including definitions of institutions, minimum standards, the necessity for a foundation year, credit transfer, and transparent financial procedures. If they are applied fairly, then the new law may still achieve its intended purpose of providing a regulatory framework for the sector. But if the ACC simply becomes a paper tiger—or worse, a tollgate—then official accreditation may have little effect on improving the quality of the higher education sector.

A weak higher education sector does not bode well for Cambodia's future. There is increasing recognition of the importance of higher education in national development. Cambodia is tipped to be the first "least developed country" to join the WTO in September of this year, and its participation regionally is increasing. Graduating 7 to 10,000 students every year from narrow, weak programs almost certainly means that however bright the students, they will be ill-equipped to satisfy the development needs of the country or compete internationally.

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American Accreditation of Foreign Universities: Proceed—with Caution

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In the summer 2003 issue of *International Higher Education*, Philip Altbach argues against American accreditation of colleges and universities in other countries. He writes that as an academic superpower, the United States should not practice this kind of "academic invasion" and that granting American accreditation abroad is an act of "academic colonialism." While I agree with many of his observations, I wish to support a somewhat different conclusion.

Regional accrediting agencies are approached regularly by institutions abroad. The motivations vary, in part because American regional accreditation is both the gold standard and not well understood. Sometimes the reasons relate to marketing or "branding," as when institutions ask what form they have to fill out for accreditation so they can get an .edu Internet address. Another inappropriate reason for seeking regional accreditation occurs when an institution mistakes it for an ISO 9000-like international stamp of quality. Indeed, interest and sincerity and even eagerness on the part of the applying institution should not be sufficient reason for American accreditors to become involved. Nor should the siren call of international travel for staff or team members motivate us into accrediting institutions abroad.

What, then, are the appropriate reasons? The clearest case for accrediting abroad involves places that identify themselves as American-style institutions of higher education. Attaining American regional accreditation validates their claims and is of great worth locally, given the paucity of consumer information and secondary school help for students choosing a higher education institution. In an article in the January/February 2003 issue of *Foreign Affairs*, "Hate Your Policies, Love Your Institutions," John Waterbury, president of the American University of Beirut, argues eloquently for this validation in places where institutions claiming to offer American-style education are otherwise essentially unregulated. Indeed, this consumer protection role is one of the functions American accreditation serves at home.

Also, just as in the United States, the standards of regional accreditation, when appropriate to the founders' goals, can provide a useful framework for new institutions abroad, as they develop, from ideas to degree programs to institutions of higher education with the probability to endure and improve. Because regional accrediting standards are the articulated expectations of the community of (American) higher education—and not a set of bureaucratic regulations—those wishing to begin new universities find that the standards provide a useful roadmap and that the process of peer review offers collegial support and feedback.

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The challenge here concerned defining American-style higher education or the limits to which American accreditation should appropriately be applied. The widespread adoption of taught courses, credit systems, and even forms of (something like) general education means that these curricular structures, at least by themselves, do not define American-style higher education. Increasing variation in regionally accredited institutions at home also makes defining what's American about American higher education more challenging. How do Americans define American-style

higher education? Experience suggests there are as many definitions as there are American academics considering the question—maybe more.

Another key question, and one to which Altbach alludes, is whether regional accreditors have the capacity to accredit institutions of higher education in other countries. Language is one issue; I would argue that regional accreditation ought not to consider institutions other than those using English as a principal language of instruction and operation. Even if visiting teams can be composed to work in another language, commissions and their staff will have incomplete access to the information about the institution.

Capacity issues must also include the ability to help the team visitors and the commissions deal with local regulations and local culture, at least at some level. To what extent should the system accommodate—or even encourage—adapting an American-style institution to local conditions? Inherently, having the capacity to address considerations will make the process more expensive, and the cost must be borne largely by the institution seeking accreditation or some beneficent third party.

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Accrediting institutions abroad is not the only international activity of American accreditors—and arguably not the most important. Hosting international visitors who want to learn from us as they build their own system is one useful way that American accreditors work internationally. We also help build capacity elsewhere by serving internationally on accreditation boards, participating in the on-site visits, and working with colleagues in their locations while they create an accreditation system to serve their country. National systems of accreditation (government systems all, unlike the United States) are developing throughout the world. And, as Altbach suggests, the ability of countries to work together regionally through their quality assurance systems has great potential to support the mobility of students and scholars, the cooperation of institutions, and a multidimensional international agenda for higher education.

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Russian Private Higher Education: Alliances with State-Run Organizations

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Russian private higher education is about a decade old. While it shares many features of private sectors of higher education worldwide, one of its prominent traits is hardly addressed in the private higher education literature: considerable public involvement in the creation of Russian private higher education institutions and continued association of private institutions with various state-supported organizations and public resources.

There are currently over 500 private institutions (as compared with 620 public ones), accounting for roughly 10 percent of enrollments in higher education. Generally located in metropolitan and large urban centers—such as Moscow, St. Petersburg, Kazan, and Novosibirsk—these institutions mainly offer market-related programs in economics, law, psychology, sociology, social work, business administration, and other fields that do not require much investment in equipment and research infrastructure. They are characterized by responsiveness to the needs of the labor market, flexibility of course offerings and curricula, frequent use of learner-centered instructional methods, heavy reliance on part-time faculty, tuition dependence, loose admissions requirements, limited concern about research, and many other features typically ascribed to private institutions worldwide. Only a handful of Russian nonstate institutions have acquired a reputation for high-quality education, with the majority offering degrees that are still questioned by employers and the general public. Like private higher education elsewhere and unlike the privatization in industry, Russian nonstate higher education institutions were not created by turning public institutions into private but rather by organizing new institutions, virtually from scratch.

Russia's private higher education institutions are commonly referred to as "nonstate" institutions in legal documents and in public discourse, connoting the state's limited role and its separation from the private sector.