

people and knowledge back and forth across borders and among societies, the great advantage still accrues to the traditional academic centers at the expense of the peripheries. Even China, and to some extent India, with both large and increasingly sophisticated academic systems, find themselves at a significant disadvantage in the global academic marketplace. For much of Africa, the traditional brain drain remains largely a reality.

CONCLUSION

Thomas Friedman's "flat world" is a reality for the rich countries and universities. The rest of the world still finds itself in a traditional world of centers and peripheries, of peaks and valleys and involved in an increasingly difficult struggle to catch up and compete with those who have the greatest academic power. In some ways, globalization works against the desire to create a worldwide academic community based on cooperation and a shared vision of academic development. The globalization of science and scholarship, ease of communication, and the circulation of the best academic talent worldwide have not led to equality in higher education. Indeed, both within national academic systems and globally, inequalities are greater than ever. ■

The Growing Accountability Agenda: Progress or Mixed Blessing?

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Compared to the well-established tradition of accreditation in the United States, public universities in many countries have typically operated in a very autonomous manner. In the francophone countries of Africa, for example, institutions enjoy full independence in the selection (election) of their leaders and complete management autonomy. They do not have to answer for their inefficient performance. In several Latin American countries, the constitution entitles public universities to a fixed percentage of the annual budget that they are free to use without accountability. Some countries do not even have a government ministry or agency responsible for steering or supervising the tertiary education sector.

In the past decade, however, accountability has become a major concern in most parts of the world. Governments, parliaments, and society at large are increasingly asking universi-

ties to justify the use of public resources and account more thoroughly for their teaching and research results. This undertaking may include many forms: legal requirements such as licensing, accreditation, assessment tests to measure what students have learned; professional examinations; performance-based budget allocation; and governing boards with external participants. Sometimes the press itself enters the accountability arena with its controversial league tables.

THE ACCOUNTABILITY AGENDA

Nobody can argue that universities should not be accountable. First, governments are responsible for establishing a regulatory framework to prevent fraudulent practices. Accusations of

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flawed medical research in the United Kingdom, reports of Australian universities cutting corners to attract foreign students, and the student loan scandal in the United States show the need for vigilance, even in countries with strong accountability mechanisms. Second, universities should legitimately be held accountable for their use of public money and the quality of their outputs (graduates, research, and regional engagement). The evolution toward increased accountability is reflected in the expansion in the number of stakeholders, themes under scrutiny, and channels of accountability.

The teaching staff has traditionally been the most powerful group in universities, especially where the head of the institution is democratically elected. Even at Harvard, the demise of President Summers in 2006 was largely due to the opposition of some professors. But today university leaders must at the same time meet the competing demands of several groups of stakeholders: (a) society at large; (b) government, which can be national, provincial, or municipal; (c) employers; (d) the teaching staff; and (e) the students themselves. Even within government structures, demands for accountability are coming from new actors—as has happened in Denmark, where responsibility for the universities' sector is now with the Ministry of Technology.

The pressure for compliance comes through an increasingly broad variety of instruments. Government controls take the form of compulsory requirements, such as accreditation, performance indicators, and mandatory financial audits. They can also operate indirectly through financial incentives such as performance-based budget allocation. In countries with a student loan system, these loans are usually available only for studies in bona fide institutions. Innovative funding approaches—such as the voucher systems recently established in the state of Colorado and in several former Soviet Union republics

or the contracting of places in private universities piloted in Brazil and Colombia—put the decision making on where to study in the hands of the students themselves. Establishing university boards with outside members who have the power to hire (and fire) the leader of the institution, as has recently happened in Denmark, is another accountability channel. In many countries, accreditation reports are made available to the public, unlike the practice in the United States.

PUBLIC OPINION

Colombia was the first country in Latin America to set up a national accreditation system, but the number of programs reviewed by the new accreditation agency remained relatively low because accreditation was voluntary and the most prestigious universities did not feel any compulsion to participate. But after the country's main newspaper started to publish the full list of accredited programs, many more universities joined the accreditation process out of fear of being shunned by the students. In the same vein, the Intel Corporation announced in August 2007 that due to quality concerns it was removing more than 100 US universities and colleges from the list of eligible institutions where its employees could study, for retraining, at the firm's expense.

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The power of public opinion has been revealed in the growing influence of rankings. Initially limited to the United States, university rankings and league tables have proliferated in recent years, in more than 35 countries. Notwithstanding the methodological limitations of these rankings, the mass media have played a useful educational role by making relevant information available to the public, especially in countries lacking any form of quality assurance. In Japan, for instance, for many years the annual ranking published by the *Asahi Shimbun* newspaper fulfilled an essential quality-assurance function in the absence of an accreditation agency.

THE ACCOUNTABILITY CRISIS

In recent years, grievances about excessive accountability requirements and their negative consequences have come from many quarters. In the United Kingdom and Australia, for example, universities have complained of performance-indicator overload. In the United States, a controversy arose recently around the recommendations of the US Department of Education Spellings Commission on the Future of Higher Education regarding the need to measure learning outcomes. This reaction illustrates the weariness of the tertiary education community vis-à-vis accountability demands beyond accreditation. Another common complaint concerns the tyranny of the rankings published by the press.

In developing and transition countries, university leaders may accuse government of mixing accountability with excessive control. Comparing recent trends in two former Soviet Union republics, Kazakhstan and Azerbaijan, helps to illustrate practices that may stifle the tertiary education sector. In 2001, Kazakhstan introduced a voucher-like allocation system to distribute public resources for tertiary education. About 20 percent of the students receive education grants to study at the public or private institution of their choice. To be eligible, institutions must have received a positive evaluation from the quality-assurance unit of the Ministry of Education. As a result, all tertiary education institutions have become more mindful of their reputation as it determines their ability to attract education grant beneficiaries. In Azerbaijan, by contrast, the Ministry of Education controls student intake and program openings, even at private universities. Thus, for the more dynamic tertiary education institutions it becomes extremely difficult to innovate and expand.

Even in the absence of unethical behaviors, institutions may succumb to the natural temptation to pay more attention to those factors that receive prominence in rankings. In the United States and Canada there have been rumors of universities and colleges “doctoring” their statistics to improve their standing in the rankings.

Accountability often involves the need to reconcile multiple objectives, some of which are incompatible. For example, the pursuit of equity may be defeated by high admissions requirements—especially in countries like Brazil, with socially segregated secondary schools. While the proportion of low-income families is 57 percent in the state of São Paulo, it is only 10 percent at the University of Campinas (UNICAMP), one of the country's top universities.

On the positive side, however, many university leaders seek to make their institutions more accountable on a voluntary basis. In the United States, for example, the same presidents who decided in 2007 to boycott the *US News and World Report* rankings announced that they would start publishing key performance indicators in the context of a Voluntary System of Accountability Program. In Belgium, the Flemish universities have voluntarily joined the German ranking exercise for benchmarking purposes. In France, ironically, when the government in July 2007 offered increased autonomy against more accountability on a voluntary basis, there was a unanimous outcry. The scope of proposed autonomy was then reduced but imposed on all universities.

THE WAY FORWARD

The universal push for increased accountability has made the role of university leaders much more demanding. This irreversible evolution toward greater accountability has transformed the competencies expected of university leaders and the ensuing capacity-building needs of university management teams.

Accountability is meaningful only to the extent that tertiary education institutions are actually empowered to operate in an autonomous and responsible way. In the final analysis, their successful evolution will hinge on finding an appropriate balance between credible accountability practices and favorable autonomy conditions.

Author's note: The findings, interpretations, and conclusions expressed in this article are entirely those of the author and should not be attributed in any manner to the World Bank, the members of its Board of Executive Directors, or the countries they represent. ■

Internationalization: A Decade of Changes and Challenges

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As we progress into the 21st century, the international dimension is a key factor shaping and challenging the higher education sector in countries all over the world. During the last decade internationalization has increased in importance, impact, and complexity. It is a formidable force of change in its role as agent and reactor to the realities of globalization. But are all these changes positive?

NEW ACTORS

For several decades international academic relations have generally been under the purview of ministries of education, culture, and foreign affairs. Since the mid-1990s, ministries of immigration, trade, employment, industry, and especially science and technology have focused on the international recruitment of students and professors; the global competitiveness for the production and commodification of knowledge; and the commercial and economic benefits of cross-border education. Not only have additional national government agencies become more engaged, so have intergovernmental bodies such as UNESCO, and the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development, and the World Bank, as well as international and regional nongovernmental agencies. In fact, international education is now seen by both politicians and academic leaders as instrumental to regionalization initiatives such as those underway in Europe through the Bologna process, in Africa through the African Union higher education harmonization project, and the efforts in Latin America to work

toward a community of higher education. The role of higher education as an international or regional political actor has clearly gained ground in the last decade.

INCREASED DEMAND AND A DIVERSITY OF PROVIDERS

The forecasted growth for international education moves from 1.8 million in 2000 to about 7 million in 2025. This has major implications for the number and type of institutions, companies, organizations, and networks involved in the cross-border provision of higher education. Traditional public and private universities, primarily in Europe, North America, and Asia, are more and more active in sending and receiving education programs through a variety of delivery modes including franchising, branch campuses, twinning, and distance. At the same time, alternative or nontraditional providers are seeking business opportunities based on the rising demand for higher education and the attractiveness of foreign degrees for employment mobility. As a result, more than 50 large transnational companies are publicly traded on stock exchanges and are active in providing international educational programs, degrees, and services on a for-profit basis. In addition, multitudes of small private companies are now involved in cross-border education. Many offer quality education programs and recognized qualifications, but others are rogue, temporary, and unaccredited profit makers. The “for-profit” side of internationalization is increasing in many countries of the world, but certainly not all.

The recent inclusion of education services in the General Agreement for Trade in Services has been a wake-up call for higher education. As already noted, the export and import of higher education programs have been steadily growing, and so it should be no surprise that the World Trade Organization sees the education sector as a lucrative market. But what is unexpected, and of concern to many, is that the movement of private higher education services and programs between coun-

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tries is now subject to multilateral trade regulations where before it was done primarily on a bilateral basis, usually between government departments related to education and foreign affairs—certainly not trade. This raises new implications, questions, and challenges for higher education.

QUALITY

A worrisome trend is the treatment of quality assurance and accreditation as strategies for “international branding” and market position rather than for academic improvement pur-