

## GLOBALIZATION AND THE UNIVERSITY: REALITIES IN AN UNEQUAL WORLD

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In the past two decades, globalization has come to be seen as a central force for both society and higher education.<sup>1</sup> Some have argued that globalization, broadly defined as largely inevitable global economic and technological factors affecting every nation, will liberate higher education and foster needed change. Technological innovations such as the Internet, the forces of the market, and others will permit everyone to compete on the basis of equality. Knowledge interdependence, it is argued, will help everyone. Others claim that globalization strengthens worldwide inequality and fosters the McDonaldization of the university. All the contemporary pressures on higher education, from massification to the growth of the private sector, are characterized as resulting from globalization. There is a grain of truth in each of these hypotheses—and a good deal of misinterpretation as well. This chapter will seek to “unpack” the realities of globalization and the related concept of internationalization in higher education and to highlight some of the impact on the university. Academe around the world is affected differently by global trends. The countries of the European Union, for example, are adjusting to new common degree structures and other kinds of harmonization that are part of the Bologna process and related initiatives. Countries that use English benefit from the increasingly widespread use of that language for science and scholarship. Of special interest here is how globalization is affecting higher education in developing countries, which will experience the bulk of higher education expansion in the next two decades (Task Force on Higher Education and Society, 2000).

From the beginning, universities have been global institutions—in that they functioned in a common language, Latin, and served an international clientele of students. Professors, too, came from many countries, and the knowledge imparted reflected scholarly learning in the Western world at the time. Since universities have always figured in the global environment, they have been affected by circumstances beyond the campus and across national borders. This reality is all too often overlooked in analyses of 21st century globalization. A long-term perspective when considering the university reveals the deep historical roots of the ethos and governance of universities. As Clark Kerr has noted, of the institutions that had been established in the Western world by 1520, 85

still exist—the Roman Catholic Church, the British Parliament, several Swiss cantons, and some 70 universities. The universities may have experienced the least change of these institutions (Kerr, 2001, p. 115).

Today's globalization, at least for higher education, does not lack precedents. From the beginning, universities have incorporated tensions between national conditions and international pressures. While English now dominates as the language of research and scholarship, in the 19th century German held sway, as did Latin in an earlier era. Students have always traveled abroad to study, and scholars have always worked outside their home countries. Globalization in the 21st century is truly worldwide in reach—few places can elude contemporary trends, and innovations and practices seem to spread ever faster due to modern technology. But again, similar trends have occurred in other periods as well.

It is also the case that all of the universities in the world today, with the exception of the Al-Azhar in Cairo, stem from the same historical roots—the medieval European university and, especially, the faculty-dominated University of Paris. This means that the essential organizational pattern of the contemporary university worldwide stems from a common tradition—this is an important element of globalization. Much of the non-Western world had European university models imposed on them by colonial masters—academic systems in India, Indonesia, Ghana, and the rest of the developing world stem from common Western roots. Even those countries not colonized by Western powers—such as Japan, Thailand, Ethiopia, and a few others—adopted the Western academic model (Altbach & Viswanathan, 1989). This is the case even where, as in China, well-established indigenous academic traditions already existed (Hayhoe, 1999).

The American university itself, so influential worldwide, constitutes an amalgam of international influences. The original colonial model, imported from England, was combined with the concept of the German research university idea of the 19th century and the American ideal of service to society to produce the modern American university. Foreign models were adapted to domestic realities in creative ways. As the European Union moves toward the harmonization of national higher education systems in the “common European space,” foreign influences again emerge—degree structures, the course-credit system, and other elements in modified form—to produce evolving academic patterns. Just as Japan adapted German academic models and some American traditions as it built its modern university system after 1868, the European Union is looking to “best practices” worldwide in 2004.

Given the centrality of the knowledge economy to 21st century development, higher education has assumed a higher profile both within countries and internationally because of its roles in educating people for the new economy and in creating new knowledge (Altbach, 1998a). As evidence, the world trade organization (WTO) is now focusing on higher education. Currently, a debate is under way concerning the General Agreement on Trade in Services (GATS). Multinational corporations and some government agencies in the rich countries are seeking to integrate higher education into the legal structures of world trade through the WTO. These developments indicate how important universities and knowledge have become in the contemporary world (Altbach, 2002; Knight, 2002; Larsen, Martin, & Morris, 2002).