

subprime institutions—sleazy recruiters, degree packagers, low-end private institutions seeking to stave off bankruptcy through the export market and even a few respectable universities forced by government funding cutbacks to enter foreign markets for profit making.

Buyers, such as students but also including some academic institutions in developing countries, are similarly unregulated, sometimes ill-informed and often naive. Most tragically, students and their families buy international educational services without much information or understanding. Sometimes recruited to study abroad at subprime schools or motivated more by the desire to seek employment than to study, students may be shortchanged. Uninformed or simply avaricious institutions in developing countries may partner with low-quality colleges and universities in, for example, the United States, Australia, the United Kingdom and receive substandard teaching or degree courses. Regulatory agencies may be entirely missing or inappropriate, thus making quality assurance impossible to achieve. There are not enough top-quality universities in countries like China and India to absorb all of the potential overseas partners. Further, most academic institutions worldwide lack the infrastructures to successfully engage in sophisticated international programs and initiatives.

#### HOW TO AVOID A CRISIS

Transparency is a key step for building a healthy international higher education environment. This approach means obtaining accurate information about the scope and extent of international higher education—by governments, international and regional organizations, and by universities. Information about motives and policies would also be useful, although now very little reliable information is available. The market should not be left to determine the success or failure of international high-

*International higher education stands somewhere in the middle of the cycle—somewhere between irrational exuberance and a bubble.*

er education. Some interests, especially the governments of the major “sellers” (such as the United States, Australia, and the United Kingdom and the for-profit education industry) argue that the doors to international commerce in higher education should be open and that this openness should be legislated by the World Trade Organization through the General Agreement on Trade in Services. Such forced openness would leave the world subject to whatever irrational exuberance and bubble mentality that is now evident in the mortgage industry and is increasingly in higher education.

The world also needs clear regulation, probably by government authority, to ensure that national interests are served and students and their families are not subjected to shoddy business practices by unscrupulous education providers. This will

also help academic institutions themselves think about their motivations for entry into the global education market. Internationalization, including student mobility, cross-border educational provision, and involvement in the global knowledge economy of the 21st century is a positive and inevitable element of global higher education. What academe needs to avoid is succumbing to subprime practices and the inevitable crisis that will ensue.

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## Foreign-Backed Universities: A New Trend

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In the last decade, discussions about transnational universities concentrated on the branch campus model. In recent years, another type of transnational institutions has expanded rapidly: the foreign-backed university.

#### BEYOND BRANCH CAMPUSES

In contrast to a branch campus, a foreign-backed university is set up not by a foreign academic institution but rather by (wealthy) local individuals, local governments, or enterprises. The local founders provide or organize the basic financial endowment for a new university but also delegate academic development to one or several “academic mentor” or “patron” universities abroad. Thus, foreign-backed institutions are legally independent local universities that are academically affiliated with one or several universities in another country.

Mentor universities typically take care of the development of curricula and quality assurance measures, support the development of infrastructures, and assist in the training of lecturers. They often send their own teaching staff to the foreign institution and engage in fund-raising in their home country. Foreign-backed universities grant their own national degrees. In some cases, the degrees of mentor institutions are granted in addition to national ones. Mentor universities generally receive remuneration from the founders of the university. They normally do not benefit from the revenue generated from tuition fees.

Mentor universities may withdraw once the new institution is fully operational, although they as well as the governments of their countries are usually permanently represented on the boards of foreign-backed universities. The function of rector or

president of foreign-backed universities is sometimes shared, at least during establishment of an institution, by a local person and a scholar from the backing country. Nevertheless, the ultimate responsibility for financial and operational decisions normally rests with the founders.

#### THE WHY AND WHEREFORE OF AFFILIATIONS

From a local perspective, foreign-backed institutions are not only expected to contribute to the expansion of study places, the reduction of study-abroad numbers, and the prevention of brain drain. Primarily, their founders intended to enrich the national higher education system by implementing foreign educational and organizational expertise and innovation. Often, the goal of introducing labor-market-oriented programs plays a major role. In some cases, foreign academic affiliation is seen as an opportunity to introduce research-based study programs.

Without foreign ownership, the founders of foreign-backed universities can determine and easily limit the degree of foreign influence on the academic development of their institutions. In comparison to branch campuses, foreign-backed provisions draw upon the expertise of well-developed institutions while at the same time maintaining local ownership and ensuring full adherence to national higher education legisla-

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tion and quality-assurance regulations. Many countries with foreign-backed provisions explicitly do not allow the establishment of branch campuses (notably Egypt, Nigeria, and Indonesia). Only the United Arab Emirates and Malaysia host both types of transnational institutions.

From the perspective of foreign-patron institutions, the academic support of new institutions abroad constitutes a relatively weak form of involvement in transnational higher education. For them, it is an attractive way to strengthen their international presence with limited organizational and financial risks but with a rather large development potential.

#### OVERVIEW OF FOREIGN-BACKED PROVISIONS

A recent report for the Observatory on Borderless Higher Education ([www.obhe.ac.uk](http://www.obhe.ac.uk), February 2008) identified 24 foreign-backed universities in different parts of the world. Among the countries setting up foreign-backed universities, those in the Arab world (especially Egypt, but also the Gulf states and the Middle East), eastern Europe, and central Asia stand out. In the Arab world, private capital or government resources aid the establishment of foreign-backed universities. In eastern

Europe and central Asia, local university founders usually draw upon international development funds for basic institutional endowment. At present, Egypt has the most-diverse foreign-backed provisions in the world, with institutions backed by German, British, French, and Canadian universities. The US-backed Jacobs University in Germany illustrates that the foreign backing of newly set-up universities is not only of interest for developing higher education systems but also for mature systems under modernization. A further expansion of the foreign-backed university sector is under way: Pakistan, a country that has always been cautious to maintain tight control over foreign provisions, has recently requested several countries to back the establishment of new universities in the country.

The most significant home countries of mentor universities are Germany and the United States, followed by the United Kingdom. Interestingly, Australia, a leading provider of branch campuses, is not represented. The Swiss-German University in Indonesia is the only foreign-backed university that receives academic support from mentors located in more than one foreign country. Currently, the three by far largest foreign-backed universities (3,000 to 5,000 students) are the American University of Sharjah (first enrollments in 1997) in the United Arab Emirates, the US-backed Gulf University for Science and Technology (first enrollments in 2002) in Kuwait, and the German University in Cairo (first enrollments in 2003).

All types of universities represent mentor institutions of foreign-backed universities: from internationally renowned research-intensive universities like the Massachusetts Institute of Technology (Malaysia University of Science and Technology) or RWTH Aachen University (Oman-German University of Technology) to small, highly specialized institutions with a focus on teaching. Selection by founders is often based on the universities' specific teaching models. Some founders of academically affiliated universities select different foreign partners for each faculty, to ensure particular strength.

Generally, foreign-backed institutions receive accreditation or are licensed by the country where they are located. US-backed universities tend to strive for additional US accreditation. German-backed universities plan to have their programs accredited by German agencies; institutional accreditation does not exist in Germany.

With few exceptions, foreign-backed universities offer programs up to or at the master's level or plan to do so in the near future. The British University in Egypt and the Malaysia University of Science and Technology were designed as post-graduate universities. Several foreign-backed universities plan to offer (joint) PhD programs. Most institutions plan to engage in applied research and consultancy, which provide access to external funding.

#### CONCLUSION

Developing and running a foreign-backed university constitutes a complex challenge. It requires close cooperation between local founders and foreign academic mentors. An

intensive dialogue is necessary for the integration of a foreign-modeled institution into a national higher education system. Two national quality approaches to the programs offered have to be respected. The expectations of stakeholders with respect to success factors of a foreign-backed institution need to be coordinated. Whereas the founders may tend to favor high enrollment as well as the involvement of industry, applied research, and consultancy, the academic patrons may rather be interested in high teaching standards and academic rather than entrepreneurial ownership of institutional development. If foreign-backed provision works well, however, it offers an opportunity for amalgamation and adaptation of different national types of teaching and higher education organization to engender truly “transnational” higher education. ■

## Academic Freedom in Muslim Societies

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It has been nearly 15 centuries since Plato's Academy became a casualty of religious zealotry. Emperor Justinian's efforts to impose a standardized version of Christianity throughout the Byzantine Empire resulted not only in widespread persecution of religious minorities but also in the closure of the classical world's preeminent academic institution, after 900 years of educational activity. In this era, the tragedy evolved from (1) the bitter contestation between emergent socioreligious movements, (2) the arrival of a ruling elite eager to side with a particular religious faction rather than to enforce tolerance among competing groups, and (3) the identification of free inquiry as a threat to the consolidation of theocratic rule. Today, as globalization has enhanced the potential of religion to become a source of conflict, scholars in different societies continue to face persecution for pursuing lines of thought at odds with religio-political forces.

In many Muslim societies academic freedom is now a particularly important topic of debate. It can be defined as the right of scholars to pursue intellectual inquiry and to comment publicly without the threat of reprisal on matters within their areas of expertise. Although frequently conflated with the ongoing Danish cartoon controversy—essentially a protracted dispute over what constitutes hate speech—debates over academic freedom in Muslim societies involve efforts to establish the traditions of empirical analysis and critical thought that

have been central to the success of dynamic societies across the globe. Like Justinian's forces, however, some Islamic political groups view the establishment of these traditions as a threat to their efforts to dominate social order.

### ISLAM AND AUTHORITARIANISM

The major obstacle to building respect for academic freedom in Muslim societies is the persistence of authoritarian culture. Given that most Muslim-majority countries remain under a form of authoritarian rule, Muslim academics largely face the same kinds of pressures that scholars confront in other authoritarian states. In Syria, Sudan, and Saudi Arabia, for example, regime leaders dominate university governance and restrict campus environments in much the same way that secular regimes endeavor to control academia in Belarus, Ethiopia, and Burma. It is thus unsurprising that the opponents of academic freedom in all of these countries tend to question the appropriateness of critical intellectualism most stridently when demands for freedom of political expression are raised.

In Muslim societies, to a unique extent, religio-political ideology has come to animate both authoritarian powers and opposition groups. Regime leaders commonly call on favored

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clerics for support, while consortia of Islamic groups—some with histories of violent resistance—constitute major forms of political opposition. Since all sides eagerly seek to build constituencies within the higher education community, the struggle for academic freedom is often overshadowed by political conflict. In Egypt, Pakistan, and Algeria, for example, authoritarian regimes have greatly curtailed campus freedoms to limit the influence of Islamic resistance groups. Similarly, in countries where Islamists have gained control as in present-day Iran (or in Pakistan during the rule of General Mohammed Zia-ul-Haq from 1977 to 1988), campus controls are intended to restrict the activities of secular forces. The common theme in nearly all of these situations includes not simply the domination of the academy but the use of religion as a means to justify the persecution of scholars who dare to question the legitimacy of religio-political authority.

### PERSECUTION

The persecution of scholars takes many forms. In some cases, faculty members have been targeted by shadowy militias, as was Humayun Azad, who was a professor of language and literature at the University of Dhaka in Bangladesh. The eminent professor was an expert on Bengali linguistics and authored