



RIPPLE

THE BOLOGNA PROCESS, TEN YEARS ON

**After a decade of change in Europe,
the Bologna Process is influencing how nations
outside the European Higher Education Area look at their own
higher education systems and their interrelations.**

By Charlotte West

EFFE C T S

COUNTRIES AROUND THE WORLD ARE TAKING STOCK

of European higher education reform and contemplating what it means for their own systems. Twenty-nine European ministers signed the Bologna Declaration a little over a decade ago in the Italian city of the same name, pledging to undertake reforms that would make their educational system more comparable, compatible, accessible, and transparent to those of other member states. Important elements of the Bologna Process include the facilitation of student mobility through credit transfer schemes, the development of quality assurance mechanisms, reform of degree structures, a renewed focus on student learning outcomes, stronger linkages between education and the labor market, and development of a qualifications framework, among others. With the official launch of the European Higher Education Area (EHEA) in March 2010, 47 European countries—the most recent being Kazakhstan earlier this year—have now committed themselves to the goals of Bologna.

While the first few years of the Bologna Process were largely inward looking, in May 2005 the Council of Ministers issued the following statement on the “external dimension” of the EHEA in the Bergen Communiqué:

We see the European Higher Education Area as a partner of higher education systems in other regions of the world, stimulating balanced student and staff exchange and cooperation between higher education institutions. We underline the importance of intercultural understanding and respect. We look forward to enhancing the understanding of the Bologna Process in other continents by sharing our experiences of reform processes with neighboring regions. We stress the need for dialogue on issues of mutual interest.

Two years later at the ministerial conference in London, the Council of Ministers adopted the strategy “The European Higher Education Area in a Global Setting,” outlining the following five priority areas:

- improving information on the European Higher Education Area,
- promoting European higher education to enhance its world-wide attractiveness and competitiveness,
- intensifying policy dialogue,
- strengthening cooperation based on partnership, and
- furthering the recognition of qualifications.

In 2009, the first Bologna Policy Forum was held in Louvain, Belgium, and was attended by countries interested in developing a “global dialogue” on enhancing worldwide cooperation in higher education with the Bologna signatories. A year later, Vienna hosted the second Bologna Policy Forum, which was attended by 73 countries, including the (then) 46 EHEA countries plus Australia, Brazil, Canada, China, Colombia, Egypt, Ghana, Israel, Japan, Jordan, Kazakhstan¹, Kyrgyzstan, Malaysia, Mali, Mexico, Morocco, New Zealand, Philippines, Saudi Arabia, Senegal, South Africa, Thailand, Tunisia, and the United States. In a statement following the Vienna conference, the ministers of education noted:

To address the great societal challenges, we need more cooperation among the higher education and research systems of the different world regions.

While respecting the autonomy of higher education institutions with their diverse missions, we will therefore continue our dialogue and engage in building a community of practice from which all may draw inspiration and to which all can contribute.

The Bologna Process has thus become a force to be reckoned with within the international higher education

community. As Clifford Adelman, senior associate at the Institute for Higher Education Policy in Washington D.C., puts it in his 2008 essay “The Bologna Club: What U.S. Higher Education Can Learn From a Decade of European Reconstruction”: “While still a work in progress, parts of the Bologna Process have already been imitated in Latin America, North Africa, and Australia. The core features of the Bologna Process have sufficient momentum to become the dominant global higher education model within the next two decades. We had better listen up.”

The Global Reaction to the Bologna Process

International responses to the Bologna Process have ranged from informational seminars at the institutional level to nationwide policy dialogues about what educators and policymakers can learn from Bologna. While in some cases, national educational reforms in third countries are explicitly linked to Bologna, in others, it is difficult to separate influence from Bologna from other, more general trends towards internationalization.

There has been an international movement toward deeper regional integration and the facilitation of student mobility, primarily through the development of credit transfer systems and quality assurance mechanisms. Other countries have focused on remaining competitive in the global higher education market by ensuring graduates of their system are attractive to European employers through the development of compatible diploma supplements.

Regional Ripples

ASIA

In 2005, the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) initiated a dialog on the creation of a higher education space with parallels to the EHEA, setting 2015 as the deadline and outlining five priority areas: (a) ASEAN Quality Framework and Curriculum Development; (b) Student Mobility; (c) Leadership; (d) E-Learning and Mobile Learning; and (e) ASEAN Research Clusters. Other ASEAN initiatives include the projected implementation of the ASEAN Credit Transfer System (ACTS) throughout the ASEAN University Network (AUN) member institutions in 2010 and the development of the ASEAN Quality Assurance Network. There are ten ASEAN member states: Brunei Darussalam, Cambodia, Indonesia, Laos, Malaysia, Myanmar, the Philippines, Singapore, Thailand, and Vietnam.

Educational integration (or at least discussions about it) in Asia has not been limited to ASEAN. Similar to conversations in the EU, educational reform has also been linked to economic goals and the need to secure a skilled workforce in countries like China. At the first China-ASEAN Education Minister Roundtable Conference held in August 2010, for instance, Chinese State Councilor Liu Yandong proposed that China and ASEAN study the feasibility of educational integration “to ensure the supply of skilled labor for the development of the China-ASEAN Free Trade Area.” Other developments in East Asia include the emergence of “Campus Asia,” a project initiated after a high level meeting in April 2010 aimed at increasing student and faculty mobility between China, Japan, and South Korea. Topics for future discussion include credit transfers, exchange programs, and

quality control in institutions across the region. While the discussion about regional integration and harmonization of educational systems remains at a stage of infancy due to a number of political, economic, and institutional hurdles that would be difficult to overcome, it is nevertheless worth noting that many countries contemplating educational reform look to Europe as a potential model and source of best practice.

As Professor Richard James of the University of Melbourne notes, “I think the political impact (of Bologna) in Asia in nations as they are seeking to develop their education systems is that (a) they have to look at alignment with Europe and (b) whether or not Asia or some Asian regions try to create their own kind of higher education space in opposition to Europe.”

AUSTRALIA

James also adds that for its part, while Australia has closely followed developments in Europe, they are primarily focused on maintaining and building relationships with their partners in Asia. “While obviously Australian universities have exchange programs with European universities and there is some flow of students coming from bachelor’s

programs into graduate education, the financial circumstances are very much weighted with our relationship with Asia,” he continues.

For example, a 2006 report by Julie Bishop, then the Australian minister for education, science, and training, noted that Bologna “is an important process that is receiving considerable attention, not only within Europe, but from a range of other countries. It presents challenges to, and opportunities for, Australia’s relationship with Europe as well as Asia and raises the importance of developing effective multilateral dialogue with Australia’s key Asian education partners about future directions in higher education.”

“The best way to describe (the impact of Bologna) is to say that the Australian educational sector and the federal department responsible for education have kept a watchful eye on what’s been happening. We have been following where it might be of interest for us to align ourselves with what’s happening, and the most obvious example is the graduation statement, which is our diploma supplement,” James explains.

James and his colleague Kerri-Lee Harris, also at the University of Melbourne, have been instrumental in the development of the Australian graduation statement. After ratifying the Lisbon Recognition Convention in 2002, Australia committed to promoting the widespread use of the graduation statement by Australian tertiary institutions. Beginning in 2006, the Australian government sponsored a project to develop the Australian equivalent of the diploma supplement for a consortium of 14 universities. Following the project report in 2008, Australian institutions have begun implementing the Australian graduation statement on a voluntary basis.

“In a nutshell, our former minister for higher education committed Australia to developing a diploma supplement. This took some time due to reaching consensus within the higher education community about the character of such a statement and developing the internal system to deliver the content of the statement,” James says.

Since all Australian universities have always offered transcripts, the concept is not entirely new. “What is new is the unified national template. ‘Brand Australia’ is really

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financially important to our universities, so the graduation statement is linked to the idea that if we are to ensure the portability and transferability of Australian qualifications internationally, we best make sure that we provide the clearest, most helpful documentation possible,” says James.

Australia’s neighbor New Zealand has also been keeping a watchful eye on developments in Europe. In

2008 New Zealand held two national seminars in Wellington to encourage discussion on the Bologna Process and published a paper, “New Zealand and the Bologna Process,” outlining areas of comparability between the European higher education reforms and New Zealand’s tertiary education system. In the area of quality assurance, New Zealand has verified the comparability of its Register of Quality Assured Qualifications with Ireland’s National Framework of Qualifications as Ireland was one of the first European countries to complete the process certifying compatibility between its national qualification framework (NQF) and the Qualifications Framework for the EHEA.² In a

move similar to the one in Australia, the New Zealand Qualifications Authority (NZQA) and the Ministry of Education also released implementation guidelines for a New Zealand Diploma Supplement, which is to be known as a Tertiary Education Qualification Statement, in 2009. As in Australia, implementation is voluntary.



AFRICA

In Africa, European education models have already had an impact due to the colonial legacy. For example, the education systems of three former French colonies (Morocco, Algeria, and Tunisia) in the Maghreb, historically based on the French system, are all adopting the licence, master, doctorate degree structure currently used in France following Bologna reforms. Several conferences have also been held across the continent to discuss ways in which African institutions can learn from the Bologna Process.



LATIN AMERICA

Across the Atlantic in Latin America, some scholars argue that regional integration and educational harmonization akin to that in Europe is improbable and likely impossible, but note that one of the biggest impacts of Bologna has been the construction of “a common Ibero-American area of knowledge,” based on “renewing, enlarging, and enriching the traditional ties between Latin

American universities and those of Spain and Portugal.”

In a 2009 article in *The Journal of Studies in International Education*, Professor Jose Joaquin Brunner at the Diego Portales University in Chile, argues that Bologna has also been important for establishing interregional collaborative initiatives. “Latin American and European universities have been developing various collaborative initiatives to promote Bologna’s ideals and issues southward,” he writes, noting in particular the European Union-Latin America-Caribbean Higher Education Area (EULAC) and the ALFA Tuning Latin America Project. EULAC has established bi- and multilateral relations between states, “with the mission of sharing knowledge, transfer of technologies, and mobility of students, teachers, researchers, and administrators.” Brunner also notes EULAC is encouraging the development of compatible credit systems. The Tuning Latin America project has, among other things, aimed to develop easily comparable degrees throughout Latin America, encourage regional convergence in 12 disciplines, establish university networks, and facilitate exchange of knowledge and best practice. There are approximately 186 Latin American universities participating and tuning centers established in 19 countries.

Brunner argues that Bologna has been an important driver in placing interregional collaboration on national agendas, even if the full impact has not yet been realized. “These initiatives are in full flight, but it is too early to discuss their achievements and impacts. However, it is already possible to say that these projects have spread Bologna’s light on Latin America and started conversations that—had Bologna not existed—might not have taken place or would have developed only locally and in only a few countries,” he writes.



THE UNITED STATES AND CANADA

In North America, discussions about Bologna in the United States and Canada have also started to pick up steam. According to Diana Carlin, professor and Bologna expert at the University of Kansas, although there has previously been a general lack of awareness of Bologna among faculty outside of those working within international education, the situation is starting to change. “A lot of universities are starting to do workshops on Bologna. Study abroad is being affected and they are starting to get students who have completed Bologna undergraduate degrees,” she says, adding that the two biggest areas of concern for the United States have been graduate admissions and joint-dual degree programs.

Administrators and graduate admissions officers have expressed concern about the compatibility of the new three-year undergraduate degrees with the U.S. four-year bachelor’s degrees. Carlin points out that a lot of the discussion has to do with philosophical differences between the general education common in the United States and the specialization common in Europe.

Carlin says that three-year degrees from Europe are nevertheless becoming increasingly accepted in the United States. “The three-year degree issue isn’t as big a problem as it was ten years ago. What you really want people to know by the time they get into their graduate degree is knowledge of their subject matter. The majority of grad schools are saying that they’ll accept a student with a Bologna degree if they are qualified. Part of this has come out of a recognition that most of us have been accepting three-year degrees from the U.K., Australia, and India for years,” she explains.

Carlin adds that three-year degrees are also becoming more commonplace at U.S. universities. “Some of the liberal arts colleges in this country are moving towards three-year degrees, and that’s been an economic issue as much as anything. Students are coming in with so many AP credits and in three years you save the cost of the extra year,” she says.

Ball State University in Indiana is just one of several U.S. institutions that have recently launched three-year bachelor’s degrees. Initiated in 2005, the Degree in 3 program is available in more than 30 majors. Ball State President Jo Ann Gora explains they started the program because they “detected among some of our student population and legislators an interest in providing an opportunity for students to complete their degree in a shorter period of time.” She adds that “it really caters to students who have a very clear idea of what profession they want to go into when they graduate.”



Tuning USA

The Lumina Foundation

An important part of the Bologna Process in Europe—and around the world—has been the concept of tuning, an initiative that identifies and defines learning outcomes and competences at different educational levels for various disciplines. Tuning is closely related to the articulation of qualifications frameworks and the development of easily comparable degrees across countries. Tuning focuses not on educational systems, but on educational structures with emphasis on the subject area. In Europe, this has helped promote harmonization while still respecting the autonomy of national education systems.

In the United States, the Lumina Foundation for Education, a private, Indianapolis-based think tank, has been leading the way with the Tuning USA Project. After initial discussions at the end of 2008, a pilot project was launched in April 2009. Participating institutions in Minnesota, Indiana, and Utah are tuning seven different disciplines. In February 2010 Texas also launched its own tuning project focused on developing qualifications frameworks in four different engineering disciplines.

According to Marcus Kolb, program officer at Lumina, the foundation was initially interested in Bologna due to the scale of change that had been achieved in the 47 European countries participating in the process. “Once we engaged it further, we became more interested in student learning outcomes as a true measure of quality in higher education; and there were elements of Bologna, particularly tuning and qualifications frameworks, that we really latched onto,” Kolb says.

He says that Lumina is just beginning to receive information about the success of the pilot project, but so far, considers it to be successful. Although the process has been slow, enthusiasm among faculty has been high. Kolb adds that tuning is—and must remain—a bottom-up and faculty-led process.

“Some of greatest challengers at the beginning have turned into the greatest advocates...When they first heard about the concept and got into the work was a time when higher education was under some duress, as it is now, due to budget cuts and scrutiny. They saw it as a project that they could take and own. It got them back to what they love, which is their disciplines and students,” Kolb says.

While he remains realistic about the possibility of using tuning on a national level, Lumina will continue to promote the concept. “Once we get student learning front and center instead of credit hours, then we can start talking about innovating towards things that really will improve the system for students. We look at (tuning) as an area where we can really foster innovation in higher education,” Kolb says.

Gora emphasizes, however, that Degree in 3 is an accelerated—not a shortened—degree. Students are still required to fulfill the same graduation requirements as those who take four years, but they will take full course loads during summer semesters. As Gora puts it, “We offer students the opportunity to complete a four-year curriculum in three years.”

This distinguishes U.S. accelerated degrees from the three-year, Bologna-compliant degrees, which are based on a three-year curriculum. For U.S. institutions, the primary argument in favor of three-year degrees is an economic one. At Ball State, for example, full-time students who take anything from 12 to 18 credits pay the same fee, so students save money by taking heavier course loads.

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In addition to the increasing number of three-year degrees at U.S. institutions, administrators are also becoming more accepting of Bologna degrees in general. A 2009 Institute of International Education (IIE) survey of U.S. graduate schools indicates that graduate admissions staff believe an applicant’s preparation for study in the specific field was much more important than the length of the degree. The survey also showed that graduate admissions staff and graduate deans had a strong grasp of the Bologna reforms. According to IIE, more than half of respondents reported their institutions had an official policy in place to guide the admissions response to three-year, Bologna-compliant degrees; within this group, a third tended to view three-year, Bologna-compliant degrees as equivalent to U.S. four-year degrees, and another third decided equivalency on a case-by-case basis.

One area of concern, however, remains that some European countries may have implemented the new degree structures without any concomitant curricular reform. According to John Yopp, associate provost for educational partnerships and international affairs at the University of Kentucky, the change is in some cases superficial.

“Ninety-five percent of Bologna institutions have adopted the new Bologna structure, according to information reported in the European University Association’s Trends 2010, but those countries that have taken on the 3+2 structure without curricular reform have not really

achieved the goal,” he says. Yopp also adds that EUA surveys also indicate that employers are sometimes reluctant to hire graduates with academic bachelor’s degrees, and universities in some countries recommend that their bachelor’s continue in the master’s program before seeking employment.

Similar conversations regarding three-year degrees have also been going on in Canada. Britta Baron, vice provost at the University of Alberta and former director of the New York Office of the German Academic Exchange Service (DAAD), says Canada has been rather slow in responding to Bologna, but two conferences on Bologna held in the last two years have sparked greater interest. She believes the biggest impact of Bologna in Canada has been in terms of graduate admissions. “It has been clear that Canadian universities have been very conservative in letting three-year bachelor’s degrees into PhD programs or even master’s programs. That has definitely changed. I see a really big move towards opening Canada up to Bologna-type, three-year degrees for graduate admissions,” she says, also noting that two other areas where Bologna has had impact in Canada are dual degrees and a focus on learning outcomes.

Robert White, senior policy analyst at the Association of Universities and Colleges of Canada (AUCC), concurs with Baron’s assessment. He adds that Canadian universities have begun to recognize that acceptance of three-year degrees from Europe is also a question of competitiveness in the international education market.

“Some of our institutions are making moves to communicate their openness to these European bachelor’s degree holders. There is an element of marketing in that to recruit graduates and high-quality degree seekers. We are also trying to develop some sort of broader national message on that,” White says.

More generally, White says that what he calls “the spirit of Bologna” has been important for spurring national conversations about higher education reform: “The Bologna Process serves as an impetus for reflection here in Canada—not only on how to get ‘our own house in order,’ but also on how to leverage our existing competitive advantage as a country with a high-quality system of higher education.”

Similarly, Paul Gaston, professor at Kent State University in Ohio and author of *The Challenge of Bologna: What United States Higher Education Has to Learn From Europe, and Why It Matters That We Learn It*, notes that competitiveness is another reason why the United States has begun to pay attention to Bologna. “Another direct impact has to do with Europe’s much more aggressive ef-

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fort to claim a larger share of the world's students. So far we have not seen the negative impact in the U.S., (but we have a) very strong and determined competitor in Europe. This has at least caught the attention of higher education officials," he says.

Individual institutions are also expressing greater interest in the Bologna Process. At a conference held by the Association of Public and Land Grant Universities (APLU), a panel on Bologna sparked interest among several universities in disseminating information about Bologna at an institutional level.

"As a result of that panel, some of the senior international officers from the Big Ten schools decided it would be a good idea if each campus pulled together a group of faculty who were interested in or should be interested in the Bologna process," says Wolfgang Schloer, director of international programs and studies at the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign.

Illinois, for example, has formed an informal faculty committee on Bologna. "We share resources and information. We are committed to disseminating that information to other members of the group, but also invite guest speakers to campus," Schloer explains.

Among the issues discussed by the committee is the provision of international opportunities for graduate students. "That's why it's important to take account of the different mobility models and align with those. A lot of opportunities are based on reciprocity and you have to know what you are doing and be aware of how these degrees are structured," he says.

Another impact of Bologna in both Canada and the United States is a renewed focus on student learning outcomes.

"I think the biggest challenge Bologna has presented the U.S. is coordinating the work we are doing in the U.S. in terms of student learning outcomes. Europe, through the Bologna Process, has created (European and national) qualifications frameworks that provide a template for putting student learning outcomes in a framework that defines the bachelor's, master's, and doctoral degrees. In the U.S., we are working with our regional accreditation bodies on determining student learning outcomes. We have not yet made the step of putting those in a framework that would define out degrees," Yopp says, adding

that it is not just a matter of establishing guidelines for degrees but also identifying desired outcomes within different disciplines.

Gaston concurs, explaining that accountability is an emerging challenge for U.S. higher education. "In Europe, they are creating a very strong, continent-wide commitment to accountability, first of all through a set of standards of what bachelor's, master's and PhD's should mean. The (EHEA) qualifications framework represents a standard that each country is now asked to step up to and develop NQFs that are much more detailed and specific to the country. I think that given the call of the U.S. Congress for a much higher degree of accountability in higher education, the example of Bologna is likely to be a powerful one," he says.

Similarly, in Canada, White notes that "the increasing focus in Europe, as part of the Bologna Process, on learning outcomes and student-centered education challenges the Canadian higher education system and its institutions to closely examine how we teach, how we learn, and how we can enhance the learning and research environment in Canada."

Perhaps the greatest impact of Bologna in North America has been a call to create coordinated national responses to challenges of internationalization and globalization within higher education. As Gaston points out, the challenges faced by Europe and North America are not all that different; Bologna may thus serve as a necessary call to action within the American—and international—higher education community: "Much of the Bologna agenda corresponds to the agenda for higher education in the U.S. The major difference is that Europe is pursuing its agenda in a coherent and well-coordinated way through a strategy that leads to regular review of progress and adjustments as they go along. We have many more initiatives, but without that degree of coherence. Bologna is an example that is worth paying attention to." **IE**

CHARLOTTE WEST is a freelance writer in Seattle, Washington. Her last article for *IE* was "Borderless Via Technology" in the March/April 2010 issue.

NOTES

¹Kazakhstan formally joined the Bologna Process during the ministerial conference in March 2010. An invitation to join Bologna was also extended to Kyrgyzstan during the same conference.

²In 2005 the Bergen Conference adopted an overarching framework for qualifications in the EHEA, comprising the three Bologna degree cycles (bachelor's, master's, and doctorate), generic descriptors for each cycle based on learning outcomes and competencies, and credit ranges in the first and second cycles.