

in 2003–2004 than in 2000–2001. Two Quality Assurance Funds were also created.

#### *Maintaining Access*

While the official number of first-year students registered at colleges and universities is not yet available, the COU expected universities to enroll the usual proportion of applicants from Ontario's high schools—a remarkable achievement. In June 2003, close to 72,000 students had accepted positions in the province's universities, and 42,600 confirmed they would attend first-year classes at one of the community colleges.

Ontario's double cohort is a fascinating case study in the politics of higher education. While governments frequently come under pressure to maintain or increase access, few are forced to address these concerns in the context of a media flurry focusing on the countdown of a very public timeline to address the needs of a specific cohort. ■

## Ross University: Cash Cow or Pig in a Poke?

### **Alan L. Contreras**

*Alan L. Contreras is the administrator of the Oregon Office of Degree Authorization, 1500 Valley River Drive No. 100, Eugene OR 97401. The views expressed in this article are his own. E-mail: alan.l.contreras@state.or.us.*

DeVry University, a reputable regionally accredited U.S. college that provides a variety of mainly technical programs, announced in spring 2003 that its corporate parent, DeVry Inc., was buying Ross University's medical and veterinary schools in the Caribbean in order to improve and expand DeVry's offerings. It is not unheard of for such international acquisitions to take place, but this one was special: the Ross veterinary school is on the Caribbean island of St. Kitts.

#### *The St. Kitts Situation*

Ross has no authorization to issue degrees anywhere in the United States; its office in New Jersey is expressly limited by that state's laws to noninstructional administrative functions. Therefore, under U.S. law it is a foreign institution, and its degrees must be evaluated as foreign degrees.

Meaningful academic oversight on St. Kitts is doubtful at best. This is the country that once authorized a person in Texas to issue degrees as Eastern Caribbean University. It also hosts Berne University, which recently lost its Title IV approval because of findings by the Gen-

eral Accounting Office (the investigatory office of the U.S. Congress) and the U.S. Department of Education that its programs are not equivalent to a U.S. university, its award of credit is inappropriate and excessive, and its finances are questionable.

#### *Multinational Suppliers*

What exactly *is* the Ross veterinary school? It is not listed by UNESCO (not that this means much for good or ill anymore, since UNESCO has no screening). It does not appear on international lists of universities. The American Association of Collegiate Registrars and Admissions Officers international evaluation office (relied upon by many U.S. colleges for international evaluations) has never seen its degrees. The respected Florida evaluation firm Silny and Associates, which *has* seen its degrees, considers it only equivalent to an *unaccredited* U.S. college. It apparently has only a business license from the government of St. Kitts, the college oversight standards of which are, shall we say, opaque.

Has DeVry purchased an overstuffed pig in a foreign poke? Can this reputable U.S. chain school convert this expensive offshore porker that falls well below the normal accreditation radar horizon into a cash cow? Some observers speculate that DeVry assumed that its institutional accreditation from the U.S. North Central Association would automatically extend to cover Ross. Not so, according to the accreditor. Ross is not a unit of DeVry University but a freestanding unit of DeVry, Inc., a parent corporation. Fair enough. Ross must therefore undergo its own evaluation. But by whom and as what?

---

***Has DeVry purchased an overstuffed pig in a foreign poke? Can this reputable U.S. chain school convert this expensive offshore porker that falls well below the normal accreditation radar horizon into a cash cow?***

---

#### *Nonexistent Oversight*

DeVry has no apparent plans to make Ross a U.S. accredited school. According to the U.S. Department of Education, DeVry Inc. intends to keep Ross a foreign school for purposes of maintaining eligibility for U.S. financial aid, a much easier approval standard at the federal level in the United States since it requires no proof of academic oversight or quality, just fiscal management and a foreign business license. It appears that neither DeVry nor the Department of Education cares that the Ross vet-

erinary school has its “approval” from a nation whose approvals are widely considered substandard.

Ross will therefore become an academic version of Dr. Doolittle’s Pushmepullyou, a llama-like creature aimed in two directions at once, but worse: it will be of two species, lurching about to provide a chosen face depending on who is looking. No U.S. college or accreditor could possibly treat a school authorized by St. Kitts as having equivalent *foreign* approval to issue degrees—yet DeVry clearly considers this irrelevant.

The U.S. Department of Education piously cites its own rules, which say that foreign schools don’t need the equivalent of U.S. accreditation to be eligible for U.S. financial aid money. They just need whatever the local business license is, and if it is labeled “accreditation,” well, that is good enough for the U.S. government. So DeVry has bought a U.S.-certified foreign college that *never* requires external oversight by a legitimate national college oversight body in the United States *or* in its home country. Forever.

The fact that degrees issued on St. Kitts are illegal for use in places like Oregon is perhaps too minor a consideration to affect DeVry’s corporate strategy. We are sure that a large, lawyer-filled educational provider like DeVry has already figured out that buying a school located on an island with low oversight standards is a pretty good deal. Like everyone who observes the rela-

tionships between U.S. and foreign colleges, legitimate and bogus providers, we watch in anticipation, since the future of the Ross colleges is likely to be both entertaining and creative.

#### College Ownership

This picture—a reputable U.S. school purchasing a doubtful offshore degree supplier—may seem strange today but will be seen more often in the future. Unfortunately, the common pattern is not likely to be productive mergers between reputable providers in multiple countries, but the St. Kitts pattern: wealthy U.S. proprietary schools absorbing “approved” schools in small foreign countries, whether or not that approval means anything, and using them as one-way drainage tubes through which money can flow.

There will be no meaningful screening from the U.S. Department of Education, which lacks the structure, staff, funding, inclination, and political support to undertake such unpopular enforcement activity. Only a few states and evaluation firms, with limited ability to sail upwind in an expensive political and legal environment, are pointing out that certain colleges have no clothes. We hope that U.S. colleges and accreditors have the vertebrae to maintain standards in the face of such economic and political pressures. ■

## News of the Center

On May 3, the Center hosted a conference of the main researchers on international higher education funded by the Ford Foundation, at Boston College. The discussions focused on how international and comparative higher education might be strengthened in the United States. Work on the Center’s research project on women’s colleges and universities worldwide has now been completed. A book entitled *Women’s Universities and Colleges: An International Handbook*, by Francesca Purcell, Robin Matross Helms, and Laura Rumbley will be published by the Center, with a commercial edition from Information Age Publishing, Inc. The Center’s collaboration with the Program for Research on Private Higher Education at the University at Albany has concluded with the publication of *Private Higher Education: An International Bibliography*, by Alma Maldonado-Maldonado, Yingxia Cao, Philip G. Altbach, Daniel C. Levy, and Hong Zhu. CIHE and PROPHE jointly published the book, and a commercial edition will be available from Information Age Publishers, Inc. PROPHE will also provide web-based access to the bibliography.

The Center’s website has achieved the distinction of being at the top of several of the major search engines subject directories. When a user looks for “international higher education” or a related topic, the CIHE site is shown at the top of the lists for Google, Yahoo, and MSN. This is a considerable distinction and indicates that our website is widely used and that those who visit the site spend a significant amount of time on it.

For the 2004–2005 academic year, there are several changes to note in CIHE staff. Hong Zhu will be working for the Boston College Institutional Review Board. Francesca Purcell has received her doctorate for a dissertation on women’s higher education in the Phillippines and has joined the staff of the Massachusetts Board of Higher Education. Robin Matross Helms has taken a position with the Institute of International Higher Education in Washington, DC. Deirdre McMyler will join the Center as a graduate assistant. She is currently working as an administrator at Harvard University.