

In some cases, salary supplements are provided, and there is usually a tax advantage. But even these benefits may not produce a sufficient attraction.

As a result of these factors, the professors teaching at branch campuses are seldom full-time research-active faculty from the home university. If from the home institution, they are often senior staff close to retirement or those with fewer commitments at home. Most are not from the home university. Relevant academic departments at home often must approve the academic qualifications of these professors and offer them some kind of temporary appointment to legitimize their appointments.

### CONCLUSION

Does an academic degree mean that a student has studied at the university offering the degree? Does it mean that he or she has been taught by the faculty of that institution? Does it mean that the curriculum and language of instruction of the home university have been used? Is it enough that the home institution has approved the qualifications of the teaching staff and that the general conditions of teaching are considered to be satisfactory? Should teaching be provided by faculty members who are actually on the home institution's staff, or is it acceptable that an itinerant but qualified collection of teachers do the work? Is it acceptable that the prestigious universities whose fame in their home countries is based on excellence in research as well as teaching provide an academic environment in the branch campus almost exclusively devoid of research? Cross-border academic cooperation and transnational higher education are characteristics of the 21st century, but it is necessary to carefully examine the realities in order to assess quality and effectiveness. ■

## Problems within Singapore's Global Schoolhouse

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Singapore's Global Schoolhouse strategy, which aims to attract 150,000 international students to the city-state by the year 2015, has been dealt a blow by the recent announcement that Australia's University of New South Wales would

close its Singapore campus after operating only one semester. In contractual arrangements with Singapore's Economic Development Board, by 2020 the campus was required to have international students comprise up to 70 percent of its projected 15,000 enrollments. The university cited low enrollments (resulting in a multimillion dollar shortfall) and the expectation of further financial losses as reasons for closure. The vice chancellor of the University of South Wales noted that the university had invested AU\$17.5 (US\$14.3) million in the project, and millions more dollars would be spent on redundancy packages and other exit costs. The Singapore government also contributed resources to the operation, but the total has not been made public. This closure follows less than a year after the July 2006 announcement that the biomedical research facility of the US Johns Hopkins University in Singapore (established 1998) would close within a year. The Singapore government's Agency for Science, Technology and Research, discontinued its substantial funding, claiming that various key performance indicators had not been met—including failure to meet targets for PhD enrollments and targets for attracting leading medical researchers to migrate to Singapore.

### HUB AMBITIONS

It is now a decade since Singapore set its target of attracting 10 world-class foreign institutions to establish on its soil within 10 years. The government has exceeded its own forecast: there are now 15 such institutions—from China, the United States, France, India, Germany, and the Netherlands. The elite foreign providers, for the most part offering niche programs, are expected to attract chiefly international students. (Conversely, public institutions must cap international student enrollments at 20 percent.) In addition, foreign programs offered in partnership with 140 local private providers are helping to meet demand from local and foreign students who have not been able to attend Singapore's prestigious public universities or top-notch foreign institutions. According to official statistics, in 2004 transnational education enrollments comprised 36 percent (or more than 80,000) of all higher education students in Singapore.

In 2006 some 80,000 international students were studying in Singapore, an 11 percent increase from the previous year. While Singapore is clearly proving to be a popular destination for students from Asia, small numbers of students from Europe, the United States, and Australia are also choosing to study in Singapore. Many international students consider Singapore to be a comfortable introduction to Asia, providing both the chance to get a Western education at a leading institution and become familiar with Chinese language and business practices.

### REALISTIC TARGETS?

The Global Schoolhouse strategy is driven by considerations of economic development and recruitment of skilled immigration. The latter is a considered country response to a low

birthrate and the imperatives of a knowledge economy in a country low in natural resources except for human resources. To promote Singapore as an education destination, the Economic Development Board helms the strategy and the Singapore Tourism Board is in charge of marketing and recruitment. The overall goal is to establish Singapore as an education hub, attracting foreign talent that may remain in the

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country as employees and entrepreneurs, bringing in foreign revenue, and helping to draw more world-class research and development firms and multinational companies to Singapore.

Despite its achievements, Singapore needs to resolve several important issues to achieve its goal of becoming a global education hub. One factor is that the government and foreign providers need to set realistic targets. Historically, institutions—and governments—have a tendency to overestimate future enrollments and underestimate costs. The recent developments with the University of New South Wales and Johns Hopkins both appear to be cases in point. One lesson from the experience seems to be that one should anticipate a diminution in the “pulling power” of institutions once they move outside their home base. The challenge thus involves adjusting targets in a way that suits the parties concerned. As well as directly affecting students, institutional closures can erode public confidence in the reliability of transnational education, the foreign provider, and the host country.

#### REGULATION OF FOREIGN PROVIDERS

A second issue is the need for a transparent system for the quality assurance of foreign provision. To date, the Ministry of Education has taken a largely hands-off approach to foreign education, choosing to focus primarily on the operation of the public system. The Global Schoolhouse strategy, however, has required the government to adopt regulatory measures. Disgruntled international students reporting poor-quality courses or the loss of course fees from fraudulent operators potentially may damage Singapore's reputation and undermine its quest for hub status. Currently, the Consumer's Association of Singapore operates a registration scheme for private education operators, addressing consumer protection issues such as fee policies, means of student redress, and an insurance scheme in case of operator failure. The Product and Innovation Board has established the Singapore Quality Class for Private Education Operators, addressing their governance

and business structures. Neither addresses the question of academic standards.

The Ministry of Education's laissez-faire approach to academic quality assurance may be about to change. The minister of state trade and industry recently suggested that the Ministry of Education is exploring the feasibility of introducing a licensing system to ensure that private schools meet certain standards in terms of financial stability, student welfare, and academic rigor. It seems that further regulation of Singapore's private education sector may be imminent with the development of an accreditation system to recognize high-quality private providers, thus offering students greater guidance in the selection of an institution and increasing pressure on lower-end providers.

#### THE QUEST FOR FOREIGN TALENT

The other emerging issue concerns Singapore's quest for foreign talent. Public institutions offer top foreign students generous scholarships that bond them to remain and work in Singapore for several years. As one public university spokesperson put it: “we don't want your money—we want your brains.” Liberal immigration policies for skilled workers and professionals have made it easier for foreign talent, including international students studying at the many foreign institutions, to remain in Singapore. There are suggestions, in the press and anecdotally, that the government's quest for foreign talent is resulting in increased resentment toward foreign students on the grounds that the policy is raising the bar, squeezing out local Singaporean students at the public universities (where entry is effectively restricted to the top 25 percent of school leavers), and making the employment market more competitive.

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The Singapore 21 Project, a government initiative launched in 1997 to encourage people living in Singapore to be actively involved in shaping the country's future, reported that many Singaporeans can appreciate the need for foreign talent at the national level but cannot help but feel threatened at the individual level. While the quest for foreign talent seems a sound and farsighted approach to Singapore's circumstances, it does little to assuage the concerns of local parents and students worried about missing out on a place in the public system. It will be interesting to see how the Singapore government grapples with these issues and what impact the highly publicized withdrawal of the University of New South Wales has on the Global Schoolhouse strategy. ■