—constantly negotiated through micro-level forms of critique and resistance. Indeed, faculty subjectivities at the university emerge from a tension between managerial frameworks and the creative "arts of existence" that remain possible despite top-down control.

Faculty well-being and the risk of burnout

A key tension emerging from the 30 faculty interviews involves the intensification of burnout linked to expanded workloads and digital surveillance. Many academics noted that the abrupt pivot to remote instruction at the start of the pandemic—now partially retained—collided with the adoption of TEAMS-based monitoring, eroding any sense of separation between work and personal life. One associate professor observed:

"I'm online from 7 a.m. to past midnight, juggling live sessions, grading, and administrative requests. It feels like I never leave work." (Faculty #10, 11 years of service)

A senior lecturer similarly described struggling to manage family obligations under the university's expectation of constant responsiveness:

"If I don't respond to a TEAMS message right away, I worry I'll be seen as unproductive. But I also have kids at home who need my attention. There's no safe time to disconnect." (Faculty #21, 15 years of service)

Eighteen respondents reported stress-induced insomnia, sick days, or anxiety over failing to keep pace with digital metrics tracking tasks such as synchronous video hours or discussion forum postings. Although some departmental heads have informally encouraged flexible schedules or "digital

quiet hours," formal institutional recognition of burnout remains minimal. This resonates with international studies linking remote teaching and managerial surveillance to mental health strains (Blackmore & Sachs, 2007; Bond et al., 2021). A relatively new hire summed up the sentiment:

"I appreciate when my department chair reminds us to 'log off,' but there's no actual policy. The system still expects 24/7 availability." (Faculty #27, 3 years of service)

These accounts suggest a gap in university support systems, pointing to both the intensification of managerial imperatives and the critical need for well-being measures in the post-pandemic landscape. The desire for more holistic solutions—ranging from workload reassignments to official guidelines on online availability—remains largely unmet, illustrating a disjunction between institutional rhetoric about "innovation" and the lived realities of faculty under heightened scrutiny.

Ultimately, this expanded discussion of burnout completes the portrait of how loyalty, effectiveness, privilege, and digital accountability intersect to shape faculty identities at UACJ. Such dynamics illustrate the dialectical nature of subjectivation, revealing the interplay between top-down governance and the micro-practices of self-care, resistance, and solidarity that have emerged. As Section 6 will highlight, Foucauldian notions of governmentality and practices of freedom help further analyse how intensified managerial control coexists with new forms of academic self-fashioning and resistance.

Discussion and Limitations

The insights offered in the previous sections—particularly the intensification of digital surveillance, global rankings, and the post-pandemic pivot to remote oversight—reveal how power operates in contemporary universities through evolving mechanisms. The newly gathered interview data also underscore faculty concerns about TEAMS-based monitoring, blurred work-life boundaries, and ongoing managerial directives. Taken together, these findings make Foucauldian concepts such as governmentality, practices of freedom, and ethical self-formation especially pertinent, providing a lens to interpret both the consolidation of managerial control and the resilience of resistance within UACJ (Foucault, 1987, 1997). Below, each subsection elaborates how these new data reinforce or extend Foucault's analysis, before considering alternative governance models and the study's limitations.

Governmentality and the "Pandemic University" revisited

Foucault's notion of governmentality (Foucault, 2007) highlights how power transcends hierarchical authority, infiltrating domains like health

protocols, technology adoption, and discourses of "efficiency." The COVID-19 crisis accelerated this process globally: at UACJ, emergency governance centralized decisions on campus operations, digital teaching mandates, and public health measures, often at the expense of more consultative processes (Peters et al., 2020; Watermeyer et al., 2021). Although these measures addressed urgent needs, they also introduced or magnified practices that normalized ongoing surveillance of academic activity.

In Foucauldian terms, embedding managerial logic into health-based policies expands the university's biopolitical reach (Han, 2020). Several faculty members noted that what began to "keep everyone safe" now emphasizes "keeping everyone accountable," as TEAMS logs and contact-tracking dashboards morph into routine oversight tools. Although some interviewees acknowledged the initial pandemic rationale, others viewed it as a subtle co-optation of health concerns to entrench managerial oversight. This illustrates how power often operates through seemingly neutral imperatives (Foucault, 2007), making crisis responses a conduit for deepening administrative control.

Practices of freedom in a digitally mediated age

The new data also affirm Foucault's key insight that where power expands, resistance emerges (Foucault, 1982). While TEAMS logs, big data tools, and LMS dashboards grant administrators increased capability to monitor teaching and research, they simultaneously enable faculty to subvert or reappropriate these systems. Some instructors reported using alternative chat platforms, such as WhatsApp, to coordinate lesson planning and share strategies for dealing with TEAMS demands:

"We formed a chat where we share tips on how to keep classes engaging without spending 24/7 on TEAMS. It's not official policy, but it helps us push back a bit." (Faculty #22, 6 years of service)

Such micro-collectives exemplify collaborative accountability rather than top-down surveillance. Others adopted open-source platforms or minimized synchronous sessions, recasting digital spaces as potential sites of pedagogical agency (Castañeda & Selwyn, 2018). While these acts do not eliminate managerial oversight, they reveal that practices of freedom can flourish within regulated systems. Indeed, some union-led initiatives and faculty alliances proposed alternative measures of teaching quality emphasizing peer review or community impact over quantitative engagement metrics (Mbembe, 2016).

Ethical self-formation: from the "Privileged Academic" to reflective praxis

Foucault's later writings on ethical self-formation (Foucault, 2002) also resonate with the updated findings. The "privileged academic" archetype—someone digitally adept, meeting global ranking benchmarks, and embracing the latest edtech—remains central in official UACJ discourse. Yet many academics described consciously reconfiguring this model, identifying as "public intellectuals" dedicated to social justice, health equity, or empathetic pedagogies (Aidnik & Sharma, 2023).

Acknowledging post-pandemic inequities, some instructors emphasized reflexive or empathetic teaching, mindful that certain students face technological or psychological barriers. A few openly questioned whether "excellence" should be tied to citation metrics or rank positions, stressing broader definitions of scholarly impact:

"I've shifted my goals. Instead of chasing Q1 journals, I'm working with local NGOs on health initiatives. It won't boost my ranking stats, but it feels more impactful." (Faculty #11, 10 years of service)

Such moves capture a dynamic subjectivation, wherein academics selectively adopt or resist institutional frameworks, guided by moral and political commitments that transcend purely neoliberal mandates (Foucault, 1987, 1997). While one cannot entirely escape administrative categorization, these ethical reorientations illustrate how subjectivity remains contested and open to reinvention.

Alternative governance models as counterpoints to managerial reforms

The interviews also indicate growing interest among faculty in alternative governance models that might alleviate burnout or alienation. Many interviewees felt sidelined during pandemic decision-making but pointed to international experiments suggesting more democratic approaches. Some cited partial forms of co-governance, inspired by historical examples in Latin America, or European participatory budgeting practices, where faculty–student committees oversee resource allocation (Bernasconi, 2024).

Others referred to community-based councils, akin to those found in parts of Canada, which integrate local stakeholders and social considerations into academic planning. While none of these models is fully operational at UACJ, participants engaged in union activism or departmental forums expressed that such designs could temper the more corrosive effects of managerial logics. This aligns with Foucauldian readings that see power as relational and institutionally mutable, allowing for structures that honour ethical reflexivity over purely market-driven mandates (Morales Santillán, 2022).

Limitations

Despite offering valuable insights into how neoliberal imperatives, digital surveillance, and pandemic governance shape academic subjectivities, this study has several constraints:

1. Qualitative Emphasis
   The research is grounded in genealogical-archaeological analysis and qualitative interviews. While these methods yield rich, contextual understandings, they do not provide quantitative metrics for triangulating the findings. Future investigations could integrate mixed methods—for example, statistical analyses of faculty workload or publication output—to further validate these insights.
2. Single-Institution Focus
   Although UACJ shares traits with other Latin American public universities, the findings may not translate seamlessly to institutions elsewhere. Comparative multi-site research could clarify whether the patterns of burnout, digital oversight, and ethical self-fashioning documented here are prevalent in varying national or cultural contexts.
3. Evolving Pandemic Context
   While this study captures shifts before and after 2015, as well as faculty perceptions in the post-2020 environment, the repercussions of the pandemic continue to evolve. Ethnographies or longitudinal panel studies conducted over several years may be needed to fully track how institutional policies and faculty attitudes adapt in a post-pandemic era.
4. Foucauldian Framework
   The analysis privileges a Foucauldian lens focusing on power, subjectivation, and resistance. Alternative theoretical perspectives—such as critical political economy, decolonial studies, or intersectional frameworks—might reveal additional layers of inequality or structural factors affecting academic labour. Incorporating such viewpoints could expand understanding of how managerial imperatives are both enacted and contested within broader societal forces.

Despite these limitations, the study provides crucial insights into how market-driven imperatives, digitally enabled oversight, and global ranking pressures converge to produce new forms of academic subjectivity—forms that, while constrained, remain open to redefinition through ethical, political, and collective interventions. By integrating recent data on TEAMS usage and faculty burnout, the analysis underscores how even intensified oversight can provoke innovative pushbacks, affirming that higher education is a contested space where power is never absolute, and freedom is continually reimagined.

Conclusions and Implications

Revisiting the research questions

Before moving on to the overall conclusions, it is helpful to circle back to the four main research questions outlined at the start of this article. Each question guided the analytical framework and the selection of data, shaping our Foucauldian investigation into how academic subjectivities are produced, negotiated, and resisted in a rapidly changing university landscape.

1. Shifts in Managerial Governance
   How have the discourses of accountability, digitalization, and neoliberal reform shifted or intensified the managerial governance of universities post-2015?
   Sections 4 and 5 offered a detailed account of how global rankings, performance metrics, and pandemic-era crisis governance converged to deepen managerial oversight. These mechanisms, rooted in earlier performance-based funding models (Montano, 2015), evolved to incorporate remote-teaching protocols and real-time analytics, thereby reinforcing the managerial ethos in public universities (Marginson, 2018; Castañeda & Selwyn, 2018). The reliance on TEAMS and similar platforms further expanded accountability regimes beyond traditional funding criteria, integrating continuous digital surveillance into daily academic routines.
2. Academic Subjectivities: Control and Resistance
   In what ways are academic subjectivities shaped, controlled, or resisted under these new or deepened imperatives, and what local variations appear?
   As discussed in Sections 5 and 6, academics at UACJ have been reconfigured as "loyal and effective" employees, expected to adapt seamlessly to digital surveillance and health mandates. Nevertheless, local adaptations and forms of resistance abound (Freire, 1970; Hodgkinson-Williams & Arinto, 2017). Union activism, micro-resistance via alternative pedagogies, and faculty alliances highlight that subjectivation is never monolithic (Foucault, 1982). Individual and collective acts—ranging from critical digital instruction to negotiating workloads—show how disciplinary cultures, administrative priorities, and bargaining traditions yield diverse expressions of compliance and pushback (Morales Santillán, 2022).
3. Foucauldian Tools for Capturing Shifts
   How might Foucauldian tools—dispositive analysis, genealogy, and archaeological description—be adapted to capture these shifts, including pandemic disruptions and the growth of digital platforms?

As Sections 2 and 3 detail, a genealogical-archaeological approach illuminates how seemingly "new" practices (e.g., TEAMS-based oversight) build upon earlier managerial structures (Silva, 2009). By tracing the historical contingency of terms like "modernization," "quality," or "excellence," we see how they are rearticulated to justify updated forms of digital governance (Foucault, 1977, 2006). Dispositive analysis aids in identifying the physical and technological instruments—ranging from campus reorganization to TEAMS logs and online metrics—that anchor these discourses of control in everyday academic life (Foucault, 1994). The rapid shift to remote teaching and centralized health policies exemplifies how older diapositives adapt, incorporating urgent new elements (Peters et al., 2020; Watermeyer et al., 2021).

4. Opportunities for Collective or Individual Resistance
   What opportunities for resistance arise, and how do they illustrate the potential for new forms of subjectivation and academic freedom?
   Although the managerial apparatus expanded—particularly under pandemic governance—Sections 5 and 6 show that it has not gone unchallenged. Faculty activism, open-source pedagogies, and humour or satire on social media constitute micro-resistances that question the "submissive, hyper-productive" academic ideal (Foucault, 1982; Trowler, 2010). Some academics also explore ethical self-formation by foregrounding community engagement, publishing in open-access platforms, or adopting collaborative frameworks for teaching. These strategies confirm Foucault's argument that no power relation is absolute, and that subjectivities may be reimagined through deliberate ethical and political commitments (Foucault, 1997, 2002).

Taken together, these findings illustrate how managerial logics have intensified under global competition and digitalization, yet they are also contested in various ways. The next subsection broadens these observations into a discussion of future directions for academic work and the tensions between institutional demands and practices of freedom in higher education.

Conclusion and broader implications

This study began by examining how neoliberal reforms, digital transformations, and pandemic-driven governance have reshaped academic identities and daily practices at the Autonomous University of Ciudad Juárez (UACJ). Drawing on Foucauldian concepts such as subjectivation, dispositive analysis, and genealogy, the discussion shows that earlier managerial logics—

centred on performance metrics and hierarchical oversight—were not simply maintained but reconfigured to incorporate global rankings, expanded analytics, and COVID-19 mandates.

The four research questions introduced at the outset each find illumination. First, post-2015 developments intensified accountability discourses, blending digital oversight with global competitiveness. Second, academic subjectivities were simultaneously constrained by data-oriented imperatives and energized by micro-resistances—through innovative pedagogy, union advocacy, or online satire. Third, Foucauldian tools effectively traced how pandemic disruptions and new platforms extended older notions of "quality" and "excellence." Finally, the potential for resistance persists, whether via open-source teaching, public scholarship, or alliances focused on faculty well-being.

A key insight is that the pandemic normalized digital surveillance, embedding a managerial gaze into minute academic processes. While rhetoric praising "resilience" and "innovation" endures, many faculty face heavier workloads, near-constant connectivity, and uncertain boundaries (Bond et al., 2021; Watermeyer et al., 2021). Still, in keeping with Foucault's emphasis on counter-movements, some leverage new technologies to champion communal teaching practices and open educational resources that challenge standardized "excellence" metrics.

From a broader perspective, UACJ's case highlights that neoliberal and crisis-oriented strategies intersect with local histories, cultures, and funding traditions (Silva, 2009; Bernasconi, 2024). Although a "global script" of performance and digital compliance wields strong influence, it is never uniformly adopted. Future studies might explore whether similar intensifications and subversions appear across Europe, Asia, or Africa, and address intersectional inequalities often felt by marginalized academics (Ahmed, 2021).

Managerial consolidation does not signify the end of faculty autonomy. A genealogical lens suggests cyclical negotiations in which autonomy, critical pedagogy, and ethical self-formation reemerge (Freire, 1970; Foucault, 2002). Policymakers, administrators, and faculty leaders may rethink evaluation systems—incorporating social impact, creativity, and participatory approaches—to foster academic freedom and a "right to disconnect" (Marginson, 2018). Ultimately, a Foucauldian perspective underscores how subjectivities remain in flux, shaped by structural forces yet enriched by acts of transgression and self-creation. While digital and pandemic imperatives amplify governance, spaces for resistance and ethical reinvention endure, reminding us that higher education—and its academic subjects—possess the capacity for critical renewal, even amid crises and extensive institutional reforms.

Discussion: international significance, ongoing relevance, and contribution

International significance in relation to existing literature

The interplay of performance metrics, digital surveillance, and pandemic mandates at UACJ is far from unique to Mexico. Internationally, universities in the United States, the United Kingdom, and elsewhere are increasingly governed by neoliberal imperatives, global rankings, and data-driven oversight (Castañeda & Selwyn, 2018; Marginson, 2018; Watermeyer et al., 2021). Heightened by COVID-19, these developments often rely on platforms like TEAMS, which track real-time performance and expand administrative monitoring (Blackmore & Sachs, 2007). By situating UACJ within these global currents, this article underscores how localized adaptation, and resistance can emerge even under robust managerial oversight, aligning with comparative studies of similar transformations in higher education (Cordova et al., 2021; Bernasconi, 2024).

Beyond reiterating tensions such as accountability versus academic freedom, the discussion highlights region-specific reflections on TEAMS-based governance and faculty burnout.

Author's contribution and critical scientific opinion

This study moves beyond describing managerial reforms by adopting a critical Foucauldian lens, illustrating how these reforms discursively and materially produce "the academic subject" (Foucault, 1982, 1994). Rather than depicting universities as passive victims of neoliberalism, it emphasizes the active negotiation and contestation of managerial imperatives by faculty and administrators, revealing outcomes often overlooked in mainstream policy debates. By integrating faculty testimonials, workload data, and ethical self-formation frameworks, the analysis situates academics' lived realities at the core of the discussion.

Resistance and ethical experimentation are inseparable from the power apparatus they confront, enriching higher education reform literature that sometimes overlooks novel forms of subjectivity and well-being (including burnout). Furthermore, the article points to alternative governance models—such as participatory budgeting, collegial self-governance, and community-based councils—that, while imperfect, offer tangible pathways toward more democratic and faculty-centred structures.

Ongoing relevance of the 2015 data and the update to 2025

This research builds on findings from my 2015 doctoral work, which focused on institutional reforms and subjectivation processes at UACJ between 1999 and 2012. Although a decade has elapsed, that historical grounding remains crucial for understanding how earlier performance-based funding and departmental oversight paved the way for today's digitally intensified governance. Far from obsolete, these reforms continue to shape how new mandates—ranging from global rankings to TEAMS usage and pandemic policy—are adopted or resisted.

By juxtaposing the original data with post-2015 documents, interviews, and faculty testimonials (2020–2023), the paper exposes continuities in managerial logic alongside novel elements, such as big data analytics, ranking imperatives, and remote instruction. The older dataset clarifies why specific patterns of compliance and resistance remain deeply ingrained, while the updated material shows how crisis moments (like the pandemic) can accelerate or reconfigure established dynamics.

Global lessons, comparative insights, and future directions

Findings throughout this article illustrate how regional specificities—here, the Autonomous University of Ciudad Juárez—speak to broader international debates on academic surveillance, faculty well-being, and neoliberal reforms in higher education. While the empirical data derive from one Latin American context, similar patterns of "digital intensification" and managerial oversight have been observed in universities across multiple continents, indicating the global resonance of UACJ's experience.

Recent scholarship confirms that these challenges are not confined to a single region. In the United Kingdom, for example, Watermeyer et al. (2021) analyse the "emergency online migration" prompted by COVID-19, describing how faculty struggled with disrupted professional identities and increased digital accountability. Related concerns appear in Bond et al. (2021), who examine the "emergency pivot" to online learning and note how limited institutional support and ambiguous policies can intensify workload pressures and burnout. Australian and European studies, such as those by Castañeda & Selwyn (2018), likewise note how corporate platforms (including Microsoft TEAMS) often serve as tools for both pedagogical innovation and ceaseless performance measurement.

In Europe, Komljenovic (2021) suggests that digital governance frameworks intersect with managerial trends, potentially aggravating anxieties linked to "permanent audit" cultures. Blackmore & Sachs (2007) warns that prioritizing accountability metrics may induce moral distress among

academics who struggle to reconcile professional values with incessant demands for visibility and productivity. These observations closely align with the UACJ data, where faculty describe an incessant "on-call" culture conflating digital presence with effectiveness. Moreover, localized practices of resistance—be they union-led negotiations, open-source alternatives, or informal "quiet hours"—frequently surface wherever faculty autonomy is under threat (Slaughter & Rhoades, 2020).

Taken together, these comparative insights affirm that the post-pandemic university operates in a global environment that simultaneously demands technological efficiency and intensifies surveillance. Yet the scope for faculty agency, as well as the institutional capacity to acknowledge burnout and consider alternative governance models, remains highly variable across different socio-political and cultural contexts (Morales Santillán, 2022). In some Nordic institutions, co-governance traditions have mitigated the more corrosive effects of managerialism (Amsler & Shore, 2018), whereas in more centralized or market-driven systems, academics confront steeper barriers to contest top-down decisions.

As higher education continues to navigate post-pandemic realities, market pressures, and rapid technological shifts, the longitudinal viewpoint offered by this study can inform future debates on academic freedom, faculty well-being, and the convergence of older managerial structures with emerging digital platforms. By positioning UACJ's experience in dialogue with international literature, we see how a seemingly localized case enriches global understandings of power relations in the "digital university." Future research could expand these comparative lenses via multi-site ethnographies, cross-institutional surveys, or intersectional analyses that factor in gender, race, and precarity in academic employment. Additionally, applying alternative frameworks—such as critical political economy or decolonial perspectives—could clarify how managerial imperatives and local forms of resistance intersect within distinct historical and cultural settings (Creswell & Poth, 2018; Flick, 2018). Ultimately, such inquiries might spur participatory governance structures and well-being-focused policies, ensuring that digital transformation in higher education does not undermine faculty autonomy, ethical reflexivity, or the university's democratic ethos.

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