

institutions. For example, Westminster University's website refers to Westminster International University in Tashkent as a partner institution, not a branch campus. Similarly, Xi'an Jiaotong–Liverpool University in China and Yale–NUS College in Singapore, which both resulted from partnerships, are not described by any of the founding institutions as a branch campus. However, some branch campuses do have a partnership ownership structure. Partners may be private entrepreneurs, for-profit companies, or not-for-profit organizations. For example, Heriot-Watt's campus in Dubai is jointly owned with a company called Study World. Profits resulting from the campus's operations are shared between the two organizations.

- **The need for a campus:** Finally, to be recognized as a branch campus, the institution's infrastructure should fit with the definition of a campus. The word "campus" refers to the grounds and buildings of an educational institution and suggests that students receive a certain study experience. However, many universities run foreign outposts that offer only a single qualification, or a very small number of qualifications, operating from a handful of rooms in an office block, while others employ no full-time faculty in the host country. At a minimum, students at a branch campus should have access to a library, an open access computer lab, and dining facilities.

REVISED DEFINITION, AND MOVING FORWARD

This refined understanding of international branch campuses suggests a new working definition for the field, which speaks to the key elements that should ideally frame the phenomenon:

"An international branch campus is an entity that is owned, at least in part, by a specific foreign higher education institution, which has some degree of responsibility for the overall strategy and quality assurance of the branch campus. The branch campus operates under the name of the foreign institution and offers programming and/or credentials that bear the name of the foreign institution. The branch has basic infrastructure, such as a library, an open access computer lab, and dining facilities, and, overall, students at the branch have a similar student experience to students at the home campus."

Transnational higher education operates in a myriad of forms and modes. Although this article has identified some of the core features of an international branch campus, these campuses are far from homogenous. For example, shared campuses exist in countries such as Malaysia and the United Arab Emirates, where multiple institutions share infrastructure such as catering and sports facilities.

Thus, while our proposed definition may be an improvement over existing definitions, a degree of personal judgment will still always be needed to classify certain campuses. ■

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International Branch Campuses: Success Factors

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In November 2017, the Observatory on Borderless Higher Education (OBHE), a think tank concerned with transnational education, online learning, and other innovations, published the second part of its latest report on international branch campuses (IBCs). The first part, focused on IBC numbers, was published in November 2016 and covered in *International Higher Education*, Spring 2017. Both parts of the report were produced in conjunction with the Cross-Border Education Research Team (C-BERT) at the State University of New York at Albany and Pennsylvania State University. The Observatory and C-BERT are the world's two leading authorities on international branch campuses. Our definition of an international branch campus is "an entity that is owned, at least in part, by a foreign education provider; operated in the name of the foreign education provider; and provides an entire academic program, substantially on site, leading to a degree awarded by the foreign education provider."

The second part of the report considers the success factors of mature international branch campuses. Based on in-depth interviews with leaders at selected IBCs, it examines their organizational evolution, relationship to the home institution, and their expectations and outcomes, ultimately identifying and discussing the models and practices that have been critical to their operation long-term. The report also includes a full and updated list of known IBCs in operation, along with data on year established, number of programs offered, student numbers (where available), and IBCs currently in development.

IBC growth continues, with the number of international branch campuses worldwide reaching 263 in late 2017. Around half (130) of these institutions are at least ten years old. The fact that 133 IBCs were founded more recently indicates that IBCs continue to be a relevant and enticing form of transnational education, despite the invest-

ment and risks involved. The ambition behind many IBCs make them particularly fascinating. Little research has been done, up to this point, on the factors that have contributed to the long-term success and sustainability of international branch campuses.

The new report considers eight mature IBCs founded by institutions based in Australia, France, the United Kingdom, and the United States, with IBCs in Austria, Belgium, China, France, Malaysia, Singapore, Switzerland, the United Arab Emirates, and Vietnam: Curtin University (Curtin University, Malaysia); ESSEC Business School (ESSEC Asia-Pacific); Georgia Institute of Technology (Georgia Tech-Lorraine); Heriot-Watt University (Heriot-Watt University Dubai); Royal Melbourne Institute of Technology (RMIT Vietnam); University of Kent (Brussels School of International Studies, University of Kent); University of Nottingham (University of Nottingham Ningbo China; University of Nottingham, Malaysia Campus); Webster University (Webster University, Geneva Campus; Webster University, Vienna Campus).

Leaders of mature campuses emphasize the importance of having positive working relationships with local regulators and complying with local regulations.

In depth interviews with leaders from the institutions and branch campuses, combined with information supplied by the institutions and publicly available, allowed a multifaceted understanding of the elements that have contributed to the successful and sustainable operation of these IBCs. Key success factors and points of evolution, include:

INSTITUTIONAL INTEGRATION

- **Origins:** IBCs often originate from a desire to enhance global reputation, though personal connections and timing frequently play a strong role. Most home institutions already have experience in international partnerships and operating across borders.
- **Institutional integration:** In all cases, the IBC has strong support from the highest levels of the university and is integrated into the academic and administrative functions of the institution, as opposed to being siloed and wholly separate.
- **Self-definition:** None of the IBC leaders interviewed use the term “branch campus” in their self-definition; most prefer terminology that emphasizes a single institution with an international

presence.

- **Collaborative leadership:** There is a close relationship between home and branch campus leaders, with constant contact between the two. Decision-making is often a collaborative process, with some IBC autonomy.
- **Measuring success:** Progress is tracked, monitored, and supported by the home campus, though the IBC operates with a certain degree of autonomy in order to achieve its particular goals.

HOST COUNTRY SUPPORT AND RESOURCES

- **Evolving relationship:** The relationship with the local partner and/or government of the host country evolves over time. For example, the Knowledge and Human Development Authority (KHDA), the educational quality assurance and regulatory authority of the government of the United Arab Emirates, was not in existence when Heriot-Watt Dubai was founded in 2005, though the two entities now work together closely. Relations with local operational partners adapt to changing needs and capabilities.
- **Finances and resources:** The focus of the home and branch is on quality over profit, but financial sustainability is obviously the goal. Some campuses were operated at a loss or subsidized by the home institution during certain periods. It is the norm that some or all net revenue is reinvested in the campus. In some cases, host government restrictions are also a factor.
- **Location:** IBCs tend to be located near other IBCs or other centers of transnational education, or have specific justifications for locating elsewhere, such as local connections or mission-focused rationales.

REGULATORY ENVIRONMENT AND ACADEMICS

- **Cooperation:** Leaders of mature campuses emphasize the importance of having positive working relationships with local regulators and complying with local regulations.
- **Research:** Research, if conducted, is a function of the needs and capabilities of local, regional, and national contexts. There is active collaboration between the parent and branch campuses that do research.
- **Faculty and staff:** Over time, there is a clear preference to use faculty based in the country, and an avoidance of the “flying faculty” model. Mature IBCs have introduced academic staff development and elements of home country academic practices, especially around pedagogy and assessment of student learning.

- **Alumni relations.** Tracking and engaging IBC alumni is acknowledged as a key dimension of long-term success, but is typically at a nascent stage.

STUDENT EXPERIENCE

- **Student body:** IBC leaders perceive their students to be international or internationally minded, with an openness to new models of education. IBCs tend to enroll large numbers of international as well as domestic students, depending on the host country.
- **Relative replication:** Institutions insist on consistent academic standards and practices between the home campus and all IBCs. Other areas (student experience, program offerings, fee structures, staffing models, etc.) may be more diverse, in line with local needs and norms.
- **Student mobility:** While student mobility between institutional sites is usually a pillar of IBC strategy, it is not always as active as desired and is often skewed in one direction.
- **Online delivery:** There is potential to use online technologies to link students and academic programs between locations, but this is a minor component of current delivery models.

The full report—90 pages in length—offers considerably more detail about the eight mature IBCs studied, including quotes from the interviews with institutional and campus leaders. Both parts of the IBC report are free to Observatory members and available for purchase to nonmembers. Please contact info@obhe.org for login details or to purchase the report. ■

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Student Debt in the United States: Rhetoric vs Reality

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The idea of student debt “crushing a generation” pervades discussions of higher education in the United States. Anecdotes about former students struggling with large amounts of debt and low earnings get a lot of press

coverage, and political candidates vow to make college “debt free.” There are, in fact, significant systemic problems in the higher education system, but most of the stories garnering attention are atypical. The real crisis is obscured by calls for easing the burdens on young college graduates, who are, in fact, among the groups with the most promising life prospects.

Because of the association between higher levels of education and higher incomes, education debt holders tend to be relatively well off. In 2013, the 25 percent of households with the highest incomes held almost half of all outstanding student debt. The 25 percent of households with the lowest incomes held 11 percent of the debt. The people who are having the most trouble making ends meet are those who have not gone to college and may not even have graduated from high school. Some student loan borrowers face very real problems that public policy should address. But some proposals for general student debt relief would provide the largest benefits to individuals with relatively high earnings.

The idea of student debt “crushing a generation” pervades discussions of higher education in the United States.

BASIC FACTS ABOUT STUDENT DEBT

The press finds individual students with staggering amounts of debt and few job prospects, but two-thirds of borrowers with outstanding student loan debt owe less than \$25,000. Only 5 percent owe as much as \$100,000. Two-thirds of the students graduating with \$50,000 or more in debt, and 94 percent of those with \$100,000 or more in debt, have graduate degrees. The average debt of 2015–2016 bachelor’s degree recipients at public and private nonprofit colleges and universities who took student loans was \$28,400; about 40 percent did not borrow at all. In light of the fact that median earnings for 25-to-34-year olds with bachelor’s degrees were \$18,900 higher than the median for those with only a high school diploma in 2015, this is not a daunting amount.

Debt levels have, however, grown rapidly. Between 2003–2004 and 2011–2012, the share of bachelor’s degree recipients in the United States who had borrowed \$40,000 (in 2012 dollars) or more rose from 2 percent to 18 percent, rising from 1 percent to 12 percent at public colleges and universities (which award almost two-thirds of all bachelor’s degrees) and from 4 percent to 48 percent in the for-profit sector (which awarded 8 percent of bachelor’s degrees in 2011–2012).