

nology and why there should be reservation up to professor's level in the case of the humanities and social sciences. These divisions seem to be an outcome of the "enclave mentality" despite the fact that the IITs are now trying to bridge the gap between the sciences and humanities by offering some more interdisciplinary programs at the master's and PhD levels.

The IITs remain a small number of centers of academic excellence amidst the plethora of mediocre higher education institutions in India. Beside the faculty, the IIT alumni and current students have also expressed anguish about the quota for faculty. They believe that the IITs' reputation consists of the excellent teaching by highly qualified faculty. To them, reservation for faculty seems a politically motivated decision that will seriously ruin the interests of the students.

The existing IITs already suffer a shortage of about 900 qualified faculty. The government is now planning to start 10 more IITs and Indian Institutes of Management during the 2007–2012 five-year plan to promote technical and management education in India. Instead of providing incentives to the highly qualified sector, faculty reservation policy is likely to dilute the teaching and research standards.

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POLICY GOALS

Supporters of reservation argue that in a caste-ridden and hierarchical society like India it is desirable to find some ways of providing social justice and economic opportunities to all those who were deprived due to social and educational backwardness. Reservation policy is usually deployed to win over the support of the marginalized or underrepresented sectors of society. Reservations or quotas are seen as important instruments for affirmative action.

Whereas affirmative action remains open-ended and without any fixed number, reservations or quotas can have any fixed number or percentage. The latter are generally justified in the name of equity, social justice, or democracy. Reservation for faculty positions at the IITs can be seen as a peculiar outcome of deeply entrenched caste-based discriminations in Indian sociocultural, political, and psychological upbringing. As a political corrective, reservation can be seen as a short-term measure but certainly not a panacea. We need to find a balance between equity and quality in the long run. ■

US Regional Accreditation Abroad: Lessons Learned

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As higher education "globalizes," more institutions abroad have sought US accreditation because it offers a non-governmental, mission-oriented model, with trained and impartial evaluators and applied to both public and private institutions. Is such accreditation possible under existing standards? What are the costs and benefits for institutions and students here and abroad?

To answer these questions, the Middle States Commission on Higher Education (MSCHE), an institutional accreditor, instituted a pilot project in 2002. Although MSCHE has long accredited US institutions abroad that are chartered in the Middle States region, it had not accredited non-US-style institutions incorporated abroad. MSCHE recognized the need to be sensitive to the notion of "cultural imperialism" while applying US standards abroad, but it insisted that applicants meet the commission's usual standards.

All 9 institutions in the pilot were volunteers. MSCHE also acquires information in the course of accrediting 9 institutions abroad incorporated in our region and the 330 locations abroad operated by 79 of our member institutions in over 50 countries. Some in the pilot have achieved accreditation; others are still in the application/candidacy process. They are located in Canada, England, Chile, United Arab Emirates, Taiwan, British Virgin Islands, and Greece. Some institutions withdrew after discovering the depth and continuing nature of US review and monitoring, which includes a long "candidacy" process. There is currently a moratorium on accepting new institutions.

ACCREDITATION STANDARDS

The first question was whether the commission's mission-oriented standards were sufficiently flexible to accommodate practices abroad. So far, the answer seems to be positive, although some institutions have presented special challenges. To meet the requirement that an institution offers "general education" basic skills, MSCHE accepted precollege learning as equivalent. Some institutions changed their governance structures to meet the commission's requirements of an independent governing board with no conflicts of interest. Financial statements required "translation" into US practices. When academic freedom and free-speech issues have arisen,

MSCHE has required assurances of necessary protections. The commission's standard of student-support services was interpreted in the context of local needs and mission.

The major challenges involved fundamental accreditation standards such as a clear mission statement, specified goals to achieve the mission, planning linked to budgeting, and assessment linked to improvement.

EXTERNAL CONSTRAINTS

The challenges extended beyond accreditation standards. Although MSCHE does not require instruction in English, translation of materials required for accreditation was burdensome. Although senior administrators were often fluent in English, communication by faculty and students with a visiting team was hampered. Staff included multilingual team members when possible.

MSCHE contacts the local quality-assurance agency before it visits a location in a country, but without local expertise, it can be difficult to identify an appropriate agency. Local laws and practices have required flexibility. For example, one government did not license for-profit institutions; the institution had to be chartered elsewhere to meet the requirement of valid degree-granting authority. There is also an increasing problem with European and other countries' three-year bachelor's degrees.

Finally, after 9/11 MSCHE adopted a policy limiting travel to certain areas based on US State Department warnings or advisory statements. This forced us to withdraw from the process of accrediting in one country and led to some creative "virtual" visits through teleconferencing.

CAPACITY OF MSCHE

All of the institutions in the project went through the progressive stages of application and candidacy before becoming accredited. The MSCHE process for new institutions requires repeated visits by staff, appointed consultants, and two visiting teams, as well as biannual review and action by the commission over a period that can extend to five years.

These services and travel required significant staff time. If MSCHE were to accept more applicants, additional staff would be needed to monitor and enforce standards abroad. The need to direct existing staff resources to pressing demands in the United States was an important factor in imposing the moratorium.

If profit for MSCHE were the motive, we would have been very disappointed.

BENEFITS

In response to an MSCHE survey, institutions abroad reported that accreditation made it easier to attract faculty and students, to transfer students' credits and degrees, and to compete with local institutions. In some countries, accreditation was not available for some or all types of institutions.

The accreditation process helped the institution to set inter-

national, mission-centered goals, to develop and implement processes for assessing outcomes, and to use results for improvement. Institutions valued the suggestions of teams, especially in countries where local evaluators were not perceived as sufficiently impartial or experienced. Some noted that they wanted to develop a capacity to offer general education. The benefits to US institutions have not been surveyed, but the commission cited several when the pilot project was initiated, including easier transfer of credits and students.

There should be additional benefits to US institutions as education globalizes. Our members are opening more campuses abroad and soliciting more travel by students in both directions. Europe and other regions are working toward standardizing requirements for institutions and quality-assurance agencies. Ongoing US involvement abroad should help bridge the differences among different systems.

CONCLUSION

There is no perfect solution for establishing international standards that address the issues of countries with different educational systems. US accreditors cannot achieve this goal alone. It may be useful for US regional accreditors to accredit institutions abroad in certain situations—especially for institutions that do not raise the types of difficult issues discussed earlier. US regional accreditors can also help to establish quality stan-

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dards abroad by assuring that US-affiliated institutions abroad meet the same standards as domestic locations.

Accreditors might invest their time in projects with broader reach, such as ongoing international efforts by UNESCO, the World Bank, and others to create local quality-assurance systems that suit the needs of each country or region, while still operating within flexible international guidelines. Encouraging local review can produce systems that are accepted locally and that can also offer the quality assurance needed by institutions and students in other countries.

The MSCHE pilot project has been successful in identifying likely areas of similarity and differences among higher education institutions in various countries, and additional information will be gathered as the pilot project progresses. This important first step can serve as the foundation for international cooperation among quality-assurance agencies, and it can provide the agenda for addressing the most significant areas of difference. ■