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## ► To cite this version:

Stéphanie Chatelain-Ponroy, Stéphanie Mignot-Gerard, Christine Musselin, Samuel Sponem. Is Commitment to Performance-based Management Compatible with Commitment to University “Publicness”? Academics’ Values in French Universities. *Organization Studies*, 2018, 39 (10), pp.1377 - 1401. 10.1177/0170840617717099 . hal-01892608

HAL Id: hal-01892608

<https://sciencespo.hal.science/hal-01892608>

Submitted on 10 Oct 2018

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Article

# Is Commitment to Performance-based Management Compatible with Commitment to University “Publicness”? Academics’ Values in French Universities

Organization Studies  
2018, Vol. 39(10) 1377–1401  
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sagepub.com/journals-permissions  
DOI: 10.1177/0170840617717099  
www.egosnet.org/os  


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## Abstract

Individuals’ values in the context of NPM-based reforms are a central theme in studies of public professional organizations. While organization studies mainly focus on “professional” values, research on public administration primarily addresses the issue of “public” values. This article brings these two research streams together in order to investigate the relationship between two sets of individual values—commitment to performance-based management and normative publicness—in the context of French public universities. It draws on a quantitative survey of academics involved in university governance. The study demonstrates that a positive attitude towards performance-based management is negatively correlated with commitment to university publicness; furthermore, it delineates different groups within the academic profession—according to professional status, managerial position within the organization, and the department’s reputation and ability to generate revenues—which have differing attitudes regarding performance-based management and university publicness.

## Keywords

new public management, performance, publicness, university, values

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## Introduction

This study analyzes public values in relation to the new public management (NPM) reforms initiated in the public sector. A core feature of NPM is the development of “explicit standards and measures of performance” (Hood, 1991, p. 4), and we investigate the extent to which adhering to a performance culture is compatible, or not, with maintaining public values in the public sector. Our study was carried out in France, a country with a powerful and extensive public sector. This sector is characterized by impersonal rules, fixed salary-scales, and the disinterested behavior of civil servants, reflecting a Weberian understanding of the *res publica*—or public good—(van Bockel & Noordegraf, 2006),

Public administration and organization scholars have made important contributions to studying the impact of NPM on values, but little effort has been made so far to connect these two research streams (Bozeman, 2013). Organization scholars interested in values in the context of NPM reforms, including those working in higher education studies, have mainly examined (changing) professional values (Henkel, 2000; Kallio, Kallio, Tienari, & Hyvönen, 2015; Osterloh, 2010; Slaughter & Rhoades, 2004; Sousa, de Nijs, & Hendriks, 2010; Ylijoki, 2003), leaving the specific issue of public values out of the spectrum. Yet, this issue is of major importance in the theories of public service motivation (PSM). The PSM stream of research shows that public values provide direction for public sector worker behavior (Andersen, Beck Jørgensen, Kjeldsen, Pedersen, & Vrangbæk, 2012a; Perry & Wise, 1990), and that the motivation of public sector workers has a positive (direct or indirect) impact on job satisfaction levels, organizational commitment, and individual performance (Kim, 2012; Perry, Hondeghem, & Wise, 2010). Beyond these significant contributions, more work is needed to understand how the dissemination of the values embodied in NPM reforms impacts the public values held by public sector workers.

The scarcity of empirical evidence on the link between NPM-based reforms and public values (Perry & Hondeghem, 2008; Rayner, Williams, Lawton, & Allinson, 2011) is all the more problematic that there is currently intense debate between authors who assert that the commitment to performance-based management is not antithetical to the public sector ethos (Donahue, 2008; Le Grand, 2003; Moore, 1995), and other authors who are more skeptical of this claim (Du Gay, 2000; Perry & Hondeghem, 2008). Du Gay (2008), in particular, forcefully questions the impact of the directives passed down from the NPM reforms on the ethics of public bureaucrats.

New empirical investigation is thus necessary to determine the extent to which the dissemination of a performance culture can be associated with the commitment to public values, and, in which organizational contexts the commitment to public values and performance culture is more prevalent.

Organization studies may help to explore this issue in two complementary ways. Firstly, the research on public administration has gathered little evidence about the “organizational” grounds of public values (Moynihan & Pandey, 2007). In particular, the varying positions occupied by public sector workers in their profession or organization have never been a topic for investigation; although, organization scientists have highlighted the fragmented nature of professions and the subsequent variety of values held by different professional groups (Ferlie & Gherarty, 2007; Leicht & Fennel, 2001; Reed, 1996). A second contribution by public organization scholars to the PSM field is the clarification of the concept of “public values.” Public values and PSM can be considered to be closely related, albeit distinct (Vandenabeele & Wan de Valle, 2008). PSM concerns the individual motivation to do good for others and society (Perry & Wise, 1990), whereas, public values (Bozeman, 2007) encompass the normative ideals in the public sector (Andersen, Jørgensen, Kjeldsen, Pedersen, & Vrangbæk, 2012b). Those ideals are deeply

embedded in the specific modes of governance found in public organizations (Andersen et al., 2012a); that is, their governmental ownership, funding, and control, which define their “publicness” (Andrews, Boyne, & Walker, 2011; Bozeman, 1987). The concept of “normative publicness,” located at the intersection between organization studies and public administration studies (Bozeman, 2013) can thus be relevant in appraising the public values held by public sector workers. As it refers directly to organizational aspects of public values, normative publicness is particularly useful in connecting organization and public administration issues.

The objective of this article is twofold. Firstly, we import into organization studies the critical issue of public values. Secondly, we investigate two issues that have received little attention in the literature on public values: the relationship between the commitment to performance-based management and public values, and the extent to which organizational positions shape civil servant public values.

By bridging the gap between the PSM and organization research streams, we offer two main contributions to the literature. Firstly, our examination of the links between the commitment to performance-based management and public values provides further empirical evidence that the commitment to performance-based management is difficult to reconcile with the commitment to publicness. Secondly, while organization studies have mainly examined the link between professional values and the commitment to performance-based management in the context of NPM reforms, this article draws attention to the public values of professionals. We show that the level of public values and the commitment to performance-based management differ according to the differentiated positions of civil servants in their profession. More specifically, we highlight the similarity of values held by members of executive teams, high-status professionals, and professionals working in units that generate financial resources—but find an unexpected, atypical association between these two sets of values for academics working in highly reputed departments or faculties.

These findings are drawn from a study of academics involved in the governance of French universities (university presidents and vice-presidents, deans, department chairs, directors of research units, and academics elected to university boards). These people are in the front line of performance-based reforms and experience the tensions and dilemmas of constructing multiple identities (Deem, Hillyard, & Reed, 2007; Henkel, 2000; Parker, 2011). Moreover, the French case is particularly well suited to this research, because in France, the governance of higher education is state-centered (Dobbins, Knill, & Vögtle, 2011), and most French academics are public sector workers (Chevaillier, 2001). Furthermore, French universities are mostly funded, owned, and controlled by the state, and the support for the commitment to university publicness is traditionally strong. Nevertheless, higher education in France has undergone far-reaching reforms in recent years that have put performance at the forefront (Boitier & Rivière, 2013). The consequences of the increasing use of performance-based measures do not intend to be merely “technical.” These reforms involve “a shift in the organizational culture [and require] a move from a resource-based culture to a results-based culture, a performance-based culture” (AMUE, 2012, p. 16). Studying the values of French academic leaders is thus particularly relevant for examining how far public servants can be simultaneously committed to performance-based management and to publicness.

The remainder of the article is organized as follows. Firstly, we discuss the relationship between the commitment to performance-based management and public values, understood as the commitment to publicness. In the second section, we explore the extent to which their positions in their organization shape the values of civil servants. We then describe our methodology and measures in the third section. The fourth and fifth sections outline our results and subsequent discussion respectively.

## **Commitment to Performance-based Management and Commitment to University Publicness**

### *From public values to “commitment to university publicness”*

The definition of public values is very broad. Based on a large literature review, Jorgensen and Bozeman (2007) identified 72 values considered as public. These values can be seen as “the ideals to be followed when providing a public service” (Andersen et al., 2012b, p. 293).

The broad and loose definition of public values has given rise to many debates about the concepts of public service motivation (Kim et al., 2013), public service values (Witesman & Walters, 2013) and public service ethos (Rayner et al., 2011), as well as the difficulties of operationalizing their measurement (Andersen et al., 2012b), their possible variations across different cultural and national contexts (Kim et al., 2013), and their application to the public sector alone (Meynhardt, Gomez, & Schweizer, 2014; Van Der Wal, De Graaf, & Lasthuizen, 2008).

Because of the large scope of the concept of public values, our study focuses on “normative publicness” (Bozeman & Moulton, 2011). The original purpose of the concept of publicness was to distinguish between public and private organizations; this approach is usually termed “empirical publicness” (Bozeman & Moulton, 2011). But publicness also refers to a normative approach, called “normative publicness,” “an approach to values analysis assuming that a knowledge of the political and economic authority of institutions and policies is a prerequisite of understanding the potential of institutions and policies to achieve public values and to work toward public interest ideals” (Bozeman, 2007, p. 18). In sum, “empirical publicness” characterizes the public nature of organizations, while “normative publicness” identifies public values within them (Antonsen & Jorgensen, 1997). Drawing on Antonsen and Jorgensen’s research, we thus define normative publicness in higher education as academics’ attachment to university publicness. In line with the core model of publicness, normative publicness refers here to individuals’ adherence to public organizations’ public ownership, control and funding (Andrews et al., 2011; Bozeman, 1987; Perry & Rainey, 1988).

There is a critical need to address normative publicness in higher education. Many authors have observed that control over universities is increasingly reliant on market forces and financialization (Beverungen, Hoedemaekers, & Veldman, 2014), making academic institutions more dependent on economic authorities (Chait, 2002; Clark, 2006; Gumport, 2002; Kirp, 2004; Williams, 2004). This growing privateness—generally referred to by the ill-defined concept of “privatization” (Fryar, 2012; Marginson, 2007)—gives rise to far-reaching changes in universities, principally the “marketization” or “commodification” of academic activities, the transformation of teaching and research into private goods that can be bought and provide individual rather than collective benefits (Just & Huffman, 2009; McMahon, 2009); the increase in resources received from the private sector (businesses or families) (Mohrman, Ma, & Baker, 2008) and the rise of “academic capitalism” as a norm and behavior trait of academics working in contemporary universities (Slaughter & Rhoades, 2004). In sum, many authors assert that universities’ publicness is being eroded.

### *New public management, commitment to performance-based management and publicness*

NPM-based reforms are “deliberate changes to the structure and processes of public sector organizations with the objective of getting them ... to run better” (Pollitt & Bouckaert, 2000, p. 8). They are seen as a significant driver for evolutions in the public sector, including higher education. Attempts to analyze NPM’s compatibility with the upholding of public values (Ferlie, Pettigrew, Ashburner, & Fitzgerald, 1996; Lane, 2000) have led to two competing views in the literature.

The first of these views argues that performance-based management is not antithetical to public values. This perspective is supported by Moore (2013), who stresses the importance of “public value” while also supporting public managers’ efforts to manage performance (Rutgers & Overeem, 2014), and by other authors who observe the emergence of a new public ethos (Brereton & Temple, 1999). This new public service ethos involves a performance culture, a commitment to accountability, and a capacity to support universal access and responsible employment practices (Aldridge & Stoker, 2002). The proponents of this new public service ethos explicitly consider that all providers of public services—including the private ones—should adopt the values of customer satisfaction and performance (Stoker, 2006, p. 48). If most of these authors adopt a quite normative stance (Bozeman, 2007; Rutgers & Overeem, 2014; Williams & Shearer, 2011), some empirically find compatibility between an increase in performance management and the maintenance of public values. For instance, Van der Wal et al. (2008) show that “effectiveness” ranks among the top values to which public managers subscribe but do not observe that adherence to “business-like” values degrades classical public values (Van der Wal et al., 2008, p. 476).

By contrast, the second view asserts that the public service motivation or public sector/service ethos is threatened by public reforms that are promoting the culture, practices, and instruments of performance management (Arnaboldi, Lapsley, & Steccolini, 2015; Modell, 2003; Moynihan, 2010; Parker, 2013; Rhodes, 1994). In this stream of research, not only is the positive impact of NPM reforms on actual performance sometimes questioned (Hvidman & Andersen, 2014; Speklé & Verbeeten, 2014), but NPM is largely seen as suffering from a lack of “publicness” (Pollitt, 2013; Pollitt & Bouckaert, 2000).

One consequence of these reforms is to modify the type of control exercised on public servants and public organizations, from the bureaucratic to the market-oriented (Broadbent & Laughlin, 1998; Pollitt & Bouckaert, 2000). Furthermore, they blur the lines between public and private: public missions can be delivered by private organizations; private funding can be sought to create private-public partnerships; and methods and practices developed in private firms can be implemented in public services (Hood, 1995). Du Gay (2000, 2005) concludes that the intrinsic ideas of the NPM paradigm thus severely impair the Weberian bureaucratic ethos in the public sector.

Although a strict definition of NPM does not necessarily encompass market logics, it always emphasizes an “accounting logic” (Broadbent & Laughlin, 1998) of performance-based management (Pollitt & Bouckaert, 2000), which is usually “associated with setting clear organizational goals, specifying targets and indicators to link goals to performance outcomes, and taking action to influence achievement against targets” (Walker, Damanpour, & Devece, 2011, p. 371). But these reforms do not simply introduce new performance management tools (Bouckaert & Halligan, 2006), they also enact an “identity project” (Du Gay, 1996; Meyer & Hammerschid, 2006). Van Bockel and Noordegraf (2006) argue that performance-driven NPM instruments are not merely about instrumental change, but also about identities’ change; in other words, they are held to support the emergence of a “results-oriented culture” (Verbeeten & Speklé, 2015, p. 954) within public organizations.

Drawing on these studies, we hypothesize that academics who support performance-based management reforms may also be less sensitive to public service ideals and university publicness:

*H1: Commitment to performance-based management is negatively linked to commitment to university publicness.*

In the next section, we discuss how these two commitments may vary according to academics’ roles and status.

## **Professional Fragmentation in Universities, Commitment to Performance-based Management and Commitment to Publicness**

### *Performance-based management in higher education and professional identities*

In the field of higher education studies, the debate over values in the context of NPM-based reforms is largely framed by the traditional divide between managerialism and professionalism (Freidson, 1986; Gleeson & Knights, 2006). Most authors have examined the extent to which the professional ethos of academics is affected by managerialism (Henkel, 2000; Kallio et al., 2015; Osterloh, 2010; Slaughter & Rhoades, 2004; Sousa et al., 2010; Ylijoki, 2003).

There is arguably some overlap between professional and public values. As shown by the sociology of professions, professionals hold prestige and legitimacy because their knowledge is valued by society at large (Goode, 1957; Parsons, 1954); in turn, they are expected to be committed to the service of the public (Aranya, Pollock, & Amernic, 1981). Public values can therefore be regarded as an integral part of professional values (Koehn, 1994). When addressing managerialism and professionalism, higher education studies, however, do not focus specifically on the relationship between NPM reforms and the commitment to publicness; rather, they investigate the transformations of academic identities or norms. Building on the Humboldtian model, they expect the freedom of teaching and research to be challenged by the “McDonaldization of higher education” (Hayes & Wynyard, 2002); the core place of teaching and research in academic identities to be superseded by “academic capitalism” (Slaughter & Rhoades, 2004), and the attachment to collegiality to be disturbed by the development of managerial chains of command (Tapper & Palfreyman, 2000). None of these values are public per se, but rather, reflect the individual interests of academic professionals protecting their autonomy in building careers, prestige, or status (Bourdieu, 1988). The rare contributions that tackle the issue of academic public values (Deem et al., 2007; Macfarlane & Cheng, 2008) do not address the specific problem of the commitment to publicness.

Instead, those studies interestingly highlight the blurring of academic identities. While academics, especially those holding managerial positions, have partly internalized the “audit” or “results-based” culture (Power, 1997) promoted by NPM reforms (Deem et al., 2007), they simultaneously continue to subscribe to their academic ethos (Henkel, 2000; Kallio et al., 2015; Sousa et al., 2010; Teelken, 2015). However, because the academic profession—like many other professions—is becoming increasingly fragmented, it is important to identify which actors in the profession are more likely to adopt these sets of values.

### *Professionals in the public sector: The fragmentation thesis*

Professions are characterized by variable constituent elements, and all have internal divisions; they are neither equivalent nor homogeneous entities (Bezes et al., 2012), and their responses to NPM reforms differ accordingly. For example, Thomas and Davies (2005) have highlighted the varying capacities of different professional groups to resist NPM reforms. Suddaby, Gendron, and Lam (2009) argue that work context, work content, position in the organization, and the organizational field are important factors explaining the degree to which accountants subscribe to managerialist values. Acknowledgement of the fragmented nature of professionals working in public services thus raises the question of whether different social groups in their profession share identical values.

Building on studies stressing the diversity of the academic profession (Becher, 1989; Owen-Smith & Powell, 2001), we seek to identify which groups of academics support or reject performance-based management and university publicness. We expect academics’ responses to vary according to their own position in their professional group.

## *The fragmentation of university professionals: Reputation, resources, status and membership of executive teams*

*Academic units' reputation and resources.* We first expect variations between highly-reputed academic units that are able to secure funding, and the rest. Besides the epistemic cultures (Knorr Cetina, 2009) of academic disciplines, a key factor of differentiation between academic units is their ability to acquire resources, either symbolic or concrete. The seminal work of Salancik and Pfeffer (1974) brought to light the power imbalance between university departments that accumulate external resources (scientific prestige and financial assets), and others that are short of such resources. As Musselin, Barrier, Boubal, and Soubiron (2012) show, the members of the most powerful academic units are quite supportive of the recent reforms in France, while academics belonging to departments depending on the resources of their university are much more skeptical and in some cases opposed to the managerial performance criteria introduced by the State. Because the most prestigious fields or units are the ones generating revenues (external funding through scientific grants, or public funding based on student numbers), their members may also be more sensitive to performance-based values, hence less committed to university publicness.

Building on these findings, we propose the following hypotheses:

*H2: Academics in highly-reputed units are more committed to performance-based management and less committed to university publicness than other academics*

*H3: Academics in units that generate revenues (external financial resources) are more committed to performance-based management and less committed to university publicness than other academics.*

*Academics' individual status.* The significance of “status” in generating individual values, norms, and identities has been evidenced in general sociology (Bourdieu, 2010) as well as in organizations (Alvesson & Robertson, 2006). The sociology of science (Merton, 1973) has also pointed to the endurance of the value of meritocracy—i.e., the expectation that individual performance and rewards should be linked—among scientists. Both commitments to performance-based management and university publicness are thus expected to be influenced by individuals' career paths and professional achievement. Gumpert (1993) stressed that individual achievement encourages more positive attitudes towards the recognition of performance: full professors recognized as “faculty stars” support managerial decisions to implement cutbacks for “poorly-performing” schools. Building on these studies, we assume that academics with the highest status (those benefiting from the greatest professional rewards, having reached the status of full professor or senior researcher<sup>1</sup>) are more committed to performance-based management and may be less attached to public values than academics holding a lower status:

*H4: Professionals with the highest status are more committed to performance-based management—and less committed to university publicness—than other academics.*

*Executive teams versus lower-level managers.* The literature on professionals in organizations has stressed that their progress up the organizational hierarchy shapes professional values: the higher his or her level in the organizational hierarchy, the more an individual's values are subordinated to managerial concerns (Leicht & Fennell, 2001). Empirical evidence of this phenomenon has been observed in different settings such as accounting firms (Cooper & Robson, 2006; Suddaby et al., 2009) and law firms (Lazega, 2001). In universities too, there is a schism between the “academic



manager” and the “managed academic” (Winter, 2009). Several studies nonetheless point out that with the rise of NPM, academic leaders have multiple identities and subscribe to managerial logics while keeping a strong commitment to academic values (Deem et al., 2007; Smith, 2008). Despite the inherent ambiguities of academic leadership, the literature highlights a difference in stance between people appointed or elected to the university’s central executive bodies (members of the “executive teams” holding positions as president or vice-presidents) and people heading academic sub-units. Whereas executive institutional leaders have largely internalized externally defined policies and adopted managerial values (Henkel, 2011), academic leaders at “shop floor” level (i.e., deans, department heads, research group heads, etc.) appear to be wary of managerial logics and harbor a deep-seated respect for academic norms and values (Meek, Goedegebuure, Santiago, & Carvalho, 2010; Mignot-Gérard & Musselin, 2002; Sousa et al., 2010).

We therefore expect to find that the farther managers are from teaching and/or research, the more committed they are both to performance-based management and university privateness. As a result, managers on universities’ executive teams are likely to be more committed to those values than academic managers such as deans, department chairs and directors of research units:

*H5: Academics remote from the university’s teaching and/or research activities (i.e., members of executive teams) are more committed to performance-based management, and less committed to university publicness, than academics managing university sub-units (faculties/schools, departments, research centers).*

## Method

### *Samples and procedures*

The data used for this study were collected by a questionnaire sent to the actors involved in the governance of all French universities (both academic and administrative staff). The French case is particularly well suited to this research for two reasons: the traditional prevalence of public values among academics who are also public sector workers (Chevaillier, 2001), and the recent shift of the reforms towards an increase of performance management within French universities (Musselin, 2017).

Until the mid-2000, budgets were calculated according to data inputs (number of students, number of square meters, etc.) and evaluation was done a priori. This situation has changed dramatically over the past decade under the influence of three major shifts. First, ex post evaluation has progressively been given more attention than ex ante evaluation after the implementation of a new national budgetary law (the LOLF) in 2005 and the creation in 2006 of a national Agency for the evaluation of higher education and research (AERES, now renamed HCERES), which regularly assesses all research units, higher education institutions and teaching programs (Musselin, 2013). Second, in 2008, the calculation of university funding was modified to take into account the performance of universities’ research and teaching outputs, in addition to the traditional input measures such as the number of students, or the universities’ surface area (Chatelain-Ponroy, Mignot-Gérard, Musselin, & Sponem, 2014). Finally, project-based funding for both research and teaching gained in importance with the creation of the French National Research Council (ANR) and the development of a state program called Investissements d’avenir (Investments for the Future) to reward the research units and universities rated as “excellent” (awarded the LABEX and IDEX labels) (Aust & Musselin, 2014; Mignot-Gérard, 2012). These reforms aimed at introducing performance management and a culture of performance within public universities.

Our survey aimed at looking at these changes. The universities were informed in advance of the survey through the mailing list of the French Conference of University Presidents, and the Association of University Registrars. Links to online questionnaires were emailed to 7497

academics (members of executive teams, elected members of the decision-making bodies, deans, department chairs and laboratory directors) of all French universities. Each respondent was contacted separately: 1817 questionnaires were returned by academics (response rate: 24%) and 1289 questionnaires were usable for this study (missing data: below 10%).

## Measurements

All of the measurements used were collected on a seven-point Likert-type scale (1 = strongly disagree, 7 = strongly agree). To establish content validity, we reviewed the prior literature thoroughly and used it as a basis for our survey questions (see Appendix 1).

The measure of the commitment to university publicness is based on the definition of normative publicness proposed by Bozeman (1987), adapted to the context of universities (Fryar, 2012). Specifically, the level of commitment to university publicness (UniPub) was measured using six items that reflect the three dimensions of publicness proposed by Bozeman (1987). The first item measures academics' level of commitment to state ownership of universities as opposed to private ownership. Two items focus on the attachment to public funding. Three items evaluate the attachment to state control, by measuring the rejection of private sector involvement in the university's affairs, the rejection of increasing university presidents' power (in relation with the state) (Fryar, 2012) and the level of agreement with state intervention in the management of human resources.

Our measurement of commitment to performance-based management (PerfCom) captures the "different levels of commitment to performance management" (Dooren, Bouckaert, & Halligan, 2015). It is inspired by the measurement of result-oriented culture proposed by Verbeeten and Speklé (2015) and the measure of "management commitment to performance management" proposed by Cavalluzzo and Ittner (2004). We adapted these measures to reflect (i) the French system (ii) academics' commitment to performance-based management (instead of a more generic result-orientation). More specifically, we measure the commitment to performance-based management (PerfCom) through two main sets of questions and five items. The first set of questions concerns attitudes towards the instruments, devices and agencies in charge of evaluating or measuring performance (Cavalluzzo & Ittner, 2004; Verbeeten & Speklé, 2015), while the second focuses on the level of acceptance of factoring performance into funding criteria (Dooren et al., 2015), instead of applying budgeting processes that simply reproduce previous budgets (Wildavsky, 1964).

The measure of Reputation (Reput) is based on the measure of present image developed by Labianca, Fairbank, Thomas, Gioia, and Umphress (2001), adapted to the departmental level of universities (Chung, Harrison, & Reeve, 2009). Reputation is measured as the perceived quality and success of the respondent's department relatively to other units. The dimensions measured concern the quality and reputation of the degrees or other qualifications issued, the research reputation and the level of publication in academic journals.

The Resources variable is constructed as a composite latent variable, because different sources of funding have an impact on the entity's level of resources. For this formative measure, the indicators "jointly determine the conceptual and empirical meaning of the construct" (Jarvis, MacKenzie, & Podsakoff, 2003, p. 201). More specifically, the level of resources is measured as the combined ability of the department and the research unit to secure resources.

Two other dummy variables were included in the model. The relative proximity of academic leaders to operations and academic units was measured by their (non-) membership of the university's executive team (ExecTeam), through one item ("Are you a member of the university executive team?" yes/no). Their status was identified by the respondents themselves from a list of the several existing types of academics in France ("What is your current status?" doctoral student/part-time teacher/secondary teacher/assistant professor/CNRS junior researcher/CNRS senior

**Table 1.** Descriptive statistics ( $N = 1289$ ).

	Number of items	Theoretical range	Actual range	Mean	Standard deviation	Cronbachs Alpha	Composite Reliability
PerfCom	5	1–7	1–7	4.200	1.311	0.744	0.822
UniPub	6	1–7	1–7	4.966	1.239	0.739	0.820
Reput	5	1–7	1–7	5.213	1.051	0.800	0.841
Resources	2 (formative concept)	1–7	1–7	4.480	1.395	NA	NA
High status	1	0–1	0–1	0.610	0.488	NA	NA
ExecTeam	1	0–1	0–1	0.172	0.378	NA	NA

\*Range, mean and standard deviation statistics are based on the average of underlying item scores.

researcher/university professor). The *High Status* category thus concerns both “university professors” and “CNRS senior researchers.”

Reliability, convergent validity, and the discriminant validity of the measures were assessed using SmartPLS 3. Table 1 shows the characteristics of the three constructs we used. The Cronbach’s alphas are greater than 0.7, and all estimates of composite reliability exceed 0.8. This suggests an acceptable level of reliability (Hair, Hult, Ringle, & Sarstedt, 2017). The factor loadings of all items are in a range between .511 and .875 (see Figure 1).

The correlation estimates between the variables used range from 0.035 to 0.566 (Table 2).

For each of the three constructs used, the square root of the AVE is larger than the construct’s correlation with any other construct in the model. This suggests acceptable discriminant validity (Fornell & Larcker, 1981).

The statistical analysis suggests an acceptable level of reliability, convergent validity, and discriminant validity for the measures we used.

### Data analysis and measurement model evaluation

In order to estimate our theoretical model we performed a partial least squares (PLS) structural equation modeling (SEM) with SmartPLS 3 (Ringle, Wende, Becker, 2015). SEM integrates path analysis and factor analysis (Hair et al., 2017). It can simultaneously test all the relationships in the model and evaluate direct and indirect effects. The next section discusses the estimation results of the theoretical model. To evaluate the mediating effects, we follow the general recommendations given by Baron and Kenny (1986) and Zhao, Lynch, & Chen (2010), and the PLS-SEM-specific suggestions given by Hair et al. (2017).

## Results

The PLS structural model is assessed by examining the path coefficients, t-statistics and R2 values. A nonparametric bootstrapping procedure (5000 replications) was performed to test the significance of PLS path modeling. The model accounts for 34.9% of the variance in commitment to university publicness (see Figure 1). The standardized root mean square residual (SRMR) is at an acceptable level (SRMR = 0.098, below 0.1). In addition, VIF values of predictors are between 1.005 and 1.227, well below the threshold of 5. Therefore, collinearity among the predictor constructs is not a critical issue in the structural model. The hypothesis test results are reported in Table 3 below.

Hypothesis 1 postulates that commitment to performance-based management is negatively associated with commitment to university publicness. The relationship between commitment to

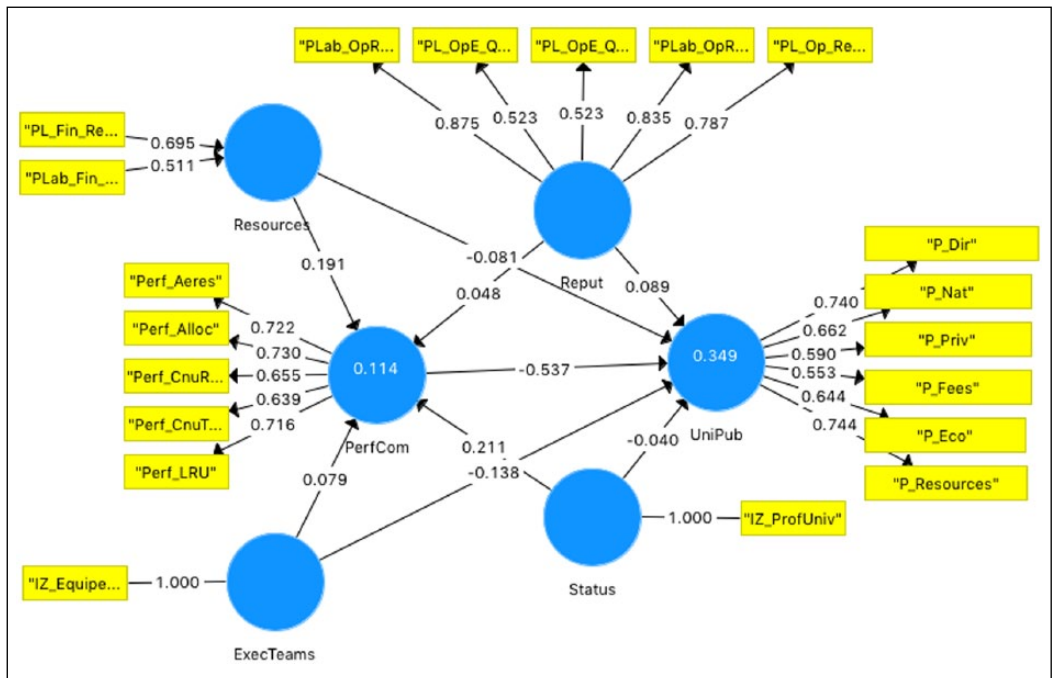


Figure 1. Inter-construct correlations.

performance-based management and commitment to university publicness is negative ( $\beta = -0.537$ ) and statistically significant at  $p < .01$ . The empirical result thus supports hypothesis 1: the higher an individual’s commitment to performance-based management, the lower his/her commitment to university publicness. In other words, individuals with high commitment to university publicness appear to have low commitment to performance-based management.

Hypothesis 2 postulates that academics in highly-reputed units are more committed to performance-based management and less committed to university publicness than other academics. Our data show that the link between reputation and commitment to performance-based management is positive ( $\beta = 0.048$ ) and significant ( $p < .01$ ). There is also a positive and significant link between reputation and the commitment to university publicness ( $\beta = 0.089$ ;  $p < .01$ ). There is an indirect negative significant link between reputation and commitment to university publicness ( $\beta = -0.026$ ;  $p < 0.1$ ). This shows that commitment to performance-based management acts as a “suppressor variable” on the association between high reputation and commitment to university publicness (Hair et al., 2017). Overall, the link between reputation and commitment to university publicness is positive and statistically significant ( $\beta = 0.063$ ;  $p < .1$ ). Hypothesis 2 is therefore not supported. Our results nevertheless suggest that academics’ commitment to university publicness is linked to the reputation of their work environment.

Hypothesis 3 postulates that academics in units that generate revenues (external financial resources) are more committed to performance-based management and less committed to university publicness than other academics. Access to resources shows a positive association with commitment to performance-based management ( $\beta = 0.191$ ;  $p < .01$ ) and a significant negative direct association with commitment to university publicness ( $\beta = -0.081$ ;  $p < .05$ ). The significant negative indirect association between access to resources and commitment to university publicness ( $\beta$

**Table 2.** Inter-construct correlations\*.

	ExecTeams	PerfCom	Reput	Resources	High Status	UniPub
ExecTeams	NA					
PerfCom	0.101	0.694				
Reput	0.035	0.163	0.725			
Resources	0.054	0.240	0.391	NA		
High Status	0.049	0.247	0.181	0.121	NA	
UniPub	-0.195	-0.566	-0.043	-0.188	-0.173	0.659

\*Values on the diagonal in the correlation matrix show the square root of the average variance extracted (AVE).

**Table 3.** Results of PLS model estimations (\* $p < 0.10$ ; \*\* $p < 0.05$ ; \*\*\* $p < 0.01$ ).

		Path coefficient (direct effect)	Indirect effect	Total effect
H1	PerfCom -> UniPub	-0.537***		
H2	Reput -> PerfCom	0.048*		
H2	Reput -> UniPub	0.089***	-0.026*	0.063*
H3	Resources -> PerfCom	0.191***		
H3	Resources -> UniPub	-0.081**	-0.103***	-0.184***
H4	High Status -> PerfCom	0.211***		
H4	High Status -> UniPub	-0.040*	-0.114***	-0.154***
H5	ExecTeam -> PerfCom	0.079***		
H5	ExecTeam -> UniPub	-0.138***	-0.042***	-0.180***

= -0.103;  $p < .01$ ) shows that commitment to performance-based management mediates the relationship between access to resources and commitment to university publicness. The mediating effect of the “commitment to performance-based management” variable between “access to resources” and “commitment to university publicness” is complementary to the direct effect. Hypothesis 3 is therefore validated: the ability to raise funds is positively associated with academics’ positive attitudes towards privateness and performance-based management.

Hypothesis 4 postulates that the highest-status professors and researchers are more committed to performance-based management—and less committed to university publicness—than other academic staff. The association between high status and commitment to performance is positive ( $\beta = 0.211$ ) and statistically significant ( $p < .01$ ). Our results confirm hypothesis 4: high-status academics are more committed to performance-based management than other academics. Conversely, the direct link between high status and commitment to university publicness is negative ( $\beta = -0.040$ ;  $p < .1$ ). In addition, there is an indirect significant association between high status and commitment to university publicness ( $\beta = -0.114$ ;  $p < .01$ ). Commitment to performance-based management further mediates the negative relationship between high status and commitment to university publicness. Our fourth hypothesis, that higher-ranking academics are less attached to university publicness, is therefore confirmed.

Hypothesis 5 postulates that academic managers not directly involved in teaching and/or research (i.e., members of executive teams) are more committed to performance-based management and less committed to university publicness than academics heading university sub-units. The association between executive team membership and commitment to performance-based management is

positive ( $\beta = .079$ ) and statistically significant ( $p < .01$ ). In addition, we observe that members of executive teams are less committed to university publicness than other academics (direct effect:  $\beta = -0.138$ ;  $p < .01$ ; indirect effect:  $\beta = -0.042$ ;  $p < .01$ ). Commitment to performance-based management is thus higher among academics involved in university governance at central level, and this commitment acts as a complementary mediator of the relationship between membership of an executive team and the commitment to university publicness: hypothesis 5 is validated.

Two final observations can be drawn from our results, concerning the extent of each variable's association with the others. First, commitment to university publicness is most closely associated with the attitude towards performance-based management ( $-0.537$ ). Second, for commitment to performance-based management, the closest association observed is with high status professionals and the department's ability to secure resources (respectively 0.211 and 0.191).

Overall, our model explains almost 35% of the variance in commitment to university publicness. Our analysis reveals that commitment to performance-based management mediates the association between reputation, access to resources, high status professionals, belonging to the executive team on one hand, and commitment to university publicness on the other hand.

## Discussion

This article contributes to the debate on the preservation of public values in the context of performance-based reforms by analyzing the public values—understood as the commitment to publicness—of academics working in French public universities, which have lately experienced far-reaching reforms aimed at instilling a “results-oriented culture.”

### *Commitment to performance and commitment to publicness: A conflict of values*

In line with our main hypothesis, we find a strong negative correlation between the commitment to publicness and the commitment to performance-based management. Such a result is important per se, as it provides an empirical grounding for the general idea that a performance ethos is difficult to reconcile with a public ethos (Du Gay, 1994). It also confirms studies that interpreted the decrease in public values as a consequence of the introduction of performance-based instruments (Meyer, Egger-Peitler, Höllerer, & Hammerschid, 2014; Moynihan, 2010). Two different mechanisms may account for this phenomenon. As performance instruments trigger anxiety, individuals are “reactive” to such measures (Espeland & Sauder, 2007), i.e., change their behavior when being evaluated, observed, or measured. As performance measurements set targets, individual motives become externally-driven; as their personal rewards are tightly linked to results, people subject to performance-based management may focus on the externally-defined objectives and lose sight of larger societal benefits (Moynihan, 2010), or, even become cynical and adopt amoral behavior, severely damaging the public service ethos (Talbot, 2007). A second mechanism relates to the “identity project” that underlies the introduction of performance management-based systems. If we extend this finding to the commitment to publicness, one can say that a lack of publicness may derive, not only, from the concrete uses of performance instruments, but also from their normative properties. As various authors (Miller & Power, 2013; Sauder & Espeland, 2009) have stressed, the quantitative measurement of performance fosters a certain kind of self, which compels individuals to develop an “entrepreneurial spirit” (Osborne & Gabler, 1992). Our study suggests that when academics personally subscribe to this vision, they may also expect their institutions to adopt the same entrepreneurial ethos, and therefore, come to consider that universities should be more independent from state authorities, and more proactive in the search for external funding.

It is, however, important to note that we only point to a negative correlation between the adhesion to a performance culture and a lack of commitment to publicness, which suggests that the reverse causality may also apply. Following Antonsen and Jorgensen (1997), who show that public organizations are reluctant to adopt performance-based reforms, it is possible to argue that public sector workers attached to publicness see public status, ownership, and control as a protection for the ideal of equality, a core feature of the public sector ethos in France. They might anticipate that the multiplication of performance instruments is likely to fuel an increase in stratification and differentiation among them, ultimately threatening the principle of equality. As a result, our study sheds light on a conflict of values, but one should be wary of the interpretation of the causation between the commitment to performance and the commitment to publicness.

### *The values divide between professional groups*

Our study corroborates research suggesting that top and middle management may react differently to organizational changes derived from reforms (Giauque, 2015; Meek et al., 2010). We observe that individuals in leadership functions at the university level are simultaneously more committed to performance-based management and less committed to public values than academics heading sub-units. This result deserves attention, as the great majority of research in both higher education studies (Rhoades & Sporn, 2002; Winter, 2009), and organization studies (Berg, 2006), highlights the tensions between people holding managerial positions and rank-and-file employees, but not among the former taken as a separate group.

As far as executive leaders are concerned, we show that university executives (presidents, vice-presidents) are favorable to reforms entailing further evaluation and performance measurement; a similar observation has been made in different contexts, such as American public universities (Rabovsky, 2014). With the enhancement of the universities' "actorhood" (Krücken & Meier, 2006), the introduction of performance-based management instruments primarily empowered academic leaders at the university level (Gumpert, 1993; Hardy, 1990; Yokoyama, 2006). Hence, the strong adherence of university leaders to performance-based management may be explained by the fact that performance measures reinforce their executive power. A similar explanation can be advanced regarding their low commitment to publicness; lower publicness means less control by the national authorities, subsequently giving institutions more independence, and the institutional leadership more leeway for discretionary decisions.

Our findings show that the deans, department heads and laboratory heads hold a different view of both performance-based management and publicness. Middle managers in universities are often depicted as "reluctant managers" (Santiago, Carvalho, Amaral, & Meek, 2006), who do not fully embrace the rhetoric of new managerialism (Deem et al., 2007). This observation is not specific to higher education. Studies conducted in the public health sector have come to similar conclusions (Giauque, 2015; Thomas & Linstead, 2002). One explanation lies in the position of middle managers in the organizational hierarchy: being both the controllers and the controlled, the resisters and the resisted, their identity is highly complex (Harding, Lee, & Ford, 2014). In addition, NPM-based reforms can bring in new constraints, such as, a higher workload linked to accountability, along with fewer organizational resources, leading to negative perceptions of change among middle management (Giauque, 2015). This argument is particularly relevant in explaining the dislike for performance-based management by academic sub-unit leaders in French universities. Mignot-Gérard (2006) already noted a conflict of values between university presidents and deans. This division possibly widened with the 2007 Law LRU that further increased the presidents' decision-making power at the expense of the intermediary levels of the organization (Musselin et al., 2012). Our study shows that the conflict of values between the top and middle management, occasionally

observed in different kinds of public organizations and universities in other countries, is particularly salient in French universities.

Unlike middle managers, high-status academics have a lot in common with the universities' top executive teams; in contrast to the rank and file academics, they are both supportive of performance-based management and less committed to university publicness. In line with Bezes et al. (2012), who encourage the identification of new patterns beyond the single opposition between managers and professionals, our study highlights potential disagreements between different ranks in the academic profession. This result converges with studies showing that as an academic climbs up the organizational ladder, he/she becomes increasingly subordinate to managerial concerns (Leicht & Fennel, 2001), or commercialistic values (Suddaby et al., 2009).

How can this be explained? One possibility is that for academics their access to a higher status is tied to their scientific performance, thus, "high flyers" might feel better able to meet the performance criteria, and better prepared to play the game of competition and meritocracy. Another explanation is that high-status academics are relatively indifferent to new performance measures, since such measures no longer impact them (contrary to the position of junior academics). Finally, and perhaps most importantly, as representatives of a "professional elite," they are frequently involved in the university ranking processes applied by national agencies (Musselin, 2013). Being actors in these processes makes them more sensitive to performance concerns.

The relatively high allegiance of high-ranking professionals to a decrease in public control, ownership, and funding is more difficult to explain. In private firms, seniors or partners are keen on commercialistic values because their jobs are heavily dependent on their ability to develop a new clientele (Aranya & Ferris, 1984; Lazega, 2001). But this explanation does not fit public universities, since the terms of employment for academics remain unchanged throughout their career. Our finding is particularly intriguing since several studies report a positive relationship between professional and public service motivation (DeHart-Davis, Marlowe, & Pandey, 2006; Moynihan & Pandey, 2007). These studies, however, define professionalism as belonging to a professional group, but do not look at the transformation of values during one's career and to hierarchies of status within a professional group. Our findings resonate interestingly with previous studies showing that public service motivation declines with tenure (Crewson, 1997; Moynihan & Pandey, 2007). Since, in the French university system junior and senior academics both have tenure, it could be argued that some joined universities with a strong commitment to public service but lost their enthusiasm over time. The decline of public values may be the result of discrepancies between the public service they expected to achieve at the beginning of their career, and what they feel they were actually able to accomplish (Perry & Hondeghem, 2008, p. 89).

Finally, and contrary to our expectations, the two different sources of academic department power, i.e., prestige, and the ability to generate revenue (Salancik & Pfeffer, 1974), do not lead to similar values. Individuals working in units that develop financial resources, and individuals who work in highly-reputed departments, both subscribe to performance-based management, but, clearly differ in their commitment to publicness.

The ability to generate external revenues goes hand in hand with a greater commitment to reforms stressing performance assessment, and a lower attachment to university publicness. In French universities, financial resources can be secured from partnerships developed with the private sector, and/or from successful project-based research funding applications to French and European research councils; as public research funding now relies more heavily than before on competition, academics who have been selected for funding may have a sharper taste for performance-based management. It is also possible that because research projects are growing and are increasingly formalized—structured by packages and deliverables—this industrialization of research production is drawing researchers closer to corporate values (Kleinman & Vallas, 2001).



In contrast, academics with a positive self-assessment of the quality and/or reputation of their units, who thus perform well in the reputation-based rankings of higher education institutions (Paradeise & Thoenig, 2013), still show a high commitment to publicness. A parallel can be drawn between the unexpected resilience of public values among these professionals and higher education studies demonstrating that academic values are particularly robust in “high-status institutions” (Paradeise & Thoenig, 2013; Tapper & Palfreyman, 2000; Townley, 1997). Our study offers two additional contributions. Firstly, it indicates that reputation may preserve not only professional values, but also public ones, and secondly, it highlights the fact that the reputations of sub-units are just as important as institutional reputation in accounting for individual values. This is unsurprising in the case of French universities, where—as in many continental European countries—low inter-university variance is associated with high intra-university variance (Paradeise & Thoenig, 2015).

Two different, but not wholly contradictory interpretations, may explain this result. The first one lies in rational choice theory; teaching units doing well in the present public system are competitive enough to access the symbolic resource of reputation and public funds provided on a meritocratic basis. Given that they have earned their reputation in this system, it is in their interest to maintain the *status quo* (Leblebici, Salancik, Copay, & King, 1991), and limit the increase in university privateness.

A second interpretation of the strong commitment to publicness stems from the theories of professional identity, which suggest that the most “established” professionals, holding elite knowledge and independence, are more willing to accept and accommodate new coercive values and principles alongside traditional ones (Belorgey, 2010; Croft, Currie, & Lockett, 2015). The concomitance of the commitment to performance-based management and the commitment to publicness, may thus, be seen as a form of individual resistance to colonization by new systems (Denis, Ferlie, & Van Gestel, 2015, p. 280), enacted by groups empowered by a relatively greater professional recognition. This result suggests that an entity’s reputation and status can play an important role in explaining in which situations different institutional logics can coexist (Sauer mann & Stephan, 2013). Further investigation of this point could be worth pursuing.

## Conclusion

The aim of this paper is to connect the respective contributions of organization and public administration scholars to public professional organizations. The former looked at changes in professional values, but, rarely at those in public values. The latter studied the impact of public values on the motivation of public sector workers, but, paid little attention to the organizational basis of public values. We combine these two perspectives by investigating the extent to which the dissemination of performance-based management is associated with the commitment to public values—defined as commitment to publicness—in French public universities.

By examining the commitment of academics to university publicness, instead of focusing on the transformation (or stability) of academic values after the implementation of NPM reforms, we first observed that performance-based management conflicts with the commitment to publicness: individuals committed to performance are more in favor of private ownership, funding, and control, i.e., of privateness.

The fact that performance-based management might erode the commitment to publicness, should alert public authorities to the risks of instilling a results-oriented culture, that could be detrimental to public service motivation and the virtuous behaviors associated with it (Frey, Homberg, & Osterloh, 2013; Georgellis, Iossa, & Tabvuma, 2011). Given that public sector workers who

experience “employee-friendly organizational reforms” (cutting red tape and empowering employees) seem to report higher public service motivation (Moynihan & Pandey, 2007), the awareness of reformers regarding this point is particularly critical.

We also identified the organizational contexts in which the commitment to public values or performance culture is more prevalent, thus, showing that this is not an equally distributed attitude, but, that organizational grounds matter and should be taken into account when public values are studied. As a matter of fact, the positions of civil servants in their organization, their professional trajectory, the reputation of their unit and its capacity in getting grants, influence the relative commitment to public values or performance. High-level professionals working in units capable of generating funding, as well as, professionals holding top leadership positions are less committed to publicness.

While these results concern only one sector and one country, and should be interpreted carefully, they make important contributions and open up promising avenues for research.

Firstly, looking not only at changes in public values in the higher education systems of different countries, but also, in other public professional organizations, would be a fertile setting to test our results. More research on the transformation of academic public values in different national higher education systems is needed. Sector comparisons would also be fruitful; in particular, public hospitals, as pluralistic organizations (Denis, Lamothe, & Langley, 2001), could be an interesting case study to assess how far the professional segmentation that we highlighted here affects the public values of medical professionals. Secondly, this study invites an assessment of the extent to which values change over time, i.e., whether academics today are more or less committed than before to performance-based management and university publicness. To address this question, repeating this study several times in the future would be necessary. As values are often precursors of concrete practices and behaviors (Campbell, 1963; Summers, 1970), examining values in a given field is critical for anticipating future institutional changes (Greenwood & Hinings, 1996). Identifying the extent to which values are changing, which actors share those values, and whether they are able (by virtue of their position, status or influence) to disseminate them, therefore, opens up a further field of investigation. In the case studied in this article, this issue is particularly important given that the academic groups with the lowest commitment to publicness occupy powerful positions in the profession, and could be agents of the expansion of university privateness.

## Acknowledgements

We would like to acknowledge the helpful comments of Carla M. Bonina, Alphonse Da, Hamza El Kaddouri and participants at the 29th EGOS colloquium (2013), 4th RESUP International Conference (2014), and 36th AFC congress (2016) on an earlier draft of the paper. We are also grateful to senior editor Professor David Arellano-Gault, editor Professor Frank den Hond and the three anonymous reviewers for their constructive and encouraging suggestions.

## Funding

This research received no specific grant from any funding agency in the public, commercial, or not-for-profit sectors.

## Note

- 1 In France, tenured academics start their career as *maîtres de conférences* and can be promoted to *professeurs des universités* after they have achieved *habilitation à diriger des recherches* (authority to direct research) or when they pass a selective exam called *agrégation*. This means that some *maîtres de conférences* never become *professeurs*.

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**Appendix I.** Survey questions.**Commitment to university publicness**

P\_Priv. Are you in favor of universities becoming privately-funded foundations? (RC)

P\_Fees. In view of your university's available resources, are you in favor of an increase in tuition fees? (RC)

P\_Resources. In view of your university's available resources, are you in favor of an increase in the proportion of funding from private entities? (RC)

P\_Eco. Economic leaders should be more involved in university governance. (RC)

P\_Dir. What do you think about the greater powers conferred on universities' executive teams? (RC)

P\_Nat. Public sector human resources should be managed by the State.

**Commitment to performance-based management**

Perf\_Aeres. What do you think of the AERES evaluations of recent and future reforms?

Perf\_CnuTeaching. What do you think of the proposal for regular CNU assessment of faculty members' teaching performance in recent or future reforms\*?

Perf\_CnuResearch. What do you think of the proposal for regular CNU assessment of faculty research in recent or future reforms?

Perf\_Alloc. In view of your university's financial resources, should performance be a more important factor in the Ministry's allocation of university funding?

Perf\_LRU. Is assessment of faculty members under the LRU law beneficial because it promotes competition between them?

**Resources**

PL\_Fin\_Resources. Relative to other departments, is yours successful in obtaining resources?

PLab\_Fin\_Resources. Relative to other centers/laboratories, is yours successful in obtaining resources?

**Reputation/status**

PL\_OpE\_Quali. Relative to other departments, do the degrees (or other qualifications) issued by your department have a good reputation?

PL\_OpE\_Qualit. Relative to other departments, does your department deliver high-quality degrees (or other qualifications)?

PLab\_OpR\_Publi. Relative to other centers/laboratories, does your research team publish a lot?

PLab\_OpR\_Reput. Relative to other centers/laboratories, does your research team have a strong scientific reputation?

PL\_Op\_Reput. Relative to other departments, does your department have a strong scientific reputation?

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\*The CNU (*Comité National des Universités*) is a national committee in charge of faculty recruitment and career promotion. Every candidate for a permanent academic position (associate or full professor) must apply to the CNU before applying for positions offered by institutions. Based on examination of the scholars' publications and academic record, the CNU decides whether candidates are "qualified" to apply for academic jobs. In 2007, a reform proposal suggested that the CNU should in future be in charge of assessing individual academics' performance in both teaching and research. This proposal has not yet been implemented but is still hotly debated in the academic community.

**Summary:**

Found 235 name-date citations, including 21 with no matching reference

Found 160 references, including 13 unused

**Citations:**

(p. 3, l. 20) Andersen et al., 2012a

(p. 5, l. 20) Hvidman & Andersen, 2014

(p. 5, l. 20) Speklé & Verbeeten, 2014

**References:**

Musselin, C. (2004). *The Long March of French Universities*. New York: Routledge.

