

a bank account for asylum seekers, which can make it very difficult to receive stipend money, pay for rent or university fees.

EMERGING SOLUTIONS

To help lower these and other access barriers, the federal government, state governments, universities, and civil society initiatives have come up with some concrete measures: In August, the German Federal Ministry of Education and Research pledged to reserve an additional 2,400 places at Germany's pathway colleges (Studienkollegs), which prepare prospective international students for university studies in Germany. In conjunction with this measure, some states like Lower Saxony and Saarland have agreed to drop formal admission requirements for applicants with sufficient German language skills, who successfully complete a Studienkolleg program. Meanwhile, the state of Baden-

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Württemberg is offering 50 scholarships of up to EUR 750 per month to Syrian students whose asylum case has been decided. In addition, dozens of universities such as the University of Hildesheim and the University of Bayreuth encourage asylum seekers to take German lessons or audit courses. Others go one step further: The Ludwig Maximilians University in Munich has started to admit asylum seekers as exchange students so that they can study for academic credit even without German-language skills. These efforts are underpinned by various grassroots initiatives such as Kiron, a tuition-free online university for asylum seekers, which offers accredited degrees in partnership with brick and mortar universities, such as the University of Rostock.

With the help of these and other initiatives and programs, asylum seekers are increasingly able to play a more active role in their educational and professional development. However, since integration is not a one-way street, universities will need to be prepared to help their new students adjust to student life on and off campus. ■

The Scourge of Fraud and Corruption in Higher Education

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No sector appears to be immune from fraud and corruption, not even those that have a direct impact on society's welfare: health, education, sports, politics, or religion. Higher education is no exception. "Corruption for resources, fame and notoriety places extraordinary pressures on higher education institutions (...). In some instances, corruption has invaded whole systems of higher education and threatens the reputation of research products and graduates, regardless of their guilt and innocence." This quote, which comes from Transparency International's 2013 *Global Corruption Report: Education* captures the situation. That corruption had infected higher education has been known for decades. What is perhaps not realized is its magnitude, its extent and that it is constantly growing. Hardly any week goes by now without the appearance of an article on corruption in higher education. The stories cover not only individual students or faculty but also whole institutions and even countries. Corruption in higher education has even crossed borders and become global. And what is surfacing is probably only the tip of the iceberg.

Corruption in higher education affects the developed and the developing world equally, even if the motivation and the actors are different. In simplistic terms, in the West, corruption arises more frequently from the commercialization of higher education, from the growing tendency to convert the university into a corporate, money-generating entity, and from the strong linkages between university and industry, the latter often funding and controlling the research of the former. In the developing world, corruption results more often from the pressure to obtain admission to prestigious universities, especially to professional programs, and to succeed once admitted. It also results from the compulsion among faculty to raise additional income and to quickly climb the academic ladder through publications and research.

GLOBAL SCAN

A quick scan of recent stories on fraud and corruption in some countries around the world gives an insight into the seriousness of the situation.

Australia. In April 2015, the Four Corners program of the Australian Broadcasting Corporation revealed examples of how the standards of Australian universities are being compromised through corrupt practices, mainly as a result of the pressure on them to recruit foreign students and to ensure that they pass the exams in order to obtain much-needed funds. The examples given included the involvement of fraudulent recruitment agents, universities graduating poorly qualified or unqualified nurses, widespread plagiarism, cheating and exploitation. The program was appropriately labelled “Degrees of Deception.” In 2014, a story appeared describing how fraud and corruption within and outside Australia’s immigration services enabled thousands of foreign students to acquire illegal permanent residency visas in Australia, thereby resulting in unemployment of Australian graduates.

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Russia. In September 2014, a paper was published in the online journal *International Education Studies*, describing the alarming situation of corruption in modern Russian higher education. It mentions that nearly 50 percent of Russian students—about 7.5 million in the 2008/2009 academic year—had to face corruption, and adds that “the corruption component of the whole industry could be compared with the budget of a small country.” The paper gives examples of the wide range of corrupt practices in higher education, mentioning the case of a dean who accepted a bribe of €30,000 for a PhD admission, and feedback from the Moscow Police that some 30–40 professors are caught each year for accepting bribes for good grades.

Africa. It was reported that in May 2015, South African authorities shut down 42 bogus colleges and universities that were offering fake and unaccredited programs, including three bogus, supposedly US-based universities offering degrees in 15 days. In Nigeria, which has the largest higher education system in Africa, areas where corruption occurs most frequently among academic staff are in promotions, journals and book publications, extortion of money for handouts and marks, and sexual harassment. In a 2012 anonymous survey among 475 students in three East African universities, about a third of the students admitted to

plagiarism and to fabrication of references, 25 percent to collusion in an examination to communicate answers, and 5 percent to impersonating someone else in an examination. Even a small country like Mauritius has not been immune to fraud. A couple of supposedly branch campuses of private Indian universities, set up in Mauritius without the necessary approval of Indian authorities and offering degrees that would not be recognized in Mauritius or India, are in the process of being closed down.

China. A 2015 article in the e-journal *International Higher Education* refers to corruption in China’s higher education system as a “malignant tumor” and mentions that since the 1990s, corruption has had a serious impact on the academic activities of Chinese universities. With regard to research, it gives examples of plagiarism, of researchers pocketing research grant funding, and of favoritism in the appointment of research staff. Previously in China, professors used to enjoy a high status, with pay and conditions commensurate with those granted to high-ranking officials. Since 1988, however, the grade has been differentiated into 6–8 levels, which is unique in the academic world. This has led to a dramatic increase in the number of professors, resulting not only in a loss of their status, but equally facilitating the promotion of many of them on the basis of personal connections rather than on academic merit. Similarly, the dramatic increase in the number of doctoral students has led to corrupt practices in the approval of doctoral programs of universities by the Ministry of Education and in the appointment of doctoral advisors.

India. Perhaps the most shocking corruption scandal, known as the Vyapam scam, has just surfaced in India. Vyapam is a government body in the Indian state of Madhya Pradesh and is responsible for conducting entrance examinations for government jobs and for admissions to higher education institutions, including the much sought-after medical colleges. There had been earlier reports of irregularities in Vyapam, but until recently no one had imagined the scale of the admission and recruitment scam, involving politicians, businessmen, senior officials, and some 2,500 impersonators in examinations. More than 2,000 people have been arrested. Worse, tens of people directly involved in the scam have died, some in suspected cases of murder and suicide. The matter has now been referred to India’s Central Bureau of Investigation.

DEGREE MILLS

The sale of fake degree certificates of well-established universities and the operation of institutions that provide degrees with hardly any period of study, commonly known as degree mills, are now well-known. There are reported cases

of even politicians, religious leaders, and other senior officials in various countries, developed and developing, who have purchased fake degrees. Most of the degree mills are located in North America and Europe, while others are scattered globally in hidden locations. There are also higher education institutions that operate without any accreditation, or which have been accredited by bogus accreditation bodies, known as accreditation mills.

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So far, attempts at stopping the operation of fake degree manufacturers and degree mills have had limited success. UNESCO has created a portal that lists all the recognized higher education institutions in different regions of the world, which is helpful. Wikipedia has, on its web site, a list of unaccredited institutions of higher education, listed alphabetically, from all over the world. It also has a similar list of unrecognized higher education accreditation organizations. While such lists are equally helpful, the legitimacy of the information on the Wikipedia site is uncertain and the site itself acknowledges that the lists may be incomplete. No organization has so far established and made public a list of fake degree manufacturers, or degree or accreditation mills, no doubt fearing legal and political repercussions, or perhaps because such institutions often tend to be ephemeral, disappearing as quickly as they appeared.

A WAY FORWARD

Fighting corruption in higher education is a mammoth task, mainly because it concerns so many different actors and stakeholders within and outside the sector. But fighting it is a must because, if allowed to spread, the national, and global consequences could be very serious. There are several actions that have been taken at institutional, national, and global level to address corruption in higher education, and these need to be reinforced and extended, and their experiences widely shared.

The University of Nairobi, Kenya, has developed an anti-corruption policy document covering the activities of the whole institution, with a special section on teaching and conduct of examinations. Since the 1990s the University of Mauritius has put in place a transparent, computerized

selection system which uses the secondary school qualifications of candidates for their admission to all programs. Turnitin is a well-known software to detect plagiarism, and there are also now several free plagiarism detecting tools available online, such as PlagTacker or Anti-Plagiarism. The small, private Botho University in Botswana has put in place an Academic Honesty Unit and has effectively reduced plagiarism among its students through the use of Turnitin and a simple Plagiarism Policy.

At a global level, Transparency International has established an Anti-Corruption Helpdesk that provides on demand to subscribers the relevant available research on any corruption-related question. The Center for International Higher Education of Boston College, US, has created an online Higher Education Corruption Monitor—which provides updated resources (news, articles, videos, etc.) on corruption in higher education around the world, serving as a forum for awareness-creation and information exchange. UNESCO's International Institute for Education Planning (IIEP) also has a web-based resource platform, ETICO, targeting the issue of ethics and corruption in education, including higher education. The US-based Council for Higher Accreditation (CHEA) has a special section on degree and accreditation mills on its web site and, in 2009, issued a statement together with UNESCO on how to discourage degree mills in higher education. More recently, in July 2015, the CHEA International Quality Group produced a Policy Brief outlining how quality assurance can make a difference in fighting corruption in higher education.

In March 2015, the IIEP organized a Policy Forum on Planning Higher Education Integrity, which brought together some 60 experts and stakeholders from around the world to discuss recent and innovative initiatives in addressing fraud and corruption in higher education. At the conclusion of the Forum, participants called for the creation of an international coalition on higher education integrity. It is time now to move forward to set up such a coalition to devise appropriate strategies, policies, and actions for combatting the scourge. The coalition could perhaps be initiated by Transparency International and it should comprise all the major associations and organizations that have experience in dealing with corruption in higher education. The guiding principle for the coalition should be that higher education is neither a business nor an industry, but a social good impregnated with values. ■
