

Higher education associations' government relations staff should discuss regulatory protection of the terms "university" and "accreditation" with legislators.

OPEN LISTS INTO WHICH BAD THINGS CRAWL

The United Kingdom's Department for Innovation, Universities, and Skills maintains "white lists" of recognized postsecondary institutions. But the department's Web site also directs visitors to the "UK Register of Learning Providers" with "information sources on education and training organizations. . . ." No quality assurance is implied by inclusion in the register, and no controls are imposed requiring legitimacy of entities listed.

Two years ago, "Marquess College London" announced it had "registered as a learning provider" with the Register of Learning Providers. However, Marquess (now called "St.

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Simon's College, London") is a diploma mill run by individuals with close ties to "École Supérieure Universitaire Robert de Sorbon" and "St. Regis University." Marquess/St. Simon's uses its insertion into an uncontrolled government-identified list to foster an illusion of legitimacy.

National agencies that allow unrecognized entities to appear on their rosters, even when no recognition is implied, provide cover for degree mills. The UK Department for Innovation, Universities, and Skills should not associate itself with any unscreened list of postsecondary organizations.

Nongovernmental organizations make the same mistake, sponsoring unfiltered lists and community blogs. Sloan-C, an online learning consortium, opened its membership in 2005. The owners of St Regis immediately injected a half-dozen unsavory "schools" into Sloan-C and placed the Sloan-C logo on their Web sites. Sloan-C restricted its membership and removed the list of members from public display, eliminating the problem.

Concordia College & University penetrated unprotected blogs at the University of Illinois, EDUCAUSE, Syracuse University, Michigan Technical University, Boston College, and the Citadel. Concordia uploaded advertising material and then posted links to the blogs, identifying them as indicators of recognition. Most of the schools responded as soon as they became aware of the problem.

PAYING ATTENTION

Effective quality assurance is a complex challenge for international higher education, even in an ideal world of honorable participants. Attracted by the world's enormous annual expen-

ditures on higher education, the wolves that masquerade as legitimate schools lie in wait in the shadows. Our planning must always include an awareness of these beasts. ■

The Bologna Process: A Weary Leap Forward

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The Bologna process, originated in 1999 by the secretaries of education of 29 European countries and joined later by 17 more, has included ambitious aims: a unified European higher education area with comparable bachelor's and master's degrees, enabling students to move freely and without bureaucratic hurdles between universities.

The goals appear laudable, and the efforts to reach them in the last decade proved enormous. The resulting gains in transparency and the move toward competence deserve the praise received by the Bologna process these days. At the same time, however, many Europeans will be disappointed with Bologna—particularly in self-perceived front-runner countries like Germany and Austria. Focusing on these two countries, this article will analyze issues of disappointment.

IMPLEMENTATION MANAGEMENT

To guarantee comparability of degrees across subjects and countries, Bologna's aim is to encompass all academic disciplines. However, some of the most popular study programs have refused to switch to the new bachelor's and master's degree system. The nonparticipating fields include law and medicine—in Germany and Austria as well as in other European countries. In France, the *grandes écoles*, the traditional cadre universities for the political and business elite, try to avoid Bologna entirely.

The official 2010 deadline for the implementation in all participating countries will by no means be met. As a case in point, in Germany, 35 percent of all freshmen still begin their studies in the "old" degree system (*Magister, Diplom, or Staatsexamen*). The Bologna process required universities to change their administrative and curricular structures fundamentally and to document these in tens of thousands of papers, reports, and module descriptions. Many universities, however, have not received significant additional funding, fac-

ing instead financial stagnation or budget cuts. Hence, universities were often compelled to design new structures with insufficient planning and assessment.

THE RISKS OF SELF-PROCLAIMED GOALS

These difficulties may typify teething problems and could be resolved in the coming years. However, even a fully implemented Bologna system may not meet all its intended effects. For example, no hard data have yet guaranteed a positive or negative impact of Bologna on student mobility. But many aspects of the process raise concerns.

Many university professors have displayed a kind of conservatism in the form of favoring traditional degree structures. To ensure that students do not learn less than their longer educated predecessors, the entire content of a five-year *Diplom* or *Magister* program is compressed into the new three-year bachelor's program. This has left students with little time to plan and prepare for time abroad.

According to a report by the European Universities Association (EUA), 47 percent of higher education institutions stated that some students face problems with the recognition of their credits gained abroad. A course in economics taken at one university might not be recognized elsewhere because the course descriptions do not match. Even if module descriptions adequately correspond, the country-specific application of the European Transfer Credit System (ECTS) leads to a different assessment of the courses, further complicating mobility. The EUA admits that while almost 75 percent of all European universities are using the new system, "incorrect or superficial use of ECTS is currently still widespread."

Apart from student mobility, the Bologna process was con-

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sidered in Germany as instrumental for tackling one of the most crucial problems of higher education—high dropout rates and comparatively long periods of study, especially in the humanities and social sciences. However, in a 2007 study by Berlin's Freie Universität, the university had to admit that these goals could not be attained. Dropout rates soared. In 2006, for example, more than 30 percent of geography students in the new bachelor's program had left after the second year. In the still existing *Diplom* program the dropout rate for 2006 was 6 percent. This reflects the national figures in Germany. The dropout rate in the German higher education system overall has increased to 21 percent. In bachelor's programs, the rate is 30 percent. The problems are also reflected in the number of students in need of psychological or stress counseling, which has gone up since Bologna's kickoff.

A MISSED OPPORTUNITY

Which qualifications and skills will be critical in the 21st century? What knowledge should a 22-year-old university graduate possess today? These questions should have been asked during the planning phase of the Bologna process. However, in many participating countries—particularly Germany and Austria—the opportunity to develop a new vision of education, before reform implementation, was unfortunately missed.

Many US universities discuss these questions on a regular basis, to address the challenges posed by a changing world. The 2004 report of the curriculum review task force of Harvard College suggested that students should learn the tools to go out into the world and "lead productive lives in national and global communities"—not too far from the concept of the founding fathers and mothers of the Bologna system. The task force actually contemplated which specific tools could be used for this objective. Why have so many European countries not seized the moment to start such a debate?

A major crisis is that German professors usually do not regard undergraduate education as significant. And why should they? Professors' advancement and tenure status are entirely dependent on their research performance. No incentives for good teaching exist for professors or for universities themselves. The government-funded excellence competition two years ago selected nine "Excellence Universities"—according to their research proposals. With this neglect of teaching, the Bologna process is still perceived as a bureaucratic burden imposed on underfinanced institutions and not as the incentive for a creative process in each individual university.

NO TIME FOR FATIGUE

Overstretched human and academic resources have led to a "Bologna fatigue." After years of countless committee meetings related to the reform, professors, administrators, and students have become weary. One of the greatest dangers facing the Bologna process is slowing down or even stopping.

Undoubtedly, Bologna has introduced much progress and momentum into higher education in Europe. Still, much needs to be accomplished. A solution of mobility obstacles and persistently high dropout rates will need to involve a better system of supervision and counseling for students, especially at the transition from secondary school to university. When students are expected to graduate after three years, universities should have the responsibility to guarantee a highly structured and effective introductory phase. To achieve this, Europe has to consider a potential move to four-year bachelor's degree programs. All this, however, only makes sense if all European countries embed it in a profound discussion of the aims of higher education. A "great curriculum debate," as former Harvard president Derek Bok called it, needs to start right now at every European university. ■