

Monitoring Internationalization of Higher Education

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Internationalization of higher education has been growing in importance and taking on new and diverse approaches. In various regions of the world it has also come to be viewed through different, context-based lenses that are not always rose-colored. The Global Survey of Internationalization conducted regularly by the International Association of Universities, since 2003, aims to monitor some of the main developments of this process. This article offers a glimpse at one or two findings of the third such survey, published in September 2010. It focuses particularly on the respondents' views concerning the significance of internationalization, the obstacles they perceive standing in the way of more progress, and the risks that may be of concern to them.

Adopting the Jane Knight's 2006 definition—which sees internationalization as the process of integrating an international, intercultural and/or global dimension into the purpose, functions (teaching, research and service) and delivery of higher education—6,000 institutions around the world were sent an electronic questionnaire. The analysis of results is based on 745 completed questionnaires received from higher education institutions in 115

countries. This represents a significant growth in the number of responses—in 2005 the International Association of Universities received 526 completed responses from 95 countries—though the response rate remains modest. The growth can be attributed to a number of factors, including the availability of the questionnaire in five world languages. It is noteworthy that the response rate was highest among institutions in the Middle East, lowest in Latin America and the Caribbean, and on par in Europe, Asia and Pacific, and Africa. Overall, European higher education institutions represent the largest number of completed questionnaires.

#### **INTERNATIONALIZATION—A CENTRAL POLICY FOR LEADERSHIP**

Many around the world maintain that internationalization has been mainstreamed, embedded in institutional strategic plans, no longer a luxury, and instead an essential part of all reforms. The survey results confirm this with 87 percent of the respondents, indicating that internationalization is part of the strategic plan; and 78 percent, reporting that the policy area had grown in distinction in the past three years. The relevance is felt at the most senior levels of the university—as presidents and vice chancellors are seen as the most notable internal driver for the process.

#### **VISIBLE IMPACT OF THE ECONOMIC CRISIS**

Internationalization is not without obstacles or risks. Focusing on the obstacles and comparing them over time, the recent survey shows the extent to which financial constraints are now a major barrier to internationalization. In the 3rd Global Survey, the vast majority of the respondents cited lack of funding as the

top internal and external obstacle. This may only confirm the “informed” scholars’ tacit knowledge of the current economic situation in higher education institutions, but being able to cite these results that have constituted a significant change since 2005 is useful.

This strong focus on financial constraints was conspicuously absent in the survey’s findings in 2005. The issue of funding was not among the top three obstacles cited. Instead, in 2005 the institutions pointed, to matters such as: lack of faculty interest and involvement, administrative inertia and bureaucratic difficulties, and lack of policy or strategy to lead the process. The concern of funding for internationalization is likely to have serious consequences for how the process develops in the future, potentially driving toward more “commercial” approaches.

#### **EUROPE, REGIONAL COOPERATION, AND CONTEXTUAL DIFFERENCES**

The 3rd Global Survey also serves to demonstrate some continuity in trends—precisely regarding the geographic priorities for internationalization. Europe, with its continuously evolving Bologna process (or the “European higher education area” since 2010) and the funding schemes offered by the European Union to promote student mobility and cooperation, remains at the top of the priority list. This was the situation in 2005 when, as now, the findings showed the power of intraregional cooperation in all parts of the world, except North America.

Even if a study based on nearly 750 completed questionnaires is far from globally representative, examining data from institutions in 115 nations in every region of the world offers a uniquely global perspective on internationalization.

Moreover, this bird's-eye view can, due to sufficiently large regional subsets of replies, allow for regional analysis and comparisons of the data. These global surveys make it possible to analyze and compare how African higher education institutions perceive internationalization and compare those results with those received from Europe, Latin America, and elsewhere. Understanding these regional differences is critical to the future of the internationalization process and to appreciating how and why the perceptions of this process are changing, not always in a positive manner.

Continued fear of commercialization, brain drain, and the risk of the expansion in the number of degree mills are the key risks perceived by institutional respondents. The different results across regions are, however, rather striking. For example, a large number of respondents in Europe and North America either did not respond to the question about risks or responded negatively, underlining the differences in the perception of the impact of internationalization.

#### **CAUTION FOR THE FUTURE**

Just as economic globalization is pervasive, likewise is internationalization in higher education. How well institutions are positioned to benefit from the process, how well they can pursue their goals, and even how empowered they are to choose their partners differ around the world. In the development of institutional internationalization strategies, the overall context matters a great deal; and significant inequalities exist. The surveys, rich in comparative data, serve to underline these differences and hopefully to stimulate institutional actors to determine what needs to be considered when working in partnerships

with institutions from around the world, what pitfalls to avoid, and how to ensure that benefits are shared.