

mitment based on a coherent education or development strategy. They were concerned about Jamaica's freedom to regulate the sector to meet its development goals. Government officials spoke of the "knowledge divide" separating rich and poor countries and recounted the daunting task, when attending international forums, of negotiating with countries vastly superior in human capital and financial resources. Still, neither politicians nor trade and education stakeholders suggested withdrawal of the commitment. Therefore, they called for greater dialogue to ensure Jamaica's interests could be safeguarded and the role of higher education in the development process preserved.

CONCLUSION

Jamaica now recognizes that education policy must objectively engage and balance the social and economic dimensions of knowledge creation and national development. This process requires dialogue between stakeholders in all relevant sectors, to align the country's development strategy with models for public policy and government's role in managing the system. Policymakers admitted the absence of a coherent framework to harness the opportunities and navigate the threats posed by GATS on higher education. There was no process in existence that might have inspired and supported the type of dialogue necessary between the education sector and trade negotiators. The challenge that Jamaica now faces is how to reconcile its GATS commitment of higher education with its development goals. ■

Transnational Education in China: Challenges, Critical Issues, and Strategies for Success

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Over the past decade, China has become an increasingly popular market for transnational education ventures. Through creating student exchanges and twinning programs, to building study centers and establishing full branch campus-

es, higher education institutions and organizations worldwide have eagerly sought to capture a share of the lucrative and expanding Chinese market.

As more institutions have tried their hands in the Chinese market, however, reports are suggesting that to establish and operate a successful campus or program in China is often easier said than done. Regulatory, cultural, and logistical challenges abound—from understanding national, provincial, and local requirements, to establishing effective partnerships and building networks, to finding an appropriate campus and classroom equipment.

To gain a clearer picture of the prospects for transnational education providers in China, the pros and cons of entering the Chinese market, and the challenges involved, the Observatory on Borderless Higher Education commissioned a report on the experiences of three different institutions with successful operations in China: Missouri State University and the Stanford Center for Professional Development, based in the United States; and CIBT School of Business and Technology Corporation, based in Canada. Leaders of each institution were interviewed about key issues, critical challenges, and strategies for success.

REGULATORY ISSUES AND ACCREDITATION

The regulatory environment for transnational education ventures in China consists of a web of interrelated national, provincial, and local regulations and policies, which are interpreted and applied with varying degrees of consistency. The institutional leaders indicate that three regulations are most critical for foreign providers. First, all degree-granting transnational programs must operate in cooperation with a Chinese partner institution. Second, profit generation cannot be the driving objective of such ventures (the regulation itself is not entirely clear, but this appears to be the dominant interpretation). Third, transnational providers are subject to a variety of provincial and local regulations—often best handled by the Chinese partner institutions.

Chinese regulations also state that programs operating in China must be accredited by the relevant accrediting body of the parallel program on the home campus. The institutional leaders emphasized the importance of actively engaging with accrediting bodies—that is, by inviting them to visit the China operations and maintaining transparency, to ensure that the accreditation and academic reputation of the home institution are protected.

PARTNERS

The three institutional leaders judged identifying an appropriate partner institution as an important aspect of any China venture. Key factors include the potential partner's reputation and geographic location (i.e., with sufficient demand for higher education and enough students able to pay foreign tuition rates). In addition, the management style of the partner should be an important consideration. Partners must be flexible,

“open-minded,” and willing to make necessary accommodations for the foreign program.

The primary role of a Chinese partner is to provide facilities including classrooms, dormitories, cafeterias, and office space, as well as operational support by, for example, obtaining relevant licenses and handling inspections. However, the institutional leaders recommended maintaining ultimate control of the academic components of their programs, to protect the reputation and accreditation of the home campuses.

The leaders noted that partnerships are often the sector in which the greatest challenges arise in their China ventures. Negotiating and management styles may be quite different, linguistic nuances may be lost in translation, and exchanging documents for review may call for significant logistical coordination. Taking time to build solid relationships with partners, establishing open lines of communication, and meeting regularly face-to-face can help mitigate these issues.

FACULTY

All three institutions employ both foreign (usually American or Canadian, generally from the home institution) and Chinese instructors. The participation of foreign faculty is a key special advantage for transnational programs and the main reason that many Chinese students enroll. However, the institutional leaders noted the often insurmountable challenge of finding well-qualified foreign faculty who are willing and able to live in China for extended periods of time. Issues such as maintaining a research program and family commitments prevent even faculty for whom the idea of living in China is appealing from doing so.

Each of the three institutions has found a creative solution to this problem—staffing arrangements that involve foreign faculty without requiring them to be on-site for extended periods. In general, these plans involve a combination of limited face-to-face classroom time in China, supplemented by videoconferencing and e-mail contact with students. Chinese course assistants may also participate, which can lend a local perspective to the curriculum and course content.

CURRICULUM AND PEDAGOGY

In all three cases, “Western-ness”—in terms of curriculum, language, and teaching methodology—is a key factor that differentiates the programs from their local competitors. Institutions considering China ventures should carefully evaluate their own strengths and specialties and create a market “niche” for themselves by developing relevant programs and curricula; programs of the Stanford Center for Professional Development, for example, capitalize on the knowledge and reputation of particularly accomplished Stanford faculty in engineering and environmental policy. English-language instruction is also essential; one of the institutional leaders speculated that many students in the institution’s program consider the tuition to be money well spent just for the English instruction they receive, even if they ultimately fail to attain a

degree.

The three institutions employ Western pedagogical techniques in their China programs, although the leaders noted that this often presents a significant challenge for instructors and students, at least initially. Because the pedagogical approach generally employed in Chinese classrooms centers around lecturing by the instructor and memorization and repetition on the part of students, asking students to suddenly go from “sitting passively listening” to engaging in active class discussion and debating with their colleagues and instructors can take students far out of their comfort zone. All three leaders noted that Chinese students can and do adapt to Western pedagogical techniques but may need time and help to do so; as one of the leaders suggested, it is critical to create environments in which “it is safe to challenge the teacher” and colleagues.

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FUTURE PROSPECTS

In 2006, the Chinese government made a decision to rein in higher education growth; it is speculated that tighter regulations and a less favorable attitude toward foreign providers will likely follow. Nonetheless, it seems clear that plenty of opportunities still exist. One of the institutional leaders interviewed estimates that overall only 20 to 30 percent of demand for higher education in China is currently being met. In comparison to other untapped markets, such as India, China has a solid infrastructure for growth in this sector, along with an expanding middle class—the key demographic for education ventures. In this leader’s opinion, it is unlikely that the Chinese education market will saturate for some time.

Ultimately, only time will tell the impact of foreign providers on the Chinese higher education system; government policies and attitudes, moreover, will undoubtedly continue to vary. Based on the experiences of the three institutions profiled in this report and others trying their hands in the Chinese education market, however, it seems clear that certain ventures will most likely succeed and flourish in the Chinese context: projects that capitalize on the strengths of the home institution form solid partnerships with reputable Chinese institutions, are genuinely committed to providing high quality programs, and have the patience to persevere through many challenges. ■