

quality, deceivers sidestep transparency. Some use Facebook as their main communications instrument, foregoing websites altogether. Curious researchers are often rebuffed, too.

The rise of disingenuous for-profit institutions exploiting the “American” brand and weak quality assurance regimes has posed a challenge for the field’s legitimate actors, especially those comprising the 28-institution consortium, the Association of American International Colleges and Universities (AAICU). In 2008, AAICU member presidents attempted to codify standards for their rapidly expanding global field by cosigning the Cairo Declaration, a statement of principles affirming the centrality of institutional autonomy guaranteed by independent boards of trustees and quality assurance certified by US regional accreditation. It also asserted the importance of the liberal arts curriculum and nonprofit financial model to contrast the business and technical programs that dominated the offerings of proprietary impostors.

ADDITIONAL CHALLENGES

Maintaining a united front against charlatans has been complicated by institutional diversity among the genuine. The field includes large research universities like the American University in Cairo and small liberal arts colleges like the American College of Thessaloniki. The median institution enrolls between 1,000 and 2,000 students on a \$20 million operating budget. But the ranges are vast. The Arab American University in Palestine has over 10,000 students while the Irish American University enrolls fewer than 200 at any given time. The annual operating expenses of the American University of Sharjah and Lebanese American University exceed \$170 million. The American University of Armenia and the American University of Central Asia each spend less than \$10 million per year. Increasing heterogeneity makes it more and more difficult to find common cause.

Another key challenge for the field is clarification of institutions’ eligibility for US government funding. Several American universities abroad, incorporated and accredited in the United States, are seeking access to Title IV funds and the ability to compete for National Science Foundation grants. An earlier version of the Higher Education Act (HEA) included a favorable amendment, but legislation has stalled. Some American universities abroad already receive federal funding, principally through US Agency for International Development (USAID) and its American Schools and Hospitals Abroad unit. In aggregate, though, only four percent of AAICU member institutions’ operating budgets come from US government sources.

The worldwide rise of authoritarianism provides yet another challenge to American universities abroad. The Hun-

garian government’s recent crackdown on AAICU member Central European University (CEU) offers the highest profile example. While CEU seems poised to endure, others have not been able to survive such politically motivated attacks. The American University of Azerbaijan closed in 2000 and the American University of Myanmar was shut down earlier this year. Political pressure in Kiev stopped the American University of Ukraine from ever getting off the ground. Repeated assaults on the American University of Afghanistan demonstrate that even institutions with the support of local government are not immune to the damages of political extremism.

LOOKING FORWARD

Issues of funding and reputation are likely to dominate the field in coming years. While aid levels have remained basically the same thus far, the Trump administration’s isolationist “America First” foreign policy may eventually translate into even further funding reductions for American universities abroad, thereby raising the stakes for HEA eligibility. Meanwhile, the establishment of knock-off American universities abroad will surely continue apace, especially in low-income countries with permissive authorities. AAICU has had some success during the past decade in fending off brand dilution, but leaders of its member institutions continue to discuss strategies that would preserve the integrity of the “American” name. Options considered by AAICU in recent years include the development of an accreditation and/or rankings function. It may also pursue recognition by the US Treasury as a standards development organization. If AAICU can marshal the collective will, observers should expect one or more of these changes to take effect soon. ■

DOI: <http://dx.doi.org/10.6017/ihe.2018.95.10680>

Definitions of Transnational Higher Education

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Transnational higher education involves providers and programs crossing national borders. Providers take a variety of forms, with different ownership structures, objectives, strategies, disciplines, and types of students. The

purpose of this article is to identify the different types of transnational education providers, so that these institutions can be categorized and defined. The focus is only on institution mobility, and therefore program mobility—such as distance education, franchised programs, and joint or dual degrees—are outside the scope of the article.

In a previous issue of *International Higher Education* (No. 93, Spring 2018), Wilkins and Rumbley proposed a revised definition of international branch campus, as follows: “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.”

The vast majority of transnational higher education institutions have fewer than 1,000 registered students.

To date, the term “international branch campus” has been applied to most transnational education operations that involve teaching at premises owned by a foreign institution, where the premises and awards gained by students bear the name of the foreign institution. However, the definition provided above does not actually apply or fit with the majority of transnational providers.

THE PREMISES

The vast majority of transnational higher education institutions have fewer than 1,000 registered students. As such, these institutions do not have the scale that is required to possess a campus that consists of land and premises providing teaching rooms, computer labs, a library, catering facilities, sports and leisure facilities, as well as offices for teaching and administrative staff. Rather, the majority of transnational institutions operate from a handful of rooms in an office block, and many of these institutions offer only a single qualification, or a very small number of qualifications, while others employ few or no full-time faculty in the host country.

A transnational institution that does not possess the scale to be classified as an international branch campus

may be referred to as an *international study center*, defined as follows:

“An international study center 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 center. The center operates under the name of the foreign institution and offers programming and/or credentials that bear the name of the foreign institution. It is a relatively small-scale operation with fewer than 1,000 students. The center may offer only a single discipline or program, and may employ few or no full-time faculty.”

THE STUDENTS

International branch campuses and international study centers typically recruit the vast majority of their students in the host countries in which they are located. These students may be nationals of the host countries or expatriates. Some institutions are also successful at recruiting students from other countries in the region. However, some transnational institutions do not exist to provide education to students in the host or neighbouring countries, but rather to provide a study abroad experience to students based at the home country campus.

In the 1950s and 1960s, several American universities established overseas study centers and since then universities from other countries have opened similar centers. Common objectives of these centers are to improve the foreign language skills of students; to facilitate “in-the-field” study of specific disciplines; and to give students exposure to and experience of different cultures, which may promote a global mindset and ultimately world peace.

A transnational institution that exists primarily to provide a study abroad experience to students based at the home country campus may be referred to as an *international study abroad center*, defined as follows:

“An international study abroad center is an entity that is owned by a specific foreign higher education institution, usually for the purpose of providing students from the home campus with a study abroad experience. The center operates under the name of the foreign institution and offers programming and/or credentials that bear the name of the foreign institution. Often, students spend relatively short periods of time at the center (e.g. one semester) and most students gain academic credit.”

THE OWNERS

In recent years, universities based in different countries have formed various types of partnerships to establish new institutions that have their own legal status and, typically, names that either include both parent institutions (e.g., Yale–NUS College or Xi’an Jiatong Liverpool University) or neither institution (e.g., United International College, a partnership between Beijing Normal University and Hong

Kong Baptist University). These types of partnership have been particularly popular with leading, high-ranked institutions.

A transnational institution that is owned by two institutions that each have substantial responsibilities for strategic decision-making and that share profits or losses may be referred to as an *international joint venture institution*, defined as follows:

“An international joint venture institution is a higher education institution that is jointly owned by two or more institutions based in different countries. Each partner institution has some degree of responsibility for the overall strategy and quality assurance of the jointly owned entity, and the two parent institutions share profits and losses resulting from the joint venture.”

International collaboration and cooperation have always existed in higher education. Nowadays, there are many examples of independent universities that are associated with a foreign country’s higher education system and that rely on foreign institutions for advice, curriculum, resources, and quality assurance. Examples of such institutions include the American University in the Emirates, the Vietnamese-German University, and the British University in Dubai. The British University in Dubai has a partnership alliance with four leading British universities (Cardiff, Edinburgh, Glasgow, and Manchester), which each advise or collaborate on matters related to program design, program delivery, research activities, and quality assurance.

An independent institution that follows a foreign higher education system and that is affiliated to at least one foreign institution may be referred to as a *foreign-backed institution*, defined as follows:

“A foreign-backed institution is an independent higher education institution that follows a foreign higher education system and that is affiliated to at least one foreign institution with which it collaborates or cooperates, and from which it receives advice, services, and/or resources.”

Independent institutions that follow a foreign higher education system but are not affiliated to a foreign institution (e.g. the American University of Beirut and the American University in Cairo) are *not* foreign-backed institutions since there is no transfer of curricula, staff, or resources across national borders.

CONCLUSION

Transnational higher education operates in a myriad of forms and modes. This article identifies the most common types of transnational providers and offers a possible definition for each type. The classification of transnational institutions provided will be useful for researchers and those publishing data on transnational education, but it is acknowledged that in practice, the institutions involved with transnational education are themselves using a variety of

terms to refer to their operations. For example, it is currently fashionable for institutions to refer to their international branch campuses simply as global campuses, while also emphasizing that the foreign outpost is *not* a branch. Such actions may be responses to previous accusations of academic colonialism, but they are often done with the approval and encouragement of host country governments and regulators. ■

DOI: <http://dx.doi.org/10.6017/ihe.2018.95.10681>

Importing Branch Campuses to Advance Egypt’s Development

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As Egypt builds a “new Cairo”—a government and business hub in the desert on Cairo’s outskirts—the government wants international branch campuses (IBCs) to be a part. Governments increasingly view internationalization as a means for advancing national policy priorities, driven by a combination of enhancing economic competitiveness and global reputation. Such government attention toward internationalization can be a welcome advance, as well as fraught with potentially troubling policy and practical implications.

Egypt is not the first country to declare IBC recruitment a component of a national strategy. Examples stretch from China to Qatar. Approaches vary. Some nations provide significant subsidies; others take a more free-market approach. A unifying aspect is leveraging “internationalization” to import foreign academic investment to build out local educational capacity. While yielding some benefits, the efforts also raise questions about sustainability and potential tradeoffs for IBCs.

Internationalization of Egyptian higher education, mainly through student mobility, has ballooned. In 2017, approximately 47,000 foreign college students enrolled in Egypt, a significant increase from fewer than 2,000 in 2010. The country emerged as a leading hub of student mobility in the Middle East due to public institutions being open to noncitizens, which is not the case in most Arab Gulf states; and affordable tuition rates relative to many