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# Higher Education Forum

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# Higher Education Forum

Volume 6, March 2009

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# Higher Education Forum

Volume 6, March 2009



# Globalization, International Rankings, and the American Model: a reassessment

William G. Tierney\*

**Abstract.** One of the primary effects of globalization on tertiary education is that institutions increasingly compare themselves with similar and dissimilar institutions around the world by using global rankings. The American model of the research university is often the most lauded and emulated of types. The paper argues that focusing on three primary market-oriented characteristics of the model – funding, labor, and marketization – is to mistake how the United States has created a tertiary education powerhouse. Instead, there needs to be a reassessment of how the American system is conceptualized by global tertiary providers and how it is used as a model of successful higher education in different cultures and nations.

**Keywords:** American model, globalization, tertiary education

## Introduction

The impact of globalization on tertiary education is still in a formative period, but one immediate impact has been that universities increasingly compare themselves not only with peer institutions within the same country, or merely the region, but throughout the world. In a relatively short time period, international rankings have become extremely popular benchmarks about how to think about the quality of a country's tertiary institutions. The first widespread ranking system – by Shanghai Jiao Tong University (SJTU) – was only published in 2003 (Shanghai Jiao Tong University Institute of Higher Education [SJTUHE], 2007). A second, popular, international ranking system, the Times Higher Education Supplement (THES) published its first survey in 2004 (Times Higher Education Supplement/QS Quacquarelli Symonds Limited [THES-QS], 2007). Both surveys are published annually. The impact of these rankings and league tables, however, has been widespread.

In Malaysia, for example, the Higher Education Minister, Dato' Mustapa Mohamed, was of the opinion that Malaysia must have research universities in the top 100. The rise or fall of the country's

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premier research universities is cause for celebration or anguish by the nation's leaders and citizens and results in multiple news stories (Mohamed, 2007). One of the country's leading newspapers, *The Star*, published 20 articles in the space of six weeks when the rankings were published in 2007. The Prime Minister of Malaysia also has commented on the rankings (Mohamed, 2007). The Ministry of Higher Education has written as part of its strategic plan how the country's top four research institutions might be able to rise in the rankings, with the goal that by 2010 at least one of them will be in the top 100 of the global rankings (Malaysia Ministry of Higher Education, 2007). As Philip Altbach (2003, p.5) has said, "everyone wants a world-class university." Apparently, a rise in the rankings is not merely an indication of the prestige of an institution, but is also related to the ability of the country itself to excel in a globalized environment. Proulx (2007, p.75) has astutely observed, that the obsession over rankings reflects a "passion for the pursuit of the mythical No. 1 in every field: the richest people, the best dressed, the tallest building, the fastest runner, the No. 1 football team."

Whether one is a supporter or critic of the rankings (Altbach, 2007; Marginson, 2006; Salmi & Saroyan, 2007; Webster, 1992) one term that frequently gets employed when discussing international rankings is the "American model." For example, Wanhua Ma (2007, p.32) notes that, "The success of American research universities has been recognized as a model for higher education worldwide." João Steiner (2007, p.175) observes, "The US system of higher learning is currently one of the most admired in the world." Simon Marginson and Marijk van der Wende (2007, p.309) comment on the circular logic involved in the rankings that privilege English language universities, and hence, the "rankings were intuitively plausible because they confirmed the reputations of the leading American and British universities." Altbach (2001, p.11) also points out how "the American higher education system has become the worldwide 'gold standard' for higher education, respected for its leadership in research and scholarship and for providing access to large numbers of students." The use of terms such as 'model' or 'gold standard' with regard to American tertiary education is generally a synonym for three specific actions. First, the phrase refers to the privatization of higher education such that public investment is lessened; second, the use of part-time labor in place of full-time faculty is emphasized; and third, the purpose of higher education is geared more toward the market than toward the ideals of citizenship and a commitment to what many define as the public good (Tierney, 2006). The clear assumption is that if one wants an institution to rise in the rankings, then the institution's leaders need to employ some version of the American model.

I understand why individuals have employed the term, and why individuals have urged its adoption for those institutions that want to improve their ranking. Fifty-four of the institutions in the top 100 of the SJTU survey are American institutions, and 37 of the top 100 in the THES survey are in the United States (see Appendix). Whereas a century ago the United States may not have had more than one or two premier universities, today American higher education is considered by many to be the best system in the world. The research capacity of the system is unparalleled and accounts for almost half of the world's research and development expenditures; graduate education is superb. Access to



higher education by high-school graduates is among the best in the world; more than 15 million students participate in post-secondary education (Institute of International Education (IIE), 2007). As I shall elaborate, although the system certainly has shortcomings and flaws, one is hard-pressed not to acknowledge its multiple strengths. Foreign students have flocked to the shores of the United States for undergraduate and graduate degrees for over a generation; during the 2006-2007 school year, the country hosted over 580,000 foreign students (IIE, 2007). Why would one not try to emulate a system where many have been educated, which peers rate as excellent, and the league tables continually list as among the best?

The purpose of this paper is neither to argue for or against the utility of rankings, nor to suggest that the American model should or should not be employed by those institutions that seek to rise in the rankings<sup>1</sup>. Instead, I take issue with how we have defined the American model and suggest that simply choosing three specific points – funding, labor, and marketization – is to mistake how America has risen in the rankings and gone from an educational backwater in the 19th century to an academic leader in the 21st century. Further, these points, while not minor, also are taken from one moment in American higher education's history. Over 85% of the U.S. institutions that rank in the top 100 are institutions that are over one century old. Thus, the assumption that the three instrumental activities are the ingredients for success in attempts to rise in the rankings is wrongheaded insofar as these issues are taken from a specific moment in time of American higher education. The implicit assumption is that the system has been in equilibrium for a century, whereas it has always been in dynamic disequilibrium – in constant change. What has been relatively constant is what I shall define as the underlying philosophy and strategy of the American academy.

My point here is not to celebrate American higher education, but to reassess how the discourse surrounding globalization and international rankings has defined the American system. I suggest that to choose only three points that subscribe to a market model of higher education that has been utilized by some institutions over the last decade or two and to define these instrumental actions as what has enabled American universities to rise in the rankings is as mistaken as to look at a recent change in a

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<sup>1</sup> One must recognize that how one is ranked also in part is determined by how one fills in the ranking forms and has little to do with the quality of the institution. If a university fills in the forms carelessly then it is likely to be ranked lower than an institution that takes care with how the questions are answered. Here are eight examples of ways an institution could rise in the rankings based on how they fill in the data. (1) Devote a professional to interpreting the survey and filling in the answers. (2) If the data are to be collected annually then maintain a sophisticated database that tracks changes well in advance of when the forms need to be submitted. (3) If citations are important for determining research capacity, then provide incentives to hire research-productive faculty. (4) If the *vitae* of part-time faculty count when determining research capacity, then hire a small cadre of productive faculty on a part-time basis to offer a lecture so that their citations might be counted. (5) If reputation matters, then create materials that are professionally and systematically disseminated to those individuals who determine reputation. (6) If student placement matters upon graduation then maintain a database about where *alumnae* get jobs. (7) If quality of faculty is important then the number of faculty who have a PhD and where they received their PhD's (e.g., a top-ranked university) will be counted. (8) If academic quality is ranked relative to size of academic staff, then a conservative estimate of staff would be preferred rather than a larger one.

particular sport and then attribute that specific change to the sport's durability and current popularity.

Accordingly, in what follows, I first consider what I shall call the philosophical underpinnings of American higher education. I then turn to three failures of the American system; my assumption is that one can learn as much from failures as from purported successes. I then conclude with an assessment of two issues that have brought strengths and weaknesses to the system depending upon how they have been interpreted and implemented. I have deliberately chosen a discreet list of points that speak to the underlying framework of the system rather than try to offer a laundry list of every facet of American higher education. My goal for the paper is to move the discourse away from choosing three convenient market-oriented markers of current American higher education that simply define the American model which ought to be mimicked, and instead offer a more full-bodied analysis of what has made American higher education a viable and sustained model of excellence.

### **Philosophical underpinnings of American higher education**

Certain principles have defined American higher education for a century. Regardless of whether the institution is a private or public university, these principles serve as core values of the organization's culture and are most likely embedded in every institution's constitution, faculty handbook, and by-laws.

#### *Academic freedom*

Academic freedom came about in the early part of the 20th century in large part because professors were being dismissed from their positions because of what they said in the classroom or wrote in articles pertaining to their research. Multiple examples exist of individuals, from different disciplines – sociology, political science, law, to name but a few – and different types of institutions, such as Stanford University, a private institution, and the University of Wisconsin, a public institution, who lost their jobs. The result was the creation of a faculty-led association, the American Association of University Professors (AAUP), which created what has become a central totem of the American academy: the idea of academic freedom. One key component of the AAUP's statement on academic freedom states:

The purpose of this statement is to promote public understanding and support of academic freedom and tenure and agreement upon procedures to assure them in colleges and universities. Institutions of higher education are conducted for the common good and not to further the interest of either individual teacher or the institution as a whole. The common good depends upon the free speech for truth and its exposition. Academic freedom is essential to these purposes. (AAUP, 1940/1970)

Although professors at public institutions are technically public employees, they differ from civil servants who do not enjoy the protection of academic freedom and frequently must not criticize the government during working hours. The removal of universities from state or federal control so that professors are free to speak their minds without fear of repercussions has been affirmed in multiple venues. Approximately 95% of all four-year institutions in the United States have a statement affirming the rights of faculty to hold academic freedom. State legislatures and governors also have stated quite clearly over the years that interference with the professoriate's right to argue openly and publicly about topics on which they are versed is unacceptable.

Most importantly, the Supreme Court of the United States has affirmed the principal by stating, ". . . our Nation is deeply committed to safeguarding academic freedom, which is of transcendent value to all of us and not merely to the teachers concerned" (*Keyishian et al. v. Board of Regents of the University of the State of New York et al.*, 1967). The assumption is that tenure protects academic freedom and in its protection more than an individual's rights are made secure. A nation that has colleges and universities where academic freedom exists is of benefit for a country where a commitment to democratic principles is paramount.

Tenure is the instrumental tool that ensures the right of academic freedom. The tenure system came about in order to protect academic freedom. The assumption was that if a professor held tenure such that job security existed then he or she would feel free to speak and to write without external interference. Thus, academic freedom is not simply a belief that might be abridged because it has no fundamental protections attached to it, but instead is an idea supported by a system that provides structural protection for people.

### *Merit*

The philosophical underpinnings I am outlining here are interrelated, but they also have distinct trajectories. In the 19th and early 20th centuries, for example, individuals often faced discrimination based on religion, race, or gender when they applied to college or for a job. Frequently, white, male Protestants were more likely to be admitted to an institution than those who were not. The result was that, over the course of time, the idea of merit became a central philosophical tenet of the academy. When a student seeks admission to an institution the decision on whether to accept or reject relies on the student's test scores from high-school and on the scores obtained in a standardized exam. The assumption is that an individual should gain admittance to an institution not because of skin color, gender, ethnicity, or religion, but based on the merits of the application. The best students, rather than those judged on the basis of an arbitrary list of ideological characteristics, should be admitted.

Similarly, how one evaluates whether a candidate should receive tenure is a judgment made by his or her peers in the discipline and within the university, based on the qualifications of the candidate. Whether an individual is of a particular race, gender, class, or nationality plays little or no role in the

decision. The role such a characteristic may play has to do with the idea of affirmative action, which came about in the 1960s. Affirmative action has tried to deal with the historic discrimination particular groups, especially African Americans, have encountered in the United States. Affirmative action's underlying rationale is relatively simple: when all factors are equal then consideration should be given to a candidate's race, ethnicity, or gender. That is, if two students applied for college and had precisely the same qualifications then the individual from a group that has been historically discriminated against should be given preference. Affirmative action rightly applied, however, has nothing to do with quotas and does not question the integrity of the idea of a meritocracy.

Salary and nationality also in part pertain to merit. Although base salary scales exist in all institutions and are more rigid in public institutions, it is also possible that different individuals will receive higher wages for reasons that in part pertain to merit. A discipline that is in demand, for example, may merit wages higher than a field where many candidates exist. A successful faculty member from one institution may be attracted to another institution with the offer of a better salary or working conditions. At the end of the year in multiple institutions candidates will receive a raise based on what they have earned, or merited, by way of their teaching, research, and service over the past academic year. The key here is that the pay scale is relatively flexible with the idea that merit will enable the system to pay individuals what they are worth whereas a rigid, inflexible schedule will not allow for merit pay or for the institution to reward those who most merit it.

Similarly, an institution that seeks to hire the most meritorious faculty or administrator will look beyond its regional or national borders to hire faculty or administrators if candidates exist in other countries that warrant consideration. Merit in an academic setting suggests that a department or school hires an individual who has the best mix of intellectual skills regardless of race, gender, ethnicity, religion, or national origin.

Further, merit pertains to the best proposal that has been put forward to study a particular project. Thus, when scholars submit a research proposal to study a project, the locale of where faculty work is irrelevant. Public universities have to compete with private institutions and no particular type of institution receives overt support. The review is blind insofar as the reviewers do not know the race, gender, religion, or ethnicity of the applicant and they do not know from where the proposal has been generated – a major public research university or a small private liberal arts college.

### *Civic and personal responsibility*

Public and private universities have been seen as part of the public good. Public institutions have long received a substantial amount of fiscal support from the state; the assumption has been that public monies are an example of the citizenry supporting education for all who are able to attend. Private institutions have received philanthropic support from foundations and individuals for over a century; over the last generation public institutions also have sought, and received, significant contributions

from wealthy donors and alumni.

The willingness of individuals to donate substantial sums of money to a university has been seen as a quasi-obligation. To be sure, not all wealthy individuals or all alumni give money to an institution, but the amount of giving nevertheless remains substantial. Indeed, the governing authority of most private and public universities is known as the board of trustees. The assumption is that the board holds the trust of the institution, and in doing so, has an obligation to ensure the continued well-being of the university. Federal and state governments have enabled substantial donations by the tax laws of the country that encourage donations to non-profit organizations.

At the same time, tuition charges, or student fees, always have been part of the postsecondary structure. Although costs have been historically low at some institutions, such as a public state college, individuals always have borne some share of the cost of going to college. The assumption has been that while society benefits from an educated citizenry it is also true that the individual benefits from a college degree and therefore should bear some of the cost of going to college, even if it is minimal, or is a loan that will be paid back over time.

### *Autonomy and shared governance*

Dartmouth College is a private college in the northeastern United States. Thirty years after the American Revolution, the legislature of the state of New Hampshire, the location of Dartmouth, sought to overrule the Board of Trustees and reinstate a deposed president. The trustees objected that the legislature had no role in the internal affairs of a privately chartered institution and sought to have the ruling of the legislature declared unconstitutional by the United States Supreme Court. The decision in 1819 by the Supreme Court supported the trustees of the college and said that the state had no role in the internal affairs of the college insofar as the corporation had a contract that could not be interfered with by a government. The ruling, written by Chief Justice John Marshall, is viewed as one of the most important decisions the Court has rendered.

The result is that private colleges have had a great deal of autonomy with regard to the decisions they make about issues such as admissions, research, curricula, teaching and learning, and the make-up of the faculty. Although all private institutions must adhere to federal and state laws and auditing requirements, the state and federal government has no right to insert its opinion or judgment about who should be hired or on what an individual faculty member studies, says, or writes.

Although public institutions have less autonomy than private universities, the autonomy of public universities is considerable. They are looked on as institutions one step removed from the political realm. For example, a department of water and power, or a department of transportation really has no autonomy from the state government that funds the operations of the department and the salaries of its employees. Public universities, however, have their own boards of trustees that oversee the organization. When public trustees function properly they provide a buffer between the state

government and the public university. Normally, a governor or legislature's pronouncement about the internal actions of a tertiary institution is seen as rare, although such comments increased during the George W. Bush administration's tenure.

Further, the concept of shared governance has been in existence for a century. Along with the idea of academic freedom came the belief about the role of faculty in the governance of the university. Although the board of trustees has the ultimate legal authority for the institution, the governance of the institution has been seen as shared by a triumvirate of parties – the board, the administration, and the faculty. The lines of authority have been frequently unclear, and significant conflict may arise over the action of one or another group, but the precept that the university is removed from the political realm and that the governance of the institution lies with internal actors has been a long-standing belief. The legislature, or a donor, then, has provided significant sums of money to an institution with actually a quite minimal level of interference.

The idea of autonomy, when coupled with the idea of shared governance, has created a culture that is much more decentralized than centralized. Departments and schools have a great deal of authority with regard to the decisions that determine the lives of the individuals within the unit. Decentralization enables local participants to feel invested in the system in a manner that a centralized decision-making structure does not allow. The result is that units have autonomy from a central administration just as the university itself has autonomy from the larger state or federal structure. The risk, of course, is that any sense of a cohesive strategy will be hard to implement, but the opportunities have outweighed the risks for American universities for the better part of a century.

### *Quality control*

Because the government is not involved in formal oversight, two forms of control have been exhibited with regard to the assessment of quality. First, the faculty, administration, and board have the authority to assess the quality of students and faculty. The faculty provide grades and assess whether an undergraduate or graduate student is worthy of advancing to the next level. When a student disagrees with a professor's assessment there are procedures for review, but they are largely internal measures that do not involve the government.

Similarly, the assessment of faculty, particularly for tenure and promotion, lies in the hands of the faculty. When a candidate fails to receive tenure, or is denied a promotion, the recourse that is usually followed is the procedure that has been stipulated in the faculty handbook with approval by the administration and board.

Second, all institutions need to receive accreditation so that they are able to demonstrate to external audiences that they are viable on multiple levels – academic, fiscal, facilities, and the like. Accreditation is by a non-governmental entity that certifies that the institution meets minimal acceptable standards for offering a post-secondary degree. If an institution is not accredited it will

not receive any federal or state funds. Virtually all public and private four-year research institutions have gained accreditation.

These five ideas – (a) academic freedom, (b) merit, (c) civic and personal obligations, (d) autonomy and shared governance, and (e) quality control – form the framework for viewing the American model. Each idea has its own trajectory and has changed over time, but their routes are intertwined and almost a century old. By no means do I wish to suggest that each of these ideas has been implemented on every campus without significant challenges. Infringements and mistakes have been made with each idea. Major problems have resulted over the last decade, for example, with regard to the curtailment of academic freedom. Racism and sexism still exist in American society and in consequence aberrations will be found on a campus where a woman or a person of color is judged not by the merits of their case. Although significant sums of money have been donated by wealthy individuals, not everyone has provided charitable contributions, and sometimes contributions have been given with the implicit understanding that the gift will aid a donor in one way or another. Legislatures, from time to time, have tried to micromanage the activities of a campus, especially with regard to the work of the faculty that some in the legislature may find objectionable.

Nevertheless, when viewed over the last century, what is remarkable is less that violations to norms have occurred, but that the norms have largely been upheld whether in a private or public institution, or whether that university is in California, New York, or Illinois. One would be hard-pressed, for example, to think that a governor would get very far if he or she suggested that academic freedom should be abolished, or tried to insert the state's authority in the kind of courses that should be taught at a particular institution. A university president will most likely become unemployed if the suggestion were made to eliminate shared governance. If institutions have no leeway whatsoever about what to pay a successful professor then they will never be in the top 100 of any survey. If an institution decides to eschew accreditation or do away with peer review then the institution will not be considered a quality institution. Similarly, if an institution implemented a plan only to hire American nationals, then the university would face the approbation of its peers. The point is not that the system is perfect or that changes are unnecessary. In a dynamic system changes always occur. Humans always make mistakes. However, just as the idea of free speech is a cornerstone of American society that on occasion has been violated, I am suggesting that these five ideas are the framework for the American model of higher education.

### **Failures of the American system**

The desire to rise in the rankings and base one's efforts on the American model suggests that the model is to be emulated. Even with the framework I have offered above, the implicit assumption is that the ideas are what should be employed and that the United States has made few strategic mistakes with regard to tertiary education. In what follows, however, I offer three mistakes that have occurred

over time to highlight paths that might best not be taken.

### *Secondary/post-secondary divide*

The United States has two different educational systems managed in two very different ways. Neither the K-12 nor the higher education systems are managed at the federal level; instead, the systems are distinct entities within each state. That is, a university's board of trustees – whether public or private – does not see its purview to extend to primary and secondary education. The result is that tertiary education sets its own admissions standards, and K-12, ironically, sets its own graduation standards. Up until recently whether these standards were synchronized one with another was entirely up to chance. Indeed, higher education has shown very little interest in the product of K-12 education other than to bemoan that today's students are less prepared than yesterday's.

Even though those who teach and work in schools are largely educated in U.S. universities, there has been very little interest in gaining advice or support from local colleges and universities on a sustained basis. Schools have been self-contained units that have operated without a desire for external advice from post-secondary institutions, and the universities have been content to avoid getting into what many see as an educational quagmire. At a state level, for over a generation, there has been a great deal of dissatisfaction with K-12 education and a wealth of suggestions for reform; whereas, based in large part on the points raised above, state leaders are much more cautious at calling for the reform and overhaul of post-secondary education.

The disconnection, however, between K-12 education and higher education needs to become an artifact of the 20th century. The point is not that all teachers and faculty must hold joint meetings or be evaluated similarly, but rather that students are not well-served when different organizational entities, which have a logical connection to one another, are not aligned. Misalignments cause multiple inefficiencies in a system that cannot afford to be inefficient. Just as the American higher education system has no one inflexible way to administer merit or define shared governance, I am not suggesting that all schools and universities must interact in the exact same manner. However, I am arguing that in the future one additional principle that needs to be part of the philosophical basis of American higher education is a sustained relationship with K-12 education.

### *Quality as one size fits all*

Rankings and the pursuit of prestige is not a new item in the United States. If one looks back on the 20th century, the trajectory of post-secondary institutions has followed a similar route. Two-year institutions largely wanted to become four-year institutions. If the institution was a teachers' college then the president tried to make it a comprehensive university. A comprehensive university that offered masters' degrees tried to offer doctoral degrees. A research university tried to get elected to



the American Association of Universities (AAU), the premier research university group in the United States.

The same trajectory was also true for faculty. Faculty at community colleges, small liberal arts colleges, state colleges, and state universities all tried to mirror the workload and compensation of faculty at research universities. If one looks at faculty in the wide array of institutional types that exist in the United States, one will find that, except at community colleges, all are better compensated if they publish and do research than if they teach.

The emphasis throughout the 20th century has been clear: the most prestigious institutions are research universities and the most prestigious faculty are at those universities. In part then, the attempt of institutions and faculty to want to improve is admirable. However, the system does not require the performance of so much research. Research, and the universities that support it, are expensive undertakings. A country the size of the United States surely does not need 4,000 research-focused institutions, although it does have a vital need for teaching institutions.

The result is that if the 20th century was a history where everyone tried to simulate a research university, then the 21st century needs to be more protean and niche-focused. A successful post-secondary system is one that will have multiple versions of what counts for excellence, with appropriate benchmarks and criteria, and enable institutions to clearly delineate how they are different from – not similar to – one another.

### *Public disinvestment in higher education*

A recent conservative trend in the United States has been to offer less public monies for public higher education. While the 20th century was largely a time when states and the federal government invested in higher education, the last decade has seen a decline and a movement toward the greater burden for paying for a college degree to shift to the family and student. Such a concern is troubling for the poorest in society who are frequently unable to pay the costs of a four-year degree.

The United States always has been among the top countries with regard to enabling access to higher education for all strata of society; however, that is changing. Other countries such as Korea are outdistancing the United States at a time when a post-secondary degree is becoming more important. As Stéphan Vincent-Lancrin (2007, p.22) has noted, “tertiary educational attainment [in the United States] has stagnated while it has continued to increase in most other OECD countries.” If a country wishes to maintain its economic viability then it will need a well-educated workforce. The result is that a government needs to increase its investment in higher education rather than decrease it or maintain the *status quo*.

## **Strengths that also can be weaknesses of the American system**

Just as the points discussed in the section on the philosophical underpinnings of the American system can be violated, it is also true that a particular strength of an organization can also be a weakness. In what follows, I raise two issues that are of particular concern with regard to how an organization enacts them.

### *The stratification of incentives*

A strength of an incentive-based system is that evaluation has consequences; the result is that the work an individual does will be rewarded (or sanctioned) based on how someone has performed. If, for example, teaching and learning are important then an incentive-based system can be created that evaluates the quality of one's teaching. Similarly, if research is important and what one means by research is carefully defined, then individuals are able to be rewarded for having done what has been expected of them. The opposite points also can be made: poor teaching or individuals who conduct no research will receive few or no rewards. At an institutional level, if the board and faculty desire a university vice-chancellor (president) to enact a strategic plan, raise a specific amount of money, reorient the institution in a specific manner, then clear measures of evaluation might be implemented and consequences can follow if the goals are not achieved.

The weakness of an evaluation system is that if the evaluative measures are not carefully and widely agreed, then academic freedom will be threatened not directly, but indirectly. That is, I am not speaking of clear-cut infringements of academic freedom (*e.g.*, a person may not discuss a particular topic in the classroom). Rather, I am suggesting that if incentives are narrowly configured then research that is at its genesis or is highly experimental may not be attempted. If the evaluation of teaching relies only on student evaluations then teachers may teach in a manner that warrants a high student evaluation when they know that other pedagogical strategies might be more useful.

The point here is not that an incentive-based system is good or bad. Rather, the challenge turns on how such an idea is implemented. A narrow system that does not have broad agreement is likely to fail over time. A system that builds on the core ideas of the academy and is enacted through widespread debate and discussion is more likely to succeed.

### *Institutional diversification*

In large part because education in general – and in higher education in particular – has been viewed as a state rather than a federal role, one cannot speak of an American system of higher education. Even in countries such as Australia where greater autonomy is being given to the institutions and more power to the states, the tertiary system is still primarily federal. As Altbach (2001, p.17) usefully

observes about the United States, “While critics fault the system for duplication and lack of coordination, in a sense, these features may constitute a strength, especially when compared to the often highly centralized and bureaucratic arrangements in many other countries.” To be sure, as I suggested above, there are strengths in an integrated system where the units act in consort one with another. The challenge, however, is that such a system is likely to move much more slowly than one that is decentralized.

Further, the system that has developed has a great many parts. Each state has a network of mostly public community colleges that offer two-year degrees and certificates. Four-year colleges and universities are private and public and differ in quality, course offerings, graduate-level offerings, and research intensity. Costs vary significantly across institutions. A for-profit sector also has sprung up over the last 20 years that is considerable and provides part-time courses for working adults in formats that most traditional institutions do not.

Such a panoply of institutional types may be viewed from two viewpoints. On the one hand, the variety of institutional forms suggests that all students will find some sort of institution that fits their particular needs. On the other hand, as was noted earlier, research universities are always seen to be at the top of the post-secondary pyramid. To the extent that particular groups – such as white men – are lodged at the top of the pyramid whereas other groups – such as people of color and the poor – are found at the bottom of the pyramid, then higher education is merely reproducing unequal power structures that already exist. Again, the point is not that one or the other view is absolutely correct, but that how systems get enacted and acted on has significance.

### **Conclusion: Lessons learned**

My purpose has neither been to demonize nor romanticize the American model of higher education. As I have noted, a great many flaws lie in the history of the system as well as in how particular points have been enacted. Countries that desire to rise in international rankings also may not wish to copy a particular point that is embedded in the American tradition based on that country’s unique culture and tradition. However, as Joan Nelson (2007, p.34) has cogently argued, “Globalization is indeed increasing the urgency of rapid improvements in educational performance. Accelerating economic competition penalizes slow change.” The challenge, then, is how to improve in a world where pressures demand significant, rather than incremental, change.

I have argued that to view the American system from the vantage point of a market-based framework and little more is wrong-headed. While a capitalist country such as the United States in the early 21st century is sure to enact, rightly or wrongly, particular market-based strategies, the transformation of the American system is not simply a financial switch that gets turned on or off. Vincent-Lancrin (2007, p.21) has noted that “many of the changes underway in other OECD countries have long been features of U.S. tertiary education.” He points primarily to fiscal issues: the

concentration of research funding, sector hierarchical differentiation and consequent tuition-differentiation, diversified funding streams, and increased consumer funding. While any observer of the trends in higher education is likely to agree with Vincent-Lancrin's analysis, my purpose has been to move us away from instrumentalist notions that excellence in higher education is simply a matter of finding the right funding formula. The vast majority of American institutions in the top 100 of both international rankings have been in existence for well over a century. I have suggested that the philosophical underpinnings of the system have more to do with the position of the United States in these rankings than do market-based incentives.

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**Appendix: Top 100 Global Universities – U.S. Institutions (2007)**

<b>Institution</b>	<b>Type</b>	<b>Year founded</b>	<b>SJTU Ranking*</b>	<b>THES Ranking**</b>
Harvard University	Private	1636	1	1
Stanford University	Private	1885	2	19
University of California, Berkeley	Public	1868	3	22
Massachusetts Institute of Technology	Private	1861	5	10
California Institute of Technology	Private	1891	6	7 =
Columbia University	Private	1754	7	11
Princeton University	Private	1746	8	6
University of Chicago	Private	1890	9	7 =
Yale University	Private	1701	11	2
Cornell University	Private	1865	12	20
University of California, Los Angeles	Public	1919	13	41
University of California, San Diego	Public	1960	14	58
University of Pennsylvania	Private	1749	15	14
University of Washington, Seattle	Public	1861	16	55 =
University of Wisconsin, Madison	Public	1848	17	55 =
University of California, San Francisco	Public	1873	18	
Johns Hopkins University	Private	1876	19	15
University of Michigan, Ann Arbor	Public	1817	21	38
University of Illinois, Urbana-Champaign	Public	1867	26	73
Washington University (St. Louis, MO)	Private	1853	28	
Northwestern University	Private	1851	29	29
New York University	Private	1831	30	49
Rockefeller University	Private	1901	30	
Duke University	Private	1838	32	13
University of Minnesota, Twin Cities	Public	1851	33	
University of Colorado, Boulder	Public	1876	34	
University of California, Santa Barbara	Public	1944	35	
University of Maryland, College Park	Public	1856	37	79
University of Texas, Austin	Public	1883	38	51
University of Texas Southwestern Medical Center	Public	1943	39	
Vanderbilt University	Private	1873	41	82
Pennsylvania State University, University Park	Public	1855	43	90
University of California, Davis	Public	1959	43	96
University of California, Irvine	Public	1965	45	
Rutgers, The State University of New Jersey	Public	1776	47	
University of Pittsburgh	Public	1787	49	77 =
University of Southern California	Private	1880	50	
University of Florida	Public	1853	51	
University of North Carolina, Chapel Hill	Public	1789	58	
Carnegie Mellon University	Private	1900	60	20 =

The Ohio State University	Public	1870	61	
Purdue University	Public	1869	68	77 =
Brown University	Private	1764	70	32
University of Arizona	Public	1885	74	
University of Rochester	Private	1850	75	95
Case Western Reserve University	Private	1967	78	85
Michigan State University	Public	1855	80	
Boston University	Private	1839	83	47
Rice University	Private	1891	87	92
Indiana University	Public	1820	90	
Texas A&M University	Public	1871	91	
University of Utah	Public	1850	93	
Arizona State University	Public	1885	96	
University of Iowa	Public	1847	97	
Dartmouth College	Private	1769		71
Emory University	Private	1836		74
Georgia Institute of Technology	Public	1885		97

\* Shanghai Jiao Tong University (SJTU) Ranking

\*\* Times Higher Education Supplement (THES) Ranking

Note: From *Academic ranking of world universities*, by Shanghai Jiao Tong University Institute of Higher Education, 2007, retrieved January 30, 2008, from <http://ed.sjtu.edu.cn/ranking.htm> and *THES-QS world university rankings 2007-top 100 universities*, by Times Higher Education Supplement/QS Quacquarelli Symonds Limited, 2007, Retrieved January 30, 2008, from <http://www.topuniversities.com/worlduniversityrankings>





# The Meaning and Recognition of Double and Joint Degree Programs

Jane Knight\*

**Abstract.** International joint, double and combined degree programs clearly have a role in the current landscape of higher education and will likely be more numerous and influential in the coming years. As an internationalization strategy, they address the heartland of academia – the teaching/learning process and the production of new knowledge between and among countries. These programs are built on the principle of deep academic collaboration and bring important benefits to individuals, institutions, national and regional education systems. The interest in them is expanding but so is the confusion. The purpose of this report is to examine the different meanings of double and joint degree programs around the world, examine the driving rationales, identify core concepts and elements, propose a working definition and typology, and discuss some of the vexing issues related to the organization, recognition and perceived ‘legitimacy’ of these programs and their qualifications.

**Keywords:** academic collaboration, combined degree, double degree, internationalization, joint degree, legitimacy, multiple degree, qualification, recognition

International joint, double and combined degree programs have an important role in the current landscape of higher education and will likely be more numerous and influential in the coming years. As an internationalization strategy, they address the heartland of academia which is the teaching/learning process and the production of new knowledge between and among countries. These programs are built on the principle of deep academic collaboration and bring important benefits to individuals, institutions, national and regional education systems. The interest in them is exploding but so is the confusion. The purpose of this article is to examine the different meanings of double and joint degree programs around the world, analyse the driving rationales, propose a working

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definition, and discuss some of the vexing issues related to the recognition and perceived ‘legitimacy’ of these programs and their qualifications<sup>1</sup>.

## New developments

For many academics and policy makers, international double and joint degree programs are welcomed as a natural extension of exchange and mobility programs. For others, they are perceived as a troublesome development leading to double counting of academic work and the thin edge of academic fraud. Yes, a broad range of reactions exists because of the diversity of program models being developed, the involvement of different types of traditional and new providers, the uncertainty related to quality assurance and qualifications recognition, and finally the ethics involved in deciding what academic workload or new competencies are required for granting joint, double, multiple or combined degrees<sup>2</sup>.

The increased interest in establishing these new types of programs has stimulated surveys both in the United States and Europe. In 2002, the European University Association (EUA) completed a ground breaking study on masters’ degrees and joint degrees (Tauch & Rauhvargers, 2002). This study identified some of the most pressing issues and tried to estimate the number of active joint degree programs in European institutions. The key issues and challenges included the legality of joint degrees, the need for compatible credit systems, the language of instruction, requirements for national legislation to facilitate the establishment of a program, and recognition of the qualification/s awarded.

A follow-up project (EUA, 2004) focused on identifying best practices and developing a set of ‘golden rules’ for establishing joint masters’ programs. The latest Trends V report (EUA, 2007) provides updated information on the number of European institutions that have established joint programs. The results by level of degree are as follows: bachelors’ 20% of responding institutions, masters’ 36%, doctoral 18%, not yet established 36%, no need 4%. This snap-shot paints a very positive future for joint degrees given that less than 5% indicated no interest in or need for joint degrees. It is important to point out that in Europe the term ‘joint degree’ often covers both double and joint degrees and does not make a distinction between the two terms. This is not the case in the rest of the world where joint degree and double degree programs have different meanings.

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<sup>1</sup> This article is based on a fuller analysis of double and degree programs in J. Knight (2008) *Joint and Double Degree Programs-Vexing Issues and Questions*. Research Report. Observatory on Borderless Higher Education. London, United Kingdom.

<sup>2</sup> In some countries (notably Australia and the UK) the terms joint, double and combined degrees are commonly applied also to degree programs offered within a single university. This article does not attempt to cover these programs though the conclusions reached for international programs possess wide relevance to intra-university programs.

In 2006, the German Academic Exchange Service and the German Rectors' Conference commissioned a "Survey on Study Programmes awarding Double, Multiple and Joint Degrees" (Maiworm, 2006). While 45 EU countries were polled, only 24 countries responded and over 40% of the responses were from Germany. The results show that these types of programs are a relatively new phenomenon: 75% of all programs have been established since 2000 with about 64% receiving some kind of financial support. The breakdown by level of program indicates that 21% were at the bachelors' level, 66% at the masters' level, 10% at a combined bachelors' & masters' level and only 2% at the doctoral level. The type of degree awarded is revealing: 59% of the programs awarded a double or multiple degree while an additional 12% awarded a double/multiple degree plus a joint certification. A single national degree was given in 13% of the cases and a total of 16% were awarded a joint degree by the universities where the student actually studied or by all the universities in the consortium. Given the low percentage of joint degrees it is important to ask why a joint degree was not awarded. About 39% indicated that the legislation in their country did not allow the award of a joint degree and another 21% indicated that the legislation of a partner country did not allow it.

In the United States, the Council of Graduate Studies 2007 "Survey Report on International Graduate Admissions" indicated that 11% of the responding American graduate schools have established dual/double degree programs and 7% have set up joint degree programs. Interestingly, colleges and universities that enroll large numbers of international students are more likely to offer these types of collaborative programs. However, the report states that as technology is further enhanced and best practices emerge, it is likely that more institutions with smaller enrollments will establish international collaborative degree programs in the future. American graduate schools look first to Europe (39% of respondents) for masters' double/dual/joint programs followed by China (24%), India (14%), Korea (8%) and the Middle East (6%) – a fascinating group of countries. Doctoral level double/dual/joint degrees have primarily been established with universities in Europe (16%) and China (4%). The future is bright for these kinds of international collaborative programs as 24% of all respondents indicated the intention to pursue these types of programs in the next two years (Redd, 2007).

### **Driving rationales**

Three of the major catalysts for stimulating the interest in joint and double degree programs are the increased demand for higher education and particularly international education, improved information and communication technologies, which permit more virtual mobility and collaboration among HEIs, and the perception by many institutions that the more international they are the better is their reputation and status. It is important to delve deeper into what is driving institutions, countries and students to get involved in joint and double degree programs. Analysis of the rationales driving joint and double degree programs is enlightening when looked at from the different perspectives of

individuals including students and professors, the institutions, national education systems and regional organizations.

### *Individual level – students and professors*

Students are attracted to these types of collaborative programs for a number of reasons. The opportunity to be part of a program that offers two degrees from two different universities located in different countries is seen to enhance their employability prospects and career path. In some countries, students who have completed a professional program, such as engineering, also receive accreditation from the professional body in each country thereby enhancing their job opportunities. Some students believe that a collaborative program is of higher quality, given that the expertise of two universities has shaped the academic program. This is especially true for joint degrees. Other students are not as interested in enhanced quality as in the opportunity to get two degrees ‘for the price of one’: they argue that the duration is shorter for a double or combined degree program, the workload is definitely less than for two single degrees, and often there is less of a financial burden as well.

Finally, students with a desire to study in another country benefit from exposure to another culture and from interaction with professors and students working in a different policy and problem context. Studying in a second or third language, often English, is seen as a huge advantage as well. Students see many advantages from a collaborative program over an exchange or semester abroad experience as there is no loss of time or the risk of credits not being counted. Finally, the status factor cannot be ignored. There is a certain sense of elitism attached to having academic credentials from universities in different countries, even if the student never studied abroad but benefited from distance education and visiting foreign professors.

Many professors are also attracted to a collaborative program as they like the diversity of students, the opportunity for innovation in the teaching/learning process, the occasion to work with fellow scholars on a joint research project, the chance to collect data or access specialized equipment, and the opportunity to broaden their professional network. The appeal of exposure to another culture, new problem solving strategies, and a different academic institution should not be underestimated for faculty members as well as students. While there is often extra workload and problems involved in collaborative programs, especially at the masters’ and doctoral levels, there are faculty who see that it is definitely a win-win situation for all involved.

### *Institutional level*

Collaborative degree programs lead to a deeper level and more sustainable type of relationship than many other internationalization strategies and thus bring important academic benefits. This is because the collaboration requires extensive discussion and reworking of program design, content,

organization, outcomes and requirements for completion. Of course, administrative matters, such as registration, enrolment, evaluation, tuition costs, are also involved. One can imagine the complexity of the issues involved, but the pluses seem to outweigh the potential problems. Academic benefits in terms of innovation of curricula, exchange of professors and researchers, and access to expertise at the partner university and its research networks make joint degrees especially attractive. Combined degrees allow institutions to work with partners that may offer a master's or doctoral level program or a speciality that is not available at their own university.

For other institutions the primary rationale is to increase their reputation and ranking as an international university. This is accomplished by deliberately collaborating with partners of equal or greater status. This type of 'status building' applies to institutions in both developed and developing countries. Finally, collaborative programs are perceived by some universities as a way to attract talented students who may want to stay for work experience after graduation and perhaps immigrate permanently.

### *National level*

At the national level, profile, status, capacity building, and competitiveness appear to be the primary rationales guiding the establishment of collaborative programs. National strategies for internationalization often include scientific, economic and technological competitiveness as top priorities. The higher education sector plays a central role in producing research and innovation as well as training the knowledge workers needed to implement the strategy. To that end, institutions are encouraged to cooperate with universities that are leaders in the field and to recruit the best and the brightest of students and scholars to the collaborative programs. Partnerships with highly regarded institutions are sought.

### *Regional level*

Europe is the leader in terms of using joint and double degree programs as a tool to promote regionalization. Three communiqués from Bologna ministerial meetings have emphasized the central role these types of programs have in building the European Higher Education Area (EHEA) (Schüle, 2006). The European University Association report on the "Establishment of joint degrees" (2004) extols the virtue of joint degrees by stating "joint degrees will boost the development of joint quality assurance, the recognition of degrees and qualifications across the EHEA, the transparency and convergence of higher education systems, student and staff mobility, the international employability of graduates, the European dimension of studies, and the attractiveness of the EHEA". This is eloquent testimony to the important role that international collaborative programs play at the regional level.

## Terminology

### *Diversity of terms – mass confusion*

A worldwide review of the literature, university web pages, survey reports, and research articles shows a plethora of terms used to describe international collaborative programs such as double and joint degrees. These terms include: double, multiple, tri-national, joint, integrated, collaborative, international, combined, concurrent, consecutive, overlapping, conjoint, parallel, simultaneous, and common degrees. They mean different things to different people within and across countries – thereby, complicating the situation. One of the key questions to be clarified is whether the terms listed above are used to describe the program offered or the qualification awarded.

To deal with the confusion of so many terms, organizations, governmental bodies and institutions have correctly tried to provide definitions to clarify their meaning. Different regions of the world, indeed each country active in this aspect of international education, have proposed definitions that relate to their policy framework and the concepts integral to their approach and native language. This has resulted in a multitude of definitions and another layer of complexity. An analysis of these definitions shows a variety of core concepts or elements used to describe double and joint degrees. They include: 1) number of collaborating institutions, 2) number of qualifications/certificates awarded, 3) completion time, 4) organization of the program, 5) recognition bodies and 6) number of countries involved.

The following examples illustrate two different approaches to definitions – the first makes the qualification central and the second focuses on the program.

The definitions proposed by Schüle (2006, p.3) uses the qualification or diploma as the core concept: a “Joint degree is a single diploma issued by two or more institutions offering an integrated study program. The single diploma (Bachelor, Master, Doctorate) is signed by the rectors of all participating universities and recognised as a substitute for the national diplomas. A double degree is two nationally recognized diplomas issued separately by the universities involved in the integrated study program.”

The Ministry of Education in Finland (2004), as well as many institutions, define double and joint degrees in terms of a program. For example: a joint degree means a program developed and organized by two or more higher education institutions (HEIs) in collaboration that leads to one joint degree certificate. Double degree in turn means a degree program developed and organized by two or several HEIs in collaboration that leads to two degree certificates – in practice one from each partner HEI.

These definitions are appropriate for their particular context but illustrate the confusion and misunderstanding about what different countries, institutions and regulatory bodies mean by double or joint degrees. While it is not the intention to propose a universal set of definitions it is necessary to

have some common understanding of what is meant in order to facilitate the collaborative agreements and mutual understanding that underpin these programs/degrees and to ensure that the qualifications awarded are recognized.

### *Core concepts*

The first key question is whether joint and double degree labels refer to the qualification awarded or the program offered. The first reaction is to automatically focus on the number of degrees/qualifications offered – one, two or more. But further reflection reveals that if the degree or qualification is the central concept one faces problems in trying to distinguish among the options available – single, joint, double, multiple or combined degrees. Furthermore, several legal issues arise due to the different national regulations of the collaborating institutions. This is particularly true for awarding a joint degree when one qualification from two or more institutions is often illegal.

On the other hand, if program is the primary concept, there are more elements available to describe and differentiate the various terms. Secondly, the collaborative nature of the academic program is the essence of this type of international education initiative and should be emphasized. The fact that institutions are collaboratively redesigning their curriculum and the organization of their programs is the most important feature and demonstrates deep international cooperation in their internationalization efforts. Therefore, given the challenges of national legal requirements for granting and recognizing qualifications and the importance of collaboratively designing an internationalized program, the following analysis and proposed typology for joint and double degrees will use the collaborative academic program as the foundation principle.

### *Proposed working definitions*

This section differentiates four types of international collaborative programs: joint degree program, double degree program, multiple degree program, and combined degree program. It is important to understand what each means and how they relate to and differ from one another.

#### International joint degree program

*“A joint degree program awards one joint qualification upon completion of the collaborative program requirements established by the partner institutions.”*

The distinguishing feature of this type of international collaborative program is that only one qualification is awarded jointly by the cooperating institutions. The duration of the program is normally not extended and thus students have the advantage of completing a joint program in the same time period as an individual program from one of the institutions. The design and integration of the

course of study varies from program to program but it normally involves the mobility (physical or virtual) of students, professors and/or course content. It is important to emphasize that students travelling to the partner country for research or course work is not a requirement in all joint degree programs, although the benefits of doing so are many and diverse. The options of having visiting professors, distance-learning courses and joint virtual research projects provide valuable alternatives to student mobility.

Awarding a joint qualification can face many legal issues. National regulations often do not allow a university to jointly confer a qualification, especially in association with a foreign institution. In this case, if the names of both the collaborating institutions appear on the degree certificate there is a risk that the joint degree will not be recognized by either of the home countries, meaning that the student does not have a legitimate qualification even though all program requirements have been completed. The situation becomes more complicated when one looks for an international body that will recognize a joint degree from two *bona fide* institutions. At this point, the Lisbon Convention for Recognition of Credentials is the only one of six UNESCO regional conventions that does so. Innovative ways to circumvent this problem have been developed by organizers of joint degree programs.

Overall, the most important features of a joint degree program are the strengths that each institution brings to the program and the opportunities it allows for students to benefit from a program that draws on the teaching, curricular and research expertise of two or more institutions located in different countries. The major drawbacks at the current time are issues related to the legality and recognition of a jointly conferred qualification.

#### International double degree program – multiple degree program

*“A double degree program awards two individual qualifications at equivalent levels upon completion of the collaborative program requirements established by the two partner institutions.”*

A multiple degree program is essentially the same as a double degree program except for the number of qualifications offered.

*“A multiple degree program awards three or more individual qualifications at equivalent levels upon completion of the collaborative program requirements established by the three or more partner institutions.”*

As titles of bachelors’, masters’ and doctoral degrees often differ across countries the term “equivalent level” is used to indicate that the double or multiple degrees conferred are of the same standing. The duration of a double or multiple degree program is normally extended beyond the length of a single degree program in order to meet the requirements of all partners participating in the collaborative program. The legality and recognition of the qualifications awarded by double/multiple



degree programs are more straightforward than for joint degrees. It is presumed that each partner institution is officially registered or licensed in its own country. Thus awards offered by the enrolling institution in a collaborative program should be recognized in that country and the other award/s would be treated like any other foreign credential.

The major hurdles facing double/multiple degree programs involve the design of the curriculum and the establishment of completion requirements. There is no standard way to establish completion requirements due to the variety of disciplines, fields of study and national regulations involved. Each partnership does it according to the practices and legalities of the collaborating institutions. However, the approach of double/triple counting the same student work load, or learning outcomes, can significantly put the academic integrity of the program in jeopardy. The idea of having two degrees from two different institutions in two different countries is attractive to students but careful attention needs to be given to ensuring that the value and recognition of the qualifications are valid and do not violate the premise, academic purpose, and authenticity of a collaborative degree program. This is especially true for multiple degree programs.

#### International combined degree program

*“A combined degree program awards two different qualifications at consecutive levels upon completion of the requirements established by the partner institutions.”*

Combined degree programs are becoming more popular both at the domestic and international level. They basically involve two consecutive qualifications (usually bachelors'/masters' or masters'/doctoral) awarded when program requirements for each degree as stipulated by the awarding institutions are completed. They differ from joint and double degrees as different levels of degrees are offered by the partners. The major focus is on the links between the two degrees and more specifically on ensuring that the completion requirements for the first program align closely with the entrance prerequisites for the second degree program. This requires careful attention as national requirements in each institution/country can differ and create obstacles. For combined degree programs, it is usual for a student to be mobile and complete the course work and research requirements for the first degree in one country and the requirements for the second degree in the partner institution located in another country. The period of study for the program is usually longer than for a single program but shorter than if the two degrees were taken separately.

#### *Analysis of working definitions*

It is informative to examine what is excluded from the proposed working definitions. The concept of recognition is problematic, especially with joint degree programs. Given that these definitions aim to be used in all regions of the world, it is too limiting to include the recognition element as these

procedures differ from country to country. The same argument applies to including concepts related to duration, rationales, intended outcomes, types of institutions. There are so many stakeholders and actors bringing different perspectives and approaches to these types of international collaborative degree programs that one needs to develop a generic definition that is useful and relevant to them all regardless of country origin. Finally, the concept of physical or virtual mobility is not included as collaborative programs can involve the movement of students or professors or researchers or course content *etc* and it is best not to make one particular kind of mobility a prerequisite.

The definition can include all types of programs (bachelors', masters', doctoral) and so the level is not specified. Consideration was given to using another word for degree, such as diploma, in order to include pre-university or non-degree programs. This is especially relevant for the combined degree definition. In the end, degree was chosen because of its current familiarity and the wide use of the term. However, in practice these definitions could include non-degree level higher education programs as well.

The number or location of countries is not specified in the proposed definitions. The generic descriptor/label for all programs is 'international collaborative program'. Using this label is preferable to having each of the four definitions specify the number of countries or include the word international. A definition, which is clear and succinct and can apply to the widest set of circumstances, is most useful. It is important to note that joint, double, and combined degrees can also be offered by institutions within a country and the proposed definitions could theoretically apply to these situations as well. There may be some advantages in having the same definition apply to domestic and international levels. This could help to avoid more confusion.

## **Issues and challenges**

The benefits of joint, double and combined degree programs are many and diverse but so are the challenges. Different regulatory systems, academic calendars, credit systems, tuition and scholarship schemes, teaching approaches, and examination requirements are only a few of the more technical level challenges to overcome. This section identifies some of the academic alignment issues and the macro questions that institutions and higher education authorities need to address in order move ahead in the development and recognition of these programs and qualifications.

### *Academic alignment issues*

National and university regulations and customs differ from country to country and present many challenges for the design and implementation of international collaborative programs. For instance, there are often regulations that prevent students from enrolling in more than one university at a time, or laws that require students to spend their last year or semester at the 'home' university, or mandatory

practises regarding the recruitment and selection of students. Non-recognition of or limitations on the number of courses/credits taken at a partner university are additional barriers. Different academic years can present problems for student mobility and yet, on the other hand, provide more opportunities for faculty exchange. Examination/evaluation requirements and procedures often present obstacles to double degree programs<sup>3</sup>.

Quality assurance and accreditation are of fundamental importance but pose significant challenges. When institutions have internal quality assurance procedures in place, requirements can be met for the portion of the program or research supervision provided by the home university. It is more difficult, but not impossible, to assure the quality of the courses offered by the partner university. Common entrance and exit requirements are often used but it would be helpful if mutual recognition of the respective quality assurance programs (where they exist) is included in the agreement for the collaborative program.

Accreditation is even more of a challenge as national systems do not exist in all countries around the world and even if they did accreditation agencies differ enormously – some focus on program and others on the institution, some focus on inputs and others on process or outputs. Furthermore, the establishment of procedures for accrediting international collaborative programs is relatively new territory for many agencies. For the present time, the best case scenario is that accreditation is completed by each partner institution involved in a double, joint, combined degree program. For professional programs there are international accreditation agencies like ABET or EQUIS, which may be appropriate for joint or double degree programs but at the current time more institutions have their ‘home’ programs accredited than the double or joint degree programs. An important question is whether national or regional or international accreditation is the best route for international collaborative programs.

### *Vexing issues – language, recognition and legitimacy*

The language of instruction for joint and double degree programs introduces some complexities. Each partner usually offers its programs in the home teaching language and, in some cases, in English. This means that courses could be offered in at least three different languages and more if multiple partners are involved. Students need to be at least bilingual – usually their native language/s plus English. There are two issues at play here. The first is the dominance of English in cases where English is not the native language of any of the partners. This speaks to the ‘Anglicization’ trend, or what some call ‘English imperialism’, in the higher education sector (and many other sectors as well).

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<sup>3</sup> For a detailed account of how European Business Schools in the Consortium of International Double Degrees overcome obstacles and develop different models of programs see Schüle (2006). An example of a check list is available to guide institutions in their work to establish joint and double degree programs. See EUA (2004) for their set of ‘Golden Rules for developing New Joint Masters Programs’.

Are international collaborative programs encouraging the overuse of English and the standardization of curricula? The second issue relates to the required proficiency level of students/professors in the second language of instruction or research and the training needed to help students/academics meet the language proficiency requirements. The positive side of the language issue is that students are required to be bilingual or multilingual, which helps their communication skills, employability and understanding of another culture. The establishment of language requirements and availability of upgrading courses by each partner needs to be crystal clear in the collaborative agreement.

The recognition of the qualifications awarded from the four different types of collaborative programs is by far the most vexing issue. As already discussed, there are only a few countries, although the number is increasing, that legally allow a university to confer a joint qualification in partnership with an institution in another country. This means that the student often gets a formal diploma from one university and an unofficial certificate from the other/s indicating that it was a joint collaborative program. For some students, this is not a problem as it is the international nature of the academic program which is most important, not the qualification. For many though, this is not the case as credentialism becomes increasingly important to students.

Employers, academic institutions, and credential evaluation agencies all need to be cognizant of what is entailed in the granting and recognition of double or multiple qualifications. There is a perception that some double, multiple and combined degrees are more 'legitimate' than others but this is difficult to prove. The 'recognition' process raises 'legitimacy' or 'misrepresentation' issues often associated with double/multiple degree qualifications – more than with joint or combined qualifications. Part of the concern rests with double counting of the same course credits/workload for two or more qualifications. This has led to the 'two for the cost of one' label for double degrees and the concern about honesty. Cost in this case is not measured in monetary terms alone as student work load is also involved.

The diversity of models used to determine the completion requirements for double/multiple degree programs is extremely varied. There is no one explanation or correct framework used to set program completion requirements. This raises the critical question whether the framework is based on 1) the number of completed courses/credits, 2) the student workload or 3) required outcome/competency. These three approaches lead to different explanations and arguments in the analysis of the 'legitimacy' of the double/multiple degrees awarded. The value of a qualification/credential is at the root of the murkiness surrounding the 'acceptability and authenticity' of double/multiple degrees emanating from a collaborative program. Many would argue that attributing the same courses or workload towards two or more degrees from two or more institutions in different countries devalues the validity of a qualification. Others believe that if students meet the stated learning outcomes/competencies required for a qualification, regardless of where or how the competencies were acquired, the credential is legitimate. This logic infers that double and multiple degrees, based on a set of core courses or competencies and augmented by any additional requirements

of the collaborating institutions, are academically sound and legitimate; and it is the process for recognizing these qualifications that requires more attention not the completion requirements *per se*. Both arguments have validity but the variety of models used prevents a clear resolution of the question of 'legitimacy'.

Clearly the debate is nuanced and complicated by national policies, customs and interpretations of what constitutes the requirements for a qualification. The critical point emanating from the concern and different interpretations of the 'legitimacy' of double/multiple degrees is that the issue needs further analysis. Stakeholders, including students, higher education institutions, employers, accreditation and quality assurance agencies, policy makers, academic leaders, and credential recognition bodies, need to address this issue individually and collectively. Similarities and differences among countries and stakeholders need to be acknowledged and respected but there needs to be some common understanding about what two or more qualifications at the same level emanating from a double or multiple degree collaborative program actually represent.

The challenge facing the higher education sector is to work out a common understanding of what joint, double and combined programs mean and involve, and to iron out many of the academic alignment issues inherent in working in different national regulatory frameworks, cultures and practices. Most importantly, a rigorous debate on the vexing questions of accreditation, recognition, and 'legitimacy' of the qualifications needs to take place to ensure that international collaborative programs and their awards are respected and recognized by students, higher education institutions and employers around the world.

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# Intermediary Bodies in UK Higher Education Governance, with Particular Reference to Universities UK\*

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**Abstract.** This paper offers critical reflections on the role, functions, problems and challenges of intermediary bodies in the United Kingdom, and particularly on Universities UK, which represents the heads of most HEIs. In an increasingly marketised, competitive and globalised higher education system, the roles and functions of intermediary bodies are being questioned and they face serious problems of credibility with both government and institutions. A special focus is on Universities UK: its role, functions, structure and the problems it faces. However, the challenges identified apply to all intermediary bodies in the UK and, perhaps, elsewhere. In particular, it is argued that they need to reinvent themselves as key players at both national and institutional levels and thereby make a serious contribution to policy-making at a critical time in the realisation of mass higher education in the UK.

**Keywords:** intermediary bodies, policy-making, problems and challenges, United Kingdom, Universities UK

## Introduction

This paper offers critical reflections on the role, functions, problems and challenges of intermediary bodies in the United Kingdom (UK), and particularly those of Universities UK (UUK)<sup>1</sup>, the representative organisation for the heads of university institutions in England and Northern Ireland and

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<sup>1</sup> See <http://www.universitiesuk.ac.uk/>. The former Committee of Vice-Chancellors and Principals was renamed Universities UK in December 2000.

all higher education institutions (HEIs) in Scotland and Wales. The UK and also the Republic of Ireland (*i.e.* southern Ireland, as distinct from Northern Ireland which is part of the UK) are unusual in having intermediary funding bodies located between the government and the institutions (OECD, 2007). In the UK, in the past at least, these have acted as a ‘buffer’<sup>2</sup>, preventing political interference in the allocation of funding to individual universities and offering advice to the government on policy and its implementation. So, representative bodies like UUK (formerly the CVCP) have negotiated as much with the funding bodies about the details of policy implementation as with the government about the overall direction of policy. Whether these funding bodies, and particularly for my purpose the Higher Education Funding Council for England (HEFCE)<sup>3</sup>, still act as ‘buffer bodies’ is open to debate. During the ‘New Labour’ government under Prime Minister Tony Blair (1997-2007), universities increasingly became the focus of national economic policy. Now, under the current Prime Minister, Gordon Brown (who was previously responsible for economic policy as Chancellor of the Exchequer for ten years), and with a ministry that combines higher education (HE) and science policy for the first time in 15 years<sup>4</sup>, the Labour government appears to be becoming even more interventionist in HE. There is evidence to suggest that HEFCE is increasingly a government controlled agency with limited influence on the direction of policy and with less and less need to work in partnership with HEIs and their representative bodies.

These developments have had significant implications for representative bodies, such as UUK, and for the external and internal governance of universities in England and the UK as a whole. They bring into question the capacity of intermediary bodies such as HEFCE and UUK to protect ‘academic freedom’ from incursion by politicians and other interested parties (such as employers of graduates and users of knowledge) and their perceived ‘utilitarianism’. Despite the changes, however, these bodies may overestimate their policy influence and significantly constrain institutional autonomy through their impact on internal governance and management. In an increasingly marketised, competitive and global HE system, the roles and functions of intermediary bodies are being questioned and they face serious problems of credibility with both government and institutions. In this paper, I will argue that the challenge they face is to reinvent themselves as key players at both national and institutional levels and thereby make a serious contribution to policy-making at a critical time in the realisation of mass HE in the UK.

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<sup>2</sup> Bjarnason defines a ‘buffer organisation’ as “an organisation which is formally constituted and functions in an intermediary capacity between government and the university sector.” (Bjarnason, S. (1998) “*Buffer*” *Organisations in Higher Education: Illustrative Examples in the Commonwealth*, London: Association of Commonwealth Universities, p.1)

<sup>3</sup> According to HEFCE, it works in partnership and “promotes and funds high-quality, cost-effective teaching and research, meeting the diverse needs of students, the economy and society”, <http://www.hefce.ac.uk/>

<sup>4</sup> The Department of Innovation, Universities and Skills was established on 28 June 2007, <http://www.dius.gov.uk/>



### *Outline of the paper*

First, the characteristics of the HE system of governance and regulation in the UK are outlined. I then describe the internal governance of HEIs and the factors that have influenced its development. My special focus is on Universities UK: its role, functions, structure and the problems it faces. Finally the challenges for intermediary bodies in the UK are presented.

## **1. Characteristics of higher education governance in the UK**

As the UK system has expanded in the last two decades, and a larger proportion of young people is participating, HE has become a much greater concern of governments, not least in terms of public expenditure. However, a reduction in the funding *per* student has put increasing pressure on institutions to reduce costs and increase income from other sources – in effect to operate more like businesses. Under the ‘New Labour’ government of Tony Blair, the expansion of HE became a policy goal: a means for improving productivity and competitiveness and thereby economic growth. The dominant ideology is of HE as an economic resource and HEIs that should be responsive to economic needs (Salter & Tapper, 2002). So, what is taught has to be relevant to employers’ requirements, applied research is more important than pure knowledge, and the State must hold institutions accountable for carrying out their economic role effectively. Hence, governments, from that of Margaret Thatcher (Prime Minister from 1979 to 1990) onwards, have felt justified in regulating HE in order to pursue national policy goals. HE is no longer just the concern of the education ministry; it is also of concern to ministries responsible for trade and industry, health and immigration, among others. Indeed, in his reorganisation of government departments on becoming Prime Minister in 2007, Gordon Brown separated HE from schools and coupled it with ‘innovation’ and improving the skills of the workforce (in the Department for Innovation, Universities and Skills).

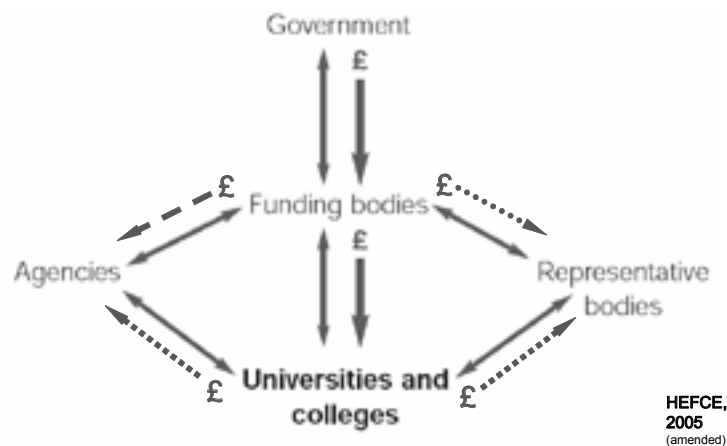
### *Intermediary bodies in the UK: a complex web of relationships*

So, where do intermediary organisations such as university associations and professional bodies fit in the relationships between the State and HEIs in the UK?

Figure 1 is a simplified diagram of the relations between Government, the Funding bodies and the Universities and Colleges of HE. It shows the funding bodies as intermediaries between the State and the HEIs. These include the Funding Councils for England, Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland, the UK Research Councils and other funding bodies, such as the Training and Development Agency for school teachers. The Representative bodies on the right of the diagram include Universities UK and GuildHE, which represents the colleges of HE or HEIs without university status in England. However, increasingly, we should also take account of the interest groups of

universities: the Russell Group representing research-intensive universities like Oxford and Cambridge; the 1994 Group of other smaller, research-orientated pre-1992 universities; Million+ representing post-1992 universities that were previously polytechnics; and other groups, such as professional associations. I will come back to these interest groups later. The Agencies consist of sector-wide organisations established to perform a particular role, like the Quality Assurance Agency, Universities and Colleges Admissions Service and the Higher Education Statistics Agency. These relationships are even more complex because the four territories of the UK – England, Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland – have different arrangements.

**Figure 1. Relationships between the State & HEIs in the UK**



Funding mechanisms remain the key policy instrument by which the Government, through the Funding Councils and Government Departments, influence HEIs. With the rapid expansion of HE and the reduced funding *per* student, universities and colleges are under pressure to chase the same few additional sources of money that become available, regardless of their mission or strategic plan (King, 2004). There is a strong traditional English idea of the university in which all institutions more or less conform to the same model, which is heavily influenced by the Universities of Oxford and Cambridge (Tapper & Salter, 2003). And there is a pervasive ideology of meritocracy and concern for fair play, ‘a level playing field’ and equal treatment. This has led to less diversity among university missions, especially since the end of the binary divide in 1992 (Salter & Tapper, 2002). The most recent example of this is that almost all HEIs set tuition fees for full-time undergraduates at the maximum of £3,000 in 2006, despite Government legislation permitting variable fees.

### *The Higher Education Funding Council for England*

As suggested above, there are different relationships between the HE Funding Council and the governmental authority in each of the four territories in the UK. These have become even more

differentiated since the New Labour government's policy of devolution from 1997. I will now focus on England, where there is a principal-agent relationship between government and HEFCE, in which the principal (the government) ensures the agent (HEFCE) allocates public funds in accordance with the principal's priorities (Yokoyama, 2006). Each year, the Secretary of State (or chief minister) responsible for HE issues a 'letter of guidance' to the Chair of the Funding Council setting out the priorities for the coming year. HEFCE manages the financial allocation but, nominally, it is not a planning body – the institutional autonomy of universities is enshrined in law, rather like that of the BBC (Kogan & Hanney, 2000), but unlike most other public services in the UK.

HEFCE's role is that of co-ordination – or implementation – rather than reform (Yokoyama, 2006), but it is responsible for the standard of the HE that it funds, and it does this in consultation with the HE sector. Its concern is damage limitation rather than policy initiation, and it seeks to ensure that HEIs do not fail. So it also has responsibility for overseeing institutions' financial auditing. However, from time to time, HEFCE does offer robust advice to the government and has sought to protect the sector from the worst excesses of the State (Scott, 2007). Certainly this ensures stability but it may also inhibit change.

Nevertheless, its funding allocation mechanisms can be used to influence universities' and colleges' pursuit of private income, from endowments, business and recently employers who are expected to fund courses that directly meet their training needs. So, by means of the influence that funding bestows, HEFCE has become more of a regulator, albeit reluctantly, in order to protect the public interest. This is no surprise, as intermediate regulatory bodies are increasingly seen as more effective operators than direct Government control (King, 2004). Even when vice-chancellors criticise particular funding mechanisms (for example, ring-fenced funding streams for particular Government initiatives), some faculty and administrators within universities may welcome the support they offer (for example, to widen access to poor students or to introduce innovations in teaching and learning).

But there are means other than just funding mechanisms for Government to steer the HE system in the UK, such as forms of evaluation, accountability and marketisation.

### *Evaluation, accountability and marketisation*

The two main forms of evaluation in the UK are the Research Assessment Exercise (RAE) and quality assurance of teaching. The RAE is a review of research outputs by university departments, but has been adapted by successive governments to restructure the HE sector in order to promote a small number of so-called 'elite' universities and increase UK competitiveness in research world-wide (Scott, 2006). Since the early 1990s, quality assurance of teaching has focused on the accountability of institutions and the basic academic units. In assessment of teaching there has been an increasing concern with outcomes and outputs that can be quantified and standards that can be compared, rather

than inputs and processes that have to be interpreted and contextualised. Although the assessment and audit of teaching has few direct financial consequences, it has led to a preoccupation with procedures, documentation and presentation rather than with teaching and learning as such. In addition, as I have argued elsewhere, this separation of the ways in which teaching and research are funded, managed, assessed and rewarded has decoupled them entirely in UK HE (Locke, 2004).

A number of consumerist ‘levers’ have also been introduced recently that are designed to help students to compare institutions and courses and so exert pressure on HEIs to improve (Naidoo, 2006). Initiatives such as *Unistats*<sup>5</sup> are designed to introduce market mechanisms alongside capped tuition fees and competition for research funding, but have a tendency to encourage institutions to become preoccupied with reputation and branding rather than real improvement – in other words, they may grow to be more concerned with appearance than with substance. However, the mechanisms only constitute a *quasi-market* which is still carefully regulated and managed by the State and its intermediary bodies.

Government regulation, control and remote steering co-exist in complex ways in the UK (Yokoyama, 2006). There has been oscillation in state-university relationships, with hyper-policy experimentation leading to unintended consequences and, in some cases, the subsequent retraction of policies (King, 2006). From even before Margaret Thatcher there has been a decline in governments’ trust in the professions, and academia has been no exception. However, there has also been an enduring recognition that creativity, dynamism and scientific development depend on high levels of institutional autonomy and academic freedom. The State is caught on the horns of a dilemma between encouraging innovation and avoiding risk through regulation and this has resulted in a patchwork design of policy instruments (King, 2007). Governments are also aware that institutions and academics are creative in learning to play regulatory games and can meet performance targets while at the same time undermining the intentions of their policy goals (Tapper & Salter, 2003).

Fundamentally, though, the framework of governance for HE is based on the value and belief system underpinning it: the conception of the university, its purposes and its relationship with the State and society (Henkel, 2007). Increasingly, in the UK this conception is about the role of HE in improving the nation’s economic productivity and competitiveness.

## **2. The internal governance of HE institutions**

### *Vertical stratification and institutional governance*

The UK HE system is vertically stratified, in other words hierarchical. Before 1992, all universities were established as charitable bodies with charters which enshrined their institutional autonomy. The

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<sup>5</sup> See <http://www.unistats.com/>

academics originally had much more influence on the governance of the institution than they do today. The polytechnics, however, were under local government control until their incorporation in 1988 and were always characterised by more centralised management and corporate-style governance. With the end of this binary division in 1992, when polytechnics became universities, their recently gained autonomy was further strengthened. However, this same legislation effectively reduced the old universities' autonomy by requiring the newly established national Funding Councils to evaluate the quality of university output – something the former polytechnics were already very used to, but the old universities never had. More recently, some of the smaller HE colleges have been awarded the title of 'university' since the criteria were changed in 2004 and research degree-awarding powers are no longer required for the 'university' title.

So, there are significant differences in the origin, size, resources, academic (and, particularly, research) strengths and reputations of HEIs in England and the UK. These differences are also reflected in the varying forms of internal governance found in universities and colleges. The government and the Funding Councils apply the same rules to all HEIs, regardless of their circumstances, but the institutions differ greatly, for example in their dependence on public funding, their access to private finance and their relations with business. So, in practice, their institutional autonomy is contingent on these other factors, which places different institutions in very different relationships of power and influence with the government and its intermediary bodies.

My point is that this vertical stratification – or hierarchy – makes it difficult for universities to agree common positions, because their interests diverge so much. The government wants to increase horizontal differentiation between institutions – in other words functional diversity – which would enable universities with different missions to position themselves in the market in order to compete more effectively in their particular niches. However, the universities themselves are increasingly concerned about reputation – and avoiding criticism by evaluators and 'naming and shaming' by the media – and are seeking 'insurance cover' by belonging to interest groups. The danger is that this strategy is likely to lead to greater government intervention, not less.

### *The role of the vice-chancellor in the governance of universities*

The role of the vice-chancellor is critical in the governance of UK universities. In 1988, with the creation of a national Funding Council, the vice-chancellor was designated the chief accounting officer and, in effect, became the chief executive of the organisation. In the 1990s, this post increasingly became a fixed-term appointment, for five years, say, rather than a semi-permanent position. Appointments were more often made from outside the university rather than by promotion from within. So a new vice-chancellor would want to make his or her mark very quickly. In the early part of this decade, there was a spate of appointments of vice-chancellors from other countries, particularly from

the United States, Australia and South Africa. So, in many ways, the position has become more and more like the chief executive of a large corporate company.

This development was reinforced by a ‘managerial revolution’ in HE and in other public services. Faced with financial constraints and increasing evaluation by Government, institutions strengthened their senior and middle management in order to act more decisively, protect their institution’s interests and become more strategic. However, they often did so at the expense of academics’ influence on the direction of the institution. Often, the senior management would use external pressures as a pretext to implement changes within their institutions, even when alternative responses – such as resistance – were available. The overall effect was the strengthening of power and authority of the institution – what Mary Henkel has called “a radical redefinition of institutional autonomy” (Henkel, 2007, p.7) – and a reduction in academic freedom and the influence of senates and academic boards.

Hence, professors in the UK have always been less powerful and influential than their counterparts in continental Europe and other countries where institutional power was constrained by more direct governmental control. In the UK, governments have been increasingly suspicious of the academic profession and are much more likely to accept vice-chancellors’ interpretation of the academic community’s views (Henkel, 2007). Some senior academics have joined a growing cadre of ‘academic managers’. They quite quickly become separated from their previous colleagues, but few have received management training. So they rarely become entirely comfortable working alongside their colleagues who are non-academic managers.

### *Initiatives on leadership, governance and management of universities*

Despite the ‘managerial revolution’ in HE, the UK Treasury has frequently been critical of the management of universities and colleges. It has sought the introduction of corporate models of governance and an increase in the influence from outside in the steering of HEIs. There has been a number of initiatives, largely from outside the sector, to ‘modernise’ institutional leadership, governance and management in line with reforms that have taken place in the business world<sup>6</sup>. However, most of these initiatives are predominantly concerned with the governing bodies of

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<sup>6</sup> The following are just some of the most recent and prominent developments:

- A series of guidelines on good practice issued by the Committee of University Chairmen (the external chairs of the university governing bodies in the UK) (from the mid-1990s onwards: latest edition, 2004).
- The Lambert Code of good practice for governing bodies published in a Government-commissioned report on business-university collaboration (Lambert, R. (2003) *Lambert Review of Business-University Collaboration, Final Report*. London: HM Treasury).
- Increasing pressure on the Universities of Oxford and Cambridge to radically reform their governance arrangements (from the late 1990s onwards).
- The establishment of the Leadership Foundation for Higher Education (LFHE) which provides advice, support and training in the development of governance and management for universities and colleges in the UK (since 2004).

universities and colleges, rather than governance throughout the institution, that is, for example, at programme, Department and School or Faculty levels. Certainly, these initiatives have reinforced the trends towards managerialism. It is pertinent to ask whether the changes in the academic profession and the administrative workforce merely reflect these policies or whether they are also, partly, a reaction to them.

So, to summarise this paper so far: increasingly, UK HE is characterised by a market-orientation in which the self-interested actions of the individual institutions reinforce and modify the existing vertical stratification. This makes it more and more difficult for the parties to work collectively in the best interests of an 'HE sector', let alone in the public interest.

### **3. Universities UK: its role, functions, structure and the problems and challenges it faces**

This section focuses on Universities UK, its role, functions, structure and the problems and challenges it faces.

#### *The role and functions of Universities UK*

The present organisation was originally formed as the Committee of Vice-Chancellors and Principals of the Universities of the United Kingdom (CVCP) in 1918 just before the government's original 'buffer body', the University Grants Committee (UGC), was established in 1919. It changed its name in 2000 to Universities UK to reflect the work of the organisation and so that the name had a direct link to HE and a more modern sound to it. Nevertheless, the members remain the individual vice-chancellors and principals of the universities in the United Kingdom, as well as the heads of the colleges of HE in Scotland and Wales (but not in England and Wales, which are represented by GuildHE).

UUK's vision: "...is of UK universities that are autonomous, properly funded from a diversity of sources, accessible to all, delivering high quality teaching and learning, and at the leading edge of research of regional, national and international significance."<sup>7</sup> Its mission: "...is to be the essential voice of UK universities by promoting and supporting their work." It achieves this by:

- influencing stakeholders;
- providing informed policy analysis;
- co-ordinating sector agencies;
- providing member-exclusive services; and
- enhancing its operational efficiency and effectiveness.

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<sup>7</sup> See <http://www.universitiesuk.ac.uk/mission/>.

*Where has CVCP/Universities UK had most impact in recent years?*

It is revealing to ask where the organisation has had most impact in the last 25 years. Of course, it is difficult to separate the effect of the organisation as a whole from that of particular influential universities, like Oxford and Cambridge, and powerful alliances of institutions such as the Russell Group. The following is a considered selection of its major influences – although these should not be seen as unqualified successes, as some of the long term effects have been mixed.

Starting from the early part of this period during Margaret Thatcher's premiership, the management of universities was significantly influenced by what was known in 1985 as the Jarrett Report on university efficiency and management, prompted by the UGC, which gave voice to the pressure for universities to adopt business models of strategic planning in order to achieve efficiencies and seek alternative sources of funds to dwindling UGC grants. This was really the start of the 'managerial revolution' referred to earlier.

Shortly afterwards in 1989, the CVCP resisted an attempt by the short-lived successor to the UGC, the Universities Funding Council, to expand HE 'on the cheap' by encouraging universities to bid for additional student numbers at lower than the marginal unit cost (Tapper & Salter, 1997).

In 1992, when the polytechnics became universities, the CVCP was prompt in merging with its equivalent, the Committee of Directors of Polytechnics. This formed a representative body for all universities that suddenly increased in number from 47 to 100 and offered a united front to the newly formed Higher Education Funding Councils for England, Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland.

In the mid-1990s, the CVCP provided significant impetus to the National Committee of Inquiry on Higher Education (commonly known as the Dearing Committee, after its chair, then Sir Ron – now Lord – Dearing), which helped to achieve recognition of the need for cost-sharing in HE, with students paying towards the costs of their tuition.

The change of name in 2000 to 'Universities UK' helped to raise the profile of the organisation and its capacity to speak on behalf of universities and enhance its role in the policy-making process. However, this was also assisted by the New Labour government's increasing focus on universities, and the media's obsession with issues such as unequal access to the most prestigious universities and rising student debt.

In a series of reports and submissions to the government's Comprehensive Spending Reviews in the early 2000s, UUK established the gap between existing institutional income and what was needed to fund expansion towards the government's target of 50% of 18-30 years olds in HE by 2010.

This certainly helped to build the case for what became known as 'top-up' or 'variable' fees – or allowing HEIs to charge up to £3,000 per year to UK (and other European Union) students for full-time undergraduate courses. By negotiating with the various university interest groups and supporting the government's policy, UUK managed to neutralise the opposition within HE to 'top-up' fees, at least for the passage of the Higher Education Bill through Parliament in 2004.



It is clear from these few examples that, even when CVCP/UUK has had a significant impact, it has been either in support of the existing direction of governments' thinking or of a more broadly developing consensus, or it has simply moderated the most damaging effects of government-initiated policies.

In recent years, much of what has been achieved by the sector has not been by the organisation as such, but by its most influential members: for example, the 'lighter touch' teaching quality assurance regime for institutions, the case for reform of the RAE, and the retention of the 'dual support' system for funding research jointly by the Funding and Research Councils. HEFCE has probably had more influence than CVCP/UUK on reining in the more interventionist tendencies of the New Labour government: for example, by setting limits to the concentration of research funding in a handful of universities, and forestalling government intervention on the provision of teaching of 'strategic and vulnerable' subjects that were susceptible to cuts or departmental closure by institutions. Indeed, I would argue that some of UUK's policies and pronouncements have actually damaged its reputation among academics and administrators in universities. Many see UUK as the vice-chancellors' club working in the interests of the leaders and senior management in institutions, and not necessarily on behalf of the sector as a whole. However, the teaching unions, academic subject bodies and professional associations have little influence of their own at national policy level.

### *The main problems facing Universities UK*

So, this discussion indicates where Universities UK's key problems lie.

The government wants to be able to negotiate with UUK as long as the organisation can 'deliver' the majority of its members (Tapper, 2007), including the most influential universities. The more a body like UUK can help the government achieve its policy goals, the more influence it can potentially have with ministers (King, 2004). However, UUK has no real influence over its members: it has no sanctions if they do not fall into line, and little in the way of incentives to encourage them if they do not want to conform.

Indeed, many of the recent developments in policy have increased the divisions among member institutions. During the last decade, devolution has widened the variation between the national HE systems, particularly between Scotland (which has always had distinctive arrangements) and the rest of the UK. The 2004 Higher Education Act changed the criteria for granting the title of university in England, so that institutions applying for this status no longer require the power to award research degrees. More than a dozen HE colleges have become universities in the last two years – albeit teaching-orientated and locally-based. They are eligible for membership of UUK and most have joined. The increased marketisation of HE has set universities in greater competition with each other for students (both UK and international), research funding and business contracts.

The increased prominence of the interest groups of universities has both contributed to this differentiation within the sector and been caused by it. These groups are becoming mini-versions of UUK, each with a full-time secretariat, their own lobbying capacity, a website and distinctive branding. The three main groupings are:

- the Russell Group, representing 20 research-intensive universities including Oxford and Cambridge;
- the 1994 Group of 19 other smaller, research-orientated pre-1992 universities; and
- Million+ representing 28 post-1992 universities that were previously polytechnics.

In addition, there is a loose-knit coalition of 24 pre- and post-1992 universities not aligned to any of the other three groups called, ironically, the University Alliance.

As a result of these increasing divisions, there are fewer and fewer policy issues on which UUK can engineer a consensus among its members. The differences in size and in branding and reputation between its members have become too great for this. Competition for resources as a result of funding constraints and the introduction of *quasi*-markets has made it harder to achieve a common sense of purpose. It has become increasingly difficult to handle internal conflict as institutional heads place the individual interests of their own university above those of the HE sector as a whole – and sometimes even the interest group to which they belong. There are still over 30 members of UUK that do not belong to any interest group – even eschewing the less formalised University Alliance.

UUK's messages, as a consequence, have become increasingly bland, reduced to the lowest common denominator and designed not to cause offence to any of the interest groups, and particularly the influential research-intensive universities – which include the 'world class' universities that the government has become so preoccupied with. UUK's statements, therefore, are often of less interest to journalists than the internal arguments and conflicts between various parts of the HE sector that leak out from time to time.

This gives UUK and its members an interesting dilemma: institutions have been placed in competitive situations in which they must act in their own best interests and yet, if they wish to influence how the system operates, they need to act with others to shape the overall governing structures and processes (Tapper & Salter, 2003). No doubt, the government and Funding Council will continue to 'consult' with UUK, partly because they always have, but also because it is a more efficient way of getting its message across to the sector, by dealing with one organisation rather than three or four. However, this is not the same as negotiating with the universities; the State still determines policy and UUK reacts to it and is only partially engaged with the implementation of some of the policy decisions. Consultation is largely symbolic and unlikely to give rise to substantive policy shifts, let alone initiatives.

UUK recognised the divisiveness of these developments in a review of its structures between 2004 and 2006. A working party was set up "to define what changes are needed better to

accommodate the increasing diversity of institutions in the sector". It eventually made 18 recommendations for change, which were to be achieved through four projects. The aims of the projects were to secure:

- increased member engagement and commitment based on more transparent decision-making;
- higher levels of personal contact between members and the UUK office;
- more effective communication; and
- development of member-responsive services and value for money.

Different external consultants were commissioned to undertake each project and produce separate reports.

The focus on structure and communication in this review, rather than organisational purpose, leadership and culture are, in my view, telling. The resulting changes have no doubt had some positive impacts, such as a sharper focus on the needs of members rather than those of the organisation and its more prominent personnel, a concentration on providing value for money, and greater transparency in decision-making. Those presiding over the review certainly avoided some of the more radical suggestions that were floated, such as reserving membership of the Board for a certain number of representatives from each interest group and cutting subscriptions so that the secretariat could provide only the most basic services to members. However, the review failed to answer some pressing questions, such as:

- How can universities collectively regain a primary position of influence in the policy-making process?
- What is the optimal balance for UUK between advocacy and providing services to members?
- How can UUK represent the special interests of particular groups of institutions as well as the common interests of the higher education sector as a whole?<sup>8</sup>
- How can a UK-wide organisation speak for institutions operating in increasingly divergent national systems and – since the local elections in 2007 – under different political regimes?

The review of structures has not resolved these issues, and so they will re-emerge in the medium, if not the short, term.

#### **4. Conclusion: the challenges for intermediary bodies in the UK**

In a sense, the first challenge for intermediary bodies in the United Kingdom and beyond, is to understand what is going on and, if they can, come to terms with it (Tapper, 2007). The key challenges in their relations with governments, then, are:

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<sup>8</sup> One notable recent UUK approach is to develop general principles or guidelines on a particular policy area, for example reform of the Research Assessment Exercise.

- as representative bodies, to achieve sufficient consensus among their members to warrant the Government negotiating with them; and
- for all intermediary bodies to exert real influence on policy in HE, by formulating proposals and building support for them, rather than just reacting to Government steering.

The key challenges in their relations with institutions of HE are:

- as representative bodies, to reconcile the tensions between exerting political influence and providing services to members that offer value for money;
- for all intermediary bodies, to assist institutions in rebuilding shared governance and to strengthen the academic and administrative heartland;
- for all intermediary bodies, to ensure that students fully participate in this new approach, rather than being treated merely *en masse* as passive consumers.

However, there are deeper and more fundamental questions to address.

- What does HE offer apart from increased economic productivity, for example, in the spheres of society, culture, the environment and democratic participation?
- Who are universities' best allies in promoting HE as being in a good position to make positive contributions to all of these spheres?
- How can UUK and other representative bodies help promote real diversity among institutions of HE in which differences of mission and purpose are more important than status distinctions?

Of course, there are also challenges for governments in the increasingly complex sphere of HE policy-making: the more fragmented the HE sector is, the more difficult it is for governments to relate to it. They need the co-operation and engagement of HEIs and of the academic community to realise their policies at institutional and departmental levels. They cannot regulate and closely manage the performance of universities and, at the same time, expect them to experiment, innovate, achieve distinctiveness and compete internationally. For the UK government, in particular, can the Higher Education Funding Councils act as buffer bodies any more? Are they, in effect, becoming more like planning bodies, and therefore in danger of attempting to manage the performance of institutions?

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# Transnational Higher Education in China: thirty years of development

Shengbing Li\*

**Abstract:** With its open-door policy, transnational higher education in China started and developed very quickly along with the globalization. Now, the numbers of transnational education programs have reached more than 1,000 at various levels including diploma, bachelor, and postgraduate. This paper reviews the development of transnational education in China in the recent thirty years, including the background to internationalization, numbers of cooperative programs, structures (forms, levels, specialties and country origins), and policies. The current problems in Chinese transnational education are analyzed. Finally, some conclusions are drawn about the thirty-year development of transnational education in China.

**Keywords:** transnational education in China, thirty years, market, value-orientation

## Introduction

This year witnesses the 30<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the opening of reform and transnational education in China. With an open-door policy, transnational education has been a notable presence in the educational globalization and internationalization of China. In the context that education export has been an important item of industrial export in developed countries, China has become an ample market. Transnational education is also considered a key component of the educational cause in China. In order to promote and standardize the expansion of Sino-foreign cooperation in running schools, the central government put forward *Regulations of the People's Republic of China on Chinese-Foreign Cooperation in Running Schools* (subsequently referred to as *Regulations*) in 2003, and *Measures for the Regulations of the People's Republic of China on Chinese-Foreign Cooperation in Running Schools* (subsequently referred to as *Measures*) in 2004 consecutively. Chinese higher education institutions, the main organizer of education, and the social associations are enthusiastic about transnational education at all times, but transnational education in China has not developed as

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expected. On the contrary, many problems have arisen. At present, Chinese society is engaged in retrospection and review of the *pro's* and *con's* of the 30-year reform and opening up. Sino-foreign cooperation in education, which is an important component of Chinese higher education internationalization, also needs profound rethinking.

### **Brief history**

Chinese-foreign Cooperation in Running Schools refers to the cooperative activities of foreign educational institutions and Chinese educational institutions in establishing educational institutions within the territory of China to provide education services mainly to Chinese citizens (Council of PRC, 2003). It has adopted two forms: collaborative institutions and joint programs. Since China's opening up to the world, transnational education has experienced four stages and some milestones.

#### *Stage 1, 1978 to mid 1980s*

From 1978, China started some forms of transnational education, including training classes, such as the Sino-US program in economics and the Sino-French program in jurisprudence that are operated by Chinese universities (such as Renmin University of China, Fudan University *etc.*) and institutions from America and France; the MBA training program operated by Tianjin Institute of Finance and Economy and Oklahoma University; the Sino-US cultural centre established by Nanjing University and Johns Hopkins University; the Beijing Center for Japanese Studies founded by Beijing Foreign Studies University and the Japan Foundation. These activities have opened a new chapter of transnational education in China. But these activities were only confined to some of the more famous Chinese higher education institutions and can be defined as international exchange activities among universities and colleges.

#### *Stage 2, mid 1980s to early 1990s*

In this period, the numbers of cooperating institutions and programs increased gradually, but problems also appeared. Together with a negative political influence, transnational education was at a standstill for some time. This lasted until in 1993, the *Notice on Individuals from Overseas Institutions to run Cooperative Schools in China* was issued by the former National Commission of Education. The *Notice* provided a preliminary stipulation on transnational education: it is also the first document issued by the Chinese government on transnational education. From then, Sino-foreign cooperation in education entered a new stage. By 1995, there were 71 Chinese-foreign cooperatively-run schools and programs (Ke Liang, 2004).



### *Stage 3, 1995 to 2002*

With an improvement in the Chinese political and economic environment, the opening-up of the national education system was gradually boosted. The former National Commission of Education issued *Interim Provisions for Chinese-Foreign Cooperation in Running Schools* on January 26, 1995, which mapped out detailed regulations on principles, the limits of the examination and approval procedure and the structure of the organizational leadership. Subsequently, transnational education in China developed quickly. In January 1996, the *Notice on Reinforcing the Administration of Degree Accreditation of Chinese-Foreign Cooperation in Education* was published by the China Academic Degrees Office to standardize cooperative education at the level of or above regular university education. By the end of the year 2002, there were 712 joint institutions and programs in China, an increase of more than 9 times compared to 1995, and covering 28 provinces and autonomous regions. Among them, 69 are at bachelor's degree level, 74 are postgraduate and 82 are diplomas (Ke Liang, 2004). Transnational education in China gave priority to degree education. Most partner institutions came from developed regions and countries, and most of the subjects fell into the category of business management and administration, followed by foreign languages, information, economics and education.

### *Stage 4, 2003 to the present*

The State Council issued *Regulations* in March, 2003 and *Measures* was announced by Ministry of Education in June, 2004. In these two documents, regulations for institute establishment, organization and activity, program approval, administration and assessment are detailed, so establishing the foundations and standards for development of Chinese-foreign cooperation in running schools. In 2006, the Ministry of Education issued its document *On the Current Problems of Chinese-foreign Cooperation in Running Schools*, concerning the public interests, management of standards, introduction of resource excellence, quality control, two-campus management patterns, and management fees etc. In April 2007, the *Notice on Further Standardizing the Order of Chinese-foreign Cooperation in Running Schools* was issued by the Ministry of Education. It proposed that approval of cooperation education at or above the bachelor's degree would take the prestige of the foreign institution as its main basis. Before the end of 2008, approval of cooperation institutes and programs of higher vocational education would be suspended, and cooperative schools would be kept under careful control.

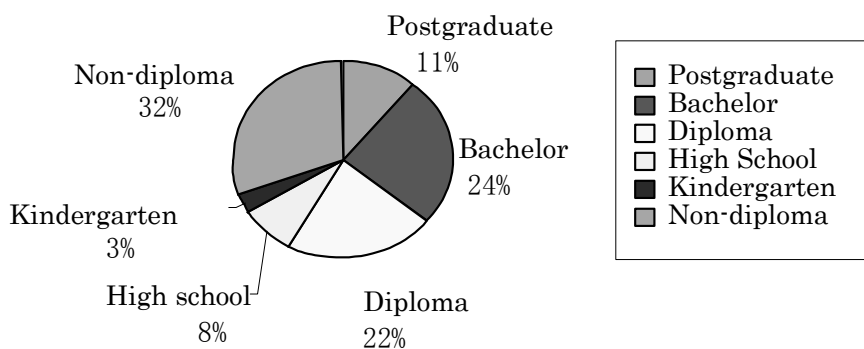
## **Current situation**

The extension of Chinese education into the international market has been accompanied by great

changes in the level, quality and scale of transnational education. Transnational education institutions and programs by 2005 numbered close to 1,000 and accommodated more than 100,000 students (Zhenguo Yuan, 2006). This article reports a survey and analysis of the general condition of transnational education in 11 provinces and municipalities, including Beijing (145), Shanghai (137), Zhejiang (83), Jiangsu (85), Guangdong (75), Heilongjiang (59), Hubei (43), Hebei (38), Henan (35), Hunan (24), Liaoning (23), in an attempt to reflect the current situation of transnational education in China (CFCE, 2008).<sup>1</sup>

Sino-foreign collaborative education is conducted at all the different levels from infant to postgraduate with the exception of 9-year compulsory education<sup>2</sup> and covers academic and non-academic, general and vocational education. According to the statistics, there are 747 transnational institutions and programs in the 11 provinces and municipalities, most of which provide academic education (516). Among them, 85 are at postgraduate level (11%), 182 at bachelor's level (24%), 167 are diploma programs (22%), 62 are at high school level (secondary specialized school, high school and vocational high school accounting for 8%), 20 are kindergarten (3%), and there are 231 non-academic programs (32%) (as illustrated in Figure 1).

**Figure 1. Distribution of Joint Programs in China by Educational Level**

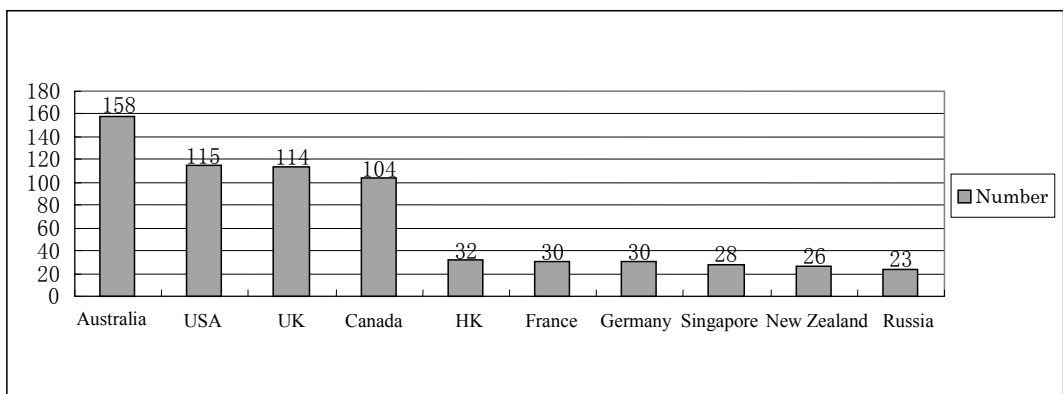


<sup>1</sup> Until the Ministry of Education completes its review of collaborative institutions and programs, the relevant statistics are not available. The statistics collected in this article relate only to 11 provinces and municipalities, so the information is incomplete. According to a report of the Shanghai Municipal Commission of Education, the joint programs in Shanghai number more than 200. The 137 joint programs illustrated here are the first batch of results released from the Ministry of Education's review. From data announced by the Department of Education of Henan province, there are 63 joint institutions and programs approved by the review by the Ministry of Education (including cooperative programs between mainland China and Hong Kong, Macau and Taiwan). Of these, 35 are undergraduate projects.

<sup>2</sup> *Regulations of the PRC on Chinese-Foreign Cooperation in Running Schools* Article 6: Chinese and foreign cooperators in running schools may cooperate to establish educational institutions of various types at various levels. However, they shall not establish institutions offering compulsory education service or special education services such as military, police and political education services.

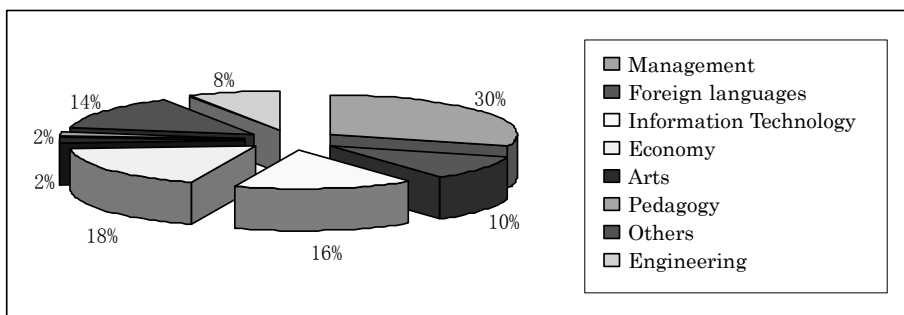
About 30 countries cooperate in Sino-foreign collaborative education programs. The participating countries and regions are characterized by possessing developed economies, advanced science and technology, and industrialized education. The top 10 of these countries and regions are (with the number of programs in brackets): Australia (158), USA (115), United Kingdom (114), Canada (104), Chinese Hong Kong (32), France (30), Germany (30), Singapore (28), New Zealand (26), and Russia (23) (as indicated in Figure 2).

**Figure 2. Top 10 Partner Countries and Regions**



The largest group of subjects in the joint programs falls into the category of management (30%), which includes business administration, marketing, accounting, finance management, human resource management and tourism management; 104 programs lie in the general area of economics (18%) (international economy, international trade, finance); there are 90 (16%) in information technology (computing, computer science and technology, electron science and technology); 57 programs (10%) in foreign languages and literature (English, German, French, Russian, Japanese); 46 (8%) in engineering (civil engineering, communication engineering); 14 (2%) in Arts (art designs, music and dance); 9 (2%) in Pedagogy; and 82 (14%) in other miscellaneous areas (see Figure 3).

**Figure 3. Subject Distribution of Joint Programs in China**



Of the 747 institutions and programs, 434 are at higher education level (postgraduate, bachelor, diploma). Of the participating Chinese institutions, 161 (37.1%) are “211” universities, and nearly all of them are provided by and contained in “211” and “985” universities. An analysis of the foreign cooperators’ colleges and universities in Australia, USA, United Kingdom and Canada is shown in Table 1. There are 137 Sino-Australian joint programs at higher education level, of which 5 are conducted by the top 5 universities, constituting 3.65%. Similarly, the number of institutions and programs operated by USA, United Kingdom, and Canadian institutions are 82, 93, 81 respectively, with the number of partner colleges and universities ranked among the top 20 in these countries as 2 (2.44%), 1 (1.08%), and 5 (6.1%) respectively.

**Table 1. Ranking of Cooperative Universities in Australia, USA, UK and Canada<sup>3</sup>**

Country	Australia (137)		USA (82)		UK (93)		Canada (81)	
	1-5	5-17	1-20	20-100	1-20	20-50	1-20	20-50
Number	5	22	2	11	1	10	5	7
Proportion	3.65%	16.06%	2.44%	13.41%	1.08%	10.75%	6.17%	8.64%

## Problems

As mentioned above, in the past 30 years, Chinese transnational education has developed from a complete blank to achieve great progress in scale, level, introduction of high-quality educational resources and international talent training. But on a close examination of the policy, administration and development, several important issues are revealed.

*With centralized management of government, Chinese higher education institutions lack autonomous power in running cooperative programs.*

According to Article 12 (Council of the PRC, 2003), an application for establishing a Chinese-foreign cooperatively-run school offering higher education for academic qualifications at or above the level of regular university education is subject to examination and approval by the education administrative department of the State Council; an application for establishing a Chinese-foreign cooperatively-run school offering specialized higher education or higher education for non-academic qualifications is subject to examination and approval by the People’s Government of the province, autonomous region or municipality directly under the Central Government where the proposed school is to be located (the

<sup>3</sup> There are 42 universities in Australia, scattered among the different states and territories. Of these 39 universities are established by the government, 3 are private ones (data source: net of Supervision on Education concerning foreign affairs in China), the universities included in the table are the top 17 in Australia according to the Times Higher Education Supplement.

Council of PRC, 2003). This regulation also conforms to the provisions for China-foreign cooperative programs. It is a government-centralized management pattern and higher educational institutions have no autonomous authority to run independent collaborative institutions and programs. However, it is consistent with the administration pattern overall in the Chinese higher educational system.

### *Malposition and Fitness in Value-orientation*

The value-orientation of Chinese higher education institutions differs from that of the government in running cooperative programs, but is similar to that of their foreign cooperators. *Regulations* and *Measures* stipulate that Chinese-foreign cooperation in running schools is an undertaking beneficial to public interests, and for-profit operations are forbidden. At the national and regional level, the government hopes that Sino-foreign cooperation can attract advanced education resources and benefit society. In this way, the value of the national authority tends to be oriented to the public and social interests.

Chinese higher education institutions demonstrate great enthusiasm for running a cooperative school or program and value it mainly as a source of profit and for the benefits it confers. Although society has a great need for education, especially international education, Chinese universities and colleges do not receive enough funds from the authorities to meet these demands, so access to huge profits available from collaborative education can be a great temptation to the Chinese higher education institutions. Consequently, the different value orientations of the government and the domestic higher education institutions influence the development of transnational education.

How does this differ from the motivation of foreign higher education institutions colleges and universities that enter the Chinese education market? Since the 1990s, the primary rationale of higher education internationalization has shifted from a political and academic perspective to an economic imperative. Many developed countries now view education as an important commercial export. The shortage of funds and, in some countries, a diminishing age-cohort for higher education have encouraged foreign universities and colleges to explore markets overseas including China. Therefore, foreign cooperators tend to have an economic orientation that is focused on its profitability and commercial nature. This is exactly the same value orientation as is expressed by Chinese higher education institutions, sponsoring their tremendous enthusiasm for cooperative education. Clearly it deviates from the value-orientation of the Chinese government. The impact of the restrictions from the government is evident.

### *The government fails in fulfilling its role in the management of cooperative education*

While developed countries take cooperation and internationalization in education as an integral component of commercial activity, the Chinese government issues official ordinances to claim

transnational education as a component element of the national education system and encourages cooperation accordingly. However, the government lacks appropriate managerial practice, as is illustrated by the following three examples.

### 1. Incomplete and lagging release of information

Although Chinese-foreign cooperation in education has been conducted for 30 years, accurate statistics of the numbers of joint programs and students in different periods are not available. Neither is there clear information about the current situation, such as numbers of collaborating institutions, programs, students, or of quality. Various figures can be found in reports of the speeches of leaders and other documents: 712 joint programs by the end of the year 2002, 951 in 2003 and 1,100 in 2005, covering 28 provinces, autonomous regions and municipalities, and serving over 100,000 students. Again, from 2002 to 2003, there are three statistics about the numbers of joint programs in Shanghai: 111, 154 and 202 respectively; and in Guangdong: 27, 90, and over 100. This information chaos reflects the limited importance that the government attaches to cooperative education, and which in turn impedes researchers wishing to carry out reliable studies and is harmful to the ability of the authorities to take decisions.

Fortunately, the Ministry of Education has already realized the problem. The *Notice on Further Standardizing the Order of Chinese-foreign Cooperation in Running Schools* issued by the Ministry of Education addressed measures that would be taken to reinforce the management of Chinese-foreign cooperation in running schools and build “two platforms” and “two mechanisms”. The two platforms are an information platform of supervision on transnational education based on the Education foreign supervision information network and a Certificate authentication platform. The two mechanisms are an assessment mechanism on disciplines in some selected provinces and cities and a law enforcement and punishment mechanism. Currently, the Ministry of Education has established the first of these, an information supervision platform for transnational education, in July 2008.

### 2. Absence of quality assurance

The quality of Chinese-foreign cooperation in education has long been doubted. The quality of enrolled students and teachers is not good and the government, higher educational institutions and society lack any measure of quality assurance. At present, quality supervision of the collaborative education institutions and programs rests mainly in the following three aspects: strict examination and approval, non-periodical review, and quality inspection by foreign universities. Cooperative institutions have no specific agencies to conduct effective supervision of the quality of joint programs.

### 3. No approval of collaborative education applications at or above undergraduate level after Regulations

Although the State has adopted policies of opening wider to the outside world, standardization of

running schools, exercising administration according to law and promoting development of collaborative education, and has accepted applications for programs in March and September every year (the State Council of PRC, 2003), the fact is that the Ministry of Education, although it has received applications for Chinese-foreign cooperatively-run schools, has granted no approvals in the 4 years following the release of *Regulations* and *Measures*. Furthermore, before the release of *Regulations* and *Measures*, the Ministry of Education had carried out a strict review of the existing programs, leading to negative growth of joint programs at or above undergraduate level.

## Conclusion

In summary, after a 30-year period of development, transnational education has achieved legal status in the Chinese education system and has become a key component of Chinese education. Sino-foreign collaborative education institutions and programs have made rapid growth and now amount to more than 1,000, offering every different type and category of education except compulsory education service or special education services such as military, religious education services. It has introduced high-quality educational resources (including contributions from famous universities in the world, teachers, and courses), updated the concept of China's higher education and cultivated a group of skilled talents with international awareness. Meanwhile, China has already become a primary marketplace for transnational education for many countries and an indispensable partner of some major developed countries in implementing their export strategies.

Certainly, the different value orientations of the Chinese government and the cooperative higher education institutions and ineffective management have affected the development of cooperative education. The Chinese government still maintains a cautious attitude to the scale and educational sovereignty of the collaborative institutions, although transnational education's important role in Chinese education has been identified in *Regulations*. This is reflected in the fact that the Ministry of Education suspended approval of joint programs at or above undergraduate level over the past 4 years. At present, the Ministry of Education has begun to implement construction of the two platforms and two mechanisms. It is expected that these measures could guarantee the orderly development of Chinese-foreign cooperation in running schools.

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## **The Transformation of Higher Education in South Africa since 1994: achievements and challenges**

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**Abstract.** The aim of this article is to take stock of and to identify the achievements and challenges of the transformation of higher education in South Africa since 1994. The article commences with an outline of the historical legacy – the development of higher education in South Africa till 1994. In the second and third parts the new socio-political dispensation (since 1994) and the ensuing reconstruction of higher education are discussed. Parts of the reconstruction project have met with various degrees of success. Some, such as expanded and more equitable access, have made spectacular progress, although even these still have a long way to go. Others, such as desegregation or multiculturalism have had limited success. The major concern is that all these were accompanied by serious governmental interference in the affairs of universities, to the point of threatening the autonomy of universities – and therefore the very essence of universities. The challenge is to proceed along the way of the present reform, which pursues noble ideals, but without much inappropriate governmental prescription driving the process.

**Keywords:** access to higher education, autonomy of universities, desegregation of higher education, equity in higher education, higher education enrolments, higher education reform, multiculturalism in higher education, South Africa

### **Introduction**

Momentous societal changes have been taking place in South Africa lately, including the South African higher education scene. On the other hand, higher education has been assigned a pivotal role in creating the new, envisioned society.

‘Transitologies’ as a term and as a study have become established and have been found useful in a host of recent publications in Comparative Education (*cf.* amongst others Sweeting, 2007, p.159; Steiner-Khamsi, 2005; Steiner-Khamsi & Stolpe, 2004; Alexander, 2001, p.507; Kazamias, 2001;

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Usarralde, 2002, p.7; Bray & Lee, 1997). Cowen (2000, p.338) defines transitology as "... the more or less simultaneous collapse and reconstruction of (a) state apparatuses; (b) social and economic stratification systems; and (c) political visions of the future; in which (d) education is given a major symbolic and deconstructionist role in these processes of destroying the past and redefining the future".

The current reconstruction of South African society and education could be regarded as a transitology (*cf.* De Wet & Wolhuter, 2009). Cowen (2000) advocates a better understanding of and knowledge of transitologies among educationists, because a study of these turning points in history illustrates the influence of political and economic forces on education. Like lightning, these turning points make visible what is usually not visible in the dark (Cowen, 2000). What makes the South African case particularly noteworthy, is that many of the changes taking place forcefully in South Africa (such as democratization, and equalization of educational opportunities) are very much part of a global agenda.

The article commences with an outline of the historical legacy – the development of higher education in South Africa till 1994. In the second and third parts the new socio-political dispensation (since 1994) and the ensuing reconstruction of higher education are discussed. In the final part the achievements and challenges of higher education reform are assessed.

### **The historical legacy: development of higher education in South Africa till 1994**

#### *Higher education for whites*

The first university in South Africa was the University of Good Hope, founded in 1873 (changed in 1916 to become the University of Cape Town), under the auspices of the then British colonial administration. In time other universities were established: the University of South Africa (1916, this university later became a distance education university), Stellenbosch University (1916), University of Cape Town (1916), Witwatersrand University (1922), University of Pretoria (1930), University of Natal (1949), University of the Orange Free State (1950), Rhodes University (1951), Potchefstroom University (1951), University of Port Elizabeth and the Rand Afrikaans University (1967). All these institutions were meant to cater for the white population. They all simulated the model of liberal-academic education bequeathed to them from metropolitan Britain.

A second type of higher education institution that came into being was the technikon, offering higher-education of a technical-vocational bent. By the end of the 1980s, there were eight technikons for whites; the Cape Technikon, Natal Technikon, Port Elizabeth Technikon, Pretoria Technikon, Vaal Triangle Technikon, Witwatersrand Technikon, Free State Technikon and Technikon RSA (a distance education institution).

### *Higher education for blacks*

Tertiary education for black South Africans commenced in 1916, when the South African Native College was established at Fort Hare. The institution became autonomous in 1949, under the name of the University of Fort Hare.

A key date in the history of South Africa is 1948. In that year the National Party came to power. It implemented a programme of rigorous *de jure* and *de facto* segregation policies ('apartheid') (as a typical colonial set-up, *de facto* racial segregation had always been a characteristic of South African society). This segregation would include educational segregation. Consequently higher education institutions were created, each exclusively for students of a particular black ethnic group. For the Indians (South Africans of Indian descent) and for the 'coloureds' (South Africans of a mixed racial descent) higher education institutions for their exclusive use were created too.

By the end of the 1980s the following universities existed: for blacks the University of Fort Hare, the University of Transkei, the University of Qua-Qua, the University of Bophuthatswana, the University of Zululand, Medunsa University, the University of the North, the University of Venda and Vista University; for Indians the University of Durban-Westville and for coloureds the University of the Western-Cape. Similarly, by the end of the 1980s the following technikons existed: for blacks the Technikon Northern Transvaal, Mangosuthu Technikon and the Setlogelo Technikon; the Peninsula Technikon for coloureds, and the M.L. Sultan Technikon for Indians.

### *Resistance against segregated education*

The policy of separate segregated education systems and universities was widely condemned among black South Africans, as inferior education as means of perpetuating inequality and white domination (*vide*: Tabata, 1960; UNESCO, 1972; Karis & Gerhart, 1977; Nkomo (Ed.), 1990; Christie, 1991, pp.229-265).

Opposition to the provisions for black education included countrywide protests by black students (primary school, secondary school, and university students), which reached a climax with the Soweto uprising in 1976. During the second half of the 1980s, black education was in a crisis characterized by school boycotts and lecture boycotts at universities, interwoven with the broader socio-political turmoil and resistance against apartheid. In many schools, teaching and learning ground to a halt and many universities were periodically closed with their lectures suspended. Such was the state of black education with the arrival of South Africa's new political dispensation in 1994.

## **1994: New socio-political and educational dispensation**

### *Constitution*

A new political dispensation commenced in 1994, based upon universal suffrage (before 1994 limited to whites), a constitution based upon the western liberal democratic model, and a Bill of Human Rights, widely hailed as one of the most progressive in the world. Following elections, the African National Congress (ANC) took over government from the National Party.

### *Educational reforms*

The ANC formulated a new education policy, which was based upon the following four principles (*cf.* Wolhuter, 1999):

- democratization: education and training should be built upon the principle of democracy, characterized by active participation by all parties, in particular teachers, pupils/students, parents and the community;
- equity: equal education opportunities for all;
- desegregation: one of the first steps which the ANC took in the field of education, for example, was to collapse all the ministries of education (before 1994 each ethnic group had its own ministry of education) into one National Department of Education;
- multicultural education.

The entire education system should further be geared towards the realization of the potential of the entire population, with societal objectives of economic development and the molding of national unity as final goals. In order to accomplish these, two major reforms were to take place:

- first, the introduction of Outcomes-Based Education, to replace the pre-1994 content-based education, which was condemned as promoting rote-learning and a culture of submissiveness;
- second, a National Qualifications Framework would be set in place, in order to create a network of lifelong learning and training for all South Africans.

## **The reconstruction of higher education since 1994**

Since 1994 three sets of changes impacted on South African higher education.

The first set is that the reconstruction of the South African education system described above also meant that higher education had to be reformed in alignment with the new societal imperatives and education policy. For example, programs offered by universities had to be accredited in the National

Qualifications Framework. Democratization and equal opportunities meant that access to higher education had to increase and inequalities in higher education enrolments had to be obliterated.

The neo-liberal economic revolution (global acceptance of the capitalist or free market system) represents a societal trend that affects universities worldwide and provides the second set of changes impacting on South African academe. Internally, academic autonomy is increasingly eroded as business principles such as accountability, quality control, managerialism and profitability are applied to the running of universities and as governments (as the main sources of funds for most universities) assume ever more say in the affairs of universities (Wolhuter & Higgs, 2006, p.64). Externally, the stockades of the ivory tower are crumbling and stronger links are being forged with the community, industry and society. As universities have to supplement dwindling public funds with funds raised from private sector sources, the private sector too gains a bigger say in university matters. The neo-liberal economic policies to which the South African government has subscribed (in the post-1990 global environment it was hardly left with any alternative) meant that universities, in the light of reduced government subsidies, also had to resort to principles of business enterprise that began to dictate university management and administration (Mickelson *et al.*, 2001). All these factors contributed to the denudation of academic freedom at South African universities, as ever-increasing government intervention became prominent, resulting in accountability requirements, quality control and managerialism (Webster & Mosoetsa, 2002; Ntshoe, P. Higgs, L. G. Higgs & Wolhuter, 2008). After the advent of the new socio-political dispensation in 1994 and after South Africa had been re-incorporated into the international mainstream, the South African academic environment was confronted with these changes not gradually, as elsewhere in the world, but intensely and rapidly (Jansen, 2004; Bundy, 2005). Furthermore, Warner (2004) notes that curtailment of university autonomy has been a common practice in the history of universities in Africa during the decolonial period, as governments took steps to ensure that their wishes were carried out when they harnessed universities to achieve their (government-set) objectives.

The third major change for South African universities and academics is re-integration into the international academic community after having been cut-off as part of the international academic boycott. The international academic boycott was waged for some three decades (*ca.* 1960-1990) as part of the international world's protest against the segregation policies of the South African government of the day. Harricombe and Lancaster (1995, p.30) note that the boycott included the following:

- a refusal by international scholars to travel to South Africa or to invite South Africans abroad;
- a refusal to publish South African manuscripts internationally;
- a refusal by some publishers to provide access to information (*e.g.* books, computer software);
- a denial of South African participation at international conferences.

## Achievements and challenges

### *Enrolment expansion and equity*

**Table 1. Growth in university enrolments**

group Year	Population	Black	Coloured	Indian	White	Total
1994		212,042	27,474	34,010	221,829	495,355
1999		315,300	29,039	31,973	162,929	539,271
2005		449,241	46,357	54,618	185,889	736,105
% growth 1994-2005		+111.9	+68.7	+60.6	-16.2	+48.6

Sources: Calculated from statistics provided by the Department of Education (2005; 2007)

Aggregate enrolments rose between 1994 and 2005 (the most recent year for which official statistics were available at the time of writing) to an impressive 48.6%. During the same period, white enrolments dropped by 16.2%. Two factors which might have played a role here are declining numbers of births among white South Africans [since 1990 birth statistics among white South Africans show a constant decline, (*cf.* Wolhuter, 2000, p.155)] and emigration. While official statistics do not exist, it is often estimated that almost one million white South Africans (or a quarter of all white South Africans) have left South Africa since 1994 (see Kenny, 2008, p.13). Between 1994 and 2005 Indian, coloured and especially black enrolments increased even more phenomenally than the aggregate figure, at respectively 60.6%, 68.7% and 111.9%. While there was clearly equalization taking place, tertiary enrolments still do not reflect the national population composition: black, coloured, Indian and white students constitute respectively 61.0%, 6.3%, 7.4% and 25.3% of tertiary enrolments, while they constitute respectively 79%, 8%, 2.5% and 9.6% of the population.

### *Internationalization*

The early 21<sup>st</sup> century of globalization calls more and more for universities to internationalize, especially in terms of programmes, academic staff, and students (the last two, *via* staff and student exchange schemes and the establishment of a significant expatriate component in student and staff bodies). Knight's (1996) taxonomy includes political, economic, academic and cultural rationales for the internationalization of higher education. Political rationales include both the need to maintain scientific and technological competitiveness, and the more altruistic notions of enhanced international understanding and peace.

Two international surveys of the academic profession in which South Africa participated reveal an interesting pattern regarding the post-1994 internationalization of the South African academic

profession. The first, during 2001/2, which applied the questionnaire of the Carnegie International Survey of the Academic profession, found that whereas during the ten-year period prior to the survey the international academic boycott (discussed above) still had a visibly negative effect, during the three-year period prior to the survey (*i.e.* 2001/2), its effect had been more than wiped out; in fact, by 2001/2 the South African academic profession was more internationalized than the international norm (Wolhuter & Higgs, 2004). For example South African academics had, on average published 1.75 and 3.67 articles or books in another country during respectively the three years and ten years periods prior to the survey (*ibid.*). The corresponding international averages (of the other fourteen countries which participated in the survey) were respectively 1.3 and 4.0 (*ibid.*). However, the second international survey of the academic profession in which South Africa participated, the International CAP (Changing Academic Profession) during 2007/8, concluded that by that time, the level of internationalization of the South African academic profession had fallen back to a level lower than the international norm (Wolhuter, P. Higgs, L. G. Higgs & Ntshoe, 2008). For example, during the three-year period prior to the CAP survey the average South African academic had published 1.23 articles or books in a country outside South Africa.

### *Internal efficiency*

The internal efficiency of higher education institutions in South Africa remains low. Only 22% of students complete their courses in the prescribed study time (Anon., 2008b, p.18). Of the 120,000 students who entered higher education for the first time in 2000, 30% dropped out during their first year of study (*ibid.*). A further 20% dropped out during their second and third years (*ibid.*).

For many fields of study the figures (some will be cited below) are even lower. To worsen matters, the drop-out rate for black students is substantially higher than for white students (see Table 2) thus to a large extent wiping out gains made on the equity count at the point of access.

**Table 2. Percentage of students who graduate in the prescribed period (based on 2000 intake)**

Field	Black students	White students
Business Management	11	43
Life and Physical Sciences	11	35
Mathematical Sciences	13	33
Social Sciences	14	43
Languages	13	52

Source: Gower, 2008:15

### *Desegregation*

Three problems beset the process of desegregation of South African universities. First, as in the case of South African schools, desegregation at South African universities, is very much a one-way process, whereby affluent blacks move from the historically black universities to the better endowed historically white universities. Thus the historically white institutions become integrated, whereas the historically black universities' student body remains more than 90% black. For example the University of Venda (historically a black university) has 10 white students and 8,957 black students, whereas the University of the Witwatersrand (historically a white university) has 8,364 white and 11,916 black students (Department of Education, 2005, p.32). Also, and this is the second problem, one pattern of segregation (social) gets replaced by another namely socio-economic segregation, again closely similar to what is happening at primary and secondary schools in South Africa (*cf.* Pape, 1998; Lemon, 1995).

Third, incidents of inter-racial friction occur frequently, often accompanied by violence, vandalism, and disruption of academic activities (*cf.* Anon., 2008b, p.12). For example, a recent unsavory incident of white on black racism occurred at the University of the Free State (*cf.* Anon., 2008a, p.13); retaliatory riots by black students caused damage by vandalism to the extent of R3 million (US\$ 400,000) (Cloete, 2008, p.4).

### *Multiculturalism*

It should first be stated that there is a school of black scholarship critical of the official policy of multiculturalism in education, which maintains it prevents the development of Afro-centric education. An example is Asumah and Hlatshwayo (1995). Second, the African cultural heritage and indigenous knowledge systems have difficulty in procuring their place in curricula, pertaining as they do to a pre-literate tradition. African perspectives too do not possess a historically and infrastructurally strong research capacity (*cf.* Altbach, 1982; Arnove, 1982).

A salient example of the failure of the African cultural heritage to make its way into university curricula is the deterioration of the study of African languages. The number of students studying African languages at South African universities is decreasing at a rate of 50% per year (Shiraya, 2008, p.18). At the University of South Africa (South Africa's largest university) 25,000 students were registered for African languages in 1997. In 2008 the number of applicants for the same courses is around 3,000 (Shiraya, 2008, p.21).

### *Local vs Global, and Africa vs World*

The extent to which universities should focus on local needs, against the extent to which they should prioritize global imperatives is problematic and has not been thrashed out in research or in policy



discussions and documents. For example, a case study on the internationalization of South African universities, shortly after the repeal of the international academic boycott, drew from some respondents the following responses on the need for the university to internationalize: the principle of internationalization should be supported, but it should not be done in such a way that it drowns the university in an international tidal wave to the point that the university loses its present identity and character; that it cannot serve the local and national community any longer; and that in an age of affirmative action, all career opportunities for black South Africans are confiscated by foreigners (Welch, Yang & Wolhuter, 2004, p.326).

Related to the dilemma of local *vs* global, is another: that of Africa *vs* the world. The university as an institution in South Africa did not develop autochthonously or indigenously, but was an importation from Europe. Despite frequent calls – amidst the designation of the current operation of South African universities – in the politics-educational debate and in scientific discourse (*e.g.* see: Vilakazi, 1999; Van Wyk & Higgs, 2007) for an African university, *i.e.* a need for South African universities to indigenize, to Africanize, the concept of an ‘African university’ is nowhere precisely defined, let alone is it explained how it differs from the idea of a world-class respectable university or even if the two are at all incompatible.

### *Links with society*

Linking the output of universities with the demands of the world of work remains the Gordian knot of higher education in South Africa. On the one hand, a skills crisis is proclaimed by politicians and social analysts alike, *e.g.*:

“To confront the full reality of our skills crisis we have to face the fact that South African education and training is in deep trouble. Fixing it will take a generation”

(Anne Bernstein, Director of the Centre of Development and Enterprise in South Africa)

“The government has identified the shortage of suitably skilled labour as the biggest threat to the successful implementation of ASGISA [the accelerated and shared growth initiative for South Africa], the shortage being most prominent in the fields of engineering, construction, management and skilled technical fields, such as IT technicians and engineers”

(Duncan Hindle, Director General of the National Department of Education, Anon., 2008c, p.2)

Several studies predict a severe teacher shortage in the near future – in the region of between 11,000 and 57,000 by 2015 (*cf.* Wolhuter, 2006, p.137; Paterson & Arends, 2008).

On the other hand, there exists graduate unemployment. Tertiary qualified graduates, though making up less than 3% of South Africa's unemployed, still represent approximately 200,000 individuals (Business Leadership South Africa, 2006). What is also cause for concern is the differential graduate unemployment rates: 7% for black South African graduates, 3% for white South African graduates (*ibid.*), identifying another factor undermining the drive for equity.

Getting the world of education in tandem with the world of work remains a challenge for South African higher education.

### *University autonomy*

As has been stated above, increasing governmental interference in the affairs of South African universities since 1994 has seriously undermined the autonomy of these universities. It should be borne in mind that, apart from the pressure to conform to government's segregation policies, universities in pre-1994 South Africa enjoyed a measure of autonomy probably unparalleled anywhere else in the world (Bundy, 2005). Even the renowned British comparative educationist, Edmund J. King, an outspoken critic of the pre-1994 government's policies, lauded the autonomy enjoyed by South African universities (King, 1979). As explained above, post-1994 governmental policies and practice changed the position. Eminent South African comparative educationist, academic, social critic and (then) Dean of the Faculty of Education, University of Pretoria, Prof. J. Jansen (2004), analyzed the situation as follows:

- the state decides which programs and courses will be taught;
- the state determines which research projects universities will conduct;
- government decides how many students each university shall admit to which program;
- government (through the parastatal National Qualifications Framework and National Qualifications Authority) determines the curricula of courses;
- government decides on the trustworthiness of qualifications, programs and even institutions by means of quality audits;
- government decides which institutions will continue to exist.

He concludes with a cautionary note: "A university ceases to be a university when its intellectual project no longer defines its identity" (Mischke, 2004, p.11).

Warner (2004) notes that curtailing university autonomy has been a common practice in the history of universities in Africa during the decolonial period, as governments took steps to ensure that their wishes were carried out and as they harnessed universities to achieve the government-set objectives. This denudation is an ominous trend, if it is accepted that the university can only fulfill its mission if it can pursue its quest for truth without hindrance.

### *Faculty functioning and morale*

The CAP survey (described above) asked respondents: “How influential are you, personally, in helping to shape key academic policies”, at each of the following levels: department or similar unit, faculty or similar unit, and institutional level, and to place their responses on a four point scale, 1 signifying very influential, 2: somewhat influential, 3: a little influential and 4: not at all influential. The mean scores of the responses were:

- at the level of department or similar unit: 2.30
- at the level of faculty or similar unit: 2.95
- at the institutional level: 3.68

The CAP survey further revealed that – in the context of increasing governmental interference in higher education – that institutions have become highly prescriptive in managing the activities of academics. Not only do academics feel that they have little influence, especially at institutional level (as is evident in the responses cited above), but they find management has a top-down management style, providing management that is not competent, and with an administrative complement not supportive of teaching and research activities of academics (Wolhuter *et al.*, 2008). This increasing managerialism at South African universities and academics’ discontent with it, have also been revealed by other research (*cf.* Webster & Mosoetsa, 2002; Ntshoe *et al.*, 2008).

### **Conclusion**

While, at the dawn of the new socio-political dispensation in 1994, South Africa was bequeathed the most advanced higher education system in Africa, serious reform was needed to gear the system for the demands of the new era. Lofty ideals informed the reform of the system to adapt to the needs of the early twenty-first century. Some parts of the reform drive have had impressive success, *e.g.* increasing and equalizing access to higher education, and the setting in place of and accrediting of higher education programs into a National Qualifications Framework in order to create a network of lifelong education for all. But even these still have a long way to go. Other parts of the reform project have had limited success, for example, the desegregation of higher education or provision of multiculturalism in universities. With respect to the reform as a whole, the major problem is that it has been done in a way which entails serious governmental interference in the affairs of universities to the point of threatening the autonomy of the universities – and therefore their very essence – and undermining the morale of faculty. The challenge is therefore to proceed along the way of the present reforms, which pursue noble objectives, but without overly much inappropriate governmental prescription driving the process.

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# On Field Knowledge in Higher Education Research

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**Abstract.** This article has two main goals. First, it aims to point out that field knowledge is a form of knowledge on higher education which most of us know, even though we are not necessarily conscious of it. The article emphasizes that becoming conscious of this knowledge is a valuable goal in itself. The second aim is to define more precisely the objectives of observations made in the fields of higher education. This study approaches the question of how other higher education systems work in reality, from a fresh perspective. This is called “field knowledge on and in higher education”, because it seems that despite many comparative studies on higher education the research has not taken seriously the use of everyday experiences and notions as research material to be utilized in comparative studies in higher education. It is suggested that the dimensions that have been pointed out in this study are helpful for more focused discussion on the nature of this form of knowledge hidden in our everyday experiences.

**Keywords:** field knowledge, higher education research, ethnography, anthropology

## Introduction

How to understand the functioning of another higher education system? This was the question I could not help thinking about when acting as a visiting professor at Hiroshima University in the 2008 spring term. How does a system of higher education that I am not familiar with (such as that in Japan) differ from the systems I know (those in Europe and more particularly, that in Finland)? And an even more difficult question: how does another system of higher education work in reality?

While reflecting on these questions I came to know that it is not only me that these questions bother; they have been addressed by many scholars visiting other countries or conducting comparative studies in and on higher education. This is evident when one looks at the history of comparative education in general, and in higher education research in particular (see Välimaa, 2008a). One of the main problems – or challenges, depending on the perspective – is how to explain differences between

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and similarities of different higher education systems. The original points of departure for comparative education were defined according to the following categories of studies: foreign education, comparative education, and international education (Schneider, 1931; Rust, Soumare, Pescador & Shibuya, 1999, p.94). Even though these categories have been re-elaborated and extended to new areas of studies, they still illuminate the original intellectual starting points for comparative research, *i.e.* studying something that is not known and comparing it with something that is already known (see Carnoy, 2006; Holmes, 1984; Paulston, 1977; Rust *et al.*, 1999). As for higher education research, Altbach (1985, p.2194) is evidently right when he says that “there is no widely accepted discipline of comparative higher education with a specific methodology. Indeed, the term ‘comparative’ is often misused in that it is applied to the study of educational phenomena in at least one country by a national of a different country.” One should also remember that a particular basic tension continues in structuring the field of comparative education, and that of comparative higher education studies. On the one hand, comparative studies are expected to have theoretical ambitions in seeking causal relationships rather than being ‘mere’ descriptions of different cases (whether they be institutions or countries). On the other hand, comparative studies are expected to be both historically well-rooted and analytically accurate descriptions of socio-educational systems, or analyses of thematic areas (see Välimaa, 2008a).

Bearing this tension in mind, the aim of this study is to approach, from a fresh perspective, the question of how other higher education systems work in reality. I call this fresh perspective “field knowledge on and in higher education” because it seems that, despite many comparative studies on higher education, the research has not taken seriously the use of everyday experiences and notions as research material to be utilized in comparative studies in higher education.

This study is structured accordingly. It begins by analyzing field knowledge as an intellectual device and continues by reflecting on its use in higher education studies. Subsequently it seeks to develop a systematic frame of analysis for not only collecting field knowledge but also for becoming conscious of its dimensions and limitations. This critical reflection on higher education research is based on a literature review and personal experiences gained when working as an academic or a student in Finland, Italy, Japan, the Netherlands and the United States.

### **On field knowledge in higher education research**

One crucial question for all scholars, examining and explaining other systems of higher education, is to understand how their social dynamics function. By ‘social dynamics’ I mean an attempt to explain how higher education functions in reality – no matter whether it concerns basic units, higher education institutions or national systems of higher education. The functioning of communities, societies and other social formations of human beings belongs to the basic questions in all social sciences. It is not necessary to run through them, because there is an abundance of textbooks that describe these



traditions. However, what is interesting in the light of higher education research is the fact that normally the question of the functioning of higher education has not been approached from the perspective of the reality of everyday practices. Therefore, this study attempts an understanding and analysis of the social dynamics of higher education institutions from the perspective of their everyday practices as an alternative to studies that are focused on the nature of higher education systems.

One needs to look at the basic approaches to this question to understand the potential freshness of the approach suggested in this article. Namely, traditionally the solution to the riddle of how higher education systems function has evolved around the question of how higher education changes (see Saarinen & Välimaa, 2008). This is, in turn, a basic sociological question provoked by and related to the problems of the modernization of societies from the 19<sup>th</sup> century onwards. For higher education research, it was Burton Clark (1983) who posed the questions, “How are systems integrated?”, “How does change take place?” and other questions which help to analyze the social dynamics of national higher education systems – together with other classical studies in the field of higher education. For Becher & Kogan (1992) the aim was to explain the interplay between structures and processes in higher education, thus reflecting the two contradictory traditions in western social sciences. Pierre Bourdieu (1988), in turn, analyzed the functioning of societies as social spaces by defining them as fields, in which people struggle for power, aiming to utilize their capital whether it be symbolic (cultural and social) or economic, or both. Education, and higher education, may be defined as one of the fields of society in which people struggle for more resources, positions and power using their cultural and social capital, and their sense of the game, *habitus* (Bourdieu, 1988; 1998). In structuralist and functionalist sociological traditions the answer to this basic question has been found in systems theories, in which the general aim of a higher education system is to reach balance through certain functions of a system of higher education (see Parsons & Platt, 1973). All these theoretical explanations of reality prove to be, however, quite helpless when they are applied in other than their national contexts. This is not to say that the theories of Bourdieu, or Clark, or Parsons, for example, can not be applied in other social contexts as well. Rather it is that one needs to gather a lot of information on the functioning of other systems of higher education in the field before one can be sure that the categories developed by western sociologists (and even more so for western economists) can be applied to other western, and especially to other than western contexts. As an hypothesis it is, therefore, useful to assume that all sociological and economic theories are bound to their contexts and their societies. This is, in fact, exactly what Bourdieu suggested that ‘foreigners’ should do when using the intellectual devices he had developed (Bourdieu, 1998). In this sense, all sociological and economic theories are contextual theories of societies – until otherwise proven.

One of the promising perspectives for the applicability of contextual theories is offered by Ulrich Teichler (1996) who speaks about ‘field knowledge’ in higher education, when analyzing the problems of comparative research. For Teichler (1996, p.453), field knowledge is related to overcoming language barriers and acquiring contextual knowledge of the themes addressed in studies. According

to Teichler (1996), the nature of field knowledge is knowledge that has been acquired while living in another country, or working in another system of higher education. According to Teichler,

“In undertaking comparative research we become aware of the fact that in the past we have acquired substantial knowledge of many themes and related areas to be analysed but frequently not in a systematic manner. Rather it was accidentally absorbed during our life course through daily observation, reading newspapers, discussion with other persons etc. In comparative projects, we have to acquire respective knowledge of other countries in a targeted manner and as part of our precious research time and resources. Even if we like to acquire this knowledge and can afford to do so in the framework of our research projects, we note that a substantial proportion of the relevant knowledge is not accessible to quick and targeted learning but is more likely to be acquired by extended observation or active involvement.” (Teichler, 1996, p.453).

This reference raises three interconnected questions which will be addressed in this study. First, it is important to define and understand better what field knowledge is in higher education research. Second, it is important to reflect on what are the ways of acquiring field knowledge of other systems of higher education. Third, the question, of what are the social phenomena, which one should pay attention to in a systematic manner when living in a foreign system of higher education, should be reflected on.

### **On field knowledge and comparative higher education research**

Cultural studies on higher education partially address all these themes because they pay attention to the time and place in which certain academic communities live and act. These contextual matters are important for all cultures of human beings, and they also serve as the basic starting points for cultural studies. A number of studies using ethnographic methods following Bushnell (1963), and Riesman & Jencks (1963), have aimed at giving thick descriptions – as Geertz (1973) puts it – on higher education. Most often these studies have aimed at describing higher education institutions – or some parts of them – as cultural entities. Scholars have paid attention to students and faculty members and their cultures, as well as organizations and disciplines as cultural entities. They have also noted that national cultures have an impact on the functioning of higher education systems (see Välimaa, 2008a). These studies are useful when trying to understand how other higher education institutions and systems of higher education function, because of their useful cultural conceptualizations and insights into the realities of higher education at a certain time and place. However, they are less useful for the topic of this study, because one of the problems with using and analyzing everyday experiences in other times and places is this: what is important information, and what is not? How does a piece of information (or a fact) become important?

A useful perspective for these simple questions is provided by comparative research on higher education, because it provides both units of analysis (national systems of higher education, higher education institutions, basic units and individuals), foci of attention (such as teaching, research, management and administration), and intellectual devices for comparative studies (especially ‘Clark’s triangle’). However, quite often comparative studies of higher education begin with a structuralist sociological assumption that all national higher education systems follow, more or less, the same social dynamics. It is assumed that the classical social forces of market, academic oligarchy and the state – as defined by Clark (1983) – not only exist, but also compete with each other in a more or less similar social setting. It is all too easy to assume that all national systems of higher education have the same social dynamics, because all national systems of higher education have their Ministries of Education (whether national or federal), their higher education institutions (whether private or public or both) and academics and students working and studying in them. Furthermore, it is all too easy to assume that the questions and topics, which are relevant in one country, are relevant also in other countries. Under these pre-assumptions it is quite natural to assume that the social dynamics of different national systems of higher education follow the same logic of action in comparative higher education research.

The perspective of field knowledge may be useful in challenging this rationalistic assumption, because it approaches the functioning of higher education from the perspectives of everyday experiences and practices, instead of theoretical constructions made in western academic circles. Field knowledge may thus provide a source of information, which helps to understand the social dynamics of other systems of higher education because it aims, not at reproducing the social dynamics described by great or trivial sociological or economic theories, but at describing what is happening every day in the practices of higher education institutions. Methodologically and practically also, it provides other points of departure for comparison of higher education than the traditional comparative studies based on a traditional comparative setting – no matter what thematic area is to be studied.

To develop this assertion into an argument it is necessary to study and define more carefully what is field knowledge in higher education research? I begin answering this question by taking a quick intellectual look at the discipline of anthropology, because this is a discipline in which the idea of knowledge gathered in the field has been discussed, developed and utilized as an intellectual device.

### **Field knowledge in anthropology**

Intellectually, the idea of a scholar studying foreign cultures through investigations carried out in the middle of a foreign culture has been developed in the discipline of anthropology from the 19<sup>th</sup> century onwards. According to Eriksen (2004), the basic theoretical objective in anthropology is to study the originality of a culture – and thus its difference from other cultures – and to explain how individual cultures are similar to other cultures. This tension between the universal and the relativist interest of

knowledge is one of the fundamental questions in anthropology and belongs to one of the permanent and fruitful conflicts in the discipline (Eriksen, 2004). This tension is often translated into theoretical discussions and debates, because the search for unique cultural elements may only be seen and analyzed through comparisons with other cultures. This comparison requires, in turn, some universal intellectual devices – concepts such as culture, ritual, kinship, family, status, socialization – to enable communication in the community of scholars. Therefore, the fact that other cultures may lack either the words or conceptualizations of anthropological studies may be problematic. It may also happen that some of the cultural or social phenomena studied do not exist in other communities because some cultural phenomena are not typical of all cultures. Therefore, intellectual devices used by anthropologists are not only analytical tools but contain certain problems of cultural translations. The question is not only what is lost in the translation but what is neglected in the social phenomena studied when they are translated into the academic language of anthropology. Even so, the fact that anthropology as a discipline has developed not only analytical studies of other cultures (normally cultures other than western ones) together with a number of intellectual devices these studies require, but the discipline has also established a self-critical community of scholars debating its own fundamentals as part of its tradition (see Eriksen, 2004).

The original ideal type of anthropological study is based on the idea of participant observation, taking place during long-lasting field work in a social environment of a geographically remote place.<sup>2</sup> Methodologically, ethnographic field work is the basic way of gathering information on a strange culture. According to this ideal, a researcher spends a long time (not less than a year) in a foreign culture, learns its language, and aims at getting access to its everyday life and rituals in order to produce a thick description of its culture (Eriksen, 2004). There are, however, no strict rules for field work, even though according to the generally accepted idea, access to the field is necessary for participant observation and interviews of the informants for the purpose of gathering relevant information for the study. How to behave ‘in the field’ is an equally loosely defined matter from a methodological point of view, despite the ethical points related to it (Eriksen, 2004). According to Evans-Pritchard – as he described it in his memories – he was given the following guidelines for field work: “try not to make a fool of yourself” (Malinowski), “act as a gentleman” (Haddon), and “take 10 grams of kinin every night and stay away from women” (Seligman) (Evans-Pritchard, 1983, in Eriksen, 2004, p.46). Even though these pragmatic instructions given by western men to a western man are quite amusing today, they are indicative of the basic assumption that human beings behave in more or less the same (western) ways, no matter what the culture is. According to this perspective, mainly successful data gathering, based on a learning-by-doing assumption concerning the correct human

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<sup>2</sup> This is an image based on traditional anthropological studies conducted on remote islands at the peripheries of western culture. Even though this image is out-dated in the 21<sup>st</sup> century, with general acceptance that one may study one’s own culture using the same methods, it is still useful as revealing the origins of the discipline of anthropology.

behavior in the field, is important for a researcher. As for higher education research – and researchers – this may also be a relevant assumption, because of the international traditions of disciplines and academic cultures in universities. At the same time it may, however, be quite misleading, because of its assumption that all human behavior follows the same (western) rules of behavior.

Some anthropologists (especially Mauss, 1954, in Eriksen, 2004) however, have chosen not to conduct field work, but to familiarize themselves with the history of the societies studied in a comparative setting. The rationale for this approach is rooted in the argument on the importance of understanding how societies have developed historically in order to understand how the past has shaped the present. In addition, it has been argued that history helps to understand the relationship between different societies (see Wolf, 1982, in Eriksen, 2004).

To sum up, anthropological studies always assume a comparative starting point for their studies, because the basic objectives are to study differences and analyze similarities with the help of common intellectual devices. Anthropological field studies require much time to be spent in the culture under study; no matter whether it is one's own culture or a new one, it requires mastery of the local language without which participant observation would not be possible, and it requires a systematic gathering of information. 'Systematic' in this context may mean different methodological approaches.

### **Field knowledge on and in higher education**

The elements of anthropological studies open four important aspects to be considered in higher education research. First, for historians, at least, it is quite easy to accept the argument that one should familiarize oneself with the history of other cultures, because historical studies show how a society has developed, what are its relationships with other cultures, and what are its main economic, cultural and political traditions. Even though historical stories are often based on different interpretations and ideas on the nature of history, these studies do reveal the main tensions in societies. Higher education institutions are and have always been an important part of their societies, because of the education of the elites of societies and also through their impact on the industrial productivity of nations. For these reasons, higher education institutions have been influenced by local politics and economics, even though universities – being a western model<sup>3</sup> – are also influenced by international and academic traditions and institutional models.

Second, it is also quite easy to accept the idea that field knowledge on different systems of higher education requires plenty of time spent in the midst of them. The easiest way is either to work or study in a higher education institution. By being a member of an academic (or student) community it

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<sup>3</sup> The western – or metropolitan - models of higher education have had a strong influence all over Asia, Africa and Latin America. This is because “metropolitan academic models are the international standard”, as Altbach (1998, p.56) puts it.

is easier to understand the social dynamics with the different – and often conflicting – expectations and duties. Third, it is perhaps equally easy to accept the idea that understanding the local language makes it easier to comprehend the conditions for local people and their system of higher education. However, it is difficult to say how much one should be able to understand, speak and even write the local language. Nevertheless, it is equally evident that without any understanding of the local language it would be quite impossible to gain access to that culture. Language is not merely a medium of communication or a product of culture, it also shapes the culture and provides a ‘password’ to the basic cultural categories and ways of thinking in that culture.<sup>4</sup> The fourth aspect deals with a systematic way of gathering data. It is maybe the most essential matter when collecting field knowledge on and in a foreign system of higher education. If one believes the introduction to the anthropological research, there are no strict methodological rules dictating how to gather information in the field – with the exception of participant observations. For higher education researchers living in other cultures there remain, then, two problematic matters to be reflected on: what is information, and how to gather it while doing participant observation?

Ulrich Teichler described one way of doing participant observation, when he wrote that it consists of “accidentally absorbed daily observations during our life course, reading newspapers, discussion with other persons etc.” This is a surely one of the ways in which one gains information while living a life in a foreign (or in one’s own) culture. However, a somewhat problematic matter with this kind of information infiltration is the random nature of the gathered information. It is also problematic, because all kinds of emotions, experiences and feelings may have an impact on one’s opinions and value judgments on important or unimportant data. For these reasons, field knowledge may be also misleading, because all kinds of strong experiences – both negative and positive – may affect attention and information gathering, indeed even in more neutral occasions of participant observation.

The making of observations as a participant consists, first of methodological guidelines (how to make observations and field notes, how to interview informants, how to collect and analyze data *etc.*), which are identified in guides to methodology (see *e.g.* Creswell, 1994). In addition, it also consists of decisions on the objects of observation. However, this is a topic which has not been properly discussed in higher education research. Cultural studies on higher education are helpful in this regard. William G. Tierney (1988) and Tony Becher (1989) have defined crucial elements and dimensions for studying organizational and disciplinary cultures. According to Tierney (2008, p.27), “just as traditional anthropologists will enter the field with an understanding of key cultural terms such as kinship or ritual, so too, will students of organizational culture also have a basic understanding of cultural terms that pertain to organization”. A framework suggested by Tierney for analyzing

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<sup>4</sup> This is especially true with two ‘untypical’ languages I am able to understand more (Finnish) or less (Japanese). Without having the basic knowledge of these languages, it is quite impossible to get an idea of the basic cultural categories of these cultures.

organizational culture consists of an analysis of how the institution's participants define its mission (overarching ideology), its environment, leadership, strategy, the nature of information and socialization. All these cultural categories help to understand "how we do things around here" in higher education institutions. A complementary perspective to studying the academic world as one consisting of cultural entities is provided by Tony Becher, whose work "Academic Tribes and Territories" also helps to define the objects of observations for a researcher in the field, because it pays attention to the basic aspects of disciplinary cultures (Becher & Trowler, 2001). These various aspects may be listed as follows: community life, patterns of communication and academic careers (in other words, socialization to and advancing in academic disciplines).

As a combination of both of these perspectives, it is possible to create a tentative list of objects to be observed, when doing a participant observation, or living in the middle of a new/strange/foreign system of higher education, which may even be the same thing.

1. *Physical space.* Social actions and activities always take place in a physical environment. For this reason, buildings of higher education institutions and their (possible) campuses establish an important frame for social life (see Eräsaari, 1995). Crucial for the academic life is the internal design of buildings, because it shapes social life for students and faculty members. It is of importance what kinds of social, office, lecturing and seminar rooms have been organized for the students and staff. It would be quite difficult to have a vital social life, if students had no rooms of their own in the departments, or if staff members met each other only hastily on the corridors. For this reason, the internal and external arrangement of buildings may be interpreted as value statements reflecting not only the resources of a society but also its values and traditions. The architecture of buildings is also important, even though it should be interpreted as a frame for social life more than a mere aesthetic aspect of academic life. The architecture of buildings can emphasize a hierarchical and authoritative or a democratic social order. Notwithstanding this, there are different traditions of higher education with different urban planning traditions. In Continental Europe – originally the southern parts of the European continent and the British Isles – the tradition was not to have campuses, because the social life of universities took place in colleges. Especially in northern parts of Europe one finds the model of the university main buildings, originally introduced in German-speaking Europe (see de Ridder-Symoens, 2003). University Campuses are known, in turn, as an American solution to the challenges caused by sending sons and daughter to college. All these traditions also carry with them a certain idea of higher education, even though local interpretations may vary significantly.
2. *Communication* is the "life blood of academia", as Tony Becher (1989) puts it. In addition to academic written communication or web pages, a participant observer should pay attention to ways of oral communication in social situations. It is important to pay attention both to the content of communication and how it is communicated. In other words, how people speak to

each other. Crucial cultural messages are the matters of fact: who speaks first, who speaks to whom, and who remains silent in a social situation. This is to say that important cultural messages are carried in and through non-verbal communication between the members of academic communities in their social situations. What is said and what is excluded from discussion is equally important.

3. *Socialization* within an academic culture and social interaction between its members are also important objects for study by a participant observer. The socialization of novices into academic cultures has been analyzed in higher education research (see Ylijoki, 2000). In addition to the socialization of novices into their academic tribes, one should also pay attention to social interaction inside academic tribes. In other words, what kind of behavior is expected from a newcomer to an academic tribe. What are the expectations, and how do we find out what they are. It is also interesting to try to find out what are those social rules that a participant observer is breaking (maybe without knowing it). According to anthropological research, newcomers often find themselves in the role of a clown because of their ignorance of local rules, norms and habits (Eriksen, 2004). It may well be that the same is true also in the academic world.

When defining these objects of observations I have in my mind a participant observer, who lives among fellow academics or students in a new or a foreign system of higher education. The physical and emotional presence of a researcher with the object of the study is typical of ethnographic studies. This makes ethnographic research process special compared to more traditional – and especially positivist – research in western science (see Lappalainen, 2007, p.10). Methodologically, it can be said that if one does not write down the experiences, they do not exist. Unwritten experiences easily turn into anecdotal knowledge, which is bound to follow the rules of a good story more than that of an academic observation. A crucial challenge is, therefore, the question of how to become conscious of what one sees, hears and feels. This may be expressed as a challenge to become conscious of one's own experiences and feelings in different social situations. To put it in other words, the aim is to become conscious of oneself as an observer and to observe the existing 'tacit knowledge' or 'common sense' behavior and perceptions, making it thus visible.

Even though this article discusses those dimensions of every day life which are important for increasing field knowledge on higher education, the aim is not to under-estimate the value of other information required for analyzing higher education in national settings. A critical reader should not, therefore, assume that participant observation is the only way of gathering information on the system of education concerned, even though it has been under-estimated so far. In another article I defined system-level dimensions, which need to be taken into consideration for comparative studies of higher education (see Välimaa, 2008b). This is to say that material and physical resources together with traditions matter in the functioning of higher education institutions. In addition, geographical



conditions and natural resources of societies – as well as climate – should not be forgotten, because of their evident impact on the population density in certain locations.

### **Discussion: on field knowledge and personal experiences**

This article has had two main goals. First, it has sought to point out that field knowledge is a form of knowledge of higher education that most of us know, even though we are not necessarily conscious of it. The aim of this article is to emphasize that becoming conscious of this knowledge is a valuable goal in itself. The second purpose has been to define more precisely the objectives for observation. The hope is that the dimensions that have been pointed out in this study are helpful for more focused discussion of the nature of this form of knowledge hidden in our everyday experiences.

The rationale for examining more precisely what field knowledge is and how to gain and become conscious of it is rooted in the nature of cultural knowledge of organizations. According to Edgar Schein (1985), there are three different levels of cultural meanings in organizational cultures. The first level is what everybody sees easily. These are called artifacts and they consist both of material artifacts and modes of behavior. The second level is more hidden. It is called values. Values tell the members of the organization (and outsiders too) what is respected and appreciated in the organization. As for universities, it could mean mission statements and other commonly accepted goals for a department, school, faculty or students. However, the most hidden and basic dimension in organizations, and therefore the hardest to change, is that of the underlying cultural basic assumptions. This consists of conceptions and perceptions on human beings, life, love, society, social relations. Basic underlying assumptions are the guidelines of behavior, even though they seldom are expressed.

Awareness of this old distinction focuses attention on the fact that what one sees is a form of information, and that it should be taken seriously. It is not, however, enough for a critical researcher to merely observe, participate and make notes. Something more is required. Epistemologically, the problem is: “How can I, as an observer, know that my field knowledge is right? How do I make sure I have not made irrelevant or arbitrary observations?” The fact is that field knowledge may also be misleading, because people normally have different opinions about and perspectives of the same phenomena. This is especially true in higher education, because of its variations according to institutions, disciplines and national traditions.

A similar problem is provided by the nature of differences and similarities. Differences in behavior and organizational structures and institutional procedures can be seen quite easily; and therefore, they can also be explained. However, it is maybe even more demanding to try to understand the similarities between European and Japanese higher education than their differences. I say it this way, because the similarities one sees are often similarities only on the surface level. It is easy to recognize commonalities, because many things seem similar when you look at them from outside, but often they turn out to function quite differently when examined from inside. The

problem is then: “How to recognize different social dynamics, of and in different higher education systems, even when people seem to be doing the same things (researching, teaching and learning) at their universities?”

One of the methodologically sound ways of overcoming this problem is to communicate and interact with the informants. In higher education they are normally fellow academics (or students). To take an example from my own experiences during a visit to Japan in the spring term 2008, I had many fruitful discussions with my colleagues in the Research Institute for Higher Education at Hiroshima University. Quite often these discussions took place over lunch or on less formal occasions during dinners, instead of formal meetings. This is not to say that formal occasions – for example giving lectures in different Japanese universities – were less important. Quite the contrary, this kind of formal setting is both intellectually stimulating and opens comparative perspectives into institutional behaviors in another culture. What becomes evident though is that interaction with colleagues gives a different kind of information. To understand the dynamics of academic life in another country one should try to get as many different perspectives of higher education as possible. Discussions also make it possible to check one’s perceptions and observations. I should also add that field knowledge based on experience is not the only knowledge on Japanese higher education, because any attempt to understand one part of a society – such as higher education – is quite impossible without trying to understand the whole of Japanese culture and society. I do not imagine that in the short time of four months I succeeded, but in the interest of knowledge the focus should be on the whole of society rather than on only a little part of it. For this reason also, it was interesting to communicate with post-graduate students and other staff as well as academic staff. Their perspectives on life in Japan opened new windows through which to look at Japanese culture and higher education.

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## Mexican Higher Education at a Crossroads: topics for a new agenda in public policies

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**Abstract.** After a period of unregulated growth from the 1960s to the late 1980s, Mexican public higher education came to be perceived as a ‘disaster zone’ by the federal government. Starting at that point, several public policies seeking to improve its quality, social relevance, efficiency and equity have been implemented. While impacting positively on Mexican higher education in many respects, such policies have had unintended negative effects and, it is contended, they are currently showing diminishing gains. This paper identifies six topics that the next generation of public policies should address if Mexican public higher education is to evolve into a stage in which its current shortcomings are diminished and its social relevance improved: the evaluation of public policies, the increasing complexity of the system, its coordination, its openness, the role of financial resources and, finally, the academic profession.

**Keywords:** Mexican higher education, public policies, system-wide change

### Introduction

In 1989, after nearly 20 years of unregulated growth, followed by a downfall in funding in which faculty salaries shrank to around 40% of their previous levels (Gil-Antón, 2002), public higher

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education was implicitly declared by the Mexican government a disaster zone and, accordingly, became the subject of a modernizing effort that would bring it to a level found in developed countries. Consistent with such governmental appraisal, the following years witnessed the formulation of new public policies targeted at such general goals, ranging from the promotion of entrance examinations for students looking to be admitted to higher education institutions (HEIs) previously non-existent in most HEIs, to efforts to develop institutional information systems that would provide valid, reliable and timely information to institutional leaders and federal officials who, in turn, would have better information to evaluate and on which accordingly to fund HEIs. Notwithstanding the traditional autonomy with which public state institutions had governed and managed themselves up to that point in time, their internal organization and functioning was directly affected by these policies, and so the Mexican higher education (MHE) landscape started an intense change process that is still in progress.

Following the lead of the then under-secretariat of Higher Education and Scientific Research, the National Association of Universities and Higher Education Institutions (*Asociación Nacional de Universidades e Instituciones de Educación Superior*, ANUIES), published in 2000 the report “Higher Education in the Twenty First Century: Strategic lines for its development”, in which ANUIES explicitly stated that MHE confronted, in the context of an increasingly globalized world, four main challenges: improving its quality, increasing its social relevance, becoming more efficient and, finally, becoming more equitable to under-represented groups in higher education (ANUIES, 2000, pp.2-4).<sup>1</sup>

The public policies implemented since the modernization discourse of the late 1980s have been described by Kent-Serna (2005) as having an important impact on MHE and, at the same time, not being able to move it to the expected performance levels. Notwithstanding the correctness of such general comment, a detailed and balanced appraisal of the impact of those public policies remains a pending task.

Assuming that the main challenges that MHE faces have been adequately identified at a general and systemic level, in this paper we want to call attention to a set of topics that need to be considered if MHE is to improve significantly in the years to come. In the context of many changes that have taken place since the late 1980s, MHE is at a crossroads in the sense that the national public policies currently in place are showing diminishing gains in improving MHE. Under these circumstances it is convenient to review topics that provide alternatives to the identified weaknesses of the way in which national public policies and programs are functioning. Some of the proposed topics are structural and some are cultural, but in both cases they need to be considered in order to avoid the risk of drifting into

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<sup>1</sup> When Vicente Fox became the first Mexican president not to come from the Institutional Revolutionary Party (Partido Revolucionario Institucional, PRI) since the 1930s, Julio Rubio Oca, then executive secretary of ANUIES and with central responsibility for the 2000 ANUIES report, became the under-secretary of Higher Education and Scientific Research. In this position Julio Rubio Oca promoted the agenda that ANUIES had made officially its own a short time before.

a situation in which the contribution of higher education to Mexican development and the general well-being of its population falls short of its potential.

The paper is divided into three sections and, because of the space available, many details have been only mentioned briefly and some omitted entirely. The references given in the text should provide complementary information for those interested in particular issues. The first section briefly describes the evolution of MHE and the main federal programs implemented since the late 1980s. The core of this paper, the second section, discusses six topics that need to be recognized and addressed if MHE is to improve. Finally, the concluding comments provide a small set of reflections on the material previously presented. It is hoped that the ideas behind this text might be of some help in moving from discussion of the identified topics to generation of new public policies related to them.

## **Mexican higher education today**

### *Growth and development*

In this section we will describe briefly MHE accomplishments and challenges as of today. Among the accomplishments we can cite its growth (students, faculty, institutions and programs); its progressive decentralization; the professionalization of its academic faculty and, quite importantly, the yet to be consolidated spread of a new culture of pertinence, evaluation and accountability. The still pending challenges are in essence the same as those reported by ANUIES in 2000: improving quality, increasing social relevance, becoming more efficient and, finally, becoming more equitable to social groups under-represented in higher education (ANUIES, 2006).

Several authors (Kent-Serna, 1993; Gil-Anton, 1996; Grediaga-Kuri, 2000) identify four stages in the development of MHE. First from 1960 to 1969, there was a period of moderate expansion of the system. A highly accelerated expansion of HEIs characterized the second period, from 1970 to 1982. The third period achieved slower growth of the higher education system during 1982 to 1989 as a result of the economic crisis arising from the decline in oil prices and the country's increasing international debt. In order to overcome this situation, the federal government and public HEIs initiated a more rational and planned relationship that emphasized financial issues and institutional self-evaluation.

Finally, the fourth period, from 1990 to the present time, has been characterized by a renewed expansion and diversification of the higher education system, in which the private sector has grown, largely in an unregulated way, and public efforts have been targeted at underprivileged populations by way of increasing enrollment in existing HEIs and by creating institutions such as the technological, and intercultural universities. At the same time, there has been a move toward evaluation (efficiency and efficacy) and accountability. Federal policies encouraged HEIs to adopt a "culture of evaluation" and to modernize their structures. During this period federal funding was maintained at a 'survival'

level, and a very significant proportion of the additional financial support needed each passing year was granted to HEIs on the basis of project competition and institutional and program evaluation. In this way the federal government promoted implementation of evaluation policies mainly in the public higher education system, where the largest percentage of all undergraduate students is located as well as most activities related to graduate education and research. In this period a crisis of confidence in public higher education emerged, and new social sectors started demanding new academic models, greater social and economic relevance, and public accountability. The evaluation policies could be seen as part of a response by the government to regain legitimacy.

### *National public policies and programs in higher education*

In this section we will briefly describe the key federal programs that have steered, pushed and pulled MHE during the last 20 years. Specifically, at the institutional level we will talk about the Integral Program for Institutional Strengthening (*Programa Integral para el Fortalecimiento Institucional*, PIFI) (Rubio-Oca, 2006); at the student level we will comment on the National Scholarship Program (*Programa Nacional de Becas*, PRONABES) and, finally, we will describe the Program for the Improvement of the Professoriate (*Programa para el Mejoramiento del Profesorado*, PROMEP) (Urbano-Vidales, Aguilar-Sahagún & Rubio-Oca, 2006).

It is important to note that due to the institutional autonomy of state public HEIs in Mexico, many federal policies are not mandatory, even though the acceptance of these policies can influence the institutional level of financing supported by the federal government. However, with the movement away from a benevolent system to a performance-based funding model, the federal government developed for itself, despite the autonomy discourse, a strong influence in the development of HEIs through federal financing policies and programs such as those described below (Mendoza-Rojas, 2002).

At the institutional level the Integral Program for Institutional Strengthening (*Programa Integral de Fortalecimiento Institucional*, PIFI), was enacted in 2001 (Rubio-Oca, 2006a). In this way the National Evaluation and Accreditation System was provided with a 'funding arm' to the extent that it incorporated various previous funding programs that provided additional federal funds to those public HEIs that were willing to carry on strategic planning and evaluation with an emphasis on the improvement of the quality of educational services; quality had been defined essentially by the federal agencies involved in the program and – an issue that has been contested by different academic communities – rests on the acceptance at face value of a set of indicators that are amenable to manipulation independent of the underlying processes.

The PIFI program rests on two main concepts directly related to the academic life of a HEI, and on one additional consideration related to the institution's administration. The core concepts are academic capacity and academic competitiveness. Academic capacity refers essentially to the profile



of the academic faculty that work in an institution and is directly related to the proportion of academics that holds a graduate degree and, at the same time, has a level of productivity that enables them to be recognized as having a “desirable profile,” as they are members of the National Researchers System and, in recent years, have been grouped together in “academic bodies.”

Academic competitiveness, on the other hand, refers centrally to the number of academic programs that are accredited. In this aspect PIFI requires from HEIs organization of their academic programs, irrespective of their internal academic organization (Departments and Faculties, for example), in entities called “Higher Education Units” (*Dependencias de Educación Superior*), which integrate programs in related disciplinary and professional fields. These entities have now become the center of institutions’ planning efforts.

Finally, in the administrative arena PIFI has encouraged institutions both to order their administrative procedures and to make more efficient and transparent use of public funds that public HEIs receive. In particular, PIFI has encouraged institutions, among other things, to train administrative personnel, to modernize their infrastructure and information systems and, in a particularly visible way, to certify their administrative procedures through quality-assurance mechanisms typical of those found in private organizations (Rubio-Oca, 2006a). It is not clear, however, that these measures have had a positive impact on the effectiveness and efficiency of the implicated procedures (Díaz-Barriga, Barrón-Tirado & Díaz-Barriga-Arceo, 2008).

Directed to students, PRONABES has been generally considered a very successful program. It has been shown to reach the intended population and it has also promoted the retention and graduation of groups of students that otherwise most probably would not have remained in the system (ANUIES, 2006; Rubio-Oca, 2006b). In this way PRONABES has contributed significantly to making access to and graduation from higher education somewhat more equitable, although at present the enrollment rate is around approximately 25% (ANUIES, 2006). Another national program, although this one operated from ANUIES, which was formulated to promote equity, was the National Tutoring Program (ANUIES, 2002).

At faculty level the Program for the Improvement of the Professoriate, (*Programa para el Mejoramiento del profesorado, PROMEP*) was designed, following the antecedent of the SUPERA-ANUIES program (*Programa Nacional de Superación del Personal Académico*), by the under-secretariat of Higher Education and Scientific Research in 1996, to help increase the number of highly trained full-time faculty members in public institutions. Unlike many programs, PROMEP has remained functioning throughout three different presidential terms of the country and is currently a key component of the institutional PIFI program. Nowadays PROMEP focuses mainly on three aspects. First, it has promoted an increment in the number of full-time faculty with a “desirable profile” through a faculty hiring policy requiring that only professors who have already earned graduate degrees can occupy new full-time faculty appointments. Second, PROMEP has fostered in-service full-time faculty acquisition of graduate education by way of granting scholarships to current

faculty members. Third, the program has tried to foster academic collaboration by requiring academics to organize themselves in academic bodies that integrate activities of generation and application of knowledge.

However, several studies (Gil-Antón, *et al.*, 1994; Grediaga-Kuri, 2000) have shown that a formal full-time appointment is not sufficient to guarantee a high involvement in academic life. Some full-time faculty members tend to combine their academic jobs with other paid professional activities. Nevertheless, as a result of the PROMEP policy 8,406 new full-time faculty positions have been created between 1996 and 2005, of which more than 2,000 have received support to acquire academic equipment.

PROMEP has also fostered in-service full-time faculty acquisition of graduate education on the basis of a policy that consists of granting scholarships to current faculty members so that they can earn a master's or PhD degree. According to Secretaría de Educación Pública (SEP) (2006), in 1998 about 8% of all full-time faculty in public universities had obtained a PhD, while by 2006 the proportion had risen to 22%. Notwithstanding these accomplishments, there is concern about the quality of graduate programs specifically designed to meet the training needs of current professors. These programs could very well satisfy the need to increase the number of faculty in the higher education system with PhD degrees, but their contribution to the training of specialized professionals is not as clear as it might be.

Another PROMEP policy fosters the development of academic bodies in order to facilitate the integration of teaching and research. According to the operational rules, institutions are to organize academic bodies that in turn can be identified by SEP in terms of being in training, in a consolidation stage or already consolidated (SEP, 2006). These academic bodies receive, according to their level of development, some financial support to implement projects that may allow them to obtain the required level of academic productivity. Notwithstanding this, in some cases faculty members have perceived this policy as an imposition, which has somehow forced them to become part of an academic body in which the members are not all productive, or are not all willing to work collaboratively. They feel that an unintended effect of this policy is the simulation of the existence of an academic body that can qualify to receive financial resources.

Since the early 1990s, federal programs and policies have fostered the appearance of a "differential salary scale for academics based on research productivity and the quality of teaching with special salary supplements for full-time academics who meet certain standards" (Kent, 1993, p.79). HEIs (mainly public) have implemented programs of economic stimulus based on evaluation of faculty productivity. One issue with this strategy, however, is the fact that income from merit pay systems might represent as much as 60% of the total income of an academic (Gil-Antón, 2002). A second much debated aspect is the general perception that these systems favor research over teaching activities and that, as with other processes that rely very heavily on indicators, they also tend to promote simulation (Cordero-Arroyo, Galaz-Fontes & Sevilla-García, 2003).

## **Topics for a long-term vision of Mexican higher education**

Having briefly described the current state of MHE, including the main challenges that it faces, we now turn to a set of reflections on several topics that need to be addressed if MHE is to improve its functioning and be in a better position to increase its relevance in an effective and efficient way. Specifically, we will deal with the topics of (1) public policy evaluation, (2) the increasing complexity of MHE, (3) the coordination of the higher education system in Mexico, (4) openness and mobility within the system, (5) reconfiguration of the academic profession, and finally (6) the limits of money.

### *Evaluation of national public policies and programs*

In an accountable democracy every effort should be made to openly evaluate public policies. In the case of MHE there are evaluation studies of national public policies and programs that have been performed both by organizations responsible for them (e.g., Urbano-Vidales, Aguilar-Sahagún, & Rubio-Oca, 2006; Rubio-Oca, 2006b), and by external academics (e.g., Díaz-Barriga, 2008). However, if one considers the amount of financial resources managed in the context of such policies as well as the goals of higher education, then there is a clear need for more and better evaluation. Particularly relevant when evaluating public policies, evaluation studies should make holistic and balanced analyses of a policy or a program in terms of achieved goals, collateral unintended negative consequences, costs and benefits.

Given its role as the key player in developing national public policies and programs, it is only natural to expect the under-secretariat of Higher Education to be the official body that should be most interested in promoting evaluation studies of the national public policies that they enact. Such studies, on the other hand, should be done by different groups of experts with a variety of methodologies and measurement instruments, so that more aspects of these programs can be considered.

In addition to the need for promoting more evaluation studies regarding national public policies and programs, much more attention should be given to the distribution and uses of their results. Given the availability of technology, it is indeed surprising how little information is distributed regarding research on national public policies. Both the under-secretariat and independent scholars should make extra efforts in order to make accessible to academics all over the country the materials and findings generated by these studies.

A most important issue regarding evaluation studies is the extent to which high-ranking officials pay attention to what these studies have to say and the extent to which these officials are willing to change in the direction that the information generated might suggest. The existence of a productive dialogue between high-ranking officials and researchers studying national public policies and programs is not currently the norm, and it appears that national public policies and programs once

implemented are by definition seen as correct by their creators, who therefore usually expect the higher education community to endorse them. The alternative, of having national public policies and programs not recognized as appropriate, is usually taken as proof that those not accepting such policies and programs are against everything and/or are unable to see the benefits those policies and programs bring with them.

### *On the complexity of Mexican higher education*

Mexican higher education has grown in size and complexity: more and more different students, more and more professionalized faculty, more and more varied academic tasks, more and more support activities and personnel. Nonetheless, it seems that, except for a few big and influential public and private HEIs, new demands are being confronted with essentially the same organizational structures and the same personnel that were in place several decades ago.

In the educational arena, student services is an area in need of considerable stimulus. Nowadays it is an underdeveloped and pre-professional area, and often faculty are required to take care of activities that should be a responsibility of professional advisors, psychologists, librarians and student services personnel. Academics requested to take charge of such a variety of functions are not only overloaded but are being condemned to perform in an amateur way tasks for which they are not adequately prepared. At the same time, student services receive neither the recognition nor the support that they deserve.

In much the same way, there is little understanding of support services that faculty should receive in order for them to be more productive in their central tasks of teaching, research and service. Teaching improvement centers and programs, or funding support offices are not as common as they should be. Faculty are expected to do everything related to their core responsibilities but such a situation demands increasing amounts of time and academics are therefore confronted with a no-win situation in relation to the central tasks they are supposed to engage in.

Finally, MHE institutions need a more specialized administrative staff and, particularly in positions having to do with the core institutional tasks, a staff more knowledgeable about higher education, its academic life and culture, and with an attitude of service towards both students and faculty.

### *On the coordination of the higher education system*

In parallel to what happens in the national political arena, there is at present a growing tension between the control exerted by the center and the decentralizing expectation of an increasing number of higher education actors. The tension between centralism and federalism is at the base of the discussion of the coordination of MHE. While national public policies usually imply a unique set of

criteria being applied in much the same way across the states, which are considerably different in their circumstances and development, there are sectors at the state- and even at the municipal-levels, which claim larger margins for maneuver. Why not generate a national system, not from the ‘center’ to the ‘periphery’, but rather one located in the country as whole – one in which the terms center and periphery loose meaning?

The actual challenge can be phrased in the following way: how to decentralize not only the operation but also the generation of policies and programs without, at the same time, dividing the country? That is to say, the challenge is to replace a central structure with a new federal structure that regulates basic aspects of the system but at the same time leaves wide spaces for the initiative and creativity of the states, including the possibility of generating regional educational spaces that go beyond the traditional administrative criteria that were mainly derived from central control.

Many higher education actors prefer the discretionary rationality of the center (the under-secretariat of Higher Education) to the discretionary non-rationality of state and local authorities and, not infrequently, the institutional authorities themselves. Conceptually there is no problem in accepting the convenience of being decentralized, but in practice there is much more confidence in the competencies of central authorities. This situation is closely associated with differences in the profile and balance of entities such as the national *versus* the local congress, or the influence of national organizations such as the National Association of Universities and Higher Education Institutions, *versus* State Planning Commissions, many of them existing only as bureaucratic agencies that are in charge of collecting data for governmental bodies.

This dilemma points towards a solution that might be gradual: building local and regional control systems to counterbalance the central ones. Given that a federal system would take time to establish, it is crucial to accept that problems would appear at the local level. However, this horizon is less dangerous, in terms of the evolution of the system, than maintaining central control. Local disturbances, however, could be diminished to the extent that local and institutional units are reinforced.

After almost 30 years with the same higher education law, the new conditions demand a new law regarding higher education coordination. However, is it better to promote a new law directly or, would it be wiser to proceed for a limited period by way of specific agreements? Maybe more progress can be achieved from making concrete specific agreements that pave the way for a future law.

The centralism/federalism debate is crucial for the formulation of a new kind of national policies and programs. Should Mexico work towards becoming an open or closed system; vertically controlled or with increasing degrees of horizontality; dependant upon decisions taken in the capital or interdependent and in need of becoming more coordinated, but with allowances for regional and state idiosyncrasies within reasonable degrees of unity? In other words, will the center keep dealing with the states as if these were under-aged and in need of direction and even micro-administering HEIs? The situation in the states is quite heterogeneous, but centralization is not the only reasonable

implication of such a situation. An alternative route is to build an intelligent vision of decentralization that, on the one hand helps improve planning and implementation tools, and on the other allows states, which already have such tools in place, to take full responsibility for being relatively autonomous in their development and assuming the benefits and costs associated with it.

### *Openness and mobility within the system*

A by-product of the centralism that characterizes MHE is that its actors have little opportunity to move from one institution to another, particularly if the movement does not imply passing through the center of the system. It is probably no exaggeration to state that for students and academics is easier to move to and from institutions outside the country than to move within it. Many institutions are in fact islands and their isolation impedes seeing the higher education system as an emergent property that stems from the relationships among its institutional components. Centralism produces dependency, not dynamism and variation.

However, there are efforts targeted at resolving this situation. A national credit system would allow students to move from their original institutions but up to now HEIs have only been willing to recognize a relatively small fraction of the work done in other institutions.

Faculty mobility in terms of academics taking jobs at different institutions, without which it is nonsense to talk about an academic market, requires the liberalization of benefits associated with income (seniority mainly, as it represents a significant proportion of a faculty member's income), so that they might be portable from one institution to another. The current situation, in which faculty with a relatively small number of years of seniority are discouraged from moving to other institutions, promotes endogamy and limits seriously the incorporation of new perspectives that faculty coming from other institutions might bring with them. Not having an open market for the academic profession limits considerably the enrichment of its academic personnel.

By the same logic, MHE needs to eliminate barriers and stimulate the mobility of university administrators. Due to the way power is attained and distributed within HEI, academics and other professionals with genuine interest and skills in the administrative arena are forced to associate themselves with the dynamics of local power groups. This is indeed a very interesting factor that works against decentralization and against opening the system. These groups, which in some instances include governing boards that have build an exchange-of-favors network, would be among the losers from a new state of affairs, and it is only natural to expect strong resistance from them. One important task of a federal entity would be to deal with such situations by stimulating organization of faculty as a balancing factor.

Mexican culture in general is not very mobile and additionally there are specific situations that deter professional mobility in general (the high costs of credit for buying a house, for example). So, it is necessary to create incentives for academic mobility, which should not be limited to money but

include, perhaps in a larger proportion, opportunities for professional development. Academic and administrative mobility, on the other hand, would entail costs, especially high at institutions that have been traditionally isolated. The discussion of academic mobility reminds us that the higher education system should not only move away from a centrally-controlled system but should also be careful not to run into a situation in which local feuds are reinforced. Avoiding such a possibility in the creation of an open academic market for students, faculty and administrators would help create a system in which regulation of the system would be distributed across the entire system.

### *The reconfiguration of the academic profession*

While students pass through HEI, faculty remain and constitute those who are ultimately responsible for the core activities of these institutions, namely teaching, research and service. MHE treatment of its most valuable resource, however, is not consistent with such a perspective.

Mexican academics, particularly those on full-time contracts, have been the objects of a series of national and institutional policies, which during the last decades, have demanded from them an increasing number and variety of activities (teaching, tutoring students, research, extension activities, administrative responsibilities, fund raising, *etc.*). In the process of becoming a professional, centered in knowledge according to the new scholarship notion advanced by Boyer (1990), the Mexican academic is forced to act as an amateur in many activities that are now being implemented in response to new needs that HEIs have identified. At the same time, it has also been demanded that they increase their level of training and, because of the low salaries, complement their income as an exclusive or almost-exclusive dedication to the academe is insufficient to maintain a middle-class living standard.

One form of salary complementation is to become a member of the National Researchers System, and so receive significant merit-pay. This provides an acceptable income for a low proportion of the faculty, but these remuneration schemes have unexpected consequences. Because the largest proportion of their income comes now from sources outside their home institutions, these are now seen by many to constitute not so much a community of scholars and students in pursuit of purposes that at least overlap somewhat but rather as platforms from which it is possible to pursue further initiatives that will bring in more money both to themselves and to their institutions. As might be expected, these modern academics have little disposition to behave as citizens of their institutions (Organ, 1990), as such an activity requires time and for them time is valuable in maintaining their merit-pay income.

Not only has there been change in the work of Mexican faculty but also in themselves as persons. Mexican academics, like many others in the world, are growing older and approaching retirement. With the current schemes it appears that many academics will keep working as long as they can in order to retain what they consider an appropriate income. This fact has large implications for the

new generation of academics, particularly because there is still no clarity regarding the trajectory of an academic career and, as has already been mentioned, there is no real academic job market.

On the other hand, two-thirds of Mexican faculty are hired on a part-time basis. These colleagues require special attention in regard to various aspects, including professional development programs and hiring policies that would allow them to have a more stable job and, in that context, contribute to an institution's mission in a more significant manner. Nevertheless, these faculty members are consistently excluded from federal, state and institutional policies.

### *The limits of money*

Mexican higher education has indeed improved during the last three decades. Notwithstanding the fact that the situation is heterogeneous and that in certain areas it has largely remained the same or even deteriorated, the main mechanism for change has been, largely a "stick and carrot" national public policy, with probably many more carrots than sticks. Money has been the carrot for institutions and faculty to change, while the stick has been, not the dismissal of academics or the firing of incompetent or fraudulent personnel, but maintaining them with resources just sufficient to enable them to survive. To this end the under-secretariat of Higher Education adopted performance-dependant financing. Quite regrettably, there has been little collective discussion regarding the reasonableness of the programs and measures taken by the central authority.

If money had not been in place as the main incentive would change have taken place? Two reasons make us believe the answer would be "no." In the first place, there has been an abdication from exercise of legitimate academic and institutional authority. Instead of firing faculty who do not work it was decided to pay more to faculty who do indeed work; institutions with improvement programs were reinforced instead of having national, state or local authorities assume their role as legitimate leaders. If our authorities do not recover their leadership role, with the associated exercise of authority, money will be the only reason for change and, although money changes short-term behavioral patterns, it does not generate solid academic traditions and cultures.

Secondly, the vast majority of full-time Mexican faculty receives a salary low in comparison with that of professionals with equivalent training working in the public or private sector. Moreover an important proportion of their total income (as much as 60% for the highest paid academics) comes from merit-pay systems, both internal and external to the institution. This situation has prompted academics to become largely interested in the economic consequences of their work and to assume an individualistic perspective in their work that diminishes the possibilities of creating academic communities intra- and inter-institutionally (Suárez-Zozaya & Muñoz-García, 2004).



## Concluding Comments

While MHE has made significant progress during the last 30 or so years, it needs to consider changing some of its fundamental ways of functioning. New ways of thinking about higher education are needed. As the very first step we need to evaluate in a very critical way the current national policies and programs that are being implemented in higher education. Not everything is white or black, and independent and systematic evaluations would provide valuable information that can help us accept that:

- Mexican higher education needs a core set of national public policies, which corresponds to the conditions under which higher education is to function. At the same time, it also needs a larger set of differentiating policies, which would allow each HEI to pursue its mission in the context of the space that it occupies. Mexico needs to move from having a small set of “national,” usually centrally located, institutions to a system in which a larger group of institutions is competitive and of high quality.
- Although little attention was paid to the subject matter on this occasion, Mexican HEI have functioned, until relatively recently, under the culture of the Mexican political system. In this context there is a need to increase the transparency with which resources are handled and the consequent associated accountability (Gil-Antón, 2008).
- Although MHE has come a long way from a period in which its functioning reflected essentially political processes both within and beyond its boundaries (Levy, 1980), attention should be given to the promotion of local, informed, professional and responsible power centers that could counterbalance both the centralism of current policies and local feuds associated with groups with strong political traditions outside higher education.
- There needs to be an open market not only for students but for faculty and highly specialized administrators. The movement of highly skilled personnel will help to level the terrain across the country and as well help open up HEIs that have been isolated for decades. Considering the extensive interaction between academics in their role as such and as administrators, particular attention should be given to preparing those academics taking administrative positions so as to maximize opportunities for academics to become administrators and high-ranking officials.

There are other specific recommendations that stem from the above reflections but they need to be considered in the context of the particularities of specific regions of the country, HEIs, faculty and students. There are many ways in which these changes could be promoted but a fundamental issue is to let go our fear of not having central control of the system and move the control and funding roles from the federal government to the state level. Subsequently, it will be appropriate to recognize that building the politics of such a fundamental change is a pending task.

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# The Triumvirate Governing Japan's Higher Education Policy since the 1990s: perspectives on neo-liberalism

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**Abstract.** The aims of this paper are to track the primary actors in the transformation of policy toward higher education in Japan since 1990 and to explore the effects of those policy changes at Japanese universities. We find that the Ministry of Education was joined by two new actors, the Councils established by the Cabinet Office, plus METI and the business world. This triumvirate has been engaged in a three-way struggle over the universities, with the new actors both strongly proposing neo-liberal policies. When the actors' policies were applied to the universities, however, they were seen less as expressions of neo-liberalism than as ways to overcome the Japanese universities' recent crises. Because of these pressures, university reform could not be resisted.

**Keywords:** Japanese higher education policy, 1990's-2000's, neo-liberalism, policy actors, university reform

## 1. Defining the issue

The goal of this paper is to track the primary actors involved in the transformation of policy toward higher education<sup>1</sup> in Japan since 1990 and to explore the effects of those policy changes on teaching and research at Japanese universities. The period being considered is limited to the years since 1990 because it was at about that time that neo-liberal principles of marketization and relaxation of regulations began to take root in Japan and became an important factor in educational policy and educational reform. Previous research on the impact of neo-liberalism on educational reform has dealt mainly with primary and secondary education (Sanuki & Yotoriyama, 2008), but almost no research has been done on its impact on higher education. That is because in higher education, in contrast to primary and secondary education, the Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, Science and

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<sup>1</sup> "Higher education" is defined by law as referring to four-year undergraduate universities, two-year junior colleges, and technical colleges. While it is customary to include junior and technical colleges in the category of higher education, this essay focuses on the four-year undergraduate universities, which are in the majority.

Technology (MEXT) and other governmental actors, by accepting the principles of university self-government and academic freedom, have allowed universities considerable autonomy. Given the lower profile of government policy toward higher education, this topic has attracted less interest. Nonetheless, higher education has indeed been exposed to the wave of neo-liberal reform. The resulting reforms, however, do not appear to be neo-liberal. Bringing this state of affairs to light is the goal of this essay. In analyzing the influence of neo-liberal reform on higher education, it is also essential to analyze the effects on both the roles that institutions of higher education perform – teaching and research – with research being the one area in which they differ substantially from institutions of primary and secondary education.

Amano (2002) and Ichikawa (2003) have included neo-liberal reform perspectives in their comprehensive discussions of structural changes in Japanese higher education since 1990. Since, however, several years have elapsed since they were writing, their discussion of the neo-liberal influence on higher education is now incomplete. The analysis presented here aims to fill the gaps left in their accounts.

Turning, then, to specifics. The focus of Part 2 of this essay is the MEXT, the primary actor affecting policy toward higher education, which has focused its reform efforts on teaching. Part 3 deals with a new type of actor, the councils set up by the Cabinet Office to implement reforms in the system of higher education as part of a broader effort to transform Japan along neo-liberal lines. Part 4 analyzes the deep involvement of other ministries and agencies, in particular the Ministry of Economy, Trade and Industry (METI), in promoting research at universities as one aspect of policies aimed at re-energizing the Japanese economy. Part 5 then summarizes changes in higher education induced by the increasing diversity and dynamic of the actors involved in policy toward higher education.

## **2. Reforming university teaching: the Ministry of Education**

As many have already argued, the Ad Hoc Council on Education Reform in 1984 was established at a turning point in policy toward education. It was in the debates of this Council that neo-liberal policy principles first appeared. Especially noteworthy for its impact on higher education was the 1987 establishment of the University Council in response to the Ad Hoc Council's fourth report. The establishment of a University Council, dedicated to reform of higher education and distinct from the Central Council for Education, which had until then been the body whose brief included all education, was a sign of the importance and urgency attached to reforming higher education. While the University Council was restructured in 2000 as a subcommittee subordinate to the Central Council for Education, the 28 reports it issued during the 12 years prior to that demonstrate the speed with which reform of higher education was being implemented in the 1990s. The focus of those reforms was,

however, teaching. The opening shot in reforming the teaching side of higher education was the 1991 report, “Concerning Improvements in University Education”.<sup>2</sup>

The report opens with a statement on “What is expected from the university.”

University education should, while working to transmit the legacy of scholarship and culture, also respond appropriately to advances in scholarship, scientific and technical innovation, internationalization, the spread of information technology, changes in the industrial structure, and other change. *Curriculum, content, methods and organization of teaching should be continuously checked and improved*, to train persons of talent who can be active in all aspects of society and to work to build the capacity to respond to changing times and new developments in science and technology. (The Higher Education Research Group, 2002, p.222; emphasis here and in subsequent quotations added by author.)

Here the focus is clearly on improving university teaching. This report was the first to mention the issues of faculty development, syllabi, curricula, guidance, and credit substantialization. It was also the first to make reform an obligation for the universities themselves and subject to their own discretion.

Improvements in university education are to be realized through the autonomous efforts of the individual universities. Universities will distinguish themselves by the energy they devote to reform, thus making revitalization a critical issue for every university. (*ibid*, p.223)

Emphasizing this purpose, it continued,

Concerning the soft aspect of reform of educational content, every university should proceed in a direction that reflects its autonomy. Hard aspects, including the minimum amount of space required for campuses and buildings and the minimum number of full-time staff, will continue to be regulated quantitatively. (*ibid*, p.223)

The Standards for the Establishment of a University had been prescribed in general terms, but they only regulated the external, physical framework in which a university would operate. That the report also discussed in detail improvements in the soft aspects of universities was a momentous change. While the report spoke of universities’ self-directed efforts, we can read it as signaling that the Ministry of Education would be strengthening its control over the teaching aspect of universities.

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<sup>2</sup> The earliest report by the University Council is the 1987 “On making the graduate school system more flexible.” Subsequently independent graduate schools, not based on an undergraduate institution, were institutionalized. That might be described as the first example of deregulation. Its next report in 1991 “On Improving University Education,” established the base for subsequent reforms of university education and had a far greater impact.

The 1999 Standards for the Establishment of a University defined faculty development, for example, as a task that universities must strive to implement. Faculty development was then made obligatory for graduate schools in 2007, and in 2008 for undergraduate programs as well. By 2005, 80.6% of universities reported that they had implemented faculty development programs along these lines (MEXT, 2005). The self-assessment system mentioned here for the first time was followed, after a phase of encouraging external and then third-party assessments, by a certified evaluation and accreditation system made obligatory in 2004. As 85.4% of universities conducted self-assessments in 2005 (MEXT, 2005), as a format for institutionalizing certification, certified evaluation and accreditation did not come as a particular shock.

Universities are said to have been given greater scope for discretion. The reality is, however, that external control over their soft, teaching role has been strengthened, and the universities have complied with this trend without complaint.

Another largely unnoticed fact that should be highlighted is that reforms of teaching initiated by the Ministry of Education have affected the issue of faculty qualifications. In the Standards for the Establishment of a University, the regulation concerning faculty originally said that university professors should “possess outstanding knowledge and experience in their specialties.” In 1991, that wording was changed to “[should be persons] recognized for their ability in teaching and research.” Then in 2001 the wording was changed again to “recognized as having the appropriate educational ability to be responsible for university teaching.” What the regulations demanded of university faculty has changed significantly from knowledge and experience as researchers to greater emphasis on teaching ability. One result is that a column on teaching performance has been added beside the column on research performance in the faculty review conducted by the Council on University Chartering. Institutions of higher education everywhere began to include statements about teaching experience and teaching aspirations in documents related to faculty recruitment. As of 2005, the proportion of universities including teaching in performance evaluations was still only relatively small at 35.8% (MEXT, 2005). Within, however, a single decade, teaching performance, as well as research, had become a factor in the assessment of faculty performance, with the assessment being conducted by an external party. These were enormous changes of dual significance.

Another change came in 1997, with the passage of the Law Concerning Term Limitation of University Educators. It would seem to challenge the assumption that becoming a university faculty member made one’s position secure until retirement age. However, as of 2001 only 21.9% of universities had established fixed-term employment systems (MEXT, 2001).

The theory that institutions of higher education should focus their efforts on teaching and thus that universities should try to increase the number of faculty members who are passionate about teaching, as faculty who only do research are no good, has slowly but surely changed the orientations of university faculty members. A 2006 survey of four-year universities found that if asked to choose which is more important, 51.9% of faculty members said teaching, while almost the same proportion,



48.1%, chose research (Yoshida, 2008). While these results do not indicate a clear-cut choice of one role over the other, when we compare them to the results of a 1992 study in which only 27.5% chose teaching (Arimoto & Ehara, 1996), we do see a clear shift towards teaching as the faculty focus.

One can hardly deny that some connection exists between neo-liberal thinking and the series of reforms initiated by the Ministry of Education (and Science), which derived from the Ad Hoc Council on Education Reform and resulted in relaxing the Standards for the Establishment of a University and giving universities more discretion. As these reforms also gradually made obligatory the use of a variety of new tools to ensure that teaching had more practical results, they did not increase academic freedom and cannot be described as neo-liberal reforms. While the Ad Hoc Council had advocated greater individuality and freedom based on neo-liberal thinking, the Ministry of Education positioned its opposition to greater freedom and flexibility as a value-neutral stance with the goal of preserving the public character of education (Schoppa, 1991). That stance, starting in about 1990 with the series of reforms of teaching described above, which began with the systematization of the Standards for the Establishment of a University, has never fundamentally changed. The Ministry of Education took maintaining the existing system of higher education as its fundamental position and chose to concentrate on reforming teaching, the soft aspect of that system.

These efforts to reform teaching were driven by the deeply rooted belief that, in Japan, once students pass the university entrance exams, they stop studying: that it is hard to get into university but easy to graduate. The universities have been under intense pressure to adopt reforms, for which winning public support is easy. At the same time, universities, confronted by the unprecedented shrinkage in Japan's birthrate, have had no choice but to welcome a more diverse student body. Survey results, which show universities as now using a variety of new educational tools, may not solely be derived from the decision to make the use of such tools obligatory.

### **3. Cabinet Office Councils promote marketization**

Overtly neo-liberal reforms affecting higher education can be traced to the 2001 establishment of the Cabinet Office and the bodies set up by it, whose reform policies reached the universities *via* the Ministry of Education in the form of Cabinet decisions. Two of the most important bodies in terms of their influence on systemic reforms at universities were the Council on Economic and Fiscal Policy (CEFP) and the Council for Regulatory Reform (CRR). These two Councils had as their objectives the relaxation and elimination of regulation and the promotion of free competition in all areas of Japanese society. During the Koizumi era (2001-2006) that tendency became significantly stronger.

The CEFP line on structural reform led to the transformation of national universities into public corporations. The Toyama Plan for structural reform, presented by the Ministry of Education to the CEFP in 2001, had two pillars: "Principles for Structural Reform of Universities (National Universities)" and "A Structural Reform Plan to Re-energize Japan's Economy, Starting with

Universities.” The former called for “Restructuring and Integration of National Universities,” “Introduction of Management Techniques from the Private Sector,” and “Reforms Based on Competitive Principles.” The latter called for “Creating Universities that Meet the Highest Global Standards,” “Creating a Talent Superpower,” and “The Rebirth of Cities and Regions.”

Through “Restructuring and Integrating National Universities,” 98 national universities were to be reduced to 87, while the call to introduce management practices from the private sector reignited debate on turning the national universities into independent administrative institutions of some sort (“reignited,” because the debate over whether to transform the universities’ status had begun before World War II and had recurred periodically during the postwar period).

In every previous recurrence, that debate had, however, assumed the need to preserve academic freedom and self-government. This time, the assumptions were different. In 1997, the Hashimoto Cabinet had added education to the list of items for administrative reform. Then the ruling Liberal Democratic Party’s Headquarters for Promoting Administrative Reform asked that consideration begin on converting the universities into private corporations or agencies. The question of whether to transform universities into an independent corporate format was positioned as part of administrative reforms aimed at reducing the size of government.

The following year, 1998, saw the establishment of the Basic Law on Administrative Reform of the Central Government and the decision to reduce the number of civil servants by 25%. When that law was passed, it seemed unrelated to the question of transforming the national universities into independent corporations. A Cabinet decision in 1999, however, called for a conclusion on turning universities into corporations by 2003. In 2001, the CEFPP began considering how to follow up that Cabinet decision and linked the transformation of the national universities to plans to reduce the number of civil servants by 25%. About 135,000 national university faculty members, then formally civil servants, were targeted as part of efforts to implement the 25% reduction in national civil servants. The question of achieving more efficient management by introducing techniques from private industry was little more than an afterthought.

Under the guise of an efficiency coefficient for the now-incorporated national universities, funding for each university’s basic budget was to be reduced by 1% per year and funding for faculty and other employee salaries was to be reduced by 5% over five years. Universities found themselves required to make up the difference from their own revenues. The national universities were simultaneously impoverished and made to work independently on reforms. The result was a widening gap between the fully-fledged national universities and the more limited regional national universities (Amano, 2008; Nakai, 2008).

Then, while this was going on, in 2007, four CEFPP members from the private sector released a report entitled “Concerning Reform of Universities and Graduate Schools to Reinforce Growth,” demanding even greater reforms in the universities. This report proposed that rules be changed so that government grants to support national university operations would be geared to the efforts

universities were making and their results. It also proposed that mid-term plans for the next period beginning in fiscal 2010 should reconsider allocation of faculty numbers.

According to the minutes, Yashiro Naohiro (of the International Christian University), one of the four members who issued the report, advocated a policy of rewards and punishment.

The private sector members' paper also emphasizes the point made by special Council member Ibuki [Bunmei] concerning the importance of improving the quality of universities. There has invariably been nothing specific said, however, about how that is to be achieved. *It will not be enough to wait for individual universities to act.* On that point, distribution rules are needed, are they not, as in the private sector members' proposal to gear the distribution of grants to universities' efforts and results, with rules prescribing more generous allocations to those that work hard and strict treatment of those that do not. (CEFP, 2007)

Council member Mitarai Fujio (president of Canon, Inc.) recommended a policy of selection and concentration:

*We hear talk about the excessive proliferation of universities; looking at our national universities as they are today, I think that is true. We must now be selective and focused; that includes restructuring the universities.* Japan's universities, and especially the regional universities, all aim at being similar comprehensive universities; they thus fail to take full advantage of the distinctive features of their regions. For universities to become centers of innovation in their regions, they must make more efficient use of staff and infrastructure and specialize in the areas in which they are strongest. (CEFP, 2007)

That is, in fact, one theory driving today's university reforms. University reforms now insist on the distribution of resources on the basis of competitive results.

The second education-related body organized by the Cabinet Office that must be mentioned here is the CRR (since 2007, the Council for the Promotion of Regulatory Reform). Founded in 2001, it was inspired by the perception that regulation was ossifying Japan's social system and was charged with "Easing or eliminating regulations and creating new rules in conjunction with the shift from a prior-approval format for administration to an *ex-post-facto* checking system, and actively developing policies for competition in conjunction with promoting deregulation." Its recommendation, with respect to higher education, was a proposal to change from prior regulation to *ex-post-facto* checking. As a result, since 2004 institutions of higher education have been required to undergo an external evaluation once every seven years.

This new evaluation system is modeled on the accreditation system used in the United States. Adoption of that type of system had been mentioned in the University Council's 1989 report, "On Improving University Education," and the 2004 requirement could be seen as that Council's idea

being implemented at last. It was, however, the CRR that made the adoption of the evaluation system happen; the rationale was to deregulate, eliminate regulations on entry (in this case, to the higher education market), and thereby promote free competition.

The same rationale was applied to authorizing “universities, inc.,” privately owned for-profit universities operated by corporations. Initially, the Ministry of Education was strongly opposed to the establishment of such institutions.

That a corporation or other company in business to make a profit should be the founder of a school is extremely inappropriate, in view of the nature of formal education, and would present many specific problems, including *the risk that the stability and continuity essential to formal education could not be assured*. In addition, a corporation can already, by establishing an incorporated educational institution, found a university or other educational institution and thus could apply private-sector management methods such as carrying out for-profit businesses and issuing bonds within the incorporated educational institution system. There seems, therefore, little need to establish universities or other educational institutions as for-profit corporations. Moreover, participation by for-profit corporations would fundamentally contradict the concept of what a school should be, as determined by the Basic Law on Education and other laws and regulations; even approval of such institutions on an exceptional basis only in designated zones would be inappropriate (MEXT, 2002a).

*Formal education is a public good. The state and society have responsibility for the founding and management of schools; those are tasks of extremely strongly public nature.* In view of that quality of formal education, it is our ministry’s argument that formal education is incompatible with the format of a for-profit corporation; we think that such an institution could not be planned even as an alternative (MEXT, 2002b).

The ministry’s strong opposition to the idea of for-profit universities was grounded in the public nature of education and the need for stability and continuity, which the existing system of incorporated educational institutions secures.

In the end, however, driven by the wave of deregulation, the ministry was forced to recognize the establishment of for-profit universities in special zones in 2003. The need to permit joint stock companies to found educational institutions was stated as being “necessary to promote diversification in educational entities, to build a system that can provide a wide variety of educational services in response to consumers diverse values and needs” (CRR, 2004). The establishment of conventional schools is restricted to national and local public bodies and incorporated educational institutions, but the aim is a richer range of services by diversifying the entities providing them. In addition, the Council noted, “Working towards the removal of the prohibition on the operation of schools by joint stock corporations and the like on a nationwide-scale is desirable, at least in areas outside compulsory

education.” It thus was proposing that for-profit educational institutions be established not as exceptions in special zones but nationwide.

Thus far, seven companies have used this system to establish for-profit universities or graduate schools. The Council for University Chartering and School Corporation has responded to many applications by indicating numerous areas of concern; several applications have been rejected. Of the seven institutions that have received approval, only two are attracting more applications than they have places to fill. Private companies have not rushed as a body to enter the field of higher education, and those that have done so are hardly achieving stable for-profit operations. Nor has the program been extended to all areas nationwide. The problem with such for-profit universities is that because the founders’ aim is to make a profit, their preparations are often insufficient in the soft aspects of curricula and faculty qualifications, rather than in such hard aspects as classroom buildings (Yoshida, 2007). It has become obvious that the requisite unwritten knowledge about how universities operate has not reached even the institutions that operate university prep schools or other education-related businesses. In addition, entry into this market, when the system of higher education itself is contracting, means that it is inevitably difficult to attract sufficient students; deregulation does not necessarily mean meeting diverse needs.

#### **4. Research as the target of economic revitalization policies: METI and the business world**

How to get the Japanese economy growing again has been the largest issue in economic policy during the long economic slump that began in the 1990s. One proposed answer is that Japan should become a creative scientific and technical leader. Enactment of the Science and Technology Basic Law of 1995 aimed at the creation of new industries underpinned by technological innovation. Next came the Science and Technology Basic Plan (1996), the aim of which was to energize the economy through investment in research and development. A second Basic Plan was drawn up in 2001 and a third in 2006. Since 2001, the Council for Science and Technology Policy, in the Cabinet Office, has been responsible for drawing up and implementing such plans.

These plans are to be executed through close cooperation between universities – as sites for research – and industry, the driver of economic growth – that is, through business-academe tie-ups. It was hoped that in addition to conventional research and teaching, universities could, through technology transfer and the training of personnel, contribute to industrial revitalization. That, at least, was the concept put forward by what was then the Ministry of International Trade and Industry (MITI; now the Ministry of Economy, Trade, and Industry, or METI), with the backing of the business world.

In the past, the universities were subject to control only by the Ministry of Education, but the redefinition of their research role opened the way for other ministries to become involved as well.

So in 1995, MITI set up its Promotion Office for Collaboration with Universities and Research Institutes and began to become seriously involved with universities as sites for research, an effort that led them to frequent butting of heads with the Ministry of Education. Why did MITI and other ministries begin to meddle in higher education? They aimed to use higher education to recover from the failures of the economic policies that were their basic responsibility (Ichikawa, 2003).

In 1998, MITI and the Ministry of Education jointly secured the passage of the Law for Promoting Technology Transfer from Universities (TLO Law). That law permitted the establishment of technology licensing organizations, or TLOs, organizations for patenting discoveries made at universities and turning them into intellectual assets. Until then, treating knowledge discovered or invented at universities as private property had been seen as contradicting the principle of the public character of the university; university faculty members were unable to patent their work and receive royalty income from it. The TLO system not only allowed them to do both of these but also was intended to serve a matching function, to develop a connection between university R&D and industry needs and turn technologies from the laboratories into industrial technologies and engines of growth.

To promote such industry-academe collaboration, MITI had laws enacted to permit university faculty members to serve concurrently as officers of TLOs and to permit multiple-year contracts for joint research (the 1999 Law on Special Measures for Industrial Revitalization and the 2000 Law to Strengthen Industrial Technology). In 2001, when the ministry was reorganized as the the Ministry of Economy, Trade, and Industry (METI), it presented what is known as the Hiranuma Plan (properly the Plan for the Creation of New Markets and New Jobs) to the Japanese Council on Economic and Fiscal Policy (CEFP). That plan envisioned the creation of 1,000 high-tech start-up companies originating from universities over the course of three years. A year later, in 2002, the Intellectual Property Basic Act was approved; it provided for intellectual property to belong to universities as well as individuals. The relationship between an individual researcher and a corporation was treated as the relationship between the university and the corporation, with the university managing the intellectual property, thus opening up a way to increase revenues.

The Ministry of Education was overwhelmed by this flurry of policy measures from METI. The arrangement until then, by which the Ministry of Education had monopoly control over universities, had decisively changed. By using industry-academe collaboration as the point of entry, METI was now also meddling even in the teaching side of universities. For example, in 2005, it drew up “Educational Guidelines for Efficient Development of Human Resources Capable of Management of Technology (MOT)” because “It is one of our important challenges to develop MOT personnel who are knowledgeable about both the nature of technology and business management, and capable of linking the results of investment in R&D, carried at the highest level in the world, to economic value.” As a result, management of technology was designated as a discipline in the professional graduate schools that were inaugurated in 2003. Similarly, in 2007, the Ministry of Education, the Keidanren (Japan Business Federation), and the academic societies launched industry-academe partnerships to

train personnel, because, “There is an urgent need to achieve dialogue and action between industry and academe in order to train personnel who can win in the increasingly fierce global competition, including competition over innovation.” In addition, METI is providing funds for collaborations between universities and industry through its Program to Train Manufacturing Personnel.

Another actor that, with METI, must not be overlooked is the business community. It is, of course, involved in industry-academe collaboration with universities. Also, starting in the latter half of the 1990s, the business community has made suggestions about how personnel should be trained at universities. The Keidanren and the Japan Association of Business Executives had offered suggestions about university education and training personnel on many occasions in the past, but what they were now emphasizing is the training of personnel who can keep up in the accelerating international competition that accompanies economic globalization; they have expectations concerning the role that universities should play in that training and are proposing university reforms to achieve those ends.

For example, the Keidanren came out with its “On Training Personnel for the Age of Globalization” (Nippon Keidanren, 2000), in which it asserted that “The end of a socioeconomic system in which Japan is always trying to catch up and surpass is nigh, and the building of a new socioeconomic system is urgently needed. We must significantly intensify our efforts to train the people that the twenty-first century requires.” It thus called for training “people with abilities that will have international currency, on a broad foundation of culture” and stated that the Keidanren itself would cooperate in that training, in the form of seconding instructors.

In 2007, the Japan Association of Business Executives spoke up on “Changing universities from the point of view of education” (2007), stating that in twenty-first century Japan, “It is critical to strike out in new directions, going beyond existing paradigms, to aim for new growth in which innovation to create new values and solutions provides the motive force.” It called for reform, saying much is expected of the universities, but “A comprehensive view of the situation suggests that university reforms are just beginning and that further, radical reforms are needed in faculty members’ attitudes, in how universities are organized, and in how universities are managed, whether national, public, or private.”

The notion that the universities provide a means of extracting Japan from economic recession and the pent-up frustration over the perception that they are not performing that task as well as they should pervades the business world. A classic example can be seen in the opinions of Onoda Takeru, an adviser to Mitsubishi Chemical Corporation and vice-chairman of the Japan Accreditation Board for Engineering Education.

Over the past 21 years, Japan’s response to globalization has been laggardly, and our international competitiveness has swiftly weakened. Creating new industries holds an important key to closing that gap. Creating new industries, however, requires bringing

together knowledge of all kinds. *Society's hopes for our universities, which are our largest repositories of knowledge, are naturally rising. But the Japanese university system is superannuated, and Japanese universities are far removed from society's demands.* According to a think tank overseas that has compared the competitiveness of the world's universities, Japan's universities are content to rank last in a list of 47 countries. Japan is, they say, a great industrial and technical power, but our universities are particularly poorly regarded. I want to call upon the people of Japan's universities, who are doing such a poor job of transmitting information, to rouse themselves. (Asahi Shimbun, 2001)

Needless to say, such arguments from the business world are grounded in neo-liberal ideas. Business activity assumes free-market competition. As one option for getting out of the recession that followed the collapse of Japan's economic bubble, the business world looked for reforms in the universities – reforms that would revamp them so as to be better adapted to the market and, on that basis, to foster deeper ties with the business world.

The universities have also shown, on their part, an active interest in acquiring outside funding to improve their research productivity, instead of shunning industry-academe tie-ups as they had in the past. As a result, by 2007 universities had established 44 technology licensing organizations, or TLOs. The number of patent applications submitted by those TLOs peaked in 2003 at 2,333 applications, then declined to 1,506 in 2006. Their royalty income peaked in 2004 at ¥2,904 million, declining to ¥837 million in 2005 and ¥691 million in 2006 (Japan Science and Technology Agency, 2007). The TLOs, set up with such ballyhoo, were not producing the expected dramatic effects. Industry-academe tie-ups were, however, having a definite effect on the universities, with the number of research contracts accepted by them rising from 13,786 in 2003 to 16,960 in 2005 and joint research carried out by universities and corporations also tending to increase, from 10,728 projects in 2004 to 13,020 in 2005 (Japan Science and Technology Agency, 2007).

We must not forget, however, the premise that the mission of the universities is publicly shared knowledge; carrying out that mission is in conflict with the newly emergent concept of intellectual property arising from collaboration with industry. Treating knowledge as private property also risks generating distortions in knowledge, including concealing research results or aiming towards results favorable to a particular corporation. The United States, which has pushed industry-academe tie-ups since the 1980s, provides many instructive examples of that problem (Miyata, 2002), and we can hardly say that Japan is free from a similar risk. A Ministry of Health, Labour and Welfare research team carried out a survey of professors in the medical colleges and colleges of pharmacy at universities throughout Japan in August and September 2008. To the question, "Does receiving a grant cause bias in your judgement?" 3.6% replied "Yes, it does" while 17% said "It may, somewhat."



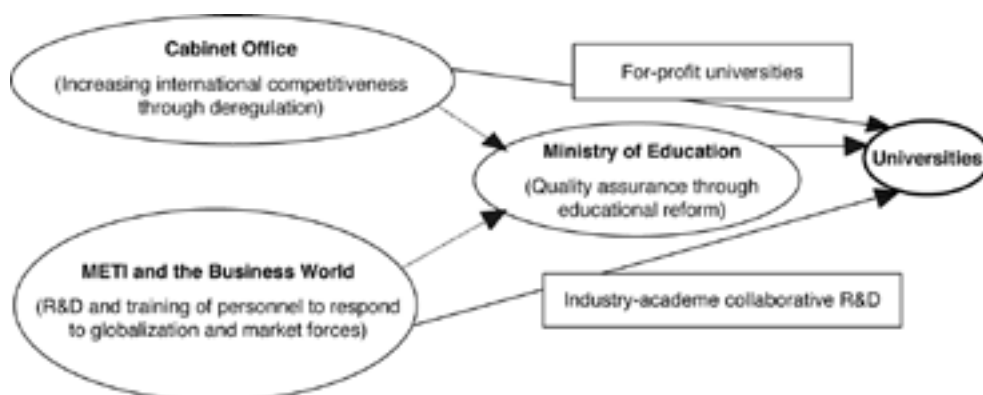
Thus, it is clear that about 20% of researchers are themselves aware of the occurrence of such bias (Asahi Shimbun, 2008).

Even if the incentive of accumulating private property through competition were deemed to be superior to the university's sharing knowledge and making it public, a freedom-of-information mechanism is needed to provide a check on its negative effects.

## 5. The transformation of policy measures concerning higher education and the transformation of the system of higher education

In the 1990s, the Ministry of Education, which had been the main actor in higher education policy in the past, was joined by two new categories of actors, the Councils established by the Cabinet Office, plus METI and the business world. This triumvirate has been engaged in a three-way struggle over the universities, with the two new actors both proposing neo-liberal policies and calling for the universities to effect reforms based on those policies. The relationships among these three sets of actors could be represented as shown in Figure 1.

Figure. 1 Relationships among the actors involved in policy on higher education



The actor that had historically been most involved, the Ministry of Education, is working to reform university teaching; it has added items related to teaching methods and content to the Standards for the Establishment of a University. The Councils established in the Cabinet Office, working to deregulate society as a whole, have constructed new systems. METI and the business world, wanting to energize the economy through research, have promoted industry-academe tie-ups. Each of the actors differs in their policy objectives and attitudes toward the universities.

The Cabinet Office Councils have had a strong neo-liberal orientation, close to that of METI and the business world. Together, this pair of new actors has proposed new principles and thrust their demands for reform directly at the universities, without going through the Ministry of Education.

The Cabinet Office Councils, pushing neo-liberalism with the aim of strengthening international competitiveness through deregulation, have positioned university reform as one aspect of social reform and have depicted the universities as overly conservative and hamstrung by regulation. They have pushed for liberalization on many fronts.

METI and the business world pursue the goal of economic recovery through industry-academe collaboration, hoping for R&D and training that more effectively respond to globalization and market forces. In this sense, they, too, were rather neo-liberal in their thinking.

In response to those new actors, the Ministry of Education's position has varied between nonresistance and occasional cooperation, to keep from losing the initiative. Not totally reactive, the Ministry places its emphasis on reforms in university teaching and promoting policy measures to improve its quality.

Why was it that the new actors could so strongly influence the universities? To answer that question, we must consider three points: that the Ministry of Education was unable to serve as a buffer; that the universities as a body were weak; and that Japan's system of higher education itself was at a major turning point in the 1990s.

On the first of those points, the relationship between the Ministry of Education and the Cabinet Office, we should note that there was a limit to how much the Ministry could resist, given top-down policy making by Cabinet decisions spearheaded by the office of the Prime Minister. It also went along with the industry-academe collaboration policies of METI. Given the relative power of the ministries and the dominance of neo-liberal policies, the Ministry of Education's position was doubly weakened.

Why, however, was the collective influence of the universities themselves so weak? One answer may lie in the number of university associations. The national universities belong to the Association of National Universities, the public universities to the Japan Association of Public Universities, the private universities to the Japan Association of Private Universities and Colleges or the Association of Private Universities of Japan. To what extent did those groups, severally or collectively, formally express their objections to the various policies being proposed? With respect to the transformation of the national universities into national university corporations, in particular, they seem to have been unable to form a common front and were steamrolled into accepting the change in the national universities' status.

The transition that the higher education system was undergoing, was, to put it simply, the change from a system that was growing to one that was shrinking. For about half a century after the war, the demand for higher education exceeded the supply, and the labor demand outstripped the number of university graduates. In the mid 1990s, however, the percentage of high school graduates going to university rose. By 1996, the number of admissions began to decline and, in 1998, the total number of university students began to decline as well. The higher education system was clearly shrinking.

At present, with 40% of colleges and universities not achieving their admissions quotas, change is inevitable.

Given these factors, the pressure for university reform could not be resisted. However, while the actors' policies may have been neo-liberal in inspiration, when applied to the universities, their policies were seen less as expressions of neo-liberalism than as ways to overcome the crisis the universities were facing. Change was inevitable. More time is needed, however, before we can say whether those reforms have improved the universities.

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