

this point of view seems not to be the case. Many countries have been run by strong regulatory regimes that have worked well. Singapore, with a largely successful history of foreign collaboration, stringently regulates foreign providers and has been willing to end programs, such as one with the Johns Hopkins University in the United States, which the Singaporeans felt was not living up to its promises. Ministries of education or their equivalents in South Korea, Japan, and some other Asian countries carefully regulate who can enter the local market and monitor performance.

Quality assurance has been a central concern, and few countries have solved that problem. Few countries can effectively monitor standards of their own universities, and foreign institutions do create additional challenges. American branch campuses are monitored by the US accreditors, which have found it difficult to fulfill this task. India's quality-assurance agencies do not function particularly effectively. Monitoring and evaluating numerous foreign transplants may be beyond the capability of the system.

WHAT CAN BE DONE?

Minister Sibal is right that India cannot forever keep its academic doors closed. India, after all, constitutes an increasingly central part of a globalized world. However, simply to throw the doors open would be a serious mistake. India, like other developing countries, needs a clear and transparent policy and regulatory framework. What comprises the rationale for participating in global higher education? What institutions—and investments—from abroad are appropriate for India? What are the criteria for selecting, monitoring, and evaluating foreign institutions? Without answers to these questions—and the policy framework to go along with the answers—opening doors will create long-term problems for India's academic system. ■

How Greed Ruins Academia

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Spend more money and get better universities—this piece of conventional wisdom appears uncontested. Yet, it is not always true. Indeed, Pakistan's experiment provides a counterexample where an enormous cash infusion has served to aggravate problems rather than improve teaching and research quality. This experience in Pakistan may serve as lessons for other developing countries.

Under the Higher Education Commission's grand plans for a massive change, a tidal wave of money hit Pakistan's public universities during General Pervez Musharraf's years, 1999–2008. The budget for university education rose by an astonishing factor of 12 during this period. Although difficult financial times finally stemmed the flood last year, the impact on the university system was profound—some good and a lot bad.

On the positive side, Internet connectivity in universities expanded, distance education was pursued through a new virtual university, a digital library came into operation, some foreign faculty were hired, and students were sent abroad for PhD programs (albeit largely to second-rate institutions). The number of universities doubled, then tripled. The number of PhD students registered at various universities exploded. Huge financial incentives were announced for publishing papers and for supervising PhD students. Salaries skyrocketed.

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THE GREED FACTOR

Naked greed is now destroying the moral fibre of Pakistan's academia. Professors across the country are clamoring to lift even minimal requirements that could assure quality education. This tactic is happening in two critical ways. First, to benefit from threefold increases in salaries for tenure-track positions, professors are speedily removing all barriers for their promotions. Second, they want to be able to take on more PhD students, whether these students have the requisite academic capacity or not. Having more students translates into proportionately more money in each professor's pocket.

Nowhere are these attempts more evident than at Quaid-e-Azam University, Pakistan's flagship public university. Barely two miles from the presidency and the prime minister's secretariat, it was once an island of excellence in a shallow sea of mediocrity. Most other universities started lower, and their decay has gone further and faster than at Quaid-e-Azam. Some are recognizable as universities in name only.

Quaid-e-Azam University's departments of physics and economics were especially well known 35 years ago, which is when I joined the university. The faculty was small and not many PhD degrees were awarded in those days. Money was scarce, but standards were fairly good and approached those at a reasonable US university. But as time passed, less care was taken in appointing new faculty members. Politics began to dominate over merit, and quality slipped—a slow decline is now

turning into a rapid collapse.

Last month, at a formal meeting, the professors at my university voted to make life still easier for themselves. The Academic Council, the key decision-making body of the university, decided that henceforth no applicant for a university teaching position, whether at the associate professor or professor level, could be required to give an open seminar or lecture as a part of the selection process. Open lectures were deemed by the council as illegal, unjust, and a ploy for victimizing teachers.

This is mind-boggling. Public presentations allow an applicant's subject competence and ability to communicate to be assessed by the academic community. (For the record, the author of this article insisted that requiring open lectures from candidates is standard practice in every decent university in the world. This perspective prompted angry demands for his dismissal as chairman of his department.)

ELIMINATING INTERNATIONAL TESTING

A second major decision also dealt a stunning blow to the future of Quaid-e-Azam University, and Pakistan's other universities as well. The council voted 25–12 that the PhD candidates did not have to conform to international standards. It decided to overturn its earlier acceptance of the Higher Education Commission's requirement that the international Graduate Record Examination (GRE) subject tests must be passed by a candidate prior to the award of a PhD degree. Some professors gleefully noted that the commission had been mortally weakened by the new government's removal of its chairman, Dr. Atta-ur-Rahman, and argued that advantage needed to be taken of this happy fact.

Quaid-e-Azam University's decision to eliminate international testing has resonated well throughout other universities in Pakistan.

Eventually responding to my emphatic public criticism that substandard PhD degrees were being awarded by Pakistani universities, in 2006 the authorities declared that PhD candidates must “pass” the GRE subject test, administered by the Education Testing Service located in Princeton, United States.

Initially, the Higher Education Commission stonewalled the meaning of “pass,” but two years later this label came to mean achieving a score in the 40th percentile or better, in the subject test. This level was rather low but had drawn howls of protest from students and their supervisors. The GRE test is known as fairly elementary and pitched at the bachelor's level (i.e., 16-years of education). It has, however, proved to be too difficult for many Pakistani PhD students even at the *end* of their studies. In spite of several tries, most cannot meet the 40th percentile passing mark.

Quaid-e-Azam University's decision to eliminate international testing has resonated well throughout other universities in Pakistan. Each professor gets paid a few hundred thousand rupees (a few thousand dollars) per PhD produced, with a current maximum of 10 students per supervisor at the university. Lifting the GRE requirement removes a threat to the additional income of their supervisors. To keep up appearances, from now on a token internal test will be used instead. It is hard to imagine that any student will be allowed to fail.

This horrible mess comes from a misguided policy that emphasized numbers over all else.

While the decision of the professors to do away with international testing has been greeted with relief by many PhD students at Quaid-e-Azam University, better students face a foreboding sense of an endless downward slide.

Although many students recognize international tests as difficult, they also understand them as a real measure of what they have learned. All students, whether they do well or otherwise, say they learned a great deal of subject matter in preparing for this challenge and felt more educated. Although students in all other departments at Quaid-e-Azam have reportedly failed, some students in my department have done reasonably well. Over the last year, a total of 9 students in the physics department have cleared the 40th percentile requirement. Three students, whom the department subsequently honored, secured over 75th percentile. One cannot deny, however, that most PhD students, perhaps because of their poor schooling, simply do not meet good PhD standards.

A SAD ENDING

This horrible mess comes from a misguided policy that emphasized numbers over all else. A propaganda blitz by the former Higher Education Commission chairman had convinced overseas institutions and prestigious publications—such as the World Bank and Nature—that a revolution in Pakistan's higher education was in progress. These outsiders were led down the garden path but perhaps did not want to look too closely.

However, now that the money is gone, construction of university buildings has been frozen, leaving them half-completed. Fantastically, expensive research equipment litters the country, much of which is unused. Academic standards are plummeting. Seven years of furious spending has little to show for it.

The bottom line: how you spend matters much more than how much you spend. Let this be a lesson to those who think that it only takes money to make universities good. ■