

tatively superior to others. The United Kingdom maintains that it supports at most three institutions in the top tier (Cambridge, London, and Oxford), and Switzerland only one (Zurich). It is unlikely that Germany could support as many as six, and yet the internal national pressures will be to widen rather than narrow the circle of truly excellent universities.

LOOKING FORWARD

The stakeholders in the Excellence Initiative are committed to continuing it in some form when the current funding is exhausted. Future plans are not yet settled, but it is unlikely that the “next round” will be a replica of what has just been completed. Scholars and politicians are working to determine how best to build on what has begun. One outcome, however, is now certain. German universities no longer constitute what they were in 2005. An entirely new course has been set, built upon differentiation of mission evolved from rigorously high academic standards. One surprising message surfaced with clarity in the minds of the many outstanding international scholars who participated in evaluation panels. It is not that German universities are weak. It is that, despite formidable obstacles, they are astonishingly strong. ■

Universities and Social Cohesion in the European Union

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It has become conventional wisdom in recent years that Europe faces a daunting challenge of social cohesion in the face of increasingly hostile and radical Islamic immigrants residing in European cities. In the year 2006 alone, there were four major books addressing how the “growing threat” of “radical Islam” is “destroying the West from within.” The murder of two prominent public figures in the Netherlands, Theo van Gogh and Pim Fortuyn, has been particularly highlighted as examples of how Islamic fundamentalism has run amok in Europe.

Major questions have been raised on the ability of European states to create institutionalized mechanisms to improve the integration of Muslim immigrants and especially their children, who often feel as if they are caught between two quite disparate cultures. It has thus become a goal in the European Union to increase social cohesion using state programs and resources, universities among them. But what is the likelihood that European universities will see these social cohesion goals as legitimate, and work to implement them?

SOCIAL COHESION IN THE UNIVERSITY

To investigate the possibilities for implementing the EU's social cohesion goals in continental universities, I conducted a small study among faculty in Dutch universities. We discussed whether universities should have special access policies for Muslim students, if the curriculum should incorporate topics related to the Muslim integration, and if a university should directly engage Muslim communities through recruitment, speaking opportunities, or visits to schools.

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With few exceptions, the faculty expressed indifference and even open hostility toward all these ideas. They laughed off the idea that universities would take any unified action toward addressing these goals. “You don't understand,” one faculty member said to me, shaking her head. “The administration doesn't do anything around here.”

To many, just asking the question characterized me as an impossibly naïve American with no understanding of how universities operate in continental Europe. Often I was given a brief lecture about how academic power is decentralized in the faculties, which is not different from American research universities. “This is how it is done in America, no?” one staff member asked. My informants simply did not see the university as a unitary actor with the potential for significant action.

The faculty identified complicated issues of equity and policy regarding immigrant students, but saw no role for higher education. They denied that any access issues existed due to open enrollment policies, even as they acknowledged that immigrant students were far less likely to have the qualifications or financial resources to succeed. “This is a problem for the schools to fix, or maybe the government—I'm not sure,” one faculty member said. Another directly opposed any scholarship funds to encourage Muslim student enrollment. “I came from a poor family, and I had to find a way to make it through graduate school,” he said. “I don't see what makes this student any different.”

Despite my preconception of Muslim integration as largely a social problem amenable to interventions by universities and educators, the faculty again and again recast integration as a political problem. This is problematic, as there are deeply held beliefs that the university faculties should “stay out of politics,” although in practice many individual faculty members are highly involved in national and local politics. For the university to act on a political problem was seen as totally illegitimate.

One of my informants brought up an incident at an American disciplinary conference that he attended. He wandered into a heated discussion about whether the association should take a stand in favor of same-sex marriage, due to a recent law preventing federal recognition of same-sex mar-

riages in the United States. The discussion left him aghast. “The whole thing—the idea of [the discipline] getting involved in this!—is just . . . preposterous!” he exclaimed. When I suggested that the discipline might be trying to provide its professional expertise to inform the public debate, he stopped me in midsentence. “No no no!” he nearly shouted. “It was purely political!”

RETHINKING SOCIAL COHESION FROM THE BOTTOM UP

The purpose here is not to castigate faculty for their resistance to social cohesion policy, but to identify major cultural barriers to the imposition of policy through external governance. EU social cohesion policy seems quite naïve in its inattention to major stumbling blocks to implementation. From a governance perspective, the top-down approach to social cohesion does not seem likely to succeed beyond its symbolic value. Instead, we must rethink governance from the bottom up.

Immigrant students often suffer from a lack of social capital, the resources provided by connections within social networks. Social capital has been shown to increase attachment to school and have positive impacts on academic achievement. European universities need to increase the baccalaureate attainment of Muslim students, through recruitment and retention efforts; and facilitate the creation of student groups, both social and academic, which will foster community among students. This requires casting aside an official ideology that suppresses group identity by embracing vague affirmations of social diversity and equality.

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Funding for research projects and curricular programs addressing the emerging problems of immigration and integration are another means to improve our awareness of these social challenges and to affirm the importance of these challenges. Prominent scholars should be invited to speak on these issues on campus and in public. Indeed, the Dutch universities are a model for supporting public intellectuals who engage social issues through public debate.

Any one of these suggestions may or may not prove feasible. The idea is to turn the usual thinking about social cohesion upside down, by building social networks among students and faculty that yield social benefits. Effective governance cannot rely upon a heroic model where individuals work valiantly against social norms to move initiatives forward. We need a more prosaic model of governance that supports our social goals.

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Participation, Persistence, and Attainment Rates: The US Standing

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After largely ignoring international comparisons for many years, several recent reports in the United States have compared the American performance in higher education to that of other Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) countries. These reports have focused mostly on how the United States is slipping when it comes to attainment rates in tertiary education, but they often also raise questions about the country's position with respect to its participation and persistence rates.

PARTICIPATION RATES

For decades, participation rates—the proportion of the traditional college age population that enrolls in a tertiary program—has been coin of the realm when it comes to comparing national performance. Martin Trow built his now-famous typology of elite, mass, and universal higher education systems by bracketing their participation rates. Since the United States became a mass system in the 1960s, it has been generally agreed that its participation has ranked among the highest rates in the world. Statistics collected by the US Department of Education indicate that more than two-thirds of spring high school graduates now enroll in a postsecondary education program in the following fall, up from less than one-half as recently as the early 1970s.

But this high US level of tertiary participation is not reflected in the OECD-reported figures because of how US entry rates are defined. The primary OECD method to calculate entry rates divides the number of students enrolled (including international students and older students) by the population of traditional college age, thus tending to overstate entry rates in those countries with large numbers of overseas or older students. That is how New Zealand in some years has had an entry rate of more than 100 percent; its rate in 2005 was 79 percent. The US figure in the same year was 64 percent (ninth