



University marketing has gone global and it's more than just messages about the value of higher education to recruit students. The branch campus phenomenon has taken academia by storm and today, international students don't always have to go abroad to get a Western-style degree—many can now get the same education without leaving home.

BY ALAN DESSOFF

BRANCH



ING OUT

FROM SENEGAL TO SINGAPORE, QATAR TO FRANCE, and at points between and beyond, U.S. universities are establishing campuses in other countries, contributing to the global educational marketplace and bringing some of its assets back to their home campuses in the United States.

In what some international educators see as a phenomenon and others view as a trend that will continue and perhaps pick up speed, U.S.-based postsecondary institutions are taking advantage of opportunities they see abroad to attract more foreign students while enhancing their own—and the United States’—international presence and image, principally in the Middle East and Asia.

“We regard it as a logical and reasonable extension of our institutional mission and also as a contribution to our own country’s presentation of itself in a positive light outside our borders. Higher education is a face of the United States that most people think of as being a positive contributor to society,” says David Decker, vice president for global academic programs at the New York Institute of Technology (NYIT), which operates branch campuses in three Middle Eastern countries—Bahrain, Jordan, and the United Arab Emirates.

Grant McBurnie, executive officer international at Monash University in Australia, calls the foreign branch campus movement “transnational education” and says it is “at the leading edge of the most fundamental changes taking place in higher education today.” Monash is among universities in other countries that also have established branch campuses offshore (see sidebar).

International education administrators at some institutions with overseas campuses say that in addition to drawing in more foreign students, advantages include providing their home-based faculty with international teaching experience and possibly new research opportunities. They say home campuses and their home states can benefit as well when intellectual capital that faculty have developed abroad pays off in new business ventures when they bring it back to the United States.

“Some countries are very wealthy and are doing research that we can’t do,” says Stephen Dunnett, professor and vice provost for international education at the University of Buffalo, The State University of New York. He cites “highly advanced” stem cell research underway in Singapore. “So American universities established in those countries that would like to do some of those things can collaborate with foreign institutions that might be able to provide funding as well.”

But most educators agree that in an educational marketplace that is becoming increasingly international and competitive, at-

tracting and enrolling foreign students in U.S. degree programs is a primary motivation.

“We all need high-quality graduate students in math and the sciences and sadly, our country does not produce enough of them from the high schools,” says Dunnett.

Buffalo’s Singapore campus is “a feeder back to the home base for good quality graduate students,” he says.

Similarly, some French and German students who earn master’s degrees at Georgia Tech’s branch campus in Metz, France—“some of the best students in Europe,” according to Howard Rollins, director of Georgia Tech’s office of international education—come to the home campus in Atlanta to pursue doctorates.

Dunnett adds that “the perception of our country has changed overseas. We’re not viewed as we used to be as a bastion of human rights and a progressive society. So if U.S. institutions want international students, they have to fight for them. Branch campuses are part of an institution’s international enrollment strategy.”

Suffolk University’s branch campuses in Senegal and Madrid “are recruiting for me internationally, because those students become part of our international population in Boston when they transfer here,” says Marguerite Dennis, Suffolk’s vice president for enrollment and international programs.

‘INTERNATIONAL FOOTPRINTS’

Other Nations Also Start Campuses Beyond Borders

U.S. UNIVERSITIES ARE NOT THE ONLY ONES opening campuses in other countries.

Driven by reduced government funding and a growing demand for English-language education throughout the Asia-Pacific region, Australian universities are in the forefront of institutions that are establishing campuses outside their own borders.

One of them, Monash University, accepted an invitation from the Malaysian Ministry of Education and established its first campus outside Australia in Kuala Lumpur in 1998,

in partnership with Sunway College. The campus now has more than 2,600 students and plays a leading role in Monash’s commitment to global education.

Three years later, Monash opened its second foreign campus in South Africa, which attracts students from more than 25 countries.

Grant McBurnie, executive officer international at Monash, cites three key motivations for Australian universities to establish offshore campuses: academic, financial, and reputational. Academic benefits,

as McBurnie defines them, include “enhanced opportunities for student and staff mobility, international collegial interaction, the development of new or expanded curriculum material to meet local needs, and research opportunities.”

Financial benefits come through student tuitions as well as partnerships with local universities and corporations that can help branch campuses survive through economic crises. But sometimes the road can be rocky. Monash opened its second offshore campus in 2001 in South



U.S. universities also find that it doesn't cost much to open branch campuses on foreign shores. Many of their initiatives are invited, encouraged, and even financially supported by governments and other organizations in the host countries.

September 11 and Money

Although some educators discount their importance, they acknowledge that political and economic factors also play into the decisions of U.S. institutions to open campuses abroad. One factor is tightened security in the United States following the September 11, 2001 terrorist attacks that has made it difficult for many foreign students to obtain visas to come to this country. So U.S. universities are going to them.

"We originally envisioned that most of our students in Singapore would be from Singapore but after September 11, that campus started to attract undergraduates from China, in particular, who perceived that they would

not get a visa to come to the U.S., or did not want to come. Islamic students from Indonesia also had those feelings. So instead of applying to our Buffalo campus, they applied directly to Singapore. That was fine with us, although it wasn't anticipated," says Dunnett.

U.S. universities also find that it doesn't cost much to open branch campuses on foreign shores. Many of their initiatives are invited, encouraged, and even financially supported by governments and other organizations in the host countries with inducements that U.S. institutions find hard to resist.

Phillip Altbach, director of the Center for International Higher Education at Boston College, which does not have a campus abroad, says that although educators at other institutions "give all sorts of reasons other than money" for establishing foreign campuses, "in my view, it's mostly money. They all need the money."

Public universities in particular, impacted by tight state budgets, see offshore campuses as a way to address that problem, Altbach



Africa and McBurnie reports that it faced "early and continuing difficulties" in lower-than-forecast enrollments and high over-budget costs, although it continues to operate.

McBurnie says universities with an "international footprint," as they sometimes call it, consider that their presence abroad enhances their reputation. But "poor quality off-shore operations will be regarded as mere teaching factories, detracting from the reputation of the institution and, by extension, the standing

of the home country," he says.

Meanwhile, institutions in other countries also are entering the global campus marketplace. The University of Liverpool, one of the United Kingdom's leading research institutions opened a new campus in Suzhou, China last September in partnership with Xi'an Jiaotong University, a leading Chinese university.

"The Chinese government has given enormous support to our plans," Drummond Bone, vice chancellor of the University of Liverpool, said last spring when the Chinese granted Liverpool a license to proceed.

In its first three years, the new campus, called Xi'an Jiaotong Liverpool University, will offer degree programs in computer science, electronics and information technology, meeting what Liverpool terms

"an urgent need for highly trained individuals throughout China." The campus is located in a modern industrial park in Suzhou, a city with more than 2,000 years of history.

Students will be recruited from across China and other parts of Asia and will have the option of completing their studies in Liverpool. They will graduate with a full University of Liverpool degree.

The establishment of the new Chinese campus is part of Liverpool's overall international strategy that includes recruitment of overseas students to its main campus in the U.K. "I am confident that our new university will help meet the global demand for highly trained professionals and cement Liverpool's reputation in China as a world leader in teaching and research," Bone declared last year.

says. “Some institutions just start up in a country where they think there is a market. They ask some knowledgeable people there to help them, then they rent or build facilities, and there they are,” he asserts.

Dennis says Suffolk never intended to “take any money out of” its foreign campuses. “Anything that we earn goes right back into those campuses,” she says. However, she adds, “a lot of tuition dollars have come as a result of the recruiting activities of those campuses” when students who begin degree programs abroad transfer to Suffolk’s home campus in Boston.

Dunnett acknowledges that at some institutions, the “cash cow” that a foreign branch campus can become motivates its establishment. He says Buffalo makes money from its Singapore campus, although that is not its prime motivation. “It’s not a lot, but it’s money we wouldn’t have normally. We put it into scholarships for study abroad,” Dunnett says.

He emphasizes that as a public institution, “we’re not investing any State of New York funds in what we do overseas. That would be political suicide.”

Georgia Tech did not invest public or university money, either, when it established its French campus in 1990. The governments of the city of Metz and the Lorraine Valley put up the money to purchase the land and build the buildings “and they continue to provide some annual support,” says Rollins.

Georgia Tech also gains income from research grants to faculty at the Lorraine campus and tuition from students there, “so we have a revenue stream that covers the ongoing costs,” Rollins states.

Other institutions with foreign branch campuses cite similar support from governments or institutions in the host countries. For its campus in Dakar, the government of Senegal “leased us the building and the land so we didn’t have to go out and build the facilities,” says Dennis at Suffolk.

Qatar: Education City

No place better demonstrates how branch campuses originate than Qatar, an oil-rich country where a 2,500-acre campus—Education City—is still under development in the capital, Doha, by the Qatar Foundation for Education, Science and Community Development. The Foundation is a private, nonprofit organization founded in 1995 by the Emir of Qatar.

Today, it hosts branch campuses of five U.S. institutions—Virginia Commonwealth University, Weill Cornell Medical College, Texas A&M University, Carnegie Mellon University, and Georgetown University’s School of Foreign Service.

The Foundation bears all the costs of developing the U.S. campuses in Qatar. “That was part of our reasoning in going over there, so we would not have a financial risk,” says Chuck Thorpe, dean of Carnegie Mellon’s Qatar campus, its only one outside the United States. Carnegie Mellon did not have to invest anything in buildings and infrastructure. The space it occupies is owned by the Foundation.

“They invite foreign institutions that they want, mostly high-end American, and offer them big bucks in facilities and help getting settled,” says Altbach. He adds that it’s the same in Singapore, where the Singapore Economic Development Board plays a key role in attracting interest from U.S. universities.

Thorpe says Carnegie Mellon was introduced to Qatar through the dean of its school of computer science. He was advising Qatar on how to develop its information technology infrastructure, and “they asked if he knew anybody who would like to come over there to teach computer science and business,” Thorpe says.

Earlier, when the university wrote its last strategic plan, “we said we need to think international. It’s a no-brainer for us because we have such a large international undergraduate population,” Thorpe says. “We didn’t put Qatar in the plan but that’s only because we didn’t know about it at the time. It would have been an obvious choice. It has the vision and resources to do education right.”

Now 120 undergraduates study computer science and business at Carnegie Mellon’s Qatar campus. Thorpe says they represent 20 different nationalities, mostly in the Middle East. From classroom teaching and learning to faculty research projects, the Qatar campus offers a scaled-down version of “everything we do in Pittsburgh,” Thorpe says.

The students pay tuition, although those from Qatar are sponsored either by the state Ministry of Education or potential future employers and others are eligible for “forgivable loans,” Thorpe says. “If they stay in Qatar and work for a number of years, the loans are forgiven,” he explains.

The core of Carnegie Mellon’s Qatar faculty, about two-thirds of them, bring experience from the home campus. Some spend as little time as a semester in Qatar while others contract for three years and “all have asked for an extension” beyond that, Thorpe says. The other Qatar faculty members come from “a variety of different places” in the U.S. and abroad, he says.

While Carnegie Mellon seeks to bring a U.S. higher education experience to the campus, Thorpe acknowledges that cultural factors come into play. “For Americans, it’s such an unknown part of the world, and we’re an unknown part for the Qatarese. It’s hard to get beyond the stereotypes,” he says.

He cites his observations of students “sitting around a student lounge with their laptops.” I thought, ‘oh, isn’t this nice, they’re studying.’ Some are studying, but some are watching pirated downloads of *Desperate Housewives*. That’s the image the Qatarese have of the United States—what they see on American television. Similarly, Americans’ views of the Middle East are colored by the very bad news that comes out of places like Iraq. “So there are misconceptions on both sides. That’s part of why we are there; to educate and also to learn,” Thorpe says.

The Qatar campus provides many benefits. “It gives us eyes on a very interesting part of the world” as well as “access to students we wouldn’t otherwise be able to reach,” Thorpe says. The links between



Because of its collection of branch U.S. campuses, Qatar's Education City offers another advantage to students of all its schools: cross-registration. "A student can take a computer science course at Carnegie Mellon, fashion design at Virginia Commonwealth, a foreign service course at Georgetown, and so on.

Pittsburgh and Qatar enrich the learning experiences of students on both campuses, he adds. He cites a class in which students in both places read the same text about the Middle East, then talked to each other about it through a videoconference.

Academic departments in Pittsburgh reap the benefits of the Qatar campus. The English and Modern Language departments study how English is used around the world but "nobody has really studied how the Arab countries use it," Thorpe says. "To have an outpost right there where we can do some of those studies is a win for everybody."

Similarly, for business faculty members studying the economics of the natural gas industry, "to be able to go to Qatar, one of the world's major natural gas producers, is a benefit to both campuses," Thorpe declares.

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Suffolk's experiences in Spain and Senegal were similar but with some different twists. Suffolk already was operating a program in Madrid in conjunction with another school when the other school wanted to sell out. "We decided that since we already had been there for five years, it would be good to go on our own. So we did," Dennis says. The university leased space from a religious order and celebrated its 10th anniversary in Madrid last year.

The Madrid campus provides another benefit. When more accepted freshmen chose to enroll at Suffolk's main campus in Boston than its space allowed, the university offered some of them the opportunity to spend their first year or two in Madrid instead, and up to 20 students a year do that now. Everything about the curriculum is the same on both campuses and the Madrid students transfer seamlessly back to Boston, Dennis says.

It was more challenging in Senegal, an initiative that began when the Senegalese ambassador to the U.S. attended a reception that Suffolk hosted in Boston and "he and I started talking," Dennis relates. "The next thing we knew, we had an invitation to visit Dakar and meet with the minister of higher education. They said they wanted a business-focused program in English, and that launched what has turned out to be our most ambitious project."

Although the Senegalese government leased Suffolk the land and the building it needed, "we had to start from scratch" on everything else, Dennis says. "We didn't have a pencil, a textbook, anything. We had to design applications and brochures, hire faculty, make sure computers were hooked up in Boston. It was difficult."

The campus opened in 1997. Now, more than 700 students study there in Suffolk's English language programs and about 100 students in its bachelor's degree programs. After one or two years, many of them transfer to the Boston campus to complete their degree work.

The Dakar students, who come from across Africa, are "absolutely among the best students we have in Boston. They come here and they are achievers," Dennis exclaims.

Sending Faculty Abroad

At both its Madrid and Dakar campuses, some faculty come from Suffolk in Boston and others are hired locally. Both admissions officers report to Dennis and the university's marketing and branding covers all three campuses.

Other institutions also staff their branch campuses with faculty from their home campuses and hire others locally. Georgia Tech sends faculty from Atlanta to its Metz campus on one- or two-year assignments but also has two permanent faculty members there full-time.

But some administrators say home-based faculty are not always willing to go abroad. "It's tough if you are a young faculty member on the tenure track, getting your research done, and you have family issues as well, maybe dual career issues," Altbach says.

Then again, it might depend on where their university wants to send them. "Singapore is a pretty easy sell," says Dunnett. "It's a highly developed country, English-speaking, with great housing and health care that probably is better than it is here. Also, it has a good climate, especially in winter, compared to Buffalo."

Still, some faculty are not convinced that foreign branch campuses are a good idea in the first place. "A lot of them don't agree with me that this is a good thing. They say we should not offer degree programs overseas," says Dunnett. "They don't believe we can provide the same product overseas that we offer here, that we can replicate the American teaching and learning environment in Singapore. Their feeling is that if you're going to get a U.S. degree, you should get it in the U.S., where you interact with American students and faculty."

Although most U.S. institutions with branch campuses abroad insist that they provide the same quality of education that students would receive on the home campus, there are concerns that academic integrity might take a back seat in some places to the push to enroll more foreign students. There also are questions about how effectively senior administrators at home oversee their foreign campuses.

The *Chronicle of Higher Education* cited these concerns in a December 2006 story about problems facing a branch campus that the University of Indianapolis established in Athens.

Also under question is the practice of some U.S. institutions with foreign campuses to use them to house students who travel there from the U.S. on education abroad programs. Georgia Tech sends about 160 undergraduates from Atlanta to its French campus every summer. "One of the nice things" for them is sharing the residence halls with French students, Rollins says.

Altbach doesn't think it's a good idea to use essentially U.S. campuses for education abroad programs. "I believe that U.S. students who are going abroad for a foreign experience should embed themselves in a foreign institution and its culture," he says.

More Branch Campuses Coming

Not all American institutions accept attractive enticements to open campuses in other countries. The University of Washington last year turned down an offer of land and a \$100 million loan from China to build a campus there. UW President Mark Emmert cited "an enormous amount of time and energy" that the undertaking would require.

It would have been the first campus of a U.S. university in China as that country begins to change its previously restrictive policies and joins other nations in seeking to import higher education offerings from the U.S. and other countries.

In China and elsewhere, it seems likely that U.S. institutions will establish more campuses abroad in the near future, probably building on bases already established in Asia and the Middle East. Chicago-based DePaul University is set to open a branch campus in

Jordan offering undergraduate and graduate programs in information and communications technology. New York University's Tisch School of the Arts announced in December that it will open its first-ever branch campus in Singapore.

In Middle Eastern countries, "there is a relative scarcity of opportunities for Western-style, career-oriented education, and a strong demand for it from potential students. With receptive governments and student populations and friendly relations between our country and those countries, things come together to make those good places for us to be," says Decker of NYIT.

A spokesperson for the Singapore Economic Development Board cites an estimated \$2.2 trillion global education market, led by "the demand from emerging economies of India and China." Altbach says those two countries are slowly dismantling restrictions that have long worked against establishment of foreign campuses within their borders. Meanwhile, many Indian and Chinese students are enrolling at branch campuses operated in other countries by U.S.-based and other institutions.

"U.S. higher education, like every sector of our economy, is becoming internationalized. Actually, we're kind of slow to branch out compared to the business sector. I think it would have happened anyway, but 9/11 gave it a push," Dunnett says.

Educators with established U.S. campuses abroad offer some advice to other U.S. institutions that might be considering doing the same thing. "Get a long-term commitment from the top. You can't make this happen in a year or two. Give it up to three years," says Dennis of Suffolk.

"Do a feasibility study. Think it through carefully and be sure it is going to contribute to the educational mission of your institution," adds Dunnett at SUNY Buffalo, which has put together written guidelines on how to establish foreign campuses.

"Don't underestimate all the little details," says Carnegie Mellon's Thorpe. He cites the university's accounting system in Pittsburgh, which shuts down every Sunday night for maintenance. "But that is 8 a.m. Monday in Qatar; prime working hours there," he says. "There are a lot of funny little things you don't even think about."

"Always remember," concludes NYIT's Decker, "that you are guests of a foreign government, and as such you must not only comply with local customs and practices, and laws and regulations, but also should consciously attempt to make a contribution to the society in which you are operating."

"In the U.S., higher education institutions have credibility because we contribute to society. We produce graduates who make our country and economy better. We produce research that advances knowledge. We support the development of human capital in our country. That also has to be at the top of the agenda when you go abroad."

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