

mailed to rectors but was often responded to by heads of the international offices.

In most of the countries, the international officers alone or together with academics or other administrators were viewed as the key forces. However, in Belgium, Germany, and the United Kingdom, academics were viewed as central. These findings suggest that the active participation of rectors in developing European mobility and cooperation was not an expression of managerial and strategic strength. On the contrary, the rectors seemed to have played a strong role in this area, even in countries where they had limited managerial and strategic functions.

The final example in this overview is the 1993 pilot study on the strategies and self-perception of university presidents undertaken by the Center in Kassel showing that university presidents consider having to balance their various roles the most challenging and difficult task. Presidents have to manage the formal apparatus of administration, represent divergent interest groups, be aware of major developments in teaching and research, and serve as spokespersons for the mission and dignity of the institutions. The interviewed presidents underscored that they constantly felt the need to transform formal mechanisms and procedures into informal processes of communication and negotiation.

#### *Ideas for Future Research*

A comparative survey of how university presidents perceive themselves would be a most fascinating higher education research project. Major changes in higher education have called for changes in the role of the key players in higher education institutions, but it is not known how these individuals perceive and cope with such changes. Such a study would need to explore how presidents perceive the current conditions in higher education; how they react to the new expectations; what actions they have taken; and finally, how they judge the impact of their actions.

A broad range of issues that influence patterns of decision making and administration should be explored (e.g., national cultures, the organizational character of higher education institutions, and national regulatory systems). Attention should be paid to the composition and authority of the major actors involved in higher education. The role of the president also needs to be examined.

Research on the university president ought to address personal biography and include prior professional experience, academic expertise, age and gender, political views, and other factors. These issues and factors may influence the way university presidents respond to the challenges they face and the way they decide to act.

#### *Conclusion*

Reforms of the structure and organization of higher education tend to be pursued episodically. Typically, problems are identified, measures are taken, and hopes for success run high. After a period of time, attention to the issues levels off, partly because of certain successfully implemented changes, partly because the anticipated miraculous impacts did not materialize, and partly because other issues became more relevant.

If it is true that a spirit of managerialism was a fad bound to lose momentum without a return to the status quo ante, then a study on the university president might be forward-looking by already focusing on the character of the "postmanagerial" interpretation of the president's role. One might try to establish how the views of the president differ depending on the stage of managerial debates within a given country, the period of time the individual had already been in office, and the person's ability to understand and fulfill complex roles. With this more comprehensive approach, a study on the university president might be more than just a snapshot. ■

Author's Note: This text was presented at the 12th triennial conference of the International Association of University Presidents (IAUP), 11–14 July 1999, in Brussels.

## The Crisis in Multinational Higher Education

### **Philip G. Altbach**

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**M**ultinational higher education is big business, and it is about to get much bigger. Glenn R. Jones recently became the chairman and CEO of GATE, the Global Alliance for Transnational Education, an organization that has the aim of fostering and maintaining quality in cross-border higher education enterprises. This is notable because Jones is also responsible for Jones International University, a for-profit provider of on-line educational programs. GATE moved from its location at the Dupont Circle complex of higher education associations in Washington, D.C., to Englewood, Colorado, the headquarters of the Jones educational enterprises. GATE, which was largely funded by Jones, is now directly linked with a profit-making corporation in the international education business, and is unlikely to be considered

an objective arbiter of quality programs. At the same time, the British minister for higher education, Baroness Blackstone, was rapping the University of Derby for poor performance in a joint-degree program it has with an Israeli institution. A report from the Quality Assurance Agency noted that the Derby-Israel collaboration “did not secure the quality and standards of programs offered.” There have been repeated criticisms in the press of British multinational higher education initiatives in Malaysia and elsewhere. All is not well in the world of multinational higher education, and it is time for a careful look at the issues involved.

The University of Phoenix, now America’s largest private postsecondary institution, and a for-profit corporation listed on the New York Stock Exchange, has announced plans for a string of campuses around the world. Major investment capital is behind this initiative, which will have a large impact on offshore postsecondary education. The United States has so far been slow to expand overseas, and the Phoenix initiative is a sign that the Americans are moving aggressively into the international education business. Sylvan Learning and Kaplan, the test preparation company, have also begun foreign initiatives.

#### *New Trends*

Academic institutions, and increasingly business enterprises, are actively engaged in providing educational programs in other countries. The initiative is largely from the industrialized North to the middle-income or developing countries of the South. While higher education has always had an international dimension, with more than a million students studying overseas and with many collaborative arrangements among universities, this multinational thrust is a new development. There is a huge market for “offshore” academic programs since in many countries the demand for postsecondary education is much larger than the supply. This is combined with the ability to deliver programs worldwide through offshore campuses, collaboration with overseas institutions, or via distance education. There is no question but that these initiatives are needed in the context of expansion. And there is universal agreement that it is possible to effectively deliver useful and effective educational programs through new technologies and international collaboration. We need to understand all of the implications of these innovations if they are to serve the interests of students and teachers—and not simply become a vehicle for profit-making corporations.

We are in the midst of a revolution in the delivery of academic programs of all kinds, internationally. So far, commentators have focused largely on the positive aspects of the revolution. Increased access, lower costs, and the advent of a truly global market for higher education are all cited as favorable trends, especially when governments are cutting back on higher education spending at the same time that demands for access are increasing worldwide. Enroll-

ments have expanded dramatically—from 40 to 80 million worldwide in the past two decades, and with likely increases of another 20 million in the coming decade, most of it in developing countries. The means to serve these additional students must be found.

The focus here is on the problems and challenges. Our intention is to provide a needed balance to the overblown rhetoric of promise. We are not arguing that multinational and distance education are necessarily bad or that the problems outweigh the promise. Yet, it is necessary to stand back and carefully analyze the new realities.

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First, a few definitions are useful. By multinational higher education, we mean academic programs or institutions that are offered by institutions of one country in another. These may be “stand alone” branches, or collaborative arrangements with local academic institutions or business enterprises. They range from such high-end institutions as the University of Chicago Business School or France’s INSEAD—each of which have established overseas branches—to tiny schools wanting to ensure their survival through overseas initiatives. There are also examples of free-standing institutions, such as the American University of Bulgaria, which exist in one country but follow the curriculum of another country and are accredited abroad. Distance higher education includes educational programs offered entirely through the Internet and other means that do not involve the student in face-to-face classroom or laboratory experience. Again, the range of programs is immense—and so far largely unevaluated with regard to quality—from the British Open University, generally seen as the Cadillac of distance programs (OU programs include some traditional classroom elements as well as distance aspects) to Turkey’s Anadolu University, with 578,000 students. Growing numbers of students are utilizing the Internet to enroll in distance programs offered by institutions outside of their countries, often with little knowledge of the nature of the program or of the reputation of the school offering the program.

#### *The Critique*

In order to understand the new multinational and distance phenomena, a few central facts must be kept in mind.

- Multinational higher education always has elements of inequality. Institutions from the developed world are selling their products abroad, usually in developing countries. They are in general providing “off the shelf” programs that are simply used overseas. The decisions about the curriculum, standards, faculty, and requirements are all made by the sponsoring institution.
- The motive for establishing multinational higher education enterprises is almost always to make money. This is of course the aim of the growing number of for profit institutions, but it is also the case for most traditional nonprofit universities. Many, such as Australia’s internationally aggressive Monash University, are quite open about it. British and Australian institutions have been especially active internationally as a way of making up for budget cuts at home.
- Institutions like Phoenix and Jones International are not really universities, although they have the term in their titles. Rather, they are degree delivery machines, providing tailored programs that appeal to specific markets. They do not have regular faculty, nor is there the kind of participatory governance system typical of universities. They do no research, and there is no free inquiry. They are devoted to delivering a clearly defined product, and they hire employees or contractors to produce and deliver it. They should not be called universities. Perhaps a better name would be the “Phoenix Training and Credentialing Service, a division of the Apollo Corporation.”
- The multinational and distance movement does not really contribute to the internationalization of higher education worldwide. Knowledge products are being sold across borders, but there is little mutual exchange of ideas, long-term scientific collaboration, exchange of students or faculty, and the like.
- Multinational and distance institutions operate in a largely unregulated environment. Accrediting systems are trying to catch up with new developments, and government agencies, both in the sponsoring and in the receiving countries, are concerned and sometimes critical. GATE shows leaving regulation in the hands of those who own and control the new multinational and distance institutions and profit from them may not be the most effective way of ensuring quality. Higher education is, in general, notoriously difficult to evaluate. The new phenomena, using new and untried methods and extending across international boundaries, are even more unclear.
- Multinational and distance higher education are seen as “demand absorbing,” as the economists put it. They provide access at a very low price to those who seek it. It is easy for governments to permit these new institutions to enroll students—every person in a multinational or distance institution will not be attending a traditional university, where the costs are higher and government often foot, much more of the bill.
- While the trends discussed here constitute some of the major trends, there are many truly collaborative academic arrangements aimed at fostering international research, teaching, and

enhancing academic programs. For example, the collaborative degree program in management between the 28 American Jesuit universities and Peking University or the longstanding collaboration between the Johns Hopkins University and Nanjing University, both in China, are such cases.

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***Multinational higher education always has elements of inequality.***

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### *Conclusion*

All of this does not mean that these new trends are evil. No doubt, they have a role in contemporary higher education. They will not take the place of traditional universities, but there are things that the new technologies and cross-border initiatives can do well. We must understand, however, the problems as well as the promise. So far, everyone wishes to think the best of multinational and distance higher education—a lot of money is being invested, and many see the potential of large profits. Others are happy to see students who demand access being served almost regardless of the quality of the educational experience. Still others are happy to be able to obtain a degree conveniently. Those concerned with the future of higher education and with the broader public interest need to step back and take a careful look at what is actually happening. ■

### ***Position Announcement—SUNY at Albany***

As part of a comparative higher education project (see *IHE* summer 2000 issue), the Department of Educational Administration and Policy Studies, University at Albany, SUNY, announces two Ford Foundation–sponsored assistantships of up to two years.

Candidates must gain acceptance into department’s doctoral program (with GREs). Applications are welcome from disciplines outside education.

Request application materials from Carm Colfer, ED 316, University at Albany, Albany NY 12222, USA. E-mail: <Ccolfer@csc.albany.edu>. Fax: 518 442-5084. Send a separate letter explaining interest in the competitive assistantships to Daniel Levy, Distinguished Professor (address: see Colfer; e-mail: <dlevy@wizvax.net>). Selection may start November 15, 2000; subsequent applications will be considered if possible and inquiries are welcome.