

THE FUTURES PROJECT

Policy for Higher Education in a Changing World

THE UNIVERSAL IMPACT OF
COMPETITION AND GLOBALIZATION IN
HIGHER EDUCATION

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INTRODUCTION

This report describes the activities conducted by *The Futures Project: Policy for Higher Education in a Changing World*, supported by the Ford Foundation, with the goal of amplifying domestic research on higher education policy to include an awareness of trends outside U.S. borders.

The *Futures Project* began examining higher education abroad with several goals, including finding policy examples, unimagined and untried in this country. We also sought an understanding of the degree to which forces of change being experienced in the United States are present elsewhere. As the project progressed, the “digital divide” and the potential impact of globalization on higher education in the developing world were identified as critical questions for future research and policy debate. In the years to come, the *Futures Project* will expand the focus of its research to include a study of policy recommendations and initiatives designed to improve access to quality higher education for citizens of the developing world as well as the developed world. The globalization of higher education is at a critical juncture—technology is making tertiary education accessible to a greater number of people than ever before. At the same time, there remains a stratification between technology “haves” and “have-nots” at the global level. Careful study is required in order to insure that educational opportunities develop equitably, and that the quality of educational programs meets appropriate standards.

WHAT WE HAVE LEARNED

THE UNIVERSAL IMPACT OF COMPETITION AND GLOBALIZATION IN HIGHER EDUCATION

As the *Futures Project* began researching trends here and abroad, we recognized—through a veil of obvious historical and national differences—important similarities in the forces for change in higher education. It was a startling discovery, given the broad diversity of higher education systems around the world, to learn that institutions everywhere are confronting many of the same challenges, placing them all in a similar state of transition. In this situation it becomes all the more relevant to study methods and policies employed by many nations.

One important outcome of the transitional forces being experienced by higher education everywhere is a global environment of increased competition. Worldwide, education is being treated increasingly as a commodity, and students are treated increasingly like customers. For example, News Corporation announced in May 2000 that it would form a joint venture company with 18 leading universities, Universitas 21, “to secure a substantial share of the global higher education market.” Universitas 21 already faces competition from the University of Phoenix, which chief executive Jorge Klor de Alva describes as a “global education company.” Reflected in his choice of words is the fact that higher education has become “market driven.” Leaders of academic institutions in countries such as Australia and New Zealand have argued that they are already in the grip of a market system. Numerous well-established university presidents speak of “wanting to capture the higher education market abroad,” usually referring to the markets of less-developed countries.

The new competition between institutions of higher education—for students, for scarce resources, for recognition—is central to today’s higher education landscape and links all other forces identified below. The *Futures Project* is well aware of the situation in this country and has drafted a report on the impact of competition in higher education in the United States. Abroad, where education systems have historically been the domain of centralized states, this topic seems to be less clearly defined. There is no doubt,

however, that a free-market mentality is impacting higher education in essentially all nations. It is valuable to identify its component parts in other national-historical contexts—especially as world systems become increasingly linked—and work toward developing policy that mitigates the disadvantages of a purely market-driven system and promotes the innovative and competitive benefits of a well-regulated market. Identifying thoughtful market-related policies or policy ideas, at home and abroad, is a central focus of the *Futures Project*.

Globalization, already well established in the new world economy, is fueling this competition and is emerging as an important force in higher education. Altbach estimates that worldwide more than one million students are studying in a foreign country, and other estimates have almost doubled that figure. Australia's foreign student population grew from 15,000 in 1984 to 75,000 in 1998. The Institute of International Education reports that last year 490,933 international students entered the U.S. system, comprising 3% of total enrollments. Meanwhile, Tajikistan has announced the founding of an English-language distance university. Japan has introduced an aptitude test to increase enrollments of foreign students. Rice University is in Bremen; Bard is in St. Petersburg; Australian R.M.I.T. is in Vietnam. Sylvan Learning Systems and the University of Phoenix, American for-profits, are headed abroad. Monash, Australia's largest university, has two off-shore campuses in Malaysia and South Africa as well as offering 108 distance programs to students from 80 countries. The British Open University has 43 branches outside the UK. New York University Online enrolls students from 35 countries. Interlibrary loan systems typically span the planet. Higher education has clearly moved far beyond individual international exchange programs to a point where a global sector exists—a sector that assimilates participants rather than exchanging them.

As a critical part of the *Futures Project's* work, we have begun an examination of the impact of globalization in and of itself. Under the influence of profound advances in telecommunications and information technology as well as the emergence of a global economy, are institutions of higher education progressively losing a clearly defined community? Across the world, institutions seem less affiliated with specific geographic and cultural regions and gradually more intertwined in a borderless, market-driven system of higher education. While the components of this “system” are not yet wholly devoid of place, a global system is evolving more rapidly than most people and institutions realize. As one might imagine, there are important advantages and disadvantages to this trend, as well as resistance to the idea by those opposed to globalization.

What are the implications of this progressive loss of place in higher education? The loss of place creates opportunities to ensure the best education for all who seek it, regardless of nationality. On the other hand, it raises difficult questions, such as given the high cost of tertiary education, who will pay? Given the recent global expansion of higher education, who will ensure quality? As higher education institutions become global, what is the community to which they are responsible? Who is responsible for an educated global citizenry? These questions must be addressed as it is unlikely that the trend toward globalization can be reversed.

FORCES DRIVING TRANSITION, BOTH AT HOME AND ABROAD

Over the course of the year, the *Futures Project* identified universal factors that impact the higher education community in countries around the world. The first and most important factor is the movement from manufacturing- and service-based economies to **knowledge-based economies**, which has touched every country. “The world economy is changing as knowledge supplants physical capital as the source of present (and future) wealth...As knowledge becomes more important, so does higher education,” notes the World Bank study *Peril and Promise*, which focuses on developing countries. For poorer countries, this is an opportunity, as a knowledge-based economy requires less time, less

infrastructure, and less capital to grow. On the other hand, the danger of being rapidly left behind is very real if the skills and knowledge to participate are not immediately adopted.

The second major pressure transforming higher education is greatly **increased enrollments** in most countries over the past four decades. While enrollments have leveled off in some countries, higher education infrastructures are still catching up everywhere with the increased load of students seeking access. This is as true in developing countries as it is in developed ones.

A third source of pressure comes from the **new providers** created in response to the growing number of students. These institutions often view students as a profitable market and are exerting a new form of competitive pressure on the older, by-and-large public, institutions. The rapid growth of what are called “for-profits” in this country has been paralleled by an explosive growth of private institutions all over the world. In many cases, these private schools are pulling both talent and resources away from existing institutions and are slow to be integrated into, or even acknowledged by, national education systems. Centralized government authorities, however, have been gradually stepping back and letting the private sector expand as they no longer have the resources nor the will to provide for new or expanded public institutions for the increased number of students. Private and for-profit institutions are flourishing and have a great deal of autonomy, which, while opening the door to new approaches to education, has given rise to both quality and equity concerns.

Another force for change is the worldwide **technological advances** that now hold the potential to profoundly alter the nature of higher education, and already have in some cases. The *Futures Project* is now compiling a database of institutions offering virtual courses, both in the United States and abroad. Over a thousand universities in the United States now provide virtual courses, rapidly moving this sector beyond the experimental phase. The *Futures Project* is in the process of estimating a similar tally for the rest of the globe, but at this early stage already have a list that includes 169 institutions. Web-based distance education has created new arms of existing universities and colleges as well as entirely new institutions. Virtual education is now a major force in the shift toward greater competition and toward the globalization of higher education.

Beyond this, new modes of learning based on new technologies are now being introduced in both virtual settings and traditional classrooms. As new modes of using technology emerge over the next decade on campus and in virtual settings, creating more exciting and effective learning, the competition among institutions is likely to increase as some institutions pull ahead in the race to provide their “customers” with tangible results in the form of learner outcomes.

AREAS OF RESEARCH

Through the process of identifying the trends that have impacted higher education systems worldwide, the *Futures Project* arrived at two foci for its international research: first, to compile comparative data that informs US policy; and second, to examine more closely the conditions that influence educational and economic opportunities in the developing world. This report identifies a sampling of policy examples that may be relevant and useful to U.S. as well as international policymakers. The act of examining international methods of quality control, market regulation, new uses of technology, and administrative restructuring has given the *Futures Project* a more sophisticated understanding of the implications of higher education policy, and added more ideas to its research agenda. Examining new models implemented in different cultural contexts has illuminated issues that are not traditionally considered central to higher education in the United States, but that perhaps could be or should be. In different cultural contexts, diverse factors that influence policymaking come to the fore—such as the movement of professionals across boundaries, the differing approaches of governments, or the different historical roles of public and private institutions.

As our work progressed, the *Futures Project* has become increasingly aware of the distinct needs of developing nations. This research has led to the conclusion that it is imperative that higher education policymakers in developed countries explore the role, or potential role, they could assume vis-à-vis poorer countries where higher education infrastructures are less mature or more precarious. It is vital to move strong and technologically advanced institutions beyond an interest in profiting from the foreign market. Project researchers have begun to participate in international discussions focused on how developing nations can build and fortify sound educational systems, and specifically the role technology can and should play in this process. The crucial question is whether developing countries can use new technologies in ways that allow a skillful expansion of higher education, within the boundaries of their resources, with an eye to entering the “new economy.”

POLICY MODELS FROM ABROAD

The *Futures Project* approached its international research with this initial question: having recognized that, worldwide, countries are struggling with similar higher education issues, are there policy models found abroad that can be useful to U.S. policymakers and educators? As the *Futures Project* compiled and examined policy initiatives that may prove beneficial to higher education in the long run, the project has benefited enormously from international research and from policy examples found abroad. Researchers have identified the following country-specific initiatives, for example, as worthy of further attention by policymakers.

Specific government efforts to regulate, but not stifle, free-market trends

Following a rapid growth of private institutions in Malaysia, for example, the government—seeing the advantages of promoting an expanded and diverse higher education system—provided an enabling policy to facilitate a sound private sector. This policy allowed the Malaysian government to control equity of access, accreditation procedures, and guide curriculum to retain a Malaysian cultural content while at the same time shunning regulations such as tuition price control that would harm the private sector.

In other examples, educational reforms in both New Zealand and South Korea have capitalized on market trends to expand their higher education system, giving the government a steering function as opposed to that of a sole, proprietary provider or hands-off critic. In the case of New Zealand, relaxing government regulations and opening the system up to new private providers has led to problems causing the government to consider a change in their new policies. In the face of severe financial difficulties on the part of several regional institutions, the government has seen that market forces have little recognition of important outreach services and other societal goods provided—at some expense—by the smaller or weaker institutions. An understanding of these problems and the corrective measures proposed can be instructive to those of us across the globe; while the situation in the United States may not be identical, questions regarding the direction the free market will take higher education are being asked.

New contracts with previously centralized authority

In these cases we see a creative manipulation of the public-private dichotomy. Governments striving to control public-sector costs and institutions seeking to raise revenues and have more autonomy have, in some instances, negotiated a semi-public status. Two examples include Chalmers University in Sweden and the French university system.

In 1991 a new Swedish conservative government offered any university “foundation” status. Chalmers University of Technology was the only one that accepted. Under the new contract, the university is essentially run under the same form as a private company. Chalmers received a large lump sum to create an endowment; it signed a 15-year contract with the government in which performance targets were stipulated and annual support from the state was assured, but its management became independent. This successful case of semi-privatization is especially interesting as the Swedish higher education sector has always been tightly centralized.

In the case of France, the system was tightly centralized until the passage of the Savary Laws in 1984, which granted French universities the possibility of financial, academic, and teaching autonomy. While general acceptance of the government proposals took nearly a decade to come about—and they are still resisted by a large number of institutions—about 90 institutions now negotiate four-year contracts with the Ministry of Higher Education. These contracts replace a traditional system of annual grants and are designed to guarantee university autonomy while empowering the State to exercise responsibility for quality standards within the system. The contract system represents structural changes in higher education administration as well as an important philosophical shift. While the progress of decentralizing the French system can be viewed as a model for change, the setbacks within that system provide important lessons as well. Those creating and implementing the changes, for example, must acknowledge the enormous obstacle posed by traditional bureaucratic and organizational norms.

Quality assurance models

In Brazil, the higher education landscape is evolving rapidly as the public system is autonomous and new private providers appear daily. This makes quality assurance a key issue. Over the past decade, educational reforms in Brazil have resulted in a comprehensive, in-depth evaluation system for higher education, of which four central components constitute valuable test cases for the international community. Those components are: the PROVAO national exiting exams for undergraduate students used to validate courses and accredit institutions; CAPES graduate program evaluations that use data gathering and peer review; accreditation of distance education programs; and a modern, integrated system of educational information. In addition, the PAIUB (the body established by the government in 1993 to evaluate public universities) remains dynamic and continues to improve upon existing evaluative tools with new ones, especially in the area of information dissemination.

The *Futures Project* has also looked at the independent quality assurance agency established in Hong Kong in 1990, the Hong Kong Council of Academic Accreditation (HKCAA). HKCAA’s responsibilities include: setting standards of worldwide qualifications, the development of accreditation theory and practice, and advising both the government and the public on educational issues. HKCAA also works in tandem with tertiary institutions in Hong Kong, overseeing the accreditation of degree programs, the development of internal quality assurance systems, and the development of institutional systems involving both accreditation and degree-program creation. Under the Non-Local Higher Education Ordinance, HKCAA is the “named adviser” to outside course providers. In addition, the Council coordinated the 1991 establishment of the International Network for Quality Assurance Agencies in Higher Education, which includes more than a hundred members from fifty different countries.

Regulating new private providers

In much of the world, the growth of private institutions has been rapid—even chaotic in those countries where only recently institutions were exclusively public. The strategies governments are using to attempt to control and regulate this expansion—in order to create a coherent, integrated higher education

system—can be useful to our understanding of how to manage the burgeoning growth of for-profits in the United States.

In Uruguay, for example, a 1995 decree gave the Ministry of Education and Culture the responsibility to authorize, recognize, and regulate private institutions and also accredit the degrees of all institutions. The ministry in turn created an advisory board whose members represent public and private institutions to implement its new responsibility. The effect of the decree was to formally end the governmental monopoly in higher education and facilitate the growth of private institutions. Since the decree, eight private universities have been established, 19% of students are now enrolled in private institutions, and 16% of faculty work in private institutions. The decree also compelled the public university to evaluate itself and make changes in order to compete with the new private institutions. In response, the private institutions are also engaging in internal evaluations. The *Futures Project* is interested in Uruguay's policy of establishing accrediting bodies whose members are from public and private higher education institutions. This may compel public institutions to compete with their private counterparts, but more importantly, to begin the process of establishing an integrated higher education system.

Researchers have also examined government legislation in Mexico and Brazil as these countries struggle to regulate private institutions and bring them into an integrated system.

Virtual and computer-based distance learning models from diverse countries

Given the potential of computer-based technologies to advance higher education, especially in underprivileged areas, the *Futures Project* has sought out two model types: virtual or distance programs that promote improved access as opposed to creating or deepening a digital divide, and virtual or distance programs that improve effectiveness of teaching and learning.

In the first case there are many models worth following. Four of these might serve as examples: Australia's R.M.I.T. International University Vietnam, which will be the first foreign-owned branch in Vietnam and which will rely heavily on online delivery of courses to students on and off-campus; University of the Highlands and Islands Project, a project of 14 rural Scottish universities which uses extensive telecommunications infrastructure to increase access to post-secondary courses, reduce costs, and share resources; Dr. B. R. Ambedkar Open University (India) offers only distance-education courses with less-stringent entrance requirements than traditional institutions, allowing Muslim women, in particular, a chance to gain a degree; the African Virtual University project piloted by the World Bank, which has 24 sites across the continent for satellite-transmitted courses.

International examples of the second case-type—technology improving effectiveness of teaching—are more rare, often harder to locate, and still in an early-pilot phase. The greatest potential of the new technologies will be found in the capability offered to improve pedagogy. The *Project* is now looking abroad for examples of innovative teaching strategies employing new technologies.

Other types of policy models that the *Futures Project* has examined include:

- Specific institutional strategies to “internationalize,” such as those found, for example in Belarus, Japan, New Zealand, and the United States. Some of the reasons stated for seeking more international institutions have included: 1) to promote diversity, 2) to promote language acquisition, 3) to gain income, and 4) to establish a more global-real world curriculum.
- In contrast to “internationalization efforts,” programs designed to specifically preserve or uplift local culture and language in Malaysia, Bhutan, and Egypt.

- Models of collaboration. Here researchers looked at both regional agreements, such as Mercosur and the European Union, as well as collaborative initiatives between individual institutions, such as Universitas 21. A better understanding of successful collaborative arrangements—both in terms of student and institutional well being—could help domestic higher education policy makers create programs that improve communication and relationships with our neighbors.

DISTINCTIVE CHARACTERISTICS OF DEVELOPING NATIONS

As the *Futures Project's* research progressed, a second focus on the specific challenges and opportunities facing the developing world emerged. Developing countries are home to 80 percent of the world population, but have only 50 percent of its tertiary students, according to the World Bank. To function well in today's world, their higher education infrastructures need to be fortified and access augmented. *Futures Project* researchers have identified the following issues as worthy of attention by both national and international policymakers working with developing countries.

The potential impact of distance education

Distance education has a long-standing history of opening educational doors in developing countries. Research and resources need to be directed toward supporting these programs and improving upon them. An Islamic leader and the president of Tajikistan, for example, have just pooled resources to found an English-language university serving the isolated mountain peoples of Central Asia through distance education. The university will serve 1,500 regular students and over 5,000 continuing education students. Policymakers need to direct themselves toward promoting the health and quality of such programs. While paper-based and satellite-based distance programs are gradually being supplanted by Internet programs, these original programs can also benefit from more advanced technologies; policy initiatives that promote the broader use and dissemination of such technologies—which includes equipment grants as well as the essential teacher and professional training—need to be developed.

The growth of the digital divide

The digital divide, and the North-South scientific gap, are large and growing. Some striking facts brought to light by the World Bank indicate that developed countries have 10 times as many scientists and technicians per capita as developing countries. In addition, developed countries produce 84 percent of the scientific articles and 94 percent of new patents. The College Board estimates that, while 50 percent of the people in the United States and Canada are connected to the Internet, no more than 2 percent are on-line in Asia, Latin America, the Middle East, and Africa. It is unlikely that the free market alone will move connectivity forward as fast and as far as it needs to go in these areas, yet it is on the basis of this technological infrastructure that the new economies are being built.

Brain drain

Brain drain is another very real obstacle to improved education systems in the Third World. An estimated one-third of foreign students studying in the U.S. do not return to their home country. The subsequent shortfall in university graduates is detrimental to high-quality national higher education systems and further adds to the digital divide. Some corrective government policies in recent years

reflect an awareness of this problem and could serve as models in other places of the world experiencing brain drain. In India, for example, new information technologies and distance learning have been used to retain talent at home. The once near-universal emigration of computer science graduates has been reduced to 70 percent. In another striking initiative, the Malaysian government has removed tax relief for parents who send their children abroad to study. However, these attempts to curb brain drain for poorer countries are inhibited somewhat by U.S. immigration policies that favor educated entrants.

In some cases, the expansion of educational opportunity has led to further brain drain. In South Korea, the rapid ballooning of the higher education system has had serious consequences. Not only are there far more university graduates than the local market can accommodate, there is a shortage of quality professional and graduate programs within the university system, a deficiency that results in a drain of Korea's top students to study-abroad programs. Education reforms are now directed at resolving these problems.

Educational quality

Closely linked to and resulting from the problems posed by the technology gap and brain drain is the problem of educational quality. Mamphela Ramphele, a visionary on higher education in the Third World and currently a managing director of the World Bank, attributes poor quality in higher education to underfunding, lack of vision, poor management, and low morale. She advocates for both public and private involvement in bringing about a “renaissance” in higher education. She also advocates keeping the debate over the above issues alive so they will not be forgotten as other crises move into the foreground.

WHAT WE PLAN TO DO

The *Futures Project* plans to continue its present course of research on forces that influence the international higher education community. In the years to come, this research will:

- Produce further examples of effective policies within the international community that can help to shape activities in the U.S.
- Develop a network of engaged scholars and policymakers who have a thorough understanding of new factors in higher education.
- Generate further discussion of the “digital divide,” and the implications for citizens of developing nations.

The *Futures Project* will continue to seek out examples of innovative policies from around the world. This research would serve the *Futures Project's* domestic policymaking efforts by infusing it with innovative ideas. It also appropriately broadens the context within which policy ideas are formulated. In addition, the research would produce an analysis of policy examples that could be useful to others. Where appropriate, the *Futures Project* will continue to work with leaders from other countries to outline the changes happening in higher education worldwide and the potential implications. In particular, researchers want to examine new higher education policy models resulting from political programs of regional integration, such as Mercosur and the European Union, and evaluate their evolving outcomes.

The *Futures Project* also recognizes a need and a responsibility to promote and participate in an international debate on the future of higher education in a new global, competitive world. It is only by sharing research results and discussing these issues together—with others from diverse countries as well as from diverse roles in higher education—that researchers can identify problem areas and develop

policies that address those problems. All publications and findings will continue to be made available via the web site and regular mailings to the growing distribution list of key constituents.

It is also the *Futures Project's* goal to stimulate an informed debate about the danger faced by developing countries of being left behind in the "new economy." To this end, the *Futures Project* will conduct research probing the extent and implications of the global digital divide, along with the role that higher education and its policymakers could play in mitigating that divide and improving education in poorer countries. It is especially important to encourage this debate with influential world leaders and policymakers.

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