

schools, vocational diploma schools, and foundation schools enroll a very large part of international students in New Zealand. A number of the secondary schools have also been very active in recruiting international students. The universities recruit mainly from the English, foundation, secondary, and diploma schools. In recent years the numbers in these schools (of all types) have dropped sharply, especially the number of Chinese students, which peaked in 65,999 in 2003 and fell to 49,569 in 2005. Indications are that in 2006 the figure had fallen further.

A combination of factors has led to this downturn. In the last few years there has been substantial investment in higher education by both state authorities and private entrepreneurs in China, leading to the creation of many more higher education places in that country. Competition for Chinese students in international markets has also intensified, and a rising exchange rate in New Zealand has choked off the country's reputation as a low-cost country.

#### **DOWNTURN**

The year 2006 has been a traumatic one for the export education industry in New Zealand as the impact of the retrenchment and closure of English schools has gradually begun to flow up to the universities, which for perhaps the first time in their histories have seen their student numbers and income decline. Retrenchment of staff in a number of the universities has taken place, and this process could quite easily continue into 2007 as the number of students studying in the various schools in New Zealand are far smaller than they were a few years ago.

Given that New Zealand's universities have relied upon recruiting international students from educational institutions within New Zealand, growth in numbers at universities could take a few years before it picks up again. Even when it does the universities are going to have to broaden their attraction away from China if they are going to be able to regain the position they held just a few years ago. ■

## US Accreditors Should Not Evaluate Foreign Colleges

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The recent dispute between Hawaii's Office of Consumer Protection and the American Academy for Liberal Education, as well as the supporters of each side, raises questions worthy of attention. As the *Chronicle of Higher Education* reported ("Accreditation of College in Former Soviet Republic Raises Questions of Oversight," September 8, 2006), the academy accredited the American University for Humanities, Tbilisi Campus College, in the Republic of Georgia. That entity is linked to a Hawaiian degree mill, the American University of Hawaii.

*Accreditation is a minimalist exercise, conducted for the purpose of limited quality control.*

The American Academy for Liberal Education did what several US accreditors do: it accredited a school in a foreign country. That is not illegal. However, there is no federal oversight of American accreditors' work with any foreign college. Although they must operate within certain parameters when they accredit an American college or university, they are not obligated to do so when they evaluate a foreign institution, and the US Department of Education has no jurisdiction over their activities outside the United States. Most people, even education officials in other countries, do not know this.

US accreditors that operate in foreign countries are doing so *only* as private organizations with *no* US government connection. That is not widely known in other countries. In fact, there is no such thing as a federally recognized accreditor once the accreditor steps outside the United States, and any accreditor that refers to itself that way in a foreign country is coming close to deception. Non-US governments should not allow US accreditors to call themselves "federally recognized" when recruiting members outside the United States.

#### **SHOULD FOREIGN EVALUATORS ACCREDIT US COLLEGES?**

If American accreditors continue to operate outside their country, foreign accreditors may want to do the same. If an American accreditor offers its good name to Monash University in Australia, should the Australian Qualifications Framework operate in the United States so that it can make sure that degrees from Oregon State University meet Australian standards? That kind of entanglement poses problems because degrees and institutions vary so much from country to country.

Even inside the United States, accreditorial oversight can be nominal, and many other countries have very limited capacity for meaningful oversight. It is impossible to do more than scratch the surface of a large institution. We cannot expect American accreditors to do more than a basic walk-through of foreign institutions, and our accreditors have no way to use the mechanisms of foreign governments to check on key points as time passes. The recent uproar over operations of Indianapolis

University in Greece provides a fine example of why oversight at a distance does not work.

Accreditation is a minimalist exercise, conducted for the purpose of limited quality control—although it is better suited for financial oversight than for academic quality assurance. Even on the financial side, I am aware of a case in another state in which an accredited institution moved millions of dollars into its accounts before a reapproval and afterward moved the money right back out again. That review was one of the regular evaluations conducted by a state government; states, not accreditors, have the power to decide whether institutions can operate within their borders and what degrees they can offer.

#### MEANINGFUL EVALUATION IS NEITHER EASY NOR CHEAP

Genuine, meaningful oversight is expensive. The natural inclination of governments and organizations is to want to do it quickly, cheaply, and infrequently. This is a recipe for poor enforcement, lack of awareness, and substandard educational outcomes. Within the United States, accreditors have only limited knowledge of changes in faculty composition, financial policies, and the award of credits during the typical 10 years between accreditations. That is one reason why states generally use a much shorter review cycle: Oregon, for instance, reviews every program under our jurisdiction every three years and after two years for a new program.

All an American accreditor can really do for foreign colleges and universities is to rent them its reputation. The institutions get to mention the accreditor's name, though the standards that the accreditor chooses to apply overseas may be extremely low. Who will know?

*Genuine, meaningful oversight is expensive.*

The Tbilisi case shows how complex international evaluation can be. The government agency that screens foreign degrees in the Netherlands and the American Association of Collegiate Registrars and Admissions Officers, which does the same for many American universities, consider degrees from the American University for Humanities to be invalid or substandard. The American Academy for Liberal Education considers the program to be acceptable. National education officials in Sweden treat the degrees as legally issued but are not yet convinced they are equivalent to Swedish degrees.

The bottom line is that American accreditors should not evaluate foreign colleges and universities. Other nations have the right to set their own standards, whether high or low. American colleges should be free to use customary academic norms and their own standards to decide whether a foreign degree is suitable for purposes of admission or employment. Do not rely on unsupervised accreditors that freelance in foreign lands.

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This essay is revised from a version that first appeared in the *Chronicle of Higher Education*, December 1, 2006, and is printed here with permission from the *Chronicle*. ■

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## Internationalizing Canada's Universities

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In Canada education is the responsibility of the provinces, and unlike many other federal systems, no national ministry or legislation exists that establishes a national framework for higher education. Several federal departments invest in specific international education program initiatives within their overall policy framework. For example, the Department of Foreign Affairs and International Trade, as part of its public diplomacy portfolio, supports bilateral educational exchange agreements, international scholarship programs, the Canadian studies initiatives abroad, international youth programs, and international marketing initiatives. The Department of Human Resources and Social Development Canada invests in international academic mobility programs within North America and Europe. The Canadian International Development Agency (CIDA) contributes to university international initiatives by funding development projects—for example, through the University Partnerships in Cooperation and Development program. More recently, through its new Canada Corps initiative, CIDA supports international internships for students and joint projects delivering governance programming in developing countries engaging both faculty and students in Canada and partner countries. Several other federal departments such as Industry Canada and Citizenship and Immigration Canada also contribute to the overall international education and research portfolio.

While a range of federal departments support initiatives in this area, the overall level of federal government support is extremely modest. In a 1994 report the Department of Foreign Affairs and International Trade estimated that Canada's per