In the year 1416, Henry, the son of King John I of Portugal, established a base at Sangres in the southwestern part of that Atlantic coast country to foster exploration of Africa’s western coast. In addition to constructing a naval arsenal Prince Henry started an innovative school to study and teach navigation and geography. The school enabled Portuguese sailors to explore West Africa, and, soon after, reach India, Goa, and Brazil. Within decades little, poor Portugal became a great and wealthy colonial empire.

Like Prince Henry, many national leaders today have been improving schools and building new universities to increase the quality of their workforce, or human capital, in order to improve economic growth, military security, public health, cultural vitality, and political sagacity (Bowen, 1977; Schultz, 1981). Intellect building is increasingly seen as essential to nation building. Higher education has become, and is likely to remain, a central activity of developed and many developing countries. It is now the preferred approach among national leaders to prepare a country’s more able young people for tomorrow’s Darwinian social environment. From Mexico, Brazil, and Poland to Malaysia, South Korea, and China the number of universities and specialized institutes has multiplied and enrollments have swelled (Altbach, 2002).

Naturally, questions have arisen about how these universities should be managed, and by whom. How should they be governed? Which students should be admitted? Who should be the teachers, and toward what ends should the students be taught? And how can they be financed, or who should pay for all this expanding advanced education?

The possible answers to these and other salient questions are complicated by the fact that the expansion of higher learning is proceeding at the same time that major social upheavals are erupting in most areas of the world. The questions that are largely internal to universities are assaulted by fundamental external changes in the societies in which the universities carry out their activities. This double load of pressures has contributed to the increasing demise of traditional patterns in the way universities are run (Keller, 2004a). The unhurried decision making, the inward-looking and preoccupied concerns, and the frail and unobtrusive administration by university executives have been forced to yield to stronger central management, swifter and deeper changes, and the creation...
of new, more thoughtful strategies so that colleges and universities can respond more adequately to threats and opportunities.

The Forces of Change

Most universities are shaped appreciably by external factors and large shifts in their environment, though many professors believe they, not the external forces, are the principal architects of their academic lives. These external developments have become quite powerful and appear to be multiplying. A growing challenge for university faculty and administrators is the extent to which colleges and universities should yield or adapt to these new conditions.

An example is seen in the form of demographic changes. There have been massive waves of immigration from the poorer and war-torn nations to the richer nations. The United States, for instance, has absorbed an estimated 33 to 36 million immigrants since 1965, when the immigration law was altered. One in nine persons in America today was born in another country. Some scholars have begun to worry that the entire range of religious allegiances, languages, family patterns, and attitudes toward education in the country is being transformed (Huntington, 2004). The United States is not alone. In Australia, foreign-born people are 23% of the population; in Switzerland, 19%; in Canada, 17%; in France and Germany, 10%. University leaders have had to ask themselves a host of questions about their institution’s residential arrangements, the breadth of the curriculum, their assistance for the non-native students, and the recruitment of faculty from other cultures and national origins.

Another radical development has been the rapid advance of digital technology, connecting the world through the Internet. Computers have become ubiquitous in much of the developed world, and are increasingly available in developing nations. The information and data obtainable from software programs now competes with that in venerable university libraries. How should universities incorporate the new technology? To what extent should they modify pedagogy and research, or increase collaboration with other academics, or deliver more courses online to new, enlarged audiences? Should nations follow India’s lead in the field of software engineering? Or Great Britain’s lead in distance education?

There have also been several shifts in the political atmosphere that affect higher education. These shifts differ greatly from country to country, but a few trends are discernible. One is the changing role of government in the patronage, financing, and control of their country’s universities. As V. Lynn Meek observes, “Higher education is characterized by a common trend whereby governments increasingly refrain from detailed steering of their respective higher education systems in favor of more global policies that determine the boundary conditions under which institutions may operate” (Amaral, Meek, & Larsen, 2003, p. 1). Governments now prefer to concentrate on such matters as results, efficiency of operations, and service to national needs rather than giving more specific directions. This trend allows higher education institutions more freedom to design their own practices, but it compels them to become more strategic, better managed, financially entrepreneurial, and educationally productive and innovative.