

INTERNATIONAL HIGHER EDUCATION

THE BOSTON COLLEGE CENTER FOR INTERNATIONAL HIGHER EDUCATION

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Education, Science,
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Editor Philip G. Altbach and Hans de Wit

Associate Editors Rebecca Schendel, Gerardo Blanco, and Chris Glass

Publication Editors H el ene Bernot Uller o and Tessa DeLaquil

Editorial Office

Center for International Higher Education
Campion Hall
Boston College
Chestnut Hill, MA 02467–USA

Tel: +1 617 552-4236

E-mail: ihe@bc.edu

www.internationalhighereducation.net

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ISSN: 1084-0613 (print),
2372-4501 (online)

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The 2021 Nobelists: Lessons for Higher Education, Science, and Society

Philip G. Altbach and Tessa DeLaquil

The Nobel prizes in the sciences (chemistry, economics, physics, and physiology/medicine,) were recently awarded for 2021, and as usual they not only recognize top scientists and their discoveries, but they also have lessons for contemporary universities and science. It is worth reflecting on some general trends in this year's selection of Nobelists. It is, of course, necessary to understand that Nobel awards, with few exceptions, recognize impressive scientific achievements of recent decades, and "reward the discoveries that have conferred the greatest benefit to humankind."

Who and Where?

Here is a brief overview of who received this year's prizes and where they are located. All of the 10 winners this year were men, as is unfortunately the norm for these awards—only 25 women have previously been awarded Nobel prizes in the sciences. (In 2020, exceptionally, three out of 10 were women). This year's winners are currently affiliated with universities in only three countries—seven in the United States, two in Germany, and one in Italy. Three are located at research institutes (two at Germany's Max-Planck-Institutes, and one at the US Howard Hughes Medical Institute) and seven at universities. As is typical, the affiliated universities are top-ranked, highly funded, and well-recognized research universities, for instance Stanford University and Princeton University.

The Origin, Education, and Careers of the 2021 Nobelists

Interestingly, only two of this year's Nobel laureates were born in the United States (others were born in Canada, Germany, Italy, Japan, Lebanon, the Netherlands, and the United Kingdom), although six out of 10 work in the United States at present. Six out of 10 earned their PhDs from US universities, with two from Germany and one each from Japan and Italy. Their undergraduate origins, on the other hand, reflect the diversity of the laureates' countries of birth—only two out of 10 earned their bachelor's degrees from US institutions. The others studied in Canada, Germany, Italy, Japan, Lebanon, the Netherlands, and Scotland—all at top universities and colleges. For graduate study, they moved from the peripheries to centers, if they were not already at the centers.

The career patterns of Nobel laureates are also significant. Only four of the 2021 cohort have remained within a single country (the United States), sometimes with several career moves between top universities, while the other six have had at least one international career experience—ranging from visiting professorships to full-time positions. These experiences often include the laureates' own countries of birth, but also other national contexts that boast top institutions, such as Germany and the United Kingdom.

Science is International—But Limited and Stratified

The education and careers of this year's Nobel laureates show that top scientists are indeed internationally mobile. Some have held appointments in several countries—all at top institutions, and they tend to gravitate to the countries with the most advanced scientific institutions—especially the United States.

The careers of this year's Nobelists are international, but within an elite circle, indicating the extent of global science and the importance of cross-fertilization of ideas. The educational and career journeys of this year's and recent Nobel laureates, especially in terms of graduate student mobility, scholar exchange, and some instances of joint

Abstract

The 2021 Nobel prizes in science reveal much about trends in higher education and science. They show that only top global universities produce Nobelists and that the winners are educated at top universities. The United States and United Kingdom currently have an advantage. Nobel laureates are born in a diversity of countries but often migrate to the United States. The 2021 Nobelists in the sciences include no women—and women are in general dramatically underrepresented.

All of the 10 winners this year were men, as is unfortunately the norm for these awards—only 25 women have previously been awarded Nobel prizes in the sciences.

international collaborative work, may signal a shift in the make-up of the elite scholars of the academic world to include more characteristics of research internationalization.

In keeping with previous years, the 2021 Nobel laureates are largely confined to a few countries in terms of their currently affiliated universities, with no representation this year from anywhere other than Europe and the United States. It is worth noting that, in some cases, the research that led to the Nobel prize took place at a different institution or country from the laureates' current affiliation or location. There is little sign yet of a "rise of Asia," despite the massive research investments made especially by China, and the existence of highly ranked universities in Hong Kong, Japan, Singapore, and South Korea. It is the case that Nobel laureates are a somewhat "lagging indicator" of scientific achievement, but one might expect that the near monopoly of North America and Western Europe might have been somewhat weakened by now. Academe, perhaps especially at the top levels of research universities, changes slowly.

What the 2021 Nobel Prizes Teach Us about Universities and Science

It is clear that the United States dominates the Nobel prizes in the sciences. In 2021, scientists working in US universities snared seven out of 10 prizes. Of course, all of the winners were not born or educated at the undergraduate level in the United States. For this year, only two were US-born and undergraduate educated—although six received their doctorates from American universities, as mentioned above. This is not unusual and shows the attraction of American research universities.

The Nobel prizes show that basic science is both concentrated and stratified. For the past two decades, 103 out of a total of 230 Nobel prizes in the four scientific fields were won by scientists born in the United States. An additional 38 were born in other English-speaking countries. This was not always the case. Prior to World War II, German-speaking countries ranked high—but the Nazi regime destroyed German scientific domination. Indeed, until 1948, Germany often led in terms of the number of prizes by citizenship, at which point the United Kingdom led for a number of years until the United States overtook the count in 1960, due in part to the immigration of Jewish and other scientists fleeing Nazi oppression.

Might the United States and other Anglophone countries lose their dominant positions in the coming years? Despite the much heralded "rise of China" and some evidence of the geographic spread of basic research, it is unlikely that the balance will fundamentally alter in the foreseeable future. The ecosystem of the top American universities is stable—good infrastructure, a culture of research excellence, high (by global academic standards) salaries, competitively available research funding, academic freedom and reasonable autonomy, and, of great importance, the ability and willingness to attract and retain top global talent.

Some change is possible, perhaps likely, and highly desirable. Expanding path-breaking basic research globally would diversify themes and people. And the wave of academic excellence initiatives that are taking place in 15 countries, including China, France, Germany, Russia, and others may, in the medium-term, strengthen the best research universities. The use of English as the global scientific language levels the playing field a bit by giving the global scientific community a common language, while at the same time undeniably giving an advantage to those countries using English as their native medium.

Philip G. Altbach is research professor and distinguished fellow, and Tessa DeLaquil is PhD student and research assistant, Center for International Higher Education, Boston College, US. Emails: altbach@bc.edu and tessa.delaquil@bc.edu.

This article has been previously published in University World News.

Conclusion

Nobel prize-level research clearly operates in a rarified stratosphere of global science. And in today's "results-oriented" academic atmosphere, long-term thinking and orientation toward basic research is considered to be an unaffordable luxury by most governments and universities. Yet, as the Nobel prize committees recognize each year, it is precisely such fundamental research that yields the most brilliant practical results in the long run—such as the work by David Julius and Ardem Patapoutian on the discovery of receptors for temperature and touch, which Francis Collins, director of the US National Institutes of Health, suggests may support the [development of pain treatment](#). It is worth considering, then, whether in our efforts to support research internationalization through funding, mobility, and collaboration schemes, we should also reevaluate our approach to supporting basic research at a global scale. ▲

A Missed Opportunity and Limited Vision for Internationalization

Hans de Wit and Elspeth Jones

On October 21, 2021, international education organizations from nine Western countries (the Canadian Bureau for International Education [CBIE]; the Finnish National Agency for Education [EDUFI]; Campus France; the German Academic Exchange Service [DAAD]; the Centre for the academic promotion and study orientation in Italy [Uni-Italia]; the Dutch organisation for internationalisation in education [Nuffic]; the Norwegian Directorate for Higher Education and Skills; the British Council; and the Institute of International Education [IIE] in the United States) published a [Common Statement in Support of International Education and Mobility](#) as a result of their 2021 international education summit. The statement is accompanied by brief national reports from the nine organizations (in the case of the United States, the report is by the US Department of State, the US Department of Education, and Education USA).

One Step Forward, Two Steps Back

The title of the summit and resulting document, *What's Ahead: Building a More Equitable, Sustainable and Peaceful World through International Exchange in a Post-Pandemic World*, appear at first glance to be quite advanced and promising as a comprehensive and inclusive approach to international education for the future. Both in this title and throughout the statement and national reports, reference to inclusivity, equity, and sustainability suggest a focus on what had certainly become key action lines for the internationalization of higher education before the pandemic, and have become even more so since then. Policies and initiatives of these nine organizations, such as the Scholars Rescue Fund, the work on refugee access to higher education, capacity building and cooperation with other regions, internationalization at home, and [internationalization for society](#), are mentioned in the national reports by most of the nine organizations. It is positive that these organizations set their objectives for the future on international education and mobility.

Unfortunately, the short statement itself might at best be described as one step forward and two steps back in advancing the internationalization of education.

Western Orientation

In 2014, we argued that internationalization should no longer be considered in terms of a westernized, largely Anglo-Saxon, and predominantly English-speaking paradigm. Many other scholars and policy advisors have argued for a more inclusive and less elitist approach to internationalization than international exchange and mobility can offer. Voices calling for decolonization of the curriculum and for less emphasis on the Anglosphere and Western dominance grow increasingly loud, and articles on these topics are frequently seen in news reports as well as in peer-reviewed journals. When the Nelson Mandela Bay Global Dialogue was convened in 2014, it included associations from all regions in the world. The resulting [Declaration](#) on the Future of Internationalization of Higher Education stated that “internationalization must be based on mutual benefit and development for entities and individuals in the developed, emerging and developing countries.” Have we gone backward since 2014? Why a summit and common statement from nine organizations, which only represent the westernized, developed world, instead of actively involving perspectives and positions from other regions?

Abstract

The *Common Statement in Support of International Education and Mobility*, recently issued by the international education organizations of nine Western countries as a result of their 2021 summit is a missed opportunity. It does not include the perspectives of other regions of the world, and promotes physical mobility, in contrast to the impetus given to more inclusive virtual mobility initiatives during the COVID-19 pandemic.

Voices calling for decolonization of the curriculum and for less emphasis on the Anglosphere and Western dominance grow increasingly loud.

Focus on Physical Mobility

Perhaps even more surprising is the statement's rather explicit appeal to reinforce degree mobility toward the nine countries, as well as exchange between these countries. It asks "leaders at every level to support measures to allow more students around the world to spend part of their education in other countries and to keep our own academic doors open to incoming students from abroad." And although it is followed by a call to respond to the needs of refugees, the impression remains that the most important postpandemic action is to support inbound mobility into the nine countries.

This is particularly strange, since each of those nine countries faces very different student recruitment challenges. On the one hand, in the Netherlands, the overall growth in student numbers has increased dramatically. As a result, international students are now making up 23 percent of the total student population—causing Dutch universities to urge the government to provide legal options to curb their number. On the other hand, the United States has seen a significant drop in the number of undergraduate students; as a result of this overall reduction, US universities—especially those with the steepest declines—are encouraged to become more active in recruiting international students and using agents to do so.

The individual reports of the European and Canadian organizations suggest a more comprehensive and inclusive approach that, unfortunately, is not sufficiently reflected in the common statement, nor in the report from the United States. The national focus of that document is quite overt, with the following statement: "We recognize that the U.S. government has a unique role in international education because of its responsibility to the American people; its purview over foreign affairs, national security, and economic and border policy; its capacity to provide national and global leadership; and its role in affecting how the United States is perceived globally."

The common statement also explicitly promotes physical mobility and exchange, which has only ever been an option for a very small percentage of the global student body. It does not refer to virtual mobility and exchange, collaborative online international learning or virtual work placement. All these alternatives to physical mobility received added impetus as a result of the pandemic, although many institutions had already begun to develop creative approaches to such initiatives before then. The power of these alternatives to offer more inclusive and sustainable forms of international engagement has become increasingly recognized, enabling more students to be involved than is possible through physical mobility alone.

A Missed Opportunity

The national reports make frequent reference to the importance of digital internationalization, but in the common statement it is surprisingly absent. Also missing from it is reference to the crucial role played by internationalization of the curriculum at home, the social impact of internationalization (internationalization for society), and global learning for all students. The overall impression given by the common statement is that of a Western, physical mobility-focused approach to international education, something that may have been relevant in the past, but is much less so in the present and for the future.

It has to be said, this is a missed opportunity and does not appear to reflect what several of the organizations involved are advocating. Partners in the Global South may continue to wonder what it takes for their voices to be heard in the internationalization debate. ▲

Hans de Wit is professor emeritus and distinguished fellow at the Center for International Higher Education, Boston College, US. Email: dewitj@bc.edu.

Elsbeth Jones is professor emerita of internationalisation of higher education at Leeds Beckett University, UK. Email: e.jones@leedsbeckett.ac.uk.

This article is an updated version of an article published in University World News.

Can Quality Assurance Beat Corruption in Higher Education?

Irene Glendinning

If you believe that corruption in education is a rare phenomenon or that this only applies to low-income countries, then think again. In this article, I share some insights gained from more than a decade of research into how academic integrity and corruption are perceived and managed in different parts of the world.

Surveying Corruption

Between 2010 and 2018, European colleagues and I surveyed higher education institutions (HEIs) in 38 European and Eurasian countries, asking about their academic integrity policies and practices. One project was funded by the European Commission and two by the Council of Europe. Although our initial interest was to reduce student plagiarism, we discovered complex influences in relationships between students, their teachers, university governance, and local political, cultural, and societal norms. Bribery, fraud, nepotism, and deliberate cheating were reported almost everywhere we looked. Although there were national and regional differences in the extent and nature, educational corruption was apparent in every country we studied.

During 2016–2017, two UK colleagues and I conducted a global study on corruption in higher education for the Council for Higher Education Accreditation's International Quality Group (CIQG). CIQG were interested in exploring how accreditation agencies and quality assurance bodies (AQABs) in different parts of the world respond to corrupt practices that they encounter during their operations. We defined corruption as deliberate actions to gain an unfair advantage for monetary or other benefits. We surveyed using an online questionnaire, capturing 69 valid responses, and we conducted 22 interviews.

Quality Assurance and Academic Integrity

Connecting quality assurance (QA) and academic integrity is an important dynamic, especially for higher education. But QA can mean very different things to different people. A QA expert whom I interviewed for this research said that “quality” is often used without fully understanding what it means. I believe that basing the assurance of quality on academic standards and integrity is more meaningful and powerful than considering “quality” in isolation. HEIs that do not invest in academic integrity are at risk of undermining their quality and standards. All institutions need systemic internal checks on quality, standards, and integrity to counter corruption and malpractice. QA audit panels and accreditation bodies can provide an important external perspective and help to enhance institutional practices. However, institutions are naturally selective about what they share with AQABs; looking for or presenting evidence of corruption within an institutional context is not normally part of anyone's agenda.

Globally, accreditation is a more common reason for external institutional scrutiny than QA auditing, but the motivation and *modus operandi* of accreditation bodies vary hugely. Accreditation can be used to decide on allocation of government funding, student grants, and loans; by professional bodies to check on subject content and assessment methods for professional registration of graduates; and to confer recognition and kudos on an institution or discipline. Some AQABs operate commercially, for profit, and not all are interested in quality and standards.

Abstract

Corruption undermines the operational basis for civil and cultural society. Corruption in higher education or research leads to an erosion of trust in academic credentials and claims of scientific breakthroughs. External bodies tasked with quality assurance and accreditation of higher education providers have an important role for ensuring that appropriate standards are maintained. However, in recent research, responses from reputable bodies to concerns about corruption did not always provide the expected reassurances.

Connecting quality assurance (QA) and academic integrity is an important dynamic, especially for higher education.

What Does Corruption in Higher Education Look Like?

The CIQG study explored how corruption is addressed in all aspects of higher education, encompassing government responsibilities, the external quality assurance process, institutional governance, the teaching role, admissions and recruitment, student learning and assessment, qualifications and credentials, academic research, and scholarly publishing.

In an educational context, corruption normally involves people neglecting or flouting their responsibilities, taking advantage of privileges, and/or breaching the trust placed in them. Corrupt practices can be initiated by any person involved in the educational process, ranging from government officials to students. Financial gain is a common motivator for corruption, but the driver could be personal, educational, or related to career advancement or other rationales, including sexual harassment. Sometimes, people are persuaded or compelled toward engaging in unacceptable practices, as victims and perpetrators, through ignorance, pressure, bullying, or desperation. Some involved are consciously corrupt, but others may see no alternative or do not consider their conduct corrupt.

Corruption in education means that someone gains an unfair advantage at the expense of others. In extreme cases, corruption can have serious public safety implications, such as when a qualified but underskilled professional engineer or medic has responsibility for life-critical decisions.

In countries where loyalty to family and friends are cultural requirements, nepotism and ignoring conflicts of interest are often normalized and not considered to be forms of corruption. Conversely, in high trust countries such as New Zealand, or in Scandinavia, there is far less public discussion about corruption, and often denial, when suggestions of malpractice are raised.

The literature that we explored showed many forms of corruption in every country and educational system. Some types of corruption are fueled by local conditions and contexts. For example, low wages or precarity of employment for professors or recruiters make it more likely that attempted bribery will be successful, to raise grades, overlook cheating, or secure student admission.

Conclusions

Our findings demonstrated that very few of the AQAB respondents had any concerns about the types of corruption reported in literature, press, media, and social media, and even fewer of these organizations were taking action to address the underlying causes of corruption in education and research. The AQABs taking action, mainly from Anglophone countries, especially Australia, Ireland, New Zealand, and the United Kingdom, have been instrumental in improving national legislative powers against essay mills and fake universities. They have created guidance for educational institutions, raising awareness and helping them develop effective policies.

The more active AQABs, together with governments and nongovernmental organizations, researchers, and international agencies, are proactively investigating and sharing knowledge to provide guidance, training, effective services, and support. We also owe a huge debt to investigative journalism for providing key evidence about corruption in education that would be difficult to uncover through academic research.

In August 2018, CIQG published the [“Inventory of Key Questions for Quality Assurance and Accreditation Organizations,”](#) based on our recommendations, which, together with [the report from our research](#), is downloadable for free from their website.

Understanding the threats and underlying causes will help to ensure that appropriate action is taken to counter corruption. Both proactive and reactive approaches are needed by those with decision-making powers and the authority and responsibility to act, both to root out corruption and respond when evidence arises. International collaboration is required where the nature and global scale of corruption demands. The starting point is recognizing that something needs to be done about all forms of corruption in education. Instilling integrity in the next generation of professionals throughout their education is an important part of the broader response against corruption in society.▲

Irene Glendinning is associate professor at the Office of Teaching and Learning, Coventry University, UK. Email: csx128@coventry.ac.uk

Optimistic Postpandemic Outlooks for International Branch Campuses

Jana Maria Kleibert

The future of international branch campuses (IBCs) has been much debated by scholars and practitioners of international higher education. Given the often risky financial investments into the physical presences of universities abroad, the question of the durability or sustainability of branch campuses—as an internationalization strategy—has been raised many times. With the current disruptions of transnational education operations caused by the COVID-19 pandemic, the question has gained new impetus. Will we see a wave of branch campus closures following the pandemic? Or will they adopt new roles and increase in relevance for their mother institutions? Our survey of IBC managers, funded by the Regional Studies Association, shows a surprisingly high level of optimism for the future.

IBCs Severely Impacted by the Pandemic

The COVID-19 pandemic has disrupted the operations of campuses worldwide. IBCs have been heavily impacted by the pandemic, as they tend to rely more on cross-border linkages and mobility of students and staff. The TRANSEDU team at the Leibniz Institute for Research on Society and Space conducted a global survey of international campus managers from 15 countries. The sample reflects well the geographies of IBCs: The international education hubs of Malaysia, Qatar, Singapore, and the United Arab Emirates were each represented by at least one respondent. In total, 29 IBC managers completed the online survey, a response rate of 14 percent. More than 80 percent of all respondents reported that their campus was strongly or very strongly impacted by the pandemic. The challenges that were most frequently mentioned were campus shut-downs, problems with student well-being, and financial difficulties. Most campuses (74 percent) did not receive any financial assistance to help them through the crisis. Other challenges were related to complying with COVID-19 regulations; delivering teaching; human resources and staffing; and a decrease in student enrollments.

IBCs have experienced manifold challenges prior to the pandemic, and campus closures have occurred not infrequently. Geopolitical changes, as well as strategic decisions by host governments to reduce the influence of foreign partners, present further challenges to the existence of IBCs. Recently, and to the surprise of most, Yale-NUS College, a joint liberal arts college operated by Yale University and the National University of Singapore, announced that it will close in 2025 and will be merged with an existing program at NUS (see [Hoe Yeong Loke](#), “Closure of Yale-NUS College: Unclear Reasons, But Clear Implications,” in this issue). Higher education scholars have pointed to the many inherent risks of IBC development, which involves sizable investments of time and financial resources and can lead to substantial financial and reputational losses if the campuses fail. Many campuses have struggled financially and experience considerable challenges in their day-to-day operations. Crises like the COVID-19 pandemic add to these pressures and may push campuses that are already in financial difficulties over the edge.

New Roles and Adapted Strategies

IBCs are a heterogeneous category. IBCs differ according to contexts in sending and host countries, and are set up with a number of different rationales in mind. Some have a highly international student body, while others largely rely on making international degrees available to students in the campus' location.

Abstract

International higher education has been severely impacted by the COVID-19 pandemic. This article reveals how international branch campuses across the globe have been impacted by the pandemic and how institutional strategies have been adapted. The results show how international branch campuses, while being heavily affected, simultaneously offer opportunities for geographically diversified teaching that may increase the resilience of the home campus. Campus managers express high levels of optimism about the future of international branch campuses.

Four-fifths of all respondents think that their campus will remain open for at least five more years.

Jana Maria Kleibert is a junior research group leader at the Leibniz Institute for Research on Society and Space and Humboldt-Universität zu Berlin, Germany. Email: jana.kleibert@leibniz-irs.de.

Interestingly, since the pandemic, two-thirds of offshore campus managers have changed their strategies toward recruiting more domestic students. Campuses located in Malaysia, for instance, have all shifted their focus toward the Malaysian student market. Moreover, several IBCs have been able to enroll students who were set to study in the country of origin of the IBC. More than a quarter of IBC managers used this strategy to increase their student numbers. In Malaysia, the strategy of transforming a transnational education zone into a “transit hub” for students waiting to become international students was launched. In this way, students are able to start their classes at home prior to going abroad.

Although physical cross-border mobility was interrupted, universities with IBCs in countries with high numbers of potential outbound students were able to collect tuition fees from international students. For some institutions, IBCs have constituted an opportunity for geographic diversification, enabling business continuity during the pandemic. To a lesser extent, offshore campus managers recruited students from neighboring countries or within the region, and a few campuses managed to access revenue sources other than tuition fees to deal with pandemic-related financial constraints.

Optimistic Outlook

Despite increasingly challenging environments in many host countries, IBC managers in our survey have an optimistic outlook on the post-COVID-19 future, not foreseeing any waves of campus closures. Four-fifths of all respondents think that their campus will remain open for at least five more years, which even in prepandemic times was a high figure, given the tendency to rather frequent closures among IBCs. Only two campus managers believe that their campuses are not resilient, while a third of those surveyed believe operations at their IBCs to be somewhat resilient, and a striking 59 percent believe that their campuses are highly resilient. Better yet, the University of Nottingham Malaysia decided to buy out its Malaysian joint-venture partners for GBP 23 million and thus increased investments into its IBC during the pandemic.

Given the changing landscape of international higher education and the rise of blended learning, the majority of our respondents believe that IBCs may not only be able to survive a pandemic, but also increase the resilience of their home institutions by enabling geographic diversification and the opportunity to teach across multiple locations in the medium to long term.

This reveals important insights for the postpandemic future of IBCs as a phenomenon. While digitalization and online learning have been widely adopted and rapidly expanded upon during the pandemic, the limits of online-only interaction have also been felt quite severely. Students continue to desire face-to-face interactions, making blended learning a potential growth area. Rather than seeing the end of physical university spaces, we will most likely see a change in the requirements for campus spaces. Universities may opt for several smaller presences operating as a geographically diversified network to support both face-to-face and online learning. Although we may continue to witness closures in the future, the recent experience may give IBCs a renewed boost. ▲

The Future University in the Eyes of Today's Students

Dana Abdrasheva, Diana Morales, and Emma Sabzalieva

What do today's students think about the university of the future? What are their hopes and fears, when thinking ahead to possible scenarios for higher education in 2050? This article presents the voices of some of the 741 respondents from around the world, who participated in one of 55 focus group consultations conducted in 2020–2021 as part of UNESCO's priority to examine the [futures of education](#).

In connection with this global initiative, higher education is brought into focus through the [UNESCO World Higher Education Conference 2022](#) as well as by the UNESCO International Institute for Higher Education in Latin America and the Caribbean (IESALC), through a large-scale project on the [plural futures of higher education](#). This project has included a global consultation with higher education experts, published as [Thinking Higher and Beyond: Perspectives on the Futures of Higher Education to 2050](#), and a [public consultation](#) that engaged over 1,200 people in 100 countries during 2021.

Focus Group Participants

Focus groups participants, 502 of whom were students and 239 active in fields related to higher education (e.g., government, NGOs, academia), recognize the adverse effects of the pandemic as well as opportunities created by it on the processes of higher education. Some of the main topics that emerged from the focus groups are discussed below.

The Campus Experience Will Be Transformed

The campus, currently the hub of most students' higher education experiences, will be complemented—but not replaced—by integrating technology into teaching and learning. As one focus group participant noted, “an equilibrium must be reached where students are also able to learn by real experiences, human interaction and physical expression, without relying heavily, or borderline exclusively, on digital tools.”

While fears of a [global digital divide](#) abound, focus group participants felt that technology could have a positive impact on inclusion and accessibility. For example, one participant said that “digitizing classrooms will allow access to top education institutes for people who were geographically or otherwise left out previously. A student in rural California will be able to take classes online through top schools in San Francisco or Los Angeles. Any student around the world no matter [their] location will be able to access higher education.”

Although students were optimistic about the role of technology in opening up higher education, they also felt that the future may hold more “market characteristics.” It was felt that this competition would ultimately drive up quality in universities and colleges, but at the same time lead to greater stratification throughout society in terms of education.

A Paradigm Shift from Academic Mobility to Engagement

Participants recognized that “mobility will turn into connectivity” and that traveling to other countries would not always be necessary in the future, because students will learn how to stay engaged with the global community in different ways. Students see their future university attending to local needs by tackling all kinds of inequalities, while remaining responsive to international collaborations.

Participants believe that technology will act as an equalizer between countries in the future, and that “mobility opportunities should reach other countries and be more international.” Students and educators talked about restructured university degrees

Abstract

What do today's students think about the university of the future? What are their hopes and fears, when thinking ahead to 2050? Based on focus groups consultations conducted as part of UNESCO's Futures of Education initiative, key issues include the transformation of campus experiences by technology; a paradigm shift from mobility to engagement; cocreated learning environments; climate change concerns; links between higher education and the labor market; and the impact of artificial intelligence on employment.

that would consequently lead to changes in curriculum content as well as forms of academic mobility. Students trust that virtual forms of mobility will be equally beneficial for intercultural exchange and understanding.

Cocreation of Learning Environments

Participants foresee “new forms of knowledge construction, based on cooperative and collaborative relationships between teachers-students and students-students. For this, it is essential to reconfigure the role of the teacher who, in addition to preserving his/her role as a specialist, must assume more [of the] role of tutor, mediator, facilitator, and motivator.” In this future, students are more active about what they want and need according to their contexts and realities. They will be cocreators in their own higher education, which includes having the ability to shape their learning pathways.

Climate Change, A Ubiquitous Concern

Among all participants, climate change is a major issue, particularly its lack of coverage in today’s higher education curricula. Focus group participants articulated the need for more interdisciplinary and accessible teaching and learning. This should incorporate climate change: “Topics such as sustainability and guidelines focused on social causes, will be more discussed and included.”

Another participant noted that “[c]limate change has effects on various diseases, but there are few specific links made during our education. We need to connect the dots and incorporate the impact of climate change.”

Links between Higher Education and the Labor Market

Looking ahead, the links between higher education and the labor market are also important concerns for students. While job markets will vary, students remained practical in their perception that a university degree serves to elevate their economic and social status. Unemployment is seen as a big threat in the future, and the university’s role in teaching students to be “market ready” will continue to be significant.

However, participants also looked beyond the financial benefits of employment, into fulfillment and reward from their chosen area of work. As one participant noted, the “fluid options of lifelong learning” present many opportunities for continuous growth and development beyond the “four walls of the classroom.” Students are aware of the need to reskill and upskill to maintain stable employment.

Impact of Artificial Intelligence on Employment

Automation and robotization will further affect human interactions and will specifically appear in the service field when “cars ... drive themselves, shopping will move away from brick and mortar and lead to more convenient lifestyles.” However, participants also expressed their concerns about the social effects of such change and predict various upheavals and social disorders.

Connectivity

If the findings from these very varied focus group consultations had to be summarized in one word, it would be connectivity. Participants no longer see higher education as created only by institutions, but connected to students in the cocreation of their learning pathways. Further, global processes should be connected with local communities. Students want to become better communicators and collaborators to thrive in a technologically interlinked world where learning runs throughout their entire lives. Individuals will continually upgrade their skills to stay relevant and connected in fluid labor markets. Participants acknowledge their role within the structures of higher education because they want to become better learners and serve global and local communities to the best of their capacity.

These focus groups have revealed students’ hopes and concerns, as they think ahead to 2050. The next big question is: Are universities ready to attend to students’ visions of the futures of higher education? ▲

Looking ahead, the links between higher education and the labor market are also important concerns for students.

Dana Abdrasheva is a fellow, Diana Morales is a junior policy analyst, and Emma Sabzalieva is senior policy analyst at the UNESCO International Institute for Higher Education in Latin America and the Caribbean (IESALC)

Emails: d.abdrasheva@unesco.org; d.morales@unesco.org; e.sabzalieva@unesco.org.

UNESCO–IESALC worked with the Future of Learning and Innovation team at UNESCO HQ to analyze the focus group data and wishes to acknowledge the contributions and support of Keith Holmes, Tioluwani Aderibigbe, Leanne Davey, and Cory Richardson.

Global Liberal Education: Contradictory Trends and Heightened Controversy

Mary-Ellen Boyle

Liberal education (also known as liberal arts, liberal arts and sciences) expanded globally during the first two decades of this century, with dynamism continuing today. Schools and programs are opening and closing; professional networks are starting and disbanding; and scholarly books and conferences are offering critical analyses as well as pragmatic assistance. The dynamism is characterized by differentiation and politicization: Schools are distinguishing themselves from each other and distancing themselves from US models, as Western values are being challenged and indigenous approaches created.

What Is Liberal Education, And Where Is It Offered?

Liberal education is easiest to define by what it is not: It offers an alternative to specialist and professional education at the postsecondary level. Sometimes mistakenly equated with general education, its core characteristics include comprehensive multidisciplinary knowledge, along with fostering intellectual qualities such as critical thinking, communication, creativity, learning to learn, problem solving, and social responsibility. Pedagogies are interactive and student-centered. These characteristics prevail across the cultures, nations, and regions that adopt the philosophy, suggesting universal agreement about core practices. These characteristics are not inherently politicized, but the term “liberal” has connotations of freedom and choice, values that are not embraced worldwide. Hence the controversy.

Based on the above definition, over 200 schools and programs have been identified outside the United States, up from about 100 at the turn of the century. The increase can be attributed to the overall expansion and continued differentiation in the tertiary sector, with growth primarily, but not entirely, in Asia—China in the lead. Efforts have also begun in places as diverse as Argentina, Germany, Ghana, and the UAE, with schools or programs now found in approximately 60 countries. Much of this growth has been explicitly US influenced, while other efforts reference European, Muslim, or Confucian traditions—or claim to be modern innovations. At the same time, a handful of schools have closed or discontinued their liberal education foci, typically because of leadership, politics, and/or finances.

This dynamism and growth in the sector have generated a burst of scholarly literature. Emerging research is addressing thorny questions about purpose and politics, since liberal education is found even in illiberal regimes. Comparative case studies show the nature of differentiation across and within nations, and studies of classroom activity address how to nurture the qualities of mind associated with liberal education. Access and affordability remain key research and policy making topics.

Contradictory Trends: Convergence and Differentiation

Even with the sharp spike in programs of late, liberal education will not surpass specialized tertiary education any time soon. Yet the numbers and visibility are such that impact can be analyzed. By adding liberal education to their arrays of postsecondary offerings, national systems are becoming more like each other, i.e., converging. The numerous case studies published reveal that this is not liberal education in name only—practitioners describe genuine efforts to teach differently, to gain from the experiences of educators elsewhere, and to position their students for success, defined broadly. At the worldwide level, convergence has also been intensified by efforts to create global

Abstract

This article defines global liberal education, summarizes global and regional trends, and assesses current key issues including politicization and pandemic impact. It is argued that the waning US influence in global geopolitics has resulted in the acceleration of indigenous efforts as well as innovative approaches to integrating the global and the local.

Even with the sharp spike in programs of late, liberal education will not surpass specialized tertiary education any time soon.

alliances or international networks of liberal arts schools. However, these global alignments are increasingly being replaced by regional convergences and differentiation.

Scholars and practitioners use geopolitical terminology to distinguish the interpretations of liberal education found around the globe. Three regions, defined broadly, dominate the discourse: Europe, Asia, and the United States. These geopolitical descriptors are found in book titles and articles, as well as in regionally named professional associations, networks, and blogs. Regional convergences can be described as follows:

- ▶ The European “resurgence” serves elites, with goals of excellence and tradition. A research orientation and multiple languages are typical. The Erasmus program has published a guide.
- ▶ The Asian approach is utilitarian and international, serving economies in need of entrepreneurial thinking, creativity, and global adaptability. Research on these innovations is flourishing.
- ▶ The American interpretation is democratic and inclusive, with contestation, embeddedness, and diversity as constituent elements. Claims of decline are debated widely.

Notably, the European and Asian interpretations occur within the bounds of their geographic regions. In contrast, explicitly “American-style” liberal education exists outside as well as within the United States. These American-style schools outside of the United States are straightforward exports—attempts to replicate US liberal education, buttressed by US structures (in terms of accreditation, cooperation agreements, funding), and designed to advance US ideals. Such schools are in several categories: self-named “American” universities and colleges, found in 50 countries; those that have accreditation from US agencies; and branch campuses/high-profile partnerships. Several of these American outposts have become political flashpoints, as described below.

With or without American influence, and notwithstanding the geographic region, liberal education across the globe has been growing increasingly differentiated at the level of the individual school/program. Variety is seemingly limitless, and may reflect national priorities, the founders’ passions, or prior experiences of the faculty, staff, and/or families. As further illustration of variability, liberal education was integrated into comprehensive research universities (Hong Kong, the Netherlands), emerged as a pilot project within existing state structures (Argentina, China), grew out of religious traditions (Indonesia, Israel), or began independently (Ghana, Italy). Curricular foci, too, are numerous—e.g., from great books to climate change research, global languages and cultures to ethical leadership, and more. This diversity illustrates the malleability of liberal education in practice, given a shared set of core characteristics.

Heightened Controversy and Politicization

More a philosophy than a prescriptive model, the ideals of liberal education have long been associated with the West, particularly the beliefs about academic freedom and democratic participation that are prevalent in the United States. Yet, as liberal education proliferates and global balances of power shift, these Western values are being challenged. Several recent high-profile changes have brought global attention to the sector: the surprising dissolution of the Yale-NUS partnership (described in [Hoe Yeong Loke’s article](#) in this issue), the Russian expulsion of a Bard College (US) program, the relocation of Central European University from Hungary to Berlin, and the abrupt closure of the American University of Afghanistan. The narrowing of the Chinese space with respect to Fulbright exchanges and Confucius Institutes has also generated concern and controversy, not limited to liberal education. As authoritarian political regimes gain sway, liberal education is buffeted.

Yet, while these retreats from US collaboration are notable, they are by no means universal. NYU Abu Dhabi is enthusiastically celebrating its 10th anniversary, the Duke Kunshan partnership in China remains strong, and the Harvard-supported Fulbright University in Vietnam appears vital. Start-ups continue, notably in Nepal and Sicily, advised by experts from American universities and veterans of other global efforts. With US influence waning, it is increasingly common to acknowledge the intent to adapt American-style liberal education to local circumstances. Some global advocates would like to create new terminology (eschewing “liberal”) because of both its political connotations and lack of clarity. Philanthropist George Soros is taking an analogous approach,

funding an Open Society University Network with Bard and its international liberal education partners, with the explicit goal to “counteract polarization by promoting global collaboration in research and education to examine issues from different perspectives.”

Such evolution in interpretations and nomenclature is anticipated in theories of educational transfer asserting that ideas and practices that come from elsewhere are eventually claimed (and indigenized) by the borrowing culture. Moreover, this development suggests that the sector overall is resilient: It can adapt creatively and relatively quickly. At the same time, the political backlash was perhaps inevitable, given rising authoritarianism around the world and waning US power.

The increase in controversy and politicization is not the only challenge facing the global liberal education sector. Full assessment must take the COVID-19 pandemic into account: With student mobility severely limited, the programs that depended upon international students, particularly study abroad, have lost revenues and must retrench. Travel restrictions have stimulated interest in local options, resulting in unanticipated enrollment growths in certain settings. Pandemic adaptations also spurred appreciation of online and hybrid learning, thereby testing the schools and programs designed around the residential college experience.

In conclusion, liberal education is firmly established as a global phenomenon with ongoing investment, scholarly interest, and innovation. Several high-profile closures will not be enough to disrupt the entire sector, since global schools and programs are dispersed, variable, and interconnected. Resistance to change is inevitable—and informative, keeping us all aware of neonationalist dangers and China’s long shadow. ▲

Mary-Ellen Boyle is associate professor of management at Clark University, Worcester, US. Email: mboyle@clarku.edu.

The Coming Liberal Arts Wave in India

Pushkar

There are clear indications that India’s higher education sector will ride a liberal arts wave in the 2020s. This is evident from the success of universities like Ashoka University and the emergence of several other similar private institutions emphasizing liberal arts education and even offering bachelor degrees in liberal arts. The signs are also visible in recent initiatives by some of the country’s leading public institutions—including select branches of the Indian Institutes of Technology (IITs), the Indian Institutes of Information Technology (IIITs), and the Indian Institutes of Management (IIMs)—to launch new degree programs that combine courses in their core areas of engineering and management with courses in the liberal arts.

IIT-Bombay has launched a unique [liberal arts, science, and engineering \(LASE\) program](#). IIIT-Delhi offers a [BTech in computer science and the social sciences](#). IIM-Bangalore will soon begin an [undergraduate program in the liberal arts](#). While all these initiatives signal the coming of a liberal arts wave in India, none is more significant than the recommendations made in the [National Education Policy \(NEP\) 2020](#), which has effectively legitimized the liberal arts trend. And while NEP 2020 does not explicitly state as such, it is quite evident from the 2019 draft version of the document that India’s policy makers are hoping that a greater emphasis on the liberal arts—understood primarily as multidisciplinary education—will improve the low employability rates of college graduates.

Abstract

India’s higher education sector is likely to witness a liberal arts wave in the 2020s. The National Education Policy 2020 emphasizes multidisciplinary education as the path forward. This is also expected to boost the employability of college graduates. However, it will not happen without a broader set of reforms across the higher education sector—in areas such as governance, regulatory structures, institutional autonomy, and others—to improve the overall quality of college education.

NEP 2020 asserts that “a holistic and multidisciplinary education” is needed “to lead the country into the 21st century and the fourth industrial revolution”.

NEP 2020 and Liberal Arts

India’s universities have traditionally offered three-year undergraduate degrees with a specialization in one discipline, without offering students the opportunity to take up a sufficient number and variety of courses outside that discipline. This means that in obtaining a college degree, students acquired deep knowledge in one subject area and almost none in others, unless they did so on their own. NEP 2020 aims to replace the current system with a four-year multidisciplinary education.

In its section on higher education, NEP 2020 identifies “a rigid separation of disciplines, with early specialization and streaming of students into narrow areas of study” as one of the main problems in higher education. As a solution, it “envisions a complete overhaul and reenergizing of the higher education system” including “moving towards a more multidisciplinary undergraduate education.” It justifies this shift by citing the examples of India’s ancient universities, such as Takshashila and Nalanda, and extensive interdisciplinary literature. Accordingly, it emphasizes that the “knowledge of many arts or what in modern times is often called the ‘liberal arts’ (i.e., a liberal notion of the arts) must be brought back to Indian education.”

Further, NEP 2020 asserts that “a holistic and multidisciplinary education” is needed “to lead the country into the 21st century and the fourth industrial revolution,” and calls for all higher education institutions to become multidisciplinary by 2040—so that engineering students take up more liberal arts courses, while arts and humanities students learn more science.

Since NEP 2020 was approved by the government in the middle of the COVID-19 pandemic, it has taken a while for the central and state governments to begin implementing its recommendations, including multidisciplinary education. For example, an 18-member task force, appointed by the state of Maharashtra under noted scientist Dr. R. A. Mashelkar, only recently submitted its [report](#), including a timeline for the implementation of several NEP 2020 recommendations.

Why Liberal Arts?

One of the main challenges of India’s higher education today is providing reasonably good quality mass education to the considerable, and ever growing number of college students, so that they are employable. The number of students has increased from 30.2 million in 2012–2013 to 38.5 million in 2019–2020, and, worryingly, the employability rate of college graduates has remained below 50 percent.

While NEP 2020 does not acknowledge that one of the primary reasons for recommending multidisciplinary education is to improve student employability, the much lengthier and detailed 2019 draft version of the document does so on several occasions. For example, it states that “the purpose of a liberal arts education is not simply to prepare for one’s first job, but also for one’s second job, third job, and beyond. With the coming fourth industrial revolution, and the rapidly changing employment landscape, a liberal arts education is more important and useful for one’s employment than ever before.”

The [2021 India Skills Report](#) offers some interesting insights into the employability rates of college graduates under the current system. Only 45.9 percent of college graduates are considered employable, of which engineering graduates are the most employable at 46.8 percent, followed by MBA graduates at 46.6 percent. However, only 12.6 percent of undergraduate students are in engineering and technology. Interestingly, arts graduates do not fare badly compared to those with engineering or business degrees. 40.3 percent of arts graduates are employable, far more than science graduates, whose employability is at 30 percent. These figures are important because 32.7 percent of all undergraduate students are enrolled in arts/humanities/social sciences, compared to 16 percent in science and 14.9 percent in commerce.

The higher employability of students with arts degrees augurs well for India’s young population and more so if their employability continues to improve. At the same time, it seems that science students, in particular, might benefit from taking more liberal arts courses.

Overall, however, with less than 50 percent of college graduates considered employable, India is facing a deep crisis. While employability figures have gone up by a few

percentage points from 37.2 percent in 2015 to just under 50 percent today, they are still disappointing.

The Real Challenge: Improving the Quality of Education

The central issue in India's higher education is not whether or how liberal arts can improve employability or lead India into the twenty-first century, but whether specific steps can be taken for India's universities to improve the quality of education across the board, which in turn would certainly improve graduate employability. For example, it is quite unreasonable to think that the employability of the 70 percent of science graduates considered unemployable will increase significantly if they take some liberal arts courses.

While the turn toward multidisciplinary education is laudable, it will be insufficient to push employability rates upward significantly. Employability will only improve with a broader set of changes including better governance of universities, reform in regulatory structures, institutional autonomy, recruitment of better-qualified faculty, and much more. Such reforms are, of course, recommended in NEP 2020. For example, the document states that "[t]he Board of Governors (BoG) of an institution will be empowered to govern the institution free of any external interference, make all appointments including that of head of the institution, and take all decisions regarding governance." However, anyone remotely familiar with the actual functioning and governance of public universities knows how improbable it is that the appointment of vice-chancellors will become free of political interference. No one should be under the illusion that things will change because NEP 2020 says so.

In the absence of deep, fundamental changes in terms of how India's universities are run, the coming liberal arts wave will promise much, but deliver much less for India's college students. ▲

Dr. Pushkar is director and chief executive of the International Centre Goa (ICG), Dona Paula, Goa, India. Email: pushkar@incentgoa.com.

These are his personal views.

The Closure of Yale-NUS College: Unclear Reasons, Clear Implications

Hoe Yeong Loke

The National University of Singapore (NUS) announced in late August 2021 that Yale-NUS College would be merged with the NUS's University Scholars' Programme—an undergraduate academic program much like an honors college in the United States—to form a new college by 2025. Almost everyone has understood this to be a *de facto* closure of Singapore's first and only liberal arts college, not least with Yale University clearly withdrawing from the whole venture. The whole affair has left us with a lack of clarity and a sense of surprise.

Three Surprises from the Affair

The first is the shock at why such a successful institution will soon cease to exist. That success could be measured on any number of metrics, from graduate job placement to an endowment that would be the envy of liberal arts colleges in the United States that are hundreds of years older. This is a remarkable instance of "institutional self-immolation," as one observer put it.

Abstract

Much has been made about academic freedom and financial sustainability as the reasons behind the closure of Yale-NUS College, Singapore's much lauded liberal arts college, but these reasons are not plausible. A similarly tumultuous university closure in Singapore in 1980 may provide some pointers, if only in terms of what to expect next.

No convincing explanation
for the closure has yet
been offered publicly.

The other striking thing was how chaotically the closure was announced. The president of Yale-NUS College said that he was “gobsmacked and flabbergasted” when the decision to close his institution was presented to him as a *fait accompli*, at the eleventh hour. The backlash from the student body has been greater than what anyone had foreseen. They are aggrieved at the distinct lack of consultation, or even any forewarning at all, about the closure of their college. Many of them feel short-changed, as they had given up places in prestigious universities overseas in favor of Yale-NUS College. They will soon have to peddle a defunct college on their CVs entering the job market. All of this simply does not gel with perceptions of Singaporean-style control and orderliness, whatever one’s opinion of Singaporean politics.

Most strikingly perhaps, no convincing explanation for the closure has yet been offered publicly. For sure, concerns about the lack of academic freedom in Singapore have surfaced. The financial sustainability of an elite format of education, involving low student-to-teacher ratios, was also cited widely.

But these explanations beggar belief that the typically all-knowing Singaporean authorities had no clue what liberal arts education would entail, when they embarked on the partnership with Yale University. It is also difficult to believe that they would allow the project to unwind so spectacularly in the way that it has. This has led Scott Anthony of Nanyang Technological University, in his [article](#) for *Times Higher Education* on September 10, 2021, to suggest reasons of “administrative empire building” within the NUS apparatus as a more plausible explanation behind the controversy.

Academic Freedom, Student Activism?

In 2019, a course at the College given by a Singaporean playwright on dissent and free speech was cancelled, on the basis that it lacked “academic rigour” and posed “legal risks” to students. His course was deemed to encourage students to protest. Those who claim that academic freedom was the reason behind Yale-NUS College’s closure commonly cite this incident. Yet a Skype conversation with the Hong Kong prodemocracy activist Joshua Wong, as part of a student-organised event on the college in 2017, passed without incident—and was arguably far more controversial than any college course on dissent and free speech. A similar Skype conversation with Wong conducted by a Singaporean activist as part of a public conference (that is, outside of Yale-NUS College) landed the latter in court with charges of organizing a “public assembly” without a permit.

It is understandable how fears of a clampdown on academic freedom, and free speech more generally, have gained traction since. About a month after the closure of Yale-NUS College was announced, the Foreign Interference (Countermeasures) Act—which prescribes heavy fines and jail terms for those found to “mislead Singaporeans on political issues”—was passed by the government’s supermajority in parliament. Parts of the academic community have raised concerns that the new law is so broadly worded as to potentially impinge on academic activities as innocuous as presenting research at overseas conferences.

Students at Yale-NUS College have been afforded much more latitude in political activism than their peers in NUS itself, as part of realizing the ideal of free enquiry intrinsic to a liberal arts education. But there has been a discernible tug-of-war among the powers that be, with regard to the kinds of freedoms and student activism that would be tolerated at Yale-NUS College.

Financial Sustainability?

The official explanation by the president of NUS and the minister for education is that financial sustainability, rather than a clampdown on academic freedom, was the reason behind the closure/merger of Yale-NUS College. NUS also proffered reasons of improving access to liberal arts education for more students and strengthening interdisciplinarity. These arguments have been debunked by students of the college. If these considerations were so important, the students say, then why has the NUS administration not made greater efforts to lay out clear financial arrangements or a radically different student admissions policy for the new college that would replace Yale-NUS?

All of this also jars with other developments in Singaporean higher education, such as the announcement, earlier this year, of the opening of a new arts university—a private

institution supported by the government and to be formed from two preexisting arts institutions—which is unlikely to be much more financially sustainable than a premier liberal arts college supported by two world-leading universities.

Memories of Nanyang University

The closure of Yale-NUS College has brought back memories of an uncannily similar event in the annals of Singaporean higher education, which might provide some pointers.

In 1980, Nanyang University was merged with the University of Singapore, in what Nanyang’s students and alumni regarded as a humiliating shutdown by the government. That sparked political backlash, because of the symbolism of Nanyang University for the Chinese-educated community in Singapore, historically a left-leaning lot, politically at odds with the government. That 1980 event was said to be a key motivation behind the entry into politics of the previous leader of the opposition in the Singapore parliament, who was among the last graduates of Nanyang University.

This historical comparison is perhaps overly romanticized. Nanyang University represented a whole community and political constituency in the country to be reckoned with, whereas the Yale-NUS College community is really quite small. But the point is that there is a precedent of sorts, and it is tempting to extrapolate what it may mean for Yale-NUS College.

Shortly after the shutdown of Nanyang University, a new, institutionally distinct entity was set up on the same campus grounds. No resources or efforts were spared to grow that new institution, in the first instance, as an engineering institute. It was essentially a political project from the government to justify shutting down Nanyang University, because they had stated that Nanyang’s Chinese-educated graduates were facing declining job prospects. That entity is now the Nanyang Technological University, celebrated the world over for leading in regional and global league tables, all achieved in less than four decades. Meanwhile, few outside of Singapore have heard about the “original” Nanyang University. Likewise, it is not inconceivable that Yale-NUS College will soon be forgotten, while its successor institution will be lauded for its newer achievements.

The biggest lesson here is not that such university closures are always going to be tumultuous. Rather, it is that the tumult will probably mean very little in the larger scheme of things—for the wider public, unfortunately, there are factors in higher education that weigh more than academic freedom or institutional identity. ▲

Hoe Yeong Loke is editor of Higher Education in Southeast Asia and Beyond (HESB). Email: hoeyeong@gmail.com.

The opinions expressed in this article do not represent the views of any institutions with which the author is affiliated.

Insurgence, Retreat, Reinvention: US For-Profit Higher Education

Richard Garrett

Abstract

The story of for-profit higher education in twenty-first century America opens new chapters on the possibilities and limits of for-profit sectors in mature higher education systems. This article summarizes dramatic for-profit enrollment growth in America in the 2000s, followed by regulatory pushback, consumer souring, and marked decline. Four possible for-profit futures are outlined.

In some countries, typically in the wealthy part of the world, for-profit higher education is an oxymoron: The profit motive is judged incompatible with pedagogic virtue and student welfare. Public higher education is the norm. For-profit institutions, if permitted at all, tend to be few, marginal, and specialized. Yet, in many emerging economies, profit-making institutions often spearhead higher education enrollment expansion, building capacity beyond the means of the state and nonprofits. The United States, home to the rich-country higher education system *par excellence*, makes an interesting case study. In the twenty-first century, for-profits have surged, retreated, and are in the midst of reinvention.

In 2000, for-profit higher education institutions in America, dominated by small, regional providers offering short-term nondegree career programs, enrolled 6 percent of the nation's undergraduates. By 2010, undergraduate enrollment in for-profit institutions had more than tripled to some 2.1 million students, many enrolled in bachelor degree programs.

What Changed?

For-profits spotted underserved populations—working adults experiencing economic and social pressure for the lack of a degree—and pitched them convenient, career-oriented programming. Many conventional colleges and universities also served such people but typically as a sideline to traditional students. For-profits, outspending nonprofits on marketing many times over and employing sometimes high-pressure sales tactics, made headway with dedicated facilities and classes in the evenings and at weekends, and were quickest to realize the potential of online learning. The most ambitious for-profit institutions also moved into graduate education, offering flexible master and doctoral degrees to aspiring professionals in less tradition-bound fields such as business, IT, education, and nursing.

Consolidation produced billion-dollar corporations—some publicly traded such as Apollo Group and DeVry—and significant profits. The lifting of bans on federal student financial aid at wholly distance-based institutions and the relaxing of strictures on incentive compensation for student recruiters unleashed commercial energies. For-profits exploited student aid rules not designed with giant corporations in mind, and the bonanza attracted some bad actors. The fact that students, not institutions, were responsible for repaying federal student loans insulated for-profits from the downstream risks of enrolling borderline students.

As the first decade of the century drew to a close, in the midst of the Great Recession, the for-profit sector had momentum. Championed by some pundits and officials convinced that conventional higher education needed shaking up, the for-profit sector positioned itself as relevant and responsive during an economic downturn. By 2010, for-profits had leapt to 13 percent of total enrollment in US higher education. For-profits seemed poised for further growth, and many nonprofit institutions feared for their revenue and market share.

Yet, by 2019, US for-profit higher education was a shadow of its former self.

Downturn

Yet, by 2019, US for-profit higher education was a shadow of its former self. The for-profit promise—strong learning and career outcomes for nontraditional, time-pressured students—began to unravel as enrollment momentum translated into high attrition rates,

questionable quality, and employer skepticism. Many vulnerable students, concentrated among underrepresented minorities, were left with little to show for their enrollment other than hard-to-transfer credits and a pile of debt. Cases of outright fraud were uncovered.

Federal regulatory pushback under the Obama administration compounded the turn-about, tightening student aid rules, complicating for-profit business models, and setting a higher bar for often lackluster student outcomes. Greater federal scrutiny was placed on the organization that accredited a number of the largest, most volatile for-profits. A number of major for-profit players, include Corinthian College, ITT, and Education Management Corporation collapsed under the pressure, souring consumer and media sentiment and tarnishing the for-profit higher education brand.

The record-breaking economic recovery between the end of the Great Recession and the COVID-19 pandemic, pushing unemployment to historic lows, took further wind out of the adult undergraduate market. Adult undergraduate enrollment fell 20 percent in less than a decade despite a stable underlying population.

For-profits faced more trenchant nonprofit competition. Jealous of for-profit success, and cognizant of a looming drought in traditional age students driven by falling birth rates, many nonprofit colleges and universities adapted aspects of the for-profit playbook. What were once hallmarks of for-profit exceptionalism—adult-friendly policies, digital marketing, online degrees—went mainstream. By the late 2010s, the largest adult-oriented, online institutions were no longer the for-profit University of Phoenix and Ashford University, but the nonprofit Western Governors University and Southern New Hampshire University.

Upper division for-profits focused on bachelor degrees saw undergraduate enrollment halve to under 600,000, and lower division institutions dropped to under 200,000 students. Graduate enrollment at for-profit institutions declined, too, but more modestly. For-profit institutions with significant graduate headcount were less implicated in the recruitment excesses and reputational headaches that many of the biggest undergraduate providers suffered.

What Is Next?

Four trajectories stand out. The first is nonprofit conversions. A number of the largest for-profit institutions decided that for-profit status was an inherent weakness. In some cases, notably Grand Canyon University, the for-profit split into a nonprofit institution and a for-profit services company. In others, such as what was Kaplan University and what is now Purdue Global, the for-profit institution was sold for a nominal fee to a major public university with the for-profit retained on a long-term services contract. Time will tell whether regulators or students wholly embrace such changes, and the extent of genuine brand transformation.

The second is a pivot of private capital into the online program management (OPM) business. OPM companies, such as 2U and Wiley, partner with nonprofit institutions to codevelop and deliver online degree programs. The marriage of conventional university brands and commercial operations, on a revenue share model, offers investors a position in the higher education market without wholesale recruitment and enrollment exposure.

Third, a variation on the OPM model, is a turn away from the degree emphasis of for-profit institutions and OPMs to nondegree programs. Coursera, and now edX under 2U, the large US MOOC platforms, are building businesses helping leading nonprofit universities create, market, and deliver inexpensive online noncredit certificate programs. Global reach offsets low margins. Credit pathways are an attempt to link nondegree momentum to degree programs at partner universities.

The final trajectory is least clear: direct-to-consumer reinvention by for-profit higher education institutions. Further consolidation has occurred, such as the combination of Capella University and Strayer University or the acquisition of Walden University by Adtalem Global Education. Competency-based learning, streamlining prior learning assessment, and personalizing student capability development has gained traction for a handful of institutions, doubling down on the for-profit mantra of speed, value, and customer service. Chamberlain University, now the nation's largest nursing school and also part of Adtalem, is striving to combine quantity and quality, demonstrated by

Richard Garrett is chief research officer, Eduventures (Encoura), US. Email: rgarrett@eduventures.com.

above-average pass rates on the national nursing exam. Yet-to-be-defined hybrids of campus and online learning are under discussion at a number of for-profits.

In 2020, as the pandemic made online learning the default for most students, US for-profit enrollment rose for the first time in nearly a decade. For-profit experience in the online space was suddenly an asset, as many nonprofits struggled with “emergency remote learning.” This lift may be short lived, but what is clear is that commercial players in US higher education will persist. So long as access, cost, and quality—challenges for mass-to-universal higher education systems the world over—remain friction points in the US system, the profit motive will be a source of new ideas—good, bad, and indifferent. Whether 2010 will stand as the peak of for-profit higher education in the United States, in terms of enrollment and market share, remains to be seen. ▲

Here to Stay: Where the United States Stands in the International Competition for STEM Talent

Jack Corrigan and Remco Zwetsloot

Abstract

Today, the United States is a top destination for international students pursuing doctoral degrees in STEM fields. Contrary to some claims, the vast majority of these students choose to stay in the United States after graduation. This ability to attract and retain top talent gives the United States a significant advantage. However, the country risks losing this edge if it fails to reform its immigration process to keep up with other countries.

International graduate students are among the most mobile and highly skilled migrants in the world, and demand for their expertise is growing as emerging technologies reshape the global economic and security landscape. The United States remains a top destination for these scholars, awarding tens of thousands of PhDs in STEM fields to foreign nationals every year.

Contrary to fears of a “reverse brain drain,” research suggests that a large majority of these students stay in the United States after graduation, founding promising companies, strengthening the domestic innovation ecosystem, and contributing to society at large. However, without reforms to its immigration system, the United States risks losing more of these experts to other countries in the future.

International STEM PhDs in the United States

Countries that hope to lead in high-tech industries like artificial intelligence (AI), microelectronics, and synthetic biology must have access to a robust and well-trained workforce. PhDs represent a small but critical part of that talent pool, leading research efforts that push the boundaries of their respective fields and educating the next generation of scientists, technologists, and entrepreneurs.

Today, many of the best and brightest prospective PhDs from around the world flock to US universities, where they make up a significant share of the country’s doctoral recipients. Between 2000 and 2017, approximately 208,000 foreign nationals graduated from US universities with doctoral degrees in STEM fields (life sciences, physical sciences, medical sciences, computer science, mathematics, and engineering), accounting for roughly 42 percent of the STEM PhDs who graduated during that period. About two-thirds of these international students come from just five countries and regions: China (36 percent), India (14 percent), Iran (6 percent), South Korea (5 percent), and the European Union (5 percent).

Foreign nationals are far more likely to pursue STEM degrees than their American counterparts: About 70 percent of international PhD students study STEM compared to

just 34 percent of domestic students. In certain fields—such as computer science, engineering, and mathematics—foreign students consistently make up the majority of the national graduating class.

International STEM Graduates Tend to Stay in the United States

In recent years, the large number of international students in the US university system has fueled concerns among some policymakers that the country suffers from “reverse brain drain.” Today, they believe, many foreign-born graduates—particularly Chinese nationals—return to their home countries and use their skills to support efforts that undercut US economic and security interests. However, we and our colleagues at Georgetown University’s Center for Security and Emerging Technology (CSET), along with others, have found the large majority of international students remain in the United States long after obtaining their degrees. Chinese STEM students are in fact more likely to stay than almost any other student category.

Broadly speaking, there are two ways to measure “stay rates” among foreign nationals: intention-to-stay rates, which measure how many students plan to stay in the United States upon graduation, and long-term stay rates, which count graduates who still live in the country after a certain period of time. Regardless of metric, however, stay rates among international STEM PhDs in the United States are high.

Looking at the latest data from the National Science Foundation’s (NSF) annual Survey of Earned Doctorates (SED), we found that between 2012 and 2017, the intention-to-stay rate among foreign nationals who specialized in STEM was 82 percent (compared to 72 percent for all international graduates). Across all STEM fields, intention-to-stay rates have either held steady or increased since 2000.

Data on long-term stay rates suggests that the actual behavior of foreign graduates aligns with their intentions. A CSET analysis of data from the NSF’s 2017 Survey of Doctorate Recipients (SDR) found that approximately 76 percent of foreign nationals who earned STEM PhDs from US universities between 1998 and 2015 were living in the country in February 2017. While more recent graduates were the most likely to reside in the United States, the stay rate among those who graduated 10 years or more before the survey was still about 75 percent. (An initial analysis of responses to the 2019 SDR showed no significant change in stay rates—a forthcoming CSET report will explore this data further.) Using a different dataset of PhD graduates specializing in artificial intelligence, another CSET study found five-year stay rates higher than 80 percent.

Stay rates vary significantly by nationality. Roughly 90 percent of graduates from China and India intended to stay in the United States after graduation, compared to about 65 to 75 percent of those from the European Union, Canada, Turkey, and elsewhere. Long-term stay rates among Chinese and Indian graduates were also higher than average: More than 90 percent of Chinese nationals and 86 percent of Indian nationals who graduated from STEM PhD programs between 1998 and 2015 were residing in the country in February 2017. Early analysis of the 2019 SDR data found similar trends.

Roughly 90 percent of graduates from China and India intended to stay in the United States after graduation.

Looking Ahead: Will Stay Rates Decline?

But stay rates among international STEM PhDs are not guaranteed to remain as high as they are today. An individual’s decisions to remain in or leave the country where they obtained their degree is influenced by a variety of factors, including the health of the economy and social and cultural ties to their home country. In the current US context, however, two factors are likely to drive down stay rates in the years ahead: immigration restrictions and increasing international competition for STEM talent.

Graduates are more likely to leave countries where they face high barriers to immigration, and in the United States, even those with in-demand skills can have trouble establishing long-term residency. A 2020 CSET survey of international AI PhDs found that more than half of those who left after graduation cited immigration issues as “extremely” or “somewhat” relevant to their decision. Even among those who stayed in the country, 60 percent reported facing significant difficulties with the US immigration system. These challenges are exacerbated for Chinese and Indian nationals—who account for roughly half of international STEM PhDs—due to country-based caps and large backlogs.

Jack Corrigan is a research analyst at Georgetown University's Center for Security and Emerging Technology, DC, US. Email: jack.corrigan@georgetown.edu.

Remco Zwetsloot is a Trustee Fellow at the Center for Strategic and International Studies, Washington DC, US. Twitter: @r_zwetsloot.

Other countries have capitalized on these inefficiencies in the US immigration process. For instance, Canada has made a concerted effort to draw immigrant talent across the border, and their efforts appear to be succeeding. Chinese observers similarly say that US immigration policies “have provided China opportunities to bolster its ranks of high-end talent.” With backlogs and other issues increasingly bogging down the US immigration system while other countries invest in talent recruitment, there is a significant chance that more US-educated STEM PhDs will take their talents abroad in the future.

As technology transforms the geopolitical and economic landscape, leaders across the globe view STEM talent as a critical national asset. Chinese President Xi Jinping has called it “the first resource” for “independent innovation,” and the Biden administration has said “win[ning] the race for talent” is necessary to “succeed[ing] in a competitive world.” Today, one of the United States’ biggest advantages in that race is the thousands of students who flock to the country every year to pursue STEM doctorates, most of whom stay in the country long after graduating. However, amid heated debates about immigration reform, it remains to be seen whether the United States will maintain or lose that edge. ▲

Under Threat: The Use of Recruitment Agents in the United States

Philip G. Altbach and Liz Reisberg

Abstract

Recently, the US Congress passed a law that inadvertently could have turned the use of agents for recruiting international students into an illegal activity. Many universities rely on agents and recruiters. This article discusses the “crisis” and argues that agents should in any case not be used.

Crisis! A segment of the US higher education community has been in a panic over text in legislation passed by Congress and incorporated into law on August 1. The law, dealing with veterans’ education and training benefits, has added confusion to the controversial use of agents and recruiters to increase international enrollment. The Training in High Demand Roles to Improve Veteran Employment Act, or THRIVE, sets new limits on institutions receiving federal funding, including, it seems, a restriction on “paying commissions or incentive payments for securing enrollments or financial aid.” The text creates considerable ambiguity about whether US universities that continue to make incentive payments to recruiters for the enrollment of international students would be disqualified from receiving funds from the American Rescue Plan Act of 2021.

While paying commissions is forbidden for the recruitment of domestic students, it has been accepted when applied to international students. The practice is a result of the commercialization of international study and the reliance on foreign student tuition fees to fill classrooms and ensure the financial survival of a growing number of US colleges and universities. International students have helped to mediate budget challenges resulting from declining domestic enrollments in many schools, a trend exacerbated by the COVID-19 crisis. It is all about the bottom line.

The Status Quo

Efforts are being made to correct this apparent legislative omission, led by the American Council on Education and supported by the entire higher education “establishment.” NAFSA: Association of International Educators, the National Association for College Admission Counseling (NACAC), the American International Recruitment Council (an oversight group composed of the agents and the colleges that use them), and others are

lobbying Congress, claiming that the United States will be at a competitive disadvantage in recruiting international students, since other major English-speaking host countries, mainly Australia and the United Kingdom, make heavy use of agents. As a result, on October 8, 2021, two new bills were introduced to fix the problem.

It was just a few decades ago that NACAC's code of ethics barred member universities from using agents. In 2013, after a long debate, the organization approved the practice. EducationUSA and the State Department strongly opposed the use of agents until 2018, when the Trump Administration changed course as part of their hypercommercialization strategy for higher education. Now everyone seems fully on board. According to NAFSA, 49 percent of US colleges and universities use agents. Australian and British universities use agents heavily and have fully commercialized international student recruitment strategies directed by their respective governments to turn to the high fees charged to international students to make up for budget cuts. But their strong dependence on revenue from international students, mostly from China and India, has caused severe problems, not only due to the COVID-19 pandemic but also following Brexit and geopolitical tensions between China and Australia. As a result of these crises, IDP, the Australian-owned company that is one of the largest organizations in the world promoting agents, was partly sold by its university owners.

So What Is Wrong with Agents?

This change in the text of the proposed legislation should stimulate a rethink of the reliance on agents. As the American Council on Education noted in a letter to US government officials, agents and nonuniversity recruiters are rewarded for serving the needs of an institution. Agents are hired by colleges and universities to deliver tuition-paying students. The hiring institutions pay commissions for each warm body, typically a percentage of tuition and often amounting to thousands of dollars. Agents do not necessarily have the best interests of the students in mind—they are hired by the universities.

Agents help the students through the application process to the universities that contract them and this “help” sometimes includes writing application essays and letters of reference for them. There are numerous cases of fraud and other shenanigans, to the point of having several cases of application fraud prosecuted in India and China. Thus, dishonest practices are a risk of the “agent system” that is extremely difficult to monitor.

Much of the higher education establishment, in the United States and elsewhere, seems to operate on the basis that international students will not enroll unless directed by agents and taken through the admissions process held by the hand. This may indeed be necessary in some cases, but when commercial agents with a vested interest in sending students to specific institutions also advise these students, the result may not be the most appropriate for the student, his or her funding source (most often the student's family), or even the institution, if the student does not remain to complete the program.

Finally, there is no well-defined profile for individuals acting as recruitment agents, leaving a wide range of qualifications (or a lack of them) characterizing people assuming a major role in the university admissions process. Nor are there widely accepted criteria for evaluating or certifying their work.

Solutions

The sums paid by US universities to agents are significant. Without reporting requirements, it is impossible to know exactly how much. A British study noted that universities typically pay agents 15 percent of the first year tuition per enrolled student. This money could be better spent in direct services to international students—improving university websites and providing better information to prospective candidates and their families. Funds spent in commissions could be used to add campus-based or campus-supervised admissions personnel who could provide individualized attention to prospective applicants. Government agencies such as Education USA at the US Department of State and the Department of Commerce should allocate greater resources to provide unbiased information on American higher education locally, with better orientation to universities that may not appear in rankings but that offer excellent opportunities to international

Philip G. Altbach is research professor and distinguished fellow at the Center for International Higher Education (CIHE), Boston College, US. Email: altbach@bc.edu.

Liz Reisberg is a consultant in international higher education and research fellow at CIHE. Email: reisberg@gmail.com.

This article was previously published in Inside Higher Ed.

It is imperative that the experiences of international students placed by agents receive greater supervision by impartial evaluators.

Abstract

In a growing number of countries, the private higher education sector is increasingly diverse and influential. This has not always been the case—public (state) financing and control over higher education was, with some notable exceptions, the global norm. The appropriate balance between state and nonstate participation, including funding and number of institutions, is rooted in the historical context of higher education development in each particular country, shaped by its current needs and resources.

The shift from public to private funding did not come without controversy, and in many countries, the debate continues.

students. Some of the funds currently spent on agents should be reallocated to financial aid for needy international students.

If universities are going to persist in signing contracts with third-party recruiters, then it is imperative that the experiences of international students placed by agents receive greater supervision by impartial evaluators. This legislative “omission” could have led to needed reform in an admissions system that does not serve students well and, without better monitoring, continues to risk ethical lapses. But a coalition of higher education organizations is urging government not to go in that direction. ▲

Private vs. Public Funding for Higher Education

Philip G. Altbach, Hans de Wit, and Ayenachew A. Woldegiyorgis

In the current global context of mass higher education, and with more than 250 million students in 30,000 institutions worldwide (and with severe financial and other pressures), private (nonstate) involvement in higher education is universal. Indeed, in a growing number of countries, private enrollments dominate, and the private higher education sector is increasingly diverse and influential. This has not always been the case. With some notable exceptions, public (state) financing and control over higher education was the global norm.

The shift from public to private funding did not come without controversy, and in many countries, the debate continues. Some, a dwindling minority, argue that only the state can provide the scope and breadth of higher education, and that research is necessarily a responsibility of the government. The private sector, many argue, will necessarily serve the “lowest common denominator” and focus on its own interest rather than the public good. Yet, financial necessity has led to a dramatic expansion of both nonprofit and for-profit private higher education worldwide. Latin America, once dominated by public universities, has now a majority of private enrollments. Similarly, in many Asian countries, the private sector dominates, and in such places as Japan, the Philippines, South Korea, and Taiwan, it always has.

To reflect on the dramatic rise of nonstate higher education and to highlight the public–private debates, UNESCO’s Global Education Monitoring Report is devoting its [2021 issue](#) to this theme. The Center for International Higher Education at Boston College was asked to provide a perspective on the state–nonstate debate. As part of our work, we asked five colleagues to contribute with short national cases. The articles in this issue, focusing on Argentina, Egypt, Germany, Romania, and Vietnam reflect differing perspectives and experiences, but confirm that the debate is a common one across different contexts.

A Public or Private Good

A prominent question often referred to in the debate regarding the involvement of nonstate actors in higher education is whether higher education is a public or private good. While many have made cases for both sides, no one, to the best of our knowledge, has yet made a compelling argument that higher education should be considered an exclusively private matter in which broader society or the state would have no role. Meanwhile, the reverse argument that higher education should be completely in the public

domain and fully funded by the state is just as implausible. This is the reality around the world, as also highlighted in the cases under consideration.

State and nonstate components of higher education are intermingled. One common aspect of this reality is the way resources transcend boundaries between the two domains. Public institutions receive funding from various nonstate sources, including private companies, foundations, philanthropic individual donors, alumni, etc. They also increasingly tend to outsource operational and administrative activities to private entities. Conversely, private (nonstate) institutions often enjoy various kinds of support from the state. Private institutions can commonly compete for publicly funded research grants and contracts. In many countries, they enjoy benefits in the form of tax exemption and availability of loans with favorable terms (this is generally limited to nonprofit private institutions). In some exceptional cases, such as Chile, certain private institutions are entitled to receive direct government funding. Private institutions also indirectly benefit from public resources through student loan and financial aid programs.

This generally reflects the difficulty in making a clear distinction between the state and nonstate domains in higher education. This is illustrated in the case of Romania, where public universities have dual track options (free and tuition fee-based access), while tuition at private institutions is recognized as less restrictive and is even lower in some cases than that of public institutions. A caveat that often comes with such a scenario is, of course, the issue of quality. In cases in which private institutions assume the role of absorbing demand, they are frequently criticized for the low quality of the education that they offer. However, as illustrated in the cases of Argentina and Romania (and many other countries), low quality is not limited to private institutions. In the absence of sufficient investment and strong quality assurance mechanisms, public institutions are equally vulnerable.

An Appropriate Balance between State and Nonstate Participation

The case studies illustrate that the appropriate balance between state and nonstate participation, including in terms of funding and number of institutions, is rooted in the historical context of higher education development in the particular country, as it is shaped by its current needs and resources. The trend is that at least some publicly funded flagship and specialized institutions, with the role of generating research and graduates that support the entire higher education sector, coexist with private institutions—although worldwide, the research university sector is largely dominated by public institutions.

In countries like Vietnam, private provision of education has been fundamentally contradictory to state ideology. Hence, the involvement of nonstate actors in higher education has gone through a gradual development, from raising much skepticism to playing an increasingly important role in the postsecondary environment. Similarly, in Argentina, the debate about nonstate actors in higher education has evolved from direct opposition to a discussion about what their roles should be. In Egypt, where higher education is predominantly public, private institutions are seen as key players in improving quality and internationalization. In Germany, another largely public system, the overall discussion remains low key, as private institutions are neither seen as a threat nor as a competition to the public sector.

In general, the debate about state and nonstate actors in higher education does not aim at exclusivity. There are pros and cons on both sides, and with its distinct characteristics and functions, each contributes to adapting the whole higher education system to the diverse needs of society. The relative positions of public and private institutions vary according to context, evolving along with overall environmental requirements.

The current global environment, affected by the pandemic, economic crisis, climate change, geopolitical tensions, etc., has implications on the role of higher education in general, and that of nonstate actors within it. Both public and private institutions will continue to face financial constraints following reallocations of public resources. Quality and access, particularly in low- and middle-income countries, will suffer considerably. Meanwhile, broader challenges such as the environment and public health, are likely to generate more collaboration between state and nonstate actors, increasing the latter's role in higher education and research. ▲

Philip G. Altbach is research professor and distinguished fellow, Hans de Wit is professor emeritus and distinguished fellow, and Ayenachew A. Woldegyiorgis is postdoctoral research associate, Center for International Higher Education, Boston College, US. Emails: philip.altbach@bc.edu, dewitj@bc.edu, and woldegyi@bc.edu.

Private Higher Education in Egypt—From Necessary Evil to Celebrated Player

Ghada Barsoum

Abstract

This article looks at the evolution of the role of private higher education institutions in Egypt, where the higher education landscape has been predominantly public. Until the early 1990s, private institutions had a very shy presence, primarily as a last resort for underachievers. They have shifted roles to become celebrated players tasked with the mission of improving the quality and competitiveness of the higher education system.

Egypt presents an interesting case of the changing role of private players in the provision of higher education. The higher education system has been, and continues to be, predominantly public. Private institutions enrolled 26 percent of Egypt's 2.9 million students in 2019, according to data from the ministry of higher education. This marks a significant growth of the size of the student body in these institutions.

Some history is always relevant when discussing Egypt. The first modern university in Egypt was established through philanthropic efforts by the Egyptian elite in 1908. This nascent experiment was later merged into a national public university project in 1923, to form the "Egyptian University"—now called Cairo University. The ensuing system expansion was solely reliant on public institutions, however. Higher education was conceptualized as a public good and was constitutionally promulgated as a free right in 1962. Private institutions remained at the periphery. This article aims to relate their increased role and the evolution of the discourse surrounding them.

The Early Experience of Private Institutions

Few private institutions coexisted within the predominantly public structure of the early years of the higher education system. The American University in Cairo was established in 1919 and attracted a relatively small and elite student body. In addition, a couple of private institutes were established in the 1950s by professional societies.

Private two-year and four-year nonuniversity institutes started to appear in the 1970s, with the country's adoption of economic liberalization policies. These fee-charging private institutes were established to ease the pressure on public universities. They were introduced into the system for students who could not achieve the required cut-off score of the secondary education completion examination and were, hence, not deemed worthy of the privilege of free higher education. This first generation of fee-charging private actors were low-prestige institutions of last resort. They continue to provide a significant proportion of private higher education in the country.

The legal framework governing these institutions, which was promulgated in 1970 (Law 52) and remains operative, closely ties these institutions to the public system. Fee structures, subjects, course content, student cohort size, and faculty hires all require approval from offices at the central ministry. I have documented a culture of mistrust toward these institutions in my research. In a sense, that generation of private higher education institutions was seen as a necessary evil that should be controlled and managed closely.

The Shift

The 1990s heralded a serious paradigm shift in the role envisioned for nonstate private providers and the discourse surrounding them. In 1992, new legislation, further amended in 2009, granted the establishment of private elite and semielite universities. By 2019, the system included 23 private universities and 168 nonuniversity private institutions. The legal framework governing private universities shows much more flexibility compared to the earlier generation of private nonuniversity institutes. Improving education quality and advancing research are stipulated mandates for these new private players, as shown in the legal framework governing them (Law 12 issued 2009). Competitiveness, labor market relevance, and quality are the key words defining the parameters of the

That generation of private higher education institutions was seen as a necessary evil that should be controlled and managed closely.

debate around these nonstate players, also reflecting the role of international donors in developing the nomenclature of the debate.

More recently, international branch campuses (IBCs) started to be established in Egypt. This new generation of private players is envisioned to address more than access challenges. A focus on quality, internationalization, and the advancement of research in the country are central to the vision for introducing these new players, as stipulated in their governing legal framework. The discourse surrounding IBCs is celebratory, with endorsement and support from the country's leadership. Their legal framework also represents a breakthrough in its ostensible focus on issues of academic and procedural autonomy. (See also Jason E. Lane, *Importing Branch Campuses to Advance Egypt's Development*, in IHE # 95.)

"Privateness," to borrow a term that is now in wide circulation in the field of higher education, extended to existing public universities. While they continue to provide higher education at nominal fees, new programs (normally called "sections") are increasingly offered at much higher fees within the same public institution. These programs provide parallel degrees in foreign languages (primarily English or French), or offer fee-based education to students who slightly missed the required score to enroll in the regular system.

Higher education continues to be envisioned as a public good in Egypt. In fact, the government's Vision 2030 highlights the quest for increasing access to higher education beyond the current 31 percent to 45 percent by 2030. The vision also illustrates indicators for quality improvement, internationalization, and research productivity. The burden of increasing access and continued massification is still shared by segments of both public and nonstate providers. Private players, once a necessary evil, are increasingly central to the vision of improving the quality of higher education and its internationalization. ▲

Ghada Barsoum is associate professor at the American University in Cairo, Egypt. Email: gbarsoum@aucegypt.edu.

Vietnam: Public–Private Higher Education Debates in a Communist State

Quang Chau

Abstract

With private higher education emerging in the late 1980s and challenging the public monopoly that had long been the norm in Vietnam, debates arise. Apart from debates common in other countries, such as those related to access, quality, equity, and profit, public–private debates in the Vietnamese case also occur along the line of political correctness, and indirectly reveal policy makers' limited understanding of, and inexperience with the private sector.

Private higher education (PHE) in Vietnam emerged from the state's political and economic reform called *Đổi Mới*, which was initiated in 1986. The adaptation of the market economy gradually penetrated into higher education and indirectly helped PHE to emerge. Initially, the state's regulations for PHE were highly interventionist, but generally spontaneous—largely due to the state's inexperience with the sector. Since the mid-2000s, these regulations have been continuously consolidated and institutionalized, and PHE (currently counting 65 universities and over 260,000 students) is an integral part of the national higher education system. Yet, private universities continue to claim that they are treated unfavorably compared to their public counterparts.

Public–Private Sectors: Complement or Competition?

In general, discrepancies between the public and private sectors (intersectoral distinctiveness) are key to understanding debates about Vietnam's PHE. During the early years of PHE, intersectoral distinctiveness was remarkable: Private universities were generally considered *the* avenue for less academically competent students. To enter private universities, students only needed to get the baseline score in the nationally administered entrance exam. That score was set by the ministry of education & training (MOET) for quality assurance purposes. In contrast, public universities were highly selective: The acceptance ratio was extremely low, and the admission score was generally far above the baseline. Furthermore, most faculty members at private universities were adjunct, while faculty at public universities held tenured positions. In sum, while most supporting arguments for PHE centered on access, the sector was simultaneously vulnerable to quality criticism.

Since the mid-2000s, when intersectoral distinctiveness started to decline, competition between the two sectors has increased. Public universities were established in many provinces, including economically peripheral ones, usually from upgrading existing colleges that delivered short-cycle tertiary education programs. These universities focused largely on offering low-investment programs and enrolled students who were academically less competent than those at traditional public institutions. This expansion policy raised numerous debates. Faced with direct competition from new public universities, private university administrators argued that the state should concentrate their investment on improving the quality of “key” programs benefiting the larger population, such as medical education, engineering, biological technology—while leaving other programs to private universities. This argument was, however, thwarted by provincial governments claiming that new public universities would contribute enormously to the provincial economy. Eventually, as public universities were established one after another in many provinces, they attracted students who would otherwise migrate to major cities and enroll in private universities. As a result, enrollment dropped at many private universities, which faced serious financial crises.

The recent involvement of private corporations in PHE has, however, significantly revived the sector. Several private universities are now owned by multisector corporations, and from acquiring many private universities, education conglomerates have also evolved. Some corporation-affiliated universities have opened capital-intensive programs, attracting high-performing students, and have therefore become a counterbalance to major public universities. In general, PHE is believed to have indirectly forced the public sector to innovate and operate more effectively. There is now a flow

of senior faculty members and staff leaving public universities to work at private universities, because the latter not only pay higher salaries, but also allow more space for experiments, innovations, and entrepreneurial spirit.

Equity and Inclusion: An Attack on the Public Sector

Unlike in many other countries, questions of equity and inclusion have not yet played out significantly in Vietnam's PHE. There is general support for meritocracy in the Vietnamese tradition: It is considered fair that less competent students, regardless of social background, study at lower-tier universities, which are often private and charge high tuition. However, public universities have recently become subject to equity and inclusion criticism. As a part of the public administration reform initiated in the mid-2010s, major public universities have been encouraged to become financially autonomous from state funding, in exchange for greater decision-making authority in select aspects. Consequently, tuition fees at these universities have rapidly increased and are now affordable mostly to affluent students.

Private Higher Education and Political Correctness

Since private education was originally considered antithetical to the Communist ideology, policies regulating nonstate actors' involvement in education development have evolved through tremendous ambiguities and sharp discontinuities (see also my article [Vietnam, The Unique Case of For-Profit Monopoly](#), IHE # 103). The socialization (*xã hội hóa*) policy first announced in the late 1990s sought both to encourage the participation of private actors in funding and governing public education institutions, and to promote the PHE sector. However, this soon turned out to be largely a cost-sharing policy: Private actors, especially parents, were called in only to help share the state's financial burden—while governance decisions remained in the state's hands. Regarding PHE, the Communist Party of Vietnam (CPV) on one hand legalized the sector, but on the other hand refused to recognize higher education as a market, and explicitly opposed the commercialization of higher education. However, after Vietnam's accession to the World Trade Organization (in 2006), which coincided with a top leadership reshuffle of the CPV, policy orientations on PHE tended to reverse. All private universities were mandated to convert to for-profit corporate status and run entirely as businesses. In parallel, the government also proposed (but this was later rejected by top CPV leaders) that public universities be equitized and run as joint-stock enterprises. One reason for these policy proposals was that some senior policy makers seemed to misunderstand "corporatization"—then a buzzword among higher education communities in East and Southeast Asia, which essentially called for greater institutional autonomy—as "to be run as a business corporation." Furthermore, since most policy makers were previously trained in the Soviet Union, where the nonprofit sector was practically nonexistent, they tended to have only a partial perception of the private sector. For them, "private" meant for-profit businesses. Consequently, the profit-making nature of most Vietnamese private universities is considered legitimate, and does not receive extensive criticism.

Currently, with nonprofit PHE recently legalized, one could expect intersectoral distinctiveness to decline further, and public-private debates to de-escalate. However, whether a truly nonprofit sector will eventually emerge remains an open question. After all, higher education is not shielded from the country's political economy, and Vietnam's political economy contains so many unknowns. ▲

Whether a truly nonprofit sector will eventually emerge remains an open question.

Quang Chau is a PhD candidate at the Department of Education Policy & Leadership, and an associate at the Program for Research on Private Higher Education (PROPHE), University at Albany, US. Email: qchau@albany.edu.

Private Higher Education in a Dominantly Public Sector: The Case of Germany

Barbara M. Kehm

Abstract

This article presents the role of private higher education in Germany. It includes some statistics about the size of the sector compared to the public sector, discusses motives for establishing and running a private higher education institution, and focusses on the public debates and perceptions about the private sector.

In Germany, all education, including higher education, is considered a public good and is therefore free: There are no tuition fees in the public sector. The system is devolved and the 16 German states have overall responsibility for all public educational institutions located on their territory. Germany is well known for having a state-funded and dominantly binary system of higher education, consisting of mainly two institutional types, universities and universities of applied sciences.

There is a private sector of higher education institutions as well. The state is present in the private sector insofar as these institutions have to obtain approval from the relevant German state to be established and they have to seek state recognition if they want to award academic degrees (bachelor, master, doctoral degrees). To achieve state recognition, private higher education institutions need an institutional accreditation awarded by the Science Council (an important buffer and advisory body in the field of higher education planning, funding, and policy) and an accreditation of their study programs awarded by accreditation agencies.

Motives for Establishing a Private Institution

The majority of private institutions are considered to be too small, too specialized, and often too mediocre to merit much public attention. Thus, the sector does not really present a competition or a threat to the public sector, and public debates about private higher education in Germany are rather low key.

Nonstate actors play a major role in the private higher education sector. In her 2006 study on the reasons and motives to establish a private higher education institution, Sperlich distinguishes between six groups of actors: private individuals, companies, foundations, associations, the Church, and cities. All of these actors have founded and are running private higher education institutions for a variety of reasons.

Sperlich points out that there are three factors that play a role in basically all foundations of private higher education institutions: shortages in the supply of study places in the public higher education sector; deficits resulting from a capacity overload in the public sector; and a somewhat changed perception of education as a purely public good. Furthermore, she distinguishes between four key motives for establishing a private higher education institution:

- The need of certain sectors in the economy for higher education graduates with particular, branch-specific qualifications (e.g., banks, telecommunication).
- The wish for a better image and an increase of prestige, as well as opportunities to influence political and societal decisions. This motive can be found among cities and individuals as founders of private higher education institutions.
- Economic reasons, which can either take the form of gaining a profit or writing off profits to save taxes or complementing a particular company portfolio (for example, a publishing company).
- The intention to improve the existing higher education system by declaring the private institution to be a model with better prospects to overcome existing problems in the public sector, better opportunities to implement reforms, or by developing a particular educational profile due to the fact that a private institution has more freedom to shape its own structures and approaches and is less burdened by bureaucracy.

The majority of private institutions are considered to be too small, too specialized, and often too mediocre to merit much public attention.

In fact, most private higher education institutions try to build an image for themselves that is characterized as being better able to act as reform models and doing a better job in teaching and learning, compared to public sector institutions.

The Public Discourse about Private Higher Education

The public discourse—if private higher education is at all a matter of debate—is divided between pros and cons. Private higher education is praised for its strong relationship to professional practice and the opportunity to build good networks with potential employers already during the program of studies; for its good organization and infrastructure, its small seminar groups, and the possibility to be in personal contact with the teachers; and for its low drop-out rates, good job prospects, and facilitating an easy transition into the labor market.

Private higher education is criticized for its high tuition fees coupled with the allegation of being elitist; for its complicated and complex student application and selection process; for its small range of subjects and its strictly regulated and tightly focussed study programs; and for offering education that for the most part is not based on research and is highly influenced by private sector companies.

Some Statistics

In 2018–2019, Germany had 117 private higher education institutions, of which 19 were universities and 92 were universities of applied sciences. In addition, there were three private faith-related higher education institutions and three private art colleges. In comparison, the state sector consists of 107 universities and 243 universities of applied sciences. Typically, private universities offer bachelor and master degrees, but 15 private universities also have the right to award doctoral degrees. Private universities of applied sciences mostly offer only bachelor degrees.

The German Federal Office of Statistics states that while 2.9 million students were enrolled in the state higher education sector in 2017, 247,000 students (8.5 percent of all students) were enrolled in private higher education. Overall, it is justified to say that despite the seemingly considerable number of private higher education institutions in Germany, most of these institutions are relatively small, ranging from just a couple of hundred to a maximum of 5,000 to 6,000 students per institution.

Most private higher education institutions are universities of applied sciences and the majority offer degrees in business administration, often coupled with communication sciences. Study programs are designed in close cooperation with private sector companies and often some of the teaching is carried out by professionals whose main employment is in the private sector.

In their 2016 study about the private higher education sector in Germany, Buschle and Haider indicate that the main source of income of private higher education institutions is tuition fees, which are not allowed in the state sector. Fees vary according to institution and subject. On average, students at private institutions have to pay between EUR 6,240 and EUR 14,000 per year for a three-year bachelor degree and on average EUR 15,500 per year for a two-year master degree. In addition, sponsoring and donations play a role in the funding of private higher education institutions. On average, more than two thirds of all institutional expenses are covered by tuition fees. ▲

Barbara M. Kehm is a Fellow at Leibniz Center for Science and Society (LCSS), Leibniz University of Hannover, Germany. Email: bmkehm@t-online.de.

Romania: Public–Private Divide in a Dual-Track System

Georgiana Mihut

Abstract

States can ensure that higher education remains a public good by providing free or low-cost high-quality education either to all students or to students who otherwise could not afford it. It is often assumed that public good-oriented provision is offered by state-funded universities. The reality of the public-private-good dichotomy is much messier in many countries, including Romania.

Similar to many other post-Soviet countries, Romania has a dual-track higher education system, in which public universities offer both fee-paying and non-fee-paying places. In the Romanian case, the tuition charged at both public and private universities is low. Due to the dual-track feature of the Romanian higher education system, public universities are characterized by a public–private divide. Public universities were not designed to be equitable; they have embraced commercialization (e.g., making use of advertising for recruitment purposes, enrolling many students in high-demand programs without direct links to labor market demand, and recruiting increasing numbers of fee-paying international students), and created tiers between fee-paying and non-fee-paying students. In addition, due to the low cost of tuition at both public and private universities, private universities are accessible to students. Contrary to typical arguments from supporters of private provision, the emergence of private higher education in Romania did not lead to pedagogical, managerial, or technological innovation. Nor did it lead to public debates on the role of the state in the provision of higher education. This article discusses some of the ways in which the Romanian case undermines traditional debates on public and private higher education.

Public–Private Dynamics Characterize State Higher Education Provision

A public good-focused higher education system ensures access to its neediest students. Yet, state-funded higher education in Romania is not oriented toward equity and inclusion. Merit orientation is a typical feature of dual-track systems. While a few tuition-free places are earmarked for students from rural high schools and Roma students, and a limited number of need-based scholarships are offered at public universities only, tuition-free places are primarily merit, rather than need oriented. Merit criteria also dominate scholarships and allocations to coveted and scarce publicly funded student accommodation. State institutions in Romania are designed to attract and support students with the highest academic achievements—who traditionally come from more privileged backgrounds.

Private higher education provision is criticized for leading to commercialization and the creation of a two-tiered system. As public universities also have an incentive to attract fee-paying students, they too engage in commercialization activities and demand-driven courses, partly as a response to competition from the private sector, but also due to competition within the public sector. Moreover, with some students paying and some students not paying tuition, a two-tiered system is formed among students at public universities.

Low-Cost Tuition Available at Both State and Nonstate Institutions

Despite the merit-oriented design of public universities, cost is not the main barrier to higher education access in Romania at either state and nonstate institutions. Both public and private universities are low cost. In some cases, tuition at private universities is lower than at public universities. At the Ecological University of Bucharest (EUB)—the longest operating private university in the country—the yearly tuition for a master degree in psychology was less than EUR 750 in 2020. This was EUB's highest priced bachelor or master program. At the University of Bucharest—one of the largest and most prestigious public universities in the country—a fee-paying master student in psychology would be charged a little over EUR 800 per academic year. The official monthly minimum wage in the country was about EUR 460 in 2020.

Nonstate Provision: Neither Increased Quality nor Innovation

It is assumed that the emergence of private higher education can lead to innovation and increase quality of provision. This has not been the case in the Romanian context, as private universities emerged as, and remained, demand-absorbing institutions. Less than 1 percent of Romanians had a higher education degree in 1990. To compete in a demand-driven market, private universities did not have to innovate in order to succeed. They merely mimicked the programs, practices, and structures of public institutions. The similarities between public and private universities went as far as often using the same staff, with private universities offering dual employment to public sector faculty. The private sector peaked in Romania in 2009—enrolling 42 percent of students—and has decreased since, due to a major demographic decline coupled with relatively constant state funding toward public universities. In the academic year 2017–2018, private universities enrolled only 14 percent of all bachelor degree students. Due in part to this decline, in the past two decades, higher education researchers have not devoted much attention to private higher education.

The similarities between public and private universities went as far as often using the same staff, with private universities offering dual employment to public sector faculty.

Lack of Access: Persisting, But not Due to Cost

Despite sufficient supply and the low cost of enrollment, access to higher education remains a significant challenge in Romania. In 2019, only 27 percent of 30–34-year-olds in the country had completed a higher education degree—the lowest rate in the European Union. Significant contributors are the high rate of early school drop-out, the low rate of enrollment for the baccalaureate (the secondary school leaving examination), and the current relatively low rate of passing the exam. In the Romanian context, innovations in the K-12 sector will be necessary for higher education to meet its public mission.

Changing Market Conditions

In Romania, the public debate about nonstate universities is not about the public-good vs. private-good nature of higher education. As stated above, private universities emerged as, and have remained, demand-absorbing institutions. Occasionally, they are criticized on quality grounds, but such criticism is easily applicable to many public universities. Private universities missed the opportunity to spur innovation, in great part due to the systemic conditions in which they emerged. Yet, an urgent impetus for change is emerging in the country for both public and private institutions. Romania is experiencing one of the highest population declines in Europe. In 2018, universities only enrolled the equivalent of 44 percent of students compared to their enrollment peak in 2007. Perhaps the continuing demographic decline—rather than current national funding policies—will force both public and private universities to innovate and increase their quality in order to attract a shrinking number of students. ▲

Georgiana Mihut is assistant professor, Department of Education Studies, University of Warwick, UK. Email: georgiana.g.mihut@gmail.com.

Abstract

Significant resistance to private universities in Argentina has resulted in a small, but strong participation of this sector in higher education. Core debates about private actors in education have evolved from vigorous opposition to more nuanced discussion about their fundamental role. However, the more prestigious and larger public sector still enjoys much governmental support in terms of finance and regulations, which has led the private sector to rely mostly on tuition revenue.

Argentina's Private Universities: Stringent Regulation of a Small but Consolidated Sector

Dante J. Salto

Private sector provision of higher education in Argentina has met much more resistance at the university level than at any other level of the educational system. Argentina's binary higher education system includes 2,369 university and nonuniversity institutions that enroll almost three million students. The private sector enrolls one out of four students in higher education, but only one out of five students at universities. Private institutions tend to be smaller than their public peers, as the number of private universities represents approximately half of the total. Nonuniversity-level institutions offer teacher education and technical and vocational educational programs. Universities offer a wide range of degrees from undergraduate to graduate education. By and large, the provision of private university education has been at the epicenter of the debates.

The core debates surrounding university education provision focus on the role, function, and quality of the private and public sectors. Those arguing against private participation stress that higher education is a public good. According to this viewpoint, public provision should be a priority, and private providers should be stringently regulated and minimally funded. Instead, those supporting private participation claim that the private sector fulfills a public mission, and, as such, deserves government funding and equivalent regulation. Also, they stress that the public sector faces quality and efficiency issues.

Debates over the Freedom to Educate

Argentina's higher education system dates back to its colonial times. Through the Catholic Church and the Spanish Crown's approval, the Jesuits created the antecedent of the first university in its current territory back in 1613. The Universidad Nacional de Córdoba, as it is known nowadays, was provincialized and nationalized—switched to full public ownership—in 1820 and 1856, respectively. The public sector at the university level remained a monopoly until the mid-twentieth century in Argentina. Only in 1958, more than a century after its independence, did Argentina legally allow private university providers.

As also happened in other Latin American countries, the first wave of private universities in Argentina responded to the Catholic Church's longstanding demands. During the ban against private universities, those who defended the status quo argued that the state should be the only university education provider. On the other side, those who opposed the ban claimed that the constitution recognized their right to provide education.

Even If Allowed, Public Funding Is Restricted

The arguments, however, went beyond the right to provide education. The late establishment of private universities in Argentina reflects discussions regarding the public purpose of private universities. Private sector advocates emphasize that the sector fulfills a public mission as much as the rest of the system. Those opposing private involvement claim that the private sector should not receive public support as they only contribute in a limited way to society. As a result of those debates, private universities in Argentina cannot receive direct or indirect public funding, except for research. The private sector therefore relies vastly on tuition fees charged to students, in sharp contrast to its public counterpart, which is fully funded by the national and provincial governments.

The clear-cut contrast between funding of public and private universities differentiates Argentina from some of its neighbors. Brazil and Chile provide public financing for both private and public higher education sectors. These differing policy choices may

signal that some countries do consider that the private sector fulfills a public purpose, while public funding in Argentina exclusively targets public universities.

Public or Government Mistrust of Private Higher Education?

The massification and diversification of higher education, both private and public, have increased quality concerns. Those opposing the introduction of private actors in higher education prescribe further regulation of the private sector through quality assurance mechanisms. Nonstate actors, however, point out that quality concerns are not exclusive to the private sector. In fact, a few private universities in Argentina are fairly prestigious, notwithstanding the public sector's domination. Yet, the regulation set up to oversee new universities reflects some bias against nonstate actors. Created in 1995, the accreditation agency sets extra regulatory hurdles to establish new private universities. Private providers need approval from the agency before their formal creation, whereas public universities go through the review after congress has created them without much room for dissent. Although some may claim that this regulatory differential is unfair, in practice, these extra barriers to create new private universities have legitimized them and have kept the number of low-quality, demand-absorbing, and "predatory" institutions very limited in Argentina.

Private providers' survival in such stringent conditions (e.g., stricter regulations, free-tuition competition) could be explained by their capacity to offer something different than their public peers (e.g., small class sizes, flexible hours, distance education). Notably, the dominant and prestigious free-tuition, free-access public sector has accumulated perceived failures that have led to a flight from upper-class and middle-class students to their private peers.

A Small but Consolidated Sector

The arguments regarding nonstate actors' participation in higher education in Argentina have moved from explicit opposition to more nuanced discussions about their role as a consolidated part of the postsecondary education system. In spite of the limitations and restrictions that nonstate actors face in Argentina, they represent a sizable number of institutions and enroll a small, albeit stable, percentage of students. However, the COVID-19 pandemic poses a significant challenge to a sector that heavily relies on tuition fees. The pandemic effects, coupled with more stringent regulations and a lack of public funding, make it unlikely that this sector will become more prominent in size in the future. ▲

The massification and diversification of higher education, both private and public, have increased quality concerns.

Dante J. Salto is assistant professor of higher education at the Department of Administrative Leadership, University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee, and associate of the Program for Research on Private Higher Education (PROPHE), US. Email: salto@uwm.edu.

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Toward a Data-driven Classification of European Higher Education Institutions

Benedetto Lepori and Agata A. Lambrechts

Since the adoption of the Bologna Declaration in 1999, we have seen moves toward a system-level convergence and transnational harmonization of higher education in the European Union and the larger European Higher Education Area. However, in response to global competitiveness in higher education and encouraged by some policy makers and European institutions, we have also observed growing diversification of European higher education institutions (HEIs). Unfortunately, unlike in the United States where the [Carnegie classification](#) provides a clear understanding of the main types of institutions in the system, there is currently no widely accepted classification of European HEIs capturing their increased diversity.

The Value of Classification

Classification is a basic tool for research and decision-making. Its value and purpose are twofold. Firstly, classification allows for summarizing the diversity of objects about which inductive generalizations can be made into a limited number (between five and 10) of categories that fit the human mind's cognitive abilities. Secondly, characteristics of the objects and their relationships with others can be predicted according to their classification before it has been verified for all within the category. This allows, for example, for more rapid strategy development.

In higher education, institutional classification is used as a tool for research and basis for governmental policy making, recognizing and describing institutional diversity, allowing for analysis of institutional performance and meaningful representation of large systems, and identifying "research universities" competing in international rankings.

Designing a Classification of European HEIs

Previous HEI classifications in Europe have primarily focused on institutional categories such as universities and colleges, which, however, are not comparable across countries, even if similar labels are used. Further, the distinctions between categories have been blurred in the recent decades, with nonuniversity institutions in some countries developing sizable research activity (e.g., in Switzerland) and even acquiring the right to award a PhD (e.g., in Ireland and Norway). This calls into question the value of such classifications. Finally, existing classifications focus on the research vs. education missions and activities of HEIs, overlooking the so-called third mission and differentiation along subject profiles. Overall, this makes it increasingly challenging to identify the main types of institutions that are present in European higher education.

Given this context, we felt the need to develop a new, comprehensive classification of European HEIs, focusing on differences in activity profiles (education vs. research vs. third mission) and subject scope (generalist vs. specialist institutions, a long tradition in the European context). Key to this process, described in detail in our recent [article](#), is a statistical analysis of data on most of the HEIs to be classified, to identify distinctive characteristics of classes and to attribute HEIs to classes. We have used the [European Tertiary Education Register \(ETER\)](#), which for the first time provides a register and comparable data on a population of more than 3,000 HEIs in nearly 40 countries. Based on this, and thanks to the integration of ETER with research and technology output data from the [RISIS](#) research infrastructure project, we were able to develop and empirically test a comparable classification of European HEIs.

Abstract

The differentiation of profiles of institutions over the past several decades emphasizes their relevance for higher education. Unlike in the United States, there is currently no broad classification of higher education institutions in Europe. Building on European Tertiary Education Register data, we propose a new comprehensive and cross-country classification in six classes that recognizes the diversity of functions and specializations of institutions within European higher education.

Our proposed classification comprises six classes of HEIs showing distinct characteristics in terms of relative orientation toward research vs. education and subject specialization.

*Benedetto Lepori is professor at the Università della Svizzera italiana, Lugano, coordinator of the European Tertiary Education Register (ETER) database, and the author of "The Heterogeneity of European Higher Education Institutions: A Configurational Approach." *Studies in Higher Education*, 2021, 1–17. Email: blepori@usi.ch.*

Agata A. Lambrechts is a postdoctoral researcher at the Università della Svizzera italiana, supporting the development of the ETER database. Email: agata.lambrechts@usi.ch.

The New Classification

Our proposed classification comprises six classes of HEIs showing distinct characteristics in terms of relative orientation toward research vs. education and subject specialization (natural sciences vs. social sciences and humanities).

Through the empirical analysis, we identified a class of about 300 research universities, including all top-ranked European universities. Research universities constitute the core of European higher education, accounting for the lion's share of scientific publication, but also enrolling 40 percent of students. The second main research component of European higher education are so-called science and technology-oriented HEIs, such as the Technical University of Munich and ETH (Swiss Federal Institute of Technology) Zurich, with a strong research focus and high technology production. These institutions account for 40 percent of all patents filed by European HEIs. Further, a large class of generalist HEIs includes younger and less-research-oriented universities, alongside large universities of applied sciences, enrolling nearly 40 percent of the bachelor and master students. This class represents the main areas of overlap between the traditional university and nonuniversity sectors in Europe. Finally, the European HEI system also includes a group of highly specialized HEIs in social sciences and humanities, such as art, music, and theology schools—some of them ancient and highly reputed in their domain, and a large number of educational-only HEIs, comprising many private institutions.

We believe that with six classes, our proposed classification strikes a reasonable balance between parsimony and detail. The ex-post analysis shows that the classes can be described and labeled consistently on the basis of their characteristics and—although the relation with nationally defined categories is somewhat complex—the names borne by the HEIs. Thus, the classification satisfies the first important criterion of being narrable in a meaningful way. Furthermore, the classification provides a delineation of “research universities” that is more selective than the Carnegie classification, but still includes most European HEIs featuring in international rankings. In particular, besides the traditional classes of (research-oriented) “universities” and educational HEIs, we were also able to identify a large class of generalist HEIs with some research activity that cuts across the traditional distinction between universities and universities of applied sciences. The importance of this development is underscored by the fact that more than a quarter of all students at the bachelor and master levels in Europe are enrolled in this particular class.

The new classification allows for a better understanding of the European higher education structure and identifies groups of institutions with similar characteristics, for example, as targets of European policies. The ongoing extension of ETER will allow for its successive refinement and for analysis of changes over time. The challenge, as shown by the example of the Carnegie classification, will be to add dimensions while keeping the original simplicity of the classification. ▲

The Dual-Track Tuition Fee Model in Russia and Post-Soviet Countries

Anna Smolentseva

The dual-track tuition-fee system is a distinctive funding model in international higher education, which exists only in (most) countries of the former Soviet Union, some postsocialist countries in Central and Eastern Europe, and a few African countries. Unlike all other international funding models, which either require tuition fees from everyone (e.g., England, the Netherlands, the United States) or no fees from anyone (e.g., Finland, Germany), the dual-track system applies different rules to different categories of domestic students. It was implemented in all 15 countries of what was the Soviet Union and still exists in all but Estonia. Variations of the dual-track model are minor across these countries.

In the dual-track system, there are two streams of students, divided on the basis of academic merit as determined by national standardized tests. Higher-scoring students get a tuition-free place. The rest have to pay. In Russia, about half of the students in public institutions now pay tuition fees; in most other post-Soviet countries, their numbers vary from 45 to 85 percent. In most cases, the number of tuition-paying students is determined by the institutions (in mass institutions, that group is as big as can be recruited and taught). The minimum “merit” bar established by government is low. Tuition fees are a significant share of income, supplementing low levels of public funding.

The two groups of students study together, but the different admission criteria are associated with two different sets of aspirations, motivations, and incentives among students (where to study and how to prepare), among higher education institutions (which students to recruit for each segment, and how), and for the state (what to fund). This division lies within each public higher education institution.

The Dual-Track System as a Late Soviet Legacy

In the 1980s, Soviet higher education (ISCED 6 programs) had already reached a level of mass participation: about a fifth of the age cohort across the country, and a quarter in the Russian Socialist Republic, comparable with the Western world in that period. The government sought to stimulate the socialist system using economic freedom and market injection, increasingly popular policy tools globally. The 1980s *perestroika* policies introduced key changes in governmental funding of higher education: the notion of education as a service; a departure from solely state funding; the diversification of funding sources; private funding; and facilitation of nonstate provision. It was hoped that liberalization would help to overcome the rigidity of the Soviet system, its bias toward engineering, and its orientation toward applied education, and enable the creation of dynamic and flexible institutions.

After the dissolution of the Soviet Union, new educational laws in Russia and other post-Soviet countries confirmed the commitment to the new private sector and partial marketization in the public sector, where the tuition-fee track complemented the tuition-free track. While private sector enrollments did not develop to any large extent in Russia and most post-Soviet countries, marketization largely took place in the dominant public sector.

The Structure of the Dual-Track Model

As indicated above, the dual-track model divides the field of educational production into two segments: merit-defined (free places) vs. market-defined (tuition-fee places).

Abstract

The dual-track tuition fee model in post-Soviet countries is a distinctive funding model in international higher education. A legacy of the late Soviet state, which injected market mechanisms into the tuition fee-free socialist system, it divides students into two selection and funding streams regulated by different types of competition and price setting. This creates profound inequities, and, in most institutions, incentives to focus on revenue without regard for educational quality.

These two segments are based on different types of competition: based on merit in the free segment, and based on price in the tuition-paying segment.

These two segments are based on different types of competition: based on merit in the free segment, and based on price in the tuition-paying segment. Elite institutions, which maintain selectivity by limiting the number of total fee-based places, have an admissions system that is both price based and merit based.

In the free-tuition segment, the cost per student is set centrally by the government—unbeknownst to the “customers.” Admissions are based on the list of applicants ordered by their test scores. Merit (test scores) serves as a competition-based signal parallel to price. Cut-off and average admission test scores are publicly available, creating a “value hierarchy” among students and institutions.

In the tuition-paying segment, admissions are price based. Price is established by institutions and varies by institution and field of study. Fees must be paid directly and immediately—in contrast to the quasi markets of England and Australia, where price is established by government, students do not pay directly, and payment is deferred until a certain level of employment income is achieved. As in the marketized US system, prices are set by institutions, but unlike the United States, there is a division between those who pay and those who do not. Further, unlike the United States and some other models, dual-track systems do not provide extensive scholarships or support to students to cover their living expenses, aside from studentships of nominal size for certain groups.

Implications of the Model

This model dramatically reinforces educational inequality, as routinely criticized by the European Commission, the World Bank, and the OECD. The merit strand opening access to the free track, especially in prestigious institutions, is associated with socioeconomic inequalities: Only better-off social groups are able to afford exclusive secondary schools and private tutoring. Meanwhile, access to the nonmerit track is determined by the capacity of families to pay. In contrast with the relatively egalitarian Soviet system, both strands of post-Soviet higher education foster inequality.

The system also reinforces institutional stratification: As the elite sector is not regulated by market competition and market price, but by reputation, high selectivity and high price together have come to signal “quality” and prestige. In the nonelite segment regulated by market competition, the dual-track model creates peculiar, and in some respects ineffective, institutional practices aimed at optimizing both governmental and private financing. The model also reproduces double standards of social value (money/merit), in which money is decisive. For students unable to access free education, it normalizes “nonexcellence”—the value of money, not academic merit, in higher education.

The dual-track selection and funding system has had an enormous impact on the development of higher education in Russia and all other post-Soviet countries, contributing at the same time to massification, system expansion, institutional stratification, and social inequalities. Strikingly, this system is almost never questioned. Only Estonia cancelled tuition fees in the public sector for normally progressing students in 2012. Georgia moved toward further marketization, introducing educational vouchers covering 100, 70 and 50 percent of tuition fees, depending on test results; it also established need-based grants and free places in priority fields, but overall only 19 percent of first-year students received full coverage of tuition fees in 2018. In Russia, educational vouchers were piloted in early 2000s in a few regions, but were discontinued. A voucher system is a fiercer version of the dual-track model, where access to the tuition-free stream is more tightly linked to “merit” and thus social disparities.

The post-Soviet dual-track model is consistent with the globally prevailing idea of employability as the central purpose of higher education, a legacy of the human capital theory, which provides the rationale for governmental and individual coinvestment in higher education. Training specialists for the national economy was also the Soviet purpose of higher education. This helped the dual-track model to flourish in the region after the dissolution of the Soviet Union.

The dual-track system reproduces a cultural divide between the egalitarian but vocationally instrumental Soviet provision of higher education as a common good, and post-Soviet higher education as a vocational private good resulting from consumer choice and normalizing inequality. The dual-track Soviet legacy needs to be revisited and checked against the criteria of social equity, well-being of society, and economic efficiency, as well as the larger purposes of higher education in the twenty-first century. ▲

Anna Smolentseva is a senior researcher at the Institute of Education, National Research University Higher School of Economics, Moscow, Russia. Email: asmolentseva@hse.ru.



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Abstract

Australia's universities have long relied on international students, who form one-fourth of total enrollments. Forty percent come from China. But the US–China cold war, US pressure on allies to align themselves accordingly, and the impact of COVID-19 travel restrictions on the capacity of Chinese students to return to Australia and resume their studies, have severely disrupted universities. Continuing cold war polarization could damage bilateral relations in higher education and research.

Australia's China Challenge

Anthony Welch

Two features stand out in the Australian university system; each bears on higher education and research relations with China. Although a relatively small system, with a total enrollment of 1.6 million, the country lists six universities among the world's top 100, according to Shanghai Jiaotong's ARWU ranking. This is more than Canada, for example, with a much larger population. The second feature is the unusually high proportion of international enrollments—27 percent of total enrollments in 2019. By far the largest contingent are mainland Chinese students. These two features are in fact related, since 27 percent of university revenue stemmed from international student revenue in 2019, and it has been estimated that a quarter of total university expenditure on research came from international student revenues.

International Enrollments in Australia

International enrollments have grown vigorously for decades, making international education Australia's fourth largest export industry. But this has made Australian universities heavily dependent on international student revenue, particularly from China. In turn, this was due to persistent underfunding of higher education, which drove universities to seek other income sources, notably by energetically expanding fee-paying international student numbers, particularly from mainland China.

Australia's location—the only substantial English-language education system in the South Pacific—means all top 10 source countries for international students are Asian. Of the overall total income of AUD 32.4 billion (USD 22 billion) derived from international education in 2017–2018, Asia contributed AUD 22.2 billion (USD 16.6 billion). Much of this came from China. At the national level, mainland Chinese students comprised 40 percent of all international enrollments, but in some universities, particularly the research-intensive Group of Eight (Go8), the proportion was much higher. At the University of Sydney, mainland Chinese students alone accounted for 24 percent of total enrollments. The university earned AUD 885 million (USD 664 million) in international student fees in 2018, accounting for 35 percent of overall revenue. Prior to COVID-19, more Chinese students studied at the three inner-Sydney universities than in all 33 public universities in California.

Skilled Chinese Migrants

Australia's longstanding bias toward skilled migration means Chinese migrants are now among the most high-skilled categories, something which has important consequences for higher education. Nationally, over 15 percent of the current Australian academic workforce now stem from Asia, with data showing that the number of academic staff from China tripled between 2005 and 2015. The Chinese knowledge diaspora, many of whom came to Australia to undertake their doctorates and have subsequently settled there, is a growing force in Australian higher education, often with well-established links to the powerful Chinese research system and its leading universities.

COVID-19 Consequences

The onset of the COVID-19 pandemic in early 2020 disrupted most of these patterns. Travel restrictions shuttered international student mobility, especially from China. Over 60 percent of the 170,000 Chinese international student-visa holders, many of whom had travelled home for the Spring Festival in early 2020, were caught outside Australia. Persisting travel restrictions meant that most were still unable to return to Australia by late 2021. This had major consequences for many universities, particularly those with high proportions of mainland Chinese students. Notwithstanding a swift transition to online teaching and learning, which was initially accepted but was replaced by a growing

desire to resume the on-campus experience, total revenue losses across the sector were estimated at AUD 1.8 billion for 2020, and were projected to amount to a further AUD 2 billion in 2021. It is predicted that between 2020 and 2024, the sector will lose AUD 6.4 billion–7.6 billion in discretionary income available for research.

The abrupt, ongoing loss of revenue prompted a halt to building programs, cuts to discretionary spending, and a selling-off of property, particularly student accommodation that now often lay empty. Despite this major revenue loss and job losses that were, by late 2021, estimated to total 35,000, the federal government repeatedly withheld financial support to universities from a scheme purposely designed to support employment across all industries during the pandemic. A series of interviews with public servants, vice-chancellors, ministers, and former ministers in 2021 identified a common explanation: “It’s not that complicated. The government hates universities.” (See also [William Locke](#), “Australian Higher Education, The Perfect Storm?” in IHE #107).

Collaboration and Culture Wars

US–China tensions and increasing polarization also influenced higher education and research relations with China. While Australia had long been keen to enroll hundreds of thousands of Chinese students, the increasingly rancorous and rivalrous relations between the two world powers, and pressure from the United States on its allies to align themselves accordingly, had a definite impact. Pressure for decoupling from China intensified, especially regarding research collaboration, reversing an established pattern of growing bilateral collaboration that saw China become Australia’s leading research partner in mathematics, engineering, and chemistry. China’s scientific rise means that it is now ranked second only to the United States in citations according to the Web of Science (WoS) database, and by 2019, second in the list of highly cited authors. This made it an increasingly attractive research partner; as such coauthored articles yielded higher average citation counts than purely Australian publications in those subject areas. Many such coauthored papers, numbers of which involved the Chinese knowledge diaspora in Australian universities, now featured mainland Chinese colleagues. In fact, Australian papers coauthored with Chinese colleagues rose from 4 percent of the total in 1996 to 14 percent in 2009.

This was particularly important, given that the Australian ratio of international coauthored papers, at 45 percent, was significantly higher than the worldwide average of 35 percent. Hence, broad restrictions on China–Australia academic relations would impede scientific progress, limit higher education relations between the two countries, and contribute to increased polarization. In a 2018 speech on university governance, the chancellor of the University of Queensland (a Go8 institution) and former secretary of the department of foreign affairs and trade outlined the extent of scientific collaboration between his university and China. He pointed to more than 3,000 copublications, the Category Normalized Citation Impact (CNCI) count of which was almost three times the world average. But in the face of a rising climate of anti-China sentiment and a broader securitization of policy, a national audit of university links with China was instituted, provoking complaints by universities about both its blunt framing and administrative burden. Amid concerns that it could fuel anti-Chinese prejudice and “Reds under the bed” paranoia, foreign interference legislation was also introduced, with plans to train both academic staff and students how to spot projects of concern.

Although bilateral collaboration at the individual level mostly continues, institutional collaborations, especially in high-tech areas, are now subject to much greater scrutiny. While legitimate security concerns have been pointed to, it is to be hoped that the current cold war climate of polarization and rancor does not result in a sledgehammer being used to crack a nut, endangering a broader productive relationship. ▲

*Pressure for decoupling
from China intensified.*

*Anthony Welch is professor
of education, University of
Sydney, Australia. Email:
anthony.welch@sydney.edu.au.*



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by Giorgio Marinoni

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CIHE Updates

The *IHE* editorial team is delighted to welcome a new associate editor, [Professor Chris Glass](#) from the Department of Educational Leadership and Higher Education at Boston College. In addition to his extensive scholarly knowledge in the field of internationalization, Chris brings a wealth of editorial experience to *IHE*, as Editor-in-Chief of the *Journal of International Students*.

We are also excited to share the following CIHE updates:

WES–CIHE Summer Institute

The annual [WES–CIHE Summer Institute](#) will be held virtually from June 1 to 3, 2022. All graduate students and early-career professionals are invited to submit a proposal on the theme of “Innovative and Inclusive Internationalization in Higher Education.” Proposals must be received by March 15, 2022.

Recent CIHE Publications

The results of our recent comparative study of international student recruitment in non-Anglophone contexts, conducted jointly with the Institute of Education at the Higher School of Economics (Russia), have now been published as part of the Routledge Series on Internationalization in Higher Education. *International Student Recruitment and Mobility in Non-Anglophone Countries: Theories, Themes, and Patterns* (edited by Hans de Wit, Ekaterina Minaeva, and Lizhou Wang) is now available for preorder.

A full list of CIHE-affiliated publications is available on the [CIHE website](#).

Project management: Niklas Heuser

Cover illustration: [axeptdesign.de](#)

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DUZ Verlags- und Medienhaus GmbH
DUZ Academic Publishers
 Kaiser-Friedrich-Straße 90
 10585 Berlin
 Germany

Phone: +49 (0)30 21 29 87-0

Fax: +49 (0)30 21 29 87-20

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***International Higher Education* is the quarterly publication of the Boston College Center for International Higher Education.**

The journal is a reflection of the Center's mission to encourage an international perspective that will contribute to enlightened policy and practice. Through *International Higher Education*, a network of distinguished international scholars offers commentary and current information on key issues that shape higher education worldwide.

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