

## **The Race to Globalize Higher Education**

*There can be many winners in this race --provided all parties are clear about their goals and keep them firmly in view.*

### **A presentation by Sheila Embleton**

To begin, I'd like to quote extensively from Peggy Berkowitz's January 2011 editorial in

*University Affairs*, published monthly by the Association of Universities and Colleges of Canada:

The internationalization of higher education is the topic of the day, without a doubt. Groups that in the past focused more on the Canadian experience in higher education are looking outward. I've just had invitations to two conferences on the topic, both in Toronto in January: Being Global 2011, hosted by higher-ed consultant Alex Usher, and The Race to Globalize Higher Ed, sponsored by the Ontario Confederation of University Faculty Associations.

We're being urged to think more deeply about what it means to be engaged in international education. When Canada reaches out with scholarships, fellowships, and partnerships to bring the best students to study in Canada, the relationship doesn't start or end with an award. Here's just one small example: scholars who come to Canada from developing countries benefit from well-equipped labs, excellent teachers and generous funding. But when they go home, as many do, the support ends. At the recent Canadian Association of Graduate Studies conference, Barbara Evans, UBC dean of graduate studies, talked of the need for a small amount of resources for developing-country grad students and postdocs to allow them to stay in touch with other researchers, attend a conference, or help with their research after they return home.

As many have remarked, such as Balbir Sahni, emeritus professor of economics at Concordia University in Montréal and long-term keen advocate of deeper relations between Canada and India, education is increasingly seen as the lynchpin connecting technology and technological innovation, health, trade, economies, social development and, fundamentally, people - generating cultural and cross-cultural understanding, increasing "soft power," especially for middle powers like Canada, and then through all of this, peace and harmony domestically and around the world. So with all that at stake, really a very lofty backdrop, how can one begin to sum up the threads of this conference? As Mark Langer invites us in his conference welcome, this conference was:

intended to reflect on the trend towards the internationalization of higher education and to consider its implications for the well-being of our universities, our students (both domestic and international), and our colleagues here and around the world. It offers the opportunity to step back and look at some fundamental questions and concerns about the race to globalize higher education. Is the globalization of higher education a good idea whose time has come? Or is it a potentially troubling development? And either way, what are the policy areas that we need to develop and implement to ensure good outcomes for universities, students, and faculty, not to mention our larger society?

As we have heard over the course of yesterday and today, there are many drivers in this globalization and internationalization of higher education. Eva Egron-Polak, secretary-general of the International Association of Universities, has ably laid them out for us today, explained them and summed them up, so I don't need to repeat all of that. (Her slides may be found at <http://www.ocufa.on.ca/conferences.conf2011.gk>.) There are many external forces, including: the sense that internationalization will increase the quality of the content of our curricula; that it will build a critical mass of researchers/students in certain disciplines; and, especially, that it can help with the mismatch between the need for spaces and the capacity to provide those spaces.

This latter problem is very complex because, as we know, although many regions of Canada may have an oversupply of spaces (which could be conveniently filled with fee-paying international students), some regions, particularly the GTA, worry about having an undersupply of spaces (and yet still seem keen on recruiting international students, for various reasons, but increasingly because of money). Looked at from the other side, in countries such as India, there is a burgeoning demand for quality higher education, and an inability to create new seats at a fast enough pace, especially new seats at high enough quality. I won't go further into the Indian situation here but will use it just as an example of how demand in one country, namely India, could possibly be met by supply in another, such as Canada, the US, the UK, Australia, etc. to their mutual benefit. This mismatch between oversupply of spaces (or ability to create spaces) versus undersupply of spaces (or inability to create spaces) is very complex and is

further complicated the moment we consider the many other dimensions of this issue, for example, urban/rural, gender, race, socio-economic class, and the interaction between these dimensions. And these issues are complicated both in the regions with the supposed supply of spaces as well as in the countries and regions where people are seeking those spaces.

The landscape of the issues involved was nicely laid out in Ontario Institute for Studies in Education Professor of Higher Education Glen Jones's overview presentation near the beginning of the conference (also available at <http://www.ocufa.on.ca/conferences.conf2011.gk>) and summarized by Eva Egron Polak's summary (see above) at the end.. And in the course of this conference, we have heard a broad range of of both topics and perspectives. We have heard from student leaders and from student researchers and graduate students, from faculty (both full-time and so-called part-time) including librarians, from staff, from union leaders, from academic administrators (both faculty and permanent staff), from civil servants, and from journalists, and not just from Ontario or even Canada. It's out of such multifaceted conversations that the best understanding and introduction of fresh perspectives come. And this is definitely one of the most complex and multifaceted contemporary topics in higher education, around the world in every type of jurisdiction in every stage of development. My sincere congratulations go to OCUFA and particularly all the staff who have worked so hard to make this conference the success that it obviously has been.

There of course are many themes which recurred and could be followed throughout the conference: the very definition of "internationalization" itself, with most speakers opting for Jane Knight's definition, recruitment, raising the profile of the institution or even of the jurisdiction, developing international research collaborations, providing students with global experience, educating the global citizens of tomorrow, and so on. It was remarked that

internationalization is in the strategic plan of almost every institution and that it is now most often the responsibility of a senior leader in the institution. But I would like to ask how real all this is. It's easy to add words into a plan, either one that the senior leadership writes itself or that it stick-handles through a governance process, such as through the senate.

It may, in fact, be easy to get agreement on adding the word "international", because until it's spelled out in detail as to what it entails. It's both easy to agree with and hard to disagree with. But adding words to a plan doesn't make it real, as we all know. To make it real, it has to be decided what international/internationalization actually means, and then a strategy has to be implemented to get there. It's also easy to appoint a person (It was not so a decade ago when I did it at York, the first university in the country to have an associate vice-president dedicated to internationalization.) to a senior role such as associate vice-president, international. But that doesn't make it real, either. In fact, sometimes it almost makes it worse, as the box can be checked, because after all, it's in the plan and somebody's charged with working on it.

I would argue that one of the major obstacles in making it real is that many institutions don't actually know what they want, or why they want it. Many don't even know why international – but it sounds good and everybody is talking about it. As Glen Jones said, "There is nothing innately good about international." Students can have bad experiences abroad, and just because a research collaboration involves people from various countries doesn't make it either a good collaboration or good research. For example, many institutions want to recruit international undergraduate students. Why? Is it the cash? Is it to provide their domestic students with the opportunity to rub shoulders with international students? Is it altruism (for example, to help a developing country that can't provide the same quality of higher education for a promising student)? A recent *Maclean's* article (whose topic is satellite campuses abroad)

suggests that one motivation is, after all, a type of altruism, “selling our values.” Is it because everybody is doing it, so presumably it must be good, so we should do it, too?

If you don't know why you are doing it, it can easily lead to confusion and contradiction. For example, I have seen instances where institutions recruit international undergraduate students for the cash. Fine. I personally don't like that as the main motive, but at least it's clear. But then they succumb to the pressure (perhaps exactly as they stick-handle a high tuition fee through a governance process, whether senate or board) to keep those fees low or charge a high fee but give almost all of it back as waivers or bursaries, so that the net income from those fees is really quite small for the effort (and additional recruitment expenses and services) involved. So the goal is left unrealized.

If it's to rub shoulders with the domestic students, what measures are taken to monitor or ensure that those students do integrate, do rub shoulders? UBC President Toope [I think I need that citation to protect myself in case he would claim he didn't say that.] recognizes that “drawing the various communities present on Canadian campuses into a common medium can be challenging.” And he's mostly referring to the domestic students! So it's all the more challenging for those international students who may not have expectations of longer-term integration into Canadian society. Do the international students integrate in residences, or do they tend to live together (some universities explicitly have international student residences, and then wonder why there isn't as much integration)? Are the students found across a wide variety of programs and courses, or are they all gravitating to a narrow range of disciplines? Are the students from a wide range of nationalities, or are they highly concentrated in just a few? How much is their expertise actually used and encouraged in class, to really take advantage of the additional knowledge and perspective that they bring? If the follow-up

mechanisms aren't there, or it's left to the housing office, to a registrar's office, or to individual faculty, there is no guarantee the goal of rubbing shoulders will be achieved.

In passing, I'd note that these defects in goal-setting are not unique to internationalization. In all our strategic planning exercises, we often don't pay enough attention to the "why" of the goal, being too focused on the "what" of the goal, perhaps in our rush to accountability and quantitative measurable outcomes. So the goal becomes "increase international undergraduates by 500," with the knowledge of why we are doing it being forgotten, which makes it all the more difficult to maneuver through choppy waters [that needs to go back in, as it was part of the meaning - finding alternate strategies to achieve the real goal rather than the pseudo-goal when difficulties are encountered or pressures are exerted along the way. (It's exactly that sort of thing that enables the type of situation alluded to above - wanting to recruit international undergraduate students for the revenue ["why"], setting a target, for example 500 ["what"], and then realizing, as opposition is encountered, that opposition could be lessened by not charging additional fees or not much additional, or even lowering fees, so that the target of 500 can be achieved but with little financial gain, so, in fact, the real goal, the "why" goal, is not realized, but it can be triumphantly reported that the goal was achieved, all because the pseudo-goal has been mistaken for the real goal.)

Another interesting but classic type of problem is when the rhetoric is all there but doesn't match the practical daily reality. For example, many universities have plans and presidents who speak quite eloquently of the value of the study of other languages and cultures, while deans - charged with balancing budgets - are busy cutting exactly those language and culture programs. Most recently we have all read in the academic press about the outcry at SUNY Albany, a university which boasts of its global ambitions even while it is substantially scaling back its language programs. Or a lesser known recent example here in Canada, as the University of

Saskatchewan reportedly prepares to cut its German language program. In short, the goal should be known to all, so that the goal remains, even if the implementation strategies and tactics change as circumstances on the ground change. Otherwise, there is danger that a concrete measurable deliverable (a pseudo-goal) will be substituted for the actual goal and that the deliverable could perhaps be achieved in a way that doesn't achieve it at all, maybe even negates, the original goal, rendering only a hollow success if the target is reached.

We see the same issues around weak execution of strategy all too often, even at the senior levels of leadership, whenever the original goal is forgotten and some quantitative proxy takes its place. But, also, many senior leaders neither come from a background where internationalization is truly cherished and understood nor seem to have acquired adequate understanding on the job. I can illustrate this most easily with my experiences in India, where I have more than once encountered North American or European senior administrators who will confess they have no idea why they are there and only went to India I was writing it from it happening when I'm in India, not when I'm here, so when I actually meet these folks in India, not back here because everybody else had (or they are on an organized tour by a national or international association or government mission) and they wanted to find out what the "buzz" around India is about. One even went so far once as to turn the question back on me by asking me why *I* thought he should be there. (And I'm pleased to report that after a series of questions from me, he had come to the beginnings of an institutional strategy around both India and other international relationships – a networking cocktail reception well spent.) With such lack of understanding of strategic purpose, it's not possible to have a strategic plan for how to get there. I believe this also partly explains what Glen Jones perceptively noted earlier; namely, that there is an odd lack of institutional research around internationalization (in an environment where there is normally an abundance of institutional research about almost anything) and that the

purposes and goals are not well understood by many of our institutional leaders (by which I mean not just presidents, but vice-presidents and deans and their various assistants and associates).

Some of course very much have their strategy mapped out, and here I can use the business schools as an example. Ian Lee from Carleton's Sprott School of Business talked knowledgeably earlier in this conference about internationalization in his business school, and it was clear that his is a school that has a strategy (and several desired outcomes) and is clearly working towards that, undeterred, and with the eyes of those responsible firmly on their original goals. Other business schools seem equally focused – and one must admire them. Those foci vary. For example for York University's Schulich School of Business, extensive work overseas (including the beginnings now of an India campus) has as its goal establishing a global presence (and name recognition/branding) for the school and to be very directly in some markets where it expects to recruit some top students. For some, the opportunities could be different: for example, an opportunity to internationalize one's faculty members, so that upon their return, they teach and act differently (for example, incorporating international cases into their curricula). In some other instances, it's about providing a stable and predictable way for their own domestic students to spend a worthwhile term away, with no academic risk around the quality of the host institution. And for yet others, it will inevitably be about additional revenue.

People have often thought that governments are not clear what they want from international education, and that lack of clarity accounts for the fragmented efforts that many lament. I would argue that governments (in general) are far clearer about their goals (which may be several) but just may have some difficulty in articulating those goals (and their overall strategy) to the wider academic community. Different programs may also serve different goals,

which doesn't necessarily mean that they don't know what they want; it's just a reflection of the fact that in this complex field, there may be many worthy goals to be pursued simultaneously.

Often though, I will admit, the communication is not ideal, and without context-setting, different goals can, regrettably, be seen sometimes as in opposition to one another. For example – and I choose Ontario because that is the jurisdiction with which I am the most familiar – the government has comparatively recently talked about (and provided some cash support for) a) recruiting (primarily undergraduates – and even if not always explicitly stated, the goal here is around generating cash for universities); b) exchanges ( Ontario Universities International, which runs the Ontario-Baden-Württemberg, the Ontario-Rhone-Alpes, the Ontario-Maharashtra-Goa, and the Ontario JiangSu exchange programs); and c) the Ontario International Education Opportunity Awards. The goal of all these is to give our students an experience abroad, regardless of the student's ability to pay. Trillium graduate scholarships are, on the other hand, unabashedly about brain gain, so that excellent students can start to integrate into Canadian society while they are still graduate students. So the goals are clear: generating cash, providing valuable international experience to a subset of our students, and trying to induce the best international graduate students to study here, so that we gain a well-educated, immigrants who will stay in Canada to contribute to our knowledge economy and our prosperity as a nation. The goals are absolutely clear and direct – even if the communication and contextualization before the announcements, especially the most recent around the Trillium scholarships, weren't fully clear to a critical public.

This is an incredibly rich subject. With limited time available at a conference, there are many issues that were not treated in any depth at this conference. For example, there are huge issues (lurking in the background of any international endeavour) with flows of people and

money. (Remember that our federal government generally considers higher education to be an export, and it is often in the portfolio of our trade commissioners abroad.) There are issues of colonialism, of outsourcing, of brain drain, of building domestic capacity, of impairing domestic capacity by over-catering to international interests, and so on. Therefore, we should analyze what we do in terms not only of our own goals and achievement of those goals but also in terms of the impact on the wider environment, such as developing nations, akin to the new push in the business world around “triple bottom line” and “corporate social responsibility”. For example, is it success if we recruit brilliant graduate students in agricultural technology from a developing country, and then few or none return to their homeland -- or even keep up ties with their homeland such that knowledge is transferred? If we claim the expenses of recruiting and educating such students as a credit towards our contribution to foreign aid, and yet they remain in Canada and hence the entire benefit accrues to Canada, how is this moral? At one point in the conference, it was mentioned that faculty members are (sometimes) “nodes of resistance” in the advancement of internationalization because it is exactly these kinds of questions that they ask. My view is that these are the types of questions we should all be asking – and to the extent that such questions are even answerable – and reflecting upon and then answering, even if it’s only to make transparent some of the ambiguities and contradictions in any possible course of action in such complex matters.

As a linguist, I am always very interested in the meanings and nuances of words. This conference was entitled “The Race to Globalize Higher Education”, and – although we could probably all find a lot to say about “globalize” – I want to concentrate on the word “race” here. There are of course many different dictionary definitions, but they all focus on a “race” being “a competition of speed”, with clear implications that there can only be one winner, and that there is actually a finish line/goal line. There is of course also an implication that in order to do well

in a race, one must train, and I would regard conferences such as this one to be part of that training, where we learn from each other, where we learn from each other's experiences without having to repeat the experiment, etc. I also believe that that very learning, cooperatively from each other, rather than in competition with one another, means that this particular race is one in which there can be multiple winners, not a sole winner or even a sole jurisdiction as winner, at the ever-receding finish line, provided we are clear about our goals, and keep those goals (not the pseudo-goals) firmly in view.

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