



# GLOBAL ISSUES IN HIGHER EDUCATION

Stephen P. Heyneman

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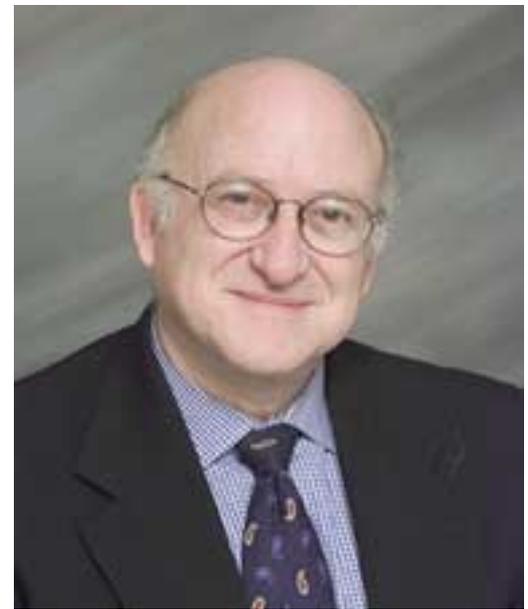
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Stephen P. Heyneman

Global influences have affected many aspects of daily life, and hence our strategies for coping. In the 1970s, for example, it was common to rely on government finance to stimulate economic growth. Today private investment outstrips foreign aid and public assistance.

It was once also common to make industrial decisions on the basis of suppliers located nearby who speak one's own language. Today industrial decisions are made on the basis of worldwide comparative advantage. A computer assembly plant may be located in Nashville, Tennessee; Northern Ireland; or Malaysia; a textile plant in Bangalore, India, or Sonora, Mexico; a farm for winter fruit in Florida, Chile, or Morocco.

### Ambitions for Education

Global influences also affect higher education. Today virtually every country has three higher education ambitions. First is a demand for greater levels of access, and in every part of the world access to higher education is rising rapidly. In the late 1960s, there was no nation in Western Europe where the proportion of the age group in higher education (18 to 22) was greater than 8 percent; today there is no nation in Western Europe where the proportion in higher education is lower than 35 percent. Worldwide enrollment is growing between 10 and 15 percent per year, including in middle- and low-income countries of Asia, Africa, and Latin America.

The result: There are few parts of the world where higher education constitutes "elite" education, that is, where it reaches less than 15 percent of the age cohort. Higher education has become "mass

education." Enrollment at Universidad Nacional Autónoma de México is 269,000; the University of Delhi has 309,000 students; Anatolian University (Turkey) has over one million; and enrollment at what may be the world's largest private university, the Islamic Azad University in Iran, with its 145 campuses, is 850,000 students. The traditional image we may have of higher education institutions as cloistered retreats from the world educating a select few may have to change. The fact is that higher education today is often impersonal—long lines to enter antiquated lecture halls, libraries with many missing books, cracking walls, falling paint, leaky faucets.

The second ambition in every country is to improve the quality of higher education. Over the last decade there has been a revolution in the criteria that help define higher education quality. High-quality higher education now requires electronic modernity in classrooms, dorms, libraries, science laboratories, study halls. Students are often older, work part time, and live far away from the campus. High-quality syllabi are no longer based on textbooks

Rank	Multi-Disciplinary Schools	Bandwidth per Student (kbps)	Overall Rank 2000
1	Sun Yat-sen University (Taiwan)	33.53	20
2	Kyungpook National University (S. Korea)	29.76	35
3	Chungnam National University (S. Korea)	20.84	50
4	Australian National University	19.58	8
5	Taiwan Normal University	19.02	37
6	Seoul National University (S. Korea)	17.14	4
7	Tsing Hua University (Taiwan)	14.77	18
8	Kyoto University (Japan)	14.17	1
9	Chonnam National University (S. Korea)	13.52	34
10	Tohoku University (Japan)	11.84	2
11	Tianjin University (China)	11.54	46
12	Xi'an Jiaotong University (China)	10.81	54
13	National University of Singapore	7.1	5
14	University of Wollongong (Australia)	6.92	45
15	University of Adelaide (Australia)	6.88	26
16	Nagoya University (Japan)	6.58	11
17	Central University (Taiwan)	6.12	24
18	University of Melbourne (Australia)	6.06	9
19	Kasetsart University (Thailand)	5.56	63
20	Chao Toung University (Taiwan)	5.5	28

SOURCE: <http://www.asiaweek.com>

but on the most up-to-date information from print and electronic sources. Information for students is scanned and available online. Students have access to curricular information wherever they live or travel.

What's more, classroom instruction has changed. Class time is no longer devoted to providing information for students; instead it is devoted to the analysis of information absorbed prior to class. The Internet and other forms of electronic information have changed the academic library and enhanced its quality. There is less need for faculty or students to visit the physical place. A high-quality academic library used to be defined by the quantity of its holdings. Today it is defined by the quantity of its access to information. The difference is enormous. Every high-quality academic library has enough money to join exclusive "information networks" where holdings are shared with one another.

Networks of academic libraries are transnational, and cover university libraries in Europe, Asia, and North America. Access to information is what separates the excellent libraries from the mediocre. All academic services, both teaching and bibliographic, are delivered through broadband facilities. Rankings of universities, in fact, now include the size of a university's bandwidth (see accompanying chart). Universities

with low bandwidth cannot compete in quality with universities with large bandwidth.

A third common ambition of universities worldwide is to improve equity, that is, to offer scholarships and fellowships to the able students from impoverished families or disadvantaged regions. Many first-class universities will have enough resources to offer scholarships to about one student in three, over and above what may be available through public resources.

### **Financial Resources**

But all three ambitions, taken together, are expensive, and there are few countries where all three can be financed out of public resources alone. With the increase in student numbers and rising expectations for quality and equity, public resources are insufficient. The scarcity of public resources is likely to be permanent, and this poses a global dilemma: How can higher education successfully finance its own objectives, including its traditional objectives for serving the public good?

This dilemma pertains to both public and private institutions. Public universities in the United States, for instance, now receive only 15 to 20 percent of their recurrent budgets from the state legislatures; the university itself is responsible for raising the remainder, hence making high-quality public and private universities similar in their management objectives and strategies. So far as I am aware, all universities have four categories of choices to which they can turn for funding:

- They can raise revenue from traditional sources (such as by raising fees, charging rent for facilities, and increasing overheads);
- They can diversify into new sources of revenue (such as by establishing copyrights on inventions or investing in equity markets);
- They can allocate current resources more efficiently (for instance, by shifting from line item to block funding, differentiating faculty salaries and so forth); or
- They can eliminate programs or services that are outdated (e.g., domestic science).

All the choices are controversial. High-quality universities are not only successful at raising resources, but are wise in the reallocation of the resources they raise to help preserve their public-good function. Different institutions differ, of course, in how successful they are in financing their own objectives. Some are slow because they may not yet recognize that to be of high quality, all universities now have to take finance and management into their own hands.

Some might see this trend as a "commercialization" of higher education. Others may see it as the globalization of an "American model" of higher education. I see this necessity for maximizing resources differently. I would characterize this not as commercialization but as the professionalization of higher education in its legitimate pursuit of excellence, and not as an American model but as the successful model in which all higher education must participate in order to address what is now a universal dilemma of public resource scarcity.

## Social Cohesion

There is one other global influence on higher education that deserves to be mentioned, and that is the way in which higher education contributes to (or hinders) a nation's social cohesion. Both private and public higher education have roles to play in helping to ensure that citizens live at peace with each other and with their neighbors, and that their graduates are technically able to perform in the labor market up to expectations.



Students from Louisiana State University were met at the airport in Frankfurt, Germany, by U.S. Consul General Peter W. Bodde (left) and Hesse state minister for science and arts Udo Corts (right) when they arrived in October 2005 to take up an offer to continue their studies, which had been interrupted by Hurricane Katrina. (BERND KAMMERER ©AP/WWP)

Whether the primary purpose is for teaching, research, or vocational preparation, all universities attempt to influence a community's social cohesion through two mechanisms. One mechanism is through their curriculum and professionalism in teaching history, culture, biology, physics, engineering, and ecology. High-quality universities are defined by their openness to the world's literature and evidence, provided freely to all students on as many topics as feasible. No great university restricts access to information.

The second way is the manner by which a university models good behavior and exhibits professional standards. This includes the degree to which a university rewards academic performance honestly and fairly, the degree to which its faculty and administration openly advertise and adhere to codes of conduct, and the degree to which open discussion is cherished and differing opinions respected. The more a university exhibits these characteristics the more likely will its students exhibit human capital through their knowledge and skills and the more they will contribute to social capital, the kind that generates willingness to sacrifice for a common good, as well as tolerance and understanding of other views and opinions.

Universities that exhibit a very high degree of human and social capital are of higher quality, and it is high-quality universities that will have the most positive impact on a nation's social cohesion. What this implies is that universities where corruption occurs, where grades and admission decisions and accreditation itself can be changed through bribes, will threaten a nation's social cohesion. Instead of modeling good behavior, a corrupt university would model the opposite, behavior that is dysfunctional to the nation's future.

Fighting higher education corruption is a global problem today, and the stakes are high. The Bologna process, through which members of the European Union are working to harmonize their higher education systems to allow for increased mobility of students and staff, and the new UNESCO accreditation guidelines hold out an



These Qatari students are working in their

opportunity for universities in different parts of the world to be compared in terms of program quality. The willingness of a high-quality university to be compared to others often seems to depend on whether a university can demonstrate that it is not corrupt.

typography class at the Virginia Commonwealth University School of Arts in Doha, Qatar.  
(©AP/WWP)

The burden of proof is on the university undergoing scrutiny. If it cannot prove its own honesty, its students will be at a permanent disadvantage in the labor market, and the public may well ask to what extent public investment has been well spent.

In sum, there is increasingly a successful "model" of higher education that applies in all regions of the world, and that is the model in which higher education institutions themselves are able to finance their own objectives. It is increasingly clear that higher education has a unique role to play in a nation's social cohesion, but it can play either a negative role by modeling unprofessional behavior, or a positive role by living up to international standards of conduct.

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*The opinions expressed in this article do not necessarily reflect the views or policies of the U.S. government.*

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