

INTERNATIONAL HIGHER EDUCATION

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**Global Engagement
in a Time of
Geopolitical Tensions:
A New Cold War**

PHILIP G. ALTBACH AND
HANS DE WIT

3

**Where is Value in Digital
Higher Education: From
Commodities to Assets**

JANJA KOMLJENOVIC

9

**International Students
in Non-Anglophone
Countries: Challenges
and Opportunities**

HANS DE WIT AND LIZHOU
WANG

13

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education news and
comment see our partner



universityworldnews.com

**Can We Measure
Universities' Impact
on Climate Change?**

TRISTAN MCCOWAN

17

**Foreign Academics
in China**

YUZHOU CAI, ANDREA BRAUN
STŘELCOVÁ, GIULIO MARINI,
FUTAO HUANG, AND XIN XU

29



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The complete table of contents
can be found on page 2.

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GLOBAL ISSUES

- 3___ Global Engagement in a Time of Geopolitical Tensions: A New Cold War
PHILIP G. ALTBACH AND HANS DE WIT
- 5___ Needed: Financing Policies That Are Both Affordable and Sustainable
ARTHUR M. HAUPTMAN
- 7___ Academic Globalization: Where Did We Come from? Where Are We Going?
PHILIP G. ALTBACH AND JAMIL SALMI
- 9___ Where is Value in Digital Higher Education: From Commodities to Assets
JANJA KOMLJENOVIC

STUDENTS: ACTIVISM AND RECRUITMENT

- 11___ Student Activism and the Pandemic: A Global Round-Up
THIERRY M. LUESCHER AND DIDEM TÜRKÖĞLU
- 13___ International Students in Non-Anglophone Countries: Challenges and Opportunities
HANS DE WIT AND LIZHOU WANG

RESILIENCY, THE CLIMATE CRISIS, AND HIGHER EDUCATION

- 15___ STEERING into the Swerve: Adjusting to the Challenges and Opportunities Forced by COVID-19
ROBERTA MALEE BASSETT
- 17___ Can We Measure Universities' Impact on Climate Change?
TRISTAN MCCOWAN

AFRICA FOCUS

- 19___ Will Experiences of Doctoral Study in China influence African Academic Practice?
NATASHA ROBINSON AND DAVID MILLS
- 21___ Higher Education in Africa: A Complex but Hardly Researched Enterprise
NELSON CASIMIRO ZAVALE

THE ACADEMIC PROFESSION AND MOBILITY: INTERNATIONAL PERSPECTIVES

- 23___ Where Are You From? Career Experiences of Non-US PhD Holders in the United States
DONGBIN KIM AND SEHEE KIM
- 25___ Broadening Our Understanding of "International Academic Staff": Nationality as a New Marker of Diversity
GIULIO MARINI
- 27___ Sojourn or Stay: International Academics and Researchers in Australia
ANTHONY WELCH
- 29___ Foreign Academics in China
YUZHUO CAI, ANDREA BRAUN STŘELCOVÁ, GIULIO MARINI, FUTAO HUANG, AND XIN XU
- 31___ International Researchers in Japanese Companies
MING LI AND FUTAO HUANG

COUNTRIES AND REGIONS

- 33___ Trends and Propositions to Provoke Debate about the Future of Higher Education
ELLEN HAZELKORN AND TOM BOLAND
- 35___ Emergence within Emergency: Kazakhstan's Higher Education System
DOUGLAS L. ROBERTSON AND NAZGUL BAYETOVA
- 37___ Rethinking São Paulo's Higher Education System
JACQUES MARCOVITCH



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Global Engagement in a Time of Geopolitical Tensions: A New Cold War

Philip G. Altbach and Hans de Wit

Over the past decades, global engagement has been a key priority of higher education and its internationalization. The global knowledge economy increased competition between universities, but also stimulated cooperation and exchange of people and science, although primarily for the benefit of the Global North. While the COVID-19 pandemic brought the mobility of students and staff to a halt, the need for global research cooperation became crucial. And the Sustainable Development Goals of the United Nations create further need for global engagement and cooperation to solve key social and scientific problems across the world.

But current geopolitical tensions (first, primarily between China on the one hand and the United States, Europe, Australia and other high-income countries on the other, and now, as a result of the invasion of Ukraine by Russia, also between Russia and that same group of countries) place momentous challenges on higher education's global engagement. The world is becoming divided again between Russia and China and their allies and what we used to call the "Western" countries—in addition to a large group of non-aligned countries in the Global South. As a result, we seem to be returning to the Cold War period, which ended in the late 1980s. The implications for global engagement in higher education in this "second Cold War" will likely be severe. Building on two recent articles in *University World News* ("[In a new Cold War, academic engagement is still necessary](#)" and "[In the mad rush to disengage, we join in Putin's extremism](#)"), we ask ourselves what lessons we can learn from academic cooperation during the first Cold War and during the academic boycott in South Africa, and how we can avoid returning to the isolated bubbles of engagement of that past.

The debate about academic engagement and academic values is complex. The academic boycott against the apartheid regime in South Africa taught us that such a boycott can be effective as part of a broader social, economic, and cultural struggle, but continued active interaction with individuals in the academic community of South Africa who were critical of the regime was mutually beneficial. Thus, a total boycott was not implemented. A similar argument can be made about an academic boycott of Israel, relating to its Palestinian policies. Blanket boycotts are in nobody's interest.

Global Engagement and the Russian Invasion

A present, additional harm resulting from Russia's war on Ukraine appears to be the loss of rationality among segments of the academic community in North America and Europe. In their rush to disengage from all things Russian, academics, universities, publishers, scientific organizations, and governments are cutting ties with everything and everyone.

We have argued why engagement with Russian colleagues and knowledge of Russia are essential at this point in time. Within the academic community, colleagues are now advocating against, or even canceling, courses dealing with Russian society, history, and culture. This is precisely what should be avoided. Knowledge of Russia is more crucial than ever—not to mention that it is one of the world's great civilizations, regardless of what Mr. Putin is doing to it today.

While it is difficult to make sense of public opinion in Putin's increasingly authoritarian Russia, much of the Russian academic community opposes the war and values international relationships. According to Maria Yudkevich's history of internationalization of Russian higher education, since the early 1990s, contacts between Russian researchers

Abstract

Global engagement has been a key priority of higher education and its internationalization, but is currently seriously challenged by geopolitical tensions. We seem to be returning to the political climate of the Cold War, which ended in the late 1980s. What lessons can we learn from academic cooperation during the first Cold War and during the academic boycott in South Africa, and how can we avoid returning to the isolated bubbles of engagement of that past?

What will now become of academic cooperation and exchange with Russia cannot be foreseen at this stage, and will require constant monitoring.

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and their foreign colleagues have grown substantially, resulting in joint projects and publications, and in the course of the past decade, the integration of Russian science into the international community has become even stronger. “During various periods in history, higher education and science in Russia have been connected to the international community in different ways. The situation moved from close ties to a policy of almost complete autonomy and isolation, from cooperation and integration to a quest for a national identity of its own place on the global academic market.” (Handbook of International Higher Education, 2022, p. 37). We are entering a new phase of isolation and quest for national identity at political and institutional levels, but for the sake of Russian—and global—higher education, personal academic ties and knowledge development that have taken decades to build should not be completely dismantled.

While it is a necessity to end relationships with Russian institutions linked to the Putin regime—and this includes all of the universities whose rectors have, some under duress, signed a pro-war declaration—similarly boycotting all individuals and some NGOs is not justified, and indeed harms brave individuals who are trying, under the most difficult and dangerous of circumstances, to carry on with their research and maintain international collaborations. Academic freedom is the highest among academic values. It is gone in Putin’s Russia. We should not join in this political extremism.

The Present and the Future

For now, the global academic community needs to take a step back and carefully consider how to appropriately react to the crisis, as we need to do in relation to increased academic repression in China and other countries. Instead of cutting off Russian academics and distancing ourselves from Russian culture, we should do the exact opposite. Russians who are not involved with the Putin regime or who oppose it, among them the many who left Russia and numerous others who are unable to do so, need our support and continued cooperation, similar to the support currently extended to the higher education system and community in Ukraine.

We agree with the four Ukrainian academics who wrote in [a recent opinion article in *Times Higher Education*](#) that “It is wrong to pretend that Russians who publicly condemn Putin’s regime face anywhere near the dangers that Ukrainian academics now encounter daily; they should not be united in one basket. While Russians and Belarusians face domestic repression, Ukrainians are fleeing shelling, bombing, killing and complete destruction of their homes and cities; victims of aggression should be prioritised.” We also agree with them that “the reputations of these [Russian] institutions and individuals [those who signed a letter of support to the invasion] will forever be stained by this failure as public intellectuals and public platforms to defend the universal values of democracy, peace and academic integrity.” But in our opinion, this must not lead to isolation of those—Russian or others—who are in agreement with these universal values.

During the first Cold War, we kept contact with Russian academics open and tested grounds for institutional cooperation in the hope for a better future—which did come, although now it is gone again. Thanks to that engagement, the past decades brought about a much broader foundation of human and academic values in Russia. Keeping that foundation alive is a necessary basis to increase the chances for a more positive future.

What will now become of academic cooperation and exchange with Russia cannot be foreseen at this stage, and will require constant monitoring. The same can be said about China and its allies. But complete academic isolation will be counterproductive in the short and long run. ▲

Needed: Financing Policies That Are Both Affordable and Sustainable

Arthur M. Hauptman

In countries around the world, there are two key objectives in financing public higher education: to make it affordable to a broad range of the population, and to make the system financially sustainable. In reality, these goals are rarely achieved. In this article, we ask whether a financing model exists that meets both objectives without devoting too large a share of GDP to higher education.

The Two Predominant Financing Models

Let us first examine the two predominant approaches. One is institution-based: Tuition is kept low relative to the costs of providing the education. Government pays most of the costs and student financial aid plays a relatively minor role. The other approach is more student-based: Tuition fees pay for a significant share of the cost and more financial aid is used to help students pay the rest.

Keeping tuition low is a politically popular approach based on the notion that higher education is a public good and taxpayers should pay the full cost of providing it. By definition, this approach typically achieves broad affordability by charging all students a very low price—although the issue of paying for students' living expenses is often not fully addressed.

But the reality is that most governments do not have the resources to provide a quality education if prices to students are kept low. As a result, the supply of seats is limited and the higher education system shrinks rather than grows. Or, spending per student is sharply reduced. Neither situation is sustainable. Notable exceptions are some Scandinavian countries, which, thanks to their high tax revenue base, are able to support low tuition and provide a quality education for much of their population.

By contrast, the student-based approach (also often referred to as high tuition/high aid) views higher education mostly as a private good, of which students are the primary beneficiaries because of the higher incomes that they earn after graduation. Under this philosophy, institutions tend to charge higher tuition and provide more financial aid to those who cannot afford it. The high tuition/high aid approach is far more sustainable than the low-tuition approach because it generates more revenue per student. But if the additional financial aid provided is insufficient, it leads to sharply reduced affordability, possibly resulting in a system that mainly serves the well-to-do.

In this model, the gap between higher prices and the ability of many students to pay often leads to greater reliance on student loans. Thus, loans come to represent a key mechanism for achieving greater affordability and sustainability in higher education funding. But too often, program design flaws can prevent loans from achieving these twin objectives. For example, weak controls on tuition can lead to excessive reliance on loans, resulting in an unacceptably high level of borrowers unable or unwilling to repay. This undercuts the rationale for relying on loans in the first place.

Toward a Consensus Model

One problem that limits the effectiveness of both models is that funding, fee setting, and financial aid decisions are often poorly coordinated. Another is that neither plan adequately does enough to help students pay their living expenses while in school. Is there a better way to achieve these two objectives, which could be successfully employed by a broad range of countries?

Abstract

Neither of the two predominant models of financing public higher education around the world manages to achieve both affordability and sustainability. Keeping tuition low provides affordability but fails to achieve financial sustainability and limits accessibility. High tuition/high aid models are more sustainable, but less affordable, resulting in more reliance on student loans. There is a consensus model that can make higher education affordable and sustainable without devoting a high percentage of GDP to higher education.

In countries around the world, there are two key objectives in financing public higher education: to make it affordable to a broad range of the population, and to make the system financially sustainable.

The first step in *ensuring greater affordability* is to abandon the notion that the primary function of tuition fees is to help pay institutional operating costs. Instead, countries should base tuition on what an average family can afford to pay, and build their institutions from that. For example, institutions could set their tuition and mandatory fees between 10 to 25 percent of GDP per capita. Institutions and programs in greatest demand could charge a higher percentage of GDP than those less in demand. A key component of this approach is that funding must be sufficient to provide grants to cover tuition and living expenses for students who cannot afford to pay.

This approach results in a certain symmetry. The more institutions charge within the acceptable range, the less funding their governments will have to come up with. But at higher-charging institutions, financial aid funding would need to be augmented because there will be more students unable to afford the higher charges. By contrast, for institutions that charge at the lower end of the acceptable range, the government would have to provide more institutional funding but less student aid.

The key is for countries to set realistic and reasonable limits on tuition as a percent of GDP per capita. Carefully crafted, these policies could lower net funding requirements as the reduction in institutional subsidies would more than offset necessary increases in financial aid. Under such a system, loans would return to their intended role of allowing certain groups of students to invest in themselves at a reasonable cost.

To *achieve greater sustainability*, countries must develop policies that promote relevance to society's needs, accommodate growth in demand, and achieve greater efficiency. To ensure greater relevance, the share of funding allocated to training opportunities should be increased. Many countries provide much more funding per student for academic programs than for vocationally oriented programs, including apprenticeships. Shifting more funding to vocationally oriented programs could increase relevance to the economy's needs as well as help lower spending per student, because vocational training typically costs less than academic programs.

To encourage enrollment growth, countries should use government funding to provide more marginal revenue to institutions. In most countries, government funding does not track with enrollment gains, forcing institutions to rely on student-paid fees to cover the marginal costs of any unanticipated enrollment growth. Creating a separate, government-funded fee that is uncapped when enrollments rise above target levels would mean taxpayers would share in paying for enrollment growth.

To increase efficiency, allocations to institutions should be based on normative costs. Governments or funding bodies typically rely on institutional reports of how much they spend per student to determine the allocation of funds for the future. But institutions often exaggerate what they spend. Costs could be curbed if allocation formulas were based on normative costs—that is, what “ought” to be spent per student in different fields as determined by objective data analysis.

This is a bare outline, but all of these steps taken together would help make the financing of public higher education both more affordable and financially sustainable. As a result, such a consensus model is a worthy and achievable goal for many countries. ▲

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Academic Globalization: Where Did We Come from? Where Are We Going?

Philip G. Altbach and Jamil Salmi

The Western concept of universities has been under growing attack from several fronts. Many countries have cut public subsidies for higher education in the past decade, reflecting general disaffection with universities for their failure to act as channels of social mobility and economic success. The scientific research mission of universities has also been challenged. During the Brexit campaign in the United Kingdom, a former secretary of education commented on the discredited status of universities, arguing that British society was tired of listening to academic experts. Authoritarian leaders in Brazil, Hungary, and Turkey have used their powers to restrict institutional autonomy and academic freedom.

Lately, Western colonialism and related themes such as critical race theory have entered the debate about contemporary higher education reality. In a recent article on the globalization of higher education ([University World News](#), May 15, 2021), Simon Marginson denounced the domination of Anglo-American science and the English language. Against this background, the article focuses on just one important aspect of the development of the modern universities—how “Western-model” universities were established in the Global South, mainly in the nineteenth century, and the convergent forces at play in creating a global model of university.

Colonialism and Christianity

Colonialism was, of course, the key driver of Western-model higher education development in the Global South. Christian missionary efforts also played an important role, and often, the two were linked. The colonizers had different approaches to higher education: The British were more active in permitting or sponsoring higher education in their colonies, the French less so, while the Portuguese eschewed academic development. The Spanish “outsourced” higher education to the Catholic Church and particularly to the Jesuits, with the dual goals of Christian conversion and colonial management. All colonizers recognized the need for a small Western-educated indigenous class to manage the colonies.

In India, the modest expansion of higher education under colonialism was largely due to Indian initiatives to build colleges to provide access to the civil service and growing commerce for an emerging Indian middle-class, and to Christian missionary efforts. The British authorities made few investments in higher education, and only after 1857 did they try to control emerging higher education. Unsurprisingly, the institutions that were created followed the English model and used English as the medium of instruction. The story in other colonial areas was similar. It is, of course, significant that all colonial universities used the language of the colonizer—and many continue to do so in the twenty-first century.

Many regions in the world had rich intellectual, religious, and higher education traditions before the advent of colonialism. The oldest universities in the world were in South Asia—in Taxila and Nalanda, predating European universities by many centuries. Al-Qarawiyyin University in Fes and Al-Azhar University in Cairo also predated the birth of the first European universities. But while the intellectual and religious traditions continued in South Asia and the Arab world, the traditional academic institutions did not thrive and were gradually eclipsed by Western model institutions in their respective countries.

Colonial higher education institutions used the languages of the colonists, since their purpose was mainly to train civil servants and other professionals to staff the colonial

Abstract

Almost all existing universities stem from the Western university model. This article discusses this tradition—how colonialism impacted the expansion of universities and the reasons why modern universities continue to use this pattern of academic development.

Interestingly, in the postcolonial era, no country has returned to precolonial higher education.

government. Similarly, the curriculum was entirely imported from the metropole. It is probably an oversimplification, but at the same time accurate to summarize colonial attitudes toward indigenous cultures with the paternalistic and culturally dismissive words of colonial administrator Thomas Babbington Macaulay: “A single shelf of a good European library was worth the whole native literature of India and Arabia...”

Interestingly, in the postcolonial era, no country has returned to precolonial higher education or has attempted to deviate fundamentally from the Western academic model imposed by the colonialist authorities.

Developments in Noncolonized Countries

Not every non-Western country was subject to colonial rule, and it is worth looking at higher education developments in noncolonized nations. Of particular interest are Japan and Thailand. When, in the nineteenth century, both countries were pressured by the Western-dominated globalization of the day, they felt the need to modernize society and education—and both chose to establish Western-style higher education institutions rather than rely on existing academic traditions. After the Meiji restoration in 1868, Japan searched for a university model that would serve a modernizing society, and, after careful examination of useful models, adopted German and American higher education ideas, ignoring centuries-old indigenous traditions. Similarly, when King Chulalongkorn looked to modernize higher education and society, in part to hold off possible colonial incursions, Western models were chosen, culminating in the establishment of Chulalongkorn University in 1917. In no case did noncolonized countries seeking to modernize higher education use an indigenous traditional academic model.

The Chinese experience is significant as well. As Rui Yang points out in his article “*World Class Universities in China’s Heroic Past*” (*IHE* #107), in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, a variety of Western Christian missionary institutions, as well as the Chinese government’s own use of Western models, were influential in developing modern higher education in China—and proved successful. In addition, European colonial powers, mainly Germany and France, established universities in the parts of China that they directly controlled. Significantly, the powerful traditional Confucian educational model was not used to assist in China’s modernization, except perhaps for the traditional civil service examination that evolved into the *gaokao*, which today is a major sorting mechanism to select and allocate students to universities.

Where Are We Going?

When countries in the Global South became independent in the second half of the twentieth century, they maintained and expanded the Western model of university introduced by the colonial authorities, perceived as an essential instrument for nation-building and human capital development. Notwithstanding a large variety of economic systems, political realities, stages of socioeconomic development, religious and cultural traditions, and other variations, almost every university in the twenty-first century broadly follows a Western model.

However, this model is being challenged today on grounds of elitism, insufficient attention to the Sustainable Development Goals, and the perceived colonialist nature of the curriculum. While some of the criticisms can be coopted by governments that are against autonomous universities committed to the dissemination of scientific evidence, a lot can certainly be done to make universities more inclusive, sustainable, and socially responsible. A growing number of institutions have started to reexamine their past with a critical eye, acknowledge their close association with ugly moments in their country’s history, such as slavery, apartheid, or discrimination toward indigenous and other marginalized population groups, and ensure that their programs are more attuned to the experience of traditionally oppressed social groups.

At the same time, it is essential to safeguard the fundamental values of the Western model of university, dedicated to the search for truth based on scientific evidence and academic freedom. In a world full of grand challenges, no one has better captured the noble mission of universities as beacons of knowledge and wisdom than Alfred North Whitehead, the twentieth century philosopher and mathematician:

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This article is adapted from a previously published article in Times Higher Education.

“The tragedy of the world is that those who are imaginative have but slight experience, and those who are experienced have feeble imaginations. Fools act on imagination without experience. Pedants act on knowledge without imagination. The task of the university is to weld together imagination and experience.” ▲

Where is Value in Digital Higher Education: From Commodities to Assets

Janja Komljenovic

In 2020, digital platforms, which had already gained a significant foothold in higher education (HE) globally, were suddenly thrust into the limelight, as HE institutions over the world suddenly pivoted to operating almost entirely online. As a result, there has been a collective recognition of the influence of such platforms and related discussion of their role and impact.

Digital Platforms in Higher Education

Although the debates over the past two years have helped to educate those who knew little previously about the role(s) of digital platforms in HE, they have failed to adequately account for the tremendous diversity of digital platforms that exist in and around HE. However, we must understand this diversity in order to truly grasp the potential long-term implications of the “digitalization” of HE across the world.

Broadly conceived, there are three categories of digital platforms that can be found in the HE sector. First, there are platforms that target individual students directly, running in parallel to the institutionalized and regulated HE system (e.g., apps that automate note taking or allow for group annotation of course materials). Such platforms collect content and aggregate user data, while the platform owner makes pedagogic decisions, structures the learning process, and innovates (if desired) with the collected user data.

Second, there are platforms that almost serve as educational “institutions” in their own right (e.g., apps that allow self-employed teachers to offer micro- and other courses directly to prospective students). Such platforms serve as intermediaries, connecting service buyers (learners) and sellers (content providers). They also directly structure the social and economic relations that exist on the platform—setting the terms of use—and unilaterally determine how content will be provided, what teachers can do, how learners can interact, how content is assigned value, who has access and who does not, pricing, and so on. Such platforms can also benefit from the user data, e.g., by offering personalized suggestions to learners for particular classes, deciding on teacher payment based on user behavior, etc.

Finally, there are platforms that are integrated directly into the work of a university, via contractual arrangements. Generally, universities pay a subscription or fees for the use of such platforms. A university might integrate such external proprietary platforms into its digital ecosystem, allow certain data flows, and even use proprietary analytics operations (i.e., receiving intelligence about teachers and students as part of the platform functionality). In this case, the university is the personal data controller and is responsible for making sure that personal data is collected, accessed, stored, and processed legally. Nevertheless, there are ways in which personal data might be shared with the

Abstract

Students, academics, and higher education institutions’ administrators and leaders use digital platforms in their everyday work. A diversity of platforms offer various services, target different clients, and include different business models. Most of these platforms are proprietary and form the edtech industry. We should pay attention to the specific economic form of coordination in which digitalization of and in higher education is expanding, namely assetization.

proprietary platform owner to aggregate, analyze, and create new data about particular users. Generally, it is very difficult to change such arrangements, given contractual implications and also the scale of integration that occurs.

Understanding Digital Platforms as Assets, Not Commodities

The three categories outlined here have different business models and client foci. The first is direct to consumer service, the second is intermediation between individual users, and the third is a business-to-business model. However, in all three cases, platforms are protected by a software licence and terms of use. As a result, they work as assets (i.e., resources that generate ongoing value and economic benefit, as a result of ownership and control), rather than commodities (which only have value at the time of purchase). There are many implications to this, which must be better understood by HE institutions around the world. In the remainder of this article, I will highlight three key points that are particularly relevant for policy and practice, namely the implications for value, for control, and for user data.

First, the fact that edtech platforms operate as assets in terms of their financial models has important implications. Universities do not pay once for ownership rights over a particular platform. Rather, they generally pay annual subscriptions for access and use. There are similar ongoing payment models in place for platforms that directly target students. These arrangements ensure that students, staff, and HE institutions are locked into ongoing relations with platform owners, as it becomes increasingly technologically, legally, or pragmatically difficult to sever ties. As a result, the platform owner has significant power to increase the cost of accessing and using the platform.

A second implication relates to control. With commodities, ownership rights are exchanged when products and services are sold and bought. However, in the case of accessing assets, all ownership, follow-through, and control rights stay with the asset owners. They decide about access to the platform, how users interact, and what they can or cannot do. Moreover, edtech companies structure learning and social and economic relations on their respective platforms. Conditions of operations can unilaterally and even suddenly change, if the owner issues new terms of use, decides to sell the platform, or merges with another company. Individual and institutional users have little say about how things are run on the platform, including algorithms that make predictions and have a consequential impact on their learning paths. In addition, due to commercial sensitivity, users often have little awareness of which operations exist at all in the platforms and how they are designed.

Finally, there are implications in terms of user data. Digital platforms collect digital user data whenever users engage with them, e.g., any content posted, individual click-through behavior, time spent on particular activities, the sequence of their actions on the platform, their IP address, their machine ID, and so on. Such user data can be made valuable in its own right when aggregated, analyzed, and turned into intelligence. At the moment, discourse in edtech and education more generally places high bets on data-rich processes as aiming at personalization and automation to support efficiencies and effectiveness. In reality, we notice the early stages of such operations in HE. There are lots of experimentation in innovation with user data in how various analytics and other intelligence are integrated into a platform offer. Data privacy regulations do not tackle the issue of data-rich operations and statistical calculations. When user data is aggregated, individuals are always put in groups and in relation to each other in search of potential trends. New information is produced about individuals with looping back to target their behavior. But students and staff as users do not have a say in how their data is processed for producing analytics and predictions in the products in platforms that they use for their studies and work. It is, therefore, key who gets access to the aggregated user data, who has an opportunity to innovate in edtech, and who can benefit from its potential future economic value.

Edtech has an enormous potential to bring benefits to students, staff, and HE at large, but it matters how it is rolled out and how it is governed.

Conclusion

There is much to say about edtech in HE. Clearly, edtech has an enormous potential to bring benefits to students, staff, and HE at large, but it matters how it is rolled out and how it is governed. We need to think much more carefully about how we can make

proprietary edtech platform owners accountable to HE stakeholders and the public at large. We also need to do more to control potential predatory lock-in and monopoly exploitation. If edtech becomes dominated by a few giants, as has happened in other industries, what would that mean for the future of our sector? Finally, we need to find ways to ensure more democratic governance of user data. Should currently private data assets be made publicly available, for example, so that aggregated user data could be used by everyone for ethical and socially just innovation? These are key questions that policymakers and stakeholders should urgently address. ▲

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Student Activism and the Pandemic: A Global Round-Up

Thierry M. Luescher and Didem Türkoğlu

Student activists persisted to push for change during the COVID-19 pandemic. Indeed, the pandemic itself added fuel to the fire. Many of the grievances and commitments that had sparked students to political action before the pandemic continued to drive them into the streets and onto social media platforms in 2020 and 2021. But the single biggest issue causing protests at different moments was the pandemic itself.

A Geospatial Overview of Student Protesting

To gain an overview of student activism worldwide during the pandemic, we identified and analyzed all articles published in *University World News* (UWN) between February 2020 and March 2022 that referred to protesting. This gave us 210 instances of student protest news covering 55 countries and all world regions. As much as this shape of the data is an artifact of the news-making decisions of UWN, for the purposes of this article, it provided a useful point of entry for further exploration.

Of the 210 reports, the regions that had the biggest number of UWN reports were Asia and Africa (75 and 72 respectively), followed by Europe (34) and North America (14), with South America, the Middle East, and Australasia reporting less than 10 protest instances each. In terms of countries, a third of all student protest reports came from only six countries: South Africa (14), the United States (12), Turkey (11), Zimbabwe (11), Pakistan (10), and Thailand (10). In addition, Hong Kong continued to have a high count despite the crackdown on student protesting in the aftermath of the 2019 protests.

Causes of Protests and Highlights

Globally, both grievances specific to higher education or triggered by broader societal, socioeconomic, and political concerns caught the attention of student activists during the pandemic. Still, the top concerns were student funding, scholarships, and access to affordable higher education; greater equality and social justice; and access to employment. Opposition to undemocratic government and coups, lack of political freedoms and democracy, advocacy for gender equality, and protests against racism, gender-based violence, and LGBTIQ discrimination were also among students' pressing concerns. Most of these triggered protests in every world region in 2020 and 2021.

In South Africa, the country with the highest number of UWN protest reports, student funding, the affordability of higher education to working-class students, and financial exclusions continued to top the list of issues causing protests. After the nationwide #FeesMustFall protests of 2015–2016 (and the more localized reverberations since then)

Abstract

The COVID-19 pandemic led to far-reaching changes in higher education globally, yet student activism continued to be a force to be reckoned with. Key concerns and commitments remained student funding; equality, social justice, and antidiscrimination; political freedoms and democracy; and gender equality. The single biggest cause of protests was, however, the pandemic itself. Recent additions to the protest agenda include climate change, academic freedom, and the Russian invasion of Ukraine.

The single biggest issue causing protests at different moments was the pandemic itself.

had succeeded in greatly expanding student financial aid, historical student debt came into focus. The inaptness of the national student financial aid scheme also continued to cause anxiety to hundreds of thousands of students. Thus, prepandemic trends of protests clearly carried on in South Africa.

The murder of George Floyd by a police officer in Minneapolis caused a massive outcry across the United States and beyond, and triggered a huge wave of protests. Thousands of students joined community members in the streets across the country and in other parts of the world during the May–June 2020 protests against racism and police brutality. In addition to Black Lives Matter protests, students continued to target racist legacies at their institutions, such as buildings named after slave owners or the very names of the universities that refer to confederate generals. Continued employment and working conditions of student workers during the pandemic, housing concerns, and rising college costs were also among students' key grievances. In short, we also observed a continuation of prepandemic student protest trends in the United States: antiracism and higher education finance.

In Turkey, the biggest wave of student protests arose in response to the appointment, by Turkey's president Erdoğan, of new public university rectors with close affiliations to the ruling party, starting in Istanbul with the rector of Boğaziçi University and followed by appointments in Ankara. Faculty members and alumni joined student protests. These appointments were widely considered a violation of university autonomy. The excessive use of police force against the protesters caused even more protests across the country in solidarity with the students. Rising housing prices led to another wave of student protests; students organized sit-ins in parks in major cities and protest marches. In this respect, the Turkish cases demonstrate two additional leading trends in global student activism: academic freedom and economic concerns.

COVID-19 As a Source of Grievances

As much as prepandemic causes continued trending globally, the most frequent reasons for protesting in 2020 and 2021 were the pandemic itself, pandemic-related measures, and governments' use of the pandemic as an excuse to pass unpopular measures and repress protests. In addition to public health measures restricting public gatherings, protests were also triggered by indirect effects of the pandemic: economic pressures and new government repression tactics. It soon became clear that the pandemic exacerbated inequality globally and within country. Student financial concerns were another significant driver of protesting. Students demanded tuition hikes to be reversed, fees to be refunded, scholarships to be paid, program closures to be undone, rent assistance, and so forth. Such protests occurred in a wide range of countries from Kenya to Indonesia, Ireland to South Africa, Puerto Rico to Brazil.

Over 2020–2021, the challenges that the pandemic brought to higher education, the way governments and institutions responded, and students' discontent evolved. In the first year of the pandemic, students in countries such as Zimbabwe and Nigeria protested against the reopening of campuses without appropriate safety measures. In the second year, as India became the worst-hit country in April–May 2021 and universities moved to online teaching, several campuses witnessed student protests against this measure and in favor of continuing face-to-face instruction; the same had been observed earlier in China. Medical students in India and Pakistan protested against increasing hours of active duty in COVID wards. In Iran, in contrast, students protested against taking exams in person. As several studies show, the most affected student groups during the pandemic were international students and students from low socioeconomic backgrounds. In China, Bangladeshi students protested restrictions on their movement; in Sweden, protests occurred against changes made to international students' residency permits; and Mauritanian students stuck in Mauritania picketed in front of their ministry to be permitted to return to their universities in Morocco and take exams there.

The reopening of universities across the globe caused yet another COVID-related grievance: mandatory vaccination. Antivaxxing student protests have been observed across continents in universities in Australia, South Africa, Switzerland, and the United States, to mention but a few.

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A New Postpandemic Front for Student Activism?

With the end of the pandemic in sight in 2022, key global concerns are returning onto the global protest agenda. Climate change certainly tops that list. From late February, anti-war protests against the Russian invasion of Ukraine surged across Europe and beyond.

Global challenges that have been flying under the radar or were not yet covered by *UWN* are also coming to the fore. In several US states, there is a crackdown underway on universities' equity and social justice agendas, in a conservative (mis)interpretation of free speech. In France, there are attacks on sociology curricula that are alleged to promote leftism. And in countries from the United Kingdom to Australia and Brazil, a right-wing agenda is threatening academic freedom. As these issues increasingly come to the attention of progressive student activists, they will likely spark the outcry that they deserve. ▲

International Students in Non-Anglophone Countries: Challenges and Opportunities

Hans de Wit and Lizhou Wang

In studies about international student recruitment and mobility, the emphasis is primarily on South–North mobility to the Anglophone world (the United States, the United Kingdom, Australia, and Canada) as well as to a few non-Anglophone countries such as France and Germany. But the reality is more diverse, illustrated recently by the substantial presence in Ukraine of students from post-Soviet countries, Africa, India, Turkey, China, and other countries, trying to leave the country during the Russian attack.

What are the challenges and opportunities of non-Anglophone countries, in particular in the Global South, shifting from mainly being sending countries toward striving to receive international students? In a book on international student recruitment and mobility in non-Anglophone countries, experts from these countries looked at this rising phenomenon in Europe, Asia, and other parts of the world. In order to carve a place in the market for themselves, these non-Anglophone countries must devise mechanisms to overcome multiple challenges, including language barriers, lack of internationalization in the study environment, less competitive job markets, etc. International student recruitment models in high-income Anglophone and high-income non-Anglophone countries are only partially applicable to other players.

Non-Anglophone countries are developing ways to overcome the recruitment barriers with which they are confronted. Many of them have established national policies and practices, used competitive tuition fee policies, adjusted their immigration regulations, leveraged opportunities for regional collaboration, designed competitive and diversified education programs, and even offered programs in languages other than their national language, in particular in English. In addition, many countries make use of their specific advantages, such as their position in their region, regional partnerships, low domestic tuition fees, etc.

However, challenges are still considerable and take a long time to overcome. At the national level, they mostly relate to a lack of marketing strategies for specific markets, lack of funding, and lack of alignment with the higher education sector and its institutions, and between different ministries. At the institutional level, the most common

Abstract

In studies about international student recruitment and mobility, the emphasis is primarily on South–North mobility to the Anglophone world. But the reality is more diverse. What are the challenges and opportunities of non-Anglophone countries, in particular in the Global South, shifting from mainly being sending countries toward striving to receive international students?

Governments and institutions should not ignore the potential of niche markets, such as prospective immigrants, refugees, specific (ethnic) groups with whom they relate, or the diaspora.

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challenges are a low level of comprehensive internationalization and limited dedicated services on campus. While the strengths of these countries are relatively similar, the threats and opportunities are more specific to each country, which points out the importance of tailoring internationalization and student recruitment strategies to the specific circumstances of each country.

Pull Factors

If a policy does not present a clear overview of what makes a country and its higher education attractive for international students in terms of pull factors, that strategy will fail. In the case of India's current recruitment policy, "Study in India," such an analysis resulted in a focused strategy on soft power and a geographic focus on specific target regions: the Middle East, Central Asia, and Africa. Non-Anglophone countries have to be realistic in their geographic focus. Moving from focusing on neighboring countries to a more global approach requires a comprehensive set of actions. These countries and their institutions should define their key rationales for wanting to engage in international student recruitment.

Language of Instruction

Non-Anglophone countries have been using English as a medium of instruction to increase their competitiveness. This certainly applies to the Netherlands, but also to France, Germany, Japan, Russia, and South Korea. Romania is an interesting, more diverse case, as it offers programs in English, French, and German, as well as in Hungarian for its Hungarian minority, which is the consequence of historical, linguistic, and regional factors. Due to shifting international influences, Turkey has successively offered courses in French, then German, and is currently teaching in English and Arabic to its refugee student population.

But countries and institutions that predominantly base their recruitment strategy on offering courses taught (mainly) in English take high risks with respect to the quality of education and services for both international and local students, the level of integration between international and local students, and allegations of loss of national and cultural identity. The Dutch case is the clearest example of a policy to widen the use of English as a medium of instruction that went too far.

Governments and institutions must develop a language policy based on why, for whom (local/international students), and for which programs it is relevant to prioritize the local language, English, and/or other languages as mediums of instruction. Promoting one's national language in potential sending countries can be a clever investment.

Affordability and Services Are Key

Providing scholarships and a less costly educational offer (including online programs), as well as pathways to the job market after graduation, are strategic instruments to attract and keep talent. Dedicated facilities and services before and upon students' arrival and during their studies are crucial to guarantee retention. Integrating international students with their local peers is pivotal and also benefits the local student community.

Niche Markets

Governments and institutions should not ignore the potential of niche markets, such as prospective immigrants, refugees, specific (ethnic) groups with whom they relate, or the diaspora. Turkey's focus on refugees from Syria, and Romania offering medical education to international students are examples of countries intentionally targeting niche markets.

Governments and institutions must also complement their traditional student mobility activities with innovations in program offerings and delivery methods, including transnational education, institutional partnerships, and online learning.

Ethical Consequences

We must be aware that international student mobility contributes to increased global inequality between sending and receiving countries and institutions, as well as between students who have access to these opportunities and students who do not. An international student recruitment policy also needs to address its severe ethical and social consequences. In conditions of constantly tightening global competition, countries

with education export ambitions must take a systematic and comprehensive approach to recruitment. Such an approach must not be primarily driven by rationales of revenue generation, soft power, and rising in the rankings. Being driven primarily by these three rationales is unrealistic for most non-Anglophone countries, particularly low- and middle-income countries, and will contribute to further global inequality and exclusion of systems, institutions, and individuals.

Ethical considerations are even more relevant in the current context of Russia and Ukraine, as we stated in our article in *University World News* of April 9th. For Russian higher education, the prospect of expanding and diversifying its international student presence has become very bleak as a consequence of the war, Western sanctions, and the isolation policy of the regime. As for Ukraine, sadly, military invasion, life-threatening bombings, massive brain drain of talented refugees, and disruption of the higher education sector have become major impediments to pursuing any form of international student recruitment. The country will need considerable support to rebuild the sector and its international presence—which the current war may have permanently jeopardized. ▲

STEERing into the Swerve: Adjusting to the Challenges and Opportunities Forced by COVID-19

Roberta Malee Bassett

The 2008 financial crisis presented formidable challenges that needed to be addressed both in the short- and long-term, including diminished resources, personal and academic challenges for institutions and students, staffing problems, downward pressures on comprehensive tertiary systems, and much more. Recollecting (former World Bank chief economist) Paul Romer's famous 2004 quote that "A crisis is a terrible thing to waste" and applying what was learned from the financial crisis over a decade ago, the World Bank reassessed its policy advisory framework in order to craft a tool that would allow policy makers and advisors to use future crises as opportunities for reflection and potential reform. As when operating cars on icy roads, "drivers" of tertiary education found themselves swerving dangerously and, seemingly, uncontrollably during the COVID-19 pandemic.

With its 2021 policy advisory framework, "STEERing Tertiary Education: Toward Resilient Systems that Deliver for All," the World Bank has developed a tool to help countries steer their tertiary education sectors into the COVID swerve. Policymakers and academic leaders should be purposeful in steering their tertiary sectors toward national and institutional strategic goals, particularly recognizing how those goals may have been affected by the impacts of the pandemic on their operations (including, but not limited to, financing, quality, staffing, and student access and retention issues) and may even need to withstand future disruptions. The STEERing framework is built around five key dimensions that are instrumental for creating agile, effective, and sustainable tertiary education, particularly in the post-COVID environment.

Abstract

"Drivers" of tertiary education found themselves swerving dangerously and, seemingly, uncontrollably during the pandemic. The action required to regain control over a vehicle when sliding is to steer into the swerve. For higher education leaders around the world, STEERing into the COVID-19 swerve means acknowledging that the crisis pushed tertiary education off its path, resulting in a need for innovative, open-minded thinking to reposition tertiary systems and institutions onto a new one.

With its 2021 policy advisory framework, “STEERing Tertiary Education: Toward Resilient Systems that Deliver for All,” the World Bank has developed a tool to help countries steer their tertiary education sectors into the COVID swerve.

- ▶ **Strategically Diversified Systems:** supporting all postsecondary institutions, ensuring agile, articulated pathways and diversity of forms, functions, and missions. Countries at all levels of economic development can benefit from ensuring that tertiary education offers options for studies that suit the interests of students in terms of both their studies and outcomes. Diversified systems can promote lifelong learning opportunities for (re)skilling, with flexible pathways, second-chance options, and greater adaptability to meet the needs and opportunities of employers, civil society, and governments. This means permeability across pathways and providers, modularization of learning offers, and student-centered credit systems to allow for flexible pathways as well as bridging and mentoring programs to boost tertiary remedial education, to give everyone a good start and adequate support.
- ▶ **Technology:** designed and applied in a purposeful and equitable manner. While technology has been a mixed experience in countries around the world in terms of the benefits achieved through massive (often very expensive) investments, there is no doubt that applying effective education technology is now a mainstay of tertiary education everywhere in the world. Harnessing the power of technology to improve teaching and research capacity while simultaneously acknowledging and countering the impact of expanding digital divides has to be in every nation’s tertiary education strategy, to make the most of what was experienced and learned during the COVID pandemic.
- ▶ **Equity:** a universal approach to the benefits and opportunities of postsecondary learning. As noted in the STEERing report, equity (as equality of opportunity in tertiary education) promotes sustainable and impactful economic and social development. Inclusion promotes policies and cultures that enable all members to benefit from, and contribute to, their learning environment and institutions. As knowledge drives economic development and the rewards of advanced education become ever greater, attention to equity and access must be a central consideration for all stakeholders in tertiary education. Access to, and persistence through, tertiary education is a global concern and one that requires sustained commitment to resolve.
- ▶ **Efficiency:** a goal-oriented, effective use of resources requires improving information systems so that sectors, subsectors, and institutions can be managed and enhanced utilizing evidence and sound information. To ensure both operational and fiscal efficiencies, leaders benefit from establishing robust and data-driven governance, financing, and quality assurance instruments that are designed to weather the current and potential future crises. For financing, systems and institutions may benefit from diversifying their funding base and reducing dependency on a single income source like government budgets. For quality assurance, adapting accreditation and institutional operations requires agility in ensuring that innovations in delivery can be assessed and adapted quickly. And, for governance, it is vital to ensure that external governance (legislative and ministerial oversight) and institutional governance (boards and oversight bodies) are developed and operated in such a manner that promotes effective connections with external actors and the world of work and allow for rapid innovations to be tested and embraced.
- ▶ **Resilience:** the ability to persist, flourish, and deliver agreed goals despite adversity, and while maintaining a commitment to mission and purpose. In order not to waste the lessons learned via this crisis, countries and institutions will benefit from acknowledging the need for resilience planning, by taking stock of the successes and failures of the COVID-19 response at the systems and institutional levels, and analyzing options that would have mitigated the failures. The adoption of this new indicator optimistically aims for a return of a local focus among faculty, who are expected to work closely with communities, industry, and government organizations as an alternative to seeking to compete globally by publishing in international journals. This initiative also marks a shift from an outward-looking strategy to a relatively inward-looking approach. Importantly, this reorientation exemplifies the tension between the global and local agendas in higher education policy.

In Conclusion

Utilizing adaptive governance frameworks to embed strategic resilience interventions to address significant short- and long-term challenges enables leaders to establish operating norms and opportunities that reinforce the institution's capacity to survive and thrive during times of disruption. Major issues to be acknowledged and addressed include diminished resources for institutions, personal and academic challenges for institutions and students, demand for improved infrastructure to support continued distance and blended learning models, reduced mobility placing pressures to improve regional and local tertiary institutions, questions of sustainability of funding models, continuity of research in terms of funding and day-to-day activities, and more.

STEERING into the swerve means acknowledging that the crisis has pushed tertiary education institutions and systems off of the path on which they were in 2019, and committing to repositioning them on a new one. And, while the immediate pain of COVID-19 disruptions recedes, new disruptions emerge, such as the brutal invasion of Ukraine and the resultant diplomatic and geopolitical isolation of Russia. Higher education has weathered disruptions from war and pandemics in the past. New tools and innovative thinking can bridge from today into the future, utilizing purposeful and directional "steering" to ensure that higher education is able to promote the values and serve the needs of its societies and constituents. ▲

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Can We Measure Universities' Impact on Climate Change?

Tristan McCowan

In order to assess their impact on the climate, organizations are now gauging their greenhouse gas emissions in three ways: scope 1—directly from their own activities; scope 2—through their energy supply; and scope 3—through upstream activities (goods and services used, transportation, investments, etc.) While this is a useful frame for organizations of all types, it falls far short of encompassing the range of impacts that a university might have. Universities do have their own emissions, but they also shape minds, advance science, and form professionals, all of which have impacts on the progress of climate change—sometimes profound ones. How can these impacts be gauged? Would it in fact ever be possible to find out what the full impact of a university is on climate change?

These questions are not merely of interest to theorists and researchers of higher education. The UN-endorsed Agenda 2030 and Sustainable Development Goals see universities as playing a pivotal role in ensuring global sustainability. University leaders are anxious to monitor and reduce their carbon footprint, whether through their own commitment to the environmental cause, or swayed by the consumer pressures of an environmentally committed student body. Governments concerned with moving toward net zero will certainly be keeping one eye on their higher education systems, particularly when public funding is involved.

Measuring Greenhouse Gas Emissions

Some of this evidence is starting to be gathered. A [2019 study](#) by Robin Shields estimated that the global emissions associated with international student mobility amount to between 14.01 megatons of CO₂ equivalent per year (approximately the level of the national

Abstract

Universities have a growing interest in understanding the impact that they have on climate change, whether positive or negative. Yet beyond the direct emissions from their campuses, is it possible to measure their multiple influences through education, knowledge production, and public engagement? This article argues that while it is important to monitor carefully those activities that can be measured, universities should not dismiss those activities that cannot.

The UN-endorsed Agenda 2030 and Sustainable Development Goals see universities as playing a pivotal role in ensuring global sustainability.

emissions of Latvia) and 38.54 megatons (similar to Tunisia), and are increasing year on year. Eckard Helmers and colleagues have created a [composite index](#) (across scope 1, 2, and 3 emissions) to assess the carbon footprint of 20 universities, of which energy consumption is on average the greatest component, followed by mobility (commuting and business travel). A [study](#) by Eugene Cordero and colleagues is particularly innovative in attempting to quantify the impact of an undergraduate module in terms of greenhouse gas emissions, estimating that five years after the course, it had led to a reduction per student of 2.86 tons of CO₂ per year, comparing favorably with other initiatives such as building insulation and electric vehicles. Yet there is still a dearth of evidence that universities can draw on in understanding their contributions and in comparing between the different areas of their work.

Pathways of Influence on Climate Change

In order to understand the impact of universities on climate change, we can start with the range of activities carried out. The Transforming Universities for a Changing Climate (Climate-U) project has conceptualized the university as working in [five modalities](#): education (courses provided to undergraduates and graduate students, as well as other teaching and learning processes); knowledge production (basic research, innovation and application of knowledge, and academic publishing); service delivery (community projects, consultancy, and secondments); public debate (science communication, political mobilization, and fostering public discussion); and campus operations (universities' physical space and community).

It is possible to understand the impact of these five modalities on the climate through three stages. First are the communities who come into direct contact with the university—most importantly the students, who then go out into society as graduates, but also, on occasions, local communities, government, businesses, and civil society organizations. These are termed “bridging actors,” as they translate the influence of the university to the broader society (the second stage). Universities influence society in general through their shaping of work practices, production of new technologies, and circulation of ideas, all of which have a knock-on impact on the ecosphere (the third and final stage). These influences can, of course, be negative as well as positive, and universities have historically been implicated in much of the destruction of the natural environment, through the worldview that they have promoted and the technologies that they have developed.

Naturally, this is not a linear process through which universities change society without in turn being changed. There are various feedback loops through which the ecosphere and society influence universities and the higher education system. With the passing of the decades this century, universities around the world will be increasingly at the sharp end of climate impacts, including flooding, wildfires, water shortages, and extreme weather, not to mention changing economic and political currents.

Challenges of Measurement

Yet while this framework can help us understand the flows of influence, it does not resolve all our problems of measurement. First, there is the age-old attribution problem. From being an issue known only in select circles in the 1980s, we have now moved to a situation in which 64 percent of the world's population recognize that we are living in a climate emergency, according to a [UNDP/University of Oxford survey](#)—in spite of the concerted attempts of the fossil fuel lobby to obstruct and distract. Yet what portion of that monumental change can we attribute to the work of universities and their researchers? Pennsylvania State University climate researcher Michael E. Mann has campaigned on this issue through his lifetime and developed the hockey stick graph that helped place anthropogenic global warming in the popular imagination. Yet could we ever track exactly the extent to which his ideas have shaped societal perceptions?

Even if we can chart the various flows of influence and solve the attribution problem, we are still faced with challenges of breadth, intensity, and timescale. Some of the impacts of the university are deep, but focused on a few people: For example, for a first-generation student, the experience of studying in the university may be life changing and lead to major shifts in career, lifestyle, and political commitments. Other impacts may be very diffuse. The secondment of a university professor to support UNESCO's climate

change education policy may have a global influence, but thinly spread. Furthermore, timescale can vary dramatically. Some impacts may be immediate, but others may mature over years or decades. History is full of examples of scientific discoveries that only came to have a practical influence on people's lives long after the event.

It is tempting to conclude from the above that the impacts of universities on climate change are simply too complex to gauge, and that it is a lost cause. It is true that we may never be able to identify, document, and compare all of the influences. Yet there is still a vital place for monitoring and research, if approached with the following three principles. The first is to carefully measure those things that are amenable to measurement—direct emissions, travel of students and staff, and so forth. Second is to diversify the ways in which we document impact, using qualitative as well as quantitative research, so as to capture those aspects of the work of universities that cannot be numerically measured. Finally, for those things that cannot be adequately captured through any form of research, to refrain from dismissing them on those grounds. To invoke a well-known saying, “not everything that counts can be counted,” and in universities—as in all spheres of our lives—we have at times to act on the basis of our experience and reasoned inferences, even in the absence of systematic research evidence. ▲

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Will Experiences of Doctoral Study in China influence African Academic Practice?

Natasha Robinson and David Mills

In 2001, the Forum on China–Africa Cooperation (FOCAC) was established to promote China's economic, political, and developmental engagement with Africa. A key tool of Chinese soft power in Africa, the ministerial summits, held every three years, are used to announce major bilateral agreements and policy initiatives covering trade, finance, health, security, development, and education. Increasingly, China's focus has been on “people-to-people” exchanges, with educational exchange and training opportunities for African students and professionals at every level.

The 2018 FOCAC summit promised 50,000 training opportunities and 50,000 scholarships to African countries between 2019 and 2021. In the same year, the total number of African students in China was approximately 80,000, of whom 8,000 were PhD students, more than 2,000 fully funded by the Chinese government. In 2020, the *Financial Times* announced that China was offering more university scholarships to African students than all the leading Western governments combined.

This South–East academic mobility and migration represents a growing proportion of African PhD registrations. In 2018, for example, 800 Ghanaians were registered for PhD study in China, compared to 2,200 Ghanaians registered for a PhD in Ghana. We spoke to one Ghanaian academic who reported that three out of 10 of his departmental colleagues had PhDs from China. For some, China was the only option after other applications failed; for others, the offer of a bursary was transformative.

The decision to pursue doctoral education in China—sometimes leaving behind spouses and children—reflects the shortage of funding and supervision capacity in many African universities. The policy concern to strengthen the research qualifications of university academics has prompted growing doctoral enrollments. Lecturers need to “upgrade” to

Abstract

In the five years leading up to the COVID-19 pandemic, the number of African doctoral researchers training in China doubled to 8,000, often on scholarships funded by the Chinese government. Many plan to return to posts in African universities. Will these experiences influence African university research cultures, doctoral supervision, and publishing practices?

qualify for promotion to senior lecturer. A lack of domestic scholarships or institutional funding means that many study part-time while continuing to teach, and in countries such as Tanzania, there is a shortage of qualified supervisors for this growing cohort of PhD candidates. In contrast, the doctoral bursaries, dedicated time, and well-equipped research infrastructure on offer in Chinese universities are attractive.

Africa–China Publishing Collaborations

Will experiences of Chinese research training influence cultures of research training and publishing in Africa? We identified three countries—Ethiopia, Ghana, and Tanzania—that have historic ties to China and receive large numbers of Chinese scholarships. Using snowball sampling and social media, we interviewed online 10 Ethiopians, 10 Ghanaians, and 6 Tanzanians, who were either enrolled at, or recently graduated from, Chinese universities. Of the 26, some held university posts in their home countries and were hoping to “upgrade” to be promoted, others had left lectureships, and a minority had never held an academic position. Most were doing research in life and material sciences, or were in education and management. None were based in humanities departments.

A range of themes emerged. Several had taken up the opportunity to study in China after several failed scholarship applications to European or American universities. Once they arrived, most were impressed by Chinese research training and supervision practices. Compared to their home institutions, supervisors were supportive and approachable. Professors formed cohesive research teams, which would meet weekly to share progress and discuss problems. One outcome of such collaborations were large numbers of co-authored papers. As one interviewee recalled, his peers in the team “were very enthusiastic, because most want to have their names on publications.”

Some universities made publications in journals indexed in the elite Science Citation Index (SCI) a requirement for graduation. Many told stories of students who had finished their doctoral research without managing to publish their work in the “right” journal, and left China without graduating. The number of required SCI publications varied, and some claimed that their supervisors shifted the goalposts for talented students to “squeeze out” more publications. On the other hand, some struggled with supervisors who spoke little English, while others spent a year or more learning Mandarin. One university reportedly announced that international students were offered scholarships partly to increase their production of English-language publications.

The pressure to publish in order to graduate took its toll. One participant admitted to sending the same article simultaneously to multiple journals; he could not afford to wait for a rejection. Another participant accused his supervisor of stealing his research. African PhD students also recounted instances of racism, mostly from the broader community, but sometimes from the university itself. Despite these challenges, almost none of our interviewees regretted studying in China. They had graduated with PhDs and a set of publications, making them attractive candidates for academic jobs if, or when, they returned.

Many researchers valued the collaborative—if high pressure—research cultures that they encountered.

Shaping the Future of Research and Academic Publishing in Africa

Our interviewees described how their attitudes toward research and publishing had changed as a result of their experiences in China. Aware of the value of SCI-indexed publications, these were seen as “worth the wait” that the accompanying peer-review entailed. In contrast, one participant complained that colleagues trained in Ghana could not distinguish so-called “predatory” journals from “quality” journals. He hoped to change this through his own supervision practice, and by insisting that his Ghanaian supervisees publish in SCI journals before graduating. He had learned that by copublishing with his Chinese supervisor, you “make time for supporting younger researchers without jeopardising your own research outputs.”

Many researchers valued the collaborative—if high pressure—research cultures that they encountered. Rebecca had recently returned to Ghana from her PhD study in China and was developing a research strategy for her department. “We are proposing weekly seminars, we are proposing research cliques, and we are encouraging collaboration—both internal and external.” Afework had similar ambitions for “when I go back to my

country,” describing a vision for “a research centre that has influence not only in Ethiopia but across Africa: This initiative is coming after I came to China and saw a lot of things.”

The future of this scholarship program is now in question. China’s zero-COVID policy has made it virtually impossible for international students to travel to China. Those who returned to Africa during the pandemic have been stuck in an unfunded limbo; their PhD scholarships do not pay living expenses when they are not residing in China. Those still in China spoke about growing restrictions on movement. The 2021 FOCAC communiqué reflects this uncertainty: Although “training” is mentioned several times, there is no commitment to further PhD scholarships. Meanwhile, the current cohort of Chinese-trained researchers is prefiguring the future of African academic practice. ▲

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Higher Education in Africa: A Complex but Hardly Researched Enterprise

Nelson Casimiro Zavale

It is a truism that higher education (HE) has become a complex enterprise. Almost everywhere, HE systems have increased and diversified, for example in number of institutional providers, academic programs, profiles of students, categories of academic and administrative staff, forms of administrative and governance structures, typologies of funding sources, and categories of social functions (e.g., education, research, outreach, innovation, entrepreneurship, and social mobility). This complexity justifies the need to regularly produce knowledge about the social phenomenon of HE.

HE systems in Africa are also increasingly complex. By the early 1970s, when most African countries gained independence, the number of higher education institutions (HEIs) was 94, enrolling about 200,000 students. This rather small HE landscape changed in the postcolonial period, particularly from the 1990s. While by the late 1980s, the number of HEIs had grown to 152, with about 542,700 students, by the mid-2010s, there were over 1,600 HEIs, with over 6 million students. Updated aggregate statistics from different sources (particularly statistics from ministries or national councils/commissions on HE) indicate that by 2020–2021, Africa had over 5,400 HEIs of different typologies (public vs. private, university vs. nonuniversity type).

This increase was particularly driven by the private HE sector. In the early 1990s, only 30 out of 150 HEIs were private. By the late 2010s, the number of private HEIs had increased dramatically. Estimates indicate that 60 to 75 percent of existing HEIs in Africa are private. By 2020–2021, about 4,100 HEIs out of 5,400, representing 76 percent, were private. Countries like Cameroon, the Democratic Republic of Congo, Ghana, Ivory Coast, Madagascar, Nigeria, Senegal, and Uganda each have more than 200 HEIs. For example, the Democratic Republic of Congo has more than 1,080 HEIs (55 percent private); Nigeria has over 500 HEIs (80 percent private); Cameroon has 270 HEIs (76 percent private). The increase and diversification of suppliers has resulted in an increase in numbers of students, from about 500,000 in the early 1990s to over 9 million by 2021. This represents an increase in gross enrollment ratio from about 2 percent in 1970 to about 10 percent in the late 2010s. Yet, Africa is still below the world’s average of 38 percent (per region: about 70 percent in Western Europe, North America, and Oceania, about 50 percent in Latin America, and 30 percent in Asia), and it is the only world region without mass HE systems.

Abstract

As elsewhere, higher education (HE) in Africa has become a complex enterprise, yet is hardly researched. This article presents the main findings of a systematic review of literature focusing on African HE and published from 1980 to 2019, and suggests that the transformation of African HE was not accompanied by an equivalent production of research focusing on it, which is crucial to make its features and developments intelligible and guide policy makers and practitioners.

This rapid expansion, from the late 1990s onward, occurred in a context of repositioning HE to make it relevant for low-income countries. In the early 1990s, the international development community regarded HE to be a luxury for low-income countries, particularly for Africa, because of its supposedly low rate of social return. Recall the advice that the World Bank gave to African vice-chancellors, during a meeting in Harare in 1986, of closing universities in Africa and sending students abroad. This position was reversed from the late 1990s onward. In a seminal work in 2000, the Task Force on Higher Education and Society, sponsored by the World Bank and UNESCO, published *Higher Education in Developing Countries: Peril and Promise*, in which HE was again legitimized as relevant to enable low-income countries to integrate in, or benefit from, the global knowledge-based economy.

Since then, several reports (e.g., *Constructing Knowledge Societies*, 2002; *Improving Tertiary Education in Sub-Saharan Africa: Things that Work*, 2004; *Higher Education and Economic Development in Africa*, 2006; *Accelerating Catch-up: Tertiary Education for Growth in Sub-Saharan Africa*, 2008) have been produced with similar arguments, i.e., that HE is again important for Africa. This turnaround revitalized higher education on the continent and accounted for its rapid expansion.

To What Extent Is the African Higher Education Enterprise Known through Research?

Thus, despite lagging behind, African countries also house complex HE systems. In order to meet the double challenge of linking Africa to global science and addressing local socioeconomic problems, HE needs resources and better steering mechanisms. It also needs specific expertise and knowledge. Since colonial times and throughout the postcolonial period, research has been produced about African HE. However, this bulk of research has hardly been systematically examined. This contrasts with systematic analyses of the state of HE research at the global level, in Europe, and in Asia. A recent study, published in *Higher Education* (January 2022 edition), attempted to fill this gap by undertaking a systematic review of about 6,500 articles and books focusing on African HE and published from 1980 to 2019.

This study highlights three main findings. First, about 95 percent of the research was published from the 2000s onward, which shows a renewal of interest, particularly in contrast to the 1980s, when the neoliberal structural-adjustment programs and rate-of-return approach had a negative impact both on the development of African HE and on HE research.

Second, African HE research addresses four main topics. Thirty-six percent of publications focus on different aspects of teaching and learning. Next, about 25 percent focus on how HEIs are structurally transformed by factors such as access equity, globalization, and HE privatization. About 25 percent focus on internal organization and governance. Finally, about 13 percent focus on societal engagement. The dominance of teaching and learning is not surprising, given that most African HEIs are teaching oriented. This also indicates an increasing interest in examining the conditions under which teaching and learning occur in Africa. Likewise, the fact that societal engagement has remained in focus over the four decades from 1980 to 2019 suggests that narratives about the relevance of HE to Africa are yet to be resolved. Finally, the emergence of access equity, gender, governance as key themes suggests an interest in these concerns that often go along with the expansion of HE in Africa.

Third, most African countries have barely or never been researched. Ninety-two percent of publications target only nine countries: South Africa (41 percent), Nigeria (18 percent), Ghana, Uganda and Ethiopia, each with 3 percent; Kenya, Tanzania, and Zimbabwe, each accounting for 2 percent. Among the remaining 45 countries, 29 countries altogether account for 8 percent of publications and 16 have never been researched, except perhaps in continental or cross-regional studies.

Unsurprisingly, the most researched countries are also home to most HE authors. South Africa is home to 44 percent authors, Nigeria to 20 percent, and Ghana and Uganda to over 2 percent of authors. Twenty-two countries account for less than 2 percent of authors, and no author is affiliated to institutions from 20 African countries. South Africa is dominant as a research focus and as home to most scholars. Nigeria comes second, but Nigerian authors publish mostly in nonspecialized and nonindexed journals, and focus mostly on library sciences.

Most African countries have barely or never been researched.

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In conclusion, except for South Africa, research on African HE is weak, although some communities are emerging, particularly in West, East, and Southern Africa. Given the social challenges of HE, this weakness in expertise should raise concerns. ▲

Where Are You From? Career Experiences of Non-US PhD Holders in the United States

Dongbin Kim and Sehee Kim

The prevalence of international scholars and researchers in the United States is largely associated with their pursuit of advanced education at US higher education institutions, unlike many other countries where international scholars and academics look for professional experience and career advancement after completing their education. Accordingly, the number of international students in the United States, particularly at the doctoral level, is strikingly high, especially in science, technology, engineering, and math (STEM). In 2003, foreign students accounted for 50 percent of doctorate recipients in the physical sciences, 67 percent in engineering, and 68 percent in economics. Many of these international students remain in the country after graduation, expanding the workforce as highly trained individuals.

But while the presence of non-US PhD holders has become a significant feature characterizing manpower in the United States, their professional experience has received little attention. With this in mind, we studied career outcomes and professional experiences among non-US citizens, to check for differences against their US counterparts. For this, we used the 2013 National Science Foundation *Survey of Doctorate Recipients*, which provides data on doctoral graduates from US institutions who are active in the US labor market. Given that the majority of non-US citizens change their immigration status when acquiring permanent residence or US citizenship, we considered citizenship status at the time of doctoral graduation. This is an important consideration, assuming that the cultural, educational, and linguistic background of non-US citizens is likely to have a continuing impact on their career experiences and advancement, even after they become US citizens.

Career Advancement with a Supervisory Role in the Workplace

Our study shows that while US citizens were more likely to hold a supervisory position (50 percent) than non-US citizens (46 percent), this slight difference disappeared when adjusting for their demographic background, field of study, and the number of years since their doctoral graduation. Focusing exclusively on non-US citizens, however, their country of origin had an impact on their likelihood to hold a supervisory position. More than half of PhD holders from Canada (58 percent), Germany (62 percent), India (52 percent), and Russia (50 percent) indicated holding a supervisory position. In contrast, less than 40 percent of PhD holders from China (39 percent), Japan (38 percent), and South Korea (32 percent) held a supervisory position. It is worth noting that these three countries are all East Asian and non-English speaking, in contrast to the first three, which are English-speaking or European.

Abstract

The increasing presence of international scholars and researchers has become a significant feature of the American workforce, yet the career experiences of this group of workers have received little attention. National data on US-trained PhD holders show that non-US citizens are significantly less satisfied with intrinsic and extrinsic career-related factors than their US counterparts.

We studied career outcomes and professional experiences among non-US citizens, to check for differences against their US counterparts.

Career Satisfaction: Does US Citizenship Matter?

Concerning both the intrinsic aspects (e.g., opportunities for career advancement, intellectual challenge, level of responsibility, degree of independence, and contribution to society) and the extrinsic aspects (e.g., salary, benefits, and job security) of their jobs, non-US citizens were significantly less satisfied than US citizens. This significant difference in career satisfaction by citizenship status remains true even after adjusting for differences in demographic background, field of study, and number of years since doctoral graduation between US and non-US citizens.

Career Satisfaction: Does Country of Origin Matter?

Focusing on non-US citizens, notable differences emerged across countries of origin. Regarding satisfaction with intrinsic factors, PhD holders from Canada, Germany, and India had a relatively higher satisfaction than other non-US PhD holders. On the other hand, non-US PhD holders from China, Japan, South Korea, and Taiwan reported significantly lower satisfaction levels with intrinsic factors than other non-US PhD holders. In terms of extrinsic factors, while PhD holders from India reported higher satisfaction, those from China, Japan, South Korea, and Taiwan reported significantly lower satisfaction than other non-US PhD holders.

Once Foreigners, Forever Foreigners?

To explain the negative effect of immigration or foreign-born status on career outcomes, prior research often cites language barriers, lack of local experiences and references, cultural differences in ways of working or communicating, and subtle marginalization of immigrants (e.g., because of a heavy accent when speaking English) as primary reasons for why immigrant workers experience disadvantages in the labor market. These challenges, however, may be mitigated as these workers' career experience increases over time and they adapt to their professional life in the United States. With this in mind, it is worth noting that the differences between US and non-US PhD holders in the likelihood of holding a supervisory position disappeared when considering the number of years since graduation. On the other hand, our study shows that non-US PhD holders were not as satisfied with their professional experiences as their US counterparts. This finding suggests that non-US PhD holders may continue to experience subtle career-related barriers, resulting in a negative perception of their professional experiences, and lower satisfaction.

Not Everybody Experiences the Same: Country of Origin Matters

There are distinctive patterns in career experiences between PhD holders from Western, English-speaking countries and those from East Asian countries—China, Japan, South Korea, or Taiwan, specifically. Cultural and linguistic distance from the United States is greater for PhD holders from East Asian countries. Therefore, East Asian PhD holders may experience significant challenges, largely due to their language backgrounds, work/communication styles, and cultural norms and values. They may also experience challenges in their workplaces because of racial prejudice and discrimination.

To conclude, we argue that it is important to further examine the professional experiences among highly US-educated members of the workforce, not only by citizenship status but also by countries of origin among non-US citizens. Simply dichotomizing foreign-born PhD holders by citizenship status may result in a misleading understanding of the challenges and difficulties that some experience more than others. Future research should delve into this aspect, focusing on the impact of country of origin and cultural and linguistic background on a variety of career and professional experiences. This will deepen our understanding of non-US PhD holders and their career outcomes and experiences. ▲

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Broadening Our Understanding of “International Academic Staff”: Nationality as a New Marker of Diversity

Giulio Marini

International academic staff in higher education are considered *per se* a signal of attractiveness and success. The more a system attracts them, the better that system is. The United Kingdom is one of those countries attracting many international academics.

Success and Its Drawback

The percentage of international academic staff in the United Kingdom rose consistently in the past years, reaching 23.4 percent of all academic staff in terms of full-time equivalent by 2020–2021. This growth is continuing despite Brexit casting doubts about the country’s attractiveness. There have been less EU academics in the past years, but the number of non-EU staff hired in the United Kingdom have more than compensated that deadlock. The percentage of international staff is also likely to grow in the coming years, as faculties from abroad are on average younger than their British colleagues. For instance, international staff within the 31–35-year-old band—a typical entry age in the academic system—represent above 35 percent of the international staff population.

Literature has often highlighted the extent to which higher education systems benefit from having more international staff. Attracting international faculty has *per se* become a key issue. It is not only a matter of valuable labor supply. Employing a large and ever increasing number of international staff is also a sign of high demand on the employer’s side. Nowadays, UK universities need international staff to run them.

Another stream of research about international academic staff highlights the issue of adaptation, which deals with cultural differences. Within this stream, international staff are often referred to as a token minority. However, this is no longer the reality for higher education systems that have been highly successful in attracting international employees. When international staff make up a significant proportion of the workforce, they are no longer a token minority.

In this article, we discuss the findings of a recent study on international staff working in the United Kingdom. The study explored their careers, assuming that when international staff move from being a small, elite minority to becoming a significant proportion of the workforce, something may change. For instance, international staff at UK universities are not only “talents” assessed according to research criteria. They also extensively cover the essential teaching functions of these global providers. International staff do not populate only the postdoctoral subset of faculties. International teaching-only staff (a recently established academic career track) represent around 23 percent of all teaching-only staff. Thus, the elite international minority committed mostly to research is a thing of the past. International staff are now fully immersed in all academic functions and involved in wider organizational constraints. Advanced metrics in teaching and specific organizational solutions engender the rationale for this research: the issue of adaptation.

Dimensions of Adaptation

Much of the existing literature and practice on adaptation fails to account for the implications deriving from the fact that international staff are not native to the system. As such, they may struggle to understand norms and expectations—many of which are never made explicit to them during staff training, probation, mentorship, or the like.

Abstract

International academic staff in higher education are considered *per se* a signal of attractiveness and success. In this article, we discuss the findings of a recent study on international staff working in the United Kingdom. International staff are now fully immersed in all academic functions in their institutions and involved in wider organizational constraints, which raises the issue of their adaptation. Nationality appears to be an important and different marker of diversity.

National identity might represent a more overarching different type of diversity—one dealing with culture.

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Recent longitudinal qualitative research identified some frictions between international staff's assumptions and their context. Over time, there is a process of assimilation, as international staff come to understand through their own experience what is important and relevant, the rationale behind certain regulations and practices, and how to communicate the actions that they plan to perform. These patterns of adaptation are also a by-product of an expanding system and the way it is organized and regulated, making the issue more pressing.

In this regard, it is useful to list some dimensions of adaptation categorized via qualitative methods. First, novel or increased standardizing procedures result in much tighter managerial practices. Second, compared to many other countries, metrics receive more attention in the United Kingdom, especially in teaching. Third, metrics are in turn coupled with practices, which are often tacit and at first incomprehensible for newly arrived international staff. Other dimensions deal with rationales about research grants; different collegial and managerial styles, and the relationship between nonacademic and academic authorities; different expectations regarding accountability; and different quality assurance practices.

A Different Diversity

One possible implication is that highly internationalized systems of higher education, such as in the United Kingdom, would benefit from explicitly recognizing that nationality is an important and different marker of diversity in the system. Diversity by nationality is arguably different from other forms of diversity. The current discourse about antidiscriminatory policies by, say, sexual orientation or ethnicity are typically framed within a country. National identity might represent a more overarching different type of diversity—one dealing with culture. Empirical evidence confirms that this type of diversity is relevant when discussing one's attempts at moving up the academic ladder, especially during one's first years of professional experience in the United Kingdom.

Simmel's notion of "strangers" might help to conceptualize how this dimension of diversity should be understood. For Simmel, "strangers" are individuals who are in a place to stay and remain, but are viewed by locals as outliers. They are both close and distant, at the same time an exogenous and new, but familiar, presence.

Despite the fact that it is common sense to believe that faculty are open-minded, cosmopolitan, polyglot, adaptable, and prone to change, issues of adaptation driven by nationality probably occur more often than expected. Mertonian norms would suggest that there are common values that any faculty would agree upon. Nevertheless, higher education systems are different from each other and these differences frame the way that faculties understand their roles in them. This research might thus have glimpsed only a part of this problem.

International faculty bring, often implicitly, different tacit assumptions in terms of practices and expectations. This recent research about adaptation issues gives an interpretation to occasional and unnecessary frustrations that form an obstacle to unleashing international staff's potential. Implications of this research are relevant for any global provider of higher education that needs to balance cultural differences, expectations of global openness, and increasingly tightening governance practices. ▲

Sojourn or Stay: International Academics and Researchers in Australia

Anthony Welch

Increased international mobility, both of students and staff, is widespread, if uneven. Countries of migration and the Anglosphere still serve as major destinations, but a more multipolar knowledge world means mobility is more diverse. Traditionally, Hong Kong has hosted many international academic staff, but recently this began to change. At least until the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic, China's major universities and leading research laboratories attracted many scholars from around the world, often via numerous foreign talent schemes. Likewise, Germany's Max Planck Institutes, some of which work in English, have attracted leading international researchers, and Singapore has attracted leading scholars, and even teams, to its universities.

Australia, long a country of migration, has a particularly diverse academic and research staff cohort; some 45 percent of academic staff were born overseas. Internationally competitive salaries and working conditions, as well as an open migration scheme prioritizing high skill levels, attract highly qualified staff from around the world to both research bodies and universities. Skilled migrants form over two-thirds of the country's total migration. Some years ago, OECD research listed Australia as having the highest net brain gain among its member countries.

The Rise of Asia

The rise of Asian knowledge systems and Australia's location as the only substantial English language higher education system in the South Pacific have ensured that more and more academic staff and scientists at its universities and research institutes now stem from Asia. In many cases, researchers take their PhD in Australia, then move to universities or research institutes. Paralleling the increase in the overall population, the proportion of Australian academics born in Asia grew by over 50 percent during the decade from 2005 to 2015, from 10 percent to 15.4 percent. Almost a third came from mainland China and a further 5 percent from Hong Kong. Academic staff from India now account for 16 percent of Australia's total international staff. But the proportion of Asia-born staff varies significantly by discipline, with the social sciences having the lowest, and areas such as IT and engineering having over 30 percent. Findings by the author show that more than 75 percent of Asia-born academic staff collaborated with scholars from Asia, two-thirds on joint research projects. National origin was particularly important: Over a third had helped to develop exchange programs with their country of origin. The high proportion of China-born international staff has led to a boost in bilateral research collaboration. China, now an international knowledge powerhouse, is one of Australia's key partners, with active research collaborations across a range of fields, in the natural and applied sciences as well as in social sciences and humanities. That China is also a major knowledge partner to other countries in the region offers potential to grow regional knowledge partnerships, including China-born researcher networks.

Representation, But Limited Recognition

Yet, the substantial number of Asia-born staff is not always matched by outcomes or institutional recognition, for example in promotions processes. Some lamented that, while their disciplinary knowledge was valued, the additional work to build and sustain international collaborations was often not recognized. Some also complained that, when visiting potential international collaborators, initial enthusiasm was not followed up.

Abstract

Australian higher education is highly diverse, with numbers of researchers and academics from Asia rising the most, especially in recent decades. The knowledge diasporas of China and India, two major sources, contribute to teaching and research but also help to build bridges with their homelands and international scientific networks—contributions that are not always fully valued. US–China tensions and COVID-induced travel restrictions have interfered with the contributions of many international staff.

The expectations of Chinese institutions with regard to foreign academics are closely connected to the effort of building world-class universities.

Language was often reported to be a problem, while some reported that their cultural background constituted a disadvantage.

Asia-born academics were also underrepresented at more senior academic levels. A recent survey showed that one in four of the lowest staff tier were Asia-born, but only one in 10 at the most senior level (professor), and less than one in 30 at deputy vice-chancellor (vice-president) level. As in North America, female Asia-born academics often faced additional gender discrimination. Asia-born female academics held 4.8 percent of engineering posts, for example, whereas their male peers held 28.5 percent. In IT, disparities were also large: Female Asia-born academics represented 9.4 percent of total staff in the field, relative to their male peers at 25.1 percent. Nonetheless, the rise and growth of significant knowledge diasporas, particularly from the two Asian giants, China and India, but also including Singapore, Malaysia, and Vietnam, is a substantial resource, constituting an important bridge between the Australian research system and Asian systems.

COVID Barriers to Mobility and Networks

From early 2020, the COVID pandemic severely disrupted international mobility, including of academic staff. When Australia abruptly shut its borders, tens of thousands of international students were marooned abroad and unable to return to Australia to study. Thousands of Australian citizens were also stranded abroad, including numerous international academics. Indian-Australian citizens were threatened with substantial fines if they attempted to return to Australia. Only recently have international borders reopened. The fact that international travel remains somewhat restricted, including to China, forms an ongoing limit to international academic staff activities, particularly those who need to conduct fieldwork abroad.

US–China Relations

But the increasingly rancorous and rivalrous US–China relations form a further barrier to the activities of some Asia-born staff at Australia’s universities and research institutes. The so-called US–China trade war is now increasingly recognized as a technology war and even a culture war. This poses particular problems for international researchers in high-tech fields with potential security implications such as quantum computing, AI, new materials, and robotics, but even China-focused social science colleagues, numbers of whom are of Chinese origin, are affected. The introduction of far-reaching foreign interference legislation and the overall securitization of policy burden universities and research institutes with the obligation to check thousands of international agreements. A recent federal ministerial decision to reject several research grants already awarded by the national research agency—two of which involving China, spurred allegations of political interference. As in the United States and the United Kingdom, the increasingly febrile atmosphere resulting from tensions with China has led to a higher incidence of anti-Chinese and even anti-Asian harassment and abuse. Numbers of China-born colleagues report feelings of anxiety, or a perceived need to keep their head down, until relations improve.

The Australian higher education and research system remains vibrant and diverse, with international academic staff making major contributions. Some have left; some will continue to join. The next few years will determine to what extent the activities of international staff at Australia’s universities and research institutes have been constrained by COVID-19 and the ongoing US–China culture war and resulting securitization of policy. ▲

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Foreign Academics in China

Yuzhuo Cai, Andrea Braun Střelcová, Giulio Marini, Futao Huang, and Xin Xu

A major global science and technology player, mainland China has also become a destination for international academics. In this regard, the Chinese government's policy has shifted from primarily encouraging overseas Chinese to return to also attracting foreign-born academics to China. Over recent years, the composition of the latter group has evolved. The "old" cohort in this category consisted mainly of university (language) teachers, short-term academic visitors, part-time-post holders and honorary affiliates, trailing spouses, or Chinese returnees. They have been joined by a "new" cohort, foreign nationals moving to China for full-time, long-term academic positions. The authors of this article have recently conducted comprehensive investigations on this emerging phenomenon, and report on the key findings below.

Who Are the Foreign Academics in China?

The term—foreign or international academics in China—has been frequently used without a univocal definition. In China, policy discourses on foreign academics have evolved from *sulian zhuanjia* (Soviet experts) in the 1950s, to *waiguo wenjiao zhuanjia* (foreign cultural and educational experts) and *waiji jiaoshi* (foreign-nationality teachers) in the 1990s, and *waiji rencai* (foreign talents), the term used in recent talent programs at national and local levels. The current policies focus on attracting researchers with a foreign nationality to work in China. In many universities, further priority is given to those of non-Chinese ethnicity, primarily white foreigners from the Global West. Although most accurate, up-to-date data is missing, the 2019 ministry of education's data indicates that there are more than 18,000 foreign academics in China. Recent studies, including the authors' works, show that foreign academics in China do not constitute a homogenous group. They can be differentiated according to various attributes, such as scientific disciplines, career stage, gender, nationality, ethnicity, country of previous work experience, educational background, and more.

Recent studies have revealed some interesting additional findings. First, the most sought-after foreign academics in Chinese universities are established researchers in engineering and natural sciences from the Global West. Second, there is a prevalence of academics who are male, senior, and have citizenship, work experience, and degrees from Western countries. Finally, an emerging group of foreign-born academics, who stayed in China after receiving their doctoral degrees there, has appeared. Naturally, the group's heterogeneity is reflected in the diversity of their experiences.

What Motivates Foreign Academics to Work in China?

Foreign academics come to China for a combination of professional, cultural, social, and personal reasons. The most common primary motivation is career development, as the change of location is expected to bring better opportunities than staying in one's previous country of residence. The prospects also concern salaries, allowances, research funding, subsidized housing, dual career offers to accommodate spouses, and overall recognition of one's track record. The second motivation is opportunities for cultural and social connections, often combined with the professional aspect. Academics from social sciences and humanities, in particular, are attracted by the opportunity to work in a unique cultural environment. For some of them, having strong networks in China is essential to their research. The third motivation is related to personal reasons, such as having a Chinese spouse.

Abstract

This article examines the experience of international academics in mainland China. The emerging trend of foreign academics moving into long-term, full-time positions in Chinese universities is an underreported phenomenon in research. This article discusses the following questions: Who are the foreign academics in China? What motivates them to go and work there? What are their expected roles in local academia? Are they satisfied with their jobs? Are they going to stay in China?

The expectations of Chinese institutions with regard to foreign academics are closely connected to the effort of building world-class universities.

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What Are Their Expected Roles in Chinese Academia?

The expectations of Chinese institutions with regard to foreign academics are closely connected to the effort of building world-class universities. When hiring foreign academics, universities and research institutes seek to enhance their international reputation, increase research productivity, promote international collaboration, support faculty development, and attract international students. This is in significant contrast with the 1990s, when international staff was hired mainly for teaching. According to the foreign academics themselves, they are primarily recruited to boost their institutions' research performance and international reputation. Nonetheless, they also feel that they are confined to "bubbles" and are less integrated in their workplaces than their Chinese colleagues. Many believe that they could play more important roles in building links between their affiliated institutions and global academic networks.

Are They Satisfied with Their Jobs?

To various degrees, foreign academics are overall satisfied with their working conditions. In most cases, those in engineering and natural sciences are happier with their jobs than those in social sciences and humanities, who are more prone to feeling frustrated, especially if they are junior researchers. Nonetheless, all foreign academics see challenges in both the professional and nonprofessional aspects of their lives, especially after a few years. First, they perceive themselves as being viewed as a possible source of conflict by domestic academics and administrators. Second, they often feel seen as guests and isolated from the rest of the institution. Third, most of them believe that there are language barriers, for instance when applying for research funding. Fourth, shrinking academic freedom is a concern, particularly to some social sciences researchers. Fifth, most find it hard to adapt to the local research administration system. And finally, non-professional challenges mainly include cultural integration (e.g., conflicting value systems), legal procedures (e.g., lengthy visa and residence permit applications), and living conditions (e.g., expensive healthcare, children's schooling).

Will Foreign Academics Stay in China?

Regarding long-term stays, there are significant differences among academics according to their circumstances. A recent study on European academics in Chinese public universities, for instance, shows that their job satisfaction tends to decrease with time, as they gradually identify further challenges related to their institutions as well as to society at large. On the other hand, since many accept offers in China that include a higher academic rank at a relatively younger age, it is logical for them to consider relocating elsewhere at a later stage. Their work experience in China becomes an essential stepping stone to increase their competitiveness in the global academic labor market.

Concluding Remarks

The world is currently experiencing extraordinary crises caused by the COVID-19 pandemic, the US–China decoupling, and Russia's war against Ukraine. Shifting geopolitical dynamics are likely to dramatically influence the landscape of international mobility of academics. Due to the pandemic travel restrictions in China, the country's foreign population has already shrunk. For instance, the number of European academics in China has decreased by one-third. In view of that, the evolving flows of international migration to China, including the movements of foreign academics, should be closely monitored and continuously traced. ▲

International Researchers in Japanese Companies

Ming Li and Futao Huang

To compete in the global economy and strengthen Japan's highly specialized domestic industrial structure, the Japanese government has launched several policies to attract foreign talents. In 2020, the number of foreign workers was 1.72 million, 2.5 times more than 10 years before. Moreover, since the "Point-Based Preferential Immigration Treatment for Highly Skilled Foreign Professionals" was issued in 2012 (aiming to certify 40,000 highly skilled foreign professionals by the end of 2022), the total number of certified cases reached 29,084 by June 2021.

In order to develop more global human resources and improve the international competitiveness of Japanese industry and business, companies have made efforts to attract excellent international researchers and expect them to play an active role in their workplaces. This is comparable with what universities and research institutes have done.

While the global mobility of human resources and the number of international researchers working in Japanese companies have increased, little research has been carried out about them as individuals, about their motivations to come to Japan, what roles they play, what contributions they make, and what challenges they face. The authors of [the study on which this article is based](#) conducted interview surveys with 11 international researchers through online platforms from September 2020 to January 2022, aiming to make an inventory of these issues and compare them with characteristics of international faculty at Japanese universities, identified in prior research.

The interviewees, six men and five women aged 20 to 40, came from China, Mongolia, Nepal, the Philippines, and Taiwan and had all graduated from Japanese universities. They were employed at 10 different companies within the manufacture, pharmaceutical, cosmetic, and information industries.

Motivations

While international faculty are primarily driven by professional and academic reasons when moving to Japan, our interviews suggest that international researchers are more attracted by stable positions and more advantageous salaries available at Japanese companies. In comparison, most young international faculty at Japanese universities are hired on fixed terms and poorly paid for their workload. In addition, interviewees from countries with a lower GDP per capita than Japan are driven more by economic reasons. By gender, female researchers appear to place greater value on job stability, benefits, and the culture of their affiliated companies. The motivations of international researchers for working in Japanese companies have not been found in the study of international faculty at Japan's universities.

Work Roles and Contributions

Widely differing from international faculty at Japanese universities, the interviewees were mainly involved in applied research and product design and development, following, in most cases, the requirements of their companies rather than their own scholarly and research interests. In comparison, international faculty have a greater degree of academic freedom and autonomy.

They were also expected to engage in their companies' international business, leveraging their international background and multilingual abilities. This is similar to international faculty, who are strongly expected to undertake any activity that cannot be performed by their Japanese colleagues, especially to help enhance the international reputation of their universities. Several interviewees believed that they could provide advice from an international perspective, promote international cooperation, and stimulate

Abstract

To develop global human resources and improve the international competitiveness of Japan's industry and business, Japanese companies have made efforts to attract excellent international researchers, expecting them to play an active role in their workplaces. This article explores some aspects of their personal identities, their motivations, work roles, and contributions, as well as the challenges that they face, compared with international faculty employed at Japanese universities.

Due to work pressure and long working hours, most of the interviewed researchers, especially the women, found it difficult to balance their work and private life.

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the integration of different cultures in their companies. More importantly, most of them stressed that they could bring new insights to research, product development, and perhaps to the ethos of their companies.

However, some interviewees mentioned that the effectiveness of their contributions largely depended on organizational arrangements at their companies, expectations on both sides, and other factors. In most cases, international researchers did not participate in governance and management issues, which may have prevented them from contributing more. Moreover, the lack of familiarity of international researchers with the systems and politics of their companies may have limited their participation in governance and other company functions. This is different from some international faculty, who have become middle-level or even institutional leaders in Japanese universities. This is especially true in the case of private universities, where some international faculty have even become presidents.

Challenges

Due to work pressure and long working hours, most of the interviewed researchers, especially the women, found it difficult to balance their work and private life. This finding was not confirmed in the study of international faculty at Japanese universities. Language is another issue: Although all interviewees earned their degrees from Japanese universities, most of them still felt that there was a communication barrier with their Japanese colleagues. Having a good mastery of the English language was also very important, especially when they needed to do research and communicate with researchers in other countries. Many international researchers found it very challenging to be expected to use their mother tongue, Japanese, and English when assuming their duties and responsibilities. In comparison, for most international faculty in Japan, the main challenges are unstable employment, lower research funding and salaries, heavy teaching and research workload, and uncertain career prospects.

Conclusion

Our findings from the interviews suggest that international researchers at Japanese companies share some similarities with those hired at universities. For example, most come from Asian countries, graduated from Japan's universities, and are attracted by favorable research and academic environments. They are expected to undertake international collaboration with partners abroad on behalf of their employers. Very few participate in governance and management issues, and they face language problems at work. Unlike international faculty, they are required to do research, R&D, and product design to respond to the needs of their companies.

From the perspective of international higher education, it is important that Japanese universities provide more English-degree programs to attract international students who do not speak Japanese, and hire high-quality graduates not only originating from Asian countries, but also from English-speaking countries, to work in the country's universities, research institutes, and companies. This may make it easier for Japanese companies to hire global talent. Further, Japanese universities need to make more efforts to help their international students and staff improve their proficiency in Japanese. They should also give credit for internships and recognize them as part of the curriculum, and provide more internship opportunities to international students, related to their majors and future careers. These initiatives will greatly help international graduates to better communicate with their domestic colleagues and become used to their workplaces and job responsibilities more quickly. ▲

Trends and Propositions to Provoke Debate about the Future of Higher Education

Ellen Hazelkorn and Tom Boland

The world is in a state of flux, and the future is less predictable than ever. What are the implications of international megatrends on higher education? How should we think about the longer-term issues that will be important for our higher education institutions (HEIs), staff, current and future students, society, and economy? What administrative and governance structures will we need? And how is the system to be paid for?

The European Commission made a significant contribution to the policy debate when it published its roadmap for higher education last January: [European Strategy for Universities and Council Recommendation on building bridges for effective European Higher Education cooperation](#). In *Strengthening the Sustainability, Quality and Competitiveness of Irish Higher Education: Trends and Propositions to Provoke Debate*, we review key trends with implications for the direction of higher education in Ireland.

Macro-Trends and Implications

It is time to rethink the model of “mass participation” higher education. Ireland has been privileged by student demand, but this has forestalled closer scrutiny of trends and innovation. The tertiary attainment level is 55 percent of 30–34 year-olds (compared to the EU average of 40.3 percent approximately). Seventy percent of secondary students transfer to tertiary education. Yet, despite this expansion, the model of education provision has remained relatively unchanged, as if it was still a system catering to an elite. Policy and program structures are too focused around a linear educational pathway, whereby students progress from primary to secondary to tertiary and then into work in their 20s—and fail to recognize that greater innovation and flexibility is required for different types of learners pursuing different types of programs over their lifetime.

We need a comprehensive higher education management information system. Without a system for collecting, analyzing, and reporting on data (both qualitative and quantitative), we cannot know how well our system is doing and plan accordingly. Essentially, we have outsourced this crucial function to rankings and other such data systems.

Ireland is playing catch-up in the digital revolution. Irish HEIs rightly won praise for rapidly changing the educational format from on-campus to online in response to COVID. But an emergency response is not equivalent to high-quality online or blended learning. Competing successfully in the twenty-first century requires a step change in approach and investment. A systemic and strategic approach is necessary rather than an institutional, competitive approach.

A well-functioning national research system is needed. The Irish research, science, and innovation landscape has been transformed since the start of the millennium. But we have no research policy/strategy. We have individual agency strategies, but that is not the same—indeed we have competing strategies.

What about funding for sustainability? Funding models beget the system and if the future reality is different, then the funding model that supports it needs to change accordingly. Government enjoys the political kudos of once-off initiatives but this is not a funding policy—especially as we enter headwinds post-COVID and from the war in Ukraine, and face growing and competing demands from elsewhere in the political and public system.

Last but not least, strengthening the steering core and heartland is important. Higher education’s greatest asset is the quality of its people, academics and researchers, but also professional, technical, and maintenance staff, who are too frequently overlooked.

Abstract

This article reviews key trends with implications for the future direction of higher education in Ireland, including developments at the EU level. The implications are discussed with a particular focus on issues potentially impacting on the sustainability and performance of higher education institutions, and those that appear to create significant opportunities for the sector. Arising from this assessment, propositions are set out to provoke a debate.

We spend much time talking about HEIs producing human capital, but too little time thinking about the human capital of our HEIs.

Propositions to Provoke Debate

There are three dominant messages. First, a system approach can deliver the greatest collective impact and economies of scale. Second, change is coming. Ireland is either in the vanguard or it will be left behind. Third, tertiary education policy should utilize an equity and inclusiveness lens. The present system—to a very great extent—perpetuates past privilege.

Below, we summarize the propositions from the original paper. Unlike recommendations that propose specific actions, a proposition is like an onion, capable of being unravelled, dissected, and adapted. In the first place, we propose to develop a coordinated, collaborative higher education, research, and innovation system. For that purpose, it is important to establish the Tertiary Education and Research Authority (TERA) to provide policy advice on, and regulation of, the entire system. This includes strengthening the HEI-based research system, supporting challenge-based collaborative centers, achieving a better balance between social and technological innovation, and building a sustainable researcher pipeline. Regional knowledge and innovation clusters should form the primary policy instrument for greater regional sustainability through collaboration between education providers, business, and civic society. And private higher education needs to be integrated into the tertiary education system with formal governance and contractual arrangements.

Secondly, it is important to widen educational opportunities and improve outcomes. For that reason, further education/technical and vocational education and training (TVET) should be a central player in the education and training system, on equal terms with higher education. To balance demand, a cap should be introduced on student numbers entering higher education. A national credit accumulation and transfer system is needed to provide opportunities for learners of all ages and ability to build credits and credentials over time and carry them from one program/institution (or form of education and training) to another. It is important to empower students to tailor their entry, exit, assessment, and qualifications to their personally determined needs, rather than require them to fit a standardized model. And there is a need for more focus on work-based/work-informed learning, employability, and work placements, competency-based education (CBE), new forms of apprenticeship, and new forms of credentials.

Thirdly, Ireland needs to strengthen the infrastructure and establish a national digital platform as a shared digital infrastructure promoting and supporting open access solutions and scholarly and other resources, data and analytics, training, advice, and other services for education and research, libraries/museums, other public services, and society at large. And it needs to establish a national research information management system to collect and manage higher education and research data and analyze and plan accordingly. While context is important, many of the issues discussed and propositions made have relevance for other small or medium-sized systems. ▲

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Emergence within Emergency: Kazakhstan's Higher Education System

Douglas L. Robertson and Nazgul Bayetova

This article discusses Kazakhstan's emerging higher education system. To be clear, we are not sure whether this commentary addresses a trajectory that continues, or one that changes.

The independent Republic of Kazakhstan was born in 1991. Its first president was Nursultan Nazarbayev (April 24, 1990 to March 20, 2019). He was succeeded by his close ally, Kassym-Jomart Tokayev. Many think that Nazarbayev still rules. On January 2, 2022, "Bloody January" erupted in Kazakhstan, taking the form of massive protests and violent demonstrations connected specifically to a dramatic increase in liquified gas prices the day before, and more generally to growing unease with the government and economic inequality. Ten days later, on January 11, 2022, after 227 people had died and nearly 10,000 had been arrested, Tokayev declared that order prevailed. Russian troops were in the streets restoring that order by force as part of the Collective Security Treaty Organization between Armenia, Belarus, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Russia, and Tajikistan. Shortly after, on February 24, 2022, Russia invaded Ukraine. The war continues as we write this article. Nineteen percent of Kazakhstan's population is ethnic Russian and is concentrated near the border with Russia. Protecting ethnic Russians is one of the Russian government's justifications for invading Ukraine. Many Kazakhs are on edge.

Within this context, this article is a reflection on the higher education system that Nazarbayev built in Kazakhstan while serving as president. A rigorous qualitative analysis of Nazarbayev's official speeches and policy texts suggests five paradoxes that describe Kazakh higher education as we navigate this uncertain period.

Nationalistic Globalism

Nazarbayev wanted to strengthen inward-facing national pride by "looking outward," toward international relations. Nazarbayev's vision of Kazakhstan's developing higher education system was integral to this dynamic. Kazakhstan's leadership chose to use its resource advantages, such as abundant oil and natural gas, to finance the transition from a centrally planned, resource-based economy to a market-driven knowledge economy. A key element in this strategy was the development of a high-quality higher education system, influenced by Western standards and practices. The crown jewel of this system was Nazarbayev University, founded in 2010, the envisioned national flagship university. Nazarbayev spoke of its significance in his 2009 presidential address, "[The c]reation of the new university is the most important national project... [This project] will have a significant impact on many Kazakhstanis and the development of a backbone for our state. I believe that the new university... should be created as a national brand, harmoniously combining Kazakhstani identity with the best international educational and scientific practice." Kazakhstan's globalized higher education system would promote national identity and nationalistic pride, particularly among the younger generation who participated in the system and directly benefited from it.

Regulated Nonregulation

Globalism is promoted by the neoliberal paradigm that is predominant in many high-income nations and explicitly informs the lending policy of the international entities that help finance Kazakhstan's development, such as the World Bank and the Central Asian Development Bank. The neoliberal view holds that the world should be one big, unregulated system of market and supply chains. Western high-income countries are models

Abstract

This article frames a description of Kazakhstan's emerging higher education system in five paradoxes: nationalistic globalism; regulated nonregulation; "give to get"; communal individualism; and developmental demise. To enrich the analysis, we have made a rigorous qualitative study of major speeches and policy documents by Nursultan Nazarbayev (President, 1990–2019) and his government. The commentary occurs within the context of recent uprisings in Kazakhstan and the Russian invasion of Ukraine.

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of neoliberal success. Low-income countries tend to adopt successful policies, and so it made sense for Nazarbayev to look to the US higher education model in particular. A neoliberal tenet is privatization, which is expressed in many forms in American higher education, perhaps most fundamentally as private colleges or universities. In Kazakhstan, 60 new private universities were established in major urban markets following the implementation of the 1993 Law of Higher Education. Required of each new institution was a license issued by the ministry of education and science. Despite the appearance of a deregulated higher education market, de facto regulation still exists through licensing and kleptocratic mechanisms.

“Give to Get”

In his 2005 presidential address, Nazarbayev highlighted the need to support excellent students financially, stating, “We have many talented boys and girls who are willing and able to become engineers or technologists. Through education grants and credits, the government will help them in a very real way. I urge the private sector to join actively in this initiative.” As in Western neoliberal higher education, a student loan industry quickly developed. In the Soviet era, higher education was free. In the familiar pattern of privatization, freedom of choice came at a cost. The government could not pay completely for individuals’ educational costs. Private, for-profit loan companies filled the gap. In 2005, Nazarbayev introduced student loans offered by all Kazakhstani banks except the National Bank. These loans were guaranteed by the state. Students gained greater freedom of choice while paradoxically acquiring greater constraints of debt.

Communal Individualism

Neoliberalism emphasizes individualism, competition, and meritocracy. From antiquity, Kazakh culture was organized around the family and the community. The Soviet period (1936–1991) reinforced this cultural predisposition to collectivism. Under Nazarbayev, the transition to a market economy led to a shift to individualism, as evidenced by his 1997 and 1998 presidential addresses. In 1997, the president said that “[the] state-and-collective world outlook was replaced by a private-and-individual one and the event reversed each and every aspect of our life.” In 1998, he stated that “[c]ollective responsibility equals no responsibility. Collective responsibility is the enemy of accountability.” In higher education, for example, instead of cohorts of students attending the same courses each semester, policy makers created the possibility for students to follow “individual course pathways.” This change allowed students to complete courses based on their particular choice and desired degree, with the aim to serve the nation’s (collective) prosperity.

Developmental Demise

Nazarbayev’s vision was of sophisticated, Western-influenced, market-oriented Kazakhstanis who would become the foundation of the country’s emerging knowledge economy. As part of building this human capital, Kazakhstan’s authoritarian-leaning government established the Bolashak Scholars Program, which sends talented young students to top Western universities. But this effort may actually be counterproductive. Western universities emphasize critical thinking, which can turn against Kazakhstan’s government and bolster opposition to corruption and oppression. The paradoxical message to Bolashak Scholars and university students is to develop critical thinking and problem-solving skills to create wealth and elevate Kazakhstan, but not to apply those same skills to the sociopolitical system that distributes power and wealth.

Major events, such as wars, pivot trajectories in nations and regions. The systemic ripples of the Russian invasion of Ukraine and the ensuing hot war may alter the path and patterns of the emerging higher education system in Kazakhstan that we have discussed in this article. It is hard to imagine that such a major perturbation would not. How, and to what end, evolves as we speak. ▲

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Rethinking São Paulo's Higher Education System

Jacques Marcovitch

In March 2020, COVID-19 unlocked and accelerated five distinct crises in Brazil: health-related, economic, social, political, and geopolitical. The high degree of unpredictability resulting from the pandemic meant that all institutions of higher education, whether national or international, public, private, or nongovernmental had to seek out more flexible and agile organizational structures to respond to different dimensions of the effects of the crises. The future of universities can be understood in the context of a new era in construction, requiring them to confront the five challenges presented below.

Preserving and defending university autonomy requires universities to strengthen their governance and the process of selecting leaders. They should also update the way in which pluriannual plans are constructed and seek closer connection with society in order to advocate for, and reinforce, the importance of autonomy for higher education institutions.

Second, we need to ensure the *continued financing of higher education*, which is contingent on government actions and crises afflicting the country. Universities need to be more proactive, working together with legislators in defense of their budgets. They need to expand and diversify the ways through which they attract resources for research and innovation, whether in collaboration, from national or international research funds, or from private sources.

Promoting and accelerating social inclusion and insertion needs to be at the center of plans for economic recovery and regional development. This requires building integrated social inclusion strategies, of which affirmative action makes up a small but crucial part, and also involves lifelong support, improved use of teaching technology, and access to healthcare and social welfare systems, among other measures.

Tracking graduates from higher education institutions through their working lives is also important. This is a continuous process of improving methodology, expanding the range of data available, and maintaining engaged networks of former students and offering them channels to contribute to the development of their institution.

Last but not least, it is essential to rethink the *connection with all sectors of society*, in order to prioritize community development. The community is not only the scientific community, or business elites, but everyone who contributes to the upkeep of, and benefits from, the university. This is a vital part of a long-term strategy.

These challenges strengthen the bonds that universities have with the society that finances them. They should be brought to the attention of governors, parliamentarians, healthcare authorities, workers' and employers' unions, as well as any other sphere that is willing to be part of the difficult undertaking of constructing the twenty-first century.

Looking at public higher education in the state of São Paulo, Brazil, we posit that universities must rethink their relationship with society in order to contribute to social and economic recovery.

State Higher Education in São Paulo

The public higher education system in São Paulo is a driving force in the social, economic, and cultural life of the country. It is central to training the workforce, creating innovation and new knowledge, and driving social development and inclusion. The system is also the curator of heritage, culture, and identity. It manages many of its most important museums, galleries, and venues, and stages countless cultural events both alone and in partnership with other organizations.

As the most significant centers of postgraduate study, state universities provide faculty to universities across Brazil and as such have a huge impact on scientific culture

Abstract

COVID-19 unlocked and accelerated five distinct crises in Brazil: health-related, economic, social, political, and geopolitical. In its aftermath, universities in Brazil and beyond must confront challenges related to autonomy, financing, their connection to society, and governance. Looking at public higher education in the state of São Paulo, we posit that universities must rethink their relationship to society in order to contribute to social and economic recovery.

As the most significant centers of postgraduate study, state universities provide faculty to universities across Brazil and as such have a huge impact on scientific culture across the country.

across the country. What is learned during postgraduate training in São Paulo has the potential to mold culture and practice in higher education.

The state of São Paulo has a population of 45 million, of whom around 20 percent are under 15 years old. At BRL 2 trillion, its GDP is equivalent to 32 percent of the national GDP. The state supports and finances three universities, the University of São Paulo (USP), the State University of Campinas (Unicamp), and São Paulo State University (Unesp), which receive US\$4 billion per year, as well as a state research foundation that allocated the equivalent of USD 195 million in 2021. These institutions are financed by a fixed portion of the state sales tax (ICMS), which gives them a high level of autonomy with a relative degree of budgetary predictability.

Since the turn of the millennium, São Paulo's public higher education system has expanded significantly, with undergraduate enrollment increasing by 56 percent from 67,000 in 2000 to 120,000 in 2020. São Paulo state institutions have campuses in 28 cities and towns, reaching areas far from the state capital and traditional centers of influence. São Paulo's universities are often required to fulfill roles in public health and social security that in more developed countries are carried out by public authorities. While the size and reach of higher education in the state of São Paulo may be exceptional, it shares many of the same challenges as other universities in Latin America and other lower-income countries, where higher education plays a special role in nation building.

Confronting the Coronavirus

During the pandemic, university hospitals, among the most extensive in the country, dealt with tens of thousands of cases through the public health system. Universities were on the frontline of a public information program, filling the void left by the denialist federal government.

USP served as the state's principal research and manufacturing center for COVID vaccines. Laboratories in all the universities worked tirelessly on sequencing, treatment modalities, and other aspects in response to the crisis, trading information round the clock with institutions from across the world, making use of open science platforms that greatly accelerated the free exchange of knowledge. Despite this momentous contribution, institutional data gathering, academic evaluation, and communication of results broadly fail to reflect this impact.

Given that public universities in São Paulo, but also elsewhere in Brazil and Latin America, have such a distinct role in nation building, it is imperative that the way we conceive of universities and measure and represent their value is rethought.

Rethinking the University

The Sustainable Development Goals, digital transition, and cooperation between countries make higher education a haven to address the fundamental needs of the new era. The administration of every university must determine indicators, costs, and procedures for the proposal from the United Nations to become more than just a list of well-intentioned aspirations.

These challenges are more ambitious than adding a few new indicators. They require careful analysis of how and why different stakeholders value the university and ensuring that they are engaged with planning and evaluation processes, to draw the outside world into the sphere of university governance.

Rethinking the university means defending its values, strengthening its commitment to teaching, research, and outreach and, at the same time, renewing its bonds with a society in rapid transformation. This type of rethinking and adaptation cannot be carried out by a single research group, or a single institution, but requires the dedication of a whole ecosystem of institutions working together. ▲

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