

GLOBAL PERSPECTIVES ON HIGHER EDUCATION

Higher Education in the New Century

Global Challenges and Innovative
Innovative Ideas

Philip G. Altbach and
Patti McGill Peterson (Eds.)



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Higher Education in the New Century: Global Challenges and Innovative Ideas

GLOBAL PERSPECTIVES ON HIGHER EDUCATION

Volume 10

Higher education worldwide is in a period of transition, affected by globalization, the advent of mass access, changing relationships between the university and the state, and the new technologies, among others. *Global Perspectives on Higher Education* provides cogent analysis and comparative perspectives on these and other central issues affecting postsecondary education worldwide.

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS	ix
PREFACE	
<i>Patti McGill Peterson</i>	xi
INTRODUCTION	
The Underlying Realities of Higher Education in the 21st Century <i>Philip G. Altbach</i>	xv
1 The Academic Profession in the Globalization Age: Key Trends, Challenges, and Possibilities	
<i>Nelly P. Stromquist with the collaboration of Manuel Gil-Antón, Elizabeth Balbachevsky, Reitumetse Obakeng Mabokela, Anna Smo- lentseva, and Carol Colatrella</i>	1
2 Comparative Perspectives on Access and Equity	
<i>Patrick Clancy, Heather Eggins, Gaële Goastellec, Sarah Guri-Rosen- blit, Phuong Nga Nguyen, and Teshome Yizengaw Alemneh</i>	35
3 Higher Education and Social Cohesion	
<i>Stephen P. Heyneman, Richard G. Kraince, Nancy Lesko, and Michael Bastedo</i>	55
4 Rethinking the Public-Private Mix in Higher Education: Global Trends and National Policy Challenges	
<i>Sunwoong Kim, Zulfikar Gilani, Pablo Landoni, Nanayike B. Musisi, and Pedro Teixeira</i>	79
5 The Dynamics of International Student Circulation in a Global Context	
<i>Pawan Agarwal, Mohsen Elmahdy Said, Molatlhegi Chika Sehoole, Muhammad Sirozi, and Hans de Wit</i>	109
6 The Emerging Global Model of the Research University	
<i>Kathryn Mohrman, Wanhua Ma, and David Baker</i>	145
ABOUT THE AUTHORS	179
INDEX	185

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Beginning with the selection of the scholars through the program's final plenary, we are grateful for the effective administration of NCS by the Council for the International Exchange of Scholars (CIES) in Washington D.C. The American University in Cairo helped organize the midterm meeting in Cairo. The Franco-American Fulbright Commission, the Division of Higher Education at UNESCO, the office of the U.S. Ambassador to UNESCO, and the Bureau of Educational and Cultural Affairs provided additional support for the final plenary at UNESCO in Paris.

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have emerged from this endeavor which will benefit higher education in many parts of the world.

Philip G. Altbach
Chestnut Hill, Massachusetts

Patti McGill Peterson
Washington, DC

Preface

Patti McGill Peterson

The collaborative project that served as the basis for this volume is an important outcome of the Fulbright New Century Scholars Program. In a joint effort to expand and build on the strengths of the traditional Fulbright Scholar Program, the Bureau of Educational and Cultural Affairs of the U.S. Department of State and the Council of International Exchange of Scholars created the New Century Scholars Program. It holds at its core the tenet that has informed the Fulbright Program from its beginnings in 1946--a deep belief in the importance of sharing knowledge from different cultural perspectives through academic exchange to build mutual understanding among nations and their citizens. As a new dimension of the Fulbright Program, New Century Scholars, established in 2000, seeks to move beyond bilateral exchange to multilateral engagement and to multidisciplinary research collaboration to examine topics of global significance.

The main idea behind New Century Scholars is that the major challenges facing humankind warrant global attention and can benefit from the ideas and experience of experts from many countries. To this end, New Century Scholars work in close cooperation to advance the state of human understanding on a chosen topic of global salience. In its first three years the program addressed three major topics: (a) The Challenges of Health in a Borderless World, (b) Ethnic and Sectarian Conflict within and across National Borders, and (c) The Global Empowerment of Women. In its fourth year, it turned its attention to global higher education.

The decision to focus on higher education as a field of collaborative study was a natural choice for the New Century Scholars given the Fulbright Program's longstanding role in sponsoring the movement of students and faculty among most of the world's institutions of higher education. Under its auspices, the program has supported hundreds

of thousands of exchanges and is considered the largest program of government-sponsored academic exchange throughout the world. Perceived and real strengths and weaknesses of institutions and systems of higher education around the world are a key element affecting academic mobility. While the spirit of the Fulbright Program is the same for everyone—shared knowledge, mutual respect, and understanding—the home and host institutions supporting the academic exchange reflect widely varying conditions.

Demand for higher education around the world is escalating rapidly. As a consequence, higher education is one of the “growth industries” of the 21st century. Trying to keep up with demand for its services across the world, in developed and developing countries alike, is an increasingly daunting challenge. In developing countries that have been successful in promoting basic literacy and greater access to K-16 levels of education, the demand for access to higher education is becoming overwhelming. This, in turn, not only prompts outward mobility when demand cannot be met but leads to an array of problems internally. Lack of adequate funding, significant overcrowding, low quality of academic programs, and poor working conditions for faculty and administrators all combine to challenge the ability of institutions to produce graduates who are well educated and who can contribute to national development.

These problems notwithstanding, the quality of higher education institutions and their support for the development of human capacity and civil society will play increasingly critical roles. The existence of high quality and accessible institutions of higher education in any country is one of the key predictors of national progress; not less important, the existence of such institutions predicts a nation’s ability to claim a leadership role in the community of nations.

Reflecting the importance of higher education as a global issue, in the fall of 2005, 31 New Century Scholars gathered to address the topic “Higher Education in the 21st Century: Global Challenge and National Response.” Led by Philip G. Altbach as Distinguished Scholar Leader, they organized themselves into six working groups: (a) The Academic Profession in the Age of Globalization, (b) Access and Equity, (c) Higher Education and Social Cohesion, (d) The Private and Public Mix in the Development Process, (e) The Dynamics of Student Circulation, and (f) The Emerging Global Model for Research Universities.

Each working group chose a topic that captures a significant aspect of higher education development in comparative context. While the topics vary, there are some common themes that unite the analysis of the working groups. In varying degrees, all of them address the following issues:

- The importance and complexity of the relationship of higher education institutions – private and public-- with the societies they purport to serve.
- The impact of burgeoning demand for higher education upon institutions and the ability of those institutions to develop the human and financial resources to respond in effective ways.
- The ways in which globalization influences the development of higher education and shapes the expectations that citizens and nations have for the public and private goods that institutions should provide.

The topics of the working groups are key elements that are constantly interacting as globalization, demand, and societal expectations create a blend of forces that produce extraordinary pressure for the performance of higher education in the 21st Century. Some may have greater priority than others, depending on the circumstances and the national setting. Yet all the topics must be addressed by any nation wishing to strengthen its higher education system.

While the issues may be of global significance, they require a strong local response if the goal of high quality, accessible higher education is the desired outcome.

Introduction

The Underlying Realities of Higher Education in the 21st Century

Philip G. Altbach

Higher education is undergoing dramatic change everywhere. It seems that the early 21st century is the “perfect storm” of external pressures and internal responses. The current period may provide a chance for significant reform and change, although the pressures could overwhelm already stretched academic institutions. The purpose here is to highlight the underlying causes creating this unprecedented situation as a way of analyzing contemporary higher education in context. While these realities exist almost everywhere, the responses of national academic systems, governments, and individual universities vary considerably. One of the benefits of a comparative approach is the ability to contrast differing ways of responding to crisis.

The underlying realities discussed here are both simple and complex: the reality of mass higher education worldwide; the transformation of higher education from a public good to a private good and the economic and social thinking and policies behind this perception; the advent of a service-oriented postindustrial economy in a growing number of countries; and the impact of information technology on higher education and society. There are no doubt other factors impinging on higher education policy and practice, but these are central realities that have deep implications for how academic systems and universities operate.

Massification

Mass higher education is a reality of the latter half of the 20th century, and the expansion of higher education systems worldwide has been dramatic. Only the United States had mass enrollments prior to 1950.

From 1975 to 1995, worldwide postsecondary enrollments doubled from 40 to 80 million, and expansion has kept pace since then (Task Force on Higher Education and Society, 2000). China, with more than 17 million students in postsecondary education, now has the world's largest higher education system but still enrolls a modest 20 percent of its university-age population. Most of China's expansion has taken place in the past two decades. India has the third-largest enrollments, with under 10 percent of the age group—10 million students. Current plans are to increase this proportion to 15 percent by 2015, adding perhaps an additional 10 million students to the system (Tilak, 2007; Government of India 2006). These countries are just two large examples of the scope of higher education (Altbach 2007a). Other parts of the world have seen similar growth. No countries, with the possible exception of Burma and perhaps North Korea, are unaffected by the pressures of massification. However, a number of countries, mainly in Africa, still enroll under 5 percent of the relevant age groups. Further, while state policies can steer the direction of growth, expansion cannot be stopped (Altbach, 2007b).

Mass higher education is in many ways the driver of all other changes that have taken place. Based on a scan of academic realities in many countries, the following implications stem from massification. Of course, not all countries are equally or simultaneously affected.

- *Differentiated higher education systems.* Whether planned or not, massification contributes to creation of different kinds of academic institutions serving diverse populations, with varying quality, purposes, and resources. No nation can afford to educate all of its students in traditional universities, nor can all of those seeking postsecondary education meet the admissions standards of such institutions. Typically, traditional universities are at the pinnacle of the system, with less selective universities, postsecondary vocational institutions, and a range of other specialized schools serving a diverse clientele. Smaller specialized institutions, especially business schools, may occupy places at the top of the system as well.
- *Private higher education and the privatization of public postsecondary institutions.* The pressure of numbers combined with the inability of the state to adequately fund growing enrollments means that new kinds of institutions and new ways of funding them are necessary. The growth of private higher education worldwide is proof that when state-supported higher education cannot provide sufficient access, other kinds of institutions will be established. Private higher education is now a powerful force

in almost every part of the world, western Europe and Australasia being two of the very few exceptions, and many countries now enroll a majority of students in private postsecondary institutions. Accompanying this trend is the privatization of public universities in many countries—the growing demand by governments that public institutions increasingly pay for themselves through higher tuition fees, generation of income through consultancies, university-industry linkages, and other schemes.

- *Decline in overall academic standards.* While difficult to quantify, it seems to be the case that as higher education expands, the overall quality of the system declines. This is probably an inevitable result of an academically more diverse student population, institutions with poorer facilities and less highly trained professors, and less rigorous selection of students. This decline of standards and increase in diversity have resulted in a larger proportion of entering students not finishing their degrees and a greater time-to-degree.
- *Greater access and more diversity of gender, social class, and ethnicity among students, and academic staff.* Higher education has become much less of a preserve of a largely male upper-social-class sector of society. Even the top institutions now contain more diversity, although it is especially prevalent in the middle and lower levels of the academic system.

Public Good and Private Good: A Transformation in Economic Values

Over the past several decades, there has been a significant rethinking of the economic rationale for higher education. For a long period of time, higher education was seen in most countries as a “public good”—that is, as something valuable for society as well as for individuals and for which society should pay because of the social benefits. Among these benefits were the creation of educated people who would contribute to society through their work. Research shows that highly educated people earn more and thus pay more taxes, remain healthier, and more actively engage in society through voting, membership in organizations, and the like. These values are considered to contribute to the public good. In contrast, a “private good” mainly benefits the individual—the increased lifetime income earned by university graduates is thus considered a private good. While higher education has always contributed to both the public and private good, society has been willing to support higher education financially because of the perceived public benefits.

The argument worldwide has dramatically changed in recent years. Higher education is increasingly seen mainly as a private good that

should be paid for solely by those who benefit from it—students and their families. The private good argument largely dominates the current debate, and there are a number of reasons for this change. This argument is very much part of the conservative and market-oriented approach that has emphasized privatization in society generally as well as in the higher education sector. World Bank economists, and many others, have pressed the centrality of the private-benefits argument for higher education and have convinced policymakers worldwide of the relevance of this approach. Further, the expansion of higher education has made it increasingly difficult for the state to finance ever-larger enrollments, institutional expansion, and a mass system of postsecondary institutions. Thus, ideological, economic, and philosophical argument has supported the fiscal realities faced by most governments. The debate, often couched in economic terms, is in reality a combination of economics, ideology, and philosophy. While it is certainly the case that increases in demand for access has placed great pressure on the state to raise expenditure on higher education, the private good argument has provided a rationale for not devoting more resources to higher education.

The implications of the domination of the private good argument in higher education are immense. The private higher education sector, almost completely dependent on student tuition, is the quintessential reflection of this approach. Public higher education has increasingly been asked to depend on student tuition and entrepreneurial projects to support itself. The state has systematically withdrawn its financial support for higher education. The results of this are clear worldwide. Increased tuition fees for students, less basic research, and more academic entrepreneurialism characterize academe in most places. Sometimes, as in Latin America, the withdrawal of public resources has led to student unrest and sometimes to political conflict.

The changing economic circumstances of higher education affect access and equity, often in contradictory ways. Increasing tuition fees in the public sector and the dependence of private institutions on student tuition have hindered the ability of students from poor families to afford higher education. Yet, sacrifices are made so that at least one family member can study. In many countries, the inability of the public sector to provide access means that the least economically well-off must attend relatively high-cost and often low-quality private institutions. Higher education systems are increasingly stratified, with the top tier ever more dominated by students from affluent backgrounds who have had the advantages of good secondary schools and can often afford coaching classes to pass required entrance examinations. The domination of the

private good has meant that the poorest sections of the population must often pay the highest prices for a mediocre education.

At the other end of the academic spectrum, the growing acceptance of the private good argument has created problems for basic research in higher education. Basic research does not yield a quick payback—rather it is the underpinning of applied research. Furthermore, fundamental research is a central function only at research-oriented universities, a small elite of an academic system. This kind of research does, however, produce the scientific basis for applications later, and it is the underpinning for scientific discoveries that, among other things, win Nobel prizes. Basic research is thus the ultimate academic public good, and in an environment that stresses the private good, it inevitably suffers.

The debate has been fueled by philosophical and ideological commitments and the very real financial problems of supporting higher education.

The Knowledge-Based Economy

As many countries move to a postindustrial service-oriented economy, higher education becomes more important as a central underpinning for the knowledge economy of the 21st century (Castells 2000). The role of higher education is essential to this economic and social transformation. Universities serve as essential institutions that integrate information, training, and research. Furthermore, universities are the venue of scientific and technological communication with other countries and academic systems in increasingly interconnected economies. Higher education institutions perform the following roles:

- *Training.* Knowledge economies need skilled personnel at all levels and in growing numbers. Technology requires sophisticated knowledge and, just as important, adaptable skills to deal with rapid technological change. Universities and other postsecondary institutions provide this education and training. Universities are especially crucial for educating the top levels of research personnel and other people needed for the new economy.
- *Research.* Universities provide the basic and applied research necessary for knowledge economies. University-industry linkages and academic involvement in biotechnology and other fields indicate the value and relevance of research. University spin-offs are increasingly significant ways of innovating in the economy.
- *Communications.* Not only are universities involved in commu-