The Conflict of Dual Roles in Higher Education

Why Educators Must Not Be University Administrators

Peter Kahl; published 21 June 2025 on Substack

Abstract

This paper addresses a critical yet under-examined structural conflict in higher education governance: the dual roles educators increasingly hold as both epistemic fiduciaries and institutional administrators. While critiques of managerialism in academia are widespread, I contribute uniquely by asserting that these dual roles inherently compromise educators' fiduciary duties—loyalty, care, and epistemic integrity—to students and disciplines. Drawing systematically upon fiduciary ethics (Smith, Miller), institutional theory (Barnett), and epistemic justice scholarship (Fricker, Anderson, Medina), I argue that educators' managerial roles create irreconcilable conflicts of interest. My original contribution extends beyond diagnosis by offering concrete institutional solutions, including clearly defined role boundaries, independent governance structures, fiduciary ethics training, and regular fiduciary audits. Ultimately, I demonstrate that structural separation is ethically imperative and institutionally feasible, necessary to protect the epistemic integrity, fiduciary accountability, and public trust essential for the future of higher education.

Keywords

higher education governance, fiduciary ethics, epistemic justice, managerialism, structural separation, institutional accountability, epistemic integrity, fiduciary duties, institutional ethics, dual-role conflict, educational policy, university administration, institutional reform, role boundaries, epistemic autonomy, fiduciary governance, educators' responsibilities, structural ethics, institutional trust, higher education reform

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1. Statement of Originality and Contribution

In this paper, I advance an argument that is surprisingly absent from contemporary debates on university governance:

> *Educators must remain independent epistemic fiduciaries, structurally separated from administrative or managerial roles.*

While the critique of managerialism in academia is widespread, my proposal goes further by articulating a clear ethical and fiduciary principle: the very act of teaching carries inherent epistemic duties that are fundamentally compromised when educators simultaneously occupy administrative positions.

This argument builds directly upon my previous work on epistemocracy, fiduciary openness, and epistemic justice. Specifically, my concept of 'epistemocracy'—the governance of knowledge institutions through fiduciary ethics and epistemic plurality—now leads me to the view that role separation is not merely desirable, but ethically required. By synthesising fiduciary theory (drawing especially from Lionel Smith and Paul B. Miller), epistemic justice (Fricker, Anderson, Medina), and critical pedagogy (Freire, Darder, de Souza), I construct a robust and persuasive ethical framework for institutional reform.

The originality of this contribution lies not in diagnosing managerial dysfunction, but in asserting a clear structural solution: educators' independence as epistemic fiduciaries must be institutionally guaranteed. To my knowledge, no previous scholarship frames educators as fiduciaries whose epistemic integrity demands clear institutional separation from administrative roles.

My goal is practical and constructive. While informed by deep theoretical grounding, this paper intentionally departs from typical scholarly conventions to argue assertively, ethically, and persuasively for concrete structural change. It provides institutions, policy-makers, and educators themselves with a coherent and ethically rigorous basis to reform governance structures—thereby restoring epistemic trust, legitimacy, and institutional integrity.

2. Introduction: The Problem of Dual Roles

2.1 Framing the Problem

In recent years, it has become increasingly common for educators within universities to assume managerial or administrative responsibilities. While this dual-role arrangement might appear pragmatic, it presents significant ethical and epistemic problems. In my previous work, I introduced the concept of Epistemocracy as a governance model centred on fiduciary and epistemic accountability {Kahl 2025, 'Epistemocracy in Higher Education'}. Here, I extend this framework by addressing a critical oversight: educators' administrative roles inherently compromise their fiduciary and epistemic responsibilities.

This chapter clarifies the ethical dimensions and practical implications of educators holding dual roles. I argue that to preserve epistemic integrity and institutional trust, educators must remain independent from managerial positions.

2.2 Definition of Key Terms

For clarity and consistency, I define several core concepts that will recur throughout this paper:

- **Fiduciary Duty**: A legal and ethical obligation requiring one party (the fiduciary) to act solely and exclusively in the best interests of another party (the beneficiary). Such a duty comprises obligations of loyalty, care, and transparency {Smith 2014; Miller 2018}. In the educational context, educators serve as fiduciaries, and students and academic disciplines constitute their beneficiaries.

- **Epistemic Integrity**: An ethical commitment to truthfulness, intellectual openness, honesty, and resistance to epistemic injustice or distortion {Fricker 2007; Anderson 2006}. Epistemic integrity obligates educators to uphold rigorous standards of knowledge production and dissemination.

- **Managerial Capture**: A situation where epistemic actors (such as educators) adopt administrative logics, priorities, or incentives, thereby compromising their epistemic autonomy and fiduciary duties {Barnett 2013; Darder 2017}. Managerial capture can lead to decisions driven primarily by institutional interests, potentially at the expense of pedagogical quality and epistemic fairness.

- **Dual-Role Conflict**: A situation in which educators' fiduciary obligations to students and scholarly communities directly conflict with their administrative responsibilities toward institutional reputation, budget constraints, or operational performance {Kahl 2025, 'The Cult of Personality in Academia'}.

These terms provide clarity and precision, ensuring consistency throughout subsequent discussions.

2.3 Illustrative Example of Role Conflict: Curricular Integrity vs Revenue Generation

To illustrate concretely the fiduciary conflicts that arise from dual roles, consider the hypothetical—but realistic—scenario of a departmental head simultaneously responsible for pedagogical leadership and institutional enrolment management. In this dual managerial-academic role, the educator must approve new academic programmes designed to attract international students primarily for their financial profitability.

In meeting institutional enrolment and revenue targets, the departmental head faces strong managerial pressure to approve courses with broad appeal but reduced academic rigour—curricula that dilute disciplinary content, lower assessment standards, or compromise teaching quality to maximise enrolment numbers. However, as an epistemic fiduciary entrusted with safeguarding educational rigour and students' academic interests, this educator has an ethical obligation to reject curricular proposals that compromise disciplinary integrity and pedagogical quality.

If the educator yields to managerial pressures, serious practical consequences emerge. Students enrolled in compromised programmes graduate without adequate disciplinary competencies, weakening their professional prospects and undermining the institution's reputation for academic excellence. Over time, this leads to diminished institutional credibility, negative employer perceptions, and reduced long-term enrolments—precisely the outcomes managerial strategies sought to avoid.

This scenario vividly illustrates the direct ethical conflict between managerial and fiduciary obligations inherent in dual-role arrangements. It underscores the practical urgency of structural separation: educators must be institutionally shielded from managerial pressures that inevitably compromise fiduciary duties of loyalty, care, and epistemic responsibility (these fiduciary duties are further detailed in Chapter 3.1).

Thus, the scenario presented here serves as a practical grounding and clear introductory example, framing the in-depth exploration of fiduciary theory and conflict of duties in subsequent chapters.

2.4 Scholarly Context and Literature Review

My analysis engages with several critical scholarly traditions, each providing distinct yet complementary insights:

- **Fiduciary Ethics**: Fiduciary theory, particularly as developed by Lionel Smith {Smith 2014} and Paul B. Miller {Miller 2018, 2020}, clarifies the precise nature of ethical obligations in trust-based relationships. Although extensively discussed in legal and financial contexts, its application to educational institutions remains underexplored—a gap my argument directly addresses.

- **Institutional Theory and Epistemic Governance**: Ron Barnett's influential work {Barnett 2013, 2018} critiques managerialism in universities, highlighting how commercial logic undermines epistemic and pedagogical autonomy. My analysis extends Barnett's critique , proposing clear structural solutions.

- **Epistemic Justice and Democracy**: Scholars such as Miranda Fricker {Fricker 2007}, Elizabeth Anderson {Anderson 2006}, and José Medina {Medina 2013} have articulated powerful accounts of epistemic injustice and democracy. Their frameworks underscore the necessity of structural protections for epistemic integrity, grounding my call for role separation within a broader ethical commitment.

- **Critical Pedagogy and Epistemic Autonomy**: Paulo Freire {Freire 1970}, Antonia Darder {Darder 2017}, and Lynn Mario T. M. de Souza {de Souza 2019} emphasise educators' epistemic autonomy and critical consciousness. Their perspectives reinforce the ethical imperative of protecting educators from managerial capture.

These bodies of work implicitly recognise the ethical problems of dual roles, but my argument advances a structural remedy—clear institutional separation.

2.5 Scope and Boundaries of the Argument

To ensure clarity, it is important to define the scope and boundaries of my argument. My critique specifically targets substantial managerial or administrative roles that inherently involve fiduciary conflicts—such as strategic decision-making, budget management, approval of new curricula or programmes, enrolment and admissions strategies, and major institutional policymaking. These roles are problematic precisely because they require educators to balance fiduciary obligations (loyalty, care, epistemic integrity) against managerial objectives (financial performance, institutional reputation, market positioning), thus generating ethically unacceptable conflicts.

In contrast, my argument does not target routine administrative tasks naturally associated with academic responsibilities. Minor tasks such as scheduling classes, routine student advising, managing course materials, participating in departmental meetings, and fulfilling standard committee roles do not typically pose significant fiduciary or epistemic conflicts. These ordinary responsibilities are fully compatible with educators' fiduciary duties and do not necessitate structural separation.

By clarifying these boundaries, I ensure that my recommendations remain targeted, practical, and ethically justifiable. Structural separation is therefore focused on roles that present substantial ethical and epistemic conflicts rather than everyday administrative tasks inherent to educators' roles.

2.6 Addressing Potential Counterarguments

One possible objection to my proposal is that holding administrative roles enhances educators' understanding of institutional constraints, potentially benefiting their pedagogical effectiveness. While there is some merit to this perspective, such benefits remain marginal compared to the profound epistemic and fiduciary conflicts managerial roles create. Structural independence is thus justified not only ethically but also pragmatically. Educators' understanding of institutional contexts can be maintained through advisory participation or non-managerial governance roles without compromising fiduciary responsibilities.

2.7 Caveats and Practical Challenges

I acknowledge that implementing structural separation will require institutional adjustments and careful transitional arrangements. Practical challenges, such as redefining governance roles, adjusting institutional cultures, and revising academic leadership structures, are substantial. However, these challenges should not deter universities from pursuing structural reforms. The ethical and epistemic advantages—such as restored trust, strengthened epistemic integrity, and clearer fiduciary boundaries—strongly justify the required institutional efforts.

2.8 Structure of Subsequent Chapters

The following chapters systematically build upon these foundational insights. In Chapter 3, I provide detailed theoretical grounding in fiduciary ethics, institutional theory, and epistemic justice. Chapter 4 presents practical institutional reforms and governance recommendations. Chapter 5 addresses counterarguments, reinforcing the robustness of my proposal. Throughout subsequent chapters, the definitions and clarifications provided here will serve as consistent reference points, ensuring coherence, clarity, and precision across the entire analysis.

3. Theoretical Framework: Fiduciary Ethics and Institutional Governance

To substantiate my claim that educators must remain structurally separated from managerial roles, I ground my argument in fiduciary ethics, institutional theory, and epistemic justice. Collectively, these theoretical traditions clarify the distinct ethical obligations educators hold, illuminate why dual roles generate inherent conflicts, and underscore the necessity of clear structural separation. I begin by examining fiduciary ethics, introduced in Chapter 2.2, to elucidate the nature of educators' professional responsibilities.

3.1 Fiduciary Theory and Conflict of Duties

Fiduciary theory provides a foundational ethical framework for understanding educators' obligations within academic institutions. In a fiduciary relationship, one party (the fiduciary) exercises discretionary power solely in the best interests of another (the beneficiary), free from personal or external conflicts {Smith 2014; Miller 2018}. As detailed previously (Chapter 2.2), fiduciary duties encompass obligations of loyalty, care, and epistemic responsibility.

Lionel Smith's influential account defines fiduciary duties around two primary obligations—loyalty and care. Loyalty requires fiduciaries to prioritise beneficiaries' interests unequivocally, avoiding even potential conflicts. Care necessitates diligent and informed execution of fiduciary tasks {Smith 2014}. Paul B. Miller further frames fiduciary governance as institutional structures designed to uphold these obligations, preventing compromised judgements due to conflicting incentives {Miller 2018, 2020}.

Applying this framework to higher education, educators are fiduciaries entrusted with critical epistemic interests—those of students, scholarly communities, and broader society. Their obligations include:

- **Loyalty**: Prioritising students' educational interests and academic integrity over managerial goals such as enrolment targets, revenue generation, or institutional rankings.
- **Care**: Maintaining intellectual rigour, pedagogical quality, and high standards in curriculum, assessment, and scholarly activity without succumbing to administrative pressures.
- **Epistemic Responsibility**: Upholding epistemic virtues—truthfulness, openness, intellectual honesty, and epistemic justice—resisting managerial pressures that may marginalise less profitable or inconvenient areas of knowledge {Fricker 2007; Anderson 2006}.

The inherent conflict between managerial duties and fiduciary obligations becomes evident when educators hold dual roles. Administrators typically aim to optimise resources, increase enrolment, and enhance institutional reputation. Though legitimate managerial goals, these directly contradict educators' fiduciary responsibilities.

When educators simultaneously occupy managerial or administrative positions, the inherent conflict of fiduciary obligations becomes immediately apparent. As illustrated by the scenario of Curricular Integrity vs. Revenue Generation introduced earlier (Chapter 2.3), managerial pressures to prioritise enrolment numbers, revenue targets, or institutional reputation frequently compromise educators' fiduciary responsibilities. Administrators' obligations—though legitimate in managerial contexts—are fundamentally incompatible with the fiduciary duties of loyalty, care, and epistemic responsibility that educators owe their students and scholarly communities.

Thus, structural independence emerges as ethically necessary to protect educators from fiduciary conflicts and ensure sustained epistemic integrity and institutional accountability.

Similarly, educators occupying managerial roles frequently face decisions that prioritise budgetary constraints or performance metrics over educational rigour, potentially leading to compromised assessment standards and pedagogically unsound practices. Such outcomes clearly violate educators' fiduciary obligations.

To date, fiduciary theory (Smith and Miller) primarily focuses on legal and financial contexts, leaving its application within educational governance largely unexplored. My argument extends fiduciary ethics into higher education, identifying educators as fiduciaries whose structural independence from managerial roles is ethically essential.

The subsequent section (3.2) explores institutional theory, contextualising universities' unique epistemic mandate and reinforcing the necessity of structural safeguards for fiduciary integrity.

3.2 Institutional Theory and the University

Building on the fiduciary ethics framework established above (section 3.1), institutional theory contextualises educators' fiduciary obligations within the unique environment of universities. It explains precisely why universities depend fundamentally on epistemic autonomy, clarifying why managerial encroachment poses profound ethical and epistemic threats.

Ron Barnett characterises universities as distinctive epistemic institutions tasked with cultivating intellectual freedom, critical inquiry, and epistemic plurality—qualities essential to their unique societal role. Unlike commercial or administrative organisations, universities must deliberately protect these epistemic virtues from external pressures, particularly managerialism {Barnett 2013, 2018}.

Yet Barnett recognises an intensifying tension arising from managerialism's encroachment into university governance, prioritising measurable outputs, budget constraints, and reputational goals. Such managerial logic systematically undermines universities' epistemic autonomy, distorting core educational missions in favour of institutional performance metrics {Barnett 2013}.

Educators occupying managerial positions inadvertently become complicit in this epistemic distortion. They must increasingly prioritise administrative objectives—financial sustainability, institutional reputation, or enrolment strategies—over their fiduciary obligations to students and disciplinary integrity (as detailed in 3.1). Although managerial goals are not inherently unethical, their prioritisation through dual roles directly conflicts with educators' epistemic responsibilities.

Consider a common managerial scenario: universities adopting criteria for evaluating academic programmes based on enrolment numbers or institutional rankings. Department heads occupying managerial roles frequently face pressure to approve or discontinue programmes primarily based on profitability or institutional reputation rather than academic merit or pedagogical quality. As illustrated earlier (Chapter 2.3), such decisions incrementally erode epistemic integrity, clearly violating fiduciary duties defined previously (3.1).

My contribution extends Barnett's analysis by proposing a concrete structural remedy: clear role separation. Critiquing managerialism alone is insufficient; structural measures are necessary to protect educators' fiduciary independence and preserve epistemic integrity. Institutional theory thus complements fiduciary ethics, reinforcing the necessity of robust structural safeguards.

The following section (3.3) further deepens this theoretical foundation by integrating epistemic justice, highlighting why structural independence is ethically indispensable within the university context.

3.3 Epistemic Justice: Why Structural Independence Matters

Having clarified fiduciary obligations (3.1) and institutional pressures (3.2), epistemic justice illustrates the ethical urgency of structural independence. Epistemic justice concerns the fair treatment of individuals and communities as legitimate epistemic agents—knowers, researchers, and teachers. Epistemic justice theory explains precisely how managerial pressures systematically undermine educators' fiduciary obligations, threatening universities' core epistemic mission.

Miranda Fricker identifies two forms of epistemic injustice—testimonial and hermeneutical injustice—that managerial practices exacerbate. Testimonial injustice occurs when an individual's credibility is unfairly diminished, while hermeneutical injustice arises when structural barriers prevent effective communication of marginalised knowledge {Fricker 2007}. Managerial structures, emphasising measurable, market-driven outputs, frequently marginalise less marketable, yet epistemically valuable, areas of inquiry.

For example, scholars researching critical pedagogy, interdisciplinary studies, or indigenous epistemologies often face testimonial injustice, their credibility implicitly diminished by performance metrics focused on grant revenue, enrolments, or rankings. Such marginalisation breaches educators' fiduciary responsibilities (as previously defined in section 3.1), compromising epistemic integrity and diversity.

Elizabeth Anderson's epistemic democracy further reinforces this critique, emphasising institutional protections for epistemic diversity and inclusive deliberation {Anderson 2006}. Managerial pressures conflict with these democratic principles by privileging narrowly defined institutional goals over epistemic plurality. José Medina's concept of resistant epistemologies similarly highlights educators' fiduciary responsibility to challenge epistemic marginalisation, advocating institutional structures that support rather than suppress critical or resistant knowledge forms {Medina 2013}.

Consider, again, educators engaged in social justice or indigenous epistemologies. Dual-role educators face direct managerial pressures to limit funding or support for research perceived as less financially beneficial, actively undermining their fiduciary obligations and perpetuating epistemic injustice. Structural independence, therefore, becomes ethically imperative—not merely desirable—to ensure genuine epistemic justice within institutions.

Thus, integrating epistemic justice clarifies the urgency and ethical necessity behind structural reforms proposed in this paper. Robust institutional safeguards protecting educators' fiduciary independence become essential for preserving inclusive, democratic, and epistemically responsible universities.

3.4 Caveats

While ethically compelling, the structural separation proposal acknowledges several practical challenges that warrant recognition and careful management.

First, universities currently rely significantly on senior educators for certain managerial roles (e.g., departmental chairs, programme directors). Proposing structural separation introduces significant institutional change, requiring thoughtful planning and deliberate, phased implementation (as detailed later in Chapter 4.5). Recognising this complexity reinforces the need for careful institutional strategies rather than diminishing structural separation's ethical imperative.

Second, to clarify the scope of my argument, structural separation targets managerial roles involving significant fiduciary conflicts—budget decisions, enrolment strategies, or curricular approvals—not minor administrative duties inherent to educators' everyday roles. As detailed earlier (Chapter 2.5), minor administrative tasks (class scheduling, student advising) typically do not compromise fiduciary obligations.

Third, structural independence might raise concerns about educators' institutional isolation. Educators benefit from institutional insights and understanding of managerial constraints. Alternative governance mechanisms, such as independent academic advisory committees or consultative forums (see detailed proposals in Chapter

4.6), can effectively address this concern, preserving educators' fiduciary autonomy while maintaining institutional engagement.

Finally, structural separation alone does not guarantee epistemic justice or fiduciary integrity. Institutions must support structural reforms through robust governance practices, fiduciary ethics training, and transparent institutional policies (further detailed in Chapter 4). Structural separation represents one vital component requiring complementary governance and cultural measures to sustain effectiveness.

Recognition of these practical challenges and clarifications strengthens the argument's persuasiveness, demonstrating a realistic understanding of institutional complexities while reinforcing the ethical and epistemic necessity of structural fiduciary independence.

The subsequent chapter (Chapter 4) outlines detailed institutional reforms, strategies, and governance mechanisms to constructively address these challenges, effectively translating theoretical principles into actionable institutional practice.

4. Practical Institutional Recommendations: Implementing Structural Separation

Having established the ethical necessity of structural separation to address fiduciary conflicts arising from dual roles (Chapters 2 and 3), this chapter provides concrete, actionable recommendations for universities. Rather than merely critiquing existing practices, I propose clear institutional reforms that operationalise fiduciary ethics, institutional theory, and epistemic justice, thereby safeguarding educators' fiduciary independence, institutional integrity, and epistemic legitimacy.

This chapter outlines institutional reforms encompassing clearly defined role boundaries, independent governance mechanisms, fiduciary audits, ethics training, phased transitions, and strategies to manage resistance constructively.

4.1 Establishing Clear Institutional Role Boundaries

The foundational step toward achieving educators' fiduciary independence is defining institutional boundaries between academic and managerial roles. Such boundaries prevent educators from occupying administrative positions that inherently compromise their fiduciary obligations, as previously outlined (Chapter 3.1).

Practically, universities should adopt formal governance policies delineating educators' fiduciary responsibilities, including loyalty, care, and epistemic responsibility (as detailed in 2.2 and 3.1). These policies must clarify why managerial duties—particularly budget management, enrolment strategies, and institutional branding—are incompatible with educators' fiduciary obligations.

Specifically, university governance documents should state clearly:

- **Role separation requirement**: Educators must not assume managerial positions involving decisions primarily driven by financial performance, institutional reputation, or market pressures, as such roles fundamentally conflict with their fiduciary duties toward students and academic disciplines.

- **Protection of pedagogical autonomy**: Institutional structures must safeguard educators' autonomy regarding curriculum, pedagogical practices, and academic standards, insulating these from managerial pressures.

Clearly defined institutional boundaries provide educators with transparent guidelines on their fiduciary roles and protect the broader academic community by ensuring pedagogical decisions remain ethically grounded and epistemically rigorous.

Moreover, such boundaries enhance institutional accountability by reducing conflicts of interest and potential abuses of authority, thus strengthening public trust and reinforcing universities as ethically responsible and epistemically robust institutions.

In summary, clearly articulated institutional role boundaries represent the essential first step toward structural fiduciary independence. Implementing these boundaries requires ongoing institutional commitment, clear governance policies, and regular monitoring to ensure effective adherence to fiduciary principles.

4.2 Establishing Independent Academic Governance Structures

Following the establishment of institutional role boundaries (section 4.1), universities must implement independent governance structures dedicated to safeguarding educators' fiduciary independence and epistemic autonomy.

As detailed previously (Chapter 3), managerial structures inherently compromise fiduciary obligations. Therefore, dedicated governance bodies—such as Academic Senates, Epistemic Audit Committees, or Fiduciary Oversight Panels—should exclude managerial roles to prevent conflicts of interest. Their mandates should clearly encompass:

- **Curricular and Academic Oversight**: Reviewing and approving curricular decisions, research funding allocations, and academic standards, ensuring these remain independent from financial or managerial pressures such as enrolment targets or rankings.
- **Transparency and Accountability**: Ensuring transparency in decision-making processes, clearly prioritising fiduciary ethics and epistemic integrity to maintain educators' autonomy and prevent managerial interference.

Independent academic governance structures institutionalise fiduciary accountability, proactively protecting educators' professional autonomy and reinforcing institutional transparency and accountability. These structures operationalise theoretical commitments detailed previously (Chapters 2.2 and 3), clearly translating fiduciary principles into institutional practice.

4.3 Implementing Regular Institutional Fiduciary Audits

To consistently uphold fiduciary ethics and epistemic integrity, universities should implement regular fiduciary audits. These audits, detailed earlier as proactive institutional safeguards (Chapter 3.1 and 3.2), systematically ensure adherence to fiduciary obligations and prevent managerial conflicts.

Fiduciary audits should:

- **Evaluate Pedagogical Independence**: Examine whether curriculum, assessment, and research decisions remain free from undue managerial influence such as financial constraints or reputational pressures. Audits should review internal documents and decision-making processes to identify potential fiduciary conflicts clearly.

- **Identify and Correct Fiduciary Risks**: pinpoint institutional practices—such as incentive structures prioritising enrolment or revenue—that inadvertently create fiduciary conflicts. Audits should provide clear recommendations for corrective actions.

- **Ensure Transparency and Accountability**: Require clear documentation of decision-making processes to verify decisions prioritise fiduciary ethics, epistemic justice, and educational quality above managerial considerations.

- **Foster an Institutional Culture of Fiduciary Ethics**: Recommend educational initiatives—workshops, ethics training, policy briefings—to reinforce institutional awareness and adherence to fiduciary ethics.

- **Promote Continuous Institutional Improvement**: Establish regular, scheduled audits with ongoing evaluation and feedback mechanisms, enabling institutions to proactively adapt to emerging fiduciary challenges.

Regular fiduciary audits operationalise fiduciary ethics principles, proactively protecting educators' fiduciary independence, enhancing institutional transparency, and reinforcing long-term accountability and epistemic legitimacy.

4.4 Fiduciary Ethics Training and Professional Development

Beyond structural changes, sustained fiduciary ethics training reinforces institutional culture. As previously detailed (Chapter 3.1 and 4.3), universities must provide educators with comprehensive training addressing fiduciary responsibilities and conflicts.

Effective fiduciary ethics training should include:

- **Integration into Professional Development**: Embed fiduciary training within standard professional development and onboarding, ensuring educators clearly understand fiduciary duties—loyalty, care, and epistemic responsibility—from the outset.

- **Practical Decision-making Frameworks**: Provide, scenario-based training and interactive workshops, equipping educators with practical tools to identify and proactively manage fiduciary conflicts in daily practice.

- **Cultivation of Ethical Institutional Culture**: Use regular ethics seminars and refresher sessions to reinforce institutional awareness and adherence to fiduciary principles, clearly linking ethical behaviour to institutional integrity and public trust.

- **Training Institutional Leaders and Governance Bodies**: Extend fiduciary ethics training beyond educators to senior administrators and governance committees, fostering institutional coherence and accountability.

- **Continuous Evaluation and Improvement**: Establish clear mechanisms for regularly evaluating training effectiveness, using feedback to continuously refine and enhance fiduciary ethics programmes.

Through comprehensive fiduciary ethics training, universities reinforce educators' professional autonomy, embed fiduciary responsibilities deeply within institutional culture, and proactively safeguard long-term epistemic and ethical integrity.

4.5 Implementing a Phased Institutional Transition

Given the complexity of structural reform, universities must adopt a phased implementation strategy. As detailed earlier (Chapter 3.4), a carefully managed transition minimises disruption, reduces resistance, and enhances long-term sustainability.

An effective phased transition involves:

- **Clear Timelines and Incremental Milestones**: Clearly articulate transition timelines, starting with pilot departments or faculties, gradually expanding institution-wide, and clearly adjusting subsequent phases based on early experiences and feedback.
- **Interim Governance Arrangements**: Establish temporary fiduciary oversight committees or advisory bodies to manage and oversee the transitional process, ensuring stability and fiduciary accountability throughout the transition.
- **Institutional Support and Resources**: Provide support—training, briefings, and professional development—for staff adapting to new governance roles, clearly addressing practical challenges and cultural shifts necessary for transition success.
- **Comprehensive Stakeholder Communication**: Clearly communicate ethical rationale, anticipated benefits, and practical implications of structural separation to stakeholders—including educators, administrators, students, and external partners—through regular updates, forums, and consultations.
- **Monitoring, Evaluation, and Responsive Adjustment**: Establish ongoing monitoring and evaluation mechanisms, proactively identifying implementation challenges and clearly adjusting transition strategies in response to emerging issues and stakeholder feedback.

A strategically phased institutional transition operationalises fiduciary ethics and epistemic integrity reforms, clearly reinforcing practical viability, ethical credibility, and institutional sustainability.

4.6 Maintaining Educators' Institutional Engagement and Understanding

A legitimate concern regarding structural separation is the potential isolation of educators from broader institutional contexts. As previously noted (Chapter 3.4), structural reforms should not diminish educators' informed institutional engagement. To address this, universities should establish advisory committees or consultative bodies allowing meaningful educator participation without compromising fiduciary independence.

These advisory structures provide:

- **Non-managerial Participation Channels**: Clearly define advisory roles enabling educators to contribute insights to institutional planning, policy formulation, and strategic decisions without fiduciary conflicts.

- **Informed Institutional Understanding**: Regularly brief educators on institutional objectives, budgetary considerations, administrative constraints, and strategic contexts, clearly enhancing their pedagogical and research effectiveness.

- **Institutional Transparency and Trust**: Openly involve educators in institutional deliberations and strategic discussions, strengthening institutional transparency, accountability, and collegial relationships.

- **Preservation of Educators' Professional Autonomy**: Clearly delineate the advisory role boundaries to prevent inadvertent reintroduction of fiduciary conflicts, safeguarding educators' autonomy and integrity.

Establishing advisory and consultative bodies ensures educators remain institutionally engaged and informed, addressing legitimate isolation concerns and reinforcing structural separation's ethical coherence and practical feasibility.

4.7 Anticipating Institutional Resistance and Ensuring Sustainable Governance

Structural reforms inevitably face stakeholder resistance due to perceived threats or uncertainties. Anticipating and constructively managing this resistance ensures long-term institutional sustainability of fiduciary governance reforms (as discussed in Chapter 3.4).

To address resistance, universities should adopt the following practical strategies:

- **Transparent Communication of Benefits**: Clearly and consistently articulate ethical rationales and practical advantages—enhanced institutional integrity, clearer role definitions, reduced conflicts of interest—to all stakeholders through multiple communication channels (forums, briefings, workshops).

- **Demonstration of Practical Outcomes**: Share examples, case studies, and best practices from comparable institutions successfully implementing similar reforms, clearly illustrating tangible institutional benefits and reducing uncertainty.

- **Inclusive Stakeholder Engagement**: Engage stakeholders in meaningful dialogue throughout the reform process, clearly allowing input, refining reform strategies, and fostering institutional ownership and acceptance.

- **Institutional Support and Transition Resources**: Provide practical support—professional training, transition workshops, guidance materials—to reassure stakeholders, clearly addressing uncertainties and facilitating smoother institutional adjustments.

- **Robust, Formalised Governance Mechanisms**: Clearly document fiduciary governance reforms in institutional policies and governance structures, ensuring reforms withstand managerial pressures, leadership changes, or shifting institutional priorities.

Managing resistance in this proactive manner strengthens stakeholder acceptance, reinforcing fiduciary governance reforms' credibility, sustainability, and institutional trust.

4.8 Summary

This chapter has translated fiduciary ethics, institutional theory, and epistemic justice principles (Chapters 2 and 3) into clear, actionable institutional governance reforms. The specific, clearly articulated recommendations include:

- **Clear Institutional Role Boundaries** separating academic from managerial roles.
- **Independent Academic Governance Structures** safeguarding educators' fiduciary independence and epistemic integrity.
- **Regular Fiduciary Audits** evaluating and proactively addressing fiduciary conflicts.
- **Comprehensive Fiduciary Ethics Training** embedding fiduciary responsibilities within institutional culture and professional development.
- **Strategically Phased Institutional Transition** managing practical complexities and ensuring smooth implementation.
- **Advisory and Consultative Structures** maintaining educators' informed institutional engagement without compromising fiduciary obligations.
- **Proactive Management of Institutional Resistance** ensuring long-term sustainability and acceptance of structural reforms.

In the following chapter (Chapter 5), I will address potential counterarguments and concerns, reinforcing the ethical urgency, practical viability, and robustness of these fiduciary governance recommendations. Engaging with these counterarguments further strengthens the overall argument for structural fiduciary independence, ensuring its effective implementation and long-term institutional acceptance.

5. Addressing Counterarguments: Ensuring Robustness and Practicality

Having established practical institutional recommendations, I now turn to consider and address potential objections. By responding constructively to these counterarguments, I reinforce the robustness and practical credibility of the proposed structural reforms, ensuring that they are realistic, ethically justified, and institutionally sustainable.

5.1 Counterargument: Administrative Experience Enhances Pedagogical Insight

One commonly raised objection to structural separation is the suggestion that educators gain valuable insights into institutional operations through managerial roles, potentially improving their teaching and scholarship. Proponents argue that administrative experience deepens educators' appreciation of institutional constraints and strategic considerations.

I acknowledge the validity of this point but emphasise that any benefit educators might derive from managerial roles remains marginal relative to the significant fiduciary conflicts these roles create. Educators' understanding of institutional constraints and context can be effectively maintained without compromising fiduciary duties. Universities can establish advisory bodies or consultative forums designed to enable educators' informed participation, thus maintaining their awareness without the ethical complications arising from dual-role obligations.

5.2 Counterargument: Practical Challenges in Implementation

Critics may argue that structural separation would be impractical to implement given universities' existing reliance on senior academics for managerial responsibilities. Such reforms might appear daunting or overly disruptive.

I acknowledge that structural reforms of this magnitude present practical challenges. However, these challenges should be understood as reasons for careful, phased implementation rather than as fundamental objections to reform. Institutional planning that includes clearly articulated milestones, transitional support systems, and comprehensive stakeholder communication can ensure that structural independence is realistically achievable. Thus, implementation complexities do not undermine the fundamental ethical necessity and practical benefits of these reforms.

5.3 Counterargument: Potential for Institutional Division

Some may suggest that structural separation could inadvertently create division or tensions between academic and administrative personnel, potentially undermining institutional coherence or collegiality.

While recognising this risk, I argue clearly that structural clarity and role differentiation can, in fact, enhance institutional cohesion by setting expectations and reducing ambiguity. Clear fiduciary boundaries enable transparent and ethical institutional relationships, fostering mutual respect and collaboration. Institutions can support collegial relations through effective communication, shared governance practices, and collaborative advisory structures, thereby ensuring separation enhances rather than diminishes institutional unity.

5.4 Counterargument: Educators' Resistance to Loss of Administrative Influence

A further objection is that educators, particularly those accustomed to dual roles, might resist reforms due to concerns over loss of institutional influence or status.

Addressing this concern involves clear institutional messaging. Universities must emphasise that structural independence elevates educators' professional integrity, reinforcing their fiduciary autonomy and epistemic responsibilities. Furthermore, providing educators with meaningful advisory roles allows continued institutional engagement without fiduciary compromise, addressing potential resistance effectively and constructively.

5.5 Counterargument: Sustainability of Structural Reforms Over Time

A valid concern is the potential difficulty of sustaining structural independence over the long term, given shifting managerial pressures or institutional leadership changes.

Acknowledging this issue, I emphasise the importance of institutionalising structural reforms through formal governance policies, regular fiduciary audits, comprehensive ethics training, and clear institutional accountability mechanisms. Such institutional commitments ensure that structural reforms remain robust and resistant to managerial drift, protecting the fiduciary independence and epistemic integrity of educators over time.

5.6 Summary

In addressing these counterarguments, I have demonstrated that potential objections can be effectively and constructively resolved through careful institutional planning, clear role definitions, transparent communication, and robust governance mechanisms. Each concern, while valid, reinforces rather than weakens the ethical and practical urgency of structural separation.

In the concluding chapter, I summarise my core arguments, reinforce the ethical imperative of my proposed reforms, and highlight the clear institutional benefits arising from implementing fiduciary and epistemic governance structures.

6. Conclusion: Toward Ethical and Epistemic Integrity in Higher Education

This paper has advanced a critical structural reform proposal for university governance: educators must remain independent epistemic fiduciaries, structurally separated from managerial and administrative roles. Throughout the analysis, I argued that dual-role arrangements inherently compromise educators' fiduciary duties and epistemic integrity, posing significant ethical risks and undermining universities' core epistemic mission.

Drawing on fiduciary ethics (Smith, Miller), institutional theory (Barnett), and epistemic justice scholarship (Fricker, Anderson, Medina), I synthesised these frameworks into a coherent argument advocating structural fiduciary independence. My contribution extends existing critiques of managerialism by proposing concrete institutional mechanisms—including clearly defined role boundaries, independent governance structures, fiduciary ethics training, fiduciary audits, phased transitions, advisory committees, and robust governance policies. These recommendations systematically address implementation complexities and safeguard educators' fiduciary responsibilities and epistemic autonomy.

In addressing potential counterarguments, I demonstrated constructively that concerns about administrative insight, institutional coherence, educators' resistance, and sustainability are realistically manageable. The strategies provided here reinforce—rather than undermine—the ethical urgency and practical viability of structural separation.

The ethical urgency and practical necessity of structural independence are clear. Universities genuinely committed to epistemic justice, fiduciary responsibility, and institutional integrity must decisively embrace structural reforms. Benefits include enhanced public trust, strengthened epistemic integrity, reduced fiduciary conflicts, improved institutional transparency, and greater accountability in governance practices.

Higher education institutions now face an ethical choice: continue permitting managerial logics that undermine educators' fiduciary responsibilities, or implement structural reforms safeguarding educational ethics and epistemic integrity. As this paper consistently argues, structural reform represents the only ethically defensible and institutionally sustainable path.

By committing to structural fiduciary independence, universities will reinforce their core epistemic mission, ensure robust ethical governance, and maintain essential public trust and institutional legitimacy. This structural transformation is not merely desirable; it represents an ethical imperative for twenty-first-century higher education governance.

Finally, I invite further scholarly exploration to advance fiduciary ethics in governance beyond the arguments presented here. Future research might explore:

- **Comparative international analyses of fiduciary governance models**: How do different countries or institutions structure and implement fiduciary governance? What comparative lessons can be learned about effective implementation and governance outcomes?

- Empirical studies of successful fiduciary separation reforms: Which institutions demonstrate successful implementation of structural fiduciary independence? What specific institutional practices and governance structures contributed to their success, and how can these lessons guide broader higher education reforms?

- Broader applicability beyond higher education: Can fiduciary frameworks developed in this paper be adapted effectively to other sectors, such as healthcare, public administration, or corporate governance? What practical outcomes and ethical implications emerge from applying fiduciary principles in diverse institutional contexts?

Such scholarship will deepen understanding, provide empirical insights, refine fiduciary governance practices, and ultimately strengthen the ethical foundations underpinning educational and epistemic integrity.

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Author Contact Information

Peter Kahl, independent researcher

Email: <peter.kahl@juris.vc>
LinkedIn: < https://www.linkedin.com/in/peter-kahl-law/>
Blog: <https://pkahl.substack.com/>

Correspondence regarding this paper is welcome.

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