

Why Should We Care About Global Higher Education?



The worldwide competition for human talent, the race to produce innovative research, the push to extend university campuses to multiple countries, and the rush to produce knowledgeable and creative graduates who can strengthen increasingly knowledge-based economies—all of these trends are hugely beneficial to the entire world.

AT FIRST GLANCE, the Indian Institute of Technology (IIT) in Madras seems to be an incongruous place to witness the increasingly international reach of academic life. Nestled in a national park filled with deer and magnificent banyan trees, IIT–Madras’s lush campus in southeast India looks somewhat remote and sleepy. But appearances can be deceiving. The institute’s director, M. S. Ananth, has just returned from Davos, where he took part in an international higher education working group headed by Yale University president Richard Levin. The university guesthouse, where monkeys sometimes invade visitors’ rooms if windows are left open, is hosting a range of foreign academics, including David Mumford, a prominent Brown University mathematician. Outside the campus recruiting office are sign-up sheets for students to schedule interviews with Google, McKinsey, and the like. And along the same hallways is a poster advertising scholarships to the King Abdullah University of Science and Technology, or KAUST, a brand-new graduate school in Saudi Arabia that is hurrying to become a world-class center of learning.

That KAUST seeks to recruit IIT graduates is no surprise—these students have become a prized commodity in the new global talent market. But the porous boundaries between the IITs and their academic counterparts around the world, along with the routine recruiting of their students by universities and employers from Hong Kong to Oxford, are by no means unique. In the worlds of business and culture, the globalization trend is so well known as to be cliché. But the globalization of universities is equally important and has perhaps even more far-reaching consequences. For a burgeoning number of universities, national boundaries have become largely irrelevant. The same Saudi university trawling for top Indian students, for example, has also sought to catapult itself into the top ranks of world scholar-

ship by forging alliances, backed by lavish funding, with the likes of Imperial College, London, and the University of California, Berkeley. And in another demonstration of international scholarly recruiting, KAUST’s first president was poached from the National University of Singapore. For the new president, this move capped a globe-trotting career that has taken him from Asia to Canada to the United States and then back to Singapore before his new Middle East posting.

Few parts of the world have been untouched by the new university globalization. Singapore, for instance, has forged a role as a regional and even global hub for higher education, attracting institutions from around the world with considerable success. By way of illustration, a visitor to the renowned global business school

INSEAD arrives at the well-groomed, corporate-style campus an hour outside Paris to find that a scheduled interview with the head of the MBA program will take place by video conference. The dean, Jake Cohen, is in a conference room at INSEAD's Singapore campus, where he spends a significant portion of his time. Students can begin their studies at either site—"we don't make distinctions between the two," Cohen says—and demand for the chance to earn a degree by spending time on both campuses is high.

INSEAD's students are clearly prepared to embrace a life of transcontinental travel, as are the millions of others who move from nation to nation in search of educational opportunities. And they are by no means the first wandering scholars. Academic mobility has a longstanding tradition, dating back some nine hundred years to a time when students from around Europe flocked to the first universities in Bologna, Paris, and Oxford. The twentieth-century version of this phenomenon emerged with full force in the United States, which, after World War II, became an unsurpassed magnet for students and professors from around the world. Borrowing from the model pioneered in nineteenth-century Germany, American institutions adapted and perfected the combination of teaching and scholarship under one roof, becoming the universally acknowledged masters of the modern research university. For the past half century, American universities have been the envy of the world—and may well remain so for decades to come.

But the same forces of globalization that have shaken up almost every sector of the economy have greatly intensified competition and mobility in higher education. In the new educational marketplace, an unprecedented number of students are traveling to universities outside their home countries. The U.S. market share is slowly but surely being eroded by stepped-up competition from overseas universities, not only in the West, notably Australia and Great Britain, but also in the Middle East, Southeast Asia, Japan, and China. At the same time, popular Western universities are acting more like businesses—moving closer to their custom-

ers by establishing satellite campuses in Asia and the Middle East, and teaming up with overseas universities to forge strategic alliances that offer scholarly and marketing advantages to both sides.

Amid this rush of academic activity around the world, an even more consequential shift is taking place: increasing numbers of countries have an urgent wish not simply to send students to the United States, or to host branch campuses on their own soil, but to build world-class universities of their own. That desire explains why nations from China, South Korea, and Saudi Arabia to Germany and France are engaged in expensive and ambitious projects to create U.S.-style research institutions designed to be competitive at the highest levels. The progress of these new and improved universities is being measured, inevitably, by a burgeoning set of national and global college scorecards modeled in whole or part on the success of the controversial *U.S. News & World Report* rankings.

Taken together, these developments reflect the rise of a new kind of free trade: free trade in minds. In the worldwide marketplace, more and more people will have the chance to advance based on what they know rather than who they are.

For all its potential, however, the global expansion of higher education has been accompanied by myriad missteps and problems. To name just a few, there are the numerous examples of satellite campuses that have fallen short of expectations or been closed; quality problems rooted in the difficulty of persuading home-campus faculty to venture abroad; and the controversies over free speech, women's rights, gay rights, and recognition of Israel that have erupted when institutions such as Berkeley and New York University have created new campuses or forged academic partnerships in the Persian Gulf.

But these difficulties should be viewed as the inevitable growing pains of a movement that is sure to gain ground. A bigger obstacle

SIT Graduate Institute

Transformative intercultural graduate education for

GLOBAL SOCIAL CHANGE

including

Master of Global Management
in the Sultanate of Oman

SIT Study Abroad

Undergraduate field-based semester and summer programs
focused on

CRITICAL GLOBAL ISSUES

programs of **World Learning**

Learn more at www.sit.edu





is the considerable hand-wringing brought on by the increased educational competition now facing individuals, universities, and entire nations. Some governments and universities around the world have responded to the growth of cross-border higher education with outright academic protectionism. Perhaps the two biggest culprits are China and India, which are notorious for the bureaucratic barriers they erect to foreign universities wanting to open new campuses or create new partnerships (though India has recently shown promising signs of greater openness). Other nations focus not on keeping foreign institutions out but on excluding foreign students, and trying to keep domestic students at home. In Malay-

Taken together, these developments reflect the rise of a new kind of free trade: free trade in minds. In the worldwide marketplace, more and more people will have the chance to advance based on what they know rather than who they are.

sia, the Ministry of Higher Education has gone so far as to place a 5 percent cap on the number of foreign undergraduates who can attend the country's public universities. In a contrasting twist on impeding student mobility, the president of one Indian Institute of Technology responded to the huge overseas demand for his high-flying students by grounding them—he banned undergraduates from taking foreign internships.

Elsewhere, notably in the United States,

scholarly mobility has been periodically slowed or halted by visa policies that are typically not protectionist in any explicit sense but nonetheless have unfortunate effects. Stepped-up security reviews in the years since the September 11 terrorist attacks, while justifiable in some cases, have at times had the de facto effect of keeping out students and professors who would be an asset to U.S. universities and to the nation. At the same time, the stringent limits that have been placed on visas for highly skilled workers—in the name of protecting American jobs—have created an obstacle to attracting some talented international scholars, who often attend U.S. universities in the hope of staying on to work and in some cases to become permanent residents or citizens.

More broadly, an even larger barrier to the flourishing of global higher education is psychological: it can be seen in the widespread notion that a nation whose education system is on the rise poses a danger to its economic competitors. This phenomenon is particularly noticeable in the case of the West's fear about the rise of China and other Asian nations. It has become commonplace to fret, or even panic, about the alleged threat, both educational and economic, posed by the enormous number of science and engineering PhDs produced by those nations. This mind-set isn't necessarily linked to any explicit attempts to restrict academic mobility or, for that matter, to inhibit the creation of world-class universities around the globe. It might be considered simply a spur to greater efforts in the West on the grounds that developing countries are catching up in the global brain race. Its net effect, however, is to suggest that there is something worrisome about other nations' efforts to upgrade their teaching and research capacities, that the West may lose out when others move ahead.

But the globalization of higher education should be embraced, not feared. The world-

ADVERTISER'S Index

INTERNATIONAL EDUCATOR | SEPT.+OCT. 2010

AHA International	6	Marsh	29
AETNA Student Health	17	Menlo College	20
AIEA Association of International Education Administrators	58	Northern Virginia Community College	31
Alliance for Global Education. . .	49	Nuffic	19
Bader International Study Center, Queen's University (Canada) in the UK	63	On Call International	7
Bellevue College—International Student Programs.	59	Palace Travel, Inc.	63
Center for Study Abroad (CSA)	51	Pearson Test of English Academic.	14
CEPA Europe	14	Renaissance Insurance Agency	20
CIEE	43	RMIT University	56
College Year in Athens.	16	Spring International Language Center, University of Arkansas. . .	57
Concordia University, Irvine	47	Student Success	5
Dinse, Knapp, and McAndrew . . .	57	Study in Scotland	15
Education Abroad Network	49	University of Cambridge, ESOL exams	11
ETS—TOEFL	3	University of Essex	59
ETS—GRE	9	University Studies Abroad Consortium.	16
ELS inside front cover		University of Technology, Sydney. inside back cover	
Harbour Group.	21	Wayne State University— English Language Institute	45
Intercultural Communication Institute	48	World Learning	52, 61
Kaplan back cover			
Maksin Group	37		

wide competition for human talent, the race to produce innovative research, the push to extend university campuses to multiple countries, and the rush to produce knowledgeable and creative graduates who can strengthen increasingly knowledge-based economies—all of these trends are hugely beneficial to the entire world. *Increasing knowledge is not a zero-sum game.* Intellectual gains by one country often benefit others. More PhD production in China, for instance, doesn't take away from America's store of learning. In fact, Chinese research may well provide the building blocks for innovation by U.S. entrepreneurs—or those from other nations.

As the world's academic landscape is reshaped, traditional patterns of mobility, knowledge transmission, and economic growth are already being upended. A case in point: Several decades ago, some observers expressed much concern about the brain drain experienced by developing countries whose most promising citizens often departed to seek better educational opportunities and better lives in the West. More recently, however, this term has been replaced by "brain circulation" or "brain gain," as many of those who had left nations such as India or China begin to return home to seize opportunities in these countries' newly booming economies (including, especially in China, their revitalized universities). What the global university movement promises to do—as nations make sizable investments in education, compete to nurture human capital, and send students and researchers back and forth to universities around the world—is to go one step further: from brain drain to brain circulation.

This isn't to say that global competition in university education won't create some winners and losers. But again, as with other kinds of free trade, the net benefits will be significant. Three of the most important higher education trends of the last half century—mass access, growing reliance on the merit principle, and significantly greater use of technology—will all be accelerated by globalization. And there is no reason to believe that gains for one academic player will inevitably mean losses for all the others. Indeed, academic free trade may be more

important than any other kind. All this has one clear policy consequence: nations around the world should move quickly to lower barriers to truly global higher education. The trend will no doubt proceed in fits and starts, and it would be a mistake to be Panglossian about its positive effects. Nevertheless, while it is easy to become inured to the rhetoric of globalization, which seems to be on the lips of every ambitious college president, the trend is real and important.

Ultimately, it holds the keys to sustaining the knowledge economy and advancing global prosperity. **IE**


BEN WILDAVSKY is a senior fellow in research and policy at the Kauffman Foundation. This article is excerpted from his new book *The Great Brain Race: How Global Universities Are Reshaping the World*.

Copyright © 2010 Princeton University Press. Printed by permission.



Is this the best undergraduate study abroad option in the world?

Explore at www.queensu.ca/isc



PALACE TRAVEL
www.palacetravel.com The Ultimate Africa Tour & Safari Specialists

The Leader In Educational Travel To Africa

Faculty-led educational tours to Africa including Ghana, Mali, Senegal and South Africa. Programs include specially arranged Community Engagements.

www.palacetravel.com
Tel: 215.471.8555 • info@palacetravel.com