

# How International Branch Campuses Stand Out from the Crowd

RACHAEL MEROLA

*Rachael Merola is senior researcher at the Observatory on Borderless Higher Education (OBHE). This article originally appeared on the OBHE website: [www.obhe.ac.uk](http://www.obhe.ac.uk). E-mail: [rachael.merola@obhe.org](mailto:rachael.merola@obhe.org).*

Transnational education (TNE) is an unwieldy beast. Its many forms are difficult to capture in description, and its constant evolution makes arriving at a concrete definition a daring endeavor. International branch campuses (IBCs), in particular, have evolved and diversified greatly in their 150 year history in terms of size, scope, ownership, and support framework. But in all the variety of TNE around the world, what exactly distinguishes an IBC?

## WHAT IS (AND IS NOT) AN IBC?

The Observatory on Borderless Higher Education (OBHE), along with the Cross-Border Education Research Team (C-BERT) at SUNY Albany, describe an international branch campus as “an entity that is owned, at least in part, by a foreign education provider; operated in the name of the foreign education provider; and provides access to an entire academic program, substantially on site, leading to a degree awarded by the foreign education provider.”

There are currently around 250 higher education providers worldwide that fit this description, and many others that fulfill some, but not all the requirements to be considered IBCs. Of these, certain common characteristics emerge, making it possible to identify several common types of foreign higher education outposts that are not IBCs.

For example, campuses that are home to degree programs that are only partly administered on site, with a substantial portion taking place at another campus, are not considered IBCs. This describes a number of campuses that are used as study abroad centers for undergraduate study abroad, or EMBA/MBA programs that have an international study component. Because a substantial portion of the degree is completed elsewhere, these models are not considered IBCs.

In another example, campuses that do not require students to be physically present to undertake their studies are also excluded from the definition of branch campuses. This eliminates the numerous distance learning programs offered at many universities at both undergraduate and graduate levels, in which the foreign outpost of the university is used for recruiting, enrollment, testing, or other non-learning purposes, but engages in little or no face-to-face

teaching.

A third common model of non-IBC TNE occurs when the degree at the foreign campus is awarded by an entity that is not the home university, for example, twinning programs in India, or Yale-NUS, the liberal arts college in Singapore operated in collaboration with the National University of Singapore. These are excluded from the definition of branch campuses since the control of the venture rests with the foreign partner.

## CHARACTERISTICS OF IBCS

According to the Observatory on Borderless Higher Education's latest count, more than 60 IBCs have opened in the past five years. Examining these branches reveals several notable characteristics. In particular, many branch campuses begin with a limited portfolio of programs, following a strategy of deliberate expansion and careful response to market demands. At current count, 21 IBCs opened in the last five years currently offer more than five academic degree programs, and only nine offer more than 10 programs. Whether these small branches will grow to the size and scale of their home institutions, or remain niche endeavors, depends on the strategy of the institution as well as the success of the endeavor.

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Another notable characteristic of branch campuses is that they cover a number of ownership and governance models. In some countries—many of which are hosts to numerous IBCs such as the United Arab Emirates, Singapore, Qatar, and Malaysia—a top-down model, sometimes controlled by the government, is often utilized, in contrast to the autonomous governing models seen in the United States, Canada, Australia, and the United Kingdom—major players in education export. These cross-cultural dynamics require sensitivity and awareness to navigate when setting up the governance of an IBC.

Some universities see IBCs as a way to provide education under the model of their home country's education system rather than that of the host country. In particular in countries where academic freedom is limited, IBC plans and operations have stalled and/or encountered opposition from faculty and other stakeholders. Such has been the

case at New York University in Abu Dhabi, Duke University-Kunshan in China, and the University of Nottingham in Malaysia, among others. All three have persisted despite opposition, but have required significant communication from leadership regarding how the campus fits into the university's strategic plan.

While some IBCs are wholly owned by the home campus, the majority receive some sort of support, whether financial, logistical, or infrastructural, from the host country. An arrangement frequent in certain countries—especially those with education hubs—entails partnership with the host government in which the local or national government subsidizes the cost of the local campus for at least some period of time. In turn, the government has the right to rescind its support at any time. The Incheon Global Campus in Korea follows this model, and has so far attracted four foreign institutions to open branches. The NYU Abu Dhabi campus construction and operational costs were entirely covered by the Abu Dhabi government. Likewise, the city of Kunshan provided the land and building for the physical campus of Duke Kunshan University.

Another characteristic of international branch campuses is that they are clearly identifiable as belonging to the home institution by their name. While much TNE exists through franchising and creation of entirely new institutions (i.e. Torrens University Australia, operated by the for-profit American provider Laureate), nearly all branch campuses retain the name of the home institution in their own name. For example, all campuses of the *Ecole supérieure des arts et techniques de la mode* (ESMOD) contain the name “ESMOD,” though the rest of the name is tailored to fit the local context. Likewise, Penang Medical College displays its affiliation with the Royal College of Surgeons in Ireland—its parent institution—in its logo.

#### CONCLUSION

By narrowing the definition of what is, and is not, an international branch campus, a picture of the full landscape of TNE emerges. From this, we see a broad vista of the international branch campuses in existence, which reveals a wide range of international activity, ownership models, name representation, and size and scope of academic offering, all under the umbrella of the IBC definition. An updated look at these campuses will be revealed in the upcoming IBC report, to be released by the Observatory and C-BERT at SUNY Albany in November 2016. ■

## Transnational Education in Chinese Secondary Education

FION CHOON BOEY LIM

*Fion Choon Boey Lim is educational quality coordinator at Victoria University College, Australia. E-mail: fion.lim@vu.edu.au.*

Transnational education (TNE) in China has received much attention in the last decade. However, literature in this area has traditionally focused on the degree level, with increasing attention given to dual degree collaboration. There has been less attention given to the increasing transnational activities at secondary school level in China.

In China, the first three years of secondary school education are compulsory. The second part consists of three years of non-compulsory study (senior secondary). At the end of the three years, students sit for the National College Entrance Examination—the infamous *gaokao*. Parents and students are well known for their anxiety over the outcomes of this examination. However, in recent years, the increasing wealth of many middle-income parents and the liberalization of secondary school policy that permits foreign collaboration, have allowed more transnational activities at this level. A growing trend in Sino-foreign collaboration can be observed, where foreign curricula, usually western, are offered in collaboration with a Chinese public or private school, usually as a guaranteed pathway to a foreign degree. To date, there has been little research, discussion, or debate on this transnational secondary education activity. Given its growth rate, however, changes in the forms of control by the Chinese government can be expected.

#### GROWTH OF FOREIGN SECONDARY SCHOOL PROGRAMS

Foreign secondary school curricula are not completely new in China. The International Baccalaureate (IB) has been offered in China since 1991. While the 1990s were a boom time when modern China opened up its markets to foreign trade, foreign education, particularly at the secondary school level, has been tightly controlled and considered relatively hard to penetrate. In recent times, however, a new trend in Sino-foreign secondary school collaboration has been observed. A number of Chinese secondary schools have partnered with foreign schools to offer preuniversity programs. The Cambridge International Examination of GCE “O” and “A” levels, the Australian VCE curriculum, and a variety of other foundation programs have since flourished.

Many students who graduate from foreign secondary school programs find themselves with comparatively easy