Chapter 3

Regional Cooperation in Higher Education in Asia and the Pacific

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Introduction

A significant trend in the Asia-Pacific region is the rapid expansion of many higher education systems brought about by ever-increasing social demand due to population growth, democratization of secondary education, and the growing affluence of many countries in the region. As higher education systems expand, there is an urgent need to seek diverse sources of funding and resources. With the advancement of information and communication technologies and increased mobility of students and staff, higher education institutions from different countries are forming and developing strategic cooperation and collaboration to mobilize resources, to facilitate academic exchanges and to offer joint programs. The purpose of this chapter is to examine the different types of university exchanges and to analyze some of the regional cooperation initiatives that are initiated by intergovernmental as well as nongovernmental organizations (NGOs).

Types of University Exchanges

The traditional functions of universities are teaching, research, and service. The various types of university exchanges can also be broadly categorized...
as academic exchange, research collaboration, and university–community engagement. Academic exchanges can take the forms of movement of people such as students, professors, scholars, or experts; program mobility; and provider or institutional mobility. United Nations Educational, Scientific, and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) estimates that, in 2007, there were more than 2.8 million internationally mobile students, an increase of about 53 percent over the estimated figure of 1.8 million in 2000 (UNESCO-UIS 2009). At the program level, universities collaborate to offer twinning programs, credit transfer programs, and joint degree programs. There are also universities that set up branch campuses in other countries such as Monash University in Malaysia, RMIT University in Vietnam, and Nottingham University in Malaysia and China. Furthermore, academics exchange ideas through journals, seminars, conferences, and social networking on the Internet.

With the ease of communication and travel, academics collaborate in joint research projects, offer joint doctoral degrees, and share resources and facilities. For example, Universitas 21, a global network of 23 research universities from 15 countries, was established in 1997. It has several collaborative groups in which colleagues from similar disciplines meet regularly virtually or physically to discuss topics of mutual interest and collaborate on issues of importance within their field. Some representative collaborative groups include the Career Group, Global Issues Group, Research Leaders Group, Early Career Researcher Workshop, and others (Universitas 21 2011). Malaysia provides an example of another kind of university partnership, wherein a consortium of 11 public universities was established in 1999 to set up a private university named the Open University Malaysia. Although established as a private university, Open University Malaysia leverages on the quality, prestige, and capabilities of its strategic partners to provide distance education to the point where from an initial population of 753 learners in August 2000, it now is able to advertise a cumulative intake over the intervening period of over 100,000 (Open University Malaysia 2011).

Universities are often called upon to be responsive to the needs of their communities and contribute to the development of their surrounding environments. The social responsibility of higher education was stated explicitly in the Final Communique from the 2009 UNESCO World Conference of Higher Education (UNESCO 2009), in which it was held that universities need to be engaged with their communities to promote participatory and sustainable development. Community engagement and participation can be seen as mechanisms through which higher education institutions forge partnerships and linkages with communities, governments, the private sector, business, and NGOs. On September 23, 2010, eight international