

engage in problem solving. This on-line interaction is effective for drawing out those students who usually do not speak up in class. Through hyperlinks, an on-line course website can also direct students to useful sources of information on the web.

### Challenges

Despite the ways in which it adds an exciting new international dimension to academic life and work, technology also presents several challenges and responsibilities. Faculty are now faced with issues of information legitimacy and quality. After spending the previous evening surfing the web, a student may come to class and declare with absolute certainty that the Holocaust could never have happened. How does the teacher deal with this situation and its impact on other students' perceptions? For educators, this presents the new task of teaching students how to judge information sources and to seek multiple perspectives on issues before deciding for themselves what is fact and what is fantasy.

The new technologies also have other implications for the college teacher seeking new and inventive ways to encourage students to develop their thinking and analytic skills. Faculty also have to evaluate themselves and their colleagues in terms of the quality of information offered on-line within their disciplines. Rather than viewing the web as a potential "soap box," faculty could better serve the learning community by linking their websites to those of colleagues so that potential browsers might compare and contrast their differing arguments.

Increased access to information has also led to challenges in how we address issues of knowledge reproduction, copyright, distribution of research findings, and rewards for creativity. From "fair use" policies to institutional codes of conduct, the higher education community worldwide is grappling with a host of issues related to how we conduct ourselves on-line. Nevertheless, the impact of technology on academic life and work has been mostly positive. Each of us bears our own responsibility for ensuring the integrity of information transmitted through our computers—just as we take so seriously our responsibilities in ensuring the integrity of the information we provide each other in print. Our institutions of higher education have a clear mandate to provide training and professional development for faculty to make effective use of new technologies in research and teaching. How we respond to the challenges and opportunities of new technologies will have a considerable effect on the course of higher education in the next decade. ■

The following are some recommended websites:

*International Higher Education*: <<http://www.bc.edu/cihe>> and <<http://www.higher-ed.org>>; *Web Page Language Translators*: <<http://babelfish.altavista.com>> and <<http://translator.go.com>>; *Classroom Teaching & Learning Tools*: <<http://www.blackboard.com>> and <<http://bestpractice.net>>.

## Internationalizing French Higher Education

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At first glance, French universities give some semblance of looking beyond national borders, with their involvement in short-term exchanges of students and faculty. Every year the University of South Brittany, for example, sends approximately 20 students abroad for three to six months. As for faculty, 4 to 8 go abroad per year, for about two weeks. French universities receive roughly the same number of foreign students and faculty from their European partners. A closer look, however, reveals the limited nature of these international activities. Moreover, funding comes from the European Union's Socrates-ERASMUS program, and they are strictly intra-Europe. Apart from recent contacts with universities in Francophone Canada and Africa, little progress has been made in collaborating with universities outside the European Union. French universities do see exposure to the international environment as beneficial, but more for cultural discovery than for academic benefit. Only in political studies, foreign languages and business management does one find some predisposition toward internationalization.

A similar lack of enthusiasm is found with regard to receiving foreign students for full-degree programs. French universities lack the rich mix of students from different countries one sees on American campuses. Most of the "foreign" students have actually grown up in France, and only a handful are recipients of scholarships. While American universities have highly developed structures to receive and manage hundreds of thousand foreign students, most French universities set up "international relations" sections in the last few years.

Faculty may attend international conferences, or spend few weeks at a foreign (partner) university, teaching (in French) what they teach at home. Foreign exchange professors come to France for similarly short periods. This is international collaboration on a superficial level—an indication that international education is not a priority on the agenda. Nevertheless, French academics, functioning in a highly regulated bureaucracy, are captivated by the freedom of American academia, as well as the American approach toward teaching and research. But this curiosity has not yet been translated into programs of international collaboration. Although French academics are interested in links with universities in Latin America and Asia, they are motivated more by a desire for tourism or cultural enrichment than for true academic exchange.

Another aspect of internationalization is the incorporation of international elements into the curriculum. However, this has not yet occurred in French higher education. Universities follow guidelines developed by the Education Ministry that encourage uniformity rather than diversity. Faculty sometime question why they should include an international dimension in their programs when the French system of higher education is “one of the best in the world.”

#### *Determining Factors*

Several factors may account for the general lack of enthusiasm. First, French higher education is highly centralized, and universities have limited room to maneuver. In theory, universities can spend government-allocated funds as they wish; in practice, hardly any money remains after essential recurrent expenses are paid. Universities lack the resources to engage in contacts with countries other than those in the European Union (which are paid for by Socrates-ERASMUS). Moreover, programs offering partial scholarships to enable foreigners to study and work on campus at the same time do not exist in France.

Second, the university bureaucracy is governed by a myriad of rules and regulations that hamper initiatives. For example, French universities are permitted to conduct exchanges only with foreign universities with which they have established formal partnership agreements. As for students, once abroad they are expected to take exactly the same courses as in their home institution, the only difference being that the courses are conducted in a foreign language. Thus French exchange students are notable to benefit from firsthand exposure to the diverse program content and delivery methods offered by foreign universities.

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Third, the “superior” mind-set of French academics is another obstacle. Satisfied that French higher education is among the best systems in the world, they have only cursory international interactions, and the latter are seen as having little influence on professional advancement.

French professors seldom, if ever, take a sabbatical year to do research abroad. Although research has been officially recognized as part of their duties, as illustrated by the adoption of the title *enseignant-chercheur* (lecturer-researcher) a few years ago, the call to “publish or perish” is not a driving force. In addition, language is a major inhibiting factor. French academics dread being misunderstood

when they have to make use of a language they do not know well. While many younger professors are learning English, having realized its predominance in the academic world, the majority prefer to stick to the familiar.

#### *What Next?*

In spite of the Socrates-ERASMUS program, there is no policy to promote the internationalization of higher education. At the 1990 conference, Université 2000, the then education minister (now prime minister) did not even mention internationalization when setting out the future landscape of French universities.

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Most recently, what has caught attention of policymakers is that France has far too few foreign students compared to the United States. The topic of extending international collaboration by French universities beyond the European Union figured prominently on the agenda of the prime minister and the president during their trips to Latin America last year. The agency EduFrance was created with the goal of attracting more foreign students. France is hoping that its lower costs (compared to the United States) will lead foreigners to choose to study in France. However, it is unlikely that EduFrance campaigns will bring the desired effect, for two reasons. One is that EduFrance does not provide any financial aid, without which few foreigners can come to France. The other reason is that there is a misinterpretation of the situation of foreign students in the United States. While the French assume that well-to-do foreigners are attending American universities, these such individuals in fact represent only a small percentage of the total number of foreign students. Most foreign students in the United States are not actually self-funded but are recipients of full or partial scholarships.

In any case, these efforts will not make French higher education more internationally oriented. It will be a while before debates about internationalization, similar to the ones currently under way in American higher education, surface in France. In the meantime, so long as internationalizing French higher education simply means accelerating its export, France will continue to occupy its old place in the new competition. ■