

Transitions in the distribution of power (which as noted above have been modest) appear to have little relation to changes in the quality of facilities. In 1992, the more advanced systems had superior facilities, and that positive finding remained so in 2007. The main pattern of change has existed in several of the emerging countries—notably Brazil, Mexico, Hong Kong, and Korea—to raise the quality of their facilities in keeping with the quality of facilities in the more-advanced systems. Indeed, academics in Hong Kong perceive their facilities to be the best in 2007, whereas the Hong Kong ratings were relatively low in 1992. While we have only 13 items available for a temporal comparison, an improvement in the quality of managerial support for teaching appears between 1992 and 2007, though this tendency is less apparent concerning support for research.

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#### DECLINE IN LOYALTY

Perhaps the most striking change over the 1992–2007 period has been the decline in the institutional loyalty of academics, presaged above. In 1992, academics in most of the participating countries indicated a high level of commitment to their academic discipline, department, and institution. In 2007, academics in all countries continue to show a strong sense of commitment to their disciplines. However, 6 of the 8 countries for which panel data are available faculty reveal a somewhat weakened sense of loyalty to their department and a sharp decline in the level of commitment to their institution. For these 6 countries, 9 out of 10 academics express a strong sense of affiliation with their discipline in 2007, while fewer than 6 out of 10 express a strong affiliation with their institution. Correlates of low institutional commitment or loyalty include a perception that the prevailing management style is top-down, a perception that facilities are inadequate and support services too bureaucratic. The emerging countries of Brazil and Mexico are the exceptions, with high levels of institutional loyalty expressed in 1992 and 2007.

The decline in institutional loyalty appears to have consequences. Academics who express low institutional loyalty are more likely to favor research over teaching, more likely to devote a greater percentage of their time to research and a lesser percentage of their time to teaching, and less likely to engage in university service and administrative tasks.

#### IMPLICATIONS

For the higher education systems in the more advanced societies, it may be that a significant minority of academics, demoralized by decision-making processes and what is per-

ceived as an inadequate working environment, are reducing the effort they devote to the required tasks of teaching and routine administration. Thus, these systems may be losing valuable academic energy.

In contrast, in several of the emerging countries shared governance is, at best, weakly practiced. Yet, the strong managers have been able to deliver in terms of excellent facilities and efficient support services. Moreover, academics in these more authoritarian systems give their leaders reasonable ratings as wise decision makers who have created a clarity of institutional mission and have provided competent management. ■

## The Quest for Quality in China's Higher Education

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With a dramatic increase in undergraduate enrollment starting in 1999, China began to enter the mass higher education era in 2002. Given the rising public skepticism about the quality of higher education following the expansion, in 2003 the Ministry of Education launched the Quality and Reform of Undergraduate Teaching and Learning Project, which began to be upgraded and cosponsored by the Ministries of Education and Finance, in 2007.

#### THE QUALITY PROJECT

The quality project has focused on enhancing the quality of undergraduate teaching and learning by means of reforms and resource sharing. It comprises six types of granting programs—including disciplinary-program revamping and specialized accreditation; curriculum, textbook, and resource sharing; teaching and learning and talent-nurturing innovation; instructional-team and eminent faculty-team building; evaluation and public disclosure of general teaching and learning conditions; and support for postsecondary institutions in the western regions of China.

During the 11th five-year-plan period from 2006 to 2010, the central government has planned to spend a total of 2.5 billion RMB (approximately US\$366,241,338) on the aforementioned programs. In addition, both the central and provincial governments have granted a variety of awards and honors in recognition of the contributions made by individuals and teams to teaching and learning reforms. Despite these and many other efforts, it is not clear whether they will yield the

desired results due to the following considerations.

#### ISSUES AND CHALLENGES

*Unaddressed conflicts of interest.* The grants, awards, and honors of the project have conveyed at least two encouraging messages. First, the project has resituated teaching as a researchable and rewarded scholarship, which symbolizes the elevation of teaching in the status hierarchy of the collegial value system. Second, the reward system itself has been used as an avenue for change, thus giving incentives to encourage faculty involvement in reform activities.

Despite their positive nature, it is uncertain whether these messages can be sent out to the ordinary faculty because there is no policy in place to regulate the entire application process. Since some applicants, in particular the academic and/or administrative unit head, are usually eligible to evaluate qualifications of other applicants, their de facto umpire-player role may enable them to put the interest of themselves, friends, or associates above that of others. Issues such as these could be endlessly cited. As a result, perceived conflicts of interest exist almost everywhere.

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winner tended to be the academic and/or administrative unit head at various levels. Thus, between 2007 and 2009, 300 people were honored as leaders of the State Level Instructional Teams, 83 percent of whom came from this background. In 2008, 97 people received the State Level Award for Distinguished Teachers, 79 percent of whom also came from this background. Interestingly, even among winners without having administrative positions in the bureaucratic hierarchy, some were academicians while others were former deans, department chairs, or heads of an academic or advisory board of their institutions or government agencies.

Some applicants take unfair advantage of their blended role, which justifies their control over academic and administrative affairs and, at the same time, affords them undue privileges, such as getting better rewards, and/or being partially or even fully exempted from the minimum workload requirements for faculty or administrators. This reality has aroused not only suspicion as to whether these “winners” can ensure fair play in their units but also criticism regarding the credibility of the award itself, which is demoralizing for the ordinary faculty members.

*The gap between rhetoric and reality.* Indeed, the quality project, especially the current teaching and learning reform, has received enormous rhetorical support from academia. However, it is unclear whether postsecondary institutions have

endeavored to engage, motivate, and support faculty in the reform process. At many institutions, the grants and awards seem to be tantamount to achievements in teaching and learning reforms. Evidence is rarely provided to explain their impact on student learning outcomes. Unless recognized with awards or honors, faculty's commitment to teaching is scarcely valued and rewarded. Despite the rhetoric of the importance of teaching and learning, few institutions have an office in place to provide support for or to nourish the scholarship of teaching and learning. In short, there has been no substantial reform in teaching or learning at the institutional, programmatic, and classroom levels.

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#### CONCLUSION

The quality project is largely a reaction of the central government to the rising public skepticism about the quality of undergraduate education, following the expansion starting in 1999. Although it has received enormous rhetorical support from academia, it is difficult to conclude or to substantiate that the project has enhanced the quality of undergraduate teaching and learning due to the fact that it is not evidence based.

Thus, postsecondary institutions urgently need to articulate and embrace their values so as to create and sustain an environment of trust while minimizing demoralizing factors in undergraduate teaching and learning reforms. Meanwhile, they must actively solicit faculty's professional commitment by providing support and reward to facilitate their change and experiments in teaching and learning at the institutional, programmatic, and classroom levels.

However, given the current bureaucratic leadership in higher education, it may be difficult to bolster faculty's morale or to secure commitment overnight. Thus, both the government and postsecondary institutions must begin to address some difficult and taboo issues related to power, politics, and pecking order inside academia so that unheroic leadership will be valued and nurtured in the orderly pursuit of high-quality undergraduate education. ■