

dent debt mean that institutions are experiencing severe financial pressures at the same time as they are being required to restructure and transform. Already, retrenchments of academic and administrative staff have occurred at a number of institutions, and the exclusion of students on financial grounds is becoming an area of perennial conflict. This, together with the intensification of academic workload has had an adverse effect on staff morale.

- The overall shape and size of the higher education system remains a thorny problem, along with the question of whether South Africa can afford 36 institutions. An important issue is how to balance the differing needs of the drive toward global competitiveness and the goal of redistributive reconstruction and development. Another challenge is to work out what this all means for individual institutions or for groupings of institutions—the HWIs and HBIs—and for universities and technikons. Should all higher education institutions be oriented toward both needs or should there be a functional differentiation. Is this likely to result in one set of institutions, the HWIs, becoming oriented toward the global pole and another set, the HBIs, becoming reconfigured to serve the redistributive reconstruction and development pole? Will these choices be left to the institutions themselves or will the state play an active role?

- Instead of increased participation in higher education, some institutions are experiencing declining student applications and enrollments, especially in the social sciences and humanities. Related to this, public institutions are having to cope with increasing and strong competition from private international and local providers of higher education.

- There is little unanimity as to what constitutes “programs” and whether programs need to be interdisciplinary or can also be discipline based. In this regard, there is, of

course, the fear that a purely interdisciplinary concept of programs could have adverse consequences for the disciplines.

- Higher education institutions are concerned about registering qualifications based on “unit standards” (modules), under the National Qualifications Framework, as opposed to whole qualifications. The fear is that a unit standards system “atomizes” learning into the smallest units, but does not lend itself to assessment of the overall outcome. By contrast, a system based on whole qualifications evaluates coherent and integrated qualifications through assessable outcomes.

- The new system of cooperative governance entails a re-definition of the relationship between and responsibilities of key governmental and nongovernmental higher education bodies. This is yet to be accomplished in practice. Moreover, higher education policy and planning expertise is in short supply, with the result that all these bodies experience capacity problems in the face of further policy development and implementation.

Many of the challenges noted are, of course, not unique to South African higher education. This period of political and social transition places special pressures on higher education—and provides special opportunities as well. ■

Notes

1. Martin Carnoy, “Higher Education in a Global Innovation Economy” (paper presented at a Joint Centre for Higher Education Transformation and Human Sciences Research Council Seminar on Globalisation, Higher Education, High-Level Training, and National Development, 31 July 1998, Pretoria).

2. Manuel Castells, “The University System: Engine of Development in the New World Economy,” in *Improving Higher Education in Developing Countries*, ed. A. Ransom, S-M. Khoo, and V. Selveratnam (Washington, D.C.: World Bank, 1993).

Vietnamese Higher Education: In Search of an Identity

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Since the adoption of *Doi moi* (renovation) in 1986, Vietnamese higher education has moved away from its former Soviet model. Characterizing the country’s system of higher education today, however, is not as straightforward a task as one might assume. Some changes suggest that Vietnam is taking on certain aspects of university patterns in the United States, the United Kingdom, Australia, and some parts of Southeast Asia. At the same time, the Vietnamese leadership maintains that Vietnam is still pursuing Marxism-Leninism, and universities are still called upon to instill this philosophy in their students. The contradiction within the education sys-

tem between the official line and reality is creating an “identity crisis” in Vietnam’s higher education system.

Plus ça change . . .

In its first major change, the government policy responded to the substantial unmet demand for access by allowing universities to accept fee-paying students. Higher education is no longer a responsibility of the state alone; the majority of individuals are expected to pay their share. A university now enrolls both regular students, who receive full or partial scholarships, and nonregular students, who are fee-paying. With the dramatic expansion of higher education during the last several years, and given the significant revenues accruing to universities from nonregular students, their number has overtaken that of regular students. In 1997, out of a total of over 500,000 students, the nonregular/regular ratio was 51:49—and the trend continues.

Against the background of the global expansion of private higher education, changes in Vietnamese higher edu-

cation along the same lines seem inevitable. Coupled with the introduction of fees, was the government's decision to permit the opening of private universities, which until not long ago were considered by Vietnam's leaders a characteristic of capitalism. After nearly a decade of a generally open policy vis-à-vis the private sector, Vietnam now has 16 private universities in Hanoi and Hochiminh city, enrolling nearly 5 percent of the total number of university students. A number of these private universities have created a conducive environment to encourage student achievement and commitment. However, there are other institutions that were set up for quick profit making. Typically, these "fly-by-night" universities, lacking their own facilities, make under-the-counter deals to gain access to the facilities and staff of public universities, thus draining the resources of the latter. The issues of standards and quality control must be addressed if private universities in Vietnam are to become reputable institutions able to produce high-quality graduates.

The switch from central planning to a market-oriented economy has led to discontinuation of the central system of job placement of university graduates.

Management style is another important change that has fundamentally transformed Vietnam's system of higher education. Soviet-style central planning, the hallmark of Vietnamese universities until the 1980s, has been replaced by decentralized management. Universities now make their own decisions about all fundamental issues—including student enrollments and graduation requirements, program and curricula at both undergraduate and graduate levels, budget allocation, scientific research, international cooperation, the election of senior administrators, and faculty recruitment. Universities welcome their newfound freedom with great enthusiasm. But the delegation of power from the center to the universities has not been accompanied by an increased accountability on the part of the universities. The absence of adequate checks and balances has led to growing corruption and declining quality of instruction. Accordingly, the central authorities have decided to establish an accreditation mechanism in the near future. Part of a World Bank loan for education will be used for this purpose, and experiences with systems in the United States, the United Kingdom, and Thailand will be studied.

The switch from central planning to a market-oriented economy has led to discontinuation of the central system of job placement of university graduates. Moreover, government positions are now fewer in number, and almost all

the good opportunities today are in the private sector. Consequently, in the resulting fierce competition for jobs, students are finding that a degree alone will not land them a good job. For that, they need an additional qualification. Those who can afford it are taking extra courses, the most popular being those in economics, informatics, and business management.

The market economy has brought many changes to Vietnam's system of higher education. But alongside the positive aspects of this transformation, "money-mania" and corruption—the negative features of unfettered capitalism—have also appeared. They are seriously compromising Vietnam's future.

. . . plus c'est la même chose?

Given the way it is currently provided, one could say Vietnamese higher education has a distinctly "capitalist" look. Yet political studies continue to be compulsory for all students. During their degree program, students in both public and private institutions are required to take 250 hours of classes studying Marxism-Leninism. While higher education is adapting in response to market demands, sustaining political studies is still a top priority for universities. While each private university makes its own decision about the courses it offers, all of them include political studies in their curricula. Thus, in this respect, the university system retains a certain Soviet style.

Vietnam is probably the only country in the world that both embraces market economics and adheres to Marxism-Leninism. How can an education system, guided by two contradictory philosophies develop in a consistent manner? The fact that Russia and the ex-Soviet republics have abandoned their former ideology does not seem to concern Vietnam's leadership. According to the policy line set for the country, Vietnamese higher education is to keep to the path of Marx and Lenin while integrating into the nation's socioeconomic system, which is guided by market principles.

Vietnamese higher education is hard to characterize at the present time. It has elements of systems found in "capitalist" societies while at the same time retaining an important ingredient of the old Soviet model. What academic system can reconcile such contradictions in its long-term development?

However, the crisis may be temporary. The Vietnamese are still experimenting with elements of models from other countries. Although the goals have been set for Vietnam's higher education for the next 20 years—to serve the nation's drive for industrialization and modernization—the principles of market economics are likely to be the modus operandi. The search for a suitable higher education model or a combination of models continues and bring more change. In the long run, Western-style higher education can be expected to prevail. ■