

Foreign Outposts of Colleges and Universities

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Over the past several decades, many colleges and universities have been expanding their global footprint through the development of research sites, outreach offices, and classrooms in foreign countries. At times, these initiatives are done in collaboration with other educational institutions, as dual or joint degrees. More recently, though, the stand-alone extension of the home campus has garnered scholarly and policy attention. Often called international branch campuses, they have been critiqued and lauded, even as their scale and scope remain unclear. In attempts to provide some clarity to this international phenomenon, however, it has been realized that not all institutions accept the label “branch” to define their activities. Moreover, other methods universities use to offer degrees off campus seem to be absent from academic and policy discussions.

DEFINING THE BRANCH CAMPUS

There are several definitions of international branch campuses in the literature, but all focus on specifying the links between home and branch governance and academic oversight. The working definition we have used is typical: “An entity that is owned, at least in part, by a foreign education provider; operated in the name of the foreign education provider; engages in at least some face-to-face teaching; and provides access to an entire academic program that leads to a credential awarded by the foreign education provider.”

Through this lens, we have sought to study how, where, and why colleges and universities are developing a physical presence in other educational markets. The key elements defining international branch campuses are that foreign locations should use a name that reflects their home campus parentage, have an actual on-the-ground presence (online only does not count), and award full degrees to enrolled students. Ownership is important, too, so thus it should be avoided to count franchising or 4+0 arrangements, where the home campus has no real stake in the foreign operation. Using this definition, we have found nearly 200 such entities scattered across every inhabitable continent.

Based on our list of international branch campuses, local branch campus leaders have been surveyed to gain a better understanding of their governance and academic activities. It has been found, however, that several respondents rejected our branch campus label. They typically justified their exclusion from our definition, by referencing labels used in local quality assurance or government regulations. For example, one respondent noted that they were “an autonomous university accredited by the Ministry of Higher Education and Scientific Research in the [United Arab Emirates]. Therefore, we are not

considered as a branch campus in the UAE.” This campus, however, is listed as a branch on the main university Web page.

On the other hand, some locations claimed the branch campus label even when they fell outside of our definition. In an example from another country, the respondent advocated for recognition in this research, arguing that their home government and accreditation agency both approved the branch as an “off-site location for foreign nationals to matriculate and receive a [university] degree.” There seemed to be no ownership stake in the initiative, however, which had originally excluded their programs from the survey.

FOREIGN OUTPOST APPROACH TO OFFSHORE DELIVERY

The responses received to the survey led us to consider the existence of other forms of off-shore campuses. There is apparently a hidden population of “foreign outposts” operated by geographically dispersed universities. Foreign outposts have forms that diverge from formal international branch campus definitions but still represent intriguing variations of the branch campus phenomenon.

Manipal University, based in southern India, provides an excellent example of how an institution can use a variety of foreign outposts to develop a multinational presence. Established in 1953, Manipal is the first private educational institution in India to become an autonomous, or “deemed,” university—meaning that the government has recognized the institution to be of high academic quality. Through the eponymous Manipal Education Group, its corporate parent, there are several educational institutions that bear the Manipal name in India and abroad. All of these institutions draw from the programs and curriculum of the original home campus, which also provides academic

oversight. These outposts have many characteristics of branch campuses, but only one—Manipal University in Dubai—meets all the standard criteria for an international branch campus.

Manipal University in Nepal could be considered an international branch campus as the curriculum is provided by Manipal faculty at a Manipal facility, except the degrees are formally granted by Katmandu University—following local Nepalese regulations. Manipal Melaka Medical University is also a branch of Manipal University, but it requires students to complete a preclinical curriculum in India, before completing their medical training in Malaysian hospitals and health centers. The American University of Antigua is a wholly owned subsidiary of the Manipal Group, with a medical curriculum supported by Manipal University, but operates with more academic autonomy than the other outposts. Manipal International University, also located in Malaysia, is more like a spin-off than a branch. It relies on the Manipal administrative and academic infrastructure but was established as a private Malaysian university. Finally, Sikkim Manipal University has all the characteristics of a branch, except it was established as a public-private partnership with the small Indian state of Sikkim, rather than a foreign government.

These foreign outposts are all physically located in a separate policy and regulatory environment. They offer full-degree programs, all linked administratively and academically through the Manipal Education Group. They are linked also through common ownership and centralized investments in the Manipal system. Most also share the Manipal name; and though the Antigua outpost has not adopted the Manipal brand, it is an integrated part of the Manipal education family.

Although these locations may be questionable as international branch campuses, as foreign outposts they are obvious extensions of the Manipal brand beyond the home campus.

CONCLUSION

A variety of ways exist in which a university from one country can establish a presence in another country. The Manipal example, plus the responses from some campus leaders to our international branch campus definition, suggests great diversity within this subgroup of higher education institutions. A broader consideration of all forms of foreign outposts is needed. Both research and policy need to examine the diversity of strategies employed by colleges and universities, as they expand their global footprint. It is important not to allow restrictive definitions to blind us from the innovations that are now happening on the ground.