

Dædalus

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Spring 2024

Advances & Challenges in International Higher Education

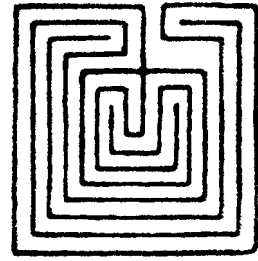


Wendy Fischman, Howard Gardner & William C. Kirby,
guest editors

with Emily J. Levine · Mariët Westermann
Pericles Lewis · Marwan M. Kraïdy · Haiyan Gao
Yijun Gu · Wen-hsin Yeh · Mianheng Jiang
Mette Hjort · Takehiko Kariya · Jamshed Bharucha
Tarun Khanna · Kamal Ahmad · Isak Frumin
Daria Platonova · Michael Ignatieff · Ágota Révész
Marijk C. van der Wende · Carl Gombrich
Amelia Peterson · Olga Zlatkin-Troitschanskaia
Fernando M. Reimers · Richard C. Levin
Teri A. Cannon · Stephen M. Kosslyn
Gökhan Depo · Kate Abramowitz



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Journal of the American Academy of Arts & Sciences

“Advances & Challenges in International Higher Education”

Volume 153, Number 2; Spring 2024

Wendy Fischman, Howard Gardner & William C. Kirby, Guest Editors

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Inside front cover: A model of the campus of Asian University for Women, designed by Moshe Safdie. The campus employs numerous sustainable design strategies, including natural ventilation, daylighting, high-thermal mass construction, hillside stabilization, and mass re-vegetation, which aim to reduce energy consumption, conserve water resources, and position the university as a model of environmental sustainability in the region. © 2019 by Moshe Safdie.

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Design for the hedge labyrinth is by Johan Vredeman de Vries, from *Hortorum viridariumque elegantes & multiplices formae: ad architectonicae artis normam affabre delineatae* (Cologne, 1615).

Dædalus was founded in 1955 and established as a quarterly in 1958. Its namesake was renowned in ancient Greece as an inventor, scientist, and unriddler of riddles. The journal's emblem, a labyrinth seen from above, symbolizes the aspiration of its founders to "lift each of us above his cell in the labyrinth of learning in order that he may see the entire structure as if from above, where each separate part loses its comfortable separateness."

The American Academy of Arts & Sciences, like its journal, brings together distinguished individuals from every field of human endeavor. It was chartered in 1780 as a forum "to cultivate every art and science which may tend to advance the interest, honour, dignity, and happiness of a free, independent, and virtuous people." Now in its third century, the Academy, with its more than five thousand members, continues to provide intellectual leadership to meet the critical challenges facing our world.

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Introduction: International Innovation & American Challenges

William C. Kirby

We often measure the strength of nations by GDP or by the size of armies, navies, and air forces. But it can also be measured in the realm of ideas. Today, the influence of a nation may be gauged by the strength of its universities and the ability to develop and attract talent. The foremost global powers of the last three centuries have all been leaders of scholarship and learning. In the nineteenth century, the modern research university born in Berlin propelled Germany to the forefront of science and global power. In the twentieth century, the strength and allure of American universities were central to an “American century” of world influence. In 2024, nearly every major ranking of global universities shows American institutions still in leading positions. Yet we know this was not the case in 1924, and there is no reason to assume it will be true in 2124. Today, American leadership in higher education – as in other areas – is under great stress, particularly in its public universities, but also in its distinguished private universities, which have become lightning rods in the political and culture wars of the day.

In the United States, forty-three of all fifty states have disinvested in higher education since 2008. Because public universities educate the majority of American students, these states have disinvested in their own future and the nation’s future. The slow-motion defunding of U.S. public higher education also threatens our famous private universities. After all, Harvard and Stanford compete with Berkeley and Michigan (and many other great public universities) for the same faculty, graduate students, and senior administrators. In education as in any business, competition is a key to excellence. On the West Coast, the University of California, Berkeley, is the flagship of what has been the greatest system of public higher education in the world. California would not be the California we know without its signature network of public universities. Today, Berkeley is a bellwether for the future of American universities, nearly brought to its knees by a series of massive budget cuts, a poster child of the enduring unwillingness of the American public to support public higher education.

On the East Coast, our oldest university, Harvard, faces the challenge of its success and arrogance – what Richard Brodhead, former dean of Yale College and former president of Duke University, has called (in the case of Yale) “the inertia of excellence.”¹ Things have been so good, how can you possibly do better? Institutions in that situation are seldom pioneers. And as recent events at Harvard have shown, America’s oldest and most famous university has great difficulty with self-governance. It is run by an opaque and secretive Corporation, itself managed by a controlling Office of the Governing Boards, which I compare to the Japanese Imperial Household in my recent book, *Empires of Ideas*. Things *can* change but change must come in imperceptible increments.² Right now, the Japanese Imperial Household is looking better.

Across the country, the liberal arts, and especially the humanities, appear on the budgetary chopping block as humanities enrollments fall and engagement in STEM fields flourish. As politics increasingly intrude on a college education, long-standing academic freedoms have come under threat, including those of institutional autonomy. I chair the board of the American Council of Learned Societies (ACLS), where President Joy Connolly has put the challenge this way: “The growing challenges to academic freedom across the country demand that organizations like ACLS avoid party politics but boldly advocate on behalf of dialogue and the free exchange of ideas and against censorship.”³

All this may explain why there is a broad and deep anxiety about the future of American higher education within the United States. This is clear in the sizeable cottage industry of books that has emerged to bewail the limits, failings, or demise of American universities. Derek Bok, former president of Harvard University, has written about *Our Underachieving Colleges* and, most recently, “Why Americans Love to Hate Harvard.”⁴ My learned colleague in Harvard’s English Department, Jim Engell, worried about *Saving Higher Education in the Age of Money*. On a similar theme, Duke University’s Charles Clotfelter has authored *Unequal Colleges in the Age of Disparity*, while Holden Thorp, former chancellor of the University of North Carolina, has written of the need to “rebuild the partnership between America and its colleges.”⁵ James Shulman, then of the Mellon Foundation, collaborated with William G. Bowen, former president of Princeton University, to study *The Game of Life* and how collegiate sports in the United States have warped educational values.⁶

To continue this urgent discussion, the American Academy of Arts and Sciences, apart from worrying that the humanities are no longer *The Heart of the Matter*, warned about *The Perils of Complacency* in American science and engineering, and it has linked the future of undergraduate education to the future of America.⁷ Oxford University’s Simon Marginson, invited by Berkeley to give the Clark Kerr Lectures on the Role of Higher Education in Society, concluded that *The Dream is Over*, while others believe that the most important agenda for American education is now *Surpassing Shanghai*. American higher education has become a *Palace*

of *Ashes*, echoes another book, whose subtitle is *China and the Decline of American Higher Education*.⁸ This sampling of works, along with the international accounts provided in this volume of *Dædalus*, help illustrate current tensions around higher education in the United States and abroad.

As Emily J. Levine's first essay in our volume reminds us, American institutions – Johns Hopkins, Chicago, and later Harvard and Berkeley – became serious research innovators in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, by adopting (and improving) German models.⁹ In turn, they transformed America's educational landscape. American universities, public or private, came to lead the world by learning from others. But when was the last time you saw an American university president or dean look abroad for new models for research or teaching? As we will see, several remarkable U.S. institutions have established international campuses, but few American universities look beyond our borders for new ideas. That is a shame. For a central purpose of this volume is to explore a vibrant world of experimentation and innovation, mostly outside the United States, in multiple settings where new colleges and universities are being founded and old ones reimaged. And where newly ambitious national systems (for example, in China and India) are laying the foundations for contending with the United States for leadership in global higher education.

Not all of the case studies here are success stories, for all exist in distinct political ecologies, some of which can prove nourishing, while others destroy ambitious undertakings in the world of universities. Sadly, we are not able to cover every region of the world in one volume, though we wish we had time and space to explore innovation in Latin America and Africa.¹⁰ Perhaps the most direct way to broaden the horizons of American universities is to internationalize their geographic footprints.

That work is described in essays by Mariët Westermann, Marwan M. Kraidy, Pericles Lewis, and Haiyan Gao and Yijun Gu.¹¹ What is clear from these cases on NYU Abu Dhabi, Northwestern University in Qatar, Duke Kunshan University (DKU) in China, and Yale-NUS College in Singapore is that the international offspring of the American parent take on an institutional character of their own, shaped by their international environment. If successful – and these examples have exceeded expectations – we find them not to be “branch campuses,” but vibrant schools connected both to their mother ship and to local institutions. Each develops its own signature curriculum: in the case of DKU, that of “rooted globalism,” a curricular innovation that has proven more successful than the curricular renovation attempted simultaneously at Duke University's home campus in Durham, North Carolina. (I was Duke's senior adviser on China in the establishment of DKU, and I must say it is energizing to create a new curriculum before there are any students or faculty to criticize it.)

It is telling that most of these initiatives, with the signal exception of Yale, come not from the oldest, established universities (such as my own, which is famously risk-averse) but from ambitious, younger institutions seeking in part to make a mark at home by excelling abroad and, in the process, transforming the university in all its settings. It is sad, therefore, that Yale's imaginative partnership with the National University of Singapore should now be coming to an end because of the political and cultural insecurities of that city-state. It is also a bit ironic (though predictable) that a communist Chinese regime would provide higher levels of autonomy for the "special educational zones" of Duke Kunshan University, NYU-Shanghai, and Schwarzman College at Tsinghua University, than a litigious, controlling Singapore proved able to give Yale.

Many of our explorations in this volume are usefully grouped by geography and national strategies. In Asia, no country has seen more revolutionary change in higher education than China. In 1977, Chinese universities were just reopening after the catastrophe of the Cultural Revolution. Today, they are poised for positions of international leadership in research and education, building on one hundred thirty years of institutional experience and several millennia of Chinese veneration of education. Thus, they enjoy matchless investment.

This recent and rapid growth of Chinese universities (now with more than forty million students enrolled) has outpaced the great postwar expansion of higher education in the United States and the growth of mass-enrollment universities in Europe in the 1970s and 1980s. Square acreage of universities in China has grown fivefold in the past two decades. Unlike the American expansion of the G.I. Bill era of the 1950s and the European growth of the 1970s, this educational growth has elements that are knowingly elitist, with the ambition to build more of the best "world-class" universities. Toward this goal, China has mobilized both state and private resources, and it has at hand more of the best human capital (Chinese scholars at home or in the global diaspora) than any university system in the world.

Chinese universities continue to rise in global rankings, and two of them now outrank most of the American "Ivy League" – Tsinghua and Peking. These universities are also investing enormously in research. The most innovative experiment creatively with conceptions of liberal education that have both German and American antecedents. Thus, as Mianheng Jiang notes in his case study of Shanghai-Tech, the new science and engineering university that he leads, the liberal arts make up an "indispensable component" of its interdisciplinary, interactive, and small-class-based undergraduate curriculum.¹²

Yet as Wen-hsin Yeh shows in her essay, leading Chinese universities, all of which were founded on international models, remain underappreciated at home and abroad.¹³ They are sites of ongoing tension between internationalized intel-

lectuals and a nationalistic Communist party-state. Her description of UC Berkeley's engagement with Tsinghua and Peking Universities puts all three institutions in comparative perspective. Yet she ultimately notes how the reform and growth of higher education in China have produced "tremendous results." In my own view, if any country is to challenge the United States for leadership in global higher education, it is China.

Universities in Hong Kong have enjoyed greater autonomy than those on the Chinese mainland, and they have made the most of it, with an expansion of undergraduate education from three to four years to allow for innovative general education programs in the liberal arts and sciences. With this came a remarkable expansion of the place of the arts in public spaces and discourse, within and beyond universities. How the arts have been valued and defended in periods of comparative openness, until 2014, and of political contestation ever since is the subject of Mette Hjort's illuminating essay.¹⁴ As the darkening shadow of a new National Security Law hovers over Hong Kong's eight excellent, well-funded, and differentiated universities, a strategy of integrating the arts with scholarly realms like science and technology shows promise. Hong Kong Baptist University, whose vision is to be "a leading liberal arts university in Asia," has emerged as the leader in the field of "Art-Tech." With financial support of that British-era holdover, the University Grants Committee, there is "hope and inspiration" still in the liberal arts in Hong Kong.¹⁵

Hong Kong's universities also have the advantage of being at once Chinese in cultural terms, and largely English (language) in teaching and research. Thus, the University of Hong Kong can aspire to be "Asia's Global University." By contrast, Japan has taken "a long and wrong road to globalization," according to Takehiko Kariya in his contribution to this volume.¹⁶ In the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, Japan was the educational innovator of East Asia, founding universities on German models and, through Japanese translations of major Western works, providing the texts and vocabulary that would define political and scientific ideas in China and elsewhere. Yet Japan's early and elite success in globalization, stimulated anew in the decades after World War II, would not be sustained. Having caught up to the West as an economic dynamo in the 1980s and having expanded greatly the role of private universities at home, Japan became more insular in educational terms, with fewer students studying abroad and a diminishing need for English language in schools at home.

As Kariya notes, what began as a determination "to find our own path" in the 1980s became viewed as a "lag in globalization" and a "critical situation" for Japanese universities by the 2010s.¹⁷ This, perhaps, is another example of that inertia of excellence: the great domestic success of Japanese universities as sites of social mobility and engines of economic growth has limited their engagement and impact internationally. Is this a bad thing? Not necessarily for Japan. Is it a symptom of the disease of the "linguistic imperialism" of English?¹⁸ Almost surely. Still, the

Japanese experience is perhaps a warning to those Chinese universities currying favor with Xi Jinping's regime that wish to withdraw from global rankings to pursue an "education with Chinese characteristics."

What about India, home to the world's largest number of institutions that call themselves colleges or universities, with half of the world's college-age population and forty-one million enrolled students – yet a gross enrollment ratio a little more than half of China's? In their complementary essays, Jamshed Bharucha and Tarun Khanna provide us with a history and overview of a higher-education sector that is both highly decentralized and heavily regulated, with large state and mostly for-profit private sectors, including extraordinary technical institutes and less distinguished comprehensive universities.¹⁹ Like Hong Kong, India has a British-style University Grants Commission (UGC) that founds, funds, and maintains standards in higher-education institutions. Unlike Hong Kong, India's UGC has been criticized for stifling innovation with what Bharucha calls stultifying generations of regulations. Echoing the Chinese aim to develop world-class universities (and perhaps emulating Germany's Excellence Initiative), an Institutes of Eminence program was started in 2017 to propel ten public and ten private institutions upward in global rankings. Khanna was one of the "empowered experts" charged with making those recommendations.

In 2020, India announced a new National Education Policy (NEP) to "provide universal access to quality education."²⁰ (May India's NEP have a longer history than Lenin's "New Economic Policy," so quickly abandoned in the first years of the Soviet Union.) For all that public investment and political attention, Khanna celebrates a vibrant and emergent "entrepreneurial ecosystem" that directs private philanthropy toward higher education, for example in the Indian School of Business, Ashoka University, Plaksha University, and Krea University – the last three of which place extraordinary emphasis on integrating the liberal arts with science, technology, and business.²¹

Bharucha draws on his experience as founding vice chancellor of Sai University in Chennai, India, to take these themes further. Sai is a "state private university" established by a government act but supported by private philanthropy. Admitting its first undergraduates in 2021, Sai is pioneering the integration of programs in law and technology with the arts and sciences. An important aim of Sai – a university without departments – is to give Indian undergraduates (and their parents) an education that goes beyond their country's obsession with engineering, and to provide an Indian alternative to a broad undergraduate education that is more easily found in Britain or the United States.

Of all the experiments in South Asia or anywhere for that matter, none can match the aspiration and audacity of the Asian University for Women (AUW). Set in Bangladesh's hardscrabble harbor city of Chittagong, this independent, regional

university has the education and empowerment of women leaders as its goal. It pursues this mission through a rigorous education in the liberal arts and sciences. In his essay, founder Kamal Ahmad describes its emancipatory mission for “the most neglected and defenseless populations” of Asia.²² For this, he has recruited the world’s notables to the university’s leadership and boards. Chief among them: Cherie Blair, Laura Bush, and Bangladesh’s powerful Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina. Harvard’s Henry Rosovsky and Jack Meyer provided counsel and support to AUW. Moshe Safdie created the initial designs for an iconic campus, whose redesign and construction are now under the guidance of the Pritzker Prize-winning architect Renzo Piano.

In short, this is a high-profile, high-risk, and high-reward effort to make a regional difference and global impact from a remote setting. Ahmad is candid, however, about AUW’s challenges in funding, the recruitment and retention of faculty, and the logistics of building infrastructure in a setting threatened by global warming. Having visited AUW in its early years, I can attest that if its outrageous ambition (to borrow a phrase from Duke University) bears enduring fruit, then anything is possible in our world of universities.²³

Europe is the ancestral home of the medieval and modern university. It is also a current site of reform, renewal, and political reaction to change. From East Berlin to Ulaanbaatar, the Soviet (or socialist) model of higher education held sway across much of Eurasia for four decades – and more after the end of World War II. Isak Frumin and Daria Platonova reconstruct for us the ideals and structures that underpinned a system that was at once populist (with free and equal accessibility) and elitist (with comparatively small institutions designed for specialized training to serve the state and the planned economy).²⁴ In their analysis, they show that certain elements of the socialist model would have a long afterlife: the idea of universities as drivers of economic growth, that universities should be places of fair access, and that universities should engage in “formative education” of individuals in a larger collective.

It was in rejection of the Soviet model that the Central European University (CEU) in Budapest was founded in 1991, the year the Soviet Union collapsed, by the Hungarian American financier and philanthropist George Soros. Michael Ignatieff, rector emeritus of CEU, places the story of that university and its unceremonious ousting from Hungary, by authoritarian Prime Minister Viktor Orbán, within a larger geopolitical landscape.²⁵ It is a story that goes far beyond Hungary to the global question of how debates on academic freedom have widened the divide between liberal and authoritarian regimes, and also become part of the arsenal of right-wing critiques of Western universities.²⁶ Yet the Hungarian story is riveting in itself, as Ágota Révész recounts in her assessment of how Orbán’s ousting of CEU was accompanied by an effort to find a more compliant political

replacement.²⁷ The substitute came in the form of a Budapest campus for Shanghai's Fudan University – a contentious project apparently put on ice thanks to the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic and, it now seems, by a marked lack of enthusiasm from Fudan.

It is, rather, in the ancient academic bastions of Britain and the Netherlands that Europe today finds several of its premier initiatives in the liberal arts and sciences. Carl Gombrich and Amelia Peterson detail the 2021 launch of The London Interdisciplinary School (LIS), which, like several of our Indian examples, is a publicly regulated private institution that was started by philanthropic entrepreneurs.²⁸ Gombrich, who created Britain's first bachelor's degree program in arts and sciences at University College London in 2010, was recruited to be LIS's founding faculty director. With a curriculum focused on problems and methods, not individual disciplines, and with faculty members as "coaches" and subjects of study as "superconcepts," LIS aims to make its mark on undergraduate and professional learners in a city that is not short of more traditional institutions.

Across the North Sea, in Amsterdam and now also in Germany, one of the most impactful set of institutions discussed in this volume arose, in universities that had long neglected their roots in the arts and sciences. These institutions, called the new "university colleges," ascended within the walls of large research universities as "an innovation [that] was in fact a small renaissance of liberal arts and science education."²⁹ Promoted as an educational reform that would bring the idea of the American liberal arts college back to Europe, these University Colleges grew as residential honors colleges with small-group instruction, yet with the resources of large universities at their disposal. Marijk C. van der Wende tells how she and other associates built Amsterdam University College to offer (and I can confirm this, having served on its advisory board) a rigorous, international, interdisciplinary, and *affordable* college of arts and sciences – in which the sciences are equal partners.³⁰ Too bad one must go abroad to see how this "American" model might work at home.

Today, educational innovation is not bound by geography. Our final set of essays describes initiatives and institutions that either are or should be borderless. In her contribution, "Global Education without Walls: A Multidisciplinary Investigation of University Learning in Online Environments across Disciplines," Olga Zlatkin-Troitschanskaia shares the research of the PLATO project, which involves more than twenty universities in Europe, North America, and Asia, studies the skills needed by students to intelligently navigate the internet, and discusses how institutions need to reimagine curriculum and instruction in the age of ChatGPT.³¹

Fernando M. Reimers explores global approaches to climate change and sustainability in his essay.³² During an age in which the mission of research universities is not simply to advance knowledge (as if this were simple), but to "solve"

the largest problems facing humanity, what are the responsibilities, roles, and ideal strategies of institutions of higher education? In teaching about climate change, who should be taught, what should they be taught, and how should they be taught? To answer these questions, Reimers explores the alternatives of a mandatory course in Italy; the “organic incorporation” of climate change into classes at the University of Tasmania in Australia; and the intentional embedding of climate studies across the curriculum, with examples from Mexico and Brazil.³³ How one measures success in this endeavor will be a long-term project: I recall being taught in college about the coming disaster of climate change fifty years ago.

Richard C. Levin is not only the president emeritus of Yale and cofounder of Yale-NUS College, he also served as CEO of Coursera, the groundbreaking online educational platform that offers some four thousand courses to more than one hundred million registered learners. Like so many “next big things” in higher education (see ChatGPT), the massive open online courses pioneered by Coursera did *not* change everything. But they did change and are changing a lot. (How else could I have half a million learners in my China course on edX? Without that experience, how could I also be confident in teaching all my students online during COVID-19?) Levin offers a learned and experienced analysis of the present and future impact of online education on higher education globally to show that high-quality education *can* be low cost.³⁴

Conceived as a Silicon Valley startup, Minerva University is another child of the internet age. As noted by Teri A. Cannon and Stephen M. Kosslyn in their essay, it is “the intentional university.”³⁵ (How many, I wonder, were founded by chance?) All classes are taught online synchronously, even though all students live in residence. Like so many of the institutions studied in this volume, Minerva’s mission is to redefine a liberal arts education for the twenty-first century. It does so through an emphasis on “practical knowledge,” active learning, and exposure to the wider world. Cannon and Kosslyn show that Minerva, too, aims to educate people from different social backgrounds to solve problems, not just study disciplines; to develop a global perspective; and to do all this while keeping costs low. Its students will acquire the skills to be “leaders, creators, problem-solvers, and innovators in the twenty-first century” and it is off to a terrific start since its conception in 2012.³⁶ Over one decade later, it now has a graduation rate of 90 percent. Whereas only 15 percent of its graduates immediately go on to graduate study (the number at Amsterdam University College is more like 85 percent), an equal number start companies. This is an education in the liberal arts and sciences for the Silicon Valley ecosystem – and those who would emulate it.

How, at the end of the day, do we evaluate the rich menu of opportunities and warnings that are to be found in the contributions to this volume? One answer, according to Gökhan Depo’s eviscerating essay on the role of rankings, is *not* to rely on notorious league tables: the Times Higher Education World University

Rankings (THE), the QS World University Rankings (QS), or the Academic Ranking of World Universities (ARWU) – let alone those from *U.S. News & World Report*, a failing magazine that was reincarnated as a rankings machine.³⁷ Yet rankings do show, however imperfectly, the shifting tectonic plates of global leadership in higher education. Had rankings such as those read today by deans and presidents around the world existed a century ago, German universities would still have pride of place. Harvard University, which ranks very well at present, would not have been in the top ten, perhaps not even the top twenty. Today, at least according to QS's portfolio, Peking University and Tsinghua University outperform every German university. Times change.

Ranking those who would reimagine or renew education, in a volume concentrated on the liberal arts and sciences, is an exercise for the future. Still, what is remarkable to me in reviewing these case studies is how strong the commitment remains to an education rooted in the arts and sciences. This devotion – set out by Wilhelm von Humboldt in the University of Berlin, the first modern research university – has endured over the past two centuries. Throughout this period, it became a foundation of American undergraduate education and now enjoys a moment of flourishing exploration (and, in places, resistance) around the world.

To return to the issues raised at the outset of this introduction: what does any of this mean for the United States and for readers of a volume published by the American Academy of Arts and Sciences? In my view, American leadership in global higher education, so clear a generation ago, exists at present *faute de mieux*, for lack of a clear competitor. But there will be alternatives. Look at China. Look at India. Look at Bangladesh! Look at Amsterdam and London. Look at the joint-venture universities in East Asia and the Middle East, which are as much the products of their geographic hosts as of their home campuses.

Leadership in global higher education (as in any realm) is a comparative judgment. Retaining leadership is America's challenge. The United States is finally reinvesting in its physical infrastructure but it now needs to reinvest in its intellectual infrastructure, particularly in its public universities, which are the academic equivalent of unrepaired roads, rusty rails, and failing bridges. These institutions educate nearly 80 percent of American students, and they have the dual and difficult responsibility of being both the major portal for first-generation American students and welcoming international talent to our shores. If the essays in this volume are any indication, American colleges and universities need to reconceive how an imaginative education in the liberal arts and sciences can be extended to new generations of students. I urge my colleagues in higher education to study what is happening elsewhere in the world.

EDITORS' NOTE

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This issue of *Dædalus* provided the guest editors the opportunity to synthesize their knowledge of the history of higher education in many places with their expertise on the current educational scene in the United States. All of us working on these issues today owe an enormous debt to Philip Altbach, founder and long-term director of the Center for International Higher Education at Boston College. Directly or not, we are all his students.

We hope this issue will give rise to more discussion about innovation in higher education around the world. In this spirit, we have established a forthcoming website, TheWorldOfHigherEducation.squarespace.com, so that other individuals may contribute information about other programs, institutions, and lines of work and inquiry. We hope that readers will consider submitting comments or essays so that we may build on the ideas presented in these pages.

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Research & Teaching: Lasting Union or House Divided?

Emily J. Levine

As a design innovation, the modern university is an institution that unites the advancement of knowledge through research with its dissemination through teaching. Its inception in Germany in the first decade of the nineteenth century inspired an American adaptation that merged the German version with the English undergraduate college to produce a new bundle that would be emulated the world over. The historical view reveals cycles of sustaining innovation in which academic entrepreneurs supplemented the research-teaching synthesis with institutions devoted to one task or the other. Despite these disruptive efforts and continuing evidence of inefficiency, however, the original institutional hybrid remains the dominant model. This essay argues that the university's persistence is best understood as fulfilling a deeper need in American political culture.

“The existence of the university . . . is a metaphysical necessity.”

—Jacob Burckhardt¹

At a meeting of the Association of American Universities in 1906, David Starr Jordan, president of the still-young Stanford University, expressed reservations about the excessive emphasis on teaching at his own institution and others. In response to Jordan’s comments, from the elite Northeast schools to the Midwest, president after president rose to criticize the inefficiencies of the American higher-education system: namely, the best researchers were not the best instructors, instructors weren’t afforded the time to pursue research, and neither priority was adequately fulfilled. Yet despite their apparent frustration, no one proposed divorcing research and teaching. Quite the contrary: they advocated passionately to stay the course toward the aspirational union.

Founded in 1810 in Berlin, the modern research university combined the dissemination of knowledge through teaching with its advancement through research. This design innovation inspired an American adaptation that merged the German version with the English undergraduate college to produce a hybrid that would be emulated the world over – including most recently in China, as the work

of William Kirby and others in this volume shows.² But it was never preordained that elite American higher education would end up this way. In fact, just a few decades after the first American universities were founded, there were simultaneous cries that they were entrenched *and* inefficient – criticisms that have persisted largely unabated to this day.³

The historical view reveals cycles of discontent in which institutional innovations both within and outside the university aimed to address the schools' inefficiencies, often by devoting themselves exclusively to one task or the other – teaching or research. Despite the critics and opposition, the combination of research and teaching continues as the dominant organizing principle, which has ensured that these distinct tasks remain awkwardly conjoined while their corresponding value systems, functions, and needs are not easily reconciled. It is understandable, then, that a disruptor would presume that the university is like a narrow-gauge railroad: an antiquated design that an earlier era standardized for reasons that no longer apply, which we cannot escape due to what historical sociologists call “path dependence.”⁴ However, no sooner are these tasks pulled asunder, whether by research institutes or coding bootcamps, do innovators – sometimes even the very same ones – recombine the tasks anew. In this essay, I argue that the long history of the university is one of sustaining innovation through various combinatorial innovations. Moreover, I suggest that the institutional design of the university may best be understood not as obsolete technology, but rather as embodying a deeper cultural need or “Chesterton's fence,” of which we may not be entirely aware.⁵

The university model that combined the dissemination and the advancement of knowledge was best articulated by German linguist, diplomat, and education civil servant Wilhelm von Humboldt. Humboldt's “academic revolution” transformed the extra-institutional scholarly world of the previous era into a state-based “great new institution . . . destined to make history in Germany.”⁶ In Humboldt's formulation, the modern university became a place that was awarded *Einsamkeit* (freedom from distraction) for *Wissenschaft* (science and scholarship). As Humboldt himself acknowledged, this was a departure from the “lower levels of education [that] present closed and settled bodies of knowledge”; but “at the higher level,” Humboldt explained, “both teacher and student have their justification in the common pursuit of knowledge.”⁷

Among the many paradoxes in this original conceptualization, referred to by historians as the “Humboldt ideal,” was the tension between research and teaching.⁸ Historian Sylvia Paletschek has shown how this ideal was, in fact, fashioned over a century later when the university's monopoly over research was threatened.⁹ Building on this interpretation, I have presented this arrangement as more transactional, better viewed as a series of compromises than a lofty ideal. The re-

sult was the first academic social contract: scholars were afforded autonomy and patronage to pursue research in exchange for providing services to the state, usually, but not always, in the form of teaching.¹⁰

In Humboldt's urtext, the university straddles the world of ideas and that of institutions. The Hegelian synthesis of research and teaching reflected this duality, an internal contradiction that was heightened in its ambivalent union in America. The antebellum American colleges combined elements of British collegiate traditions with their near exclusive focus on received knowledge, capped by a moral philosophy course. To be sure, a handful of geologists and botanists laid the foundation for university-based science, but as theologian John Henry Newman observed, *other* institutions, including royal academies and member societies, were charged with knowledge advancement. Newman offered blunt if tautological reasoning: "If its object were scientific and philosophical discovery, I do not see why a University should have students."¹¹

Yet over the course of the nineteenth century, nearly ten thousand American students helped forge this connection between research and teaching that would distinguish the university from its institutional antecedents. The American sojourners, as is well known, departed for German universities interested in bolstering their studies in theology, medicine, and chemistry, and returned with books, scientific instruments, and new credentials. Many aspired to be not only leaders in their discipline, but also organizers of knowledge. Among the most common alma maters of American university presidents in this era were Leipzig and Göttingen, underscoring how transatlantic exchange powered the motor of institutional innovation.

One such American returnee from Germany, Daniel Coit Gilman became in 1876 the founding president of the Johns Hopkins University. Admirers later anointed Hopkins "Göttingen at Baltimore," suggesting a straightforward "influence" of the German model in America that belies a messier story of institutional diffusion through adaptation that I have elsewhere called competitive emulation.¹² In fact, Gilman hybridized elements of the German model with the needs of his local constituents and new patrons. The institutional bricolage, the modern research university, with its emphasis on both research and teaching, turned out to be what historian Hugh Hawkins once called "both its glory and its shame."¹³

Gilman's hybrid rapidly ascended as a model for further emulation both among early adopters in America, notably Stanford University (1885) and University of Chicago (1890), as well as further afield. American academic entrepreneurs may have overemphasized their special relationship with Germany to foster their prestige and political centrality. The French, British, and Japanese were also embroiled in these mimetic entanglements that produced privately funded scientific institutes in Nice, the nonsectarian UCL in London, and medical and juridical advancements in Meiji-era Tokyo. As historian Richard Evans has written, echoing

Edward Shills's modernization theory, every self-respectful state soon needed a university.¹⁴

Due largely to the reputation of Johns Hopkins, America now had a formidable higher-education system with which the German incumbent needed to contend. As a result, by around 1900, knowledge exchange accelerated in the other direction. Hopkins emerged as a symbol of both American global aspirations in research and the threat that ambition posed to the project of learning for its own sake. Harvard philosopher William James worried in 1903 about a PhD octopus. With due respect to Mr. James, the apt metaphor was not the octopus, but the centaur: with the body of a bachelor's degree and the head of a doctorate, it would devour academia.

Writing at the height of massification, sociologists Christopher Jencks and David Riesman bemoaned how the university killed the college, a trope that endures today.¹⁵ But the story is more complicated. Gilman overcame his initial lack of enthusiasm for undergraduates to support their education, resulting in a university that upheld the holistic mission among its faculty. The archives reveal that the "first generation" of Hopkins faculty cared deeply about teaching and shaped the now standard seminar and methods for undergraduate education.¹⁶ Such first-rate scholars as the astronomer Simon Newcomb even contributed to pedagogy of the "lower level" secondary schools. Anticipating a key feature of organizational theory, Gilman drew on the ambiguity of the university's dual mission and made both teaching and research feel like the favored one.

That is not to say that it was always a happy marriage. The rising star and physicist Henry Rowland, whom Gilman had lured from Rensselaer Polytechnic Institute, ignored students and, according to education scholar Charles C. Bishop, had to be compelled to lecture.¹⁷ Gilman accepted that some professors simply weren't cut out to teach but could be "very capable of giving aid to those who are already strong enough to walk alone," and abetted an internal separation that disconnected the graduate from the undergraduate faculty.¹⁸

Enthusiasm for this new institutional arrangement persisted in the last decade of the nineteenth century, then, alongside increasing skepticism about its fit for America. Historian Roger Geiger describes how this decade was characterized by experimentation to alleviate the tensions that uniting research and teaching generated, experimentation that I would emphasize was largely internal. In 1889, Harvard's long-serving president Charles Eliot introduced the concept of a sabbatical as a recruiting strategy while President Charles Van Hise created research professorships to retain talent at the University of Wisconsin in Madison. It was precisely these uneven perks that prompted Jordan to caution against the advent of an academic caste system.

The tensions of two different value systems began to show: a vertical one that offered rewards to the most exceptional researchers, and a horizontal one that

was focused on universal uplift. When the European-born physiologist Jacques Loeb departed Pennsylvania's Bryn Mawr College for the University of Chicago, he reflected on his colleagues' resentment that he should receive full pay for less teaching. "In a democracy today, there is as yet no room . . . for pure research."¹⁹ The fate of the dualistic professor seemed tied to a deep tension in American political culture between elitism and democracy, a relationship that university presidents were increasingly hard-pressed to insist was "mutually helpful."²⁰

The arrival of a third party – private money for research – sparked new fears and prospects for this delicate marriage. Despite internal improvements, by the first decade of the twentieth century, the modern university hadn't fully reconciled the competing goals of the specialization required for scholarship and the experience of student learning. On the eve of the one hundredth anniversary of the University of Berlin, it seemed that Humboldt's ur-institution that unified research and teaching was doomed. In America, pressures and opportunities of cost, productivity, and transatlantic competition led to the first of over a dozen institutions bearing Andrew Carnegie's name, the Carnegie Institution of Washington, D.C., resulting in a hybridization of research and teaching that left the university's status intact. Responding to these challenges in Germany, Kaiser Wilhelm II facilitated the creation of the Kaiser Wilhelm Society in the winter of 1910–1911. By the beginning of World War II, the Society would establish twenty-four Kaiser Wilhelm Institutes (now known as the Max Planck Institutes), extra-university institutions that emphasized scientific research and involved no traditional instruction. By divorcing research from teaching, this innovation led to the "dual-pillar system," a modern university that emphasized teaching and separate extra-university institutes dedicated to basic research.²¹

Among an emerging cadre of American philanthropists, Andrew Carnegie was unique insofar as he both theorized about the role of private money in civil society, most famously in his concept of the "gospel of wealth," as well as made good on his ideas. In 1901, he retired from business and endowed his first institution, the Carnegie Institution of Washington (CIW), with \$10 million (or about \$367 million today).²² The philanthropist had thus far given money to endow student scholarships in Scotland, but as Arthur James Balfour, who was soon to be prime minister of the United Kingdom, advised Carnegie, "We ought to regard our universities not merely as places where the best kind of knowledge already attained is imparted, but as places where . . . the world's knowledge may be augmented."²³

Carnegie's prioritization of research over teaching was evident to leading American educational reformers, but how it would be organized and who would control it remained an open question. One group wished for a supra-institutional research organization while another hoped for a new national university to improve America's "inferior position" in international science.²⁴ At the first CIW

board meeting in January 1902 with Gilman, who was freshly retired from Hopkins and endowed as CIW's first president, Carnegie dispelled this notion. He would not establish a national university that "might tend to weaken existing institutions," rather he would "discover the exceptional man" and "promote original research."²⁵

Civil engineer and physicist Robert S. Woodward, who replaced Gilman as director within a year, was less agnostic. Having once called the CIW "a university without students," in an ironic reversal of Newman's ideal, Woodward betrayed a desire to disrupt the university's monopoly over research. He directed the CIW to build large research departments that drew on existing government scientific bureaus, including the Geological Survey and the Department of Agriculture, and lured professors-cum-grantees with the reprieve from teaching. President Ira Remsen, who succeeded Gilman at Hopkins, responded that Woodward was poaching his scientists. It seems unlikely that this strategy ultimately would have felled the university. As Geiger has rightly observed, Woodward's impact was limited by the government's niche scientific fields and the "exceptional" investigators who (in the natural sciences at least) were already firmly established in the university.²⁶ Despite Woodward's ambition to establish a scientific center in Washington, D.C., independent from and competitive with the university, the CIW remained dependent on the university network. The result was a hybrid extra-university institution that administered grants to autonomous individuals competing for funding, but did not offer classes or enroll students, leaving the pre-existing university system – and its prestige – intact.

Word of Carnegie's gospel spread fast. He was both lauded and caricatured in the British press, and translators quickly interpreted his works into German. German higher-education leadership was enchanted but skeptical since they enjoyed a different relationship between their state and education. The formidable minister responsible for higher education, Friedrich Althoff, together with top advisor and theologian Adolf von Harnack, agonized about what this growth of American higher-education philanthropy meant for "Germany's international standing in research" (*Weltgeltung deutscher Wissenschaft*).²⁷ The Prussian archives reveal endless anxious reports, briefs to the Kaiser, and the call for an office on Ministerial Academic Information (1904), all focused on higher-education developments abroad. The pattern was clear: from Washington to Paris, private money was altering the rules of the game.

Harnack's ambitious 1909 memo, which the Kaiser read with great interest, emphasized the dire state of German science and the threat it posed to the state and industry. The rapid advancement of the natural sciences meant the work could not be done by a single university professor and required funding beyond what universities could provide. Through a strategy styled the "Harnack Principle,"

institutes replete with assistants, funds, and equipment were awarded to “the personalities of the leading scholars,” who, in turn, unburdened by teaching, were free to pursue their research.²⁸ Notwithstanding fears of what Germans called “clique and capital,” the threat of international competition drove them to create a private-public partnership through the Kaiser Wilhelm Institutes to ensure their preeminence in research.²⁹ But Harnack – unlike Woodward – took pains to show that Humboldt had already envisioned supplemental research institutions in his original formulation. In other words, Harnack hybridized the Humboldtian university, with its twin tasks of research and teaching, with a pure research institution that had the potential to undermine it.

With World War I underway and a boycott of German science afoot, opportunities arose for would-be academic entrepreneurs to fill the vacuum. In the United Kingdom, Cambridge and Oxford finally began to offer the German PhD, having abandoned their previously entrenched idealism to the enticement of capturing foreign credential-seeking students. At the same time, in the United States, a window opened for those American reformers who wanted to devote more attention to one-on-one instruction that they felt had been overshadowed by the emphasis on credentials, specialization, and research. This camp had been represented at the turn of the century at Harvard by Irving Babbitt and Charles Norton, who railed against Eliot’s free-elective system and professionalization. By the 1920s, this counterreformation assumed full force in the revival of the small college, soon called the “liberal arts,” a term that over the course of the next three decades came to mean both a general educational curriculum that emphasized breadth and a pursuit that was centered on learning for its own sake.³⁰ Influenced by such figures as philosopher John Dewey, education entrepreneurs founded liberal arts colleges, including Bennington (1924) and Sarah Lawrence College (1926). Their strategy was to prioritize the neglected task of teaching.³¹

The scrappy start-up Black Mountain College, established in 1933, offers a good example of the possibilities and limits of challenging the dominant organizational paradigm. The college was founded by a classicist and education reformer by the name of John Andrew Rice, who was summarily dismissed by the president of Rollins College after a tense curriculum debate. Though his name would eventually be cleared by the American Association of University Professors, Rice did what any scorned academic innovator would do – he founded his own college. Rice took with him several colleagues, who resigned in protest, and with minimum underwriting and no trustees (or endowment), this motley crew set off for the Blue Ridge Mountains in North Carolina, the site for their venture.

Though Rice would make ample use of German and German-Jewish refugee scholars, the Black Mountaineers aspired to establish an educational institution that evaded the hierarchy and excessive focus on research embodied in the Ger-

man model. Dewey, on whose educational ideals of “mutual consultation and voluntary agreement” the college was based, called the experiment “a living example of democracy in action.”³² In the realm of curriculum, German refugee painter and art educator Josef Albers – who joined immediately on arriving to the states, communicating in English with the help of his wife and artist Anni Albers – helped Rice integrate democratic values into a new required drawing course (the only other required course was Rice’s own on Plato). Albers devised a version of his Bauhaus preliminary course that was designed to break the bad habits of overly instructed students. Aspiring to “make open the eyes” of his students, Albers had the students make their own paintbrushes from chewed sticks and reconnect with the fundamentals of art as experience.³³

The college became the manifestation of opposition to mainstream American academia. With its bare-bones endowment and loose administrative structure, which was held entirely in the hands of the faculty and possessed the action of a Quaker meeting, their experiment emphasized intellectual and aesthetic freedom to an extent that was unparalleled in American academia. But, perhaps for the same reason, it also couldn’t last. In 1957, after a little more than a decade, the storied college closed, leaving only a mythical legacy that continues to this day.

If Black Mountain College represented a separation of the research-teaching hybrid that prioritized teaching, the Institute for Advanced Study (IAS), which education reformer Abraham Flexner announced in 1930 and opened in the spring of 1933, furthered that separation but with an eye toward research. Flexner’s vision originated in the early 1920s, alongside several proposals for research-centric institutions that would avoid the influence of both industry and universities. Working for the Rockefeller Foundation’s General Education Board, Flexner was dissatisfied with the direction that the American university had taken. He took aim at Chicago and Hopkins, which he argued had “yielded to the pressures of undergraduate education to an extent which stultified the graduate school,” and advocated for Hopkins to divest itself of its undergraduate college.³⁴ Although his plan attracted the support of Hopkins president Frank J. Goodnow, not everyone at Hopkins looked upon it favorably and, short on money and faculty approval, Flexner’s plan collapsed. Flexner went on to criticize the American university as an “educational department store containing a kindergarten at one end and Nobel Prize winners . . . at the other.”³⁵

In a joke too good to be true, a literal department-store heiress would be Flexner’s savior. Caroline Bamberger Fuld and her brother Louis Bamberger had just sold their department store to Macy & Co. two weeks before the crash for some \$25 million. Seeking to identify “the most beneficial use to which their fortunes could be put,” and inspired by their father’s interest in medicine, they sent their representatives to seek advice from Flexner. Flexner persuaded them that “progress might be greatly assisted by the outright creation of a school or institute of

higher learning, a university in the post-graduate sense of the word . . . a free society of scholars.”³⁶

Flexner was still drawn to the idea of research institutes, but the example of Germany suggested that he should proceed carefully. Although German education entrepreneur Althoff had “made it a point to relate research institutes to universities,” Flexner knew that the development of the Kaiser Wilhelm Institutes had drained talent from the universities. Nonetheless, Flexner held onto the notion that his institute would avoid this dilemma by being “neither a current university, struggling with diverse tasks and many students, nor a research institute, devoted solely to the solution of problems. It may be pictured as a wedge inserted between the two.”³⁷

Today, the IAS continues to house exceptional research professors, albeit generally as a crowning achievement at the end of one’s career or for a short sabbatical leave. As such, it is not a scalable model for reform. In this way, neither Black Mountain College nor IAS ultimately could undermine the system. Despite these innovations, the university that unites research and teaching persists, a development that has consequences, largely for the undervalued side of the house: teaching.

Unearthing the origins of the modern university’s design, alongside parallel criticisms of it, offers lessons for the university’s evolution. First, the historical perspective reveals why organizational choices are so challenging to assess. In the short term, Germany appears to have chosen well. The Kaiser Wilhelm Institutes certainly created conditions – with more funding, plentiful staff, and no teaching – that enabled scientific productivity and an impact that cannot be overstated. Nearly all the Nobel Prizes given to Germans in chemistry, physics, and medicine between 1901 and 1944 would go to Kaiser Wilhelm Institutes’ affiliates, and, even more remarkably, their scientists won approximately one in seven of all Nobel Prizes in the sciences.³⁸

Over time, however, decisions can appear to have different outcomes. The Germans’ most consequential long-term organizational choice was to relieve its scientists from teaching to pursue pure research. In 1910, the University of Berlin’s rector struggled to claim that the university still embodied the “unity of knowledge,” much as universities today face the threat of such new sources of knowledge as Google Research and other corporate research labs.³⁹ Then and now, time, status, and salary differences threaten to make professors second-class citizens and demote their laboratories, leading to an exodus of research from the university. Nevertheless, as current research has shown, the Kaiser Wilhelm Institutes did not dismantle the German university system, as the University of Berlin rector feared. Nor have they reduced German universities’ research output. One study has shown that countries with strong universities and no external research

institutes (even smaller ones like Belgium) fare better in terms of research productivity.⁴⁰ Another study has demonstrated that despite Germany's dual-pillar system, the university nevertheless produced a disproportionate share of research in recent years.⁴¹ This storied marriage of research and teaching suggests an even greater institutional persistence: despite funding cuts and undervaluing of its research capacity, hybrids that unite research and teaching have prevailed as producers of research.

Over the last decade, challenges that began as external oppositions threatening to upend the research university have returned to join the incumbent universities in partnership. When "MOOC mania" was christened by *The New York Times* in 2012, the hype suggested that the end of the university was nigh.⁴² Many commentators assumed that MOOCs would behave like disruptive innovations, luring students away from universities with low-cost online courses, but as I have written elsewhere with Matthew Rascoff, who leads Digital Education at Stanford, twelve years later, hundreds of institutions around the world, from Duke and the University of Michigan to top Latin American institutions, are using online learning to enhance learning opportunities for their own communities and aims.⁴³ And Minerva University, an online elite university that many originally presented as disruptive, has given way to a softer position, partnering with the universities it once hoped to displace.⁴⁴ None of the recent innovators who attempted to unbundle the university by excising teaching have fulfilled their revolutionary prophecies.

There is perhaps no better indication of the institutional persistence of the research university than the fact that the Max Planck Institutes, the institutional heirs of the Kaiser Wilhelm Institutes, have now begun to create new graduate programs like CS@maxplanck, a doctoral program for computer science – in effect, rebundling research and teaching. The Arc Institute, a research organization founded in 2021 that cited the Max Planck Institutes as a model, declared that it would overcome the inefficiencies of the university but nonetheless partner with Stanford University; the University of California, Berkeley; and the University of California, San Francisco. Meanwhile, latter-day Black Mountaineers including Duke Kunshan University, University College Freiburg, and Bard College Berlin, which claim to recenter undergraduate teaching and de-emphasize research, nevertheless recruit top-tier doctoral researcher faculty worldwide.

The process of integrating external challenges to the core institutional design of the university into incumbent institutions or hybrid ventures highlights its unique institutional evolution. The history suggests that compelling solutions to our current problems will not result from a great unbundling. Rather, we can expect a layering process of hybrid solutions combining and recombining themselves anew to introduce novelty to a rigid system in which isomorphism is the norm.

Yet those who claim the research-teaching system is insufficient are not entirely incorrect. In fact, the position of research and teaching at the root of the univer-

sity is the source of many pressing problems facing higher education today. One late-nineteenth-century solution was to rely on graduate fellows more heavily for support. A critic at the time dubbed this a “sweating system,” and the precarious economics of simultaneously delivering high-quality teaching and research have only worsened.⁴⁵ We should mitigate the consequences of maintaining the hybrid and work to address the resulting costs, inefficiencies, and labor injustices.

To support the research-teaching synthesis, some have relied on the defense that undergraduates learn by participating in research. There is rather another factor at work: organizations persist not because they are efficient, but because they support a myth that is necessary to maintain their legitimacy. The preceding narrative demonstrates that the university reconciles a deep American tension between populism and elitism. The “exceptional man” doesn’t sit easily with American democracy, yet Americans have consistently worried about the political, intellectual, and international consequences of not cultivating their talents. In this way, the research-teaching synthesis reconciles the dual mission to support the best and the brightest with the duty of universal uplift. We might reject this relationship as a corrupt myth, complicit in existing power structures. Yet as long as those who run institutions aspire both to produce research and to teach, we can maintain the hope that the values of community and individualism can be reconciled. In our era, intelligent education reformers like those in this volume are right to think not only about dismantling but how to make the union more than merely symbolic.

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The International University in an Age of Deglobalization

Mariët Westermann

Over the past four decades, American universities and colleges have internationalized so significantly that many are now global knowledge institutions. After a brief survey and categorization of different approaches to internationalization (from enhanced study abroad partnerships to full degree-granting campuses of U.S.-based institutions abroad), the essay presents a case study of NYU Abu Dhabi, which the author helped create as its first provost and later led as its vice chancellor. The analysis focuses on the rationale, challenges, and rewards for U.S. universities to engage seriously abroad, and argues that in the face of deglobalizing headwinds, universities need to strengthen, not attenuate, their efforts to promote research across borders and offer vigorous intercultural education.

Even in today's "slowbalizing" moment, research and education cannot afford to be merely local. In our connected world, local trouble spells global trouble and global pathologies cause local headaches, from pandemics and climate disasters to rampant inequality and contemporary warfare. There are no sound solutions without international solidarity and vigorous knowledge exchange. As governments seek to constrain cross-border flows of data, intellectual property, and people, it is incumbent on our universities to maintain collaboration and dialogue among curious and talented people around the world. This traditional stance of universities has made them essential to knowledge production and tolerance for centuries.¹

The seemingly ungovernable forces of our time present big problems for universities, but equally big opportunities to teach, research, and debate them. Seizing on their mission, universities can demonstrate new relevance and serve as bulwarks of civil interactions across borders.

Universities are among the most enduring institutions in history.² Just four years ago, they weathered the challenges of COVID-19 with remarkable agility, resilience, and capacity for innovation to serve the world's students and research needs. Now, they need to strengthen the research and teaching across borders that have been their modern hallmark, so that they may solve problems that affect all living things. In an age when divisive action and rhetoric offer quick dividends,

universities can also shine a bright light on the beauty of the earth and on the *good things* that humans can do if they put their best minds and fellow-feeling to work.

In this essay, I briefly consider the rise of the global university since the 1980s. I then take a closer look at NYU Abu Dhabi, an institution I helped develop in its early days and have led as vice chancellor since 2019. These sections focus on the rationale, challenges, and rewards for U.S. universities to engage seriously abroad. Last, I indicate how, faced with deglobalizing headwinds, universities need to strengthen, not attenuate, the cosmopolitan character of their offerings. The regionalization of the day need not be at odds with the horizon-expanding mission that is core to every university.

The specter of deglobalization is a challenge for ambitious universities. Over the past four decades, most American institutions of higher education developed or intensified international programs as the Iron Curtain was rent asunder, air travel became cheap, and the internet and social media brought the wonders and worries of the world into every laptop and smartphone. Students clamored to study abroad, and faculty demanded partnerships to grow their intellectual communities, but few universities made global extension truly central to their strategies.

Approaches to internationalization ranged widely. Many universities established research partnerships abroad, from individual labs to broader research centers.³ Several institutions built proprietary sites for study abroad, and colleges that scaled up their study abroad programs saw a rise in student applications, satisfaction, fellowship competitions, and ratings.⁴

More ambitious colleges and universities set up degree-granting programs abroad. Bard College in upstate New York developed a dazzling array of study abroad opportunities, with a big appetite for experimentation. When it comes to international education, Bard is open to just about *anything*, even when fraught with risk. Its partnership with Saint Petersburg State University to create Smolny College (1994), a liberal arts college institution, ended unhappily in 2021, when the office of the Russian Prosecutor-General declared the institution “undesirable” as it “threatens the constitutional order and security of the Russian Federation.”⁵

Several U.S. universities jumped at the chance to create degree programs at Education City, an umbrella campus for smaller campuses, located in Doha, Qatar, with considerable success. In Education City, students can earn degrees in art and design from Virginia Commonwealth University (it established its campus there in 1998), an MD from Weill Cornell Medicine (launched in 2001), several engineering degrees from Texas A&M (2003), bachelor’s degrees in business, biology, and computer science from Carnegie Mellon University (2004), a BSc in foreign service from the Georgetown School of Foreign Service (2005), and undergraduate degrees in journalism and communications from Northwestern University (2008).⁶

Most recently, in September 2023, the American University of Beirut (AUB) launched a highly unusual instantiation of the partial campus approach in Pafos, Cyprus. AUB Mediterraneo is offering several undergraduate and graduate degrees and is slated to grow to about three thousand students. It is the first instance of a flagship institution of the Middle East and North Africa (MENA) region to establish a degree-granting campus in Europe. While the university can now offer an attractive site beyond its beautiful home campus in a challenged city, it remains deeply committed to its mission in Lebanon going back more than one hundred fifty years. As the university's president Fadlo Khuri put it, "Going global is the main objective."⁷

A very few U.S. institutions have launched comprehensive degree-granting campuses abroad, and most of those emphasize liberal arts education with an international character. Temple University in Tokyo has had remarkable staying power since 1982, and after a sustained planning period, Duke University in Kunshan has begun to graduate its first students.⁸ In 2011, Yale University and the National University of Singapore launched Yale-NUS, a promising liberal arts college. To the surprise of the Yale-NUS community and observers of international education, NUS has decided to wind down the partnership by 2025.⁹

A degree-granting campus abroad is a more plausible venture for some universities than others. From a governance perspective, the parent university has to think of a campus abroad as one of its schools, the way universities have different schools in their home states or countries (for example, many universities have schools of arts and sciences, business, law, and medicine). The scope of programs required, however, also forces the campus to operate like a version of the full university abroad, with local constituencies and stakeholders and accreditation requirements that will be quite different from those of the founding institution. Those novel conditions and constituencies may pose considerable challenges for the home campus and its sense of the university's historical identity. Challenges of connection and integration can be pronounced in the early years when trustees and faculty may worry about the centrifugal force of a strong campus in an unfamiliar setting. Even if allayed, such concerns can resurface as the campus grows, encounters obstacles that are distracting for the home campus, or needs to gain a measure of autonomy. I believe these circumstances apply whether you launch a campus in Switzerland, Singapore, South Africa, or Saudi Arabia.

New York University, my own institution, was not an early mover in the accelerated internationalization of higher education, but once it embraced the opportunities in the 2000s, it pursued several options. A broad international strategy has galvanized NYU into an integrated global institution with a significant presence on all continents except Antarctica. It has had transformative effects on NYU's campus in New York and its standing in the world. The most impactful decision in the strategy was the establishment of two full campuses of NYU in Abu

Dhabi (in 2010), capital of the United Arab Emirates, and Shanghai (in 2012). In both cities, the university committed to confer NYU degrees and develop research of NYU quality. It is delivering on these commitments by applying NYU admissions standards, having had NYU faculty lead initial recruitment, and complying with NYU's policies, including the NYU Faculty Handbook.

To make a degree-granting venture abroad worth trying, there has to be something in it for the university's key constituencies: students and their families, faculty and their research, alumni and their sense of their alma mater, and governing stakeholders who care about the university's ranking, financial health, and resource opportunities. Older, private institutions with large per-student endowments have little incentive to take entrepreneurial risks.

Most public universities do not have this weight of tradition constraining them, and the appeal of new resources abroad proved irresistible for some. The challenge for public institutions is that their international partnerships often draw impatient or antagonistic oversight from state or federal legislatures. Even if public universities can proceed, they have little leeway to secure a reasonable runway for an experiment to take hold.¹⁰

By these considerations, the kinds of institutions most likely to establish international campuses abroad are younger, private, and less well-endowed than traditional universities, and their stakeholders are often more open to experiments far from home. NYU is such an institution, and has built two full campuses. It was easier promised than done, but how it was done may be instructive for other universities that are grappling to maintain or redefine their global strategies today.

NYU Abu Dhabi (NYUAD) is a joint initiative of New York University and the Emirate of Abu Dhabi. Rather than a branch campus or satellite school of NYU, NYUAD was designed to be a global institution in and of NYU and in and of Abu Dhabi. Its first steps were building a liberal arts college and capacious research institute, in the shared understanding that the campus would eventually establish graduate and professional programs to ensure NYUAD's long-term success. In September 2007, after quiet exploration involving dozens of NYU faculty, the university committed to opening the initial NYUAD campus in the fall of 2010.

John Sexton, president of NYU at the time, saw NYUAD as a logical step in the university's internationalization. He had noticed that NYU students were expressing ever greater interest in studying abroad, and that NYU schools were eagerly launching international partnerships without much coordination. Under his leadership, the university put in place a more concerted strategy across its schools.

Several objectives motivated President Sexton's global strategy. First, as an educator at heart, he wanted to offer students seamless study abroad experiences regardless of their majors. Second, Sexton wagered that the pace of globalization

was making international exposure a vital new undergraduate requirement for employment and civic participation. Third, he intuited that a network of study abroad sites infused with New York's own global energies could differentiate NYU in a crowded field of private universities without big endowments. From a university in and of the city, NYU would become one in and of the world.

With these pragmatic arguments, Sexton could lead for what he believed: that it is the highest calling of twenty-first-century universities to transcend division by offering radically intercultural education – so radical that NYU would be the only university to have a global network of study-away sites in thirteen countries, including both Israel and an Arab country.

For a successful international strategy, credible academic leadership matters. Yaw Nyarko, an economist who served as NYU's vice provost for globalization, crisscrossed the MENA region scouting for opportunities and recognized that the UAE was determined to strengthen and diversify its higher-education system. Eventually, a trusted friend of the university with deep experience in the Gulf introduced Sexton to Abu Dhabi leadership. Over many conversations, NYU and Abu Dhabi developed the joint aspiration to create a liberal arts and research institution for students from the UAE and around the world, with majors in the sciences, social sciences, engineering (a must in the MENA region), the humanities, and the arts (a must for NYU). NYU committed to grant degrees and develop a curriculum to NYU standards, but geared to the opportunities of a young, dynamic country at a crossroads between Africa, Asia, and Europe. Moving forward was a bold decision for both partners, and at NYU it came after extensive consultations with the university's trustees, leadership team, and deans' council.

NYU faculty posed legitimate questions as to whether a research campus in Abu Dhabi could be representative of NYU, but enough faculty members had witnessed the positive effects of NYU's global strategy on student success and faculty research opportunities to give the initiative a chance. During listening sessions I was frequently asked, "How can you be sure that we can do everything in Abu Dhabi that we can in New York?" My standard answer was: "If you are asking whether we will have academic freedom and NYU-style student life on our Abu Dhabi campus, the answer is yes. But should we not rather ask what it is we *can* do in Abu Dhabi that we *can't* on Washington Square?" Flipping the lens was fruitful, as many faculty relished the opportunity to design fresh majors, interdisciplinary minors, and a new core curriculum focused on big ideas, interdisciplinary knowledge, and field experience connected to the region.

In 2008, we recruited Al Bloom, president of Swarthmore College and a passionate advocate for intercultural education, to serve as NYUAD's vice chancellor. Bloom's long-standing leadership for the liberal arts instantly evinced the ambition of NYU and Abu Dhabi not to compromise on quality, including academic freedom and vigorous campus life.

Working together with the Institute of International Education, we designed a global student recruitment strategy and bolstered it with scholarships that meet student need. We agreed that tenure should be available at NYUAD, as it is vital to the quality of faculty hiring and academic freedom. At NYUAD, freedom of inquiry and teaching is vouchsafed further by NYU's responsibility for all academic decisions, by the vice chancellor's accountability to the president and chancellor of NYU, and by the faculty's integration into NYU's faculty governance.

A true partnership between NYU and Abu Dhabi was critical to creating and opening NYUAD to students in less than three years. Prime land was provided for the campus, and NYU's fast-growing digital resources made it possible to have an instant library of high caliber. Despite the financial crisis of 2008, NYUAD could keep building its faculty, staff, student body, and infrastructure.

Finding great students was a wonderful challenge: talent is isomorphically distributed around the world, but the opportunity to develop it is not. We selected students on three criteria. First, students had to be academically outstanding and show scholarly promise, but we would evaluate them according to the educational environment that had been available to them. Second, students would have to demonstrate – not just profess – that they wanted to study and live with students who would be very different from them. And third, students had to show evidence of their drive to improve the world they had inherited. This last criterion can be daunting, so we made clear that the world is made up of many worlds, and that the aspiration to make it better could be enacted at any scale.

Today, NYUAD has 2,100 undergraduates from about 125 countries, speaking some 100 languages. The gender ratio is 54 percent women, 46 percent men. Twenty-three percent are Emirati citizens. The student population has no majority nationality, ethnicity, language, or faith. As the local student community has grown, the school has become both more cosmopolitan and more relevant to the region.

From the beginning, NYUAD's admission rate hovered around 4 to 5 percent; in 2023, it was less than 3 percent. Although no school relishes measuring its quality by the number of applicants it cannot accept, NYUAD's selectivity represents the extraordinary curiosity, creativity, empathy, work ethic, and intercultural commitment of the students. I observe this reality daily, as I interact with them in forums, on walks around the city, and in my courses.¹¹

Since 2010, NYUAD has graduated ten classes and a total of about 2,400 students. The simplest proxies for the success of its alumni are prestigious post-graduate awards: eighteen Rhodes Scholars, thirteen Fulbrights, fourteen Erasmus Mundus, nine Yenching, seventeen Schwarzman, three Knight-Hennessy, and two Truman Scholars. The six-year graduation rate is 94 percent, and 96 percent of NYUAD alumni land in excellent placements around the world within six months of graduating. About two-thirds of graduates go on to countries where

they did not grow up. Around 65 percent find employment across all sectors (with strong results for arts and humanities majors), and more than half of those stay in the UAE. Twenty-five percent enroll in top graduate schools across the globe. Another 5 to 6 percent pursue entrepreneurial opportunities. These placement rates were maintained throughout the emergency stages of the COVID-19 pandemic.

Attracting faculty of NYU caliber to teach these highly motivated students was the greater challenge. Top faculty are always harder to find than students, and even NYU cannot convince all scholars to relocate to New York. To foster a lively intellectual community in Abu Dhabi and build the university's early reputation, we developed a flexible, worldwide approach to faculty recruitment that would enable NYUAD to lay the groundwork for vigorous research.

The strategy assumed that a large number of courses would be taught initially by NYU faculty on assignment for half semesters, semesters, or a year or more. At the same time, NYU faculty would recruit and mentor the first faculty hired specifically for NYU Abu Dhabi. Some of these "standing faculty," as we called the NYUAD hires, would spend an integration year in New York, particularly if they had few touch points with NYU or with liberal arts education. Over time, the percentage of courses offered by New York-based faculty decreased, but these colleagues continued to help animate the NYUAD campus through my time there. Flexible teaching models and a mission-driven campus garnered a level of support from NYU faculty that we could not have anticipated.

Research opportunities have been critical to the development of an excellent standing and affiliated faculty. Nearly three hundred fifty NYUAD faculty and numerous researchers conduct advanced inquiry in over eighty centers, labs, and groups, in a wide range of disciplines, often together with faculty from New York. To enhance intellectual life in the UAE and communicate our research, the NYUAD Institute, Arts Center, and Art Gallery produce lively conferences, symposia, and workshops for scholars and artists from around the world. These initiatives galvanize public interest and community-based events that have opened the university to a diverse community of citizens and expatriate residents.¹²

NYUAD has attracted faculty from outstanding institutions around the world. One reason they stay is the increasingly high standing of both NYU and NYUAD. Over the past two decades, NYU has grown stronger, moving up in the Times Higher Education World University rankings from 60th in 2011, to 30th in 2016, 26th in 2021, and 24th in 2022.¹³ This success can be attributed in part to NYU's energetic global strategy and its establishment of the campuses in Abu Dhabi and Shanghai. The internationalization and digital transformation of knowledge networks have made working in a well-resourced campus far from home a plausible and exciting option.

For many scholars, disinvestment in American and European universities has made working in institutions like NYUAD or Duke Kunshan more attractive.

Faced with political division and shrinking research budgets, some no longer see America's universities as an academic pinnacle. While liberal arts colleges began to struggle in the United States, governments in Europe, China, and MENA countries were investing in holistic education in depth and breadth, including the humanities. Just as burgeoning Chinese universities have been benefiting from the return of scholars educated abroad, NYUAD has attracted top faculty of Arab and South Asian heritage who wish to be closer to family and cultures of origin.¹⁴

In addition to these incentives, NYUAD faculty members benefited from the enormous diversity, high motivation, and aspirational disposition of our campus community, which embraces the diversity of faculty and students to foster intercultural consilience and strive for a better world. It sounds utopian, but these energies are evident to visiting scholars and accrediting panels. NYUAD faculty simply love teaching because their students work hard, contribute actively to tough discussions, and take on community-based projects. The core curriculum is global, propelled by dialogue and undergraduate research, and asks students to apply their learning to real-world issues in local and international organizations.¹⁵

As much as faculty love the undergraduate vibrancy of our campus, like all university scholars, they look forward to establishing doctoral programs that bring graduate students and accelerate their research, particularly in STEM fields. Launching such programs is more challenging than creating a world-class liberal arts college. In overseas campuses, a parent university may be worried about creating internal competition for PhD students, and faculty may question the academic quality of a new campus. NYUAD has put those early worries to rest by its research output and the graduates it has sent on to world class institutions. Now, more than one hundred Global NYU PhD Fellows in Sciences and Engineering do coursework at NYU in New York and then move to Abu Dhabi to conduct dissertation research in our labs.

The success of the Global PhD Fellows program indicates the potential for homegrown graduate programs at NYUAD, but these take time to conceptualize, market-study, and launch. When establishing U.S. programs in emerging knowledge economies, a balance must be struck between doctoral programs focused on preparing research scholars and professional master's programs that support human capital development more broadly. To strengthen NYUAD's contributions to the UAE, the campus plans to launch the kinds of professional programs that propelled NYU to national and international standing in the twentieth century. In January 2025, it will launch a joint MBA degree offered by NYU's Stern School of Business and NYUAD, with two-thirds of the coursework in Abu Dhabi and the summer in New York.

Of course, a professional graduate program is not the same thing as a doctoral degree trajectory in arts and sciences. The tensions between a core university mission in arts and sciences and the need for professional education are familiar to

flagship universities across the United States and around the world. Most academic institutions are being called upon to do more for local or regional workforce development and support of the professions that societies need now and in the near future. As research universities have urgent mandates to serve local priorities and to support the international aspirations of outstanding faculty, they must find ways to balance curiosity-driven research and education with innovative and capacious professional education.

Most universities claim to have become global as well as local. NYUAD was *designed* to be both. In the UAE, NYUAD is a private university with a public mission, contributing to social and economic development for the country but rooted in the global urbanism of New York City. This hybrid condition has forced us to counter the isolationist risks of deglobalization while serving as a local anchor. As most universities face this challenge, NYUAD's experience may be instructive. Here are four takeaways from my time at the helm of NYUAD.

First, a global experience is available on *any* campus where students from different countries study together. Many "foreign" students in the United States are already in the host country before they enroll. Immigrant communities full of aspiring students are almost everywhere, not only in North America. The genie of demographic diversity, attendant on postcolonial and more recent migrations, won't go back into the bottle. Campus diversity becomes an educational resource when administrators encourage "domestic" faculty and students to bring elements of their cultural communities into classrooms, assignments, research projects, campus life, and service learning.

Second, if universities intentionally design courses and cocurricular experiences to open up the global in the local, they will help students see their own worlds differently. To make sure that the university delivers on its local and global mission, NYUAD administers its global education and community-based learning programs in one office, led by a seasoned and creative associate provost. This simple administrative move ensures that every student has access to experiential global learning.

Third, no global strategy will work if professors don't see the point of it. Faculty sometimes bristle at the idea that basic research should have local relevance. NYUAD scholars are fueled by curiosity and basic research, and their ability to pursue questions wherever they lead is what makes them scholars of worldwide repute. Nevertheless, they are also motivated to solve urgent contemporary challenges, and want to equip their students to tackle them. Their research advances climate solutions, ethical artificial intelligence, space science, water security, public health, drug discovery, human development, economic fairness, regional heritage, and tolerance and coexistence. These global research areas often converge with the UAE's goals for diversifying its economy and giving people opportunities to flourish.

That realization prompts a final point. Even if many universities now find that their global agendas are also and already local, we must remind external stakeholders that returns on investment in universities are rarely instantaneous. The greatest benefits of universities for their cities and countries come from the long-term projects of educating citizens and residents, and of generating the kind of knowledge that has brought the world computers, GPS, and COVID-19 vaccines. To make this case, NYUAD opens its resources as fully as possible to the local community, with public lectures and symposia, art performances and exhibitions, citizen science and climate action projects, and access to our library and labs, vibrant eateries and coffee shops, and splendid athletic facilities.

All universities can align worldly research and education with local needs, and become institutions that anchor our societies. To stay true to their missions, our universities need to demonstrate that they are talent magnets, idea factories, transformation agents, and forces for good. We need to show, not tell, that we keep the shining knowledge society and the Fourth Industrial Revolution within reach, not to mention a livable planet at peace.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

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ENDNOTES

- ¹ The power of international education courses through the reports of the Institute of International Education, founded in 1919; see “Research,” Institute of International Education, <https://www.iie.org/research> (accessed April 4, 2024). It is also evident in the fine case studies of the Free University of Berlin, Tsinghua University, and the University of Hong Kong in William C. Kirby, *Empires of Ideas: Creating the Modern University from Germany to America to China* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 2022).
- ² Mariët Westermann, “The Enduring University: Here, We Grow,” Convocation Address, November 8, 2020, NYU Abu Dhabi, <https://nyuad.nyu.edu/en/about/leadership-and-administration/office-of-the-vice-chancellor/communications/the-enduring-university-here-we-grow.html> (accessed April 2, 2023).

- ³ The University of Chicago created research centers in Beijing, Delhi, Hong Kong, London, and Paris. Columbia University pursued a similar but fuller strategy with ten global centers in Europe, Latin America, Africa, Asia, and the Middle East.
- ⁴ In 2006, Goucher College of suburban Baltimore became the first college to require every one of its students (approximately 1,200 students) to study abroad, and made it affordable; Sanford J. Ungar, “The Study-Abroad Solution: How to Open the American Mind,” *Foreign Affairs* 95 (2) (2016): 111–123, <https://www.foreignaffairs.com/articles/united-states/2016-02-16/study-abroad-solution>. Pitzer College, of similar size, requires all of its students to study abroad for at least one semester. It has enhanced its partnership program opportunities with bespoke sites for Pitzer students in untraditional locations, including Brazil, Costa Rica, Ecuador, Nepal, Vietnam, Botswana, and South Africa. See “Office of Study Abroad and International Programs,” Pitzer College, <https://www.pitzer.edu/study-abroad> (accessed April 2, 2023). A proxy for the success of Pitzer’s global education is its high number of Fulbright Fellows. It has been a top producer of Fulbright Fellows since at least 2005. See “Top Producing Institutions,” Fulbright Program, <https://www.fulbrightprogram.org/tpi> (accessed May 12, 2023).
- ⁵ For the sweep of “Bard Abroad,” see “About the Institute for International Liberal Education,” Bard College, <https://www.bard.edu/bardabroad/about> (accessed October 1, 2022); and “The Institute for International Liberal Education,” Bard College, <https://iile.bard.edu> (accessed April 8, 2023). See also Elizabeth Redden, “Bard College Declared ‘Undesirable’ in Russia,” *Inside Higher Ed*, July 9, 2021, <https://www.insidehighered.com/news/2021/07/09/bard-grapples-what-it-might-mean-be-declared-%E2%80%98undesirable%E2%80%99-russia>.
- ⁶ Since Northwestern arrived in Doha, no new American partners have joined, but a trio of British, French, and Qatari institutions have sought to expand Education City’s offer. In February 2024, the Texas A&M system’s Board of Regents voted to close the branch campus in Doha by 2028. No new students will be admitted as of the fall of 2024. See Liam Knox, “Cutting Off Qatar,” *Inside Higher Ed*, February 16, 2024, <https://www.insidehighered.com/news/global/us-colleges-world/2024/02/16/how-texas-ams-qatar-campus-suddenly-collapsed>.
- ⁷ Liam Knox, “American University of Beirut to Open Cyprus Campus,” *Inside Higher Ed*, June 15, 2023, <https://www.insidehighered.com/news/quick-takes/2023/06/15/american-university-beirut-open-cyprus-campus>.
- ⁸ Temple University, Japan Campus offers undergraduate degrees in the social sciences, humanities, and computer science. As of 2022, it enrolled 1,841 undergraduates. It also offers master’s degrees in management, law, education, and music therapy. “Basic Facts about TUJ,” Temple University, Japan Campus, <https://www.tuj.ac.jp/about/japan-campus/facts> (accessed April 1, 2023). See also Kirby, *Empires of Ideas*, 226–235.
- ⁹ The postmortem on Yale-NUS College is yet to be written, but for an early review, see Karin Fischer, “A ‘Flabbergasting Decision’: Abrupt End of Yale-NUS Partnership Offers Lessons to Colleges Seeking Global Re-Engagement,” *Chronicle of Higher Education*, September 17, 2021, <https://www.chronicle.com/article/a-flabbergasting-decision> (accessed October 20, 2022). See also Pericles Lewis’s essay in this volume of *Dædalus*. Pericles Lewis, “The Rise & Restructuring of Yale-NUS College: An International Liberal Arts Partnership in Singapore,” *Dædalus* 153 (2) (Spring 2024): 48–62, <https://www.amacad.org/publication/rise-and-restructuring-yale-nus-college-international-liberal-arts-partnership>.

- ¹⁰ For the closures of campuses of the public institutions George Mason University Ras Al Khaimah and Michigan State University Dubai, see Jack Stripling, “Gulf Withdrawal,” *Inside Higher Ed*, February 29 2009, <https://www.insidehighered.com/news/2009/02/27/gulf-withdrawal>; Melanie Swan, “Michigan State University Shuts Most of its Dubai Campus,” *The National*, July 5, 2010, <https://www.thenationalnews.com/uae/education/michigan-state-university-shuts-most-of-its-dubai-campus-1.521893>; and Larry Abramson, “Michigan State to Close Dubai Campus,” *All Things Considered*, NPR, July 6, 2010, <https://www.npr.org/2010/07/06/128342097/michigan-state-to-close-dubai-campus>. For the University of Connecticut’s short-lived effort to establish a campus in Dubai, see Don Michak, “Bye Bye Dubai? UConn Abandons, for Now, Plans for Branch Campus in Persian Gulf,” *Journal Inquirer*, February 20, 2007, https://www.journalinquirer.com/archives/bye-bye-dubai-uconn-abandons-for-now-plans-for-branch-campus-in-persian-gulf/article_25c58b9e-4bbb-5aa0-ac6e-94aba972868f.html. Today, Dubai is home to very good public international institutions, including the University of Wollongong from Australia and the UK Universities of Middlesex and Birmingham. The private Rochester Institute of Technology has offered successful programs in Dubai since 2008.
- ¹¹ For data as well as anecdotal snapshots of NYUAD graduates, see *Life Beyond Saadiyat: NYUAD Graduates 2014 – 2019*, <https://nyuad.nyu.edu/content/dam/nyuad/academics/undergraduate/career-development/life-beyond-saadiyat/report/life-beyond-saadiyat-2019.pdf> (accessed December 12, 2022).
- ¹² With a large umbrella research institute, NYUAD has established a major research position ahead of its graduate program rollout. Since opening in 2010, its faculty have published more than 6,200 peer-reviewed papers and books, and according to *Nature Index*, they are the UAE’s top producer of articles in the leading global science journals. The faculty have filed 145 patents. The arts faculty have contributed more than 550 creative works. NYUAD’s economics faculty is ranked fourth for research productivity in all of Asia by Research Papers in Economics. “Top 12.5% Asia,” Ideas: Research Papers in Economics, <https://ideas.repec.org/top/top.asia.html> (accessed June 30, 2023).
- ¹³ “World University Rankings 2023,” Times Higher Education, <https://www.timeshighereducation.com/world-university-rankings/2023/world-ranking> (accessed March 15, 2023).
- ¹⁴ Kirby, *Empires of Ideas*, 196, 296; Anju Mary Paul, *Asian Scientists on the Move: Changing Science in a Changing Asia* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2021). Paul, a professor of sociology at NYUAD, hails from India and spent her earlier career at the National University of Singapore.
- ¹⁵ For example, First Year Writing Seminars—critical as English is not the first language for most NYUAD students—take students into the UAE to develop projects about the society they live in. Counter to the typical fate of writing requirements, it is one of our best-loved courses. Similarly, all engineering students must take Engineering for Social Impact, and most take on a follow-up community project at home or abroad.

The Rise & Restructuring of Yale-NUS College: An International Liberal Arts Partnership in Singapore

Pericles Lewis

Yale University and the National University of Singapore (NUS) agreed in 2011 to open Yale-NUS College, an autonomous liberal arts college within NUS. As the College's first president, I recount in this essay some of the successes and challenges of creating the College, which opened in 2013, and the decision of NUS in 2021 to end the partnership as of 2025. I analyze the College's educational offerings, the political controversies surrounding its establishment and eventual closure, the finances of a small-scale, elite college within a large public university, and the broad social changes that contributed to the College's fate.

At the World Economic Forum in Davos, Switzerland, in January 2009, the president of the National University of Singapore (NUS) approached the president of Yale University with an intriguing proposition. Singapore was interested in founding a new college, along the lines of leading American liberal arts colleges, to encourage innovative and interdisciplinary learning. Yale President Richard C. Levin had a strong interest in the rise of universities in Asia and, at Yale's tercentennial in 2001, had committed the Ivy League university to a global future. NUS President Tan Chorh Chuan, a physician and educator noted as the mastermind of Singapore's successful response to the 2003 SARS (Severe Acute Respiratory Syndrome) epidemic, had long fostered an interest in sponsoring active, creative learning among Singaporean youth. This ambition coincided with the government of Singapore's enthusiasm about making the island nation a hub of regional, or global, education. After two years of negotiations, the two universities signed an agreement to open Yale-NUS College ("Yale-NUS" or "the College"), an autonomous college within the National University of Singapore. On July 1, 2012, I became the College's first president.

Yale-NUS opened in 2013 and thrived across most dimensions: an innovative curriculum spanning Asian and Western content, a state-of-the-art campus designed as a community of learning with top students, dedicated faculty, and successful graduates. It was therefore a disappointment eight years later, in the

summer of 2021, when NUS announced that Yale's name would be removed from the College, and that it would be merged with NUS's University Scholars Program to become NUS College. NUS College has since admitted its first students and Yale-NUS remains open until June 2025, when most students admitted in 2021 will have graduated. It is timely, however, to undertake an analysis of the successes and challenges experienced during Yale-NUS College's twelve years educating almost two thousand students from around the world and exploring the possibilities for a cross-cultural form of liberal education.

This essay focuses on the ambitions of both the National University of Singapore and Yale University in launching the collaboration, the successful innovations undertaken during the initial years of Yale-NUS, and some of the factors that contributed to its merger with NUS's University Scholars Program. I will delve specifically into the educational offerings of Yale-NUS, the political controversies surrounding its founding and eventual closure, the finances of a small-scale, elite college within a large public university, and the broad social changes that contributed to the College's fate. The closure of the College was overdetermined. Primary among its many causes was the rise of nationalism and populism since 2012. As a former president and current member of the Governing Board of Yale-NUS, and as dean of Yale College, I must respect a duty of confidentiality, so I refer in this essay only to matters of public record, but I hope that my analysis of this successful if short-lived experiment will be useful to educators and administrators who attempt innovations in international education in the years to come.

The original idea for creating a liberal arts college in Singapore came in a 2007 report from an international committee advising the Singaporean government on educational policy. It proposed that Singapore, which has traditionally had a very strong but rather specialized form of higher education developed out of the British Commonwealth tradition, should introduce liberal arts education loosely based on the U.S. model. It seems the committee originally envisioned a small, independent liberal arts college similar to Amherst, Swarthmore, or Pomona, but Yale-NUS resulted from a joint venture between two leading universities. (The NUS's discussions in 2008 with the Claremont Colleges did not come to fruition.) The Singaporean Ministry of Education decided to house the College within the National University of Singapore, its flagship university. NUS itself had evolved during the twentieth century from the 1949 merger of the Edward VII Medical School with Raffles College, the first undergraduate institution in the arts and sciences in Singapore, which had opened in 1928 with forty-three students. Some of my older colleagues in Singapore thought of Yale-NUS College as a rebirth of the intimate form of education enjoyed in the early days of NUS, which had subsequently grown to almost forty thousand students, not much smaller than the University of Michigan.

Liberal arts education differs from specialized forms of education in several ways. The most obvious difference is that it has broader academic requirements. Students spend at least some time studying material from the humanities, social sciences, mathematics, and natural sciences, rather than focusing exclusively on a single major subject. In general, students choose their majors only after a year or two of such broad education. The subjects taught in liberal arts colleges are not seen primarily as preparation for a specific career, although this has changed over time as vocational pressures have increased. Typically, though, the focus remains on the traditional arts and sciences rather than business, law, medicine, or engineering. In the American tradition, liberal arts education also emphasizes active learning, often in small seminars under the guidance of a professor, where students discuss and debate the subjects they are studying, rather than listen passively to lectures in large amphitheaters. Finally, since colonial times in the United States, there has been a long tradition of residential education at liberal arts colleges, and at larger universities drawing on this norm. That is, students spend most of their undergraduate years living on or near campus, usually far from their families, where they learn from their peers not only in class but in the sports, clubs, societies, musical groups, and student publications that create a lively civil society in parallel with the official curriculum taught by the professors.

Many affluent Singaporeans have sent their children abroad to study in American liberal arts colleges and universities. Other students have earned scholarships to such institutions. Some stay abroad after graduating. Singapore has traditionally sought ways to retain many of its brightest students rather than lose them to the international job market. The establishment of a liberal arts college promised to enhance innovation, offer local students an attractive option at a relatively low cost, retain talent, and perhaps shake up the traditional pedagogical approaches of Singapore's existing universities. Subsequently, in 2021, NUS would open the College of Humanities and Sciences, a larger-scale effort involving joint offerings from the Faculty of Arts and Social Sciences and the Faculty of Science. Elements of this design drew on the Yale-NUS experience.

What did Yale see in this venture? Yale has long been a leader in undergraduate education, and the 1828 Yale Reports provided an influential defense of liberal arts education in particular.¹ President Levin had made the internationalization of Yale a hallmark of his presidency, and Yale has an especially long history in Asia. In Changsha, Hunan Province, China, a leading medical school and high school remain as testaments to Yale's experiments with international education in the early part of the twentieth century. A prospectus from President Levin and Provost Peter Salovey made the case for the venture to the Yale community in September 2010. The founding of Yale-NUS College gave Yale the opportunity to experiment with new modes of liberal education, appropriate to the twenty-first century, that extended the university's international reputation by reaching

students who could not be served in New Haven, Connecticut, and influencing the development of higher education in Asia. The Singaporean government provided generous funding, all of which was invested directly in the establishment of the College. Over one hundred Yale faculty participated in the planning and implementation of the curriculum, and in the hiring of the dedicated Yale-NUS faculty who would hold tenure-track positions at NUS.

Although I was not involved in the initial planning for Yale-NUS, in the September 2010 prospectus, I was introduced as the potential chair of the committee that would recruit the new humanities faculty for the College. During the following eighteen months, I became increasingly involved in thinking through the implementation of the plans, and in speaking on behalf of the project when controversies arose. In May 2012, I was introduced as the College's founding president. Those of us most involved in the implementation of NUS president Tan Chorh Chuan's and Yale president Levin's vision included Yale vice president Linda Lorimer, NUS vice president Lily Kong (now president of Singapore Management University), Yale astronomer Charles Bailyn (who became the College's founding dean of faculty), NUS physicist Lai Choy Heng (who became the first provost of Yale-NUS), NUS historian Tan Tai Yong (who later became the College's second president), and Doris Sohmen-Pao, an experienced educational administrator who was recruited to serve as the College's executive vice president for administration. There was a strong sense of excitement among those who committed themselves to this well-resourced and ambitious educational start-up.²

The innovations introduced by Yale-NUS spanned its curriculum, cocurricular offerings, faculty organization, and residential student life. The initial plans for the curriculum, outlined by a joint faculty committee in 2009, revolved around a core program in which first-year students took six shared courses on great books from both Asia and the West. Although partly inspired by Yale's optional Directed Studies program, this core curriculum would be required of all students in the College. In this regard, it resembled the core curricula at Columbia University and the University of Chicago more than it did the broader distributional system for general education pursued by most students at Yale College. While courses in science and social issues were envisioned as part of the initial committee's report, the plans for the curriculum eventually widened across a few dimensions. Later faculty groups added required courses on social institutions, quantitative reasoning, and scientific inquiry, resulting in a common curriculum of about ten courses.³ While the initial common curriculum continued to heavily emphasize the classical works of European and Asian civilizations, over time, the faculty added more attention to modern works, contemporary social thought, and cultures other than China, India, Greece, and Rome. As the spokesperson for Yale-NUS, I encapsulated our ambition in the question: "What must a young person learn in order to

lead a responsible life in this century?” If I were asked to develop a common curriculum today, I would give greater weight to data science and economics. Nonetheless, the experience of reading challenging books together, and collectively solving formidable problems in science or statistics, succeeded admirably. Students developed a shared vocabulary (including a set of inside jokes) and a love of learning that I think would have been hard to inspire with a less unified curriculum. The faculty hired to design and teach the curriculum came from top liberal arts colleges and research institutions worldwide, often moved their families to Singapore, and built not only the educational program but also the distinctive campus culture.

Central to this education was the fact that it took place in a shared residential setting on a beautiful campus designed by former Yale School of Architecture dean César Pelli and his team at Pelli Clarke & Partners, along with Forum Architects of Singapore. Liberal education thrives in a residential environment, and I worked with the faculty, staff, and students to articulate the vision of the College as “A community of learning, / Founded by two great universities, / In Asia, for the world.” A committee chaired by Yale political scientist Bryan Garsten and NUS literature professor Rajeev Patke outlined the ambitions of the curriculum.⁴ During the planning year (2012–2013), several young Singaporean men who had completed their compulsory military service and planned to enroll joined the team. Faculty, staff, and future students worked together in a temporary location (“Residential College 4”) to build a culture and prepare for the arrival of our first students. The strong sense of community engagement throughout Yale-NUS helped the College attract outstanding students and faculty. The inaugural class of about one hundred sixty students came from across the globe with outstanding academic credentials and pioneering spirits. Generous financial aid from NUS, coupled with Yale’s recruiting network, allowed us to admit not only students from the region but also from all continents except Antarctica. A colleague visiting from New Haven during the first year after the College formally opened (academic year 2013–2014) borrowed an expression from sociologist Émile Durkheim and commented on the “collective effervescence” of the place. People felt that they were engaged in a great endeavor, and even the crises weathered during the start-up phase tended to strengthen our community and its devotion to creating a distinct educational model that we hoped would inspire others in Asia and beyond.

Among the innovations of the early years was an experiential education program called Week Seven, in which all first-year students participated in off-campus study trips led by faculty members. These ranged as far afield as England, Greece, and Japan, but most took place in Southeast Asia. The intensive study of a topic on site inspired students and attracted attention from potential applicants. Some of the themes included disaster relief in Indonesia, biodiversity in Singapore, global finance in Hong Kong, and World War II memorials in locations such as Auschwitz. A later proposal for a Week Seven project on political protest caused

considerable disquiet in 2019, but the experiential nature of the projects took students and faculty beyond the potential bookishness of the intense curriculum. In its later years, particularly under the current leadership of President Joanne Roberts, the College strengthened faculty mentorship, developed an innovative residential education program, enhanced the curriculum, and became a leader in re-thinking approaches to sexual misconduct on Singaporean campuses.

The faculty attracted to such an experimental college were themselves a remarkable group of established scholars and recent graduates of top PhD programs. Often coming from leading research universities or American liberal arts colleges, these colleagues sought a unified academic life that combined research, intensive work with undergraduates in the classroom, and college service. The College innovated in its administrative approach by organizing faculty according to their academic division (science, social sciences, humanities) rather than their department. We recruited faculty in large collaborative workshops rather than through the traditional campus visit that typically focuses on a job talk. Faculty were eligible for tenure-track positions in the National University of Singapore, and eventually about two-thirds of the initial assistant professors who stayed with the College earned tenure.

There were, however, several challenges concerning faculty development. The demands of starting a new college often impeded assistant and associate professors' progress on their own research. Yale faculty involved in the tenure process, including myself, tended to look for a good balance of teaching excellence with high-quality research (though not necessarily a high quantity of research). Those senior faculty who came from independent American liberal arts colleges often thought that the College over-emphasized research accomplishment. The National University of Singapore valued its high standing in research, and Yale-NUS faculty were employed by NUS, not Yale. Over time, working closely with the leadership of NUS, the College came to define rigorous tenure standards. Given the fact that both parent universities were research intensive, the research expectations were high and ran the risk of interfering with the junior faculty's dedication to teaching. This was particularly true in the sciences, where the Yale-NUS teaching load was heavy, and research funding was low, compared to the parent institutions. Faculty who stayed at Yale-NUS tended to have an unusual degree of commitment to the College's mission, but morale problems persisted due to high standards for tenure. For some, the tension between teaching and research spoke to the College's identity crisis.

During the decade in which I presented the outcomes of the Yale-NUS effort to public audiences, and to trustees at Yale and the National University of Singapore, our results continually exceeded expectations. Applications for admission massively outnumbered spots in each entering class, and students frequently turned down leading colleges and universities to enroll at Yale-NUS. The College was one

of the ten to twenty most selective undergraduate institutions in the English-speaking world. Faculty continued to come from top PhD programs and departments. Those who left often advanced to jobs at premiere universities such as Princeton or Oxford. The curriculum and residential life received excellent reviews from students and parents. Graduates went on to jobs with leading multinational companies in Singapore and abroad, to posts in the Singaporean civil service, and to prestigious graduate schools. Three won Rhodes Scholarships to Oxford. Interest in the College's program brought visiting administrators and government officials to campus not only from Asia and the United States but also from Europe, Africa, and Latin America. The founding of the Alliance of Asian Liberal Arts Universities in 2017, with Yale-NUS prominently featured at its opening conference, seemed to confirm that liberal education was on the rise in Asia.⁵

Yet the project was not without controversy in Singapore or New Haven. Stateside, while initial faculty planning committees at Yale embraced the vision with enthusiasm, some Yale faculty looked upon Singapore with skepticism. The city-state had the institutions of a parliamentary democracy, but only the People's Action Party had held power since independence, sometimes using heavy-handed tactics toward opposition leaders to maintain it. Advocates for press freedom have criticized the government's censorship power and tight hold on traditional news media. And although news coverage critiquing the government has become more widespread in the internet era, the prosecution of the Online Citizen, a blogging platform known for its political commentary and activism, shows that independent media still plays a precarious role in Singapore. Anti-sodomy laws have also been a flashpoint. For decades, LGBTQ+ activists opposed Section 377a of the penal code, which criminalized sex between men, before it was repealed in 2023.⁶

Shortly after the agreement to establish Yale-NUS was finalized in 2012, noted Yale political scientist Seyla Benhabib criticized the "naïve missionary sentiment" behind the Yale administration's proposal to spread liberal education abroad.⁷ Faculty at Yale endorsed a resolution that read, "We urge Yale-NUS to respect, protect and further principles of nondiscrimination for all, including sexual minorities and migrant workers; and to uphold civil liberty and political freedom on campus and in the broader society."⁸ Eventually, Human Rights Watch and the American Association of University Professors criticized the venture.⁹ Unfortunately, these circumstances led to the College being judged as a political project, by critics in Singapore and abroad, when our main goals were educational. The fate of academic institutions is often determined by external political conditions, regardless of institutional attempts to remain distant from partisan politics.

In my experience, Yale-NUS upheld principles of nondiscrimination and academic freedom, as well as on-campus liberties. More complicated is the question

of political freedom in the broader society. On the one hand, I did not consider the role of a university administrator visiting from another country to include direct involvement in political matters. On the other hand, vigorous debate on campus gave young people an opportunity to envision social change. The first class of students matriculated in 2013 and quickly established the first LGBTQ+ student organization in Singapore. There were also more diverse affiliations among students than one typically finds on an American campus: some were government scholars, others formed a Christian fellowship, and many went on to work in the private sector. Nonetheless, the students and alumni of Yale-NUS College have often received attention for their politically progressive views. For example, left-leaning activists in Singapore had a mixed view of Yale-NUS, sometimes praising the wide-ranging debates held on its campus, other times viewing the College as too close to the government, its main funder.

This kind of international attention to government policies – notably concerning press freedom, freedom of assembly, academic freedom, and the regulation of sexual behavior – was veritably uncomfortable for Singaporean university administrators, civil servants, and government leaders. To the Singaporean government’s credit, during my five years at the helm of Yale-NUS, and in the seven years since, the government upheld its promises to honor academic freedom and strong nondiscrimination policies on campus. As a result, students and faculty were permitted to work closely with organizations supporting migrant workers; the College’s decision to offer gender-neutral housing for students received widespread media coverage; opposition politicians and cabinet members were frequent guest speakers on campus; and students on campus had access to books and films that were restricted elsewhere in Singapore, prior to the government clarifying its policies so that these books and films became available (in principle) at all Singaporean institutions of higher learning. Although there was frequent debate over whether the College was living up to its promises, consensus on campus and in the broader community was that academic and other types of freedom thrived at Yale-NUS, which was sometimes described as a bubble within Singaporean society. In 2019, when the College’s administration, with faculty support, canceled a proposed Week Seven program on public protest, the incident brought attention to the extent that Yale-NUS felt compelled to observe the “out-of-bounds markers” of acceptable political behavior in the city-state.¹⁰

The “liberal” in “liberal education” is not identical with liberal politics. Despite this distinction, both meanings of the word relate to freedom, and one goal of a liberal education is to educate people for a life of freedom. Other goals may be captured under different names like “holistic,” “whole-person,” or “collegiate” education; “interdisciplinarity”; or simply “delayed specialization.” Likewise, the “liberal arts” traditionally encompass both the arts and sciences, but only relative insiders are aware of this historical grouping. For most potential applicants

and their parents, “liberal arts” seems to imply the humanities or the fine arts. In translating the complex formation called a “liberal arts education” to a Singaporean context, I sought – with the support of a very engaged governing board, colleagues in administration, faculty, and students – to identify the key features of such an education for this century. Some have asked whether this effort was doomed to fail within a political system very different from that of the United States. Even so, liberal education predates modern democracy, and during the past decade, we have seen many limitations of the American brand of representative government. I believe that a liberal education can thrive in various political contexts if key features are preserved. With respect to politics, the preconditions for a liberal education are the freedom to debate matters openly on campus, the freedom of faculty to conduct research without outside interference, and the freedom of students to associate in groups of mutual interest. I endorsed a resolution of the newly recruited Yale-NUS faculty in late 2012 that stated, “We are firmly committed to the free expression of ideas in all forms – a central tenet of liberal arts education. There are no questions that cannot be asked, no answers that cannot be discussed and debated. This principle is a cornerstone of our institution.”¹¹ In my view, Yale-NUS College has remained committed to this principle throughout its existence.

In the summer of 2021, the National University of Singapore informed Yale of its intention to end the partnership and merge Yale-NUS College with its University Scholars Program. This decision came as a surprise and disappointment to Yale leadership, since the goals of the partnership were being met. It came in the second year of the COVID-19 pandemic, during a period when travel between New Haven and Singapore was necessarily restricted, although it is likely that the decision was made before COVID-19 hit. Following the announcement, former provost and current president Peter Salovey expressed disappointment on behalf of the leadership at Yale University. While the initial agreement signed in 2012 outlined a funding model for the first twenty years of the College’s operation, Yale and NUS had the option of dissolving the partnership at various points, one of which was 2025. To NUS’s credit, it informed Yale of the decision four years before the deadline, allowing for an orderly closure of Yale-NUS College. Nevertheless, Yale was eager to continue the partnership, and Yale leaders spent the summer of 2021 seeking a way to maintain the affiliation. In press coverage of the August 2021 merger announcement, including commentary in the higher-education press, three broad explanations were put forward for Singapore’s overdetermined decision to end the Yale-NUS partnership: financial, geopolitical, and academic (or academic-political). All three considerations led to the forthcoming merger.

The financial elements of the decision, though prominent at the time, seem the least relevant to me in hindsight. It is true that Yale-NUS had not yet achieved its

ambitious fundraising targets nine years after its founding, but its financial situation was relatively strong. In particular, the fundraising challenges raised broader questions about the partnership, seeing as both Singaporean and Yale donors may have been hesitant to invest in a college they feared lacked stability. By contrast, fundraising for a new unit in New Haven (the Yale Jackson School of Global Affairs) was completed ahead of schedule in under five years, due substantially to the generous support of lead donors John and Susan Jackson. Simply put, it was harder to raise money for Yale-NUS. However, the endowment at the time of the announcement was adequate to provide at least 20 percent of operating costs.

More broadly, Yale-NUS spending was within budget every year. Yet after President Tan Chorh Chuan stepped down in 2017, new leadership at the National University of Singapore undoubtedly viewed Yale-NUS as needlessly expensive. International programs like Week Seven, though operated on a shoestring budget, drew negative attention from some commentators who viewed them as luxuries. The intensive liberal arts model with a student-to-faculty ratio of about eight to one was more costly to operate than that of other units at NUS, even though it was a bargain compared to leading liberal arts colleges in the United States. The per capita cost of educating a student at Yale-NUS was approximately US\$80,000, with over half of this cost covered by Singapore's Ministry of Education.¹² The merger with the University Scholars Program will offer some economies of scale. Still, so long as student-to-faculty ratios remain low, the successor institution (NUS College) may not be much cheaper to operate. From a business perspective, NUS may feel that it has gained useful insights from its partnership with Yale, but breaking the partnership destroyed some brand equity that might have been preserved with a less abrupt transition. Nevertheless, NUS College will inherit as much as it wants of the curriculum, some of the faculty, and all the physical property of Yale-NUS.

From the initiation of the collegiate project in 2009 to the merger decision in 2021, the political situation in Singapore became less favorable to Yale-NUS College and to international collaboration in general. Although certain areas of personal freedom have expanded (notably with the repeal of Section 377a in 2023), Singapore has not been immune to the forces of populism and nationalism that have affected most parts of the world, including the United States. The governing People's Action Party must face the electorate at least every five years, and in the elections of 2011, 2015, and 2020, the party showed itself to be highly sensitive to complaints about benefits reaped by foreigners, and to concerns of middle-class Singaporeans about the accessibility of higher education. Singapore has traditionally had one of the most open economies in the world and has benefited from the presence of multinational corporations and global finance. Regardless, many Singaporeans resent the high salaries of expatriates and the related high price of living in the city-state. Over time, in keeping with broader efforts to limit the number of work permits issued to foreigners, the government has

also largely abandoned its rhetoric about becoming a “global education hub.”¹³ While some international partnerships continue to thrive, such as the Duke-NUS Graduate Medical School, others have been quietly dissolved, including those with the Massachusetts Institute of Technology, Johns Hopkins University, and Imperial College London.¹⁴ The Yale-NUS case received more attention because it involved changing the name of an institution. The United States is currently experiencing its own populist revolt against many universities, which may come at a cost to the country in the long term.

In addition, a college that proudly announced its selectivity was always at risk of “tall poppy syndrome,” an occurrence that often leads to intense scrutiny of success. Singapore has an elevated level of participation in postsecondary education. Despite its tolerance for government authority and its relatively high levels of economic inequality, Singaporean society maintains a deeply egalitarian streak and a strong commitment to meritocracy. Although admission to Yale-NUS followed meritocratic principles, and the College has always offered generous financial aid, government officials understandably worry that the presence of a highly selective and educationally elite campus, with many international students, may trouble the median Singaporean voter whose child may not qualify for even state-supported universities. For instance, about 42 percent of college-age Singaporeans qualified for admission to the six state-supported universities in 2021, a cohort participation rate that the government has been working to increase. NUS College may cost as much to operate as Yale-NUS College, but its sticker price for tuition will be lower, it will admit more Singaporean students, and it will admit a lower proportion of international students than Yale-NUS did. These political factors surely swayed the decision-makers. As an outsider, I cannot say at which level the decision to end the partnership was taken, but in Singapore, it is clear that such decisions are not implemented without the approval of the prime minister’s cabinet.

Finally, it is said that “all politics is local,” and academic politics are known for both their parochialism and their ferocity.¹⁵ From the beginning, Yale-NUS inspired a degree of hostility in other parts of the National University of Singapore that saw the investments in liberal arts education as coming at the expense of their own priorities. Ideally, a new academic unit will strengthen the entire university by attracting talent and encouraging innovation. Elements of the Yale-NUS approach were incorporated into the new College of Humanities and Sciences at NUS and the curriculum (on which I consulted) for the future NUS College. But unfortunately, the broad innovative curriculum is unlikely to survive in its current form. Perhaps future educators or historians of education will see our efforts to create a curriculum spanning the West and Asia as a valuable contribution to intercultural understanding.

The fundamental model, however, has shifted considerably. Whereas Yale-NUS billed itself as “the first liberal arts college in Singapore,” NUS College de-

scribes itself as “the honors college of the National University of Singapore.” Yale-NUS created a relatively self-contained educational experience, in which students pursued their majors within the College while having the opportunity to take some courses at NUS and Yale. The intensity of that style of experience contributed to the College’s success. Many of my colleagues on the Yale-NUS faculty viewed NUS with some doubt, but I always thought that the College could benefit from its involvement with “two great universities,” in the words of our vision statement. During my presidency, I tried to guide the College toward being something like what former Harvard Dean Henry Rosovsky describes as a “university college,” one like Harvard or Yale College, in which students benefit from participating in the life of a great university while learning from professors who are leaders in their fields.¹⁶ The current NUS leadership has another, perfectly reasonable ambition for NUS College: it seeks to take the top NUS students and give them an intensive residential experience, with some shared curriculum, before having them complete their majors in the schools of the university. In such an arrangement, eminent faculty teach advanced courses across the university but are less involved in NUS College’s introductory curriculum. This is indeed the model of an honors college at a major state university, akin to the LSA Honors Program in the College of Literature, Science, and the Arts at the University of Michigan. Such an approach allows students access to a wide array of specializations, though it slightly dilutes a comprehensive collegiate experience.

To what extent did Yale University and the National University of Singapore achieve their goals in this partnership? In any institution, multiple goals are pursued by multiple constituents. Yale achieved the goal of developing an innovative form of international liberal education, and educated many promising students and prospective university administrators in the process. The investment in Asia was greeted with enthusiasm across the continent and signaled Yale’s continuing global ambitions. The political situation, coupled with the COVID-19 pandemic, has somewhat dented the university’s international strategy, but the founding of the Yale Jackson School of Global Affairs signals Yale’s enduring commitment to a global future. Like MIT or Johns Hopkins, perhaps Yale could have pursued a partnership without putting its name on the College. On the one hand, that would have made less of a splash at the beginning and end of the partnership. On the other hand, the ongoing success of the Duke-NUS Graduate Medical School suggests that another outcome was possible in different circumstances, and it seems worthwhile for leading universities to continue taking calculated risks in pursuit of their missions. Otherwise, one risks falling victim to the complacency of the incumbent. In the meantime, the National University of Singapore has succeeded in introducing a form of delayed specialization and other benefits of a liberal education while deciding to cease an explicit commitment to liberal arts education.

No doubt some people will conclude that we were naive to undertake this venture or will find that it was essentially neocolonial. I feel otherwise. Yale-NUS was a true collaboration jointly led by deeply committed Singaporean, American, and other international educators. The College not only educated remarkable cohorts for over a decade, but it also demonstrated the potential of liberal education outside the United States, encouraged international understanding and cooperation, and showed the value of a thoughtful approach to educational innovation. From an institutional point of view, it was a risk worth taking. It is easy for leading universities to rest on their laurels, but better to try and make an impact. In the words of the College's mission statement, we sought to educate "citizens of the world" at a time when such cosmopolitan ideals were under attack. The legacy of Yale-NUS College remains inspiring. A true community of learning, it provided a new model of liberal education in Asia and for the world.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

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ENDNOTES

- ¹ To give one striking example: the University of California, Berkeley, one of the world's great public universities, has blue and gold as its colors. The gold represents California, and the blue represents Yale, since many of Berkeley's founders were Yale graduates.
- ² The original prospectus was issued on my forty-second birthday. Remembering those founding days over a decade later, I cannot help but recall Wordsworth's lines about the early days of the French Revolution: "Bliss was it in that dawn to be alive, / But to be young was very heaven!" William Wordsworth, "The Prelude: Book XI," in *The Prelude or, Growth of a Poet's Mind; An Autobiographical Poem* (London: Edward Moxon, 1850). I admit that forty-two only counts as young in a relative sense. The excitement was captured by visiting journalist Karin Fischer in "Blurring Disciplines, Crossing Borders: Yale Helps Reimagine the Liberal Arts, with Asian Influences," *The Chronicle of Higher Education*, September 9, 2013, <https://www.chronicle.com/article/blurring-disciplines-crossing-borders>.

- ³ Pericles Lewis, “Globalizing the Liberal Arts: Twenty-First-Century Education,” in *Higher Education in the Era of the Fourth Industrial Revolution*, ed. Nancy W. Gleason (London: Palgrave Macmillan Singapore, 2018), 15–38, https://doi.org/10.1007/978-981-13-0194-0_2.
- ⁴ Bryan Garsten, Rajeev Patke, Charles Bailyn et al., *Yale-NUS College: A New Community of Learning: A Report Submitted by the Inaugural Curriculum Committee of Yale-NUS College* (New Haven, Conn. and Singapore: Yale-NUS College, 2013), <https://www.yale-nus.edu.sg/wp-content/uploads/2013/09/Yale-NUS-College-Curriculum-Report.pdf>; taking inspiration from Francis Christopher Oakley, *Community of Learning: The American College and the Liberal Arts Tradition* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1992) and Andrew Delbanco, *College: What It Was, Is, and Should Be* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 2012); and some additional history and analysis of Yale-NUS College is available in Bryan Penprase and Noah Pickus, *The New Global Universities: Reinventing Education in the 21st Century* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 2023), 53–75.
- ⁵ Haiyan Gao and Yijun Gu, “Establishing a Research-Focused Liberal Arts College in China: Duke Kunshan University,” *Daedalus* 153 (2) (Spring 2024): 68–82, <https://www.amacad.org/publication/establishing-research-focused-liberal-arts-college-china-duke-kunshan-university>.
- ⁶ *Penal Code 1871*, Section 377A [repealed by Act 39 of 2022 wef 03/01/2023].
- ⁷ Seyla Benhabib, “Benhabib: What’s at Stake at Yale-NUS,” *The Yale Daily News*, April 4, 2012, <https://yaledailynews.com/blog/2012/04/04/benhabib-whats-at-stake-at-yale-nus>.
- ⁸ Mitch Smith, “A Call to Respect Rights,” *Inside Higher Ed*, April 5, 2012, <https://www.insidehighered.com/news/2012/04/06/yale-faculty-resolution-expresses-concern-about-singapore-campus>.
- ⁹ Human Rights Watch Staff, “Singapore: Yale to Curtail Rights on New Campus,” Human Rights Watch, July 19, 2012, <https://www.hrw.org/news/2012/07/19/singapore-yale-curtail-rights-new-campus>; and Joan Bertin, Marjorie Heins, Cary Nelson, and Henry Reichman, “An Open Letter from the AAUP to the Yale Community,” American Association of University Professors (accessed May 6, 2024).
- ¹⁰ Peter Salovey, “Report Regarding the Cancellation of a Learning Module at Yale-NUS College,” *Yale News*, September 29, 2019, <https://news.yale.edu/2019/09/29/report-regarding-cancellation-learning-module-yale-nus-college>. The crisis described in this report erupted on my fifty-first birthday.
- ¹¹ “Free Speech and Non-Discrimination,” Yale-NUS College, <https://www.yale-nus.edu.sg/college-life/overview/community-policies-and-support/free-speech-and-non-discrimination> (accessed May 6, 2024).
- ¹² These figures can be derived from publicly available information, including information provided to the Parliament of Singapore by the Minister of Education in his explanation of the closing. See Chan Chun Sing, “Yale-NUS College Did Not Reach Fundraising Target ‘Through No Fault of Its Own,’ Transition to New College Will Reduce Costs: Chan Chun Sing,” *CNA*, September 13, 2021, <https://www.channelnewsasia.com/singapore/yale-nus-fundraising-target-no-fault-new-college-reduce-costs-2173821>. The Minister indicated that cost savings were not “the main motivation for the change.”
- ¹³ Hannah Soong, “Singapore International Education Hub and Its Dilemmas: The Challenges and Makings for Cosmopolitan Learning,” *Asia Pacific Journal of Education* 40 (1) (2020): 112–125.

- ¹⁴ MIT continues a research collaboration with Singapore but is no longer involved in the administration of the Singapore University of Technology and Design. In addition to its ongoing partnership with Wuhan University, Duke continues to govern Duke-NUS Graduate Medical School jointly with NUS. For more information on the continuing partnership between Duke University and Wuhan University, see Gao and Gu, “Establishing a Research-Focused Liberal Arts College in China: Duke Kunshan University.”
- ¹⁵ The phrase is often associated with Tip O’Neill, former speaker of the United States House of Representatives (1977–1987), but is recorded as early as 1932. See Fred R. Shapiro, *The Yale Book of Quotations* (New Haven, Conn.: Yale University Press, 2006), 566.
- ¹⁶ Henry Rosovsky, *The University: An Owner’s Manual* (New York: W. W. Norton & Company, 1991).

Northwestern University in Qatar: A Distinctive Global University

Marwan M. Kraidy

Founded in 2008 through a partnership between Northwestern University and Qatar Foundation for Education, Science and Community Development (QF), Northwestern University in Qatar (NU-Q) educates creative, ethical, and impactful communicators, and contributes both to Northwestern's excellence and the rise of Qatar as a knowledge-based society. NU-Q's vision is multidisciplinary, multi-modal, multilingual, and focused on the Global South as an intellectual and creative space for research and teaching. NU-Q positions itself as an "embedded institution" in which U.S. higher education overlaps with regional and "Southern" circuits of academic exchange that catalyze critical debates on enduring and emerging issues, and enables a relationship between the university and the world that is globally competitive and locally resonant. NU-Q is a distinctive university dedicated to that vision.

Founded through a partnership between Northwestern University and Qatar Foundation for Education, Science and Community Development (QF), Northwestern University in Qatar (NU-Q) opened its doors in 2008 to an inaugural class of thirty-eight students from fourteen nations, including thirty women and fourteen Qataris. One of three Northwestern campuses and an active member of QF's Education City in Doha, alongside Carnegie Mellon University, Cornell University, Georgetown University, Hamad Bin Khalifa University, Texas A&M University, and Virginia Commonwealth University, NU-Q educates students to become creative, ethical, and impactful communicators. We offer a world-class professional education nourished by the liberal arts, and contribute to Northwestern's excellence and to the rise of Qatar as a knowledge-based society.

Excellence, collaboration, community, and sustainability are key values. A faculty of 43 and a staff of 107 collaborate in a state-of-the-art building to offer undergraduate degrees in journalism and in communication, and minors in media and politics, Middle East studies, strategic communication, Africana studies, and film and design. Even with increasingly selective admissions, our yearly enrollment has grown to 473 in 2023. Since 2008, NU-Q has graduated five hundred students, now leaders in media and public affairs. In the last five years, our faculty has pro-

duced fifty major scholarly or creative-media pieces. In 2022, as we graduated our tenth class, one student received a Rhodes Scholarship, and another was a Rhodes finalist and the winner of a McCall MacBain Award, a flagship graduate scholarship at McGill University. In 2023, for the first time, one of NU-Q's students was selected as a Schwarzman Scholar, with a scholarship to complete a Masters of Global Affairs at Tsinghua University in Beijing. Professors have been awarded grants from the Carnegie Corporation of New York, the National Endowment for the Humanities, and the Qatar National Research Fund.

NU-Q is an embedded institution – nested within multiple contexts: U.S. higher education, QF's Education City, and the Arab region. Doha is a cosmopolitan city, where expatriates vastly outnumber nationals, and NU-Q has grown similarly, with students and employees from over sixty countries. While English is our official language, numerous languages are spoken on campus, and many of our students are multilingual.

According to the American Council on Education (ACE), which publishes an annual report, *Mapping Internationalization on U.S. Campuses*, a leading goal of internationalization in 2022 was “diversifying students, faculty, and staff” at 64 percent (second to “improving student preparedness for a global era,” at 70 percent).¹ Diversification increased in importance from below 50 percent in 2011 to above 60 percent in 2021, culminating at 64 percent in 2022.

NU-Q's awe-inspiring national, racial, ethnic, social class, religious, linguistic, and gender diversity exemplifies ACE's goals. Our vision blends U.S. diversity, equity, and inclusion norms and practices with the global diversity of our community. Qatar's intergroup relations differ from those in the United States: Qataris are a demographic minority. There is a large and white-collar expatriate community, global in composition, but with a significant North American and European contingent. Manual laborers hail mostly from South Asian countries like Bangladesh and India, and security guards mostly from African countries like Kenya and the Sudan.

A key leadership task is to harmonize our contextual specificities, our global community, and Northwestern's norms, policies, and procedures. Some of our tasks include the application of U.S. diversity standards and practices to a workforce whose international composition and ethnic, racial, and linguistic diversity differ from customary U.S. frameworks, as well as broader sociocultural issues.² For example, a lot of work goes into reconciling Northwestern's nondiscrimination policies while adhering to Qatari laws that ban public expression of LGBTQ+ identities and recognize only two genders, male and female.

Our institutional enmeshments, faculty expertise, community demographics, geographic location, and sociocultural context enable us to make a distinctive contribution to Northwestern's global engagement along with the Roberta Buffet Institute for Global Affairs. As we renewed our vision in 2020 to focus on

the Global South, we doubled down on Northwestern's norms and standards of excellence. In our vision, the Global South is not a specific geographical territory (what we used to call "developing nations" or "third world countries") but an intellectual space that integrates local, national, and regional ways of knowing for the development of global knowledge production in dialogue and debate with the Western humanities and social science canon. Our inclusive emphasis on the Global South complements Northwestern's global work. Generous internal funding mechanisms support faculty projects on a wide range of subjects.

Our renewed mission integrates our faculty of humanists, social scientists, practicing journalists, digital creators, and filmmakers into "a community of evidence-based storytellers" committed to excellence in scholarly and creative craft, focused on the Global South. Faculty-student collaborations are multidisciplinary, multilingual, and multimodal, using words, images, sounds, and emerging digital tools in the rigorous conduct and compelling conveyance of research, hence "evidence-based storytelling."³ With this, we contribute to a richer and more pluralistic landscape of knowledge production and dissemination. We build research and teaching capacity in and about the Global South. We include Arab, African, and Asian topics and scholars. And we explore schools of thought that are important but lesser known, in tandem with canonical approaches.

In 2021, we launched the Institute for Advanced Study in the Global South to catalyze faculty-student collaborations, foment teaching-research symbioses, integrate humanistic inquiry with professional curricula, and spearhead active intellectual and professional engagement with the Global South. The Institute's centerpiece is a fellowship that provides highly qualified undergraduates with intensive mentorship to complete a major scholarly or creative project.

Another core initiative at the Institute is the Arab Information and Media Studies (AIMS) project, which aims to build the field of media, communication, and information research in the Arab region and integrate Arabophone, Francophone, and Anglophone scholarly networks through multilingual conferences and publications. This project is supported by the Carnegie Corporation of New York and will be implemented in partnership with the Arab Social Science Research Council.

We also launched a three-pronged initiative on artificial intelligence, which includes a research lab where faculty members, postdoctoral scholars, and students collaborate on cutting-edge scholarship, a minor in media and artificial intelligence, and an institution-wide series of workshops to sustain a sophisticated community-wide conversation about, and the selective adoption of, artificial intelligence at NU-Q.

A key strategic challenge for Northwestern University in Qatar is the cyclical time horizon of our institution, which operates on renewable ten-year contracts, an imperfect timeframe for long-term strategic planning, recruitment, and main-

taining excellence. Since the institution does not offer tenure, some faculty members feel a sense of precarity due to the lack of career-long job security that they can expect at a major research university in the United States. To bolster stability, we have established contracts that are reliable and consistent, and implemented a coherent, transparent, and equitable recruitment, reappointment, and promotion process – all deeply rooted in the tenets of faculty governance – in addition to strategic research support.

The initial expectations for NU-Q have evolved from a major focus on teaching and a relatively minor focus on research to a combined emphasis on teaching global communication leaders while producing original knowledge and media content about the world, particularly the Global South. Today, although it maintains its institutional autonomy, NU-Q is more deeply enmeshed with other U.S. universities in Qatar, offering joint minors, experiencing increased cross-registration with other campuses, and contributing to more collaborations between universities. As it evolved from a start-up to a mature institution, NU-Q has become more closely aligned with Northwestern's norms and standards while making distinctive contributions to education and research, reflected chiefly in coursework and original scholarship focused on the Global South.

One possible unintended consequence of U.S. international campuses is the impoverishment of regional academic life. NU-Q and its peers (New York University Abu Dhabi, American University in Beirut, American University in Cairo) have older connections with U.S. universities than with institutions in the Arab region.⁴ Besides, with their prestige, their highly competitive compensations, and their integration with North American networks, they attract the best and brightest faculty at the risk of an intellectual desertification of local institutions. Within the Arab world, as the political and economic center of gravity shifts to Gulf states like Qatar, the United Arab Emirates, and Saudi Arabia, erstwhile higher-education leaders like Egypt, Iraq, and Lebanon, in the throes of protracted all-encompassing crises, suffer an accelerated brain drain toward the Gulf that is reshaping regional higher education.

Anthropologist Marshall Sahlins famously argued that the nail in the coffin of the Hawaiian Kingdom was not British control per se, but rather the severing of relationships between the individual islands of the archipelago in favor of direct individual connections with the British. Universities within a geocultural and linguistic region, much like islands in an archipelago, form an ecosystem in which individual entities are interdependent and mutually enriching. Consider one example: in the Arab region, one important asset that is at risk with the internationalization of higher education is the Arabic language, which requires a fertile milieu of scholarly exchange to thrive and continue developing scientific and humanistic vocabularies that keep up with technological change. This can be done only in an atmosphere of exchange and mutual growth with other languages, where Arabic

is a vital, but not exclusive medium of teaching, scholarship, and exchange. The same general rule should apply to English, which at U.S. international campuses in the region leaves very little oxygen for other languages to thrive. Hence the trilingual AIMS project combines Arabic, French, and English.⁵

Circuits of academic exchange across and within various countries in the Global South are crucial to preserving universities in a region like the Arab world as a rare and relatively autonomous space of critical reflection, as well as local and transnational knowledge development, especially in the humanities and social sciences. These circuits enable a relationship between the university and the world that is globally competitive and locally resonant. Grounded in Northwestern values and practices, NU-Q is a distinctive global university dedicated to that vision.

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ENDNOTES

- ¹ *Mapping Internationalization on U.S. Campuses, 2022 Edition* (Washington, D.C.: American Council on Education, 2022).
- ² This can also be the case in China. See Mianheng Jiang, “The Liberal Arts in a Chinese Tech University: ShanghaiTech,” *Dædalus* 153 (2) (Spring 2024): 98–105; <https://www.amacad.org/publication/liberal-arts-chinese-tech-university-shanghai-tech>.
- ³ Much like The London Interdisciplinary School (LIS), NU-Q breaks barriers between subjects of study. For more on LIS, see Carl Gombrich and Amelia Peterson, “Teaching for Synthesis at The London Interdisciplinary School,” *Dædalus* 153 (2) (Spring 2024): 217–223; <https://www.amacad.org/publication/teaching-synthesis-london-interdisciplinary-school>.
- ⁴ For information on NYU Abu Dhabi, see Mariët Westermann, “The International University in an Age of Deglobalization,” *Dædalus* 153 (2) (Spring 2024): 36–47; <https://www.amacad.org/publication/international-university-age-deglobalization>.
- ⁵ In doing so, we follow the pioneering trilingual model of the Beirut-based Arab Council for the Social Sciences.

Establishing a Research-Focused Liberal Arts College in China: Duke Kunshan University

Haiyan Gao & Yijun Gu

Duke Kunshan University (DKU), a new liberal arts and science university in China, with Duke University and Wuhan University as academic partners, is an experiment in twenty-first-century characteristics and global challenges. DKU's undergraduate degree program features an innovative, integrated, and interdisciplinary curriculum focused on cross-disciplinary challenges and research experiences. Its interdisciplinary research centers and graduate programs help attract international faculty and students, while its residential setting promotes diverse, rich, and meaningful interactions beyond the classroom. The shared vision for DKU among students, parents, faculty, staff, partner universities, and other stakeholders helps ensure the university's success. And the phenomenal achievements of the first cohort of graduates from the inaugural class of 2022 is evidence that the DKU experiment is working, despite many challenges.

Located thirty-seven miles west of Shanghai, Duke Kunshan University (DKU) was established through a partnership between Duke University in the United States and Wuhan University in China. A nonprofit, joint venture university, DKU was accredited by China's Ministry of Education in September 2013. In August 2014, it welcomed its inaugural class of graduate students and students for a nondegree undergraduate Global Learning Semester program. Following these developments, DKU started designing a new liberal arts curriculum and launched a four-year undergraduate degree program in August 2018. The goal of this program was to renew and strengthen the liberal arts and sciences tradition, characterized by a profound integrative and innovative curriculum in response to the opportunities and challenges of the globalized twenty-first century.

This century has witnessed increasingly complex problems across the boundaries of traditional disciplines and emerging fields. And the process of globalization has rendered all students in need of global consciousness and competencies. These rapidly changing dynamics – whether in the social and political realms, or in the fields of science, the environment, and health – recall the new opportuni-

ties for liberal arts education that emphasize empathy, transferable intellectual ability, and demonstrated capacity to apply knowledge and skills in real-world settings. A bold adventure, DKU provides a new type of liberal arts education in China: that of a liberal arts campus embodied in an interdisciplinary research university.

In the United States, while liberal arts colleges support the tradition of engaging students in research, research is not a primary focus for these colleges. Building a liberal arts university that is also a research university is itself a new experiment, so the success of DKU may provide valuable experiences and lessons for well-established liberal arts colleges.

Although the DKU model is rooted in the cultivation of humanism (a core value of liberal arts education), it significantly emphasizes the unity of multiple disciplines, knowledge creation, and applied learning, considering the fundamental changes occurring in both contemporary and future society. To fulfill these principles, the undergraduate program features an integrated, interdisciplinary, and research-oriented curriculum, with a strong focus on promoting global consciousness, cross-cultural understanding, and pioneering research in service to society.

The mission of DKU not only integrates education and research, it also breaks the boundaries of these specialties by fostering collaboration across their course units. The education pedagogy emphasizes the importance of educational breadth, free inquiry, and deep engagement. For example, college divisions collaborate with research centers to serve as integrated education hubs. The curriculum is also characterized by an interdisciplinary framework built upon divisional foundation courses, advanced work in disciplinary and interdisciplinary fields, fieldwork-based features, and a Signature Work Project that effectively connects coursework with practices, internships, and other experiential activities that further strengthen the creation and integration of knowledge, practice, and individual interest.

This model provides a broad range of multidisciplinary learning and cognitive approaches, with a focus on specific areas that reflect the contemporary challenges human beings face. Integration is the key feature in the entire academic design, considering profound changes in disciplines that have taken place in the past few decades. For example, in the division of the natural sciences, biology and life sciences have become increasingly quantified, traditional boundaries between disciplines have become more blurred, and new interdisciplinary fields have emerged, such as data science, biophysics, and biomathematics. Traditional courses, therefore, cannot properly meet modern demands. For these reasons, DKU relies on interdisciplinary learning, problem-solving approaches, and the research strength of Duke, Wuhan, and itself to meet emerging demands. Under this philosophy, the undergraduate college is organized into three divisions: natural and applied

sciences, social sciences, and humanities and arts. These divisions have no departments, focusing instead on integrating two strands of learning: disciplinary and interdisciplinary studies. Faculty members from the three divisions work on a significant proportion of courses that bring together cognate disciplinary knowledge, and form teams to deliver the courses collectively. Thus, key features of DKU's undergraduate program are flexibility and interdisciplinarity. DKU courses have unique, innovative characteristics that emphasize shared knowledge and experience, integrated and in-depth learning, and flexible course combinations that offer students sufficient choices for learning and experience.

Duke Kunshan University experimented with a pioneering Global Learning Semester (GLS) program before the full launch of its undergraduate degree program. To begin, GLS brought together undergraduate students from more than twenty partner universities in China and foreign universities like Duke and Shiv Nadar University in India in a semester-long liberal arts program at DKU. This program offered courses taught by faculty from Duke, DKU, Wuhan, and other distinguished institutions, innovated in various areas that were later adopted by the undergraduate degree program. Research hubs at DKU proactively provided interdisciplinary research opportunities to GLS students as well. While experimenting with GLS, DKU was designing its undergraduate education in parallel, not simply to mimic traditional practices but rather to emphasize the seven “animating principles” expressed in its curriculum and overall goals: rooted globalism, purposeful life, collaborative problem solving, independence and creativity, research and practice, lucid communication, and wise leadership.¹ These principles are embedded in the undergraduate degree program through the following innovative features.

First, a semester is divided into two intensive seven-week sessions, with some courses flexibly adapted to fourteen weeks in length. The seven-week model allows focused and immersed studies, though students can move quickly to other topics. This structure also facilitates better research and teaching partnerships with visiting faculty. Second, DKU made a big leap in designing a twenty-first-century liberal arts curriculum that pushes the boundaries of integration and interdisciplinarity. The curriculum is composed of common core courses, divisional foundation courses, and interdisciplinary and disciplinary courses. The common core course series, focusing on big questions and critical challenges, helps students develop shared knowledge and experience, so they are prepared to engage, debate, and grow. Student engagement in the series draws from and integrates humanistic and scientific knowledge in three common core courses: *China in the World* (year one), *Global Challenges in Science, Technology and Health* (year two), and *Ethics, Citizenship and the Examined Life* (year three). *China in the World* focuses on historical and contemporary exchanges between China and oth-

er regions and countries. The course invites students to think about the commercial, intellectual, and scientific engagement of China in the world, and the world in China, from an interdisciplinary perspective. Student feedback has been excellent, noting eye-opening experiences and refreshing exchanges of views via the broad perspectives and distinct cultural backgrounds offered. Global Challenges in Science, Technology and Health not only animates DKU's mission to prepare students to work collaboratively and wisely to confront global challenges with imagination, empathy, and rigor, it also helps students develop common sense and critical thinking in the arenas of science and technology. And finally, Ethics, Citizenship and the Examined Life balances traditional and contemporary analyses of moral self-cultivation with examinations of personal obligations that extend beyond the self: that is, to communities, religions, political parties, nations, and humanity.

The divisional foundation courses serve as an integrated base for interdisciplinary studies. For example, Integrated Science Series, a divisional foundation course in the natural sciences, adopts team-design and team-teaching of physics, chemistry, and biology. This approach helps students broaden their horizons, grasp cutting-edge questions about and methodologies of science disciplines, and understand the close relationship among these domains. Following their common exposure to integrated sciences, students choose a major that has both disciplinary and interdisciplinary components. Integration of disciplines also runs through the curriculum design for the social sciences, as well as the humanities and arts. Thus, the overall design considers and promotes both intersection and integration between the natural sciences, social sciences, and the humanities and arts. In this curriculum framework, students and teachers form horizontal and vertical learning communities for knowledge interaction. Interdisciplinary *horizontal* communities span multiple disciplines and address each topic from different subject areas, perspectives, and approaches. Disciplinary *vertical* communities align with traditional disciplines and provide in-depth study and exposure in discipline-specific methods. Students can adapt their study approaches to participate in both communities at different stages.

Additionally, signature work and experiential education serve as key components of capstone projects for DKU students. Signature Work projects differ from traditional thesis projects in many ways and emphasize crafting a three-year journey that fosters students' holistic development. One feature of these projects is students' involvement to choose their own research beginning sophomore year and continuing to graduation. Throughout this period, advisors and faculty members support students as they develop pathways that include thematically linked courses, along with cocurricular and experiential activities. These pathways allow students to create substantial scholarly or creative products of importance to themselves and society. Their structural designs also shape students' curriculum,

leading to tailored methods of learning that are student-centered and, thus, driven by their needs and interests.

DKU's undertaking is not without challenges, however. The first challenge comes from acquiring approval to offer such an innovative curriculum. To launch its undergraduate program in the 2018–2019 academic year, DKU needed to get the first set of academic majors approved by China's Ministry of Education (MOE) in the spring of 2017. Applications for the MOE's approval for an academic subject already on the list of majors takes about eight to nine months. For new majors, it typically takes more than a year. Although all DKU majors are new in terms of cross-disciplinary combinations, the approval process for new majors was not applicable here. We faced an interesting dilemma in finding a way to conform our innovative, interdisciplinary majors to the traditional disciplinary majors accepted by the MOE. This tested the collective ingenuity and teamwork of faculty and staff at DKU, Duke, and Wuhan Universities, who creatively matched new majors to those already on the MOE's list so they could be approved with their innovative designs intact. Our painstaking effort paid off when the initial round of all eight majors was approved by the MOE in the spring of 2017. In the summers of 2017 and 2018, we applied for additional majors using the same strategy.²

Another challenge concerns certain MOE requirements for courses with students from Greater China (that is, Mainland China, Hong Kong, Macau, and Taiwan). *China in the World*, a hugely successful common core course that we discussed before, does not fully meet the MOE requirement that calls for additional courses to cover Chinese history, law, society, and culture. This presented several challenges in course design and implementation. After brainstorm and workshop sessions between DKU and Wuhan, a team of Wuhan faculty from multiple schools did an outstanding job in designing two courses focused on Chinese history, society, and culture that debuted in 2019 to excellent student feedback. While this was a challenging situation for DKU, it was not unique to the institution as other joint venture universities in China must meet the same requirement.

One last challenge rises from implementing a new curriculum. Take, for example, the integrated science foundational course series. Developing and implementing an integrated science curriculum has always been challenging, so the faculty committee, who designed the courses, studied the examples of Princeton University and Virginia Tech. In the Princeton case, when it came to students' science and math backgrounds, such courses were offered to a small fraction of students, while at Virginia Tech, the courses were offered to a much larger and somewhat homogeneous student population. DKU's integrated science curriculum was more like the Princeton version in its design. However, the goal was to offer these divisional foundational courses to all DKU students who were interested in science. The series, which originally consisted of four courses, went through iterations by an expanded team of DKU, Duke, and Wuhan faculty during on-the-ground implementation

in the 2018–2019 academic year. Two things we learned quickly during implementation, which required further adjustments and adaptation, were that the student population at DKU was diverse and that students came from high schools in over thirty countries. Therefore, they had varied backgrounds in high school math and science. Another complication was the unique seven-week module that made practical implementation of such an integrated science course series extremely challenging for faculty, and especially for students, as there are only so many laboratory experiments one can reasonably schedule in seven weeks. This can leave students unintentionally shortchanged when it comes to the hands-on experience they need to comprehend theoretical concepts. Thus, the changes made to the integrated science curriculum during the 2018–2019 academic year shifted the original four-course sequence into a hybrid form of two integrated science courses of biology, chemistry, and physics, with three additional courses tailored toward each of these subjects, respectively. This revised curriculum was implemented immediately and worked well. Students still had adequate exposure to the integrated biology, chemistry, and physics experience, while simultaneously having their interest in a particular scientific discipline better met by this hybrid form.

As a small, newly established liberal arts and research university, DKU's undergraduate curriculum does not aim to cover all areas of study. Instead, it focuses on selective disciplinary and interdisciplinary concentrations that students combine to declare their majors. The flexibility students have in combining concentrations reflects the breadth of contemporary research and the depths of their scholarly interests.

The concentrations split into two strands: one with an emphasis on disciplinary focus and another emphasizing interdisciplinary approaches. Disciplinary and interdisciplinary concentrations can also merge to form a student's major, and there are more than forty combinations that can fulfill a degree. Environmental science, global health, applied math and computational science, behavioral science, and media and arts are a few examples of interdisciplinary approaches. Furthermore, students can combine concentrations – for instance, environmental science with chemistry, biology, or public policy – to continue different paths that expand or deepen their chosen program. Meanwhile, the boundaries between academic divisions are also blurred, so that fields like computation and design mix with social policy and digital media. These concentrations closely correlate with the graduate programs and research strength of DKU, Duke, and Wuhan. Undergraduate students benefit from the opportunity to vertically integrate their learning with graduate students and researchers through fully supported and guided collaborative learning in graduate courses, and involvement in research centers.

As a new type of liberal arts and research university, one important aspect of DKU is its early design and creation of interdisciplinary research centers and grad-

uate degree programs prior to the launch of the four-year undergraduate program. The first research center established at DKU was the Global Health Research Center in 2013, which was in full alignment with Duke and Wuhan Universities' research strength in this area. The research center focuses on noncommunicable diseases, environmental health, health policies and systems, and emerging infectious diseases. The university also launched the Global Health Master's program in 2014.

The Environmental Research Center was the second research hub established at DKU, amid the environmental problems that represent another major challenge facing the world. The center is synergistic with the Global Health Research Center, the International Master of Environmental Policy (iMEP, a graduate degree program offered by Duke University at DKU), and with Duke University's Nicholas School of the Environment, which boasts one of the most highly rated graduate programs in environmental policy and management in the United States.

A few important principles have also been adopted in designing and establishing research centers at DKU: first is addressing pressing global issues, which require interdisciplinary approaches and which have more acute challenges in China; second is building upon the research strength of partner universities, while growing DKU's strength in emerging areas together with these partners; and third is developing DKU's research impact as a small liberal arts and research university through synergies across all research areas, and vertical integration with graduate and undergraduate degree programs.

Two additional, major research centers established at DKU are the Institute of Applied Physical Sciences and Engineering (iAPSE) and the Zu Chongzhi Center for Mathematics and Computational Sciences (ZCCMCS), with data science being a prominent part of both research centers since data and computational science, and the synergy between these sciences, are among the innovative strengths DKU is developing, as well as further expansion into synergies with the social sciences and the humanities. At DKU, collaborations on data science between iAPSE, ZCCMCS, and other university centers – such as the Global Health Research Center, the Environmental Research Center, the Center for the Study of Contemporary China, and the Humanities Research Center – are also robust, with a considerable portion of undergraduate students either working or having worked on projects around this cluster.

These research centers, together with DKU graduate programs, provide important synergies and vertical integration with the undergraduate degree program. The extent to which undergraduate students participate in graduate classes, and their collaborative engagement of independent research, highlights the bold innovation of this program. For instance, ZCCMCS organizes workshops and networking opportunities for students that support academic endeavors like Signature Work Projects; while students from undergraduate, postgraduate, and research programs form close collaborations; and ZCCMCS faculty supervise stu-

dent research projects alongside faculty from the division of natural and applied sciences. A typical project for a student could focus on theoretical neuroscience with guidance from faculty in applied mathematics and biology. In addition to the innovative aspects of this undergraduate program, grants offered by research centers and the college – which facilitate student-student and student-faculty research collaborations – flourish under unified administration at DKU that promotes undergraduate research and entrepreneurship practices.

Despite such progress, there are many challenges associated with building research capabilities and support systems at DKU. On the faculty level, the responsibilities of liberal arts education can conflict with the faculty's research goals, agendas, and general scholarship, as well as the work they do to compete for grants in China that fund research pursuits. On the university level, without support for and promotion of research at DKU, faculty recruitment would be even more challenging. There has also always been more interest at Duke University in innovations of liberal arts education and certain areas of research such as China studies, global health, and environmental studies. On the municipal level, while the city of Kunshan has supported DKU generously, there remains an understandable preference for subject areas like applied science and engineering that promise quick returns on investment. Research collaborations between Duke and DKU faculty are also becoming more difficult because of the increasing tensions in relations between the United States and China, such as the clash of ideologies, competition between the nations, and risks in many science and technology areas. And while Wuhan University has been a loyal partner in the DKU enterprise, it has kept a low profile in its overall engagement in academics and research. As a result of such difficulties on many levels, a major challenge for DKU in the next decade will be sustaining and enhancing its research capabilities after some initial success.

The successful implementation of DKU's innovative yet challenging curriculum is aided substantially by its small and close-knit campus design. Though the university was designed to support a small body of diverse students, it goes beyond that to create an even more closely connected and supportive community of students, staff, and faculty members. At DKU, most students and some faculty members live in accommodations on campus or nearby off campus. In particular, visiting faculty from Duke and Wuhan, who make up about one-third of teachers, live in the same residence quarters as students. This compact campus design nurtures DKU's culture of equal and rich interactions between all members of the community.

Several factors contributed to its formation. One was an innovative curriculum that attracts adventurous students with clear expectations, tentative prospects for their life goals, and a readiness to take on challenges. To quote Peter Ballentine, a graduate of the inaugural class of 2022, he found a “kinship with other students

who were [similarly] curious and adventurous.”³ Ballentine was one of many well-rounded and high-performance students constituting DKU’s international and diverse student body, wherein approximately 35 percent of international students were admitted from over ninety countries worldwide.

Another factor of the institution’s specific campus design was to empower certain developmental processes for undergraduate students, such as their personal and cultural maturation, and unification of selfhood and identity.⁴ An ideal liberal arts college should enable students’ growth in these areas as they become members of broader society. This is why students from different backgrounds are encouraged and supported to live together in residential housing at DKU, where they also participate in various social, academic, and cultural activities that bring them together. This form of community plays a vital role in preparing students to responsibly promote a globalized vision, inclusive dialogue, international competitiveness, and thorough understanding of both their own societies and those beyond. It also helps students become active and engaged citizens in local, national, and international affairs.

All these features not only help promote the personal and academic growth of DKU students but, more important, they support students’ wellness and sense of belonging. DKU’s positive response to the COVID-19 pandemic was a testimony to their commitment to student safety. The campus provided a safe place for community life during quarantines, with hybrid classes set up immediately after the pandemic’s outbreak to ensure no interruption of instruction and other activities.

Regardless of these benefits, there are still challenges with attracting international faculty and staff to live on or near DKU’s campus. While the surrounding city of Kunshan boasts the highest GDP among all county-level cities for more than twenty years in China, many prefer to live in the nearby cities of Suzhou and Shanghai for cultural reasons or for their own children’s education. We hope more faculty and staff will live on campus following completion of the Phase 2 campus construction, when more housing becomes available.

To design high-quality educational offerings is one thing, to draw and convince prospective students and their parents is another. Although market studies were conducted prior to launching the undergraduate degree program, which highlighted certain attributes of prospective DKU students, there were gaps and uncertainties between reality, findings from surveys, and insights from focus group discussions. While its partner universities, Duke and Wuhan, are well known, DKU is a new university with a unique curriculum. One could even say DKU is a thoughtfully designed, novel experiment with many innovations. However, as with any experiment, it can fail. Eighteen-year-old students can be fearless, but how does one convince their parents to risk their child’s college education, some of the most informative years of their lives? For a long

time, the Chinese university system addressed this uncertainty by following the Soviet Union–style of highly specialized and job-focused education models.⁵ Although the weakness of such models has been clear to many, being able to find a job after getting a college degree remains important to many parents. What has helped DKU succeed, then, in attracting new students and parents, is its consistent and powerful messaging on the value of liberal arts education and its globally conscious design – one that is mindful of the twenty-first century’s global economy and the attending challenges facing humanity.

This messaging is communicated through open-house events that let high school students and their parents experience the DKU model; many visits by DKU faculty, university leaders, and staff to high schools in Chinese provinces prior to the start of new student recruitment; similar visits to schools in the United States to engage prospective students; and social media campaigns that serve as DKU’s main channel for recruitment from outside of China and the United States. These outreach efforts combined with other selling points – such as the high-quality curriculum that took years of collective effort to design, as well as the clear, consistent, and persistent message on the value of such high-quality educational goods, and the deployment of all available communication tools and resources to connect with students and their parents – have helped the university succeed in attracting future graduates.

In the summer of 2022, Duke Kunshan awarded its inaugural undergraduate class with a graduation ceremony that celebrated the university’s fulfilment of its education goal. Eighty-two percent of the graduating class continued their studies at graduate schools, the majority of whom (70 percent) were admitted by world-leading institutions such as Harvard University, Yale University, the Massachusetts Institute of Technology, Oxford University, and Cambridge University. Four graduates were awarded prestigious Rhodes, Schwarzman, and Yenching Academy scholarships. The remaining 18 percent of graduates pursued work in industries and public sectors worldwide.

Thus, the success of undergraduate research and entrepreneurship at DKU has been demonstrated by the enormous accomplishments seen in its inaugural class that highlight the benefits of facilitating support for students’ early involvement in research and practical projects. For example, one student was part of a research team in chemistry for two years, published two papers as the lead author, presented at the American Physical Society’s research conference in 2021, and secured a full scholarship for a PhD program in physical and engineering biology at Yale.⁶ A considerable number of additional undergraduate students have had work published, or scheduled to be published, in peer-reviewed journals such as the prestigious *Physical Review Letters*, while others charted transformational journeys through the university’s multidisciplinary curriculum.⁷

Moreover, the undergraduate program achieved a relatively balanced declaration of majors across natural and applied science, social science, and the humanities and arts. Considering the pressure facing liberal arts education worldwide through reallocating funds from the arts and humanities to focus solely on STEM fields, the DKU model is telling in its resistance. For the 2022 class, 52 percent of students declared majors in natural science, with 29 percent in basic sciences and 23 percent in data science. A comparable 48 percent of students studied in social science (34 percent) and the humanities and arts (14 percent) combined. The proportion also remains at a stable scale for the class of 2024, with 48 percent in natural and applied science, 37 percent in social science, and 15 percent in the humanities and arts.

The DKU partnership of Duke, Wuhan, and the municipal government of Kunshan City is a strong and interesting one. The original model of DKU, based on Duke's Fuqua School of Business, was completely changed once the broader Duke faculty became interested and engaged. This newer vision resonated and was more aligned with Duke's bold and ambitious global strategy, as well as its roots in liberal arts education and interdisciplinary research. Duke faculty in various schools became interested in the DKU experiment and its interdisciplinary approaches to solving urgent issues in energy, health, and the environment. Having a foot on the ground in China also helped position Duke faculty and students at the frontiers of these challenges in the world's second-most-populous country. At the same time, academic freedom has been an important cornerstone of this partnership for Duke and Duke faculty. But while DKU has been visible to many at Duke, the number of Duke faculty who are actively engaged in DKU remains small.

As a comprehensive university with a relatively long history in China – known for its programs in the social sciences, arts and the humanities, and science and engineering – Wuhan University was a good fit for partnership. Yet despite this suitability, the engagement and overall interest level of Wuhan's faculty in DKU was lower compared with Duke's faculty. As a joint-venture university in China, DKU undergraduate students are expected to receive a DKU degree and a Duke degree by the MOE. Duke's faculty took the lead in driving innovation and experimentation with the new curriculum. Added value did come, however, after the curriculum was socialized with Wuhan faculty for feedback prior to seeking the MOE's approval. From the research side, Wuhan faculty have also shown more interest in collaborating with Duke faculty versus DKU faculty. Nevertheless, this situation is shifting as DKU builds its research capability, and with the completion of a new building to host the Wuhan-Duke Research Institute at DKU.

The city of Kunshan is another interesting partner, with bold, ambitious, and hardworking leadership. By 2000, it had become one of the most prosperous county-level cities in China. In 2022, with a resident population of two million, Kunshan became the first county-level city in China to surpass the five hundred

billion renminbi (RMB) mark for GDP. But Kunshan's long-term aspirations to transform from a manufacturing- to a knowledge-based economy, attract talent from Greater China and beyond, and reclaim ancient cultural glory are beyond these numbers. The city's rejuvenation of Kunqu (also known as Kun Opera, a form of Chinese opera that originated in Kunshan during the fourteenth century) was part of these ambitions, as was the visionary plan of inviting Duke and Wuhan to build the Duke Kunshan University. Still, while Kunshan has been generous, accepting, and supportive of DKU, it has been simultaneously ambivalent since its original interest was not necessarily in the liberal arts. Instead, Kunshan remains more interested in applied and engineering research areas that can help drive the local economy, and ideally in the short term. Furthermore, research requires investment and time for applied research agendas. Therefore, there has been tension at DKU concerning research budgets, research areas, and the time it takes to achieve impactful results. So, while the alignment among the three partners is not perfect, it is perhaps the best anyone can hope for given the vast differences between Duke, Wuhan, and the city of Kunshan.

Despite these challenges, the DKU experiment and its initial success highlight the importance of deep engagement of all stakeholders, especially students, parents, faculty from Duke and Wuhan, Duke University's Board of Trustees, DKU's Board of Trustees and Advisory Board, and the municipal government of Kunshan. In many ways, the inaugural class of students was a self-selected group of pioneering spirits who wanted to take ownership of their education to define their future life and career paths. These students worked side by side with an equally self-selected faculty and staff from around the world. Everyone had a vested interest in the success of DKU, so the next ten to fifteen years will be critically important in solidifying the ongoing success of the university and its culture. While the university matures, a key challenge concerning DKU's faculty and staff will be their continued ability to attract students worldwide who have the same pioneering spirit as the class of 2022. Other important challenges include the continued engagement and interest of faculty from DKU's partner universities, as well as dynamic geopolitical situations, such as China's complicated relationship with the United States.

From its inception, DKU distinguished itself as an international university located in China, with liberal arts education in a residential college setting, and interdisciplinary research at its core. Yet it remains a joint venture Chinese university. And, as it develops, the maintenance of DKU's unique identity and culture in a Chinese environment will be another interesting experiment to watch. Concern must also be given to yet another one of DKU's major challenges: its financial sustainability. Not a new challenge since high-quality education often requires enormous financial resources. DKU's quality, philosophy, and implementation of its undergraduate

education are no exception, as they closely follow models of high-quality liberal arts colleges in the United States. Furthermore, as discussed previously, high-quality research has been in the university's DNA from the outset, an ambition that requires resources. Yet unlike top liberal arts colleges in the United States, DKU does not have an endowment to support these ambitions, and it is unlikely to generate a sustainable endowment soon, seeing as the inaugural class just graduated in 2022. Adding to its fiscal challenges, it is not clear whether the city of Kunshan will continue to support DKU financially as it has been doing with essentially no strings attached, given factors like the recent impacts of COVID-19 on China's economy.

Lastly, the most important challenge DKU faces as a new institution surfaces through the ever complex relations between the United States and China. In the last fifteen years or so, the relationship between both countries has changed drastically, which unfortunately seems to be going in a negative direction. No encouraging sign is in sight for a better relationship between the two governments, or at least there are no concrete efforts toward improvement. Therefore, progress in the foreseeable future will come through human interaction and dialogue. In this context, what can be more impactful than a university like Duke Kunshan?

The early formation of the DKU concept was marked by a cooperation agreement signed between Duke University and the People's Government of Kunshan in January 2010, during the early days of Barack Obama's presidency. It was a time when there were wide interests in collaborations with China in many sectors of U.S. society, including business and higher education. The number of Chinese students studying in U.S. colleges and universities more than doubled from 157,558 to 350,775 during the period starting with the 2010–2011 academic year and ending with the 2016–2017 academic year.⁸ Even then, the reception of the DKU concept by Duke faculty was varied. Historically, the university did not have a strong presence in Chinese studies compared with other top universities in the United States. Faculty were also concerned about investing financial and human resources in a country where academic freedom was not a guarantee.

Despite these concerns, both the Duke-National University of Singapore Medical School and DKU were defined as important parts of the university's global strategy. The university leadership's commitment, patience, and enormous effort in persuasion garnered sufficient support for DKU. However, we cannot assume that faculty, staff, and stakeholders of Duke would continue to see DKU as a worthwhile risk for the partner university in the coming decades. Despite all its challenges, DKU continues to thrive with the graduation of the class of 2023, the occupancy of twenty-two new buildings constructed during Phase 2 of campus construction, the planning for improvements to the physical campus during Phase 3, and the launch of new academic and research programs including possible PhD programs. In these ways, DKU is and will continue to be a once-in-a-lifetime experiment in global higher education with impacts on many fronts in the twenty-first century.

Liberal arts education at large faces key critiques and direct threats in the United States, such as accusations of being elitist in the twenty-first century.⁹ While outside the United States, new education models are expanding liberal arts education philosophy into one that sees the educational vision as the beacon guiding construction and implementation of all aspects of teaching and learning. DKU has tried to address the existing strengths and weaknesses of liberal arts education by deliberately investigating new program models in the United States, Hong Kong, and worldwide. In line with critiques, it has also created a model that is not simply focused on training leadership or competence. The core value of a DKU education lies, rather, in cultivating the next generation of global citizens to share roots in global responsibility, boundary breaking, and humanitarianism. Against the career preparation trend, DKU's liberal arts education is a return to the intrinsic core value of cultivating humanism, because a twenty-first-century liberal arts education model must attend to the big issues and problems arising out of social changes, and to their benefits for humankind.

Conveying the vision of education to all participants is crucial to the fulfilment of that vision. DKU has put enormous efforts into exchanging its vision with students, parents, staff, faculty members, partners, and other stakeholders. Consequently, students continue to accommodate new modules of teaching, new research techniques, and new methods of study while also proactively creating new learning paradigms. Parents share the vision with each other and spread the message of DKU.¹⁰ In faculty recruitment, orientations, and training workshops, DKU stresses its educational vision, collaborative teaching, and interdisciplinarity – thereby promoting the DKU model in teaching and in research. It has been an exciting journey for this newly established university to be acknowledged, appreciated, and supported in such ways. We imagine the innovative designs happening at DKU, and the lessons learned, are not unique to the new university. Perhaps they could be creatively absorbed by other liberal arts education initiatives worldwide.

AUTHORS' NOTE

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Chinese Universities on the Global Stage: Perspectives from the Recent Past

Wen-hsin Yeh

Institutional reforms in higher education in China have produced impressive results both in the quality of scholarly work and the quantity of degree-holders. The higher-education system effectively complemented China's stellar economic transformation in the post-Mao decades. But it has yet to earn unalloyed admiration in the world of universities. This essay draws on my research as a historian of modern China and my time as faculty adviser on China engagement at the University of California, Berkeley. I argue that the rise in eminence of Chinese universities is about the system becoming more Western-oriented, more elitist in ethos, less overtly top-down in directives, and more techno-bureaucratic in means. The university system is also reaching an inflection point thanks to tension between ideologized cultural nationalism and headwinds on the course of further techno-professional internationalization.

Roughly a decade ago, I attended a luncheon in Shenzhen to celebrate the opening of a research joint venture. During the event, I was seated next to one of the city's leaders. To make conversation, I asked about his family and learned that he was the father of a high school senior applying to undergraduate programs in America. Since I was at the luncheon as a representative of the University of California, Berkeley (UC Berkeley), I asked if his son would consider applying there. He responded no: Berkeley did not rank high enough as a dream school for world-shopping Chinese families. There was no ivy on the outside of its buildings or cathedrals on its campus: neither the charm nor the prestige of the world's best established schools. There were no gleaming new buildings either, only dated infrastructure that compared poorly with China's state-of-the-art university campuses. Above all, there were "too many Chinese people" on its campus to make Berkeley attractive to an ambitious Chinese applicant. I found this last point particularly intriguing. The admissions practice at UC Berkeley had produced one of the most inclusive student bodies among America's major institutions. For many Chinese parents, however, the practice apparently translated into a negative reputation for its lack of exclusivity ("too easy to get in") and social glamour ("not much money") in student life.

It is notable how America's public universities, whatever the research prowess, no longer impressed Chinese prospective students and their families as much as they did in the past. There are a variety of reasons for this shift. In 2011, Tsinghua University and Peking University, the two most prestigious schools in the People's Republic of China (PRC), surprised many by rising to the top tier of several of the world's notable charts of university rankings.¹ Beyond the "Big Two" or "TsingBei," scores of other Chinese universities similarly positioned on these charts outperform institutions in Singapore, Japan, Hong Kong, and Taiwan in influence and resourcefulness. Between 1990 and 2022, Chinese universities conferred over 240 million degrees to supply the skills for all lines of services and productions that powered China's economic transformation. They also sent numerous degree-holders internationally to hundreds of universities as graduate students, postdoctoral fellows, faculty members, and directors of research enterprises. Chinese participation in the world of universities, notable both for its quantitative and qualitative contributions, is changing conversations in multiple domains of competitive pursuits. Within the country, university enterprises, as in the cases of Tsinghua and Beida in Shenzhen, are seeding entire sectors of industry and supercharging the development of metropolitan centers.

The significance of China's universities is undeniable, yet the challenges they face are complex. The pursuit of excellence and productivity takes place under the close management of the world's longest-governing Communist Party. Any assessment of present-day Chinese universities can hardly take place without due consideration of elements of politicization and instrumentalization. The questions many observers have asked include: Is it possible for China's universities to achieve excellence without academic freedom and autonomy? How can Chinese systems of higher education, within the context of developmental economies, be a case of unalloyed success? Meanwhile, from the viewpoint of a historical researcher, sources about the operations of China's universities are rich, in both English and Chinese, and perspectives are diverse. From across several continents, many individuals have engaged substantively with Chinese universities. How might a history of China's higher education of the most recent past look? How does one do justice to the range and depth of the empirical data? How does one make sense of the subject without jumping immediately to predictable conclusions?

This essay grows out of my observations over the past two decades as senior faculty adviser for China engagement at UC Berkeley. It also draws on my study of China's modern history that views China's higher education as a component of the contemporary history of the country.

What does it mean, from a historical perspective, that China's modern universities have gone through those specific transformations in funding models and international connections in the recent decades? What are the roles of Western

universities, my own included, in that process? And how sustainable are the interaction and development pathways to future challenges? I track three sets of issues that recur in that history. My observations of international engagement are filtered through three discrete projects and communications.

First, there is the question of “China” and the “West,” about whether the norms and practices are more “Chinese” or “Western,” or adequately attentive to China’s unique experiences and circumstances. There are several variations to this pair of dichotomies, including formulations that critique the boundaries and dissolve the tension between the binaries. Beyond the classification of knowledge and the organization of learning, the contests between China and the West inform differing priorities in educational policies and aspirations.

Second, there are issues of “control or autonomy,” struggles that most notably unfolded between universities and a succession of ministries of education in the twentieth century. One way to think of this recurrent conflict is to say that it came to a definitive end in the 1950s in favor of the state over society. Upon the founding of the PRC, all colleges and universities became state entities under the jurisdiction of the Ministry of Higher Education. State control in the twentieth century usually meant a heightened degree of “Partification” (in other words, Party control) over political education and academic administration.

A third question concerns “the elite or the masses,” that is, the structure of access and opportunity. Does the system serve a minority group or the majority of the population? Does it erect barriers and reinforce hierarchies? Or does it advance wider access to economic mobility and allow everyone a fair chance to succeed?

I argue that Chinese excellence in the post-Mao era is about the system becoming more Western-oriented, more elitist in ethos, less overtly top-down in directives, and more techno-bureaucratic in means. This has moved major Chinese universities up in the global ranking tables without diminishing the attractiveness of exclusive Western universities to those like the son of my Shenzhen interlocutor. Meanwhile, over the last five years, things have been changing quickly on the ground. The Chinese system of higher education is reaching an inflection point after a three-year disruption during the emergency response to the COVID-19 pandemic. There are growing signs that the pendulum is about to swing in a different direction. There are long-term dynamics that predated the pandemic, and these emerging developments should not surprise us if we follow the dialectics of China’s modern history.

The transformation of China’s higher education began in 1977, the year a set of standardized entrance examinations known as the *gaokao* was reinstated nationwide for all applicants for college admissions.² The resurrection of this threshold exam signaled the incremental abandonment of the educa-

tional experiment associated with the Mao era, which in turn was a radical departure from its immediate pre-1949 past.

In the 1950s, the PRC dismantled an elitist system of Western-inspired education that took shape in the 1920s. That earlier system, which drew on private resources and contained elements of professional self-governance, was denounced as feudal and bourgeois. The PRC embraced the Soviet model, assigned administrative ranks to all schools under a central commission of education, and incorporated its wartime mobilizational experiences of the 1940s into the pedagogy. In the late 1960s, the Party sought to further indigenize “expertise” at a grassroots level and improve equity of access to school education. It oriented the system to focus on pragmatic skills that broke down the walls of the classrooms. For college admissions, Party loyalty and biographical elements – social categories such as worker, peasant, and soldier – took the place of entrance examinations.

The reinstatement of the gaokao in 1977 initiated a decisive swing back in the direction of an elite education of competitive performance based on scholastic merit. In 1979, the state announced a nationwide one-child policy that reduced the number of school-age children. It allowed many village schools to close, establishing instead a new category of highly selective key-point schools and setting in motion mechanisms that funneled the brightest and the most competitive – those who excelled in exam-taking – out of the hinterland into bigger towns and even bigger cities.

Higher education went through major structural changes during the post-Mao transition. Taking expert advice from the World Bank, China created fewer yet bigger institutions of more integrated learning. Its schools of engineering re-oriented toward Western models of STEM studies. The very creation of business schools and economic studies involved unprecedented partnerships between Chinese reformers and Western economists. The re-Westernization of China’s higher-education systems was a top-initiated enterprise that reoriented and certified a better-informed few over the less-informed many.

Study missions headed out to Europe and America at this time. Hao Keming of Peking University led one such mission. She spent a week in Bavaria in the late 1980s, and subsequently became an energetic promoter of the organizational features of a “German model,” which she used to push for the transformation of China into “a society of lifelong learning.” This concept gained saliency as the reforms took hold, only to be eclipsed by American models of liberal colleges in the early twenty-first century.³

Out of the heady days of the 1980s, several strands of thinking emerged that shaped China’s higher education in the following decades. To put it simply, the higher-education system pursued two strategies that would allow it to acquire two functions. In the words of Zhou Ji, minister of education from 2003 to 2009, one function of China’s universities is economic. Schools must serve as an instru-

ment to “transform the world’s most populous country into a dynamic one with rich human resources.”⁴ Under the new economy, schools are responsible for upgrading China’s pool of “labor” (*renli*) into a pool of “talent” (*rencai*).

Another function is to produce top-notch excellence. To modernize and to move China beyond its traditional economy, universities must take on the mission to produce “high-caliber constructive members of society” schooled in science and technology.⁵ These talented individuals must be as outstanding as possible and leaders with cutting-edge expertise.

Two strategies emerged to meet the twin goals of “quantity” and “quality.” The first was the diversification of university streams of funding. The goal was to bring in more funding for education, especially from family savings for tuition costs and from local government taxes of businesses, which would pay for rapid increases in college enrollments. The second was the internationalization of the Big Two, enabling the almost instant leap of TsingBei into the ranks of global universities.

Both strategies accelerated the development of China’s universities as producers of human capital. And both produced social inequity as the price of their success.

Up to the early 1990s, China’s schools of higher learning had been exclusively situated in major cities and sustained entirely by government funding.⁶ Multiple ministries ran their own specialized universities. Advanced learning served a centrally planned economy with a nationwide division of labor.

Reforms decentralized that planning and localized the schools, directing the latter to prioritize the developmental needs of their immediate regions. All ministry-run schools were consolidated under the direction of the Ministry of Education. In medium-sized cities, these changes led to the creation of new schools, usually on the basis of single-subject institutions such as those of technology or teacher training, especially in the inland provinces of central and western China. The changes thus redrew the map of tertiary studies, but they left unaddressed the issue of regional disparity in per capita educational resources.

Meanwhile, the marketized socialist economy diversified the financing structure of higher education. As the changes took hold, China’s major universities in urban centers drew their operating budgets from at least eight streams of funding: central government funding, local government funding, tuition and fees, special project funding, private giving, dividends from intellectual property, profits from school-run business enterprises, and corporate giving. The diversification brought new revenue, especially family savings, into the educational system, enabling the schools to upgrade their programs while creating more seats in their classrooms.

The cost, however, contributed to the vast disparity in educational quality between rich and poor regions. Inland schools in underdeveloped regions depended

heavily on state funding while, generous as it was, government funding accounted for less than 10 percent of the large pool of available income at the nation's top schools in Beijing. Much of the additional income for the latter came from extra-bureaucratic sources, marketized or philanthropic. Data such as sizes of class, faculty-student ratio, and per-student educational expenditure all point to overlapping patterns of disparity. This meant that students in second- and third-tier schools actually took on a higher share of the financial burden through tuition payment for their less well-resourced education.

The Party doubled down in the 1990s, after the dissolution of the Soviet Union, to marketize the economy and to build China into an “innovation nation” of science and technology. In 1993, the State Council released the Party's blueprint to “reform and develop” the entire system of education. In the same year, Tsinghua and Peking University (PKU) presented their strategic plans to become “world-class first-rate universities with Chinese socialist characteristics” within two decades. TsingBei was given special policy provisions to become world-class by international standards. What did these special policy provisions entail?

The leadership at PKU and Tsinghua partnered with the Ministry of Education to remake their institutions.⁷ Government initiatives poured multiple millions of dollars to accelerate their physical upgrade into modern institutions. By 2001, Tsinghua and PKU each gained a new campus at Shenzhen, where they launched new programs through international partnerships. They changed the procedures of personnel appointments and reviews, both to incentivize research productivity and to facilitate faculty mobility within and across institutions. On admissions, TsingBei expanded their scope of autonomy under the gaokao system to manage their own selections.⁸ The changes enabled the Big Two to further define and differentiate their emphasis on undergraduate education.

In comparison with previous practices, the Ministry of Education continued to exercise broad authority. Through its various appointed expert committees, the Ministry set and reviewed academic goals, degree requirements, curriculum criteria, hiring procedures, personnel standards, and operating guidelines, behaving as the strategic planner and accreditation authority of higher education. Yet, instead of downright state control, these exercises came with technoscientific claims of professionalism.

Educational authority in the Reform era steadily moved from a singular to a dualistic approach in the governance of Chinese universities. First, central authorities pulled back from direct management of campus administration, focusing instead on issues and directives that structured the policies that governed institutions of higher education. Second, the state accorded equal standing on campuses to university presidents and Party secretaries. The former, qualified for scholarly

credentials, were charged with academic administration from the perspectives of “domain expertise,” with the responsibility to deliver educational results of excellence. The latter, who held ranked Party positions, chaired university councils and personnel committees and assured the respective institutions’ political correctness. Meanwhile, the Ministry appointed its own committees of technical or domain experts to advise and consult on the formulation of national policies for higher education. Reforms, in short, saw advancement in the professionalization and institutionalization of educational governance in line with global standards, albeit without any decrease in Party authority.

Does the availability of more funding mean that deans and faculty members gained greater autonomy in managing schools? Does professionalization enhance the agency of campus administrations?

Government funding, especially project-specific grants, indeed came with all the accompanying budgeting, accounting, auditing, spending, and reporting rules and regulations. Revenue generated from nongovernmental sources exposed universities to extra Ministry scrutiny for corruption. The state’s shift to rule-based governance seemingly expanded professional autonomy. It injected, however, the politics of insider dealings and the consolidation of elite networks into research enterprises, while barely containing the application of political loyalty as a funding criterion.⁹

Does international engagement advance participation in university policy-making and administrative autonomy? Because they transformed into world-class institutions early on compared with other schools, Tsinghua and PKU earned prerogatives and exemptions from regular bureaucratic rules. Yet the Big Two were operating in a gray zone, in which there were no existing rules nor laws. One might argue that the mandate to explore best practices and build international partnerships paradoxically put the universities at an even higher degree of dependency on shifting state policies and the political will of top leaders.

There are a few insights to gain from UC Berkeley’s interactions with Tsinghua and Peking University. In the 1980s and upon the full resumption of diplomatic relations between the United States and China, Berkeley became one of the first American universities to pursue scholarly exchanges with Chinese counterparts. The 1984 Berkeley-PKU memorandum of understanding was among the first of its kind that committed the two sides to scholarly exchanges.

However, interest between the two sides was asymmetrical. Chinese scientists were keen to engage with the West, but their American counterparts were slow to respond. By the mid-2010s, students from the PRC made up over 30 percent of all international enrollees in American institutions of higher education.¹⁰ Multiple delegations of Chinese visitors streamed through American university campuses from coast to coast. Several universities released reports about their “China strategy.”

For Berkeley, the old way of dealing with international collaboration – ad hoc, decentralized, research-centered, and contingent on the networks and projects of entrepreneurial faculty leaders – appeared inadequate. This inadequacy was evident when Tsinghua University arrived in 2010 for a “Tsinghua Week at Berkeley,” a first leg of Tsinghua’s cross-country tour of the United States.

When a delegation of over one hundred people from Tsinghua, led by its president, announced their plan to visit in 2010, there were no central administrative offices at Berkeley designed to receive such a large-scale visit. The program of “Tsinghua Week,” when it finally came together, was unprecedented in scope and reach within campus memory. The programs brought together top administrators and Chinese diplomats for public-facing media events. They also included field-specific panels and workshops of faculty members, as well as student presentations across the campus. The planning for the event brought into sharp relief the differences in internal organization and communication between Tsinghua and Berkeley. It underscored the contrast, indeed, between Tsinghua’s top-down, centralized administrative organization, and Berkeley’s bottom-up, faculty-centered approach to governance.

The following year, Berkeley conducted a “return visit” to Beijing, participating in Tsinghua’s high-profile centennial celebration. Interest in academic partnership with China varied from field to field. Broadly speaking, engineering led the way. Professional schools showed interest to expand brand recognition for their related services. Environmental, social, and health researchers sought access to China’s vast stores of data. As always, China scholars saw China both as a site and a subject of study. Student interest was robust, thanks to the prospect of a “trans-Pacific” century upon China’s admission into the World Trade Organization. In 2012, the convergence of these interests and interactions led to the issuance of Berkeley’s “China Strategy Report,” as well as an agreement to create the Tsinghua-Berkeley Shenzhen Institute (TBSI).

Buoyed by a general optimism and support for a globally connecting world, the TBSI was an organized research unit of international engagement that broke new ground for Berkeley. It institutionalized collaborative work from multiple laboratories in engineering and biomedical studies. Yet, staying in line with the decentralized and bottom-up style of Berkeley research initiatives, it was nonetheless initiated, led, and anchored by interested faculty (principal investigators) rather than university administrators.

For Tsinghua, partnership with Berkeley catapulted its start-up Shenzhen campus to a new level of international credibility. The multiplier effect also contributed to the university’s research connections. For Berkeley, the enterprise raised many questions. Did the TBSI and its operational templates constitute a transferrable model for campus engagement with global partners elsewhere? Was the TBSI a viable standard for a measured institutional response to the trans-Pacific

dynamics of change? Once again, there was a notable lack of symmetry between the two sides.

Guided by top-down strategic visions of purpose and priority, Tsinghua did not always respond with equal enthusiasm to Berkeley-initiated proposals for collaboration. Disciplined and incentivized by state-classified criteria of research merit and performance recognition, its faculty members simply had little time to spare either for networking or exploratory conversations beyond the scope of the formally organized, scheduled, funded, or assigned projects. The contrast between the two attitudes is suggestive of the larger issues.

When Peking University joined the international conversation with Berkeley, it brought a notably different line of inquiry. In contrast to Tsinghua and its drive to improve global prestige and learn to economically leverage its advantages in engineering and science, PKU focused on issues of university governance and educational effectiveness. To a certain degree, this institutional emphasis aligns with PKU's history as a producer of statecraft knowledge and a critic in loyal opposition.

In this tradition of policy advice and dissent, PKU pursued in-depth conversations about the University of California system and its place in Californian common good. It funded junior administrators to study the making of "excellence" in American universities. At Berkeley, these visitors studied a whole range of operations from undergraduate admissions, faculty reviews, university funding, and academic senate oversight, to central administrative communications and student councils. Of particular interest to the visitors were questions pertaining to the tension between Berkeley's abundance of rules and regulations, highly bureaucratized administration, and the complete academic autonomy in research and teaching. How was it possible, PKU visitors asked, for a state-funded public institution to foster an academic culture of faculty self-governance and intellectual freedom? It's both fascinating and sensible that this would be the big question.

Through international interactions, both Tsinghua and PKU came to see the limitations of China's established educational practices. To break out of the compartmentalization of knowledge in narrowly defined fields of technical studies, Tsinghua expanded its faculties in arts, history, and humanities, by whatever the weight the school assigned to these studies. To undo the educational effects of the gaokao-centered admissions practice, the Big Two promoted student-centered undergraduate learning, and inverted the prevailing norm of teacher-centered lecturing in Chinese classrooms. Many other old norms were broken, including the hiring of new PhDs with degrees earned from universities other than one's own, or even the hiring of international scholars. In 2012, Tsinghua counted more than forty Berkeley PhDs or former faculty members among its deans, chairs, and research directors.

These changes contributed to the rise in global standing for China's top universities. They produced stunning results in the STEM fields and propelled China's status in advanced technology. However, the ideas taken in from international partners widened the gap between the coastal elite and the inland provincials. The dismissal of gaokao among elite groups, for example, erected new barriers to succeed for inland students. The promotion of student choices and individual electives – the advocacy to flip classroom dynamics – bred resentment among inland teachers, who had never known any other way to teach and learn.

In retrospect, Chinese educational reforms since the 1980s have yielded notable results. Multiple statistical indicators, counting money and people, point to the depth and magnitude of the transformation. By 2022, the gross enrollment ratio of Chinese college-age cohorts into colleges reached nearly 60 percent. The country has achieved close to full literacy. Over 240 million degrees have been conferred since 1990. Central authorities are happy to announce that the Chinese labor force supplies enough trained workers to staff all lines of work. The system has delivered the target numbers – of credible quality – that sustained the world's fastest growing economy.¹¹

On the quest for “excellence,” Chinese officials can also take pride in their accomplishments. Even if the subjectively assembled tables of global rankings are discounted, it is undeniable that the Chinese research output has increased in quality as well as quantity.

But this excellence is achieved at the expense of notable unevenness in several ways. There is much strength in engineering, but not nearly as much in biological and health science studies. It goes without saying that humanities and social sciences fare far less well.¹² This is to say nothing of the fact that teaching has been deemphasized in favor of the widespread glorification of scientific laboratory research.

Is “unevenness” in the distribution of strengths an absolute weakness? Does the Chinese state command the tools and the capacity to make strategic adjustments to overcome the imbalance? While tension from this unevenness *could* become generative forces for change in the next phase of Ministry action, these state-engineered disparities have produced problems that call into question the system's fairness and equity.

On the charged issue of “China or the West,” elite Chinese universities have moved substantively across the spectrum toward Westernizing their institutional norms and practices. They use English as a conceptual and professional language. By contrast, inland schools struggled to gain such linguistic proficiency. To be sure, reformist applications of the formula, “Chinese learning for essence, Western learning for application,” differ in the 2000s from that of a hundred years ago, when the formula was first proposed by Qing reformers. Those were the days

when the empire, on the brink of bankruptcy, turned to Western means to help its survival. China today, in contrast with the 1890s, proclaims its supreme cultural confidence and sovereignty vis-à-vis the West. But when the dichotomies of “China versus the West” are mapped over the disparities between the provincial versus the metropolitan areas, the interior versus the coast, or the “elite versus the masses,” the bundled issues allowed critics to make a much larger case about cultural authenticity and social equity. These criticisms, already in evidence in the 1990s, supplied ground-level support for an ideological swing to the left in the late 2010s. Under President Xi Jinping, they contributed to reassessments of China’s Western-leaning orientation during the Reform decades.

Wu Daguang, former vice president of Xiamen University, for example, warned in a series of recent essays published online about the “deep water” ahead in the next phase of educational reform. Wu argues that to produce the next generation of high-caliber human “talent” ready for the postpandemic world order, universities must reorient themselves toward China’s past, the country’s grassroots, and its interior. Under the new circumstances, effective cultivation of “quality” (*suzhi*) human talent, Wu stresses, must begin with a new recognition of past failings. The system of the recent past must face up not only to the siloed and differential practices that separated the scientific and humanistic pursuits, but also to the intergenerational rupture (in other words, those who came of age in the 1980s versus those born at the turn of the century) over the loss of historical memories and cultural understanding.¹³

Even before the COVID-19 pandemic, the Western-inspired and urban-based ethos of elitism, credentialism, and boundless ambition for world-class competitiveness had already seeded discontent. Against the high pressure for success under the gaokao and job interviews, performative gestures such as “lying flat” (*tang ping*) and “involution / rolling in” (*nei juan*) became popular for the college-bound and early-career cohorts. The professed disengagement of these individuals signaled a level of discontent that undercut the disciplinary capacities of the state and the schools. The rise of youth unemployment in 2023 added a sense of unease approaching crisis in China’s higher education.

For control, the Ministry of Education had steadily developed, over the past four decades, a sophisticated system that meticulously measured faculty performance and closely tracked professional behavior. Ministerial control came in the form of scheduled reviews conducted in prescribed categories. For credibility, the reviews incorporated the opinions of field experts and knowledge leaders. Up and down the channel, the system communicated in a language of scores, numbers, indices, points, sizes, dollar amounts, ratios, percentiles, projectiles, and so forth. As rewards, satisfactory performers received superior grades, elevated ranks, more funding, and conditioned operational autonomy. In comparison with their early PRC predecessors, the Ministry has successfully moved the exercise of

control and the contest for autonomy to a different plane of governance and governability. The universities are incentivized to partner with the state to strive for greater excellence and resources, albeit on the condition of adherence to Party loyalty.

That quantitative approach and standardized method of evaluation speak to the Ministry's participation in a bureaucratic system of professionalized routine that relied upon, when circumstances required, a "project engineering" (*gong-cheng*) approach to mobilize for special targeted objectives.¹⁴ As processes of operation that drew inspirations from systems engineering, one might argue, the project engineering approach took the place of the "campaign" (*yundong*) mode from the Mao era. That approach allowed the Party and the state to mobilize resources and create exceptional conditions for the achievement of prioritized goals, often through institutional means and on a monumental scale. It also allowed the authorities to appear fair-minded and merit-driven, despite complaints to the contrary.

As I began this essay with an anecdote that gestured to the aspirations of Chinese students and their status-conscious parents, let me conclude with another from a different encounter. At a joint panel on the theme of "innovation" during the 2010 Tsinghua Week at Berkeley, two panelists shared their thoughts. The Tsinghua presentation, by a dean of public policy, told a story studded with data about the university's research achievements. The presentation, which detailed sizes of funding, composition of teams of credentialed researchers, number of indexed papers, number of patents, and so forth, was about completing an impressive number of state-assigned top-priority projects in the most recent decade. The Berkeley presentation, featuring a quantitative biologist, opened with fulsome praise for the gene-sequencing capabilities on the Chinese side. After a few more words about computing machines and biological research, the presenter asked: "Where does innovation come from? How does one set one's research agenda?" He shared reflections about sitting in the shade of the trees in his own backyard, sipping coffee in the morning, and watching his children play. What could he do with his research, he asked, to make their lives better? How might science benefit people today and in the future? The striking contrast between the two presentations could be interpreted in more than one way. However surprising or unsurprising, they set in sharp relief the differences in the culture of knowledge-making between the two systems. It took effort for the two sides to begin communicating on that panel. In the years since, it has been a tremendous process of learning to collaborate across national systems and individual institutions.

China's transformation has inspired many intriguing questions. Some ask if the "Confucian Model" of East Asia stands a chance to take the place of that of the West as an alternative to third-world modernization. Others ask if there is a form

of “smart authoritarianism” when it comes to industrial policies for advanced technology. These formulations stress the exceptional qualities of the Chinese case, and how the Chinese exception might challenge existing assumptions about the role of the state and the market in developmental strategies.

But Chinese experience might also conform to worldwide patterns elsewhere. Backlash against globalization, for example, has given rise in many countries to various forms of cultural nationalism, including in higher education. Universities have been declared as soft targets for national security threats, and have come under many rules when engaging in scholarly exchanges. Chinese ideas about the securitization of university campuses, meanwhile, go beyond anti-espionage rules and laws about exchanges. Following the project engineering mode of control, students have recently been called to engage in “soul forging” (*zhuhun gongcheng*), inoculating their hearts and steeling their minds against spiritual infiltration.

In his recent book *Empires of Ideas*, William C. Kirby asks: Do Chinese universities stand a chance to lead the world in the twenty-first century?¹⁵ The answer can be “yes” if the question is about the role of higher education in the service of state-directed economic development. Do Chinese universities serve the people of China across the board? Visitors inevitably note that the campuses of Chinese universities (and now also buildings, thanks to the pandemic regime) have gates, walls, even guards, plus machines as recent additions that read bar codes assigned to campus community members. In contrast with the Berkeley campus, they are not open to entry to one and all. Though much has changed in the domain of higher learning since the Mao years, how much has changed irreversibly, so that the Party, even as it retains its presence, does not overwhelm the enterprise of learning at Chinese universities?

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ENDNOTES

- ¹ On the rise of Chinese universities in global rankings, see Jia Song, “Creating World-Class Universities in China: Strategies and Impacts at a Renowned Research University,” *Higher Education* 75 (4) (2018): 729–742, <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10734-017-0167-4>. For more on Tsinghua University specifically, see Rui Yang and Anthony Welch, “A World-Class University in China? The Case of Tsinghua,” *Higher Education* 63 (5) (2012): 645–666, <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10734-011-9465-4>.
- ² Recent scholarship on contemporary Chinese higher education that I consulted for this essay includes but is not limited to the following: Joel Andreas, *Rise of the Red Engineers: The Cultural Revolution and the Origins of China’s New Class* (Stanford, Calif.: Stanford University Press, 2009); Daniel A. Bell, *The Dean of Shandong* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 2023); Susan Greenhalgh and Li Zhang, eds., *Can Science and Technology Save China?* (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 2020); Zachary M. Howlett, *Meritocracy and Its Discontents: Anxiety and the National College Entrance Exam in China* (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 2021); Jennifer Hubbert, *China in the World: An Anthropology of Confucius Institutes, Soft Power, and Globalization* (Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 2019); and Qingjia Wang, “Crisis Management, Regime Survival, and ‘Guerrilla-Style’ Policy-Making: The June 1999 Decision to Radically Expand Higher Education in China,” *The China Journal* 71 (1) (2014): 132–152, <https://doi.org/10.1086/674557>.
- ³ Hao Keming, “Lianbang Deguo Jiaoyu de Kaocha ji qi Qishi” [Report and Insights from a Study Tour of Education in the Federal Republic of Germany] in Guojia Jiayu Fazhan Yanjiu Zhongxin [Center for Research on National Educational Development], ed., *Yanjiu Dongtai* [Research Newsletters] 15 (1990); and Ji Mingming, “Zhongshen Xuexi de Lilun Tansuo yu Chuangxin: Chongdu Hao Keming de Kuajin Xuexi Xing Shehui” [Theoretical Exploration and Advancement of Life-Long Learning: Re-Reading Hao Kaoming and Her Work on Advancing into a New Society of Learning], *Beijing Daxue Jiaoyu Pinglun* [Education Review, Peking University] 12 (1) (2014): 172–182.
- ⁴ Zhou Ji, *Higher Education in China*, trans. Foreign Language Teaching & Research Press, Beijing (Chicago: Thomson Learning, 2006), xiii.
- ⁵ Ibid.
- ⁶ Sources consulted in this and the following sections include, in addition to *ibid.*, Chang Tongshan and Wenli Li, *Cong Xique Zou Xiang Chongzu: Gaodeng Jiaoyu de Xuqiu yu Gongji Yanjiu* [From Scarcity toward Adequacy: A Study on the Demand and Supply of Higher Education] (Beijing: Jiaoyu Kexue Chuban She, 2008); Xiangming Chen, *Daxue Tongshi Jiaoyu Moshi de Tansuo: Yi Beijingdaxue Yuanpei Jihua Weili* [Searching for a General Education Model in the University – A Case Study of the Yuanpei Program in Peking University] (Beijing: Jiaoyu Kexue Chuban She, 2008); and Ling Chen and Barry Naughton, “An Institutionalized Policy-Making Mechanism: China’s Return to Techno-Industrial Policy,” *Research Policy* 45 (10) (2016): 2138–2152.
- ⁷ Dongping Yang, ed., *Zhongguo Jiaoyu Lanpishu* [Chinese Education: A Blue Book] (Beijing: Gaodeng Jiaoyu Chuban She, 2004); Li Zhifeng, et al., *Piaoyi de Xueshu: Dangdai Zhongguo Gaoxiao Jiaoshi Liudong* [Scholarship on the Move: The Mobility of the Teaching Staff in Contemporary Chinese Higher Education] (Beijing: Zhishi Chanquan Chuban She, 2020); and Li Jun, *Zhongguo Gaodeng Jiaoyu Yanjiu Shi* [A History of the Study of Chinese Higher Education] (Guangzhou: Guangdong Gaodeng Jiaoyu Chuban She, 2005).

- ⁸ In addition to the gaokao, which produced scores, TsingBei introduced qualitative criteria of their own to further differentiate among the qualified applicants. An applicant's chance of getting into Tsinghua in 2012 was about 1:3,000.
- ⁹ Zhiwen Chen, *Zhongguo Gaodeng Jiaoyu Biange 40 Ren Tan* [Forty Chats on Changes in Chinese Higher Education] (Beijing: Renmin Chubanshe, 2020).
- ¹⁰ In the 2015–2016 academic year, 328,547 students from the People's Republic of China enrolled in institutions of higher education in the United States, which was 31.5 percent of all international enrollees from that year. See Open Doors, "Leading Places of Origin," <https://opendoorsdata.org/data/international-students/leading-places-of-origin> (accessed March 20, 2024).
- ¹¹ Wu Daguang, "Chengjiu yu Yujing: Woguo Gaodeng Jiaoyu Pujihua Jincheng de Sikao" [Achievements and Advance Warnings: Reflections on the Progress toward the Generalization of Higher Education in Our Country], *Zhongguo Gaojiao Yanjiu* [Chinese Higher Education Research] (2023): 4.
- ¹² Xin Xu, "A Policy Trajectory Analysis of the Internationalization of Chinese Humanities and Social Sciences Research (1978–2020)," *International Journal of Educational Development*, May 12, 2021.
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- ¹⁴ Susan Greenhalgh, *Just One Child: Science and Policy in Deng's China* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2008).
- ¹⁵ William C. Kirby, *Empires of Ideas: Creating the Modern University from Germany to America to China* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 2022).

The Liberal Arts in a Chinese Tech University: ShanghaiTech

Mianheng Jiang

A newly founded, small-scale research university geared toward international standards and competitiveness, ShanghaiTech University has three STEM divisions (information science and technology, physical science and technology, and life science and technology) and three HASS divisions (creativity and arts, entrepreneurship and management, and the humanities). The university's undergraduate education receives its inspiration from the whole-person approach, and gives particular weight to a "broadly based and in-depth" pedagogical framework, in which the liberal arts make up an indispensable component. Through interdisciplinary curricular planning, small class sizes, emphasis on interaction and openness in learning, and international exchange programs, I explore effective measures to grow general education at ShanghaiTech as well as address challenges that are unique to a Chinese tech university.

In China, what we now recognize as liberal arts have long been a centerpiece of education. Even before Confucius, the "six arts" (ritual, music, archery, chariot riding, penmanship, and arithmetic) had already acquired lofty prestige. That "a man is made by learning" has been a guiding principle for innumerable generations of Chinese educators. Our master teachers have long seen their task as more than transmitting knowledge. They placed a premium on character formation and enlightenment through life. Yet the fortunes of liberal arts in the country were advanced in a number of distinct directions. Confucianism served as the bedrock of educational practice from its inception about twenty-five hundred years ago through the late nineteenth century, when Western cultural and educational philosophies started to make their way into Chinese society. Epitomized by Peking University and Tsinghua University, modern Chinese establishments of higher education in the early twentieth century adopted their overall models from Western industrialized nations, but made a point to cultivate their own humanist curricula.

After the founding of the People's Republic of China, a Soviet-style system of higher education centered on vocational and technical expertise prevailed. And with this system's implementation, calls for the provision of well-trained

manpower for industrialization and the production of new cohorts of socialist youth, as highlighted by Isak Frumin and Daria Platonova in their essay for this volume, also became germane and prominent in China.¹ Despite a nationwide suspension during the Cultural Revolution between 1966 and 1976, this system remained paramount until the turn of 1980s, when China commenced Deng Xiaoping's "Reform and Opening Up."² Varying institutions then started merging to create universities where the humanities attempted again to play a role. Since the 1990s, science and technology have been generally accepted as primary forces to deliver productivity. Yet as human-centered goals for undergraduates have gained sway in Chinese higher education (for example, becoming "persons of quality" and "well-rounded citizens"), there has also been a growing interest in investing in the liberal arts as a compelling resource to understand, guide, and critically engage the unfolding social changes and global momentum. In the words of Teri A. Cannon and Stephen M. Kosslyn, as we are educating the future "leaders, creators, problem-solvers, and innovators," who must have at their disposal wider perspectives and more diverse experiences, it is essential that we cross established academic boundaries and other barriers that separate research, classroom learning, and social intervention.³ For myself and my like-minded colleagues, the liberal arts make up an indispensable component of this new drive.

ShanghaiTech University seized a unique moment to launch its vision and programs by answering the call for intensifying scientific and technological research, and for nurturing talents in the interest of innovation. A small research institution geared toward international competitiveness, ShanghaiTech broke ground in 2013 and completed construction in 2016. The three main divisions in sciences and technologies are the Schools of Information Science and Technology, Physical Science and Technology, and Life Science and Technology. These schools are not further separated into departments. The Schools of Creativity and Arts and of Entrepreneurship and Management followed next, with the creation of the Institute of Humanities in 2019. The university is near several national research facilities, in particular the X-ray Free Electron Laser Facility and the Shanghai Clinical Research Center, both under construction. Our objective is to set up an educational-research complex that combines the strengths of an academic institution and its neighboring national research facilities, comparable in general profile to University of California, Berkeley's Lawrence Berkeley National Laboratory; Stanford's SLAC National Accelerator Laboratory; the University of Chicago's Argonne National Laboratory; and Oxford University's Diamond Light Source in the United Kingdom.

ShanghaiTech's undergraduate education receives its inspiration from the whole-person approach that goes beyond mere career preparations. Our STEM programs and HASS programs (humanities, arts, and social sciences) are arranged so that they mutually reinforce and are organically encompassed in the univer-

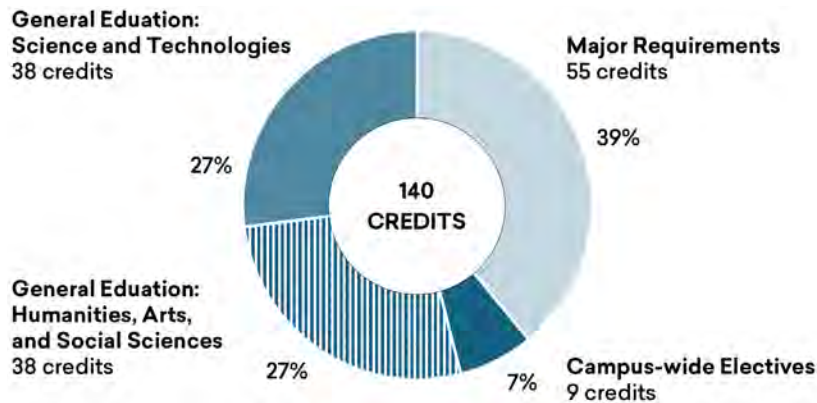
sity's comprehensive curriculum. It is by the strength of this infrastructure that ShanghaiTech looks forward to bringing forth graduates that are intellectually independent, aesthetically sensitive, and informed by in-depth understanding of both their home culture and global transformations, to become at once malleable and creative in responding to a complex and unpredictable world of infinite and constant changes. The ShanghaiTech undergraduate degree keeps to a minimum of one hundred forty credit hours, with a mandate from the Chinese Ministry of Education to lower the number of credit hours and strengthen the teaching content that each credit hour delivers (Figure 1).

Seventy-six credits of the total required credits (or about 54 percent) are assigned to general education (gen ed) courses, half of which are in natural sciences and engineering, and the other half belong to the humanities, arts, and social sciences. Fifty-five credit hours, accounting for 39 percent of the total credits, represent the courses required by the students' respective majors. And the last 7 percent are allocated for electives of the student's choice, as long as they don't overlap with courses that satisfy the student's major or gen ed requirements. Among China's tech universities, ShanghaiTech belongs to a very few that have assigned such a high percentage of classes to general education. ShanghaiTech started recruiting graduate students in 2013 and the first class of undergraduates was enrolled in 2014. This year, we reached an enrollment of 6,067 (about 4,000 graduate students and 2,000 undergraduates). Over the years, as a part of our international strategies, we deployed a 3+1 exchange program to allow undergraduate students to spend a year abroad, so at graduation, about one-third of our students have acquired international experience via this program and others, such as summer research and internships.⁴ Our partners for this program include University of California, Berkeley; Harvard; MIT; University of Pennsylvania; University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign; and a number of others. In addition, our top college graduates have been accepted at many of the world's best research universities for training for advanced degrees.

As we explore effective measures to grow liberal arts at ShanghaiTech, we face several challenges. For instance, how do we create a liberal arts curriculum within a technology-focused university that has a mandate from the Chinese Ministry of Education to limit the number of credit hours? We are making difficult choices as we increase the proportion of HASS classes without raising the current total of credit hours. In the meantime, we are addressing challenges that involve teaching and the building of a liberal arts faculty. These colleagues' classes are mostly listed as part of the gen ed requirement, to which students are often less passionately dedicated than the required courses for their majors. Plus, our liberal arts professors have to make long-term career plans without their own degree students for the time being. More generally, in addition to an overly rigorous crediting mechanism that often encourages inflexible and run-of-the mill course design, our edu-

Figure 1

Undergraduate Credit Composition at ShanghaiTech University



Requirements for general education credits in the science and technologies include mathematics, physics, chemistry, biology, and information technology. General education credits for the humanities, arts, and social sciences include coursework such as the Civilization Series, Design Thinking, and Introduction to Economics. There are eleven undergraduate degree programs at ShanghaiTech. The above distributions may vary slightly between majors. Source: Author's compilation of data from ShanghaiTech University.

cational system is also encumbered by dated pedagogy and unnecessary subdivisions within disciplines.

There are also complexities of a social nature. Despite the widening endorsement of college-level liberal arts education, much of China's current secondary teaching is still heavily focused on performance on the national college entrance examination, which represents a once-in-a-lifetime opportunity to change the social trajectory for many students, especially those from economically disadvantaged backgrounds. College education must offer students a supportive environment where they can access the resources they need to become active and independent lifelong learners. At ShanghaiTech, we must attend to the needs of a unique cohort of science and technology students whose reading, writing, and general communication skills are often inadequate. Besides, any institution of higher education that passes muster these days must embrace a global vision, and yet we cannot dodge challenges that arise from the differences between Chinese and Western cultures. In the province of STEM education, this may be addressed with greater readiness, since hard sciences follow hard rules. In arts and humanities, however, it is less clear how to approach the abundant uncertainties and disagreements.

To address these impediments, we have taken on the task of reducing the number of required classes at ShanghaiTech, thus yielding more room for student options. Our undergraduate programs give particular weight to a “broadly based and in-depth” pedagogical framework, tending toward interdisciplinary course planning, small class sizes, as well as interaction and openness in learning. Faculty members from different schools and research institutes collaborate extensively to train students, so the students can learn to best anticipate and cater to particular needs in breadth and depth. More recently, we have also revamped our English program to infuse language education with other gen ed components in the humanities, so that students may, for instance, read Shakespeare and nineteenth-century American authors in the untranslated original. We have created cross-listed classes such as “Climate Change and Human Society” and “Ethics in the Development of Information Science and Technology.” To foster individual growth, we have implemented a more balanced system in undergraduate teaching and crediting, giving students more autonomy in choosing majors and taking classes at different schools, levels, and disciplines according to their interest, after fulfilling designated prerequisites. And rounding off our efforts at educational reform, ShanghaiTech is now among the first Chinese universities to offer the Civilization Series (Chinese Civilization, World Civilization, and Evolution of Science and Technology) as part of the core curriculum. Chinese Civilization, for instance, is taught in our Institute of Humanities, which has hired more than forty tenure- and teaching-track professors from across the globe. In developing this cotaught course, my colleagues at the Institute have stayed away from a staid chronological approach, and have made a point to teach thematically and in English, so that the class may be taken by international students (see Table 1 for a sample syllabus).

As higher education is more than what happens within the confines of lecture halls, most of our classes now carry not only in-session discussions, but also substantial lab or practice components. In addition, one of our major initiatives is the introduction of residential colleges to the campus experience. Although, according to Pericles Lewis, “in the United States . . . there has been a long tradition of residential education,” the residential college system has yet to see extensive adoption among Chinese institutions.⁵ ShanghaiTech has put together three such colleges, each with its distinctive identity and appeal. All full-time professors participate as mentors to give students the needed extracurricular, individual support in work and life. And every undergraduate student at the university receives such mentorship. The key program that brings the three residential colleges together is the “social immersion” that facilitates the students’ appreciation of what goes on outside their immediate academic and personal existence. For about two weeks, our undergrads travel and reside in the hinterland or in ethnic minority regions, getting firsthand experience of pressing issues such as ecology, cultural heritage, and educational equity, but also to benefit from such traditional counsel as “that

Table 1
Sample Syllabus for the “Chinese Civilization” Course at
ShanghaiTech University

Theme	Key Content	Theme	Key Content
Introduction	Defining key terms such as Chinese-ness and the Chinese civilization	Theme 6 : Education	The evolution of educational institutions, and the influence of Civil Service Examination
Theme 1 : Climate, Geography, and Boundary Changes	Ancient China and its neighbors : How China’s interactions with the “others” (re-)shaped the Chinese civilization	Theme 7 : China and the World	The <i>tianxia</i> (all-under-heaven) concept and the interactions between China and the world
Theme 2 : Political Institutions in Ancient China	Changes and continuities in the Chinese political institutions	Theme 8 : Literature and Arts in Ancient China	Themes in Chinese literature
Theme 3 : Chinese Philosophies	Themes in Chinese philosophies	Theme 9 : Technology and Science in China	Science and the differences between science and technology in Chinese history
	Buddhism and its impact on Chinese culture, society, social values, philosophies, and politics		
Theme 4 : Social and Institutional History	Women and gender in Chinese history	Theme 10 : The Arts and Theatre	Music, drama, painting, calligraphy, and philosophies of art
Theme 5 : Economic Institutions and Developments	The theory of Great Divergence and its revisions	Theme 11 : Everyday Life of the Chinese people	Popular religions, social practices, and folklore

Source : Author’s compilation of data from ShanghaiTech University.

which is of no immediate use often sees wider use.”⁶ Mentorship regarding student entrepreneurial explorations is also provided. In short, at ShanghaiTech, my colleagues and I embrace the conviction that working through diverse value systems, cultural perspectives, and social practices activates rather than dampens students’ creative and critical spirit. It helps them know the country and their world better, and themselves too.

Over the millennia of human growth, nations and ethnic groups gave birth to local civilizations with particular characters and distinctions, and together they also created the global human civilization in all its splendid richness and diversity. It is by the strength of this global vision that our college students are making discoveries about common values and participating in the creation of a shared human destiny. Technological advances, such as artificial intelligence, will no doubt transform the makeup of the human enterprise by drastically modifying, if not totally replacing, our physical and mental access to the goals we want to accomplish. What is to become the next chapter of this ancient and young civilization of ours? The wisdoms yielded by humanist achievements so far certainly keep us grounded regarding a future of gripping uncertainties. Meanwhile, the humanist curricula of today’s higher education testify to the enduring power of human creativity.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Mianheng Jiang is the Founding President of ShanghaiTech University. He served as Vice President of the Chinese Academy of Sciences from 1999 to 2011. He is the elder son of Jiang Zemin, former president of the People’s Republic of China.

ENDNOTES

- ¹ Isak Frumin and Daria Platonova, “The Socialist Model of Higher Education: The Dream Faces Reality,” *Dædalus* 153 (2) (Spring 2024): 178–193, <https://www.amacad.org/publication/socialist-model-higher-education-dream-faces-reality>. In Wen-hsin Yeh’s account, the upgrading of human resources remained a major concern for Chinese higher education even in the early Reform episode. See Wen-hsin Yeh, “Chinese Universities on the Global Stage: Perspectives from the Recent Past,” *Dædalus* 153 (2) (Spring 2024): 83–97, <https://www.amacad.org/publication/chinese-universities-global-stage-perspectives-recent-past>.
- ² “Reform and Opening Up” is a term used in China to describe the Chinese economic reform in the late twentieth century, influenced by socialism, which began after Mao Zedong’s death in 1976.

- ³ Teri A. Cannon and Stephen M. Kosslyn, “Minerva: The Intentional University,” *Dædalus* 153 (2) (Spring 2024): 275–285, <https://www.amacad.org/publication/minerva-intentional-university>.
- ⁴ Internationalization, or the international aspect, of modern higher education seems to have formed a particularly resonant theme in this volume, in part because of William C. Kirby’s monumental research that sets the context for featured discussions. In my personal investigation on the issue, the essays by Marwan M. Kraidy, Emily Levine, Richard C. Levin, Takehiko Kariya, and Mariët Westermann have been extremely helpful. See Marwan M. Kraidy, “Northwestern University in Qatar: A Distinctive Global University,” *Dædalus* 153 (2) (Spring 2024): 63–67, <https://www.amacad.org/publication/northwestern-university-qatar-distinctive-global-university>; Emily J. Levine, “Research & Teaching: Lasting Union or House Divided?” *Dædalus* 153 (2) (Spring 2024): 21–35, <https://www.amacad.org/publication/research-teaching-lasting-union-or-house-divided>; Richard C. Levin, “Online Learning & the Transformation of Global Higher Education,” *Dædalus* 153 (2) (Spring 2024): 262–274, <https://www.amacad.org/publication/online-learning-transformation-global-higher-education>; Takehiko Kariya, “A Long & Wrong Road to Globalization: Why Have Japanese Universities Failed in ‘Catching Up’ in the Twenty-First Century?” *Dædalus* 153 (2) (Spring 2024): 120–135, <https://www.amacad.org/publication/long-wrong-road-globalization-why-have-japanese-universities-failed-catching-twenty>; and Mariët Westermann, “The International University in an Age of Deglobalization,” *Dædalus* 153 (2) (Spring 2024): 36–47, <https://www.amacad.org/publication/international-university-age-deglobalization>.
- ⁵ Pericles Lewis, “The Rise & Restructuring of Yale-NUS College: An International Liberal Arts Partnership in Singapore,” *Dædalus* 153 (2) (Spring 2024): 48–62, <https://www.amacad.org/publication/rise-and-restructuring-yale-nus-college-international-liberal-arts-partnership>.
- ⁶ This is an alternative rendition of an exhortation by Chuang Tzū, an ancient Chinese philosopher, to “know the use of useless things.” Chuang Tzū, *Chuang Tzū: Mystic, Moral and Social Reformer*, trans. Herbert A. Giles (London: Bernard Quaritch, 1889), 55.

Valuing & Defending the Arts in Hong Kong

Mette Hjort

Focusing on a period of just over two decades (1997–2023), this essay charts how the most salient approaches to valuing and defending the arts in Hong Kong reflect the changing political circumstances of the city. I select two approaches for close analysis. Emphasizing the private and public value of the arts, the first approach reflects efforts to reinvent Hong Kong in the wake of the handover to the People’s Republic of China in 1997. Influenced by significant social unrest in 2014 and 2019, and by the introduction of the National Security Law in 2020, the second approach seeks protection for the arts through collaboration with the sciences. The exceptional conditions that Hong Kong offers for meaningful arts-related work are identified to facilitate international comparisons.

In the West, the past few decades have witnessed growing challenges for projects aimed at valuing and defending the arts in higher education, the wider environment in countries such as Denmark or those in the United Kingdom being defined by a significant degree of government skepticism (some would say hostility) toward arts subjects.¹ During much of the same period, the situation in Hong Kong was very different. To understand some of the key differences, we must look to the process of reinventing Hong Kong following its return to the People’s Republic of China (PRC) in 1997, and to how new aspirations for the city created a fertile terrain for arts subjects within the universities. In the wake of the so-called handover (from the United Kingdom to the PRC), the need to imagine a new postcolonial identity for a city that was to be fully absorbed into the “Motherland” after a period of fifty years (by 2046) became a persistent preoccupation for business leaders, civil servants and the government, teachers and scholars, filmmakers and artists, and, not least, young students.²

While Hong Kong’s role as a global financial center featured centrally in well-accepted characterizations of the city-state prior to 1997, the post-handover era witnessed a series of ambitious attempts, both at the grassroots level and at more official levels, to develop a more capacious conception of what life in Hong Kong could be. In postcolonial Hong Kong, artists who had turned their backs on traditionally preferred occupations in the financial sector came together to forge

spaces for the making and appreciation of art. Thus, for example, they occupied empty warehouses in previously industrialized areas such as Fotan in the New Territories, creating studio spaces, inexpensive living spaces, and open studio events that imbued local art and the life of artmaking with a tangible and even utopic sense of value.³ As for the circles of affluence and government decision-making, the thinking was that Hong Kong's new identity would provide cultural or artistic opportunities (as well as those purely related to business) to live rewarding, purposeful lives.

Indeed, the reinvention of Hong Kong has been closely linked to such striking infrastructure projects as the West Kowloon Cultural District. Launched by the Hong Kong government in 2008 and spanning forty hectares of reclaimed land, the West Kowloon Cultural District is known as "one of the largest cultural projects in the world, blending together art, education, open space, hotel, office and residential developments, and retail, dining and entertainment facilities."⁴ Among them was M+, a museum of visual culture and more, as its inaugural director, Lars Nittve, liked to call it, which opened on November 12, 2021, uniting Hong Kongers exhausted by political divisions and protests, and by the rigors of COVID-19 protocols, in an exuberant embrace of art.⁵ Other arts-related sites and venues in the West Kowloon Cultural District include the Arts Pavilion, the Art Park, Freespace, the Hong Kong Palace Museum, and the Xiqu Centre devoted to traditional Chinese opera.

Banker, businessman, and politician Bernard Chan has been a consistently influential spokesperson for a culturally and artistically oriented Hong Kong. Chan served as a member of the legislative council from 1997 to 2008 and as the non-official convenor of the executive council from 2017 to 2022, and since 2022, he has been chair of M+. Because of a serious illness during his youth, Chan opted for a fine arts education at Pomona College, a liberal arts university in California, where he developed his own distinctive painterly style based on pointillist techniques. It is telling that during a crucial period of Hong Kong's reinvention, a liberal arts graduate occupied key roles of power and influence in the Special Administrative Region of Hong Kong. One of these roles, chairman of the council of Lingnan University, the liberal arts university of Hong Kong, had direct implications for the issue of valuing and defending the arts in Hong Kong. More generally, the influence of Chan and like-minded legislators had a decisive impact on higher education. Among other things, the universities were encouraged to nurture the local talent that the West Kowloon Cultural District needed. The University Grants Committee (UGC), a body consisting of local and nonlocal members who jointly determine funding mechanisms and policymaking for the eight government-funded universities in Hong Kong, issued the call for new programs in 2004.

External developments, such as the West Kowloon Cultural District, set the stage for valuing and defending the arts *within* Hong Kong's university sector in the

post-handover era. Yet, the story to be told about the place of the arts within Hong Kong's universities is not an entirely straightforward one. Political conflict about issues of democracy and the pressures from the PRC's concerns and interests have complicated matters. Consistent with the launch of the West Kowloon Cultural District project, the scope for demonstrating and defending the value of the arts in Hong Kong's universities between 1997 and 2014 was considerable. However, in the wake of the civil disobedience movement of 2014, the anti-extradition movement of 2019, and the introduction of the National Security Law in 2020, the value of arts and humanities subjects and studio-based programs became far more ambiguous, and the task of defending all these within a university setting much more complex.⁶

The civil disobedience movement of 2014, which is known as both "Occupy Central with Love and Peace" and the "Umbrella Movement," was to a significant extent a secondary school and university phenomenon, initiated and sustained by students and their teachers or professors. Protesters from liberal arts backgrounds with commitments to arts and humanities fields were especially well-represented in the movement, as compared, say, with those coming from business or finance. Graduation ceremonies at the government-funded universities became theatrical performances that inevitably highlighted ideological contrasts, oppositional mentalities rather than political indifference, or even outright support for the government. At Lingnan University, graduates in cultural studies walked across the stage in combat gear while brandishing large yellow umbrellas and demonstratively ignoring the ceremonial requirement of respect for the chief executive's delegate, none other than the aforementioned Bernard Chan. Graduates from the business faculty behaved quite differently, being content to follow the usual protocols with the expected respect. The contrast and underlying political preferences were not lost on the government, and it is fair to say that the Legislative Council of Hong Kong has been somewhat skeptical about arts and humanities subjects since 2014, and reserved about those who make it their mission to defend them.

In considering these two periods – the one more hospitable to the arts (1997–2014), and the other less so (2015–2023) – two quite different strategies for valuing and defending the arts in Hong Kong universities become apparent.⁷ Grounded in the increasingly favorable conditions of the first period, one strategy adopted by those engaged in arts fields was to foreground both the public and the private value of the arts in their own right. Embracing self-understandings that emphasized contributions to *public value*, arts educators and practitioners in the universities claimed to be doing their part to imagine a spiritually richer Hong Kong by building a diverse and far larger cultural sector, while developing the necessary educational ecology to sustain it. In terms of *private value*, the rationale offered for the arts had to do with the qualitative difference that art would make to the lives of those who were touched by it, through engagement in actual artistic

practices or in the critical study of the arts, or by exercising the acquired capacity to become involved meaningfully with the arts during moments of culturally informed leisure.

Arguments that considered both the public and private value of the arts resonated within the universities because of Hong Kong's far-reaching attempt to reform its university education in light of "the overall aims of education for the twenty-first century."⁸ The Education Commission released a policy document in 2000 that outlined the parameters for a significant transformation of Hong Kong's education sector within a little more than a decade.⁹ Supported and implemented in September 2012 with a "one-off \$550 million non-capital provision for the UGC-funded" universities, the so-called 3/3/4 reform mandated by the Education Commission encouraged a dramatic emphasis across Hong Kong's university sector on whole-person education, general education, internationalization, co-curricular learning, and service-learning – developments that are broadly consistent with liberal arts traditions.¹⁰ The result was a context in which the arts and humanities could thrive, and where robust articulations of their value could be met with broad support. The contrast with other jurisdictions was striking. At a time when governments in the West were increasingly challenging the value of an arts and humanities education, Hong Kong's UGC was urging the creation of new programs in subject areas such as visual studies.

The strategy of appreciating and defending the arts by showcasing their public and private value is evident in one of the submissions received in response to the committee's call for programs in visual studies (the call was issued by the UGC in 2004 with the goal of fostering and developing the talent that would be needed in the West Kowloon Cultural District). Consistent with its liberal arts mission and vision, Lingnan University bid for the right to offer a new bachelor's program in visual studies in 2004, and in 2005 launched an interdisciplinary liberal arts–style program with a strong emphasis on philosophical aesthetics, environmental aesthetics, film and media studies, and art history.

Recognizing the diversity of students' talents in keeping with the theory of multiple intelligences, the program introduced a substantial component of studio practice in 2005.¹¹ Studio practice was seen as a means of supporting less academically inclined learners, a matter of some significance given that Lingnan University typically recruits students from low-income backgrounds who are the first in the family to attend university. To support the elements of studio practice and, just as important, to assist with the project of articulating the value of visual studies, Lingnan University introduced an artist-in-residence program in 2006. Requested by academic staff in visual studies, this initiative was made possible by the visionary commitments of then Vice Chancellor Edward Chen, a Keynesian economist of humble background and stellar accomplishments who fully understood how education can transform lives (Chen was Oxford-educated). Chen

provided initial funding for the artist-in-residence program, and additional funding was soon secured on a competitive basis from the Lingnan Foundation, then based at Yale University.

The approach taken for the artist-in-residence program captures the dimensions of public and private value that merit attention. Two artists were recruited each year, one local, the other nonlocal, with the goal of nurturing local talent and building bridges, through culture and art, to other parts of the world. Thus, for example, Kenyan sculptor Elkana Ong'Esa joined Lingnan University for a semester, during which time young students from Hong Kong's most deprived neighborhoods produced sculptures through a life-changing process of intercultural collaboration.¹²

In terms of the strategy of valuing and defending the arts, the most significant principle of selection was the community-oriented nature of the artists' proposals for the exhibition that they would mount as part of their residency. Regardless of their fame, artists with a singular focus on their own creativity were not seen as contenders for the program. Instead, the program recruited artists who were intent not only on transforming the lives of students through studio practice but on bringing art to the wider community. For example, environmental artist Lai Wai Yi (Monti) invited the entire (extended) Lingnan University community into the multipurpose studio to create a mural that resonated with the distinctive external mosaic walls of Hong Kong's new housing estates, the familiar environments of low-cost housing in Hong Kong.¹³ The whole community was involved, and as art touched the lives of students, teachers, researchers, professional services staff, administrators, donors, and even the young children of this Lingnan family, the case was made for the value of art. Participants understood the public value of arts programs, and their connection to Hong Kong's transformation. They similarly understood, through lived experience, the personal or private value of engaging with the world of creative expression.

The second strategy for valuing and defending the arts is informed by the reality of the government's less trusting stance on liberal arts subjects and practices from 2014 onward. In essence, it involves the integration of the arts into large interdisciplinary undertakings that feature science and technology to a significant degree. These disciplinary spheres, at some distance from the arts and humanities, attract inherently trustworthy academics with little inclination to use the university as a platform for political action. To value and defend the arts in this context is to show that technological developments and their applications – for example, the ever more pervasive presence of artificial intelligence in everyday life – call for perspectives informed by the arts. It is a matter of demonstrating that the arts are open to change, informed by the innovations of science and technology, and of proving that when appropriately integrated into interdisciplinary undertakings involving the sciences, the arts can be sufficiently neutral to clear the successive rounds of government vetting that large resource-intensive projects entail.

Much like the first strategy, this second one sits comfortably within the context of conditions created by policymakers. More specifically, in her policy address of 2020, then chief executive of Hong Kong Carrie Lam made a commitment to the development of the art-tech sector in Hong Kong, a pledge backed by a substantial injection of HK\$100 million (approximately US\$12 million), which would encourage university presidents and vice chancellors to pursue funding for the arts through art-tech schemes, and inspire proponents of the arts to reimagine their research or practice in light of the possibilities afforded by technology. In this context, valuing and defending the arts is often about demonstrating a capacity to engage in team-based work across the divide that novelist and physical chemist C. P. Snow called “two cultures.”¹⁴

Under the leadership of President and Vice Chancellor Alexander Ping-kong Wai, Hong Kong Baptist University (HKBU) offers a good example of how universities are responding to the emphasis on art tech. A physicist recruited to HKBU in 2021 from a role as provost at the Hong Kong Polytechnic University, Wai has been keen to establish HKBU as a leader in the art-tech space. In 2021–2022, Wai led a transnational team of computer scientists, new media artists, and film scholars at HKBU, City University of Hong Kong, and the Swiss Federal Institute of Technology Lausanne to develop a bid for funding from the Innovation and Technology Fund (ITF).¹⁵ Entitled “Future Cinema Systems: Next-Generation Art Technologies,” and focusing on the work of the celebrated new media artist Jeffrey Shaw and the contributions of the equally well-established digital museologist Sarah Kenderdine, the project was awarded almost HK\$35.5 million in 2022.

Unsurprisingly, given the size of the award, the vetting undertaken by the ITF was vigorous, detailed, and time-consuming. With Shaw collaborating with West Kowloon’s Palace Museum (in the context of its inaugural exhibition), the value of “Future Cinema Systems” was well-understood by important opinion leaders within and close to the government, in addition to members of the ITF’s panel of assessors (all of whom are also well known to the government). The trust afforded to this arts project stems from the sheer size of the investment, with all the necessary checks and balances, and from the staunch support of science-based advocates at the highest level of the university, a level that is itself subject to the most rigorous of vetting processes (including, informally, from the Liaison Office of the Central People’s Government in the Hong Kong Special Administrative Region).

In evoking these two strategies, the first focused on the intrinsic value of the arts, the second on the ability of the arts to draw on and expand the sphere of application for science and technology, I do not mean to suggest that no other approaches have been adopted during the timeframes in question. But these two ways of valuing and defending the arts are especially salient in and particular to the Hong Kong landscape. Some of its unique characteristics are ultimately traceable to the dramatic political conflicts of 2014, 2019, and 2020 – that is, to struggles

over citizenship and democracy, and to assumptions about arts and science fields as, respectively, sources of upheaval and compliance or quietist support.

To take seriously the project of valuing and defending the arts in Hong Kong today is to be mindful of what would count as success in the years to come. It is important to acknowledge that no single measure will suffice, given the extent to which the project is variously distributed across the higher-education sector in Hong Kong. More specifically, each of the government-funded universities in Hong Kong operates within the parameters of a clearly defined role, the government's aim being to support an education sector that is well-differentiated and properly balanced. Some of the universities are more technically oriented (such as The Hong Kong University of Science and Technology, and The Hong Kong Polytechnic University), while others have a liberal arts focus (for instance, Lingnan University, Hong Kong Baptist University). Some are comprehensive, offering a full range of programs, including degrees in law and the medical sciences (for example, University of Hong Kong, Chinese University of Hong Kong), while others focus on tailored instruction for specialized vocations (Education University of Hong Kong).

The government is committed to a sector in which the universities (each with an agreed role) balance cross-institutional collaboration with a recurring competition for resources. Given role differentiation, the criteria for measuring success in valuing and defending the arts cannot be identical across the sector. Rather than focus on the success criteria of only one or two arts-heavy environments, we might usefully consider a composite picture of success across Hong Kong and its education sector, with each institution playing a contributing role. Referring to the attitudes, values, and actions of the government of Hong Kong, decision-makers in the cultural sector, parents, donors, and senior management teams within universities, it is fair to say that the project of variously valuing and defending the arts in Hong Kong will be successful if the following picture rings true:

- *The policy addresses of the Chief Executive (CE) of Hong Kong.* The cultural, economic, and social contributions made by the arts are acknowledged through clearly specified aspirations in the CE's annual address, a significant event that essentially establishes the "performance indicators" for the Hong Kong government, and its "deliverables" as a special administrative region of the People's Republic of China. An example is the reference in Carrie Lam's policy address of November 25, 2020, in which she identified art and technology as a priority area for the government.¹⁶
- *The schemes of the University Grants Committee and Research Grants Council.* The funding schemes that shape the internal priorities of the universities recognize the value of the arts, providing well-funded opportunities to nur-

ture artistic talent, the skills needed to support a thriving cultural sector, teaching innovation, and excellent (practice-based) research in the arts and humanities.

- *Role differentiation across the higher-education sector.* Support for the more arts-intensive universities in Hong Kong is strong. The parameters for competition across the sector are defined in ways that do not unfairly disadvantage the less science-intensive institutions.
- *Parents' support for degree programs in the arts and humanities.* As the role played by liberal arts, whole-person, and values-based education in enabling graduates to live lives of “consequence, inquiry and accomplishment” is increasingly recognized, parents support their children’s pursuit of an education in the arts.¹⁷
- *Donors' earmarking of gifts for arts-related projects.* Nonprofit, charitable organizations such as the Tin Ka Ping Foundation continue to support values-based educational projects in the arts and humanities.¹⁸
- *Power and voice within the universities.* Arts and humanities fields are well-represented at the highest level of executive management (president and vice chancellor, provost, vice presidents, and associate vice presidents). Public figures appointed to the courts and councils, the highest levels of university governance, include individuals of remarkable achievement whose contributions reflect a strong commitment to the arts.
- *Academic freedom, censorship, and self-censorship.* The culture of debate, consensus building, and academic governance is protected by visionary university leaders whose integrity, probity, and pragmatism allow them to defend academic and artistic freedoms in circumstances of scrutiny and constraint.
- *Interdisciplinary teams, grand challenges, and “wicked problems.”* Far from being marginalized, arts and humanities scholars and arts practitioners are encouraged to participate in team-based initiatives aimed at advancing goals such as the United Nations’ Sustainable Development Goals (currently the case at Lingnan University and increasingly the case at Hong Kong Baptist University).
- *Demonstrating the value of the arts to society through community-oriented pedagogies and practices.* Teachers, scholars, and practitioners of the arts understand and support the principles of service-learning, community engagement, and knowledge exchange.¹⁹
- *Students' success.* Graduates of the arts and humanities continue to demonstrate a capacity to establish deeply meaningful career paths, both in Hong Kong and internationally.

- *Telling the stories.* Through the efforts of the Hong Kong Academy of the Humanities, donors, and the liberal arts universities in Hong Kong, the achievements of remarkable arts and humanities graduates are noticed and celebrated through widely told stories that highlight these individuals' creativity, adaptability, collaborative mindsets, and purpose-driven commitment to civic values rising far above narrow self-interest.

It is telling that none of these elements of a composite picture of success are entirely absent (and thus merely aspirational) in Hong Kong. In this sense, the path to success already exists. That said, there is room for a greater degree of commitment for galvanizing efforts in some of these areas.

Regarding censorship, there are growing concerns about academic and artistic freedoms in Hong Kong, the full ramifications of the National Security Law being a natural driver of censorship and self-censorship. And yet there are also reasons for optimism. Countless examples of what remains possible in Hong Kong could be adduced, but two highly suggestive ones suffice to make the point about the still significant scope for agency.

First, the opening of the M+ museum in 2021 provided Hong Kong residents with access to media mogul Uli Sigg's remarkable collection of Chinese art, and more specifically to thought- and discussion-provoking China-focused works that can hardly be described as risk averse or banally innocent. Second, supported by grants from the Leisure and Cultural Services Department of Hong Kong and Hong Kong Baptist University (in addition to non-local funding from such sources as the Guggenheim Foundation in the United States and the Gulbenkian Foundation in Portugal), American-Russian composer Eugene Birman has been able, as a peripatetic artist and Hong Kong academic, to produce the most uncompromising artistic work without sidelong glances at censors or the mobilization of internal processes of self-censorship. Based on more than five hundred anonymized interviews with "ordinary Russians and those living in neighboring countries," Birman's documentary opera entitled *Russia: Today* (the UK premiere was held at King's Place in London in 2023, and sung by EXAUDI) explores the "complexities and contradictions of contemporary Russia" with an honesty so unrelenting that the work cannot be performed in Russia.²⁰ This meaningful, deeply moving work was to a significant extent made possible by Hong Kong.

Concerns about various freedoms in Hong Kong appear at times to have become less acute among academics and artists following the departure of Carrie Lam (whose time in office challenged the One Country, Two Systems arrangement, arguably for reasons having more to do with personality than ideology or politics). Artists and academics who once saw their own departure from Hong Kong as imminent currently speak of a continued loyalty for the city that is, or has become, their home.²¹

While there is a clear contrast to be drawn between the two periods discussed above, it is important, especially within the context of global debates about the relative merits of different educational philosophies, types of universities, and funding regimes, to draw attention to a very significant element of continuity. Hong Kong's government-funded universities, across the entire timeframe under consideration here, offered remarkable conditions of employment. While casualization, precarity, and modest salaries shape the reality of many who choose to work in higher education in the United Kingdom – witness the significant strike activity of 2022 and 2023 organized by the University and Colleges Union in support, among other things, of better pay and more manageable workloads – the same cannot be said of Hong Kong.²² Scholars and teachers in Hong Kong who are engaged in valuing and defending the arts are typically on a tenure track or already tenured. To be employed by a Hong Kong university, irrespective of field, is to enjoy a generous salary, modest taxation rate, and a gratuity more or less equivalent in size to the taxes owed. Additional benefits such as health insurance and housing (or a housing allowance) accompany the basic package, creating the peace of mind to be fully immersed in core activities. At the time of their recruitment, academics are offered sizeable research initiation grants, the aim being to facilitate research endeavors as these new colleagues prepare to apply for widely available, generous external funding.

The favorable conditions generally enjoyed by Hong Kong academics warrant additional comment. Salaries in the university sector were previously linked to those in the civil service. For example, an elite university such as the University of Hong Kong once served the role of providing a steady flow of talent for highly coveted positions in the colonial government. University salaries were unlinked from the civil service scale in 2004, paving the way for the possibility of greater variations of remuneration consistent with the principles of market demand.²³ Preparations for the launch of four-year degree programs (the aforementioned 3/3/4 reform) included the recruitment of a sizeable number of academics, the vast majority of them from institutions outside Hong Kong. At the time, generous packages were seen as consistent with Hong Kong's ambition to attract the "best and the brightest," namely, to compete successfully with leading institutions around the world.

Every now and then, an influential person (for example, Regina Ip, founder and chairperson of the New People's Party) floats thoughts about recruiting extensively from China (where academic salaries are significantly lower) or about mirroring the nine-month salary arrangement adopted by some universities in the United States. To date, proposals along these lines have failed to gain any real traction, and there is no indication that this situation will change any time soon. Ambitious on behalf of its university sector and aware of the benefits of global recruitment (which encompasses returning Hong Kong natives and overseas scholars originally from the People's Republic of China), the Hong Kong government's

commitment to attracting and retaining talent is reflected in a stable and generous funding regime for the public universities.

A second striking element of continuity is that the basic administrative systems related to running a university in Hong Kong are not maximally delegated to academics as they are, for example, in many universities in the United Kingdom. A striking feature of the Hong Kong university system is the presence of a *large number of well-trained support or professional services staff*, all of them in secure posts and well-versed in the systems that allow a complex organization to function smoothly. The Hong Kong sector offers a well-differentiated, stable institutional environment that limits the number of so-called “direct reports” to a realistic number consistent with the best practices of other sectors. The excellence of the working conditions enjoyed by academics in Hong Kong is not a trivial matter, impacting what teachers and researchers engaged in valuing and defending the arts are actually able to do. Well-supported in a whole host of ways, these Hong Kong academics are in the enviable position, within certain constraints, to be able to pursue a wide variety of freely defined initiatives that are innovative, time-consuming, and resource intensive. For those working in the arts and humanities, such initiatives typically count as compelling articulations of the value of the arts.

Finally, in Hong Kong, a graduate’s success is not solely measured by their earnings, and certainly not the earnings shortly after graduation. The United Kingdom offers a contrasting case, in which the government uses the salaries of graduates fifteen months after their date of graduation to determine whether a degree program has value or offers value for money. As University of Lincoln Vice Chancellor Neal Juster cogently argues, this shortsighted approach to determining the value of an education reflects a profound misunderstanding of the way in which meaningful, purpose-driven life paths are forged, just as it overlooks the extent to which salaries vary on a regional basis.²⁴ Hong Kong offers a different way of thinking about the value of an education, including in the arts, one that resists the idea that educational value can be made to conform to a single monetary standard. In Hong Kong, the traditional ideals of the literati and principles of Confucian learning – all of which emphasize values other than the purely instrumental or pecuniary – have effectively protected the special administrative region from some of the more damaging attacks on the arts and humanities seen in the West. By the same token, these ideals and principles, most of them widely accepted by those enjoying affluence and power in Hong Kong, provide an environment where the liberal arts – for present purposes, the study of the arts and humanities and the practice of a given art – are given genuine opportunities to develop.

In sum, when it comes to the story of the liberal arts, Hong Kong offers a good deal of hope and inspiration, even in a post-handover era. In Hong Kong, arts-related work is not seen as a form of labor that can be heavily discounted on account of the joys and pleasures of inherently meaningful creative activities or the

allegedly trivial nature of the pursuits. Arts-related work takes place in environments of significant infrastructural support, empowering scholars, educators, and practitioners to focus intensely on their core missions. Government policies acknowledge the need for a multifaceted educational ecology, one where liberal arts institutions have a genuine role to play, based on the distinctive value of what they offer – for example, a broad-based education focused on learning how we learn best rather than learning to match acquired skills with soon to be outdated vocational opportunities in the here and now. Finally, educational reforms and policies have essentially mandated the introduction of liberal arts elements into the offerings of all government-funded universities. General education, values-based education, positive education, whole-person education, and service-learning: all these terms are fully in play across Hong Kong’s higher-education sector. Inasmuch as these approaches are readily traceable to liberal arts traditions, Hong Kong offers a compelling example of the arts being valued and defended for the sake of the future success of a thriving public. Hong Kong’s universities are not merely adopting liberal arts models but adapting them to ensure the best possible outcomes for their students and the city, all within the constraints of the possible.

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ENDNOTES

- ¹ The liberal arts are typically defined as encompassing the sciences, as well as the arts, humanities, and fine arts. In this context, I am not concerned with the sciences, which need no valuing or defending in the Hong Kong context, but with arts and humanities subjects and related studio- or performance-based programs.
- ² For a discussion of the “one country, two systems” concept, see William H. Overholt, *Hong Kong: The Rise and Fall of “One Country, Two Systems”* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard Kennedy School, 2019), https://ash.harvard.edu/files/ash/files/overholt_hong_kong_paper_final.pdf.
- ³ The New Territories is one of the three main regions of Hong Kong, alongside Hong Kong Island and the Kowloon Peninsula.

- ⁴ See “Our Story,” West Kowloon Cultural District, <https://www.westkowloon.hk/en/our-story> (accessed February 27, 2023).
- ⁵ See “Overview,” West Kowloon Cultural District, <https://www.westkowloon.hk/en/mplus#overview> (accessed February 27, 2023).
- ⁶ Each of these movements involved public protests against actions viewed as the Chinese Communist Party’s attempts to control Hong Kong or its government, undermining the One Country, Two Systems concept. The civil disobedience movement of 2014 was a series of street sit-ins that began in response to a decision from the Standing Committee of the National People’s Congress regarding proposed reforms to the Hong Kong electoral system, a decision considered to be the CCP’s efforts to screen candidates for the position of chief executive of Hong Kong. The anti-extradition movement of 2019 involved demonstrations held in both 2019 and 2020 against proposed legislation from the Hong Kong government that would allow the chief executive of Hong Kong, on a case-by-case basis, to transfer arrested parties to mainland China. The proposed bill would also have recategorized protests as riots, allowing for more arrests in cases of widespread dissent. The bill was eventually withdrawn. The 2020 National Security Law criminalized terrorism, separatism, and subversion of state power within Hong Kong. Opponents of the law viewed it as antithetical to the One Country, Two Systems principle.
- ⁷ In developing my argument, I draw on my experiences as Head of Department (of Comparative Literature at the University of Hong Kong and, later, of Visual Studies at Lingnan University), Dean of Arts (at Hong Kong Baptist University), and Associate Vice President for Academic Quality Assurance & Internationalization (at Lingnan University), and on the insights afforded by my appointment to the government’s University Grants Committee by the chief executive of Hong Kong. Comparative observations are based on my experiences as a professor at universities in Canada (at McGill University, where I was Head of Film and Communications), Denmark (at the University of Copenhagen, where I was Head of the Film Section in the Department of Communication), and the United Kingdom (at the University of Lincoln, where I am currently Head of the School of Film, Media and Journalism).
- ⁸ Hong Kong’s Education Commission, *Learning for Life, Learning Through Life: Reform Proposals for the Education System in Hong Kong* (Hong Kong: The Education Commission, 2000).
- ⁹ Ibid.
- ¹⁰ University Grants Committee, “The ‘3+3+4’ New Academic Structure,” <https://www.ugc.edu.hk/doc/eng/ugc/publication/report/AnnualRpt1213/06.pdf> (accessed February 27, 2023).
- ¹¹ See Howard Gardner, “Frequently Asked Questions—Multiple Intelligences and Related Educational Topics” (2013), https://howardgardner01.files.wordpress.com/2012/06/faq_march2013.pdf (accessed February 27, 2023).
- ¹² See Elkana O. Ong’Esa, *The Fourth Dimension*, Artists-in-Residence Program: Exhibition Catalogues at Lingnan University Hong Kong, https://commons.ln.edu.hk/vs_artist_catalog/2 (accessed February 27, 2023).
- ¹³ See Lai Wai Yi (Monti), *The Color that Remains*, Artists-in-Residence Program: Exhibition Catalogues at Lingnan University Hong Kong, https://commons.ln.edu.hk/vs_artist_catalog/3 (accessed February 27, 2023).

- ¹⁴ C. P. Snow, *The Two Cultures and the Scientific Revolution* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1961).
- ¹⁵ As the initial project coordinator on this bid, I handed this role over to Jeffrey Shaw following the awarding of the grant and my move to the University of Lincoln in the United Kingdom.
- ¹⁶ On the emergence of art tech as a strategic priority for the Hong Kong government, see “CE Unveils Measures to Inject Impetus into Hong Kong’s Economy,” The Government of Hong Kong Special Administrative Region Press Releases, November 25, 2020, <https://www.info.gov.hk/gia/general/202011/25/P2020112500513.htm>.
- ¹⁷ Richard A. Detweiler, *The Evidence Liberal Arts Needs: Lives of Consequence, Inquiry, and Accomplishment* (Cambridge, Mass.: The MIT Press, 2021).
- ¹⁸ For the mission and vision of the Tin Ka Ping Foundation, see the foundation’s website, <https://www.tinkaping.org/?lang=en> (accessed February 25, 2023).
- ¹⁹ Lingnan University pioneered service-learning in the Hong Kong context. During my term as Associate Vice President for Academic Quality Assurance & Internationalization, Lingnan required all students to take at least one service-learning course before graduating. Lingnan’s Office of Service-Learning aims to enable “students to make a positive impact on society by applying their academic knowledge outside of the classroom.” See “Office of Service-Learning,” Lingnan University, <https://www.ln.edu.hk/osl> (accessed February 27, 2023).
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A Long & Wrong Road to Globalization: Why Have Japanese Universities Failed in “Catching Up” in the Twenty-First Century?

Takehiko Kariya

This essay examines how universities in non-Western, non-English-speaking countries respond to global competition in higher education, where English has become dominant due to “linguistic imperialism.” I pose critical questions about how these institutions can not only endure but thrive amid global competition, and whether intensified global competition has improved the quality of education. Focusing on Japan, I explore both successful and challenging aspects of globalization in its institutions of higher education. While Japan achieved success in adapting during the late nineteenth century, the emphasis on learning foreign languages, including English, diminished after World War II. The Japanese case illustrates the complex trade-offs between ensuring educational equity and global competitiveness, and highlights the evolving dynamics and challenges faced by universities as well as policymakers in non-English-speaking countries in the global higher-education landscape.

Global competition in higher education has intensified during the twenty-first century. Governments and higher-education institutions across countries around the world are competing to survive by pursuing quality international students, faculty members, and external funding. Global rankings of universities, such as the Times Higher Education World University Rankings and QS (Quacquarelli Symonds) World University Rankings, fuel the competition. There are clear advantages for institutions in English-speaking countries, particularly favoring the United States and the United Kingdom, partly because the value of English as a lingua franca is overwhelming in globalized economic competition. Thus, higher degrees obtained from top-ranked universities in English-speaking countries have become more valuable in the labor market beyond national borders, a situation sometimes referred to as the rise of a “global meritocracy.”¹

Under the “linguistic imperialism” of English, however, how can higher education in non-English-speaking countries survive?² Has the global competition

enhanced the quality of education among those countries? What does “universalization,” or “Americanization,” of values in education mean to those in non-English-speaking countries? These questions are rarely scrutinized, in large part because of the taken-for-granted advantages in English-speaking countries.

To examine these questions, this essay focuses on Japan as a non-English-speaking country because Japanese experiences present an interesting case of success and failure in globalization, considering that Japan underwent two phases of accommodation to globalization in the process of modernization. In the early stage, Japanese higher education successfully contributed to adapting to the globalized world through “catch-up” modernization. In this stage, which commenced in the late nineteenth century, it was not difficult for Japan to accommodate higher education as a form of globalization, because catching up with the West provided unambiguous goals and measures for Japan. The Meiji government established higher-education institutions as a driving engine to power the catch-up. Their primary role, as I will discuss later, was learning the advanced knowledge and technologies valued in the West to establish a modern industrialized nation-state as rapidly as possible to avoid colonization by those same Western powers. Ironically, however, since the purported “completion” of the catch-up in the 1980s, both the government and higher-education institutions in Japan have been struggling. The problems come from the difficulty of setting new goals and discovering appropriate and effective measures to achieve these newly defined – but always rather vague – objectives.

What I herein call the *post catch-up syndrome* has emerged since the late twentieth century, and it is clearly evident in the globalization of Japanese higher education. I will argue that the syndrome and the suffering derive from, unexpectedly, Japan’s success in its earlier phase of globalization. What are the difficulties? And what has Japanese higher education won and lost, in terms of their educational values, through the global competition? By answering these questions, we get a sense of a broader story: the impact of the pressures of globalization on non-English-speaking countries that initiated modernization later than their Western counterparts. In doing so, it becomes easier to examine some of the problems raised by the globalization of higher education that are frequently overlooked in the English-speaking world: namely, contradiction between the importance of equality and waning diversity in values in education.

Japan is recognized as the first non-Western country that achieved modernization, and much earlier than other non-Western countries. While admittedly the process was complex, this historical experience for Japan is often coined as simply “catch up with the West” by Japanese intellectuals and leaders.³ The Japanese leaders at that time modeled themselves on the advanced countries of Western Europe and the United States and strove to catch up through emula-

tion and innovation of Western modern systems.⁴ In this early stage of modernization, education played a crucial role, especially the field of higher education. First, experts and advisors in many fields were brought from Western countries to teach Japan's best and brightest young men in non-Japanese, usually European, languages. During the 1870s, 200 to 800 foreign advisors were employed in government offices, military branches, factories, and public institutions, including higher-education institutions, with the peak of 858 advisors in 1874. Second, the Japanese government sent their smartest students to universities in the United States, the United Kingdom, Germany, and France to learn advanced knowledge and technologies. In total, approximately 550 students studied abroad for the first seven years of the Meiji Restoration, with 209 students going to the United States.⁵ For these students to succeed, they required a high command of foreign languages, particularly English, German, and French.

Learning advanced knowledge from the West was a common practice across a range of countries that were "late" to modernize. In countries that had been colonized before independence, elites had (and still have) to learn the languages of their suzerain nations, and they often had to study advanced knowledge in those languages. Even in their domestic universities, the lack of textbooks and scholarly works available in their vernacular languages often made them rely on the languages of those suzerain countries, even until quite recently. In contrast, in Japan, vernacularization of Western advanced knowledge was realized in the very early stages of Japan's modernization. Amano Ikuo, an eminent historian of Japanese higher education, finds that within the first two decades after the commencement of modernization, Japanese young men who had studied abroad began to teach Western knowledge in Japanese to students in Japanese higher-education institutions, which were established and developed in the first three decades of modernization.⁶ These Japanese then gradually replaced foreign teachers. Not only were lectures given in Japanese, but also most textbooks and many scholarly works were translated and written in Japanese for students and the wider public.

There are enormous differences between Japanese and Western languages in their scripts (compare Roman alphabets and Japanese hiragana, kanji, and kana), grammatical structures (for example, Japanese uses more particles without relying on word order, unlike English in which word order is crucial to help readers and speakers understand different parts of speech), phonics (certain sounds exist in Western languages, but not in Japanese, and vice versa), and semantic fields (untranslatable terms, phrases, and idioms), all of which makes it challenging for Japanese students when learning Western languages.⁷ Despite these differences, the rapid Japanification of Western knowledge was a feat for this latecomer country in the globalized world during the late nineteenth century. In this regard, Japanese higher education successfully adapted to the globalizing world at the early stage of modernization. Avoiding being colonized also permitted Japan to take

advantages and learn from different Western nations. That is, they had time to determine what were the most suitable ways to establish modern institutions to emulate. This contrasts with former colonized countries in which the choice of models was influenced overwhelmingly by their suzerain countries. So, both language and non-colonization helped Japan establish hybrid modern institutions, including its higher-education system, by learning from different Western countries and blending these elements with Japanese tradition.⁸

This Japanification of Western knowledge can also be seen in the development of the so-called “translation culture” (*Honyaku Bunka*) in Japan. In the late nineteenth century, for example, Shakespeare’s *Julius Caesar* was translated into Japanese.⁹ In the early twentieth century, more Western literature was translated for the literate public. The *Collected Works of World Literature* gained a huge readership in the 1930s. The anthology included well-known authors of English, French, German, and Russian literature, such as Shakespeare, Dickens, Goethe, Hugo, Zola, Tolstoy, and Dostoyevsky, among many others. The publisher of this collection proudly announced that, in total, five hundred eighty thousand readers had reserved the series in advance of publication.¹⁰ That interest shows the intense demand to learn, if the language barrier could be overcome. As another example, in the field of social sciences and Western thought, Herbert Spencer’s *Social Statics* was translated in 1881, and Karl Marx’s *Das Kapital* in 1924. Furthermore, the collected works of Marx and Engels were also translated into Japanese between 1928 and 1932: one of the earliest German translations.¹¹ Thanks to such rapid development of translation culture and scholarship, people who were educated completely in the Japanese language were able to access advanced Western knowledge, thought, and literature. Few other non-Western countries had such wide access to learning and higher education in their own languages at their early stage of modernization. Accordingly, unlike in other non-Western nations, where a strong cultural divide emerged between the elites and the public, divided by the language skills of the suzerain countries as well as the limited access to higher education, Japanification of Western knowledge mitigated an acute sociocultural divide in society.¹²

It is important to note that those responsible for these translations were Japanese intellectuals who had been educated at Japanese universities first, then often studied abroad. Japanese universities became incubators of Western knowledge, where translation and introduction of advanced Western knowledge were highly appreciated as scholarly pursuits. But since works were primarily borrowed ideas from the West, this style was given the sarcastic name of “translation scholarship” (*Honyaku Gakumon*), suggesting it made little contribution to the original works in Western languages. But, in fact, the translation scholarship produced a kind of hybrid knowledge by situating Western knowledge in the Japanese cultural, societal, and historical context, since translation is never simply a copy, but a modification: Western knowledge was framed and accommodated within the Japanese

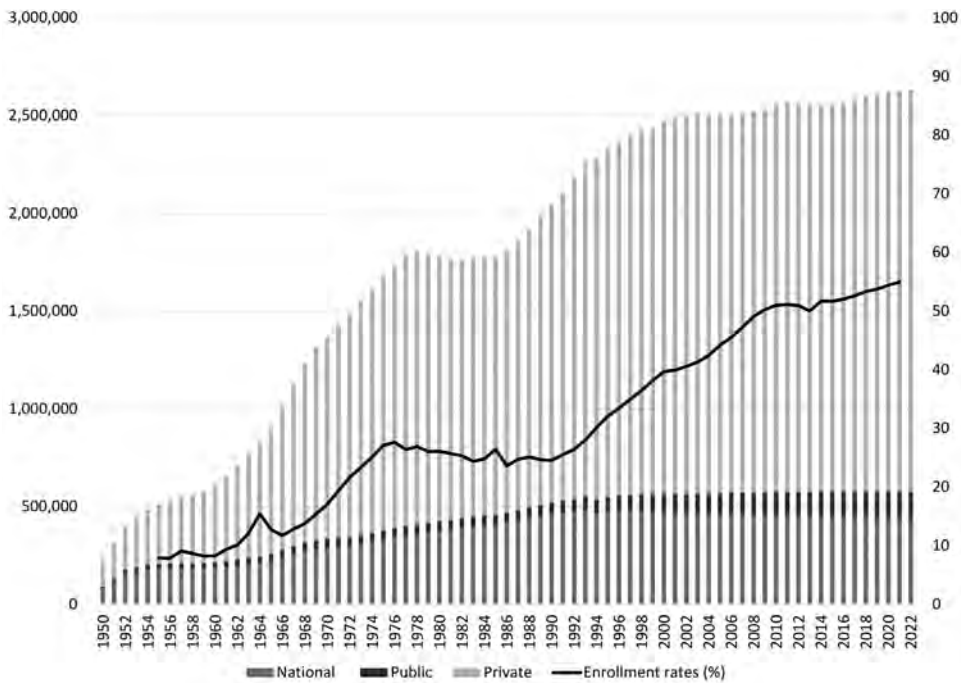
context. This role of universities in disseminating and transforming Western culture and knowledge into Japanese context should be recognized as an example of successful adaptation to the early stages of globalization for Japan, a society that was late to modernize. It was a profound achievement given its vastly different linguistic, cultural, and historical background from the West.

Paradoxically, however, the past success in globalization subsequently created a problem after translation culture and scholarship reached a higher level. Since the end of World War II, English has become the primary foreign language taught in Japanese schools, and this has generated profound problems with English education. Since the language of Japanese is vastly different from English, it is difficult for the majority of the population to learn English. Furthermore, after the Japanification of Western knowledge reached a higher level, the importance and necessity for Japanese people to learn foreign languages, including English, have become less obvious. Accordingly, speaking and listening skills in English or in other foreign languages were placed in the background. Admittedly, the importance of reading in English remains, but not as strongly as before.

Postwar educational reforms, hugely influenced by the U.S. military occupation, advocated democratic values. Democracy was to be realized, in large part, as a provision of equal educational opportunity. Establishing a more accessible educational system as well as eliminating gender discrimination were among the concrete policies. Junior high schools became coeducational and part of compulsory education, which resulted in a rapid expansion of educational opportunities beyond compulsory education. By the mid-1970s, more than 90 percent of junior high school graduates went on to senior high schools, which were also reformed to provide more enrollment opportunities for both male and female students. Higher-education reforms allowed national professional schools (which offered postsecondary technical training) to become universities after the war. Meanwhile, former “imperial universities” changed their status and name to become simply “national” universities. Two-year junior colleges were established, which enhanced access to higher-education opportunities for female students, to whom they mainly catered. Many of these institutions had been professional and vocational schools for women before the war, and a number would become women’s colleges and universities, although gender inequality in higher education has endured. Furthermore, newly established higher-education institutions, including universities and junior colleges, continued to increase steadily over the postwar period.¹³ Accordingly, the junior college and university enrollment rate reached nearly 40 percent by the mid-1970s and has increased to 58 percent for four-year universities in 2023.

The increasing opportunities of university education have been led primarily by the expansion of private institutions, as shown in Figure 1. Approximately three-quarters of university students are now enrolled in private institutions, which

Figure 1
The Number of Students and Enrollment Rates in
Four-Year Higher-Education Institutions



Source : Author's graph of data from MEXT's School Basic Survey in each year.

account for 592 institutions out of 790 universities in total across Japan today. It is this expansion that made great contributions to Japan's economic growth domestically from the 1960s to the 1980s by helping minimize government investment in higher education, given the restricted government financial support to private universities.¹⁴ Put differently, the Japanese catch-up model of university education succeeded in providing or "cramming" broad and higher-level knowledge into a large number of students in large lecture rooms in an economically efficient manner that placed minimum strain on the national budget. Intense entrance examinations, taken by a growing number of young Japanese students, also incentivized these masses to learn solid basic academic skills. During the high economic growth era in particular, the enhanced demand for well-educated white-collar workers, including engineers, was primarily supplied by graduates from private institutions.

Over the 1960s and 1970s, those university-educated workers thus became a driving force of “Japan, Inc.” With greater opportunities to enter (mostly private) universities, the generations who were educated during this period built a solid “middle class” in tandem with the continuous increase in household income afforded by strong economic growth. This societal transformation successfully created Japan’s self-portrait of its “all middle-class society” in the 1970s, where in Japan’s income distribution among households was much smaller as compared with other member countries of the OECD (Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development) during that decade. By producing a large number of highly educated people in an economical way for the government, Japan established a stable society of residents who acquired a high command of literacy in culture, science, and technology, as well as social norms. Without the expansion of private universities, such a societal transformation would not have been achieved so smoothly.

A problem of trade-offs in education values emerges here, however. The success of the Japanese-language transfer of knowledge played a major role in achieving the expansion of educational opportunities, but equal access to educational opportunities clashed with the value of foreign-language education. The earlier success of globalization, which was limited to a few elite groups, is therefore inconsistent with the realization of equality as a democratic value in education. The question now becomes whether a new phase of globalization of education should be promoted at the cost of this democratic value. These contradictions – between the elitist and egalitarian values in education, and specifically in regard to foreign language education – are expected to occur more strongly in democratic non-English-speaking nations than in English-speaking countries.

In fact, in Japan, the expansion of educational opportunities challenged the value of English-language education. For example, the introduction of English-language education in the new compulsory junior high schools raised skepticism from the beginning about the significance of teaching English. Unlike the prewar elitist middle schools, all children in a given community began attending local junior high schools without entrance examinations. But soon after, teachers raised doubts about the value of teaching English. Aizawa Shinichi, a Japanese sociologist of education, analyzed the discourse of teachers in the 1950s to examine the process of introducing English-language education in newly established junior high schools. In his research, teachers reported that local people complained, “There is no use for learning English” for schoolchildren in their communities, and teachers were concerned that they could not explain the significance of learning English to the students. Teachers also pointed out that a foreign language (English) was a difficult subject to master for students with “low intelligence,” an unfortunate expression still widely used in the 1950s.¹⁵ It contrasted with the fact that foreign languages had been taught only to students in prewar middle schools and to female students who had been selected for admission to women’s high schools. It was estimated that

only about 25 percent of elementary school graduates enrolled in those prewar secondary schools.¹⁶ The dearth of “learnability” of English became a major issue after the war. No agreement had been reached from the outset over the degree to which learning the English language should be expanded in compulsory education.

The perception that not everyone needs English and not everyone can learn a foreign language easily was shared by Japanese teachers half a century ago. A similar perception resonated with teachers in senior high schools and universities as well. The view expanded rapidly in the postwar period. In sharp contrast to the Meiji system that required elite students to be proficient in foreign languages, the rapid postwar expansion of upper secondary and tertiary education did not require advanced foreign language skills for students to attain admission, nor did these institutions provide quality language courses to enhance foreign language skills after students entered schools and universities. Even at the university level, many Japanese universities have failed to enhance students’ skills in speaking and listening in English. Again, this can be seen as a natural result of the Japanification of knowledge from abroad that no longer required the majority of students to learn English.¹⁷ This is one aspect of a cluster that comprises what I call the *post catch-up syndrome*.

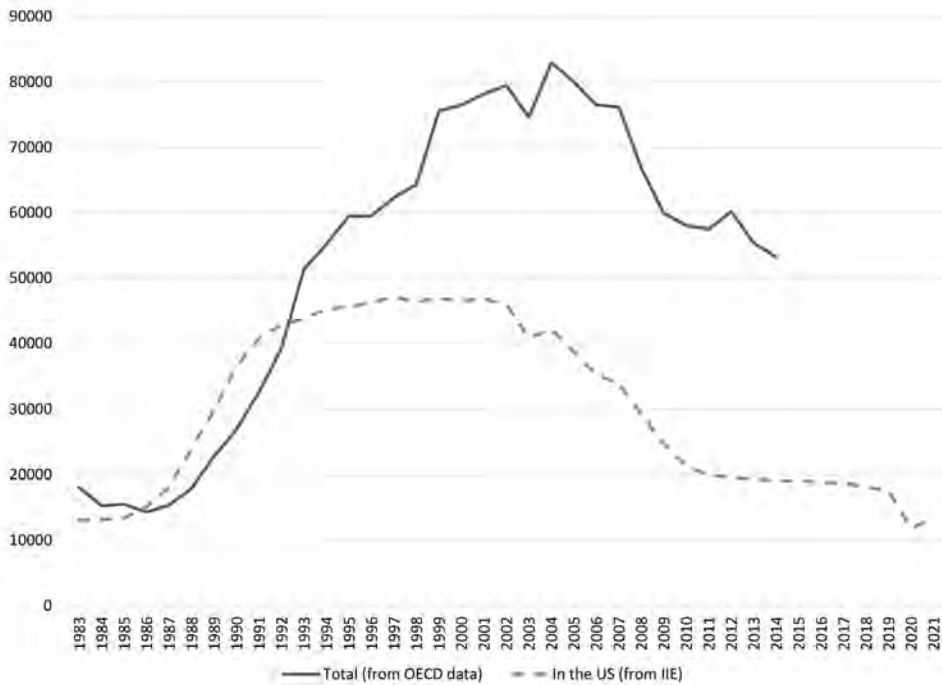
Against this backdrop, we gain new perspective as to why the number of Japanese students who studied abroad for tertiary education has declined in recent years, as shown in Figure 2.

The lines in the graph demonstrate that the number of Japanese students who studied abroad peaked in the early 2000s and has since declined both in the total number and for those studying in the United States. This is further evidence that domestic education in the Japanese language at Japanese universities satisfies the majority of young Japanese, even without providing high-level learning of foreign languages such as English, and/or obtaining globally valuable higher-education degrees abroad. In other words, as long as students pursue good jobs in the domestic labor market, Japanese universities provide enough opportunities for the majority of Japanese students, suggesting a very limited incentive to study abroad or acquire quality English skills.

Under the “linguistic imperialism” of English, however, weakness in English language abilities in Japanese universities has resulted in lower global rankings and reputations. Many Japanese institutions, particularly private institutions, simply accept this reality. As mentioned earlier, approximately three-quarters of universities are private, but not a single Japanese private university is among the top 600 universities in the Times Higher Education (THE) global rankings. Only four Japanese universities are ranked in the top 300, two of which are within the top 100, but those four institutions are all national universities that were once former imperial universities.¹⁸ Put differently, although private universities established after World War II made a great contribution to the expansion of educational opportunities, most of these institutions failed, not only in producing globally reputed quality

Figure 2

The Number of Japanese Students Who Studied Abroad, 1983–2021
(Excluding Short Stays)



Source: The data for the total number of Japanese students who studied abroad are from the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development's *Education at a Glance* annual reports. The data for students who studied in the United States are from the Institute of International Education's *Open Doors* annual reports.

research but also in providing quality foreign language education. Here again, we find a conflict between successful globalization of universities and expansion of educational opportunities in a non-English-speaking country, where the clash centers on promoting wider access to university education in an indigenous language and gaining an edge in global competition for elites.

In August 1980, a high-profile blue-ribbon council in Japan composed of famous scholars and social critics under then Prime Minister Ōhira Masayoshi published a historic document. To the council members, the purported end of catch-up signified the end of Westernization. But what would come next for Ja-

pan? In their report entitled “Economic Administration in an Age of Culture,” the council stated: “Japan’s modernization (industrialization and westernization) and its maturation into a highly industrial society implies the end of any models involving the need to align to or to ‘catch up with.’ From now on, we need to find our own path to follow.”¹⁹

In the mindset of this council, the Japanese nation and people were required “to find [their] own path to follow.” Since education was deemed a driving force after the catch-up transformations, the government launched education reforms that provided a way for students, young citizens underpinning the state in the future, to find their own path. Education reforms in the following years proposed to deconstruct alleged defects in the catch-up model of education: a pedagogy of cramming and a centralized and uniform education system that had been put in place as the most efficient way to catch up.

The shift from the cramming type of teaching to a pedagogy that leads students to think for themselves has also been vocally advocated in higher-education circles. *Akutybu-rāningu*, a Japanese version of “active learning,” has been introduced to encourage more interactive communications between teachers and students to replace the past one-way cramming pedagogy. This reform was expected to enable Japanese to find “our own path to follow” by guiding students to learn how to think for themselves rather than just listening to lectures to acquire knowledge. However, contrary to the reformers’ intentions, according to a recent survey conducted by education researchers at the University of Tokyo, about 80 percent of classes, regardless of the subject, at Japanese universities remain lecture-based. And those lecture classes do not require students to work hard. The same survey found that between 70 and 80 percent of students at Japanese universities study less than six hours a week in preparation for classes.²⁰

Although the government encouraged *Akutybu-rāningu* in university classes, another survey by the Benesse Educational Research & Development Institute revealed that approximately 80 percent of students prefer to attend traditional lecture-style classes, perhaps because of the lesser time and effort required of them.²¹ As illustrated here, education reforms since the catch-up era ended have produced lower-than-expected outcomes. Moreover, the failure of these reforms has led the government to problematize the delay of globalization in higher education.

In addition to the pedagogical reforms, the Japanese government pointed to the “lag in globalization” of Japanese universities from the beginning of the 2010s. The proposal of the Cabinet Office’s Education Rebuilding Action Council published in 2013 stated:

The lag in globalization of universities is a critical situation. Universities are expected to create new knowledge based upon accumulated knowledge and become the core

initiators for social changes by taking on the unprecedented challenges Japan is facing. The revitalization of Japan's universities into places of continuous challenge and creativity is one of the major pillars for the "Rebirth of Japan," in which Japan will once again become more competitive in the world and regain its luster.²²

Despite the recognition in the 1980s that catch-up was complete, we see in policy discourses the same catch-up mindset, though it now includes neighboring Asian countries as rivals, and the framing of the problems is explicitly linked to Japan's economic stagnation that has deepened since the early 1990s.

This problem has led to concrete policies such as the "Super Global University Support Program," which forced the nominated thirty-seven so-called super global universities to respond to globalization as rapidly as possible. One of the ambitious goals in the policy was to increase the number of Japanese universities within the top 100 in global league tables. While only two Japanese universities, the University of Tokyo and Kyoto University, ranked in the top 100 in the THE global rankings at the time, the government aggressively set its goal for ten Japanese institutions to place within the top 100 in ten years. This goal failed. Moreover, in socially constructing the problems in this way, the failure of university globalization was simply linked to the failure of the Japanese economy without any plausible evidence, which functioned to make universities a scapegoat in the wider political discourse.

As mentioned earlier, being a non-English-speaking country is a major handicap in global rankings. However, Japanese political leaders viewed Japanese universities' low scores of assessments on international criteria as evidence of the "lag in globalization." The THE rankings, for example, include a rating index called International Outlook, which is based on three criteria: proportion of international students, proportion of international staff, and proportion of international collaboration. The Japanese government compelled universities to improve on these criteria through the Super Global University Support Program policy, but with limited additional resources. To attract international students, for example, exceptional teaching in English is essential. For recruiting high-quality scholars from abroad, English-fluent environments in universities are necessary.²³

However, few resources were made available to accomplish this. Though citations are emphasized and important in research, little support was provided for translation, and nominal pressure or incentive was put on faculty to publish internationally. For example, only a small number of Japanese researchers publish in foreign academic journals in the humanities and social sciences, compared to Japanese researchers who publish in foreign science and engineering journals. To improve the International Outlook criteria, the government leaders encouraged universities to increase the number of classes taught in English, but they failed to take aggressive financial measures to hire more foreign faculty members.

For Japanese universities, which have been teaching primarily in Japanese, it is not easy to improve on these criteria under resource constraints. The number of Japanese faculty members who earned degrees from universities abroad, especially in English-speaking countries, remained very small. While there are no national statistics available, even among the thirty-seven universities selected in the scheme of the Super Global University Support Program, only 7.6 percent of Japanese academic staff obtained foreign degrees, and 8.2 percent are non-Japanese nationals, two figures that undoubtedly overestimate the national average.²⁴ As a result, the Super Global University Support Program produced very negligible improvements among Japanese universities on the THE International Outlook criteria. This result is related to the past success of Japanese universities, which contributed to the rapid expansion of educational opportunities and easier access to Western culture in Japanese. However, that once successful Japanification has depreciated the value of foreign language skills, obscured the necessity to learn English in particular, and become a huge obstacle for Japanese universities trying to engage in an English-language-based, elitist global competition. Furthermore, as discussed earlier, the recent decline in the number of Japanese students who studied abroad has further intensified the “lag in globalization.” Despite efforts made by the government, the blurred incentive or pressure to study abroad and obtain high command of English language skills erodes the global competitiveness of Japanese universities. Nevertheless, for the majority of Japanese students, Japanese instruction in universities in Japan is acceptable, insofar as their main goal is to get a good job upon the completion of their studies.

Each society has built its own higher-education system according to its own historical trajectories of modernization. Indeed, the original model for this was in Western Europe. However, non-Western countries, especially uncolonized nations, have escaped the strong influences from educational systems in suzerain countries and have created their own modern higher-education systems. In this respect, Japan’s experience in achieving vernacularization at such an early stage and on such a large scale is valuable from the perspective of its position within world history. Current global competition, however, appears to be depriving Japan’s higher education of its unique features, aspects which undoubtedly contributed to creating a stable, wealthy, culturally rich, and relatively equal society for much of the second half of the twentieth century.

To survive the challenges that accompany competition, higher-education institutions in non-English-speaking countries must increase the value of English as a medium of instruction without sacrificing the quality of educational content. However, such a shift from the systems that served them during the catch-up era has produced several contradictions in their education systems. In the case of Japan, as we have seen, the enhancement of English as a medium of instruc-

tion contradicts with equal access to educational opportunities. Such a contradiction between globalization and equal opportunity in education may not emerge in English-speaking countries to the same severe degree as it does among non-English-speaking countries. For this reason, these dynamics are often overlooked. While the widespread provision of higher education in Japanese has contributed to the expansion of educational opportunities, it has resulted in worsening quality of English language skills among students and faculty members, thus lowering the international reputation of Japanese universities in global rankings.

If we rush to resolve this contradiction by improving the International Outlook criteria, however, this will create a new hierarchy within the higher-education system. It will surely widen the gap between resourceful universities that can easily provide quality education in English by employing more faculty members with English-speaking backgrounds. In this respect, former imperial universities have a decisive advantage in receiving more financial support from the government. Yet other national universities, mostly local, and private institutions are far behind them (although exceptions exist, of course).

And this division is intensified by further prioritizing support for sciences and engineering, which are more likely to be evaluated globally. This focus gives a cold shoulder to the humanities and social sciences, whose publications in Japanese are less likely to be valued globally. The government has consistently provided more preferential treatment to sciences and engineering subjects because they are seen as more “useful” disciplines that contribute to economic growth. The widening divide between sciences and engineering versus the humanities and social sciences subjects also overlaps with the gap between national and private universities, as the latter are dominated by humanities and social sciences subjects.

The neglect of the humanities and social sciences in non-English-speaking countries will likely limit the potential contribution of those disciplines to diversify global knowledge production. In the case of Japan, Western-born ideas and thoughts were transplanted to Japan, a context far different from Western societies. The various gaps and contradictions between Japan’s reality and imported Western knowledge led to a struggle in the process of modernization and to many intractable problems. But, as a result, the humanities and social sciences scholarship that originated in Japan has obvious potential to bring about new developments – globally creative perspectives – thanks to their position as hybrids between Japan and the West. Just as diverse perspectives are understood as effective, productive, and valued within a single society, we need to recognize that diverse ways of perceiving problems and diverse approaches based on the experiences of each different society must be meaningful at the global level as well.

Unfortunately, most of the humanities and social sciences scholarship from Japan has been accessible only in the Japanese language. But the few works that do make it out, either translated or originally written in English, often reveal the

clear potential to challenge the dominance of Western-centric knowledge systems. Without falling into parochial nationalism, we need to go beyond the simplicity of rankings: making full use of knowledge originating, developed, and accumulated in non-Western countries – Japan and elsewhere – based on their past experiences of modernization, and thus create another axis to relativize the so-called universal values, which helps mitigate the unescapable influences of Eurocentrism. The groundwork of Japanese humanities and social sciences as hybrid scholarship can provide one such perspective, quite distinct from the West or even from postcolonial nations. Therefore, by walking a different path in the ongoing accommodation of globalization of higher education, Japanese universities can contribute to accumulating and diversifying knowledge without losing their historically unique legacy. For other non-Western societies, Japan's record provides a good example of how one society can recognize and understand its own hybrid legacy as a means of contributing to the diversification of human knowledge creation.

However, as this essay has shown, humanities and social sciences scholarship in non-English-speaking universities is in crisis under the contemporary forms of global competition, as it compels universities, regardless of their origins, to incorporate “universalization” into pedagogical values. How can universities in non-Western or non-English-speaking countries coexist with global competition without being swallowed up by these purportedly universal – that is, “Anglo-American” – values? Or is there no other option but to opt out of the global competition? The long and often wrong road to globalization traveled by Japanese universities by way of the catch-up era highlights the many challenges in the competitive world of higher education, as well as the wealth of possibilities we can use to address them.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

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ENDNOTES

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India's Realignment of Higher Education

Jamshed Bharucha

Higher education in India has been stifled by overregulation. The opening of private universities has been severely restricted, and all but a few exempt institutions have had to comply with rigid curricular and organizational dictates. The system has been characterized by rote learning, high-stakes examination, premature specialization, and limited flexibility. In the most sweeping transformation to the system in the nation's modern history, India's new National Education Policy 2020 (NEP2020) seeks to change all that. With half of the world's university-age population residing in India, bursting with aspiration but frustrated by limited access to quality institutions, new universities are emerging. One is Sai University, the first in the nation to integrate heretofore siloed programs in arts and sciences, technology, and law into an integrated ecosystem at the undergraduate level.

A wave of reform has swept over higher education in India, bringing hope to a stifling system. After seventy-five years as an independent, democratic nation, Indian higher education is finally breaking free of the mental shackles of colonial rule and the regulatory juggernaut that replaced it. In 2020, a new National Education Policy (NEP2020) was introduced, the first new policy since the National Policy on Education in 1986, and the first ever whose recommendations are transformational rather than incremental.¹ The NEP2020 calls for dramatic expansion of the education sector to serve India's vast youth population. It also calls for deregulation, liberal education, and more autonomy and flexibility for institutions and faculty.

The NEP2020 is scathing in its critique of a system that issues "heavy-handed" requirements "with too little effect," that for too long has compelled all but a few exempt institutions to march in lockstep to a mindless, bureaucratic drum: "The mechanistic and disempowering nature of the regulatory system has been rife with very basic problems, such as heavy concentrations of power within a few bodies, conflicts of interest among these bodies, and a resulting lack of accountability." The policy calls for "a complete overhaul" of the regulatory system "in order to re-energize the higher-education sector and enable it to thrive."² While these new proposals are not novel ideas in education, they are radical for the current system in India. Proposals include moving away from curricula stuffed with information to be mastered, to move "towards less content" and increased "learning

about how to think critically and solve problems, how to be creative and multi-disciplinary, and how to innovate, adapt, and absorb new material in novel and changing fields.” As stated in the NEP2020, students must “not only learn, but more importantly learn how to learn. . . . Pedagogy must evolve to make education more experiential, holistic, integrated, inquiry-driven, discovery-oriented, learner-centered, discussion-based, flexible, and, of course, enjoyable.”³ Calling for “no hard separations between arts and sciences” is a sea change in a system that elevated science and engineering for sixty years while diminishing the arts, humanities, and social sciences.⁴

The most dramatic recommendation in the original draft of the policy was to disband the all-powerful University Grants Commission (UGC) as a regulatory body.⁵ Two years later, however, the implementation of the policy was handed to the UGC, the very regulatory agency it sought to disband. Those of us who were cheering the revolution began to think it was too good to be true. Can a system that employs thousands of inspectors to scrutinize every decision made at thousands of institutions transform itself into one that encourages the opposite: institutional autonomy, flexibility, and innovation? For a while, it seemed as if regulators might replace the old regulatory maze with a new one. Educators and institutions, who for decades had regarded the existing regulatory regime as a moral imperative, found its repudiation disconcerting and urged regulators to tell them exactly how to implement the new system. After years of being told precisely what, when, and how to teach and assess, newfound freedom was unnerving. The system had conditioned many to believe that one could not attempt anything without prior approval from the nation’s capital, even if it didn’t violate any rule.

Fortunately, as of this writing, the UGC appears to be moving to preserve the spirit of the policy’s loftiest principles. A steady stream of documents emanating from the government, and regular meetings with vice chancellors for their feedback, seem to be upholding the promise of permitting institutions to devise their own education models within a new, broad set of parameters, such as total number of course credits. The UGC is also actively recommending principles and practices associated with a liberal education, when just recently many of them would have raised eyebrows. These atypical practices include majors that cross traditional boundaries between subject clusters; ease of switching fields of study; and continuous and multidimensional forms of assessment that are given less weight than the previously all-important end-of-semester examinations. They even encourage institutions to “creditize” activities that the faculty might consider worthy of recognition, but that were previously considered extracurricular. Even modest steps toward some of these reforms would have dramatic impact on the number of students who have been underserved by the system. It is in this crack in the system that some of us entered, to empower students and faculty to achieve their fullest potential.

As the name suggests, the University Grants Commission is a government agency originally set up to award grants that create or upgrade universities. It was formed in 1945 to manage India's three central universities and establish standards for applying for the commission's grants. But its regulatory reach expanded in accordance with the UGC Act of 1956, when it was made the omnibus regulator for higher education, even for institutions not seeking grants.⁶ Over the subsequent decades, the UGC (and other regulatory agencies for certain professional degrees) has maintained such a stranglehold on higher education that educators hesitate to implement new ideas until edicts are issued from its headquarters in New Delhi. Emerging fields and new courses have tended to be adopted only after becoming mainstream in the West. And even though India transformed its economy from a financial basket case thirty years ago to the fifth largest in the world by GDP, higher education has remained static.⁷ Except for a small number of elite and super-selective institutions with a modicum of autonomy, the regulatory system has failed to do justice to the talent, cultural history, and burgeoning global aspiration of this vast country. Quality drops rapidly beyond these few institutions, and students not able to secure admission to one of them are left with few good options. Students who don't make the cut, or who seek fields not yet available in India, flee to Western countries if they can afford it – or languish.

The accumulated regulations have become so inhibiting that authorities seem to recognize how excellence requires being exempt from their own regulations. The Indian Institutes of Technology (IITs) were set up by the government as autonomous institutions and have thrived, while few nonexempt technical colleges with storied histories have achieved the same independent stature.⁸ More recently, the government granted exemptions by conferring a special status of Institution of Eminence (IoE) to institutions with demonstrated excellence.⁹ The granting of IoE status to a university planned by one of India's largest business conglomerates, even before they had a single student, professor, or course (that is to say, before they had any evidence of excellence, let alone eminence) amplified cynicism about this scheme. While institutions that enjoy such political privilege perform an important service by offering quality education and conducting research, institutions without such financial and political clout have been restrained by the mind-numbing web of requirements. There are few, if any, examples of institutions that were guided by the regulators to levels of eminence. Some regulation is necessary, but the balance between policing and facilitation has been historically skewed in the direction of the former. The NEP2020 promises to shift this balance.

Before the new policy, higher-education reform was stymied for decades by curricular dictates focused on rote learning (called “mugging up” in India), preparation for high-stakes examinations, and premature specialization.¹⁰

Starting in the ninth grade, students choose between science, arts, and commerce. Four years of high school are reduced to an exam in each subject, conducted by one of several examination boards serving tens of millions of students. Once they complete these board examinations in twelfth grade, students then prepare for specialty entrance examinations if they want to pursue engineering, law, or medicine. Their scores on examinations at each stage follow them at every subsequent stage and switching fields during this process has been almost impossible. All these restrictions are now being relaxed for the better.

A confluence of factors has led to an urgency for change among policymakers, to the dismay of those who drew power from their mastery of the maze. First, the average gross enrollment ratio (the percentage of university-age students enrolled) was only 28.4 percent in recent years, compared with China's 59.6 percent for tertiary education, even though both began the post-World War II era at low single-digit rates.¹¹ Second, India has a young population: half of the inhabitants are under the age of thirty, compared with the aging populations of China, Japan, and the Western economic giants. This demographic advantage has been touted as promising a "youth dividend," but the realization has sunk in that the higher-education system cannot scale up fast enough without opening the door more widely to autonomous private universities that can be scaled quickly.¹² Third, the exponential growth of Indians going abroad for college – spending billions of dollars in the United States, United Kingdom, Australia, and elsewhere – was a wakeup call for India to build quality universities at home that adopt international best practices, and that students see as viable domestic options. Fourth, there is a new appreciation for the fact that ancient India was a hub of education and thought. Take Nalanda for example, a renowned monastery in Eastern India that was a center of Buddhism, astronomy, and other arts. Learned Chinese monks traveled across the mountains to study there and bring back books, some of which are the only surviving texts from that age, after invaders destroyed the monastery's collection.

This history has become a source of pride. "Why can't we recreate that today?" is a common refrain in Indian culture. After all, the rest of the world now recognizes India as a breeding ground of talent. The destruction of Nalanda and other centers of learning by invaders and colonizers has become a source of resentment fueling newfound confidence and determination. Finally, industry leaders are sounding the alarm about the inadequate preparation of the workforce for the changing nature of work, even in engineering, which was long regarded as providing immediate industry-ready skills. Leaders of the software industry, which has given India its first modern taste of international respect and leadership ability, increasingly bemoan the lack of fundamental cognitive skills, notwithstanding the paper credentials that certify acquisition of technical knowledge. Despite the incremental pace of change, liberal education is starting to gain acceptance, not

just as an individualistic philosophy but also as a strategic national imperative to unleash talent and innovation. Private universities are sprouting like fresh shoots in spring. Suddenly, “interdisciplinarity” and “critical thinking” have become buzzwords that, until recently, cut against the grain of a hierarchical culture – one in which thinking beyond the knowledge required to get a good job was the domain of tradition and family. Such buzzwords connoted idealistic luxuries of an opulent West where children could do whatever they please. Now these terms imply advanced cognitive development.

Among the most recent visionary universities to spring up in this new dawn is Sai University in Chennai, the capital city of Tamil Nadu, India's southernmost state. It was founded by software entrepreneur K. V. Ramani, who also serves as its current chancellor. His software companies were among the few fledgling startups that launched India's software industry in the 1980s, when tight import and foreign-exchange restrictions made operating these enterprises such an uphill battle that even importing desktop computers was a nightmare. Later, he helped organize his fledgling competitors to form the National Association of Software and Service Companies, an organization that tried to persuade the government to recognize India's future in software and to consequently lower commercial barriers to entry. Today, he and his fellow startup founders from that era are credited with seeding an industry that brought India to its current position as a major exporter of software, the most sought-after provider of competitive tech jobs, and the most powerful engine of socioeconomic mobility.

Many private institutions in India have financial models in which profits from auxiliary enterprises like Ramani's software companies are invested in the university. In this way, the university can become financially self-sustaining, and even profitable for the founder and/or sponsor, although it must be a nonprofit organization by law. Ramani represents a rare instance of pure philanthropy, however, with no business interests linked to the university. Instead, he has donated most of his acquired wealth to a trust that provides the seed funding to get the university on its feet.¹³ Equally inspired by the altruistic opportunity to impact a region of the world bursting with talent but underserved by the system, and encouraged by deregulation, I returned from the United States to serve as Sai University's founding vice chancellor. Rarely does one get to start a university from scratch. And rarely does one encounter the paradigm shift currently seen in India, where the status quo is being disrupted and fresh ideas are changing higher education.

Such ideas are exemplified by Sai University, one of a group of so-called new-age universities moving into this unprecedented space. It is a “state private university,” a designation of the central government, which means it is private but can only be established by an act of the state legislature. It was the first of two such universities created in Tamil Nadu, and one of many launched by private philan-

thropy.¹⁴ The trajectory of private universities, which constitute the fastest growing sector in Indian higher education, also suggests that they will soon overtake public universities funded by the states, which remain the most common type of institution. Another interesting and related category resulted from the UGC Act of 1956 that prohibited the establishment of private universities, but created a small loophole, such that an institution could be “deemed to be” a university if it met certain benchmarks.¹⁵ These institutions (uniquely Indian inventions) cannot have the word “university” in their title. Thus, most call themselves institutes, even though they are universities in all but name. Now, private universities are permitted in this category and can even be called the same.¹⁶

Sai University admitted its first undergraduate class in 2021, during the first two years of the COVID-19 pandemic. Due to the resulting lockdowns and quarantines, the university operated online at first. After restrictions were lifted, it moved to a temporary campus, and finally to its permanent campus located near an emerging corridor for education and information technology that runs parallel to the coast of the Bay of Bengal. A master plan has been completed for the one-hundred-and-three-acre property situated in a new tech park, expanding southward from Chennai, and three buildings have been constructed as part of the university’s first academic block.¹⁷

Speaking as its vice chancellor, Sai’s vision is to build a globally eminent university based on principles of liberal education designed to harness talent; develop independent, critical thinkers; and forge socially conscious citizens hungry to discover and pursue their skills. “Spark the imagination, liberate the mind” is the motto behind our mission to develop talent, not just churn out degrees.¹⁸ Thus, our principal innovation has been to expand the possibilities for cross-disciplinary education beyond what has been envisioned to date in India. Liberal arts education is catching on, but it is still viewed narrowly as excluding the sciences, engineering, and law, whose education tracks start at the undergraduate level. By contrast, Sai University characterizes its liberal education philosophy to include the humanities, sciences, technology, and law.

This inclusive disciplinary organization of knowledge and education has been essential to the advancement of expertise in and mastery of subjects, which can provide incalculable benefits to society. In technical fields, early specialization has given India its first sense of confidence and esteem since colonial times. A deep dive into disciplinary rigor is an essential feature of education and professionalism that yields social assets. At some point, however, the vertical slicing of knowledge that creates a hierarchy of subjects also yields diminishing returns, if lateral relationships between subjects are not also explored. Exponential creation and expansion of knowledge has changed its geometry. Knowledge is no longer one dimensional, from the basic principles of a discipline to its complex struc-

ture. It isn't even two dimensional with disciplinary verticals that maintain cross-disciplinary connections through interdisciplinary programs. Its multidimensionality expands with more research and innovation. Yet despite these developments, the organization of universities remains opposed to change, because hierarchical organization of disciplines is easier to manage. As business schools grow, for example, they want to create their own departments for economics rather than continue the messy process of collaborating with the original departments. It's frustrating to manage teaching loads when resources are controlled in this way at the school level.

In light of these structural concerns, we have no academic departments at Sai University. But I fully expect that pressure will grow toward traditional departmental organization because that's what faculty are familiar with, and because departmental autonomy has the advantage of tailoring practices to their unique disciplinary requirements. Some departments need wet labs while others need practice rooms. Some need high-performance computing while others need rare manuscripts. Nevertheless, a distinct intellectual climate emerges when there are no departments, and some of the finest students thrive on the conversations and interactions that grow in these environments.

Although we don't have departments yet, we do have distinct schools. This was a necessary compromise between crossing intellectual boundaries and overcoming mental and bureaucratic hurdles. For example, students and faculty in a bachelor's of technology program expect to be associated with a school that has a corresponding technical name, such as a "school of engineering," while the regulator for legal education may require a law school. You can't change everything at once, however, so the technical school we created is called the School of Computing and Data Science. We selected this name (at least to start with) over other subjects that represented engineering because computer science is the most popular major in India, and because we believe the future holds unlimited opportunities for cross-disciplinary collaboration in research and innovation.

Computer science and data science are independent disciplines, but they are also tools that can be used together. Most undergraduates will go on to jobs that apply these technologies simultaneously in other domains. Doctors will need to understand data science if they want to use it to improve health care, for example. Lawyers will need some rudimentary understanding of blockchain if they want to keep up with the inevitable shift toward smart contracts. Music producers will need to understand the structure of music if they want to go into the digital music industry. And many professionals in sectors increasingly impacted by artificial intelligence will need grounding in the humanities and analytic philosophy if they are going to apply machine learning so its benefits outweigh its risks, and if they are going to do more good than harm. The social media website X, commonly referred to by its former name Twitter, started as a cool technical innovation but

must now grapple with issues such as censorship, misinformation, and harassment that have profound consequences for humanity, and the platform has faced criticism for its oversight.¹⁹

Failing to explore synergies across disciplines comes with an opportunity cost to education and the advancement of knowledge. We need to constantly find organizational schemes that challenge our tribal impulses and that put the mission of learning ahead of administrative convenience. Nowhere is this more urgent than in India, where global issues such as educational divides, gender and income inequality, and pollution are magnified, but where new solutions should also emerge. There are no major problems in the world or any part of it that can be solved by individual disciplines on their own.

The intellectual silos in India were so rigid that even combining one branch of engineering with another is now hailed as an interdisciplinary innovation. Still, most engineering colleges offer admission to a specific branch of engineering, and switching is difficult. Although students with the highest rank on the Joint Entrance Examination (JEE-Main) get the branch of their choice (likely computer science, the most sought-after specialization), an almost irreversible life decision that follows them to graduate school and employment.²⁰ Separating college admissions by field forces high schools to devote their curriculum to preparation for all-important entrance exams, even at high schools led by innovators eager to embrace liberal education.

This separation also complicates disciplinary collaboration at the college level. For example, at one American university, eight of its ten constituent schools have environmental programs that have minimal interaction beyond individual faculty who are willing to walk across campus to different program buildings. To add more confusion, “environmental science” becomes “civil engineering” in the engineering school, “public health” in the school of public health, and “biology” in the school of life sciences. While we need these disciplinary specializations for research, we need even more to prepare undergraduate students in ways that encourage them to make interdisciplinary connections. How should the design of a dam be influenced by migratory patterns of fish? How should data science shape environmental policy? What is the economic impact of pollution? Such questions demonstrate how often multifaceted problems call for multifaceted solutions.

Students typically earn undergraduate degrees between the ages of eighteen and twenty-one, when their brains are still malleable and their minds amenable to being expanded at the speed at which the world is changing. Taking intellectual risks becomes more difficult after completing undergraduate education, graduate education is necessarily more specialized, and once a person gets a job and takes on more personal responsibilities, the price of intellectual risk increases. An undergraduate education is the last best opportunity to stretch the mind in ways that

established professions do not, with minimal consequences for errors. That, in a nutshell, is one of the most compelling reasons why undergraduate education must be liberal, and why, consequently, Sai University champions liberal arts education starting at the undergraduate level.

Engineering remains the dominant aspiration for college education in India, however, and preparation for the JEE-Main remains the exclusive focus of many stakeholders during students' four years of high school. Engineering is typically taught at stand-alone institutions, the vast majority of which have names like "XYZ Institute of Technology," emulating one Massachusetts institution that is revered in India perhaps more intensely than in its home country. (And indeed the most popular value of X is M, at least twenty-seven by my count.) Some new-age universities have launched multiple schools within the same institution, and the NEP2020 strongly encourages the transformation of stand-alone institutes of technology into multidisciplinary universities.²¹ A few liberal arts institutions have sprung up in India, but it's still a struggle for students and parents to grasp that liberal arts can also include the sciences. Thus, "liberal arts and sciences" has become a way to make the label palatable to a mindset oriented toward science and mathematics.

Despite these collaborative approaches, mental silos persist. Liberal arts schools, which award mostly undergraduate degrees in the arts or sciences, are still seen as distinct from schools of engineering, which award the degree regarded as the coin of the realm in India: the bachelor's of technology (or BTech). Some universities offer a BTech or an undergraduate law degree from a school embedded within the university, but none integrate these specialties into liberal undergraduate education as Sai University does.

At Sai University, we strive to create as much of a cross-disciplinary ecosystem as possible while preserving disciplinary rigor. All undergraduates are required to take a set of foundation courses: among them, Global Challenges; Frontiers; Environment and Sustainability; Writing and Communication; and Critical Thinking.²² The first two courses are designed differently from most college courses. Global Challenges exposes students to current issues – environment, war, migration – under the guidance of leaders who address them. While Frontiers uses the same format to study innovations in the arts, sciences, and technology, both are colloquium-style courses, meaning a different speaker interacts with students each week, either in person or online. Further exposure to the big issues of our time is left to discussions beyond the classroom. This model is typically seen only at the graduate level, since high school and undergraduate level textbooks tend to focus on a discipline's building blocks. This model also gives motivated students a way to plug into powerful international networks. Nowhere else in India can a first-year undergraduate email a leader in cybersecurity at Stanford University, or a leader in environmental sustainability. These direct contacts don't

substitute for travel abroad, but they enable students to feel connected internationally, even while at home. The model raises their awareness of postgraduate opportunities abroad and of emerging trends and careers.

Indians place a premium on higher education but have a low opinion of the domestic system that governs it. Case in point: India represents half the world's college-age population, the highest of any country, but a staggering 72 percent (or roughly seventy-one million individuals) are not enrolled, despite a yearning to advance themselves.²³ And those who are enrolled do not receive the caliber of education they seek. Competition for the miniscule number of seats at quality institutions is also fierce, and the pressure on students to prepare for national entrance exams continues to be a major source of stress. Considering their domestic options, the number of Indians applying for undergraduate programs abroad is increasing exponentially, and the amount of money spent by these families to send their children abroad is staggering, particularly if you contrast tuition in India versus the United States.

Sai University is roughly one-tenth of the cost of a private, nonprofit university in the United States.²⁴ Even among those who attend a domestic college, most Indian students say they want to go abroad for higher studies. While this flight could be attributed in part to the lure of economic opportunity in the West, my conversations with students suggest that cynicism about their constrained domestic system is also a factor. Students today know what their peers are experiencing at college elsewhere, thanks to the internet and social media. Yet despite this disenchantment, there exists a sizable group of students who prefer to stay in India for college, or cannot afford to go abroad, and who eagerly welcome new domestic institutions that offer the kind of education they might receive abroad. This is the vacuum that Sai University and other new-age universities are filling.

Politicians and policymakers cite the relative youth of India's population (in contrast to the aging populations of China and the West) as a source of economic hope. But this so-called youth dividend could become a liability if young people don't have access to education that empowers them to fulfill their aspirations or attain positions that are relevant to their future, as the world around them changes. The expansion and reform of higher education in India is a race against time. For that reason, our goal is to make Sai University an attractive domestic option for students who want something different that heretofore they could only receive abroad. In the long run, we would love to see the university become a destination for students worldwide.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

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One Aspirational Future for India's Higher-Education Sector

Tarun Khanna

Several recent encouraging experiments in Indian higher education suggest a plausible aspirational path toward a more salubrious future than that suggested by an otherwise struggling system. Four case studies of privately conceived and funded universities each exhibit a novel model of collective philanthropy. Typically, each case features multiple entrepreneurs with self-created “new” wealth, often with exposure to Western liberal arts educations, sharing in the university’s governance. The university is not hostage to the vagaries of a single family’s preferences. Encouragingly, each experiment here has built on its predecessors, and an entrepreneurial ecosystem has emerged that has privileged pedagogical excellence. However, formal research still lags. It remains to be seen whether the latter lacunae can be remedied without concerted public funding that is the norm in Western educational landscapes.

As I write this, India is the one large economy with the wind in its sails, while the United States maneuvers amidst deep political polarization to avoid a recession, the European Union is mired in conflict, and China turns insularly inward. In India, private entrepreneurship continues untrammelled, only temporarily derailed by the COVID-19 pandemic and global financial stresses. This essay does not distinguish between for-profit and social entrepreneurship, both creative and significant to India’s growth story. India’s thriving entrepreneurial ecosystem, the world’s third largest after the United States and China, has infected a hitherto staid higher-education sector. The Indian education landscape is littered with dozens of experiments by private universities. Many of these universities suffer from the desire of their principal promoters to remain tethered to their own families. Some could break out of this cognitive trap to develop a private higher-education model that could shape whether and how India capitalizes on its demographic dividend.

Higher education in India has witnessed a resurgence of philanthropic private entrepreneurship, embodying the spirit of nation-building as it did during its founding years. Before India’s independence in 1947, large industrial houses, like the Tatas and Birlas, established not-for-profit trusts that paved the way for private higher education and research institutions to contribute to India’s devel-

opment. They were the earliest institution builders that gave the nation the prestigious Indian Institute of Science (IISc, established in 1909), the Tata Institute of Social Sciences (established in 1936), the Tata Institute of Fundamental Research (TIFR, established in 1945), and the Birla Institute of Technology and Science (BITS, established in 1929, first as an intermediate college). Of these, the IISc and the TIFR have consistently represented India in global higher-education rankings with their relentless focus on research. These institutions aimed to provide a world-class education to Indian students at a fraction of the cost of studying abroad. They nurtured scientists and engineers who led India's foundational science and technology movements after 1947.¹

In this essay, I provide an overview of current experiments in India's higher-education landscape to situate some prominent entrepreneurial efforts led by philanthropists over the past few decades. Thereafter, I consider lessons from this path, identifying residual shortcomings that stand in the way of designating these institutions as "world-class." These experiments showcase one plausible aspirational path toward a more salubrious future for Indian higher education.

The roots of India's modern university system can be traced to 1857 when the British established three universities in Bombay (Mumbai), Calcutta (Kolkata), and Madras (Chennai) to build a pool of educated Indians to serve their economic, political, and administrative interests in colonial India. Modeled on the University of London, these universities were focused on teaching English and the humanities.

All subsequent universities were patterned on these three institutions. In the postindependence era, former prime minister Jawaharlal Nehru emphasized higher education over primary education, for which he is both praised and derided. This created India's vaunted institutions of technical excellence, the Indian Institutes of Technology, and comparably and intensely competitive institutions of management, medicine, and public policy.

Yet universities struggled with low enrollments, outdated curricula, and research standards far behind global ones. Although India's higher-education landscape exploded from 20 universities, 496 colleges, and 250,000 students in 1947 to 1,113 universities, 43,796 colleges, and more than 41 million students in 2021, the student enrollment paled in comparison to India's 254 million youth (ages 15 to 24).² Presently, nearly 67 percent of India's population is in the working age group.³ India is expected to contribute approximately 25 percent of the incremental global workforce in the coming decade.⁴

Using this potential demographic dividend requires extensive higher-education reform. Traditionally, India's university system pushed students into early career specialization through degrees in engineering, medicine, management, and law – safe employment bets – leaving students with little chance to explore their own

interests. While specialist institutions can be excellent, the higher-education tapestry has lacked institutions that cultivate broad intellectual exposure and multidisciplinary outlooks on relevant societal issues.

The underlying institutional structure has struggled to keep pace with demand. The primary regulatory body, the University Grants Commission (UGC), was set up in 1956, mimicking the structure of the eponymous organization in the United Kingdom. The role of the UGC is to advise the government of India on establishing universities; allocating funds, scholarships, and fellowships; and maintaining standards at institutions of higher education.⁵ Over time, the UGC has drawn criticism for inadequate staffing and enforcing complex policies that have stifled universities and innovative endeavors.⁶

In an attempt at policy innovation, the government of India initiated the Institutes of Eminence (IOE) program in 2017 to build a regulatory structure that would enable Indian higher-education institutions to become world-class in teaching and research. An Empowered Expert Committee (EEC) was constituted to identify ten public and ten private higher-education institutions that could break into the top five hundred ranked universities in the world within ten years and, eventually, the top one hundred rankings.⁷ The EEC followed a rigorous process to identify these institutions, allotting IOE status to a few. However, the process lost momentum, and several institutions had their approval for IOE status postponed indefinitely. In 2023, a parliamentary panel recommended speeding up the IOE approval process and increasing funding to grant the status more widely.⁸

Meanwhile, in 2020, India launched a new National Education Policy (NEP) to provide universal access to quality education.⁹ It aimed to expand the Gross Enrollment Ratio (GER) in higher education (including vocational education) from approximately 27 percent to 50 percent (for comparison, China has a GER of approximately 54 percent, the United States approximately 88 percent).¹⁰ This goal will require a near doubling of higher-education capacity from catering to approximately 39 million students in 2020 to approximately 73 million by 2035, and addressing a faculty shortage – the student to faculty ratio in India is approximately 28 percent compared to approximately 20 percent in China and South Korea.¹¹ Consequently, the NEP seeks to break from India's specialist-institution model and make all higher-education institutions multidisciplinary by 2040.

State governments also liberalized in the 1990s, believing investment in higher education would improve their economies and image. They provided land at subsidized rates. By 2021, the private sector ran more than 31,000 colleges (over 70 percent of the country's colleges), typically as for-profit institutions.¹²

Private universities, however, have not exactly distinguished themselves in a positive manner.¹³ One researcher documented that one-third of politicians in the populous state of Uttar Pradesh ran the colleges in the region, gaining control of otherwise inaccessible land at concessional rates. Since the governance of edu-

cational institutions often permits less transparency, they used the schools as a means to shield the flow of funds. This flurry of entries in the higher-education market resulted in regulators closing several colleges – especially those ostensibly set up to deliver technical and trade education. It also led the Supreme Court to rule against some egregious instances of land-grabbing by corporations attempting to establish new universities.¹⁴

Yet some universities have broken out of the pack. These alternative paths have been funded by new-age entrepreneurs who have prospered in an emerging and globalizing India, many with exposure to education globally, and typically in acts of collective philanthropy so that no one family controls an institution.

I consider various examples to illustrate these points, starting with the Indian School of Business, where some institutionally innovative characteristics have emerged, specifically in a professional education setting. Thereafter, I describe Ashoka University, closely modeled on an Ivy League liberal arts education, Plaksha University, which is reimagining engineering education using techniques inspired by the liberal arts, and Krea University, which is blending the liberal arts and the professions. Table 1 provides some descriptive information on three respected preexisting privately founded universities as a comparative benchmark, alongside the four I have presented here. This is not an exhaustive list. My choice to include these particular institutions is driven by expository convenience.¹⁵

The Indian School of Business (ISB) was the vision of some idealistic business leaders and Indian-origin entrepreneurs. In the last two decades, it has become one of the few management institutions from Asia, and the only one from India, that has consistently been featured in the top fifty global rankings of management education institutions. ISB competes successfully with long-established two-year MBA programs in India despite its MBA equivalent, the postgraduate program (PGP) in management, being only a one-year program and not officially recognized by Indian regulatory authorities.¹⁶

During India's liberalization, a need emerged for managers with a global perspective not offered by incumbent MBA programs. Further, those MBA programs did not insist on practical work experience before enrollment, a feature of the global best. In 1995, V. S. Raju, then director of Indian Institute of Technology (IIT) Delhi, and IIT Delhi alum Rajat Gupta (former global managing director of McKinsey & Co.) met to discuss this challenge.

The initial idea, to build a School of Management within IIT Delhi and capitalize on its brand and infrastructure, was abandoned because a regulated public institution with rule-bound budget allocation offered limited scope for innovation. This meant ISB would have to be established through private capital. A governing board comprising global stalwarts from industry was formed, with each board member contributing the equivalent of US\$1 million. By 1996, this group raised US\$15 mil-

Table 1
India's Institutions of Higher Education, 2021–2022

<p>St. Stephen's College</p> <p>Established in New Delhi in 1881 with a religious foundation called the Cambridge Mission. A constituent college governed by Delhi University with 1,263 students pursuing bachelor's degrees, 71 students pursuing master's degrees, and 49 full-time faculty members with PhDs.</p> <p>Disciplines include engineering, humanities, social science, management, and natural science.</p>
<p>Azim Premji University</p> <p>Established in Bangalore, Karnataka, in 2011 through family philanthropy. A non-profit university governed by the Azim Premji Foundation with 338 students pursuing bachelor's degrees, 197 students pursuing master's degrees, and 140 full-time faculty members with PhDs.</p> <p>Disciplines include natural and social sciences, economics, education, philosophy, and English. It opened a new campus in Bhopal in 2023.</p>
<p>Shiv Nadar University</p> <p>Established in Greater Noida, Uttar Pradesh, in 2011 through family philanthropy. A private university governed by the Shiv Nadar Foundation with 2,290 students pursuing bachelor's degrees, 248 students pursuing master's degrees, 364 doctoral students, and 248 full-time faculty members with PhDs.</p> <p>Disciplines include engineering, natural and social sciences, and humanities.</p> <p>Global academic collaborations include University of California, Berkeley; University of Michigan; University of Queensland; and University of Warwick.</p>
<p>Indian School of Business</p> <p>Established in Hyderabad, Telangana, in 2001 through collective philanthropy. It opened a new campus in Mohali, Punjab, in 2012. It is registered as a Section-8 nonprofit organization. A nonprofit business school with 927 students pursuing master's degrees and 69 full-time faculty members with PhDs.</p> <p>Disciplines include finance, economics and public policy, strategy and entrepreneurship, information systems, accounting, finance, operations management, and organization behavior.</p> <p>Global academic collaborations include Kellogg School of Management at Northwestern University, the Wharton School of the University of Pennsylvania, and the Fletcher School at Tufts University.</p>

Table 1, continued

<p>Ashoka University</p> <p>Established in Sonapat, Haryana, in 2014 through collective philanthropy. A non-profit university sponsored by the International Foundation for Research and Education with 1,603 students pursuing bachelor's degrees, 524 students pursuing master's degrees, 83 doctoral students, and 209 full-time faculty members with PhDs.</p> <p>Disciplines include liberal arts, economics, biology, computer science, physics, chemistry, math, political science, and English.</p> <p>Global academic collaborations include King's College London, Connecticut College, University of Cambridge, and Duke University.</p>
<p>Krea University</p> <p>Established in Sri City, Andhra Pradesh, in 2018 through collective philanthropy. A nonprofit university sponsored by the Institute for Financial Management and Research with 435 students pursuing bachelor's degrees, 363 students pursuing master's degrees, 20 doctoral students, and 74 full-time faculty members with PhDs.</p> <p>Disciplines include humanities, natural and social sciences, literature, arts, and business.</p> <p>Global academic collaborations include MIT (J-PAL South Asia), Yale University (Inclusion Economics), King's College London, and University of Chicago.</p>
<p>Plaksha University</p> <p>Established in Mohali, Punjab, in 2021 through collective philanthropy. A non-profit university sponsored by the Reimagining Higher Education Foundation with 86 students pursuing bachelor's degrees, 50 students pursuing master's degrees, 1 doctoral student, and 20 full-time faculty members with PhDs.</p> <p>Disciplines include engineering, entrepreneurship, and leadership.</p> <p>Global academic collaborations include University of California, Berkeley; Purdue University; and University of California, San Diego.</p>

The first three schools represent institutions with models that do not fit the collective governance of the schools profiled in this essay. The latter four represent a wave of more recent entrants, mostly driven by newer age entrepreneurs. Dates when the schools were established begin from the year the first batch of students was admitted. Source: Data for St. Stephen's College, Azim Premji University, and Shiv Nadar University were compiled from the latest information available on their respective websites, institutional brochures, and India's Ministry of Education's National Institutional Ranking Framework 2023. Data for Indian School of Business, Ashoka University, Krea University, and Plaksha University have been sourced and verified directly from the institutions. See "National Institutional Ranking Framework 2023," Ministry of Education, Government of India, <https://www.nirfindia.org/2023/Ranking.html> (accessed February 23, 2024).

lion.¹⁷ This approach would later be termed “collective philanthropy” – in which multiple people pool their philanthropic donations for a common cause. ISB’s governance superseded individuals’ independent ambitions to own the school. Therefore, irrespective of the money contributed, each board member got one vote.

Andhra Pradesh’s then chief minister, N. Chandrababu Naidu, offered land at subsidized rates in Hyderabad. He saw ISB as a catalyst to shape the city’s image as one with global aspirations and a magnet to draw investments into the state. However, land and money proved easier to find than a world-class faculty, which ISB tried (unsuccessfully) to do through McKinsey’s pro-bono services. Realizing the challenge of attracting international faculty to an unknown Indian business school, they pursued academic partnerships with global business schools as a way to facilitate knowledge and faculty exchange. Several significant decisions followed.

The first decision was to build a one-year MBA program, liked by students because of the lower cost and quicker reentry into the job market. The Kellogg School of Management at Northwestern University helped design this effort, modeled on INSEAD in Fontainebleau and IMD in Lausanne. A traditional two-year MBA program comprising roughly six hundred forty teaching hours was compressed into an intensive year of learning, while retaining the contact hours to preserve the program’s rigor and quality.¹⁸ However, ISB’s MBA program would not get official recognition from India’s apex regulatory body, the All India Council for Technical Education (AICTE), which mandates that MBA programs need to take two years to complete. Instead, ISB applied for and received international accreditations, ensuring that employers would value certificates that the school issued to its students.

The second decision was to build an executive education program alongside the postgraduate program to generate additional funding for growth. The third was to adopt a model in which visiting faculty would teach one or two courses over a five-to-six-week period each year, allowing ISB to invite top faculty from renowned international business schools without disrupting their academic and personal lives. This structure relieved ISB of pressure to recruit a cadre of permanent faculty before opening. By the time ISB opened its doors, it had hired four permanent faculty and twenty-three visiting faculty. With these “experiments” in place, ISB welcomed its first class of one hundred twenty-eight students to campus in 2001. Prime Minister Atal Bihari Vajpayee inaugurated ISB – a move crucial to establishing the credibility of this nonaccredited higher-education institution.

Twenty-two years after its inauguration, ISB became the one hundredth school in the world to earn the “triple crown” of accreditations – a feat achieved by only the top 1 percent of business schools.¹⁹ With an annual intake of nine hundred students, it is on the way to becoming one of the largest MBA programs globally. It offers scholarships to provide needs-cum-merit support to students, helping increase accessibility to its postgraduate program, which costs approximately US\$45,000.²⁰ ISB’s experiments – the collective philanthropy model, the one-year nonaccredit-

ed certificate program, the visiting faculty strategy, and the parallel running executive education program – would be borrowed many times by upcoming higher-education institutions claiming to provide world-class education in India.

In 2007, six years after ISB's opening, four philanthropists and entrepreneurs in India's capital New Delhi discussed the need to build a university that would provide a world-class, liberal undergraduate education in India at a fraction of the cost of a similar U.S. degree.²¹ Their vision was to build an institutional model that could be replicated to meet the demands for high-quality university education nationwide. They named the institution Ashoka University after Emperor Ashoka (c. 304–232 BC) of India, who is said to have represented India's highest ideals through liberal thought.²² Launched in 2014, Ashoka University (Ashoka) has demonstrated the viability of an excellent liberal arts education in India while being more affordable than American Ivy League schools.²³

Ashoka's founding group believed that India's students could study liberal arts and build sustainable careers if they were part of a great educational institution. The founders felt undergraduates should explore their intellectual interests before specializing, design their own interdisciplinary courses of study, and be admitted on holistic criteria (rather than single-dimensional test scores), all departures from Indian educational practice. The group identified five guiding principles to shape Ashoka: embrace private philanthropy, provide a multidisciplinary liberal arts education, create a self-sustaining financial model, partner with world-class visiting international faculty, and position the institution as an Ivy League–quality education alternative.²⁴

In 2008, the founders set up an independent not-for-profit company, the International Foundation for Research and Education (IFRE), inspired by ISB's experience of using a model of collective philanthropy. Hence, regardless of their donation, every founder had one vote for decision-making. Soon, India's top philanthropists, private-equity investors, industrialists, and entrepreneurs recognized the opportunity offered by Ashoka to play a role in nation-building. This was reminiscent of the sentiment from the 1930s through the 1970s when established business houses, such as the Tatas and Birlas, funded the establishment of institutions in education and health care.

The founding group realized it would take several years to demonstrate the viability of a world-class liberal arts education. They had to acquire land, get regulatory approvals, build a state-of-the-art campus, attract the first batch of students, and then wait four years for them to graduate and become alumni. Therefore, in 2011, the founding group launched a one-year graduate program called the Young India Fellowship (YIF) to build an alumni base. The fellows in the program would be rigorously selected from a pool of working undergraduates. They would undergo a one-year liberal arts education program, taking eighteen to twenty-two

courses, each lasting four to six weeks, taught by visiting world-class faculty. Like the ISB model, the students would be trained in leadership, communication, and critical writing and provided internship opportunities. The first few classes of the YIF were generously funded. Many fellows went on to top graduate degree programs in the United States and Europe. Others were hired by top organizations in India through the founders' networks.

Like the model for ISB's postgraduate program, YIF granted a certificate to the graduates at the end of one year. In 2014, when Ashoka was officially launched, the fellowship was brought under its aegis and became a recognized and accredited residential, graduate diploma-granting program in liberal studies. Today, it boasts of having nurtured more than twenty-one thousand socially conscious leaders and changemakers for the twenty-first century and has emerged as one of the most sought-after programs in India for young professionals.²⁵

Unlike other prominent, Pan-Indian, university-independent fellowships, such as Teach for India (established in 2008) and the Legislative Assistants to Members of Parliament (LAMP) Fellowship (established in 2010), in which fellows are paid a monthly stipend, the Young India Fellows pay an annual fee to attend Ashoka. The university provides need-based financial aid and partners with financial institutions to provide loans to cover the rest of the costs. As of 2023, 65 percent of the fellows are on need-based financial aid.²⁶

The pool of visiting faculty for the YIF came from different parts of India and the world to teach at Ashoka's temporary campus in New Delhi. The visiting faculty helped both to establish the credibility of Ashoka's mission and to recruit full-time faculty. While the paperwork to create the university was underway, partnerships were forged with the University of Pennsylvania and Carleton College for academic planning and certifications. The experiment's novelty attracted some top liberal arts and leadership faculty to the YIF, and eventually to Ashoka overall. Some faculty gave public lectures to drive Ashoka's outreach and fundraising efforts.

By 2014, when Ashoka formally launched its campus in Haryana and admitted the first set of more than one hundred twenty undergraduates, YIF had paved the way for over two hundred credible alumni, who were placed in top organizations and global universities. This success drew faculty from India's top institutions to move to Ashoka full-time. Today, Ashoka has over four thousand alumni (undergraduate, graduate, and YIF attendees) spread across more than thirty countries. It currently operates on a twenty-five-acre campus housing forty-five hundred students, of which nearly 49 percent receive financial aid.

In 2015, when Ashoka University was in its second year, a few technology experts dreamt of reimagining technology education, motivated by the dismal quality of India's engineering graduates.²⁷ The would-be founders, all technologists with international experience, conceived of a university named Plaksha, a refer-

ence to the ancient Indian centers of learning, or gurukuls, that flourished under the shade of the Plaksha (or Ficus) tree.²⁸

Since 2021, Plaksha has sought to reimagine technology education, enable a research and innovation ecosystem, and address the challenges of health, security, mobility, energy, and manufacturing.²⁹ The founders strive to deliver an education that addresses real-world problems by employing multiple technological know-how streams, drawing from liberal arts and business education, and offering a project-oriented curriculum connected to industry, an approach embraced by institutions like MIT (which emphasizes grand challenges) and the Olin College of Engineering (which encourages curricular innovation).

Inspired by ISB's and Ashoka's collective philanthropy, the founding group raised funds from more than thirty-five business leaders in India, the United States, the United Kingdom, and Singapore. The state of Punjab, which had earlier lost competitive educational institutions to its neighbor Haryana because of the latter's proximity to New Delhi, provided Plaksha with subsidized land in Mohali, near the state capital.

While acquiring the land, Plaksha launched a yearlong graduate liberal arts-based program in technology called the Technology Leaders Program (TLP), in partnership with Purdue University and the University of California, Berkeley, in a temporary campus in Gurgaon, Haryana, similar to Ashoka's YIF. A global community of CEOs, entrepreneurs, and academics designed TLP, and they put fifty-nine handpicked high-potential young individuals through its rigorous program. The TLP curriculum was focused on fields that Plaksha wanted to teach at undergraduate levels, such as artificial intelligence, machine learning, design thinking, systems thinking, data science, entrepreneurship, and leadership. The first batch of TLP participants who graduated in 2020 all got jobs. By 2021, when Plaksha officially opened, TLP had emerged as a sought-after program for Indian youth interested in working at the intersection of technology, product development, and the social sciences. Plaksha University then launched four unique bachelor of technology programs in computer science and artificial intelligence, robotics and cyber-physical systems, biological systems engineering, and data science, economics, and business.

To attract high school students, Plaksha started the Young Technology Scholars (YTS) program. A two-week intensive summer program, YTS exposes students to real-world problem-solving through hands-on learning and interdisciplinary coursework.³⁰ Plaksha is leveraging takeaways from both ISB and Ashoka as well as from the reputations of its founders with the hope of becoming a model that can inspire several other "Plakshas."

Krea University (Krea), led by the chairperson of its executive committee, Kapil Vishwanathan, represents a recent effort to reimagine liberal arts education for the world. *Krea* means an "action-oriented approach" in

Sanskrit. The university's mission is to help humanity prepare for an unpredictable world, using the pedagogical concept of interwoven learning that combines thought with action, joins the arts with the sciences, and connects learnings from the past with preparedness for the future.³¹ Krea aims to develop agile, ethical, and purposeful leaders prepared to navigate human-human, human-machine, and human-environment relationships.

Krea is located in Sri City in Andhra Pradesh.³² Unlike Ashoka, Plaksha, and ISB, whose parent bodies were instituted a few years before their founding, Krea's sponsoring body is the Institute for Financial Management and Research (IFMR), established in 1970 to provide research input to industries and to the government of India in finance and economics. IFMR was sponsored by major industrial groups as a form of collective philanthropy. Governing council members, who represent a cross section of society, serve three-year terms.

Krea houses two schools – the School of Interwoven Arts and Sciences and the IFMR Graduate School of Business – and oversees three research centers – Leveraging Evidence for Access and Development (LEAD), J-PAL South Asia (an affiliate of the Boston-based global Poverty Action Lab), and the Centre for Digital Financial Inclusion (CDFI). Krea welcomed its first cohort of one hundred thirteen undergraduate students in August 2019, about half of whom are on need-blind financial aid. Undergraduates are empowered to design their own course of study.

While the first class of students is yet to graduate, the business program has been leading the charge in establishing an image for Krea graduates, serving a purpose similar to the YIF and TLP models of Ashoka and Plaksha.

What will it take to become world-class? I'm a clear-eyed optimist who believes entrepreneurship can create productive societal change. Higher education in the developing world – of which India is perhaps an exemplar – is in dire need of this. The Indian example of the past few decades has infused dynamism on the margins of an otherwise staid system, run experiments that are largely succeeding, and chiseled away at the mistrust that has often bedeviled collaboration between private entrepreneurs and the rest of society (see Table 2).

A key to these lessons is the rise of philanthropically minded private entrepreneurs, typically entering higher education laterally, rather than being career educators. They have pioneered newer institutional ideas, often borrowing from their global experiences to contextualize these concepts to India's needs.³³ Continued success requires these entrepreneurs to remain mindful of the ambient suspicion of the private sector. These individuals, mostly from (self-earned) privilege, are, fairly or otherwise, subject to the critique that they are elitist. Many are attempting to address this impression by providing need-based financial aid and broader outreach, but there is always more work to be done on true social and economic inclusion.

Table 2

Lessons and Key Highlights from the Experiments with New Institutions of Higher Education in India

<p>Collective Philanthropy</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none">1. Philanthropists, entrepreneurs, high-net-worth individuals, and private organizations with a common vision to improve education collaboratively contribute capital and resources such as time and networks over an extended period.2. These benefactors believe the autonomy and goodwill of the desired institution will supersede the desire for recognition or control by any individual donor or group.3. Members of the governing boards get one vote, irrespective of their donation size. No individual group can claim ownership.4. The founders' group attracts more donors from their networks.5. The donors are often recognized as cofounders of the institutions, sponsors of scholarships and centers, and promoters of various infrastructural facilities.
<p>Shared Governance Model</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none">1. Different stakeholders of the institution, such as faculty, staff, governing board, academic council, student bodies, and alumni, participate in building policies and driving decision-making for the institution.2. A distinction is maintained between the academic, administrative, and advancement functioning of the institution wherein respective bodies inform but do not interfere with each other's work.
<p>Obsession with High-Quality Faculty and Students</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none">1. Institutions prioritize recruiting high-quality faculty with a global outlook who can inspire students with a love for learning.2. Institutions adopt a visiting faculty model to get globally renowned professors, academics, and practitioners to teach in fixed-week blocks, building a trustworthy academic perception to attract students.3. Visiting faculty fill the early gaps for high-quality instructors until permanent faculty are hired in the coming years.4. Institutions use philanthropic capital to build world-class services to distinguish themselves—from academic engagement to campus facilities, extra-curricular activities, research, branding, outreach, and placement results.

Table 2, continued

<p>Global Academic Collaborations</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Institutions build academic partnerships with top international universities to drive faculty exchange, program design, and collaborative branding. 2. Global partnerships create opportunities for international student exchanges, as well as research collaborations.
<p>State Governments' Support</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. State governments liberalize policies that enable private players to establish educational institutions, seeing new universities as investments to generate employment and improve the state's image. 2. State governments offer land and other resources at subsidized rates to the founders of educational institutions, often the result of interstate competition to attract such institutions.
<p>Experimentation outside Regulatory Regimes</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Institutions continue to experiment with nonaccredited models that have successfully coexisted with accredited programs. 2. Institutions create alternate models in undergraduate and graduate program structures to give students flexibility to design their own academic journeys. For example, undergraduate programs not limited to the traditional three-year bachelor's degree, returning graduate programs, and the like. 3. Institutions adopt diverse, flexible, and liberal admission processes aligned with central and state regulatory policies that allow them to cater to a wider candidate pool. 4. Regulators allow some of these innovations to thrive despite not coming under their control, viewing them as experiments that could lead to more formal solutions for the country's future educational needs.

Source : Author's compilation of data.

Further, for all the excellence in teaching that prioritizes more than a purely technical education, research has received relatively scant attention. None of the entrepreneurial efforts profiled here are within plausible distance of being world-class in research. The institutions that I have highlighted have focused on becoming teaching universities first and foremost.³⁴ ISB, with the longest gestation period, is perhaps the most research-oriented, but that too is a work in progress, and only in management. ISB has set up multidisciplinary centers that are not siloed like departments in science and humanities colleges, and Ashoka and Krea have followed suit. Some have taken nascent steps toward developing doctoral programs, but it is a long road ahead.

Additionally, a true liberal arts education requires institutional maturity from universities and broader societal structures, including the state's machinery. This was brought to the fore recently with regard to freedom of expression when some saw Ashoka to be bending to political pressure to contain views antithetical to the government's philosophy.³⁵

There has not been an opportunity in this essay to comment on the geopolitical moment within which India finds herself, but it is relevant to the rise of the new universities. The United States and India have edged closer together – a rapprochement in the post-Cold War era that has survived changes in governments in both countries. This closeness has increased connectivity to the West as well. These new alliances are buttressed by the coming of age of the Indian diaspora in the West (primarily Indian-origin CEOs of leading Western companies, such as Alphabet, Microsoft, Novartis, and Starbucks) and in political circles (Vice President Kamala Harris in the United States and Prime Minister Rishi Sunak in the United Kingdom). The spillovers of this bonhomie are manifesting in a greater exchange of ideas between the West and India.

Perhaps the most encouraging part of this emergent narrative is that an entrepreneurial ecosystem is taking shape regarding private philanthropy directed toward higher education. It manifests itself in openness to ideas, whatever their provenance, a *sine qua non* for unfettered inquiry and creativity. Ashoka learned from ISB, and Plaksha and Krea from Ashoka, and they are all competing for good students and faculty. In the process, they have created the possibility for preexisting universities to up their game. Society should nurture this entrepreneurial process.

AUTHOR'S NOTE

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ENDNOTES

- ¹ These nation-building private entrepreneurs did not limit themselves to education. Khwaja Abdul Hamied, for example, founded Cipla in 1935, convinced that global quality medicines could be produced in India, even as the country fought for independence. Under the leadership of Hamied's son, Yusuf, Cipla grew into one of the world's largest generic medicine producers, and today manufactures most HIV medication consumed by patients globally. See Muhammad H. Zaman and Tarun Khanna, "The Cost and Evolution of Quality at Cipla Ltd., 1935–2016," *Business History Review* 95 (2) (2021): 249–274.
- ² A university can award degrees under some Act of Parliament or of a State Legislature. A college, in contrast, cannot provide a degree in its own name, and therefore must be affiliated with a university. There are stand-alone institutions that are unaffiliated with universities, and they therefore cannot provide degrees, but they do grant diplomas. A private university is established through a legislative act by the center or a state, following a body of rules in place. An Institute of National Importance is explicitly anointed as such by an Act of Parliament. Examples include the Indian Institute of Technology, National Institutes of Technology, Indian Institutes of Management, and All India Institute of Medical Science. See Narayana Jayaram and Phillip G. Altbach, "Confucius and the Guru: The Changing Status of the Academic Profession in China and India," *Journal of Education Planning and Administration* 20 (4) (2006): 395; *All India Survey of Higher Education Report 2020–2021* (New Delhi: Ministry of Education, Government of India, 2021); and United Nations Population Fund, *Annual Report 2022* (New Delhi: United Nations Population Fund: India, 2022), https://india.unfpa.org/sites/default/files/pub-pdf/unfpa_annual_report_2022.pdf.
- ³ Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development, "Working Age Population," <https://data.oecd.org/pop/working-age-population.htm> (accessed February 16, 2024).
- ⁴ "India@100: Reaping the Demographic Dividend," EY India, https://www.ey.com/en_in/india-at-100/reaping-the-demographic-dividend (accessed February 16, 2024).

- ⁵ “Genesis,” University Grants Commission, <https://www.ugc.gov.in/Aboutus/Genesis> (accessed February 16, 2024).
- ⁶ A parallel organization, the All India Council for Technical Education (AICTE), was founded in 1945 to oversee technical education in fields such as engineering, management, pharma, computer science, applied arts, architecture, and hotel management; see “History,” All India Council for Technical Education, <https://www.aicte-india.org/about-us/history> (accessed February 16, 2024). AICTE oversaw the establishment of technical institutions and the introduction of new courses, and monitored capacity intake. Over time, these rules have been relaxed; for example, the universities described in this essay (Ashoka, Krea, Plaksha) do not have to get AICTE approval.
- ⁷ I was one of four members of the Empowered Expert Committee, led by former Chief Election Commissioner of India Gopalaswami Needamanglam.
- ⁸ R. Radhika and Aeshwarya Tiwari, “IITs, DU, BHU, Public Institutions of Eminence Have Got under 50% of Promised Funds,” *Careers360*, May 1, 2023, <https://news.careers360.com/institutes-of-eminence-ioe-status-iit-bombay-delhi-madras-du-bhu-uoh-under-50-percent-funds-list-india>.
- ⁹ *National Education Policy 2020* (New Delhi: Ministry of Human Resource Development, Government of India, 2020), https://www.education.gov.in/sites/upload_files/mhrd/files/NEP_Final_English_0.pdf.
- ¹⁰ The Gross Enrollment Ratio (GER) measures the number of students enrolled in higher education as a percentage of the population in the age group eighteen to twenty-three years old.
- ¹¹ “Higher Education in India: Vision 2047,” FICCI-EY Parthenon Higher Education in India: Vision 2047 Report.
- ¹² “Majority of Indian Colleges Are Run by Private Sector, Govt Tells Rajya Sabha,” *Live Mint*, July 29, 2021, <https://www.livemint.com/news/india/majority-of-indian-colleges-are-run-by-private-sector-govt-tells-rajya-sabha-11627556238570.html>.
- ¹³ Rahul Verma, “Politicians Will Pose the Biggest Challenge to NEP,” *Hindustan Times*, August 10, 2020, <https://www.hindustantimes.com/analysis/politicians-will-pose-the-biggest-challenge-to-nep/story-eg3ygujv9rfg3xb6wajp2i.html>.
- ¹⁴ “Supreme Court rules against land acquisition for Vedanta Group’s proposed university,” *India Infoline News Service*, April 13, 2023, <https://www.indiaonline.com/news/uncategorized/supreme-court-rules-against-land-acquisition-for-vedanta-groups-proposed-university>.
- ¹⁵ Several other higher-education institutions have also provided lessons that I have drawn from here. For example, St. Stephen’s College in New Delhi has been a hallmark of excellence for decades, as have more recent private universities like Shiv Nadar University and Azim Premji University, both funded by individual fortunes made from the software industry. None of these, however, fits the model on which this essay is focused.
- ¹⁶ India had a different nomenclature for educational programs. Undergraduate programs were called graduate programs and graduate programs were called postgraduate programs.
- ¹⁷ Pramath Raj Sinha, *An Idea Whose Time Has Come: The Story of the Indian School of Business* (Delhi: Penguin Books India, 2011), 13.

- ¹⁸ Ibid., 25–39.
- ¹⁹ Indian School of Business has received accreditation from the Association of MBAs, EFMD Quality Improvement Systems, and the Association to Advance Collegiate Schools of Business.
- ²⁰ This compares to about US\$30,000 for IIM Ahmedabad’s two-year MBA program, about US\$130,000 for University of Massachusetts Amherst’s two-year MBA program, and about US\$230,000 for a two-year MBA program at Harvard Business School. These estimates are based on information on these institutions’ websites, and on the current exchange rate.
- ²¹ Pramath Sinha (founding dean of Indian School of Business; PhD from the University of Pennsylvania), Ashish Dhawan (founder of Central Square Foundation and Chrys Capital; undergraduate degree from Yale University and MBA from Harvard Business School), Vineet Gupta (founder of Jamboree Education; degree from Indian Institute of Technology, Delhi), and Sanjiv Bikchandani (founder of Naukri Group; MBA from Indian Institute of Management, Ahmedabad).
- ²² “About Us,” Ashoka University, <https://www.ashoka.edu.in/about-us> (accessed February 22, 2024).
- ²³ “The Making of a World Class University,” *Samvad: The Newsletter from Ashoka University* 8 (2017): 1–2, https://ashoka.edu.in/static/doc_uploads/file_1509445097.pdf.
- ²⁴ “Ashoka University, A Quest to Transform Higher Education in India,” internal document, February 26, 2013.
- ²⁵ “Young India Fellowship,” Ashoka University, <https://www.ashoka.edu.in/academic-programme/young-india-fellowship> (accessed February 22, 2024).
- ²⁶ “Financing Your YIF [Young India Fellows] Education,” Ashoka University, <https://www.ashoka.edu.in/financial-aid-application-process-2> (accessed February 22, 2024).
- ²⁷ The analysis was done by Aspiring Minds, a software firm I cofounded in 2008 that was acquired by SHL (a company based in the United Kingdom) in 2019. “Thought Leadership White Papers and Reports,” SHL, <https://www.shl.com/en-in/resources/by-type/whitepapers-and-reports/national-employability-report-engineers-2019> (accessed February 22, 2024).
- ²⁸ “Reimagining Higher Education Foundation (RHEF) Plaksha,” Berkeley Sutardja Center for Entrepreneurship and Technology, <https://scet.berkeley.edu/global-partner/reimagining-higher-education-foundation-rhef-plaksha> (accessed February 22, 2024). University rankings are from QS World University Rankings 2019.
- ²⁹ Internal document, “Reimagining Higher Education Foundation (RHEF): Building a 21st Century Technology University in India.” See also “About Grand Challenges Initiatives,” Grand Challenges, <https://www.grandchallenges.org/about> (accessed February 23, 2024).
- ³⁰ “Young Technology Scholars,” Plaksha University, <https://plaksha.edu.in/hs/young-technology-scholars> (accessed February 23, 2024). Similar in spirit but at nationwide scale is the establishment of tens of thousands of tinkering labs, maker spaces in Indian high schools to encourage enthusiasm for the sciences. These labs are under the auspices of the Atal Innovation Mission (AIM), the flagship innovation policymaking body for the government of India. AIM in turn was established as a result of a public commission I chaired in 2015. Tarun Khanna, Rukmini Banerji, Shri Binod Kumar Bawri, et al., *Report*

of the Expert Committee on Innovation and Entrepreneurship (New Delhi : NITI Aayog, 2015), <https://smartnet.niua.org/sites/default/files/resources/report-of-the-expert-committee.pdf>. See also "About AIM," Atal Innovation Mission, <https://aim.gov.in> (accessed February 23, 2024).

³¹ "Krea Mission," Krea University, <https://krea.edu.in/about> (accessed February 23, 2024).

³² Krea University, *Annual Report 2019–2020* (Sri City, India : Krea University, 2020), https://krea.edu.in/wp-content/uploads/2020/11/Annual-report-05102020_w-ofinancials.pdf.

³³ See my essay on contextualizing organizational models to various locales. Tarun Khanna, "Contextual Intelligence," *Harvard Business Review*, September 2014, <https://hbr.org/2014/09/contextual-intelligence>.

³⁴ Therefore, these are unlike "research universities" that focus on research, with teaching as a derivative preoccupation. See Pankaj Jalote, *Building Research Universities in India* (Thousand Oaks, Calif. : Sage Publishing, 2021). Ideally, research and teaching should, and do, complement each other.

³⁵ A recent opinion piece accuses liberal arts institutions in India of politically expedient hypocrisy. Aakash Joshi, "Ashoka University and the Hypocrisy of 'Liberal' Branding," *The Indian Express*, June 5, 2023, <https://indianexpress.com/article/opinion/columns/ashoka-university-and-the-hypocrisy-of-liberal-branding-8646715>.

Up Close: Asian University for Women

Kamal Ahmad

At a time when equalizing measures like affirmative action are being challenged, a women's university is uplifting the most neglected and defenseless populations in Bangladesh. Yet the Asian University for Women (AUW) faces additional challenges in providing excellent higher education. This essay discusses how AUW also confronts mounting pernicious state control of education by transforming state-university relationships, and how, despite resurfacing nationalism and parochialism, it advocates for regional collaboration in its student body. In a conflict-ridden world, it marshals political, financial, and diplomatic prowess to provide a liberating pathway to those marooned in conflict. While fostering equality through its undergraduate and graduate programs, AUW has raised an age-old question concerning a university's function in an unjust, violence-prone, and divided world. Its answer: the best institutions embrace disadvantaged members of society through education aimed at emancipating those under the yoke of oppression.

In the postcolonial era, virtually every newly independent country established local universities. They were symbolic of the countries' newfound sovereignty and reflective of their aspirations to be equal participants in the comity of nations. At the outset, the dominant institutional model in former British colonies was of the Oxbridge variety: residential universities that offered neoclassical education. These universities were expected to produce a cadre of native civil servants in the image of the former colonial civil services.¹ During this era, this model was further influenced by U.S. land grant universities of the nineteenth century, whose practical approach to education became the mainstay in fields such as agriculture and engineering.² An example of this influence is the historic establishment of the Indian Institutes of Technology. In 1950, Prime Minister Jawaharlal Nehru drew on his education in physics to lead an international collaboration that created a network of engineering and technology institutions. Over time, they rose as powerhouses for practical technological education whose impact has extended well beyond India.³

In the early 1970s, however, the prevailing regard for universities in the region began to shift. The tumultuous student unrest that had become ubiquitous internationally by 1968 – surfacing in capital cities such as Mexico City, Paris, and Dhaka – revealed the power within universities to rally political protest against

the establishment that could threaten the edifice of the state.⁴ By consequence, universities became springboards in former British colonies for social, political, and even revolutionary change. In Bangladesh, the movement for independence found its center on the campuses of institutions like Dhaka University.⁵ After the country's successful struggle to gain independence from Pakistan in 1971, many Bangladeshi universities awakened to a new sense of power that forced changes in their relationship with the state. Universities became increasingly autonomous and less accountable to the government while continuing to receive state funding. Due to these conflicting dynamics, governments also came to view universities less as engines for progress and more as political hydras that had to be dominated and controlled from within to maintain the balance of national power.

In the wake of this political unrest, universities began shadowing national politics with the same competitive framework of winners and losers. Academic excellence, scientific inquiry, and international competition became subject to government interference, which not only led to politically motivated appointments of leadership and faculty, but also perniciously impacted fair admission of students. This distortion continued even on campus where, for example, student union elections became a ticket to lucrative government contracts and political patronage.⁶ With extensive state subsidies to support enrolled students completing programs, and mass unemployment in the labor market, admission to residential universities also became a coveted economic gain.⁷ This benefit was made even more attractive due to the seemingly endless and elastic study period that came from repeated delays of final exams. With these advantages and loopholes at play, individual benefits began rivaling the importance of higher education's more constructive aims. Despite these adverse impacts, many students turned *coupists* emerged from the political tumult as formidable forces to reckon with for regional government and university administrations. In the wake of such challenges, it was no surprise that the best administrative talent began fleeing or otherwise withdrew from their posts at universities, sparking and further reinforcing the downward spiral of these institutions.⁸

The private-sector response to this power struggle was an attempt to capture the unmet educational demands of students who could not or would not enroll at public universities and who did not have the means to obtain an education in the West. Today, this response continues with low barriers to entry and market-driven tuition prices, measures that have helped private universities grow rapidly in Bangladesh (and elsewhere in South Asia), both in numbers and in the sizes of populations served.⁹ Yet despite this growth, they face key challenges, such as their inability to attract qualified full-time faculty. To manage this issue, many private universities have turned to hiring faculty who have primary appointments at public universities. These instructors travel from one campus to

another to hold classes, often in the subjects of information technology, business management, pharmacology, and accounting – coveted disciplines that hold good prospects for students seeking immediate employment after graduation.

Between the deterioration of public universities, the emergence of private universities catering to a narrow stream of vocational subjects, and the development of an even narrower socioeconomic band of students, a few things have been lost. For instance, education in the liberal arts and sciences is easily forsaken, since it may appear to be unprofitable or unaffordable from a business perspective. In terms of profitability, liberal arts graduates may not be able to qualify for lucrative technical jobs. As for affordability, private universities are dependent on tuition revenues, and may not have the capital to support research or build resources like scientific laboratories. In addition, the notion of demonstrated talent and merit opening doors to socioeconomic advancement has also become devalued by the money and political connections that supersede the advantages of merit alone.

It was in this context that the Asian University for Women (AUW) was conceived in the early 2000s.¹⁰ Following its establishment as an independent international university in 2008, it has worked to nurture a spirit of comprehensive inquiry in its students through undergraduate programs in the liberal arts and sciences, and graduate programs in professional fields. The entire undergraduate program is designed to spur curiosity, imagination, and experience with different modes of analysis, while the master's programs are a bridge to the world of livelihood. For instance, one new interdisciplinary major for undergraduate studies, supported by the Mellon Foundation, combines the humanities with history, religion, philosophy, and literature.¹¹ The master's programs, on the other hand, are all geared toward employment. The MA in education, MA in apparel and retail management, and MA in drug sciences and bioinformatics are a few examples of this.

To overcome pervasive discrimination on the basis of gender, class, and caste, the university's founders positioned AUW as a sanctuary and springboard for projects that advance knowledge and justice. A charter enacted by the Parliament of Bangladesh protects the university from outside influence and engages the state as an enabler of AUW's ambitions, which include the betterment of neglected populations.¹² To support this goal, philanthropists paid to open its doors to those who are socially and economically marginalized. As a result, 85 percent of its students are on full or partial scholarships.¹³ Another strategic approach is the university's decision to recruit faculty from around the world, which made it less constrained by the local academic ecology. An additional solution to local constraints has been the international scope codified in AUW's charter that requires only 25 percent of enrolled students to be from the host country of Bangladesh. This assertive move shows how the genius of a university lies in universality and meritocracy free from nationalism. Because of these specific approaches, AUW has become a magnet for

students from twenty-two countries, and a gateway for them to enter prestigious graduate programs and professions. Richard Saller, who became the twelfth president of Stanford University on September 1, 2023, captured the empowering essence of A UW and its students in his inaugural address during Stanford's convocation ceremony in 2023:

The lesson from [A UW students'] stories is the critical importance of their personal motivation in the pursuit of their own meaningful goals. The Asian University for Women instilled in them confidence in their own agency, and Stanford provided the resources to use their extraordinary talents in pursuit of their passions.¹⁴

By focusing on the education of women, A UW powerfully signals how imperative it is to cultivate the minds of a population that has been relegated to the periphery of history for too long. At a time when values of meritocracy, secularism, fairness, and equal opportunity are receding in the face of a pernicious system – one that sustains corruption, patronage, and hate-mongering (with its attendant violence) – A UW hopes to champion the restoration of humanity's essential values. Universities cannot be bystanders in this pursuit. They must be engaged participants in reshaping the world for the better by taking action in their chosen domains and setting the agenda for research and advocacy.

The words *Let no one ignorant of geometry enter* were allegedly inscribed on the door of The Academy, a school founded by the ancient Greek philosopher Plato that grew out of a renowned institution in Athens. Though it takes part in this academic tradition, A UW has no such motto or desire to keep certain students excluded. Instead, it looks to welcome those who evince courage, outrage at injustice, and profound empathy. In our current political climate, in which equalizing measures like affirmative action are being challenged, A UW explores the most unsuspected settings for gifted women and invites them to consider enrolling as students. The university also positions itself as an educational pathway for adolescent girls who, in many parts of Asia, are rarely told that they have any value beyond marriage and childbearing. The idea that they are free to imagine and pursue their dreams often seems farfetched given their circumstances: displacement, conflict, poverty, and so on. Such conditions leave girls and women vulnerable, so it is also imperative that the university earns the trust of families and the community in its recruitment efforts. A new school in a major city that demands no tuition or additional living expenses for some students could be suspected of dangers like human trafficking. Earning trust in this context is necessary, but once it is earned, it creates a new vision in those same communities that value girls and women in new ways.

A UW believes that Plato's "geometry" and other prerequisites for success in college can be taught and learned in supportive and nurturing environments.

This is why the university offers students flexibility and opportunity for academic preparation prior to matriculating into degree programs. Yet although these conditions are ideal for preparing prospective students, someone lacking purpose and motivation is unlikely to turn their education into an instrument that further empowers them to be an agent of change. It is for such reasons that A UW also employs a community approach that eschews online education, promotes receptivity, and encourages collaboration. For one, online education without adequate access to English-language content and instruction is not helpful for students who speak other languages. Second, A UW strives to bring communities together, even those at war, so that the experience of living and learning collectively leads to reconsideration of inherited prejudices – something difficult to achieve in virtual settings. Third, A UW encourages students to develop collaborative projects with their colleagues that aim to address problems across nations. It is only by bringing the university community together in person that this level of collaboration can take root.

To recruit its inaugural class in 2008, A UW sent outreach teams to Bangladesh, Cambodia, India, Nepal, Pakistan, and Sri Lanka to meet with potential students, discuss institutional principles (such as courage, leadership, and tolerance), and administer country-specific entrance exams. With limited funds, there was no production or distribution of fancy brochures showing luxurious dorm rooms and athletic facilities. The recruitment teams focused instead on discussing the curriculum and quality of education. This was to be true college instruction that emphasized problem-solving and critical thinking, with no trace of the rote learning and memorization that remains common in schools across the region.¹⁵

After accumulating a list of 1,100 promising applicants from these visits, it was decided that 100 students would be a suitable number for A UW's first year and cohort. Not knowing how many women would say yes and leave their homes to study in Chittagong, the second-largest city in Bangladesh, 140 acceptance letters were sent out. In March 2008, the first class of A UW students arrived on campus, a group of 136 ambitious young women from six countries. Though delighted with the outcome, the university still faced many questions: Would these women, from distinct backgrounds, get along? Was the curriculum too ambitious? How would the university sustain quality faculty and administrators who worked in the admittedly difficult environment of Chittagong? Would the school be able to cater to everyone's needs in terms of health, nutrition, athletics, art, mental well-being, and so on?

Sixteen years later, nearly 1,600 students from twenty-two countries currently attend A UW, hailing from Afghanistan, Bangladesh, Bhutan, Cambodia, China, India, Indonesia, Laos, Myanmar, Nepal, Pakistan, Palestine, Sri Lanka, Syria,

Timor-Leste, Vietnam, and Yemen. In each setting, A UW has found novel ways to reach students. It has used existing microfinance networks to identify the most promising daughters of rural borrowers, campaigned in refugee camps where opportunities for higher education were not available, partnered with grassroots media to get the word out about the university's educational opportunities, and even used cellular communications in conflict zones to connect with potential students. Once these pupils are identified and express interest, they are then asked to submit an application that includes prior academic records, an admissions test, and a personal interview. Through these materials, a choice is made about their suitability for admission.

Having graduated only ten classes, it is still too early to tell how effective A UW's mission is to develop global leaders and agents of change. Yet some results have been promising. About 25 percent of graduating students enter master's and doctoral programs, with a significant number going to some of the top universities in the world. There is strong evidence of individual empowerment and entrepreneurship. For example, a group of graduates recruited from the floors of garment factories in Bangladesh have established a company that aims to create their own female-led factory. Afghan refugee alumni have taken steps to establish schools for other refugee girls in countries neighboring Afghanistan.¹⁶ Students who came from madrasas, educational institutions often associated with the religion of Islam, are signaling through their presence at A UW that a secular education does not necessarily violate any religious code.

Most important, A UW has quietly but effectively altered the image of a typical university student in Asian countries. It is no longer defined by middle-class appearances and values. Instead, it is exemplified by uniquely successful women from diverse socioeconomic backgrounds, embodying the university's mission to counter systemic discrimination. A UW alumni have entered graduate programs at Oxford, Cambridge, Duke, Johns Hopkins, and other prominent global universities, and secured employment with leading multinational organizations.¹⁷ Their success signals that the education provided at A UW is to be taken seriously, even if the students come from backgrounds that are underestimated in traditional university settings. Whether they choose to continue their education, join a non-governmental organization, or enter roles in the private or public sectors, A UW graduates are motivated through shared goals to envision large-scale change; address pressing social, political, and economic issues; and promote gender equality in their home countries and around the world.

A UW's leaders are aware that nurturing such a visionary ethos places students and graduates in positions where they may be confronted with peril in the outside world. As a community, the university must be prepared to protect its members even after they have graduated. When 148 of its Afghan students and graduates

were stranded in Kabul just ahead of the NATO withdrawal of troops in 2021, A UW organized the evacuation of its entire community in Afghanistan.¹⁸ Since the return of the Taliban, another 500 Afghan students have been enrolled at A UW. More arrive each academic term, turning A UW into the single largest host of Afghan women students at any university. Similarly, with nearly 300 students from the Rohingya community, the university is arguably leading the way for the education of women belonging to this displaced ethnic group that has been escaping genocide in Myanmar since 2017.¹⁹

In a region where both public and private universities are heavily regulated, A UW is privileged to have a charter enacted by the Parliament of Bangladesh that gives it complete academic freedom and institutional independence. Unlike other academic institutions in the country, no government official vets A UW's curriculum, individual courses, or faculty appointments. The university's administration has promoted a framework for public-private collaboration in a constructive manner. Thus, the parliament enables rather than controls university affairs, as it did by providing the one hundred forty acres of land on which the permanent A UW campus is currently being built.²⁰ The government agency also took the extraordinary step of seeking to borrow funds from the World Bank to help support the campus construction. Nevertheless, as with most universities, A UW has faced its share of problems with faculty, infrastructure, funding, diversity and inclusion, and research. These pressing challenges are detailed below:

1. **Faculty:** The structure and content of A UW's curriculum is similar to offerings at liberal arts colleges in the United States. Consequently, the institution competes for the same caliber of instructors without having the financial resources to compensate them at commensurate levels. The mission of the university is probably the single most important magnet in attracting high-quality faculty from different parts of the world. Many of the challenges in recruiting and retaining staff seem to also be related to the location and struggles of adapting to life in Chittagong. For those who have never lived in this region, it can be a culture shock. Therefore, in order to reduce the turnover rate, particularly at senior levels, it is valuable that candidates visit A UW prior to accepting a position.
2. **Infrastructure:** Though the government of Bangladesh provided land for A UW's campus, when the university's charter was ratified in 2006 – and although the government has supplied additional grants of land as needed – the process to fund and start construction has been challenging and lengthy. Because the permanent campus is in development, the university must operate out of rented facilities for all academic, administrative, and residen-

tial needs. These temporary quarters have limited space for the growing student population and incur high maintenance costs. Chittagong's limited public services further increase the challenges of daily living for the academic community. The university's dependence on this fragile infrastructure will be significantly reduced once campus construction is completed, however. The initial master plan for the permanent campus, to accommodate three thousand students, was prepared by Moshe Safdie – a noted architect who also served as faculty at the Harvard Graduate School of Design.²¹ Safdie went on to design A UW's campus center, whose construction is nearing completion. With the projected expansion of student enrollment and introduction of additional extensive academic programs, A UW turned to Pritzker Prize-winning architect Renzo Piano to revise the master plan and design the next five major academic buildings and the performing arts center. Piano has described his vision for A UW as a “university in the middle of a forest,” committing to use a maximum of 10 percent of the campus land for built space.

3. **Funding:** The university has yet to identify a viable long-term model for sustainable funding. Thus, the challenge of providing superior education in a resource-limited setting to women who are generally without substantial financial means cannot be understated. Currently, 85 percent of students at A UW are on full or partial scholarships funded by government and foundation grants, corporate sponsors, and individual donors. Humanitarian contributions could also be useful, considering a philanthropic preference in the international development arena for supporting education in developing countries, but they have yet to help the university amass needed resources. With increased economic prosperity in the region, one can envision a financial model in which the tuition and fees paid by affluent students could subsidize costs for disadvantaged students. Nonetheless, A UW is far from achieving that model.
4. **Diversity and Inclusion:** These initiatives are key aspects of the school's design, instruction, and administration. However, while diversity is an explicit goal at A UW, it does present some problems. Not all students arriving at A UW are prepared to deal with a rigorous college curriculum. As a result, the university has had to develop several preliminary programs to prepare students for college-level studies; these preparatory programs are now a necessity in the university's academic structure.²² A UW has also developed robust mental health services – including one-on-one counseling, support groups, art therapy, martial arts training, and mentoring – to nurture the health and welfare of a diverse group of students, many with

traumatic backgrounds. In addition to these services, it has built dedicated spaces for vulnerable groups, such as the Rohingya Solidarity Center, to ensure that those in the university community who have endured the greatest setbacks receive the most support.

5. **Research:** At an institution where most faculty members carry a heavy burden of teaching, generating research has been challenging. And although the university's immediate surroundings provide ample opportunities for studies in public health, environmental sciences, or refugee and migration issues, faculty participation in research within these areas is still forthcoming. However, research productivity is expected to rise as A UW establishes more graduate programs.

Most universities in the developing world are either state sponsored (public sector) or supported through tuition revenues (private sector). In the rare cases in which an independent university develops without state funding, it is privileged to have a single philanthropic sponsor whose name the institution generally bears. (For example, Aga Khan University in Karachi, Pakistan, which was named after its founder Prince Aga Khan IV.) The Asian University for Women was created with an unusual mix of public and private characteristics. It is independent of the state. It does not have an overarching sponsor, and is thus sustained by a wider array of supporters. It is international in its reach and resulting composition of students and faculty. Its principal focus is to educate women who do not have access to resources or opportunities for higher education. And, as a liberal arts college, it eschews lecture-style classes in favor of close student-faculty interaction, making its teaching method more faculty-intensive.

If A UW succeeds in its vision, it will signal new possibilities for expanding the framework of higher education in the region. It will show how the state's role in this level of education need not be defined as one of authoritative control, but instead as one that enables the ultimate mission of a university education to be realized. A UW's focus on educating first-generation college students, and others whose social mobility is impeded by disadvantages, shows that affirmative action is far from an anachronistic practice. Rather, it is a social venture that must broadly inform our best institutions, because any system that excludes large portions of its population from higher education and socioeconomic advancement imperils the fabric of society by sustaining unethical and illegitimate conditions.

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The Socialist Model of Higher Education : The Dream Faces Reality

Isak Frumin & Daria Platonova

This essay explores the socialist model of higher education that originates from early socialist and Marxist thinkers. We contrast this model with Western and Chinese models by focusing on the socialist model's ideals of education as a public good, as free and equal access to instruction, and as a class-based approach to education. Our study of this model employs historical reconstruction and path-dependence analysis to understand the implementation and transformation of these ideals. We discuss early Soviet experiments, the global influence of the model, and its evolution following the collapse of the Soviet Union in 1991. The model's emphasis on state control, specialized training, and production of a skilled workforce is also highlighted. The essay concludes by acknowledging the model's flaws, reflecting on the implications for contemporary higher education, and recognizing its contributions to ideas of social mobility, fair access, and the role of universities in societal development.

In discussions of higher education, two main historical and cultural models are typically considered: the Continental European model, which is more specialized in practical and theoretical subjects, and the British-American model, which follows a liberal arts approach to all subjects. Occasionally, the Chinese model is included due to its association with Confucianism, a system of thought originating in ancient China that promotes family and social harmony. However, there is another set of principles for arranging the higher-education system that has existed and continues to exist: the socialist model, which millions of students still study within.

To understand how this model has survived and its relevance to contemporary challenges, we need to reconstruct the initial ideas that produced it, because the socialist model has been unlucky in its objective and neutral coverage in the academic literature. Few books and articles have attempted to understand the socialist experiment without either blaspheming or praising it. And often, the instruments built to implement the fundamental ideas behind this model are viewed as the essence of this education system, when, in reality, they are technologies designed to implement its ideas in specific historic, cultural, and economic conditions.

The story of the socialist model is unusual. Unlike the Continental European and British-American models, it was not built gradually through trial and error, but rather as a dream or utopian project that was transformed into the system we see and criticize today. The history of the realization of the socialist model is largely a drama wherein a beautifully spiritual dream of a small group of thinkers and revolutionaries collides with the reality of technological, economic, and human possibilities. To identify the critical elements of the socialist model that have survived and set a deep institutional path for postsocialist models, we rely on two approaches. The first approach is *historical reconstruction*, in which we examine how the basic socialist ideas were transformed in their encounter with technological, economic, and cultural realities, and how some of these ideas contradict each other in practice. The second approach is *path-dependence analysis*, in which we identify the elements of the model that have not completely disappeared after the collapse of socialist regimes.

To begin, we discuss the fundamental ideas behind the model and attempts to implement these ideas. We then examine how these individual elements survived the new conditions of postsocialist development, and conclude by connecting these elements of the socialist model to debates about prospects for higher education that are taking place today. Please note that throughout this essay, we have used the term “communism” to refer to the ideological construct that was the aim of social development in nineteenth- and twentieth-century Europe, and “socialism” to refer to the social order that was officially implemented in the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics (USSR) and socialist states.

The conceptual foundations of the socialist model of higher education can be traced back to the works of Karl Marx, Friedrich Engels, Vladimir Lenin, Antonio Gramsci, and even earlier utopian socialist thinkers like Henri de Saint-Simon, Charles Fourier, and Robert Owen, who Lenin considered an important source of Marxism. Although these theorists mostly wrote about education in a general sense and not universities per se, their ideas still provide insights into the foundations of the socialist model.

The first foundation of this model is the idea of education as a public good rather than a private good. Education, skills development, and personality development were seen as serving the needs of society, rather than individual private interests. The authors of the socialist model recognized that real socialist education should not cater to individual human interests but instead develop human abilities to fulfill public ideals. Fourier made this idea operational by presenting the concept of mechanical harmony, which was partially built on the idea of people as parts of a harmonious and effective social machine. According to Fourier, everyone’s skills should be inserted into the right place. At the same time, he recognized the importance of specific human abilities and how skills develop-

ment should reflect them. Saint-Simon argued that free and accessible education should be a source of inspiration for the nation and should contribute to its progress.¹ Engels extended this idea politically by strengthening the role of the state in “The Principles of Communism,” which influenced his work with Marx in *The Communist Manifesto*: “The education of all children,” they say, “from the moment that they can get along without a mother’s care, shall be in state institutions at state expense.”²

The second foundation of the socialist model is the idea that education should be free and equally accessible. This idea first appeared in the writings of the early utopian socialist thinkers previously mentioned and grew from the criticism expressed by Marx and Engels, who denounced existing universities for being instruments of elite reproduction. In his brief tract, “The Eighteenth Brumaire of Louis Bonaparte,” Marx quotes the French Constitution: “Education is free. Freedom of education shall be enjoyed under the conditions fixed by law and under the supreme control of the state,” but the founders of Marxism did not provide any insights on the practical implementation of this humanist idea.³

The third foundation of the socialist model is the idea of a class-based approach to education. Marx and Engels expressed this idea clearly in *The German Ideology*, a set of manuscripts that critiqued the modern German philosophy of their time:

The class which is the ruling material force of society is at the same time its ruling intellectual force. The class which has the means of material production at its disposal has control at the same time over the means of mental production, so that thereby, generally speaking, the ideas of those who lack the means of mental production are subject to it. The ruling ideas are nothing more than the ideal expression of the dominant material relationships, the dominant material relationships grasped as ideas; hence of the relationships which make the one class the ruling one, therefore, the ideas of its dominance.⁴

The logical consequence of this idea is that the dictatorship of the proletariat should bring another set of dominant ideas into the intellectual sphere. In their perspective, the important difference between the dominant ideas of the bourgeoisie and the proletariat was that proletarian ideas were not ideas of dominance or exploitation. They were, instead, ideas of liberation and building a new world. Following this view, the socialist education system could become a mechanism for developing and disseminating these working-class ideas.

These three ideological foundations, which have influenced and continue to influence intellectuals and education practitioners around the world, faced their first grand challenge of practical implementation when the Russian Revolution broke out in 1917. Lenin and his team faced two practical questions at the time: First, what should they do with traditional Russian universities

that had been growing since the eighteenth century based on a combination of French and German education models? Second, what should be expected from the new model of higher education that considers the big ideas of accessibility, class, and public good while bringing the most value into the development of the first socialist state?

The first question had two possible answers: make existing universities serve the objectives of socialist development or destroy them completely to build something new. The decision to choose the former answer took some time. Initially, the traditional universities were preserved to keep science alive. Yet the Bolsheviks, a radical political faction led by Lenin, did not trust traditional professors from the bourgeoisie to educate the new working-class generation. They also wanted to influence all intellectual fields with Marxist philosophy, a preference that made them critical of the hierarchical structure of traditional universities, and the power relations between professors and students. They considered rigid sequential curricula and exams as barriers for working-class youth, so they initiated experiments to implement the idea of accessible, liberating knowledge. One such experiment was people's universities, which these youth had unlimited access to, and where they studied without strict curricula and exams. Other experiments included peer-to-peer learning groups (mainly for Marxism studies) in factories and public organizations, open lectures by famous scientists for workers and soldiers, and a communist academy.

The traditional universities were also affected by experiments with the formats and organization of higher learning, and with attempts to eliminate traditional power relations in academia. The Bolsheviks insisted that professors and students should be equal. Thus, in some universities, exams were eliminated as an exercise in power. In addition to such reforms, students could choose courses freely. New leaders also experimented with collective learning and peer-to-peer learning within the traditional university setting and introduced mandatory social service practices for professors and students.

Another experiment that partially survived was what we today call "part-time education." In other words, part-time study by working students. This experiment came from attempts to find effective combinations of study and work. Later, it enabled the development of the largest system of part-time education in the world and education approaches that were connected to specific enterprises. Some of these experiments lasted until the early 1930s. Prominent scholar and education reformer John Dewey wrote admiring words about these experiments in his 1929 book, *Impressions of Soviet Russia and the Revolutionary World*, in which he stated, "The Russian educational situation is enough to convert one to the idea that only in a society based upon the cooperative principle can the ideals of educational reformers be adequately carried into operation."⁵ However, most of these experiments failed. The institutional arrangements were not stable, and they

faced troubles with scaling in both the socioeconomic conditions and the new political regime that developed during Joseph Stalin's period of leading the Soviet Union (1924–1953).

Later, Lenin (and subsequently Stalin) realized that they could and should use the traditional machinery of higher education for their own purposes. Therefore, the idea of keeping elements of traditional university organization – such as rigid curricula, exams, and distance between professors and students – was not a part of the socialist model. This organizational model won partly because of its inertia despite the dramatic changes happening outside of it. Lenin made it very clear in a speech delivered at the Third All-Russia Congress of The Russian Young Communist League in 1920: “It is said that the old school was a school of purely book knowledge, of ceaseless drilling and grinding. That is true, but we must distinguish between what was bad in the old schools and what is useful to us, and we must be able to select from it what is necessary for communism.”⁶ How have the higher-education institutions evolved in this dialectical process between socialist ideas of higher education, the hierarchical education models inherited from Europe, and the Soviet government's use of these stratified models to build their own hierarchical version of socialist society?

In 1990, over twelve million students attended universities in socialist countries that had similar higher-education systems based on the fundamental ideas discussed above, with minimal variation. This could be explained by the centralized system of national control behind the Soviet Union's state organization, and the consistent model of higher education that emerged from early Soviet trial and error with education reform. At the time, many “first world” countries allied with the Western Bloc (led by the United States) – and “third world” countries neutral to both the Western and Eastern Bloc (led by the Soviet Union) – implemented some elements of this revised model, sometimes without reference. The main practical characteristics of this later system in relation to the founding principles of the socialist model follow education as a public good, free and equal access to instruction, and class-based education approaches.

The idea of higher education as an exclusively public good transformed into the idea of higher education as a state good, since, in the socialist society, everything public was controlled and owned by the socialist state. For example, the owner of the university was not the people-nation-public but the state. This is one of the striking paradoxes of the disconnect between discussion and implementation. In discussion, Lenin proposed theoretical ideas about the elimination of the state, and the transfer of power to the masses that would destroy the separation between governors and the governed. However, in implementation, Lenin's ideas and Marxist interpretations of them considered the Soviet Union as the state and as an all-embracing institution.⁷

This initial idea of higher education as a public good was entrenched in the United States and Europe in the nineteenth century via U.S. land-grant universities and the Humboldtian model of higher education, whose core idea is a holistic combination of research and studies. American state universities were supposed to be accessible to everyone. The state owned these universities and funded them, resulting in low tuition costs for students. Therefore, the important condition for implementing these ideas was the principle that higher education should be provided by the state, leaving no space for private education. This had powerful consequences such as making the higher-education system a part of the state bureaucracy. By contrast, in the Soviet Union, this idea was implemented in two additional directions.

In the first direction, higher education became a machine that produced manpower for the socialist economy. Lenin's government quickly realized the importance of specialized skills and knowledge for successful industrial development. Since he viewed socialism as one unified factory, he also saw skills development as the sector in the factory responsible for manpower production. In letters and resolutions, he stressed education as a source of productivity increase.⁸ Thus universities, following this approach, had to become part of the socialist production machine and develop useful skills and knowledge within their students. The Bolsheviks predicted the idea of human capital, strongly believing that it should be nationalized. The state, for instance, could plan how many people it should prepare for different economic sectors because the socialist plan was not just about the number of cars to be assembled, but also about the number of engineers to prepare for such specific jobs. This vocational approach was inspired by the idea of labor division as a universal perspective in all spheres of life.

In the greater mechanism of the state economy, each student was seen as a cog with highly specialized skills, which was achieved through specialized training for specific jobs, and rapid response to technological innovations. The Soviet government easily created new universities to respond to changing needs. For example, during the Cold War arms race, universities were established for the nuclear and space industries. This system not only created a supply of skilled workers but also matched them with employer demand through state economic planning and mandatory job placement, providing guaranteed employment and relatively high training efficiency. Specialized training also required a curriculum that was meticulous and focused, but this narrowly specialized character of higher education was not a feature by itself – it was a logical consequence of the idea to prepare people for very specific jobs.

At the same time, narrowly specialized training could not be called “vocational,” as stated by many sources in the literature. The graduates had extensive training in Marxist humanities, as well as mandatory foreign language and physical education classes during their first three years of study. In the 1930s, the growth

of this narrow system was fortified by the creation of specialized institutes, as well as the separation of such institutes from large multidisciplinary universities. Even agricultural universities could be divided into specific higher-education institutions of livestock, milk technologies, grain production, and so on. In the post-socialist countries of Central and Eastern Europe, specialized institutions have largely become multidisciplinary universities and have been placed under the control of these countries' education ministries.⁹

Some features of specialized higher education were typical for countries going through an industrial revolution. Just as land-grant universities did in the late nineteenth century in the United States, Soviet polytechnic universities, agricultural, engineering, and pedagogical institutions, provided infrastructure for rapid human capital development to meet the needs of growing industries. We must not forget about the territorial and geographical features of this education approach either, seeing as the task of developing the territory for academic institutions was no less acute. Universities acted as part of the standard infrastructure of new cities, along with hospitals, kindergartens, and libraries. The peculiarity of the Soviet project was that these investments were purely state owned, in contrast to initiatives that were implemented in the Russian Empire and other countries with opportunities for large private investments and public-private partnerships. For example, The National Research Tomsk State University (known as Tomsk University during the Soviet era) was established by Russian Emperor Alexander II in 1878, with the support of private investments and other major funds from entrepreneurs, industrialists, businessmen, and local city councils.¹⁰ A similar approach was used in other socialist countries where universities served as important drivers of territorial economic development.

In the second direction for implementing the idea of higher education as a public good, higher education became an engine driving the construction of a communist society. Lenin believed that the next generation would be free from capitalist memories and could therefore become the real driving force for the construction of communism, the new social order. He insisted that socialist universities should bridge the gap between life and practice:

One of the greatest evils and misfortunes left to us by the old, capitalist society is the complete rift between books and practical life That is why it would be most mistaken merely to assimilate book knowledge about communism. Without work and without struggle, book knowledge of communism obtained from communist pamphlets and works is absolutely worthless, for it would continue the old separation of theory and practice, the old rift, which was the most pernicious feature of the old, bourgeois society.¹¹

The implementation of this task created probably the most important feature of the early socialist model: social activism, the "fourth mission" of universities.¹²

It was not just about the practical implementation of learned skills. It was about active transformation of the social and cultural environment. Students and professors became active preachers of the communist ideology; they participated in the creation of new proletarian culture, including political movements like early Soviet Vanguardism; and they helped workers and peasants in their practical tasks.

It is important to note that there were two distinct periods in the development of socialist higher education. The socialist model of the first developmental period emerged in the early days of the Soviet Union. Gramsci discussed the model and stressed that universities could become a major source of social transformation and cultural revolution, even in their traditional organizational structure.¹³ This model assumed that the mission of the higher-education system is not the reproduction of an existing social order but the production of a new one. It had an emphasis on community outreach, creativity, and dynamism. In all socialist countries, higher education gradually entered its second developmental period when it became part of both the state and the party bureaucracy, fixed with the main task of reproducing existing socialist society. It made social activism formal, transforming political action into political obedience and conformity to reproduce the new party hierarchy.

After higher education as a public good, the second founding principle of the socialist model – free and equal access to education – had two directions for implementation. First, the Bolsheviks aimed to make higher education universally accessible and free but were unable to make it fully universal because access was primarily based on meritocratic selection with some exceptions. Despite this selectivity, it is notable that the Soviet Union and other socialist countries had higher university enrollment rates than many wealthy countries. In 1913, the Russian Empire had just sixty-three state and fifty-four private institutions of higher education. These were elite institutions with high tuition costs and around one hundred thousand students. In 1923, there were over two hundred eighty institutions with more than two hundred ten thousand students, and by 1940, there were eight hundred twenty institutions with eight hundred thousand students.

Second, the idea of fair access differed from that of equal access. Socialists believed that justice was fundamentally class-based and should account for initial inequalities, either through affirmative actions or additional support for students from lower socioeconomic backgrounds. The Bolsheviks pioneered large-scale positive discrimination by implementing the idea of fair and wide access, which went hand in hand with negative discrimination against students from educated and wealthy classes. This access was broadly related to social engineering, deliberately supporting what would now be called first-generation college students. This system of affirmative action helped build a new social structure, as expressed by lyrics from “The Internationale,” an international anthem adopted by the Com-

munist Party: “He who was nothing will become everything!”¹⁴ Positive discrimination provided opportunities for social mobility, gender equality, and the development of small ethnic groups.

Soviet leadership introduced not only many categories of quotas but also other instruments of educational support for students from disadvantaged backgrounds. These included grants for young people from working-class families who completed military service and went to university, as well as part-time and evening education for working students that became a popular form of instruction. Combined with a regulated labor market, these measures had a strong and lasting impact. By 1930, around 34 percent of students in institutions of higher education came from working and peasant families. By 1950, the figure increased to 66 percent, with women accounting for about 42 percent of students in higher education.

It is important to note that the process of social engineering not only employed positive discrimination but also involved dramatic negative discrimination against students who belonged to overeducated groups, such as children from bourgeois families in the 1920s and 1930s or Jewish students from the 1950s through the 1970s. All socialist countries used different forms of affirmative action to achieve better representation for underrepresented groups – for instance, students from rural areas in China, the Romani populations in Eastern Europe, or the Afro-Cuban population in Cuba. Many universities had special officers (now known as diversity officers) who controlled admission and educational support measures for such students.

A class-based education approach, the third founding principle of the socialist model, meant that higher education should not only train qualified specialists but also produce leaders, elites, and people with coherent ideological values. In other words, the “new Soviet person.” This led to two radical and practical innovations in defining higher-education objectives. The first innovation was that all graduates should be equipped with deep knowledge of Marxism. The second was that all graduates should become highly moral people focused on the collective good. These two innovative objectives were interconnected but different, with the former being about knowledge and the latter being about attitudes and values. They were also critical parts of the Soviet nation-building process in territories with extremely diverse populations in terms of culture, language, and history. Higher-education institutions played an important role in promoting a universal curriculum and common approaches to the educational process.

To return to the first objective, becoming expert Marxists required a deep dive into Marxism. Universities never agreed to call this process indoctrination, as Marxists considered Marxism a science rather than a doctrine to memorize or believe. As such, Marxism-Leninism courses were integrated into the mandatory curriculum for all fields of study, taking up 10 to 20 percent of learning time. These

courses were given high academic status and combined in a logical sequence, with a typical set including topics such as “History of the Communist Party” and “Scientific Atheism” in the first year, “Dialectical and Historical Materialism” in the second year, “Marxist Political Economy” in the third year, and “Scientific Communism” in the fourth year. The syllabi for these courses were developed centrally in Moscow Communist Party institutes and became dogma, with professors required to follow them precisely. The teaching of Marxism in courses lacked any element of questioning and doubt, focusing instead on memorizing ideological texts, rewriting them, and reproducing correct interpretations and accepted quotations. This learning method made Marxism more like a religious cult than a philosophical doctrine. No studies have been conducted on the efficacy of such mandatory scientific training in Marxism, but one can assume that it was low. For instance, millions of those who studied scientific atheism eventually joined traditional religions after the collapse of socialism.

Concerning the formation of a new Soviet person, the second objective of Soviet higher education, universities became responsible for actively engaging students through extracurricular activities – namely, amateur theater, arts, and sport activities, as well as community service (known today as service-learning). The primary mission of these activities was to develop the importance of collective action. Ninety-nine percent of students were members of the All-Union Leninist Young Communist League, also known as the *Komsomol*, a political youth organization sometimes described as the youth division of the Communist Party, despite its independent status. In addition, each university had a committee that wielded a strong voice and independent resources toward students’ collective, political action. These committees supported student initiatives, as long as they did not contradict the dominant ideology and norms. They also conducted annual evaluations of students’ moral stance and social engagement.

It is worth noting that the hidden curriculum embedded in the Soviet education model influenced the formation of this new Soviet personality, creating someone who gained the right to work, who accepted the universality of individual educational and professional trajectories, and who succumbed to the illusion that those trajectories were being planned and optimized at the national level. Though the learning plans for each field of study were standardized, their large class workloads and limited independent work provided no room for students to make valuable educational and life choices. And while these plans also maintained the illusion of providing an optimal personal track toward postgraduate success, they denied individual responsibility and agency. In exchange for students’ transferring the rights to their personal educational choices, the state guaranteed them societal success through their chosen trajectory, which was centered on the ability and right to work. Therefore, during the second period of implementing the socialist model, an era that emphasized societal reproduction and the objective of

forming a new Soviet person, the idea of creating a socially active, collectivist person turned into training young students for hypocrisy and obedience.

These new socialist elements in educational objectives and the educational process led to specific organizational features of universities. Western researchers studying socialist higher education often emphasized severe limitations on academic freedom within this model, and this is correct. However, it is important to stress that this was a logical consequence of the entire model. These limitations did not affect freedom of research in the natural sciences, medicine, or engineering after Stalin's governance. They limited political freedoms but did not stop scientific discussions if they avoided Marxist dogmas. Moreover, universities had more intellectual freedom than other organizations. For example, professors and students had access to modern art and books authorized only for science libraries. Even in Marxist disciplines, the principles of scientific rigor and academic honesty exercised by natural science and engineering communities positively influenced the culture of higher education.

The role of the Communist Party and the Komsomol in socialist higher education was quite complex. These two organizations existed not just for ideological control but also provided some degree of pluralism and debate within the executive hierarchy. Socialist universities had a dual-governance model in which the senior executive (rector or president) had significant power and was subordinate to the government's minister of higher education. At the same time, the Communist Party secretary was independent and coregulated many aspects of university life, including personnel policies. He had a completely different line of command in the territorial party committee, compared to the rector who was a member of the university party committee. These executives had complex relationships that often led to conflicts, as well as some discussions that replaced the classical form of shared governance.

When the USSR collapsed in the early 1990s, the former Soviet republics and countries of the socialist bloc in Europe faced not only newfound freedom, but also the resulting consequences of poverty, loosely coupled governance, and painful breaks in social order and social perception of justice. Though many layers of Soviet-era institutional structures and organizations fell off from higher education during this time, many also remained.¹⁵ Two examples among the layers that did not survive are coherent ideological education and formative moral education. Case studies such as Turkmenistan showed how Marxist courses were easily replaced by new ideologies formulated in postsocialist works like *Ruhnama*, a two-volume work written by one of the country's former presidents, Saparmurat Niyazov, that served as a tool of state propaganda and cultural history.¹⁶ Through cases such as this, the idea of higher education as a driving force for constructing new societies became clear. In other former constituent countries, new

universities were established to support the new aims of socioeconomic development, namely training new national bureaucracies, diplomatic corps, academics, and other professionals. By the mid-2000s, universities had received more attention from the state and large private establishments. In the decades since, universities have become part of national state-building strategies that treat higher-education institutions as drivers of their global enterprise and large-scale initiatives for competitive excellence.

Throughout these postsocialist developments, the perception of higher education as a public or state good has remained crucial. Current Russian higher education presents an interesting case in the duality of practical approaches, as seen in the binary of tuition-based admissions (a private marketized good), compared with tuition-free admissions (a relative public good). The opening of private education institutions made it possible, almost universally, to increase participation in higher-education systems. Affirmative action measures have also survived in a drastically decreased form. While societies experienced increasing inequality in the distribution of economic capital, merit-based access to higher education became a dominant source of equality, reflecting the idea of new fairness by rarely considering the socioeconomic background of applicants' families.

Although the labor market changed dramatically and the plan system of standardized study was abandoned, the idea of strong links between universities and the labor market persisted, even after the collapse of the socialist system. However, even in nonsocialist countries, the connections between labor markets and universities to graduates' employability persist as key policy issues, to ensure universities provide markets with a steady supply of graduates who are equipped with the specific skills demanded by today's employers. Toward this aim, some former Soviet countries have introduced mandatory job placement for students trained at the expense of state funding. Even more formerly constituent countries are trying to improve graduates' employment through organized contacts (usually in the form of contracts) with industries, while bachelor's and master's programs, as well as education in private universities, have supported students' flexibility within their educational and professional trajectories. The neighboring Baltic states of Estonia, Latvia, and Lithuania recently succeeded in national reforms to higher education and curricula.¹⁷ However, the specialized curriculum is still strong, preparing graduates for specific skills-based jobs with limited variability and choice.

We believe that the main lesson from our study of the socialist education model is the risk of totalitarianism demonstrated by the history this essay reconstructed, a history in which humanistic dreams about perfect universities in a perfect society transformed over time. As soon as high social objectives became mandatory for everyone, the energy and initiative to re-

alize such objectives were focused on social control, pressure, and reproduction, rather than on the production of a new social order. The expansion of mandatory values in Soviet-era universities (and any university system by extension) also created power struggles instead of meaningful discussions and free individual choice. At the same time, some ideas and elements of the socialist model were actively used in nonsocialist countries, both prior to and following the collapse of the USSR. Many of them are still good sources for the invention of effective social and educational instruments that improve higher-education systems.

The reconstructed history and path-dependence analysis that guided this essay also highlight the development of universities as drivers of economic growth. This view became quite popular in many countries that aligned the supply of skilled students from universities with the demands of employers in the labor market. We noted the growing discourse of employability as an important outcome of higher education, along with mechanisms piloted in socialist countries, like industrial practice and early employment contracts, which could be used in different economic settings. The idea of having specialized universities for fast-growing sectors of the economy in developing countries proved to be effective then and can be used more widely now, as universities worldwide continue to work as drivers of social and cultural transformation. We see many elements today of social mobilization, for example, in universities that include the green agenda and social sustainability in their missions.¹⁸

The socialist model has played its role in higher education and was attractive due to its promotion of founding principles like free and equal access. In current times, many countries have outperformed early socialist experiments with the expansion of their higher-education systems. Nordic countries are a good example of higher-education systems with high rates of participation. They are also closer than other countries to the ideal society theorized by early utopian socialists.¹⁹ At the same time, many countries elsewhere struggle with expanding public provision of higher education, but we think some ideas and approaches from the socialist model could help. Take the rapid scale-up of online higher education, for instance. Perhaps the early stages of the comparably rapid growth of higher-education systems in socialist countries could be used as a blueprint for expanding online education. At present, that expansion is mostly driven by fee-based programs. However, with fair scaling, it could become a great force for democratizing access to higher education.

Large-scale affirmative actions in Western nations, states, and countries were an obvious response to the socialist model's principle of fair access. Today, these actions exist in many countries around the world where they continue to support social mobility. Still, the practical experience of having socialist systems reinforce social mobility (through targeted access to higher education) suggests that we must take a deeper look at not just the entrance to university, but at success after

enrollment. Different instruments of enriching nontraditional students' higher-education capital could be used to increase the effectiveness of the fair-access system.²⁰

The Marxist idea to teach liberating knowledge at universities became quite popular in the second half of the twentieth century, especially in postcolonial countries, but we think the lesson this idea imparted is more negative. A class-based approach to teaching, the last founding principle of the socialist model, easily became an instrument for indoctrination and limiting free thought. But there was an upside in the idea that universities should engage in formative education aimed at students' personal development, which also supports discovery of their sense of purpose within a collectivist framework. In the first quarter of the twenty-first century, this idea is becoming more popular again, with some researchers recommending deeper study of topics like the creation of Chinese collectivist values, since most Chinese scholars in the field of higher education have found interesting connections between Marxist and Confucian ideas. We think, overall, that the socialist experiments discussed in this essay show how risky and complex the field of value education is. However, we can always learn more about the socialists' attempts to connect higher education and the real world in ways that inspired reformists like John Dewey a century ago.

AUTHORS' NOTE

The authors of this essay had firsthand encounters with the socialist model of higher education. One of them is a direct product of its implementation during the Soviet era; the other studied at a post-Soviet university that was both on the Soviet path and trying to overcome it. The authors' dialogue within this essay supported an attempt to separate personal impressions from the objective picture. In doing so, it became clear that socialist ideas concerning education, and practical attempts to implement them, deserve to play a role in the discussion of the evolution of higher education in the world.

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The Geopolitics of Academic Freedom : Universities, Democracy & the Authoritarian Challenge

Michael Ignatieff

This essay examines why academic freedom has become a defining issue in the geostrategic competition between liberal democracies and their authoritarian challengers. The growing strategic rivalry between the United States and China is threatening to disrupt, even destroy, academic interchange between liberal and authoritarian societies. At the same time, populist right-wing leaders in Western democracies are attacking university autonomy, as part of a strategy of authoritarian consolidation. Hungary's prime minister Viktor Orbán has pursued an authoritarian takeover of his country's higher-education system while seeking new partnerships with Chinese institutions. Through this essay, I seek to explain why academic freedom faces unprecedented challenges, both within liberal democracies and from authoritarian competitors.

Academic freedom has become a defining issue in the geostrategic competition between liberal democracies and authoritarian regimes worldwide. It is also at the center of the authoritarian populist challenge to liberal democracy in free societies. To grasp how these two dimensions interconnect, I look in detail at Viktor Orbán's Hungary, since his rule demonstrates how one nominally democratic regime has targeted academic freedom at home, while seeking partnerships with authoritarian regimes abroad. Academic freedom is at stake in these geostrategic conflicts because it is more than a professional privilege enjoyed by tenured faculty. It's a sustaining pillar of democracy, one of the checks and balances of a democratic system, and it entitles tenured members of a university community to write and teach without interference from governments, university administrators, colleagues, or public opinion. This freedom also comes with obligations to subscribe to the standards of academic excellence and to tolerate, if not respect, divergent opinion in academic exchange and in the classroom.¹ The freedom of individual academics depends, in turn, on the capacity of universities to set academic priorities free of interference from government or corporate interests.

Academic freedom and democratic freedom depend on each other. When democracy's checks and balances are respected, when the rule of law is upheld,

when elected officials respect the autonomy of the institutions of a liberal democratic state, university autonomy is respected too. Where these wider democratic guarantees are challenged, universities find themselves vulnerable to political attack. In a time of “democratic recession,” academic freedom has come under extraordinary pressure from authoritarians abroad and authoritarian populists at home.²

Globalization brings Western academic freedom face to face with the academic cultures of authoritarian states. Universities from these opposing systems are linked in global networks through which students, faculty, research partnerships, and corporate relationships flow.³ While universities have been transnational institutions since the Middle Ages, after the Cold War, they have transformed themselves from provincial institutions training local elites into global institutions recruiting international talent.

Unlike the totalitarian regimes of the 1930s or the Communist tyrannies of the Cold War, authoritarian regimes in the twenty-first century know that if their academic institutions have any chance at excellence or innovative research, they must be free to engage with leading universities in democratic societies. Authoritarian regimes and single-party states like Singapore, for example, have built world-class universities.⁴ China has invested in academic excellence too. As Chinese universities ascend the global rankings, their leadership knows that the universities of free societies continue to set the standard for achievement.⁵ The Chinese government allows its universities to exchange with competitors and permits their students to study abroad, reckoning that international exchange does not threaten regime control. Russia has taken a different course: allowing universities to languish to prevent them from breeding challenges to Vladimir Putin’s rule.⁶

Since the end of the Cold War, Western universities have expanded ambitiously into authoritarian territory in the Middle East, the former Soviet Union, Vietnam, and China. Through the campuses they have established there, these universities’ leaders believe they can reconcile academic freedom with the restraints imposed by their host countries. NYU Abu Dhabi, for example, claims that its courses critically analyze the political systems of the Gulf State oligarchies.⁷ NYU Shanghai tries to maintain an intellectually open environment in a host country that restricts access to the internet. The Schwarzman Scholars who study at Tsinghua University in Beijing are nominally free to write critically about the Chinese Communist Party or Chinese institutions, but putting these freedoms into practice has been difficult.⁸

Academic institutions from authoritarian societies that have expanded into the democratic West likewise claim that they respect the canons of academic freedom. The Confucius Institutes that China has established on campuses across the world claim they are independent institutions. Yet the leaders of some Western countries disagree and have taken steps to send them home.⁹ During the Cold

War, the Soviet Union and China were scarcely integrated into the global economy, and the rare student exchanges between Eastern and Western countries were highly supervised. Nowadays, Chinese students are a rising segment at American, British, Canadian, and Australian universities. Western institutions that depend on income from Chinese students must allow criticism of authoritarian regimes in their classrooms, without alienating the authoritarian governments that allow their revenue streams to flow.¹⁰ Similarly, authoritarian governments must allow their students to study abroad while ensuring they don't return with democratic aspirations.¹¹ They do so by keeping their students under surveillance overseas. This exerts a chilling effect on what these students feel free to say in class.¹² Russia and China are not the only culprits, however. An Egyptian student attending a European university, who posted critiques of President Abdel Fattah el-Sisi's regime on Facebook, found himself arrested upon his return to Cairo, and jailed for two years.¹³

China and the United States are strategic competitors, but they still seek to maintain interactions between their respective university systems. In the words of U.S. National Security Advisor Jake Sullivan, the United States seeks to achieve this equilibrium through a policy known as "small yard, high fence." That is, the United States will fence off a small number of sensitive technologies and research areas, prohibit Chinese companies and researchers from participating in these areas, and leave most technological and intellectual fields open for business and academic exchange.¹⁴ This is the theory. In practice, as strategic competition between the United States and China intensifies, academic freedom is likely to become a casualty, with a resulting loss of understanding and contact between two of the leading university systems in the world.¹⁵

The competition between authoritarian regimes and liberal democracies is both geostrategic and ideological. In this contest, academic freedom has become central to the self-definition of liberal democracy.¹⁶ Institutions free to govern themselves and produce new knowledge are essential elements of democracy itself, along with majority rule, checks and balances, an independent judiciary, rule of law, and constitutional rights. Private universities are one of the counter-majoritarian institutions that helps keep people free. In their competition with authoritarian states, democracies defend this view of academic freedom. But it has come under attack within democracies themselves by authoritarian populists who claim that democracy is simply majority rule.¹⁷ Take, for example, populist representatives in Republican-held state legislatures. Across the United States, they reject the counter-majoritarian vision of the university by painting institutions that define their roles this way as bastions of elite privilege and liberal political correctness.¹⁸

Thus, American universities find themselves caught in a partisan political debate about what democracy means. This brings them face-to-face with contradictions in their own relationship to the democratic system at home. Ideally, a uni-

iversity trains citizens for life while protecting ideas and their authors from the tyranny of the majority. To that end, the university is the custodian of the knowledge democratic societies use to make their decisions. But the university also protects those who criticize the prevailing shibboleths of the tribe.¹⁹ These two vocations – custodian and critic – are in tension, and the tensions can explode when academic institutions position themselves as public spaces for debating what counts as knowledge. While university leadership would like to see their institutions as civil referees in these debates, they cannot avoid being dragged into partisan controversies. And just as in competitive sports, when the university tries to referee knowledge debates, it is inevitable that the players will complain about the referee.

Universities can't pretend to be neutral arbiters of their societies' divisions. Administrators, faculty, and students can't stand apart from the racial, gender, and class conflicts that divide their societies. Since they are bound to associate personally with social identities and their related social-justice claims, the skeptical detachment that should characterize academic discussion often falls by the wayside. Furthermore, when universities are attacked by political actors on the outside, those inside begin defining themselves as defenders of truth, rather than as neutral arbiters of social debates. Instead of standing up as guardians of genuine pluralism in democratic dialogues, universities retreat into becoming covens of enforced moral consensus.

Academic institutions have been drawn into the center of democratic struggles over justice because their training and research functions, as well as their adjudicative role in cultural debates, give them unprecedented cultural power. University research, assisted by massive amounts of state funding and corporate investment, has become a key incubator for innovation in society at large.²⁰ Oxford University's partnership with AstraZeneca – which took vaccines developed through academic research into commercial production during the emergency stages of the COVID-19 pandemic – is a dramatic example of the way universities now produce innovations that make life-or-death differences in the societies they serve.²¹

In democratic societies and authoritarian ones alike, universities recruit, train, and accredit ruling elites. In China, prestigious institutions like Tsinghua University have become the gate of entry to the Communist *nomenklatura*. In democratic societies, the university's credentialing function has become critical to the management of democracy's deepest discontents, by expanding access to higher education.²² In the past fifty years, Western universities have opened their doors to expand opportunity to students from under-resourced communities and renew democracy's elite. In supporting the upward mobility of those once excluded for their race, ethnicity, class, or gender, the university helps legitimize and stabilize societies divided by these fissures. That being said, admission policies have still become a proxy target for public frustration at the inequality that has surged in advanced democracies since the 1980s.

Universities have power, but their role in “platforming” or “deplatforming” speakers and opinions exposes them to political attack.²³ They also do themselves no favors when students and faculty defend truth claims as if they were identity claims, and identity claims as if they were truth claims – or when, as a result, academics come to care more about winning ideological arguments than advancing scholarship. Academic freedom can be destroyed from within for the same reason that democracy can, when those who benefit from its freedoms can’t be counted on to put its welfare ahead of their own ambitions. Universities are also contested spaces because they are the place where previously imperial societies reckon with their colonial legacies. Institutions that once never paused to question the suitability of a statue honoring a slaveholder, or a monument to an imperialist adventurer, now face new questions from a generation of inquisitive students recruited from every race, creed, and color around the world.²⁴

Unlike schools in authoritarian societies, democratic universities can do little to isolate themselves from these ideological pressures. Globalization inundates universities with international styles of intellectual self-righteousness. A scholarly enthusiasm that begins at an elite institution, to deplatform (read: disinvite) certain speakers or ideas, is soon replicated at other institutions around the world. Digital media increases the speed and force of attacks on the credibility of unpopular thinkers, and brings the full force of public opinion to bear on what used to be intermural academic controversies. Just as the Protestant Reformation of the sixteenth century, combined with the printing press, broke apart the Catholic Church’s monopoly on knowledge, so the digital revolution is challenging the university’s traditional authority over knowledge. Everyone possesses the equivalent of the Library of Alexandria on their smartphones, fostering a secular equivalent of the “priesthood of all believers,” with each user believing they have unique access to the educational equivalent of gospel truth. From where they sit, authoritarian regimes watch the knowledge crisis unfold in free societies, and it strengthens their determination to keep both social media and universities under single-party control.

Modern democratic governments are also watching the university’s rise to power, with a skeptical eye. As the chief financiers of higher education, governments will respect university autonomy only so long as the staggering cost of higher education produces clear social benefit. Governments naturally believe that he who pays the piper calls the tune. Authoritarian populists, in particular, use the power of the purse to influence curriculum and hiring decisions, and university autonomy can suffer as a result. Further pressure on academic freedom comes from corporations. Large corporate interests need the university to train their engineers and experts, but they also want to acquire the intellectual property that originates in research labs. Universities also want to collaborate with businesses, but such opportunities expose them to incentives that divert research from pure objectives to applied and

profitable avenues. These latter aims do not always square with a university's commitment to research agendas free from external control.

Unless resisted by strong university leadership, these converging pressures – from populist governments, private corporations, and globalized intellectual trends – can end up distorting a university's fundamental purpose. Universities exist to teach people to think for themselves, in order to become autonomous individuals and responsible citizens. If this is the ultimate rationale for academic freedom, democratic universities too often are failing to live up to their own ideals. Moreover, the pressures that corporations, governments, and societies exert on the university make it difficult for faculty, students, and administrators to retain control of university learning and research. As a result, when liberal democracies defend the academic freedom of their institutions against their authoritarian competitors, it is questionable whether their universities are as free as they claim.

This is the geostrategic context in which academic freedom needs to be understood, as a context in which authoritarian and democratic societies constantly interact, with students, researchers, and teachers moving between two competing systems. On the authoritarian side, universities seek to maintain just enough academic freedom to permit innovation and learning, without allowing so much freedom that it jeopardizes their regimes. On the democratic side, universities struggle to maintain their autonomy in an increasingly polarized struggle, between liberals and conservatives, for power and cultural influence in democratic societies. In this context, the democratic university's challenge is to remain open to students from authoritarian states, and to welcome research collaborations with institutes in such states, without allowing its norms of freedom to be compromised by the democratic tumult at its doors.

Having laid out a framework for understanding the relationship between universities in authoritarian and democratic societies, I want to focus on the challenge posed by authoritarian populist governments to academic freedom in nominally democratic societies. Prime Minister Narendra Modi's India, President Recep Tayyip Erdoğan's Turkey, and many Republican legislators in the United States have made universities and their freedoms a central target of their policies. I will concentrate attention, however, on Prime Minister Viktor Orbán's Hungary. In his own region, Polish, Czech, Slovak, Serbian, and Slovenian governments have copied some elements of his program of authoritarian consolidation. But as one of the longest authoritarian populists in power (since 2010), Orbán's influence extends worldwide.

This populist turn in Eastern Europe, exemplified by Orbán, is an unexpected outcome of the collapse of its Communist regimes between 1989 and 1991. Eastern Europe set out on a path to democracy, crafting free constitutions to meet the accession criteria for membership in the European Union (EU). Besides separation

of powers, democratic elections, rule of law, privatization of state industries, and media pluralism, these accession criteria included constitutional guarantees for freedom of teaching and research. The Hungarian constitution, for instance, contains explicit guarantees of academic freedom.²⁵

Yet once accepted into the European Union, authoritarian populist leaders – such as Orbán in Hungary, Prime Minister Robert Fico in Slovakia, former President Václav Klaus in the Czech Republic, and former President Lech Kaczyński in Poland – have turned the tables on the accession process. Instead of converging toward Western European norms, they have used democratic victories to weaken counter-majoritarian institutions, reward loyalists with state assets, demonize and neutralize the opposition, and consolidate single-party rule.²⁶ No one has traveled further down this road than Orbán. Since winning a majority in the parliamentary elections of 2010, and three electoral victories since then, he has pioneered a form of authoritarian rule he calls “illiberal democracy.”²⁷ In this configuration, a single party wins a roughly free election. Upon taking power, it uses democratic institutions to weaken democracy by gerrymandering the electoral system, demonizing the opposition, and destroying the independence of the civil service. The Orbán regime and other authoritarian rulers who have followed his path have rewritten the constitution to muzzle the judiciary; changed the rules of the free press to ensure the sector is dominated by media companies owned by executives close to the regime; and, finally, eliminated the constitutionally guaranteed autonomy of universities, along with the individual freedom of their teachers and students.²⁸

In early 2017, Orbán achieved this latter aim by setting out to evict the last fully independent university remaining in Hungary: the U.S. accredited Central European University (CEU) in Budapest. The private research university was founded in 1991 by Hungarian American financier George Soros and a small group of dissident Eastern European intellectuals. By the 2010s, it had established a reputation as the best graduate university in the social sciences and humanities in Hungary, and one of the better schools of its type in Europe. Central European University was a refuge for critical Budapest intellectuals, but the university never ventured into politics or challenged the prevailing regime. Nevertheless, in March 2017, the Orbán regime introduced a bill into parliament requiring all private universities from non-EU states, with programs in Hungary, to secure a government permit to operate. No such university would be allowed to function in Hungary if it did not run a campus in its homeland. By excluding European institutions from the ban, the law neatly avoided censure in the European Union. This exclusion also meant that it was tailored to apply to CEU, since it was the only institution in Hungary without a domestic campus in its home country (the United States).

The law, soon known as “lex CEU,” was rubber-stamped by a legislature in which Orbán had a two-thirds majority. Faced with direct attack from the government, CEU discovered that it had no right of appeal. Orbán and his allies had already stripped

the courts, presidency, media, and parliament of their independence. The constitutionality of *lex CEU* was confirmed by a president appointed by the prime minister, and when CEU sought to appeal the decision, the Curia (that is, the Supreme Court of Hungary) ruled that the court had no jurisdiction. In May 2017, eighty thousand people assembled before the Hungarian Parliament in the largest political demonstration in Budapest since 1989. The crowd chanted, “*Szabad ország! Szabad egyetem!*” (“Free country! Free university!”).²⁹ The regime ignored them. It successfully rendered an accredited academic institution illegal in a European Union member state. This was the most serious attack on academic freedom in Europe since the expulsion of German and Italian antifascist academics in the 1930s.

European politicians universally condemned Orbán’s attack on CEU, but rhetoric was not backed by effective pressure like suspending Hungary’s structural subsidies from the European Union. The failure of these leaders to act laid bare certain core realities about the European Union – notably, that it is an association of sovereign states committed to defending their own prerogatives, especially for education. The European Commission did appeal *lex CEU* to the European Court of Justice in late 2017. But it wasn’t until 2020 that the court would finally rule that the law violated CEU’s right to establish and operate a business in an EU state. The legal basis of the decision further showed that EU treaty law does not contain legally enforceable guarantees of academic freedom and institutional autonomy. As a result, it could only rule that Hungary had damaged CEU’s corporate and commercial interests as a business entity.³⁰ The court’s decision was justice delayed, justice denied. By early 2019, concerned that the impasse would jeopardize recruitment efforts and compromise the continuity of its educational offerings, CEU moved its operations across the border to Vienna. Hungary ignored the court ruling and to this day CEU is unable to re-establish teaching programs in the country.

Orbán’s attack on CEU was never about its teaching, research, or academic standing. The university was a hostage in the prime minister’s political battle with George Soros – the institution’s founder, Hungary’s best-known private citizen, and one of the world’s most prominent liberal philanthropists. In the parliamentary election campaign of 2018, Orbán and the Fidesz party plastered the country with posters depicting a laughing Soros and the line: “Don’t let Soros have the last laugh.” The campaign blamed the philanthropist for instigating the flow of refugees into Hungary during the migrant crisis in 2015. Thus, Soros’s “open society” initiative was parsed to mean “open borders.” The campaign also cunningly recycled anti-Semitic tropes of the 1930s (for example, “Why are the Jews laughing at us?”), while denying any anti-Semitic intentions. The campaign won Orbán a third successive election victory.

The CEU affair was never a narrowly Hungarian or even European matter. CEU was a U.S. institution, chartered in New York State and accredited by the U.S.

Middle States Commission on Higher Education. Soros was a major donor for the U.S. Democratic Party, so attacking him helped Orbán win support among U.S. Republicans, including then-President Donald Trump. When Trump was elected in 2016, two generations of bipartisan support for U.S. higher education overseas unraveled. His administration's tacit support for the ousting of a U.S. institution was critical to Orbán's success in evicting CEU. Since then, the prime minister has banned gender studies in Hungarian universities and introduced new laws, subsequently replicated by President Vladimir Putin in Russia, to ban the promotion of gay lifestyles in Hungarian schools. Influential Republicans stateside have invited Orbán to speak at prominent conservative gatherings in the United States, such as the Conservative Political Action Conference.³¹ In this way, Hungary's leader has leveraged a battle over academic freedom into a position of real influence in the international conservative scene.

After expelling CEU, Orbán stripped the Hungarian Academy of Sciences of its role as the foremost research institution in the country. Following CEU's relocation to Vienna, he also privatized leading Hungarian universities by first giving them endowments in the form of shares in state companies, and then installing party loyalists on their boards with lucrative salaries. In January 2023, the European Commission ruled that these appointments compromise university autonomy. It has therefore withheld Erasmus Program funding for students to study abroad and suspended Hungarian participation in European research initiatives.³² The large question hanging over Orbán's education policy is whether, in the end, he will suffocate Hungarian higher education and force its best and brightest to emigrate.

Years after CEU's expulsion, the prime minister invited Fudan University, a Chinese institution, to take its place in Budapest. If Fudan accepts the Hungarian offer, which includes generous concessions in real estate and loans, it will become the largest Chinese institution to operate in the European Union.³³ Orbán's invitation to Fudan epitomizes a new logic of collusion between authoritarian populism at home and authoritarianism abroad. Orbán's campaign against CEU also aligns with Russian and Chinese anti-Western rhetoric, by castigating the university as a symbol of the relativist, permissive cosmopolitan, anti-national decadence of the West. This in turn endeared him to the far-right in liberal democracies who saw him as a courageous defender of the silent conservative majority. Orbán's resulting ascension has shown the way to other conservative populists worldwide. In a supreme irony, these conservative ideologists legitimize their attacks on universities as defenses of academic freedom against "woke" ideologies and coercive liberal political correctness.³⁴

Orbán's strategy in Hungary is to use state-controlled universities and institutes to develop a permanent conservative elite that will maintain power indefinitely. This is nothing new, as single-party rulers often seek to perpetuate them-

selves. What is new is authoritarianism within a European Union that is supposed to be a democratic club. What is novel is the attempt to replace Western universities with Eastern ones. What is unprecedented is an endeavor to package autocratic strategies in the language of a ferocious anti-liberal, anti-Western polemic, in a country that sought fervently to rejoin the democratic West and enjoy Western freedoms after 1989.

The prime minister's success lays bare the vulnerability of academic freedom in a world of populist demagogues and authoritarian tyrants. At the same time, the demonstrated success of free institutions – as creators of knowledge, educators of elites, and instruments of upward social mobility – should give demagogues and tyrants pause. For they must worry that they will end up crushing their own institutions, forcing their best talent to flee, and condemning those forced to stay in their societies to academic lives of timid obedience and mediocrity. This is already true in China, Hungary, India, and Turkey. For what victory have authoritarian leaders won if they have muzzled their best universities, exiled their best researchers, and created institutions whose only purpose is to indoctrinate the ruling class? In a world where borders remain open, talent flows toward freedom, not away from it. Demagogues at home and authoritarians abroad tamper with academic freedom at their peril. Faced with the authoritarian challenge domestically and elsewhere, faculty, staff, and students in free institutions have one overarching duty: to ensure that their institutions remain as free and open to pluralistic debate as they claim.

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The Pandora's Box of Fudan Hungary

Ágota Révész

A Chinese university opening a campus in the so-called “West” for the first time would have been a major advancement in the globalizing strategy of Chinese higher education. Yet the case of Fudan University opening its first European campus in Hungary seems to have contained several pitfalls from the start. This essay highlights some of them, such as the effects of a Cold War context on national higher-education strategies and the uncertain future of internationalization in higher education. The way the discourse around the university developed proved to be a Pandora's box unleashing woes: it showed that efforts to globalize higher education have become subordinate to geopolitical considerations and are regarded as questions of national loyalty, particularly in states involved in a growing resurgence of Cold War-type coalitions.

In February 2010, during his election campaign to become prime minister of Hungary, lawyer and politician Viktor Orbán said, “Although [Hungary] sails under a Western flag as an EU member state, the wind of the world economy blows from the East.”¹ Shortly after securing his second term as prime minister (Orbán previously served from 1998 to 2002), the Hungarian government launched its strategy “Opening to the East.” While focused on export and investment opportunities within the Central and Eastern regions of Asia, the strategy privileged China and major Chinese initiatives that Central European countries like Hungary readily joined: namely, the Belt and Road Initiative, the Cooperation between China and Central and Eastern European Countries, and the Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank.² In 2014, a high-speed railway project linking Belgrade and Budapest – the capital cities of Serbia and Hungary – was also launched with a HUF 750 billion (US\$2.3 billion) budget, 85 percent of it financed through Chinese state loans. The project was initiated to establish a rail route for transporting Chinese products from the port city of Piraeus in Greece to Central Europe.

There seems to have been a perceived shift in global power, however, that also influenced the vision behind the “Opening to the East” strategy. As an analyst put it eight years after its 2010 launch, “The key question is: to what extent can the strategy of opening to the East enable Hungary to move from her traditional role of conflict zone between ‘Western’ and ‘Eastern’ powers in Europe to become a bridge that helps unite the new Eurasian supercontinent?”³ Indeed, the semi-

peripheral position of Hungary has long been a cause for concern among the country's political elite, and in many cases, there was a choice, perceived or otherwise, between Eastern or Western alliances.⁴ Moving further along the line set by the prime minister to welcome collaboration with the East, a major actor in Hungarian financial policy, Norbert Csizmadia, hailed the Regional Comprehensive Economic Partnership (RECP), a historic free-trade agreement signed by fifteen Asia-Pacific nations in 2020. In an opinion piece for a Hungarian business newspaper, he framed the agreement in the following manner:

[The RECP] further strengthens the unfolding of the Eurasian global era. The process started in 2013, when China launched the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI), which marked the end of a five hundred year Atlantic era. The Belt and Road is about repositioning the axis of development from sea to land and reclaiming Eurasia's former economic, social, cultural and political importance by connecting Europe and Asia.⁵

“Opening to the East” and the China-friendly policy of Orbán's government achieved a rare consensus within Hungary's tumultuous political arena. Although the Belgrade-Budapest railway project received heavy criticism from the opposition, the target was government corruption and not the presence of China. In a report published by a network of European think tanks, it was noted that “unlike in some other countries, [China's] increased political and economic presence has not triggered any alarm in Hungarian political circles or among the wider public.”⁶ Indeed, Hungary's geopolitical horizon didn't include China. On the one hand, because Hungarian political and economic elites saw China as an opportunity. On the other hand, because China was not perceived as impacting the lives of Hungarians, while “Western” relations were seen as vitally important issues.

The ousting of Central European University (CEU) from Hungary in 2018 unleashed widespread protests. It happened almost thirty years after the private research university was founded by George Soros, a Hungarian American philanthropist and financier. Soros established CEU in 1991, with the vision of creating a student hub for the Central-Eastern European region, after Hungary transitioned from socialist rule to a democratic system in 1989. Things came to a head in 2015, however, when a sharp conflict broke out between Orbán and Soros over the 2015 migrant crisis in Europe. Orbán saw pro-settlement Soros as the head of an “international network organized into an empire,” acting against Hungarian national sovereignty, while Orbán cast himself as the nation's defender, forced to fight against the so-called globalist forces led by Soros.⁷

As a result of the ongoing fight for control between Orbán and Soros, CEU came to be viewed as a representative of Soros's “anti-national” values. A legal battle ensued, in which the conservative government claimed that CEU had no right to issue a Hungarian-U.S. degree, as it did not operate a campus in the Unit-

ed States. This assertion antagonized liberal circles in Hungary who saw CEU as an intellectual recovery after decades of occupation by the Soviet Union. But despite vehement protest from the Hungarian higher education community against governmental pressure on the university, the leaders of CEU decided to relocate to Vienna following the legal proceedings.

It was in the wake of this contentious atmosphere, in early 2021, that plans were announced for Fudan University (in Shanghai) to open a campus in Budapest. The future campus became widely perceived as a political replacement for CEU, but it was only after details became public about its being built with funds from a Chinese state loan that Fudan Hungary was thrust into the center of political debate in Hungary.

In response to domestic concerns, the government promoted Fudan Hungary by emphasizing the high international ranking of its parent university in the prestigious QS World University Rankings system of colleges and universities. In 2022, Fudan Shanghai was number thirty-one out of 1,300 institutions. By contrast, the highest scoring Hungarian higher-education institution was the University of Szeged, ranking between 551 and 560. Opening a Fudan campus in Budapest promised to launch Hungarian higher education into the international top league, or so the public was told. The campus planned to open its gates in 2028 and to offer Chinese-Hungarian dual-degree programs (BA and BSc, MA and MSc, and PhD) in its four faculties: humanities and social sciences, public policy and business, medicine, and science and engineering.

With a teaching faculty of three hundred thirty professors, and one hundred fifty administrative staff, the university would serve approximately five thousand students, not only from Hungary but from the whole Central-Eastern European region. (In comparison, the University of Szeged had twenty-two thousand students in the 2020–2021 academic year, while Fudan University had thirty-two thousand in 2021–2022.) With his vision of an elite hub for higher education in the Central-Eastern European region, Orbán conceived an idea very similar to that of Soros.

Despite the overlap, there are marked differences between CEU and Fudan University. The former is a relatively small university that dedicates most of its academics to postgraduate programs. As of the fall of 2022, CEU had 1,479 enrolled students and had amassed 18,667 alumni. It also maintained a clear focus on the social sciences, as natural science and technology fields are almost completely missing from its offerings, apart from doctoral programs in data science and environmental science. To further illustrate this point, in the 2022 QS World University Rankings by subject, CEU was twenty-fourth in politics, thirty-third in philosophy, and sixty-fifth in sociology. CEU did not appear at all, however, in the aggregate ranking of 1,300 higher-education institutions.

Another difference between CEU and Fudan University that may have stoked government pressure was CEU's connection to the elite of the Democratic Party in the United States. This connection came not only through George Soros, a noted mega-donor to the Democratic Party, but through major donors to both CEU and the Democrats like Donald Blinken: U.S. ambassador to Hungary from 1994 to 1997, father of the current U.S. Secretary of State Anthony Blinken, and benefactor of the Vera and Donald Blinken Open Society Archives, which is a unit at CEU that mainly contains materials on and does research on the Cold War era.⁸

The Budapest campus of Fudan University received strong political support in China. In February 2021, the Chinese government officially published that the consummate leader of China, Xi Jinping, "supports the opening of a Hungarian campus of Fudan University."⁹ Fudan Hungary was viewed as one of the flagship projects of internationalization of higher education under the Belt and Road Initiative.¹⁰ Referring to Xi Jinping's support, Zhang Jun (dean of the school of economics at Fudan University) added: "With such a stronghold, our students and faculty can travel regularly for study and exchange, and develop long-term research collaborations with local academic and financial institutions."¹¹ Hungary, a founding member of the Chinese Ministry of Foreign Affairs' then 16+1 initiative (now known as 14+1), was apparently seen as a location uniting institutional prestige, integration into the European academic landscape, and investment opportunities in the Central-Eastern European region.

In contrast with CEU's sociological contributions to the higher-education landscape in Hungary, Fudan Hungary would have focused on business, medicine, engineering, and newer fields in technology, such as artificial intelligence and autonomous driving. The Hungarian Ministry for Innovation and Technology saw Fudan Hungary as a means "to speed up the internationalization process of Hungarian higher education . . . to create high-quality educational infrastructure and raise educational standards."¹² They also added that the presence of the university in the country could attract investments and "encourage Chinese companies to set up R&D centers in Hungary."¹³ On a website favoring the Orbán-led conservative government, economist Csaba Lentner argued for establishing Fudan Hungary due to an urgent need for greater innovative capacity in the nation:

Patenting activity in Hungary is one third of that in the Visegrád partner countries and one fifth of the EU average. . . . There is no point in wasting any more time on cherishing certain mediocre universities, we need to move on and, if there is a chance, we need to move towards one of the best universities in the world.¹⁴

It is clear that business interests would have equaled educational aims, reinforced by the fact that the megaproject of Fudan Hungary was preceded by an agreement between Fudan Shanghai, the Corvinus University of Budapest (whose primary focus is business administration and economics), and the Hungarian Na-

tional Bank. On the initiative of the bank's governor, György Matolcsy, the tri-lateral partnership agreement launched the first double-degree MBA program between China and Central Europe in 2018.¹⁵

Despite these perceived benefits, there were several aspects of the project that came to be seen as risky for the future of both Hungarian higher education and Hungary in general. First and foremost was the budget for campus construction that totaled US\$1.77 billion, of which Chinese state loans would cover roughly US\$1.48 billion. Although there were several business models for opening an affiliated university as a foreign enterprise – including campuses that partnering schools have opened in China, such as the Ningbo campus of the University of Nottingham, and the Suzhou campus operated jointly by Xi'an Jiaotong University and the University of Liverpool – Fudan Hungary was designed as a government investment using money sourced from Hungarian taxpayers.

This arrangement was complicated by other challenging aspects, starting with high tuition fees that made attending Fudan Hungary prohibitively expensive for the average Hungarian student. The entrance of an academic giant also risked disturbing the traditional balance of higher education in Hungary, which is mostly based on free public universities. Another risk was the potential for Fudan Hungary to become a domestic brain drain, in light of its salaries for professors that would have been eight to ten times higher than the national average. Finally, in what many viewed as evidence of government corruption, a Chinese construction company was contracted to build the future campus, and the property was set to occupy most of the area once designated for affordable student housing.

Although these pitfalls worked their way into public discourse on Fudan Hungary, the main arguments employed by the opposition (that is, liberal and left-wing political parties) soon became those typical of the Cold War era. Like their predecessors, oppositional politicians and media outlets framed the pending decision on Fudan Hungary as a war between two worlds. In this conflict, there was a choice between freedom of thought or communist oppression, Western or Eastern values, and national sovereignty or Hungary becoming “a Chinese colony.”¹⁶ The harsh war rhetoric, which included calling Orbán a “traitor of the West,” was intended to strike a chord with a Hungarian population that still harbored bitter memories of communism and Soviet occupation.¹⁷

The question of the country's Western or Eastern identity, which has been central to national political battles for centuries, returned with renewed force. After the political director of the prime minister argued for a balance between the two identities and the creation of a third, saying there was no choice because “we have lived here for a thousand years on the route between the West and the East,”¹⁸ a prompt response came from the opposition: “We do have to choose between West and East!”¹⁹ Government plans for establishing Fudan Hungary moved fur-

ther into the spotlight during the run-up to the parliamentary elections in 2022. Throughout this time, public discourse around Fudan Hungary shifted from academic, social, financial, and legal considerations to an emotional fight between domestic political opponents. Because Hungary's Western affiliation still enjoys popular support, liberal opposition in the form of the Hungarian Socialist Party, for example, was eager to embrace a platform that confirmed the country's Western identity. Toward this aim, liberal candidates for prime minister drafted a collective letter to Xi Jinping, in which they pledged to halt the university's construction if they won the elections.²⁰ Thus, in order to close ranks and secure a win, opposition leaders instrumentalized Fudan Hungary to frame its development as a threat to national sovereignty.

To be sure, there were many justifiable concerns surrounding the project, especially compared with the factors that led to CEU's ousting. The Fudan Hungary proposal lacked transparency on important questions of profitability, risk versus opportunity, existing dynamics in Hungarian higher education, and possible corruption. The most important question of all, "Why should the campus be funded by Hungarian taxpayers, if the tuition fees would be out of reach for an average Hungarian family?" was also troubling. Though the opposition raised these questions, in a completely new turn they started focusing on portraying China as an enemy. Connect this strategic shift to the Orbán government's framing of George Soros (and to a certain extent the United States) as the enemy of Hungary, and one thing becomes clear: the Hungarian political binary translated into the current Cold War context. That is to say, like the myth of Pandora's Box, the case of Fudan Hungary released the antagonism of today's Western and Eastern blocs (the United States and China) in a tiny Central-European country.

The left-wing opposition would go on to lose the parliamentary elections by a huge margin the following year. Although they had a sizeable base of supporters in Budapest, residents in the countryside remained faithful to Viktor Orbán and his conservative Fidesz political party. Therefore, an urban-rural divide seemed to be at play in Hungary: the urban, liberal, and internationally mobile populace was at odds with its rural, conservative, and more stationary counterpart. Once the dust settled from the debates about Fudan Hungary, however, preparations for the campus construction were halted and the media fell silent. That was until late 2022, when Prime Minister Orbán made a surprising announcement at a press conference:

[Fudan] remains on the agenda. I am convinced that as Asia rises, there are two kinds of economic knowledge in the world today: Western knowledge and Eastern knowledge. And if we do not know the Eastern concept and knowledge of the economy, we

will not be able to cooperate with the Eastern world economy. And I do not want Hungary to be locked into the knowledge of the Western world economy.²¹

What was striking about this statement was Orbán's stress on *economic knowledge*. The East-West distinction manifested itself here not in the realm of politics, values, or ideology. The two sides were not presented as mutually exclusive either. It seemed, instead, that the prime minister was trying to strike a balance between both sides and avoid conflict, while highlighting economic interdependence and the need to absorb knowledge from both superpowers. Were we to take his reasoning one step further, we could say there should be space for CEU and Fudan Hungary to coexist with transparent financing, respect for domestic priorities, and the inclusion of all stakeholders in their decision-making processes. For Fudan University (the parent university in Shanghai), it would be (or would have been) a huge reputational gain to open the first Chinese campus in the European Union. And it cannot be ruled out that some Fudan professors were hoping to enjoy greater freedom of expression abroad.

The question of opening to the East seems not to have been confined to Hungary. Writing about the internationalization of education under the semiperipheral position and conditions of the Nordic states, public policy scholar Kazimierz Musiał drew a similar conclusion on cooperating with Russia and China: "Perhaps the Nordic countries... do not want to rely solely on the epistemic hegemony of the Western core powers. It may be a strategic choice or just a recalibration of their semiperipheral status vis-à-vis the alternative empires of knowledge."²² But this research, conducted before the Russian invasion of Ukraine in 2022, might yield different results today. With national security at the forefront of many international collaboration schemes, seeking Musiał's "alternative empires of knowledge" no longer sounds realistic. The opportunities offered by a semiperipheral position, namely balancing out East and West or even alternating between them, are limited. As Sándor Zoltán Kusai, former Hungarian ambassador to China, has stated, "Hungary, as a small state in Central-Eastern Europe, is moving along a determined path in the early stages of a new Cold War, and a fundamental choice between opposing sides is inevitable."²³

Just as science and technology "became integrated into the apparatus of the national-security state" during the Cold War, higher education seems to be following a similar path.²⁴ And the national discourse around Fudan Hungary developed in a way that demonstrates how decisions to internationalize higher education have become subordinate to geopolitical considerations. Such decisions have also come to be regarded as questions of national loyalty, particularly in non-core states within the rapidly forming blocs.

Various scholars of higher education have researched the tensions between geopolitics and the internationalization of higher education. In the first chapter

of their 2022 book on the future of higher-education research, Jeroen Huisman and Marijk C. van der Wende ask, “[Is] the era for global higher education and open science (really) over?”²⁵ Seeing the example of Fudan Hungary, the answer is likely yes, at least for a while. At the time of writing this essay, the campus project has been placed on hold due to fiscal constraints. There is a war just across the border as well, resources are depleted, and the Orbán government is likely to avoid forcing the project in a highly fragile political situation within the European Union – so the jury remains out on determining the future of Fudan Hungary University, at least for now.

AUTHOR'S NOTE

The research for this essay was conducted when the author was a Research Associate in the Center for Cultural Studies on Science and Technology in China (CCST) at the Technische Universität Berlin.

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Teaching for Synthesis at The London Interdisciplinary School

Carl Gombrich & Amelia Peterson

The London Interdisciplinary School (LIS) is a British higher-education institution that opened in 2021, with a base in Whitechapel, London. It seeks to advance higher education through innovation in curriculum, with the creation of two new degrees: the Bachelor's in Arts and Science (BASc) and Master's in Arts and Science (MASc). While a traditional liberal arts degree might expose students to a wide range of fields of knowledge, a particularly unique part of degrees at LIS is an explicit focus on knowledge synthesis across different disciplines and methods, allowing us to understand and tackle complex problems. In this essay, we describe the founding of LIS and then briefly detail three distinct aspects of teaching for synthesis. In contrast to a "bottom up" approach – which relies on interdisciplinarity to result incidentally from disciplinary combinations – this technique is part of a series of coherent actions that synthesize knowledge broadly across different disciplines and methods.

The London Interdisciplinary School (LIS) is a British higher-education institution that opened in 2021 with a base in Whitechapel, London. It is a publicly regulated private institution, underpinned by a group of individual funders but with students who are able to attend due to the public student loan system. Now serving undergraduate, master's, and professional students, its aim is to tackle three key barriers in higher education:

- *Barriers between different subjects:* UK university courses are organized almost exclusively in single disciplines. For liberal arts degrees in the United States and internationally, curriculum design is organized in separate faculties.¹ Despite a growing demand for courses that cut across disciplines, traditional universities find it organizationally and culturally difficult to break out of these silos.
- *Barriers to innovation in learning and teaching:* The funding structures and pay scales of research universities push creative academics toward research rather than teaching. Academics are given little time or incentive for innovative curriculum design or communicating advances in their fields.

- *Barriers between the classroom and the world*: Only in certain more vocational undergraduate courses do universities consistently link students to employers. Most undergraduate courses have not evolved in line with the problems and opportunities that students face upon graduation.

Combined, these barriers have limited the chances for universities to teach students how to tackle our most important and complex problems. The current pace of crises and change poses a severe challenge to the diffuse cycle of typical research institutions: research, learning, action. To rise to these challenges, LIS presents a means to shorten the loop between innovation and teaching, developing students who are more fully equipped to grasp the challenges and opportunities of their time.

The LIS approach was shaped by its founders: Ed Fidoe, a former McKinsey consultant turned K–12 school leader who cofounded School 21, an innovative and highly successful “free school” (charter school) in Stratford, East London. He was supported by Chris Persson and Andrew Mullinger, both successful tech entrepreneurs with experience of the challenges of hiring young employees with diverse skill sets. Together they brought in the founding faculty director, Carl Gombich, who had created the United Kingdom’s first Bachelor’s in Arts and Science (BASc) degree at University College London (UCL) in 2010. The vision for LIS was set: extend the BASc project, and combine it with a focus on complex problem-based learning, centering the curriculum on “wicked problems” and remaining as “porous” as possible to the real-world challenges faced by external organizations.

The enabling policy window came in the form of the UK Higher Education and Research Act 2017. This legislation created a new university regulator, the Office for Students, with the power to grant degree-awarding powers to new institutions. With backing from supportive investors, the initial team was able to bring together a small founding faculty to write the full curriculum for the three-year BASc degree. This faculty was hired to represent the widest possible range of disciplinary perspectives, from contemporary art to applied mathematics. The hiring process required candidates to present on an interdisciplinary topic, teach a live session, and participate in a day of group activities, setting the foundations for faculty roles that prioritize teaching and collaboration. In 2020, LIS became the first entirely new institution under the 2017 Act to be granted degree-awarding powers and the ability to enroll undergraduate students.

As with all universities, LIS is shaped by its students as well as its faculty. For UK students, undergraduate student fees are capped at the national norm of £9,000 per year, and students can take out loans through the government-owned Student Loans Company. This, coupled with additional support from a separate scholar-

ship foundation to support living costs, makes LIS accessible to UK students financially. Since its inception, the LIS team has organized hundreds of school visits and events to spread awareness of interdisciplinary learning and the potential of an interdisciplinary degree. In September 2021, LIS opened its doors to the first cohort of undergraduate students. This group of sixty-five students represented a wide variety of academic and social backgrounds, including scientists, artists, students with flawless exam results, and some who had dropped out of education and were returning after periods of work. Collectively, they embarked on the first iteration of the LIS BASc degree.

All undergraduates at LIS pursue the same degree. Entitled “Interdisciplinary Problems and Methods,” its name speaks to the core units of study: Problem modules and Methods modules. Problems modules form the conceptual core of student learning, in which students focus on major complex problem fields such as inequality, climate change and technology, and ethics, each approached from a variety of disciplinary perspectives. Different faculty members lead the disciplinary teaching, while a module leader creates a problem-based throughline, supporting students to draw on their disciplinary learning and apply key skills such as problem framing, stakeholder management, and critical thinking. Although this global conception of the curriculum is, indeed, radical, with no majors or minors or large blocks of siloed disciplinary studies at all, in some ways, it is a return to classical ideas of human endeavor. In the words of philosopher Karl Popper, “We are not students of some subject matter, but students of problems. And problems may cut right across the borders of any subject matter or discipline.”²

Methods modules are divided into quantitative and qualitative strands. Following a foundation year of exposure to a wide range of methods in each field, students engage in specialized study through a variety of more focused modules on methods such as Design Thinking and Visual Methods, Natural Language Processing, and Data Science. All students must retain some balance of quantitative and qualitative methods in their studies. In the final term of each year, students are required to apply their methods learning to an individual project of their choice, focused on a specific complex problem.

LIS provides students with an education that is liberal – in the liberal arts sense that it does not prepare them for any single domain or career – but more uniquely, one that is explicitly interdisciplinary. Students learn not just key concepts and methods from a variety of fields but also ways to make fields speak to each other, and to condense and transform the variety of knowledge relevant to a problem into something that can be understood, used, or acted upon. These practices of *integration* and *synthesis* are vital to interdisciplinary work.³ Yet,

as observed by psychologist Howard Gardner, there is surprisingly little codified knowledge on how these practices take place.⁴ While integration can be approximated by constructs such as integrative thinking – or, at an organizational level, methods of integration and implementation science – many widely used approaches to synthesis are not recognized as such.⁵

At LIS, various platforms and occasions for integration and synthesis are built into the curriculum and pedagogy (indeed, the largest teaching room is named *synthesis*). Synthesis and integration are taught as skills and practices in two main ways: coaching and superconcepts.

Coaching at LIS takes the form of a weekly hour-long session in which students meet in groups of five with their coach, a faculty member who guides and facilitates their learning. The LIS coaching model, led by faculty member Isaiah Wellington-Lynn, draws on both professional and sports approaches to coaching, as well as academic traditions of cognitive apprenticeship, such as the Oxbridge tutorial.⁶ Where it differs from teaching or mentoring is that the aim of coaching is for the individual student to gain a clearer understanding of themselves and their identity as an interdisciplinarian.

This role of coaching is particularly important in the context of interdisciplinary education, where, unlike in monodisciplinary programs, students do not have a ready-made field against or within which they can develop an academic identity.⁷ Alongside this personal development role, coaching provides the environment in which students can practice integration with faculty members who are skilled in interdisciplinary thinking. Supported by visual tools, faculty members work with students on seemingly simple questions such as, “How might the disciplinary perspective X help you to tackle this problem? How might the skills you have learned in Method Y relate to the assessment based on Z?”

While coaching provides regular practice in integration, Mental Models and Superconcepts is a discrete module that introduces students to key conceptual material that can aid their interdisciplinary thinking. Briefly, superconcepts are ideas that facilitate *conceptual transfer* and thus new and creative thinking. Superconcepts originated in a distinct discipline, but have transcended their origins and now provide for fruitful applications in different fields.⁸ For example, evolution (from biology), entropy (from thermodynamics), or system (from engineering) are all superconcepts at LIS, studied both within and beyond their original disciplines. LIS students research superconcepts as vehicles for integration of knowledge, whether through creating narratives or testable mathematical models. They learn that this range from narratives to mathematical models can be mapped onto a spectrum from “analogizing” through to “modeling” and discussing “isomorphism” as an example of “the perfect model.”

Explicit teaching of superconcepts provides students with examples to scaffold the high cognitive demand of interdisciplinary work. Applying different concep-

tual techniques from varied fields to a given complex problem requires the ability to move between the very abstract and the very concrete, across different contexts and knowledge paradigms. From the perspective of adult developmental theories, this is a level of conception and cognition that few adults habitually reach.⁹ As LIS develops as an institution, we hope to contribute to the small body of empirical literature on the ways this capacity can be taught and developed.¹⁰

In their final year as undergraduates, alongside their electives, LIS students take part in one discrete course in which they consolidate what they have learned about the theory and practice of interdisciplinarity. This module draws from the fields of mixed-methods research, philosophy of science, interdisciplinary studies, complexity science, and indigenous philosophies to examine different ways of combining and integrating diverse forms of knowledge. The first founding cohort brought together their work by creating a vast visual annotated bibliography of the field, linking the concepts of interdisciplinarity, mixed methods, complexity, and synthesis with real-world cases of these concepts in action. This cohort drew from their range of sources to define synthesis as “the combination of multiple and distinct representations into a coherent and novel whole.”¹¹ We hope their mapping efforts will be a strong foundation for more systematic collective research on responsible and impactful synthesis.

As with many higher-education institutions, LIS now teaches not only undergraduate and graduate students, but also professional learners in the workforce. The interest from organizations, both public and private sector, illustrates that there is strong demand for explicit teaching in how to bring together diverse forms of knowledge in the context of complex problems. This demand poses challenges for a faculty: while LIS undergraduates are exposed to an array of overlapping but distinct faculty views on interdisciplinarity, integration, and synthesis, professional learners require something more codified to study around their work schedules. Yet codification could mean boiling down the variety inherent in an interdisciplinary faculty. This limitation would work against one of the core assumptions of LIS, which is a version of Ashby’s Law of requisite variety: in order to be able to respond to complex problems with multiple interacting parts, our faculty needs to be equally multiple in its expertise and ways of operating.¹² Currently, the faculty is highly heterogeneous: while they all operate under the same contract type, which prioritizes teaching, a number of faculty are part-time to enable other roles as entrepreneurs, consultants, or makers. Maintaining requisite variety means pushing back against some tendencies to standardize or simplify.

Openness to ongoing innovation makes LIS well-placed to respond to the major questions posed by developments in artificial intelligence (AI). With specialists in large language models and AI regulation on our faculty, LIS has followed

this field closely, and in spring 2023, we offered our first open-cohort short course bringing together key perspectives for applying AI to complex problems. With faculty support, our students are currently experimenting critically with AI tools in research aggregation and speculative or creative production – with an awareness that the presence of these tools has raised the bar for the quality of thinking we expect of humans.

In the context of AI, our conviction is that the importance of understanding complex *problems* and the *methods* for interrogating them is no less urgent than before, but we acknowledge that some of the means to do so are changing. The details of the LIS curriculum may look quite different in three years but overall, the approach to tackling complex problems will remain guided by two deceptively simple principles: 1) Think in terms of networks and relationships, and 2) Pursue multiple perspectives. As our institution evolves, success will depend on the increasing ways we can spread the understanding, extension, and practice of these principles, across a wide range of problems and contexts.

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ENDNOTES

- ¹ In institutions of higher education in the United Kingdom, the term *faculties* refers to departments.
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- ³ Allen F. Repko and Rick Szostak, *Interdisciplinary Research: Process and Theory* 3rd ed. (Los Angeles: Sage Publishing, 2017); and Veronica Boix Mansilla, “Interdisciplinary Learning: A Cognitive-Epistemological Foundation,” in *The Oxford Handbook of Interdisciplinarity*, ed. Robert Frodeman (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2017), 261–275.
- ⁴ Howard Gardner, *A Synthesizing Mind: A Memoir from the Creator of Multiple Intelligences Theory* (Cambridge, Mass.: The MIT Press, 2020).

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- ⁶ See "The Oxford Tutorial," Oxford Study Abroad Program, <https://www.osapabroad.com/academics/the-oxford-tutorial> (accessed April 10, 2024).
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- ⁸ Alan Wilson, *Knowledge Power: Interdisciplinary Education for a Complex World*, 1st ed. (London and New York: Routledge, 2010).
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The Rise of University Colleges in Europe: A New Future for Liberal Arts & Sciences in the Twenty-First Century?

Marijk C. van der Wende

Starting in the late 1990s, there has been a noticeable increase in the number of liberal arts and science colleges in the Netherlands. Primarily international and often residential colleges, they became the selective or honors branches of virtually all Dutch research universities. Why did they emerge then and there? How can this innovation be characterized and understood in the context of the Dutch higher-education landscape of the time? And why did the model become more popular in the Netherlands than throughout the rest of Europe? The model benefits from being embedded in strong research universities, and having ample financial support and autonomy. Yet their future success will depend on their ability to uphold their liberal values and mission, throughout illiberal storms hitting the continent and against internal threats to academic freedom.

Many have compared the challenges of embarking on innovative change in universities to “moving cemeteries”; you can’t expect help from within.¹ Yet it was precisely *from within* that significant change in university education emerged from the late 1990s onward in the Netherlands. The higher-education landscape was characterized by long monodisciplinary first degrees and little differentiation, and had been criticized only a decade before by the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) as “parochial” for its low degree of internationalization. It was in that context that Utrecht University launched its first “university college” (UC) in 1998, an English-taught three-year liberal arts and sciences bachelor program, which would select its students and be delivered in a newly developed residential campus.

University College Utrecht (UCU) was a brave initiative and gained strong national interest. It had impact because it was led by the country’s top comprehensive university, which added two new Nobel laureates to its track record a year later. It quickly generated success by attracting significant international talent. At the same time, as a real innovation, it thus did not fit existing regulatory frameworks, and well in line with Dutch egalitarian culture, it was criticized for being elitist.

But time was ripe for change. The Bologna Declaration, also signed in 1998, would allow for such curriculum reform and system-level harmonization in higher education throughout Europe.² Expectations were high for Europe's position as a leader in the knowledge economy in the new millennium. The Netherlands, which had broken away from its Christian-democratic traditions and had recovered from more than a decade of economic recession, was now internationally recognized as a model open economy with modern third-way politics.³ It was self-confident, economically strong, and "in the mood for change."

Over the next few decades, a whole series of endeavors emerged. By the mid-2010s, virtually every Dutch research university had established a UC as an "honors branch" for its undergraduate programs, and they have since become regulated as a characteristic of the Dutch higher-education system.

Before we explore this successful journey and its essential conditions, let's take a look at the innovation that evolved into the emergence of university colleges in the Netherlands. And from there, we can ask whether we should expect it to be really future-proof.

Interestingly, what was seen as an innovation was in fact a small renaissance of liberal arts and science education, which stood at the basis of Europe's oldest universities. Their curricula were organized around the seven *artes liberales*, divided into the *trivium* (literary arts: grammar, logic, and rhetoric) and the *quadrivium* (mathematical arts: arithmetic, geometry, music, and astronomy), all together focusing on the education of the "whole" or "well-rounded" person.

Yet the introduction of university colleges in the late 1990s was not at all seen as a return to the origin of the European university. Instead, it was presented as *the* successful model of undergraduate education in the United States, with some additional flavors of the Oxbridge collegiate model, in particular its intensive tutoring concept.

Liberal arts and science education in Europe had indeed lost the continued prominence it had retained in the United States. And the UCU initiative was in fact modeled on the curriculum of a U.S. liberal arts college. Choosing to label it as a "university college" helped boost it as an internationally flavored innovation and avoid confusion around the term "liberal." While Dutch policymakers, or even modern educators, might not immediately (or at all) recognize the concept of "liberal education," the term *liberal* is ambiguous enough to cause confusion across the political spectrum of both the United States and Europe.

At the same time, "university college" was somewhat of an unfortunate naming in the European higher-education context. Various countries use the term as the international name of their nonuniversity-type institutions or in the name of their full-fledged research universities (such as University College London and University College Dublin).

Liberal arts and science (LAS) was presented as a curriculum model that allowed for interdisciplinarity and flexible individual learning pathways that students could choose themselves. With English as the language of instruction, no translation or equivalent term in the national language was required.

Elsewhere, I have analyzed why LAS had lost its prominence in Europe.⁴ The related Latin terms were long-forgotten and, consequently, the historically significant French and German influences on Dutch higher education had weakened, although von Humboldt's liberal education value of *Bildung* had its own short revival in the Netherlands (also without translation into Dutch). Yet the fact that this innovation was, in a way, a revival of the classical European curriculum and of traditional European values was overshadowed by the perception that, as a modern U.S. model of undergraduate education, university college could fit well in an increasingly competitive and globalized context of higher education.

I will try to explain why this innovation seemed to fit so well in the timeframe around the turn of the millennium, a context in which Dutch pragmatism and economic optimism spurred an innovation-driven and future-orientated zeitgeist. The Berlin Wall had come down, the "world was flat," "history had ended," and freedom was taken for granted. Utilitarian benefits dominated the educational policy debate more than historical and philosophical notions. But ultimately, we have to ask: what is the value of a liberal arts and science education? It is an essential element of any education, after all, which we are refacing as we realize that liberal values are under attack in Europe, as part of a painful return to ideological conflict.

Like in many Western countries, massification had taken its toll in Dutch higher education. General dissatisfaction grew with poor learning outcomes, student disengagement, low retention levels, stagnant or decreasing graduation rates, and lengthening time to degree. Employers criticized a lack of differentiation (no excellence) and the rigidity of monodisciplinary programs. Excitement around the new millennium and the role of digital communication generated fashionable new ideas about "twenty-first-century skills."

The shaping up of the Bologna Process, which allowed for the (re)introduction of distinct undergraduate and graduate degree cycles in European higher education, paved the way for curriculum reform. Internationalization was spurred both by the European Union's aspirations to become a significant player in the global knowledge economy and by the rise of global university rankings.

Yet the first emergence of UCs in the Netherlands was not caused by Bologna. The Utrecht initiative preceded it, and it was motivated from within by critique of monodisciplinary fragmentation, massified instruction, poor attention for personal development, and low retention, hence the value seen in broader standalone undergraduate degrees and collegial small-scale instruction and tutoring.

The Netherlands Scientific Council for Government Policy (WRR) had already launched this idea in 1995, but with no follow-up.⁵ It seemed that the status quo had become stale. But Utrecht set a leading example by launching it bottom-up, while followers such as Maastricht University and Utrecht University were facilitated by the Bologna reforms (implemented in Dutch higher-education law in 2002).

The idea of university colleges thus became popular as they would contribute to the aims and expectations of the time: namely, internationalization and interdisciplinarity of the curriculum, the development of “twenty-first-century skills,” more selectivity (excellence), and differentiation at the system level. Their introduction in the Netherlands continued with the establishment of university colleges by Maastricht University (2002), a second one by Utrecht University (2004), and Amsterdam University College (2009), followed by university colleges established by the universities of Leiden (2010), Rotterdam (2013), Twente (2013), Groningen (2014), and Tilburg (2016).⁶

A successful journey showed UCs as standalone structures within a larger research university, benefiting from available resources and infrastructure. But like all innovations, the new model did not fit existing regulatory, organizational, and cultural frameworks. Skepticism regarding elitism and the value of the LAS degree for employment and graduate study remained. Reluctance to reforming the disciplinary organization of universities persisted by creating UCs as standalone structures, which left the mainstream mostly unchanged. Hence the hurdles and resistance that I experienced as the founding dean of Amsterdam University College.

In 2004, the Rector Magnificus of the Vrije Universiteit Amsterdam (in English, abbreviated as VU Amsterdam, hereafter VU) invited me to join its professorate with a special brief to develop a university college. I accepted and engaged in a feasibility study in 2005.

It quickly became apparent that the capital city wanted a UC in its own way. Despite the fact that several academic leaders had their own children enrolled at UCU, there were two reasons why a simple copy of it would be unthinkable. First was the perceived elitist image of UCU, which its own students called “a gated community.” The Amsterdam approach would have to be more open to and engaging with the city as its direct environment and acknowledge the socioeconomic diversity of Amsterdam, then already the world’s second most multicultural city in terms of the number of nationalities among its citizens. The second reason was the need to overcome the city’s “science deficit,” a problem that had been hindering the Amsterdam universities for several decades. The city’s high school graduates with a science orientation would choose to go to Leiden, Utrecht, or Delft, rather than stay in Amsterdam, despite the fact that the city hosted a majority of the national science research facilities. Moreover, as the country’s only

city with two universities (with multiple science faculties), increasing the number of students majoring in science was becoming urgent. Competition between the universities was pointless. Collaboration was stimulated by the Amsterdam city government and its business community in the context of the development of the Amsterdam Science Park.

With a view to these parameters, Amsterdam University College (AUC) thus had to combine excellence with diversity, be open to and engage with the city around it, develop a strong science profile (able to attract at least half of its students as science majors), and bring the city's two universities, VU and the University of Amsterdam (UvA), together in a new joint venture. Neither of them was supposed to be dominant, yet it had to have an Amsterdam signature, different from its predecessors in the country. It was therefore decided to develop both its curriculum and a new building for it from scratch.

My feasibility study was well-received, and the number of challenges and rate of complexity made it interesting and attractive enough for me to decide somewhere halfway through 2007 to become AUC's founding dean.

Founding dean, in Dutch *bouwdecaan*, which literally means “building dean,” is a term that characterizes my experience at AUC quite well. Building anything in an extremely densely populated city like Amsterdam is a challenge, let alone a residential college able to host nine hundred students. The Amsterdam Science Park became the obvious location, with a view to the desired science outlook of AUC and because of newly available student housing.

Building a new curriculum from scratch was a hugely inspiring task that I shared with my cofounder, renowned physicist Robbert Dijkgraaf.⁷ The science faculties and medical schools provided strong support, and quickly succeeded in designing their part of the curriculum. The social sciences were constructive, but needed more time to discuss. The humanities struggled the longest to find their focus across their varied fields.

Over €40 million had to be raised for the initial phase and costs of the new building. The city of Amsterdam provided a matching grant, as it saw AUC as an important step toward the desired collaboration between its two universities and the development of its Science Park, and as an asset for attracting multinational companies.⁸ Their CEOs engaged successfully in fundraising for the AUC Scholarship Fund. Clearly, without the constructive role of the city's highest officials, AUC would not have come together, as “it took three to tango.” It helped to build trust between VU and UvA, whose relationship had previously been mostly characterized by competition, thus realizing a joint venture across organizations with distinctly different cultures and histories. Mutual (mis)perceptions had to be overcome and internal processes integrated across different IT systems, financial allocation, and HR processes.

In building broad institutional support, I had to become (and stay) friends with some twenty faculty deans who were concerned that AUC would attract their best faculty, which would be systematically confirmed. Luckily, I was free to choose my own core team from across the two universities and outside, thus composing an interdisciplinary, international, creative, and resilient group. There is a lot of fun but little luxury in a start-up, especially one in the public sector, for which an endless amount of red tape needed to be overcome. In the hierarchy of obstruction, administrators were more reluctant than academics. Advisory committees had to be overruled. The students were my best advocates in these processes and convinced the university councils and even the minister to side with our goals at critical moments.

The largest multimillion-euro grant was finally won in national competition from the Ministry of Education and Science's initiative for stimulating excellence in university programs. AUC's long-term financial sustainability was ensured by negotiating a higher funding level for UC students and the autonomy to raise differential fees. These adjustments to funding and regulatory provisions for accreditation required legislation changes at the national level and were obviously to the benefit of all existing and future UCs. With that and the support of both Amsterdam's universities, the city, and its corporate sector, the establishment of AUC in 2009 confirmed the significance of the new liberal arts and science model in Dutch higher education.

AUC's curriculum was developed from scratch, focusing on the big questions in science and society.⁹ These questions are addressed through overarching themes, which guide students' choices through the curriculum and help integrate knowledge gained from disciplinary courses. As a result, they achieve depth of knowledge in their chosen major(s) as a basis to participate meaningfully and creatively in interdisciplinary debate and a personal capstone project. The process reinforces Howard Gardner's advice on the importance of gaining fluency in one subject in order to incorporate others: "If no single discipline is being applied, then clearly interdisciplinary thinking cannot be at work."¹⁰

A substantial academic core supports the personal learning process with skills (such as logic, research methods and statistics, mathematics, foreign languages, intercultural knowledge) and courses in the liberal arts tradition (for example, philosophy, philosophy of science, ethics). Based on a firm belief that the most important and urgent questions of our time require a science education that connects and transcends the disciplines, AUC offers all students ample opportunities to focus on science and science-related majors, and to develop strong analytical (logic) and quantitative skills.

This belief and ambition were presented by Robbert Dijkgraaf in his speech at the opening of AUC in 2009. Quoting chemist and novelist C.P. Snow's plea for reconnecting "The Two Cultures" of the sciences and the humanities, Dijkgraaf said:

Snow was right. There are many great crises or challenges facing the world: food, energy, climate, pandemics, all driven by globalization. Science and technology might have been part of the cause of these problems, they are also absolutely key to the solutions. A complete education should be a multidimensional experience, since students, teachers, schools, and research are all multidimensional. It is a challenge for universities to offer such an environment and be a proper reflection of the talents of its inhabitants.¹¹

AUC's academic success in this respect was confirmed by then-president of the European Research Council and member of the AUC International Advisory Board Helga Nowotny, who observed in 2012 that AUC

seeks to link the parts of our globus intellectualis that seem to have become separated, much like oceans dividing the continents ...reconnecting the natural sciences – physics, chemistry, and the life sciences – with the humanities and social sciences. These innovative features of the AUC curriculum are supported by an emphasis on “big questions” and how to approach them, namely through a research-oriented style of inquiry.¹²

But the social positioning of AUC had more substantial challenges. As mentioned before, Amsterdam's global outlook, the diversity of its population, as well as its international business community were important parameters for AUC's mission, expressed in its motto, “Excellence and Diversity in a Global City,” and based on the belief that both excellence and diversity matter, as both competition and cooperation are key to success in a globalized world. Leadership does not only require excellence, but also the understanding and valuing of diversity.

As dean, I explained multiple times to different stakeholders that AUC's motto actually meant, “AUC shall never be a white middle-class college in an otherwise half Black city.” I felt the task was to position AUC as a collective of “the winners and losers” of globalization, who are well represented in global cities like Amsterdam, though often living quite separately in almost parallel universes.¹³

Among the greatest challenges in this area was the difference between UvA and VU in recognizing diversity as an important dimension. Most support came from the VU leadership, in line with VU's much more diverse student population, as compared to that of UvA. International business representatives and U.S. academic leaders in AUC's International Advisory Board pushed for more diversity in the student population and more local community engagement by the students, in particular those who were more affluent.

Despite the Dutch anti-elitist attitude, AUC became immediately popular among Dutch students from the best-ranked secondary schools (for example, local gymnasia: six-year top programs that train students in math and sciences, as well as classical and modern languages) with Amsterdam as a global brand, and

also among those from international schools around the world. Fifty percent of the student body was international, a cosmopolitan global elite, but far less diverse in economic and cultural terms. Attracting local minority students, often equally talented but with significantly lower social and cultural capital, proved more challenging. Setting up a special outreach program for students who attended Amsterdam's suburb schools, as well as a Diversity Award Program, helped recruit applicants from these communities.

A national self-image of an egalitarian culture, denying existing discrimination and inequality, hindered attempts to overcome these stark cultural and socioeconomic barriers. Initially, there was little understanding of AUC's ideal to combine excellence and diversity. A former Dutch rector in a national review panel bluntly asked, "If you want to be excellent, why then would you be diverse?" An AUC student answered, "How could we be excellent without being diverse?" In 2013, an international panel underlined the strengths of aiming for diversity and the opportunities offered by a global city, saying that "both features have been embraced by AUC, its constituent universities and its many partners in academia, business, administration and civil society."¹⁴

Yet excellence continues to be challenged. Proposals to abandon such labels are underway. And diversity is now writing university history in Amsterdam and beyond.

AUC's foundation, alongside the changes in national regulation and funding conditions, confirmed university colleges' integral position in the Dutch higher-education system.¹⁵ Virtually all Dutch research universities established a UC as a branch of international excellence to their profile. With their performance in terms of retention and study success, UCs can indeed be seen as a successful bottom-up innovation.

But their impact was limited, enrolling hardly 5 percent of the student population, relegating them to a small-scale college niche. Although more interdisciplinary, international, and honors programs were opened in Dutch research universities, their core organizational and disciplinary structures remained mostly unchanged.

This is in line with higher-education scholar Arthur Levine's view; he positioned the establishment of new colleges as the easiest way to establish a non-traditional institutional mission, while avoiding change to existing structures within the university.¹⁶ Some innovative spillover into the mainstream can be expected, but diffusion throughout less so. This applies to UCs to a large extent, as well as their modest innovative impact, although three aspects should be distinguished.

- *Interdisciplinarity*: Despite its position as a key belief in the research programming of Dutch universities, interdisciplinarity still seems to be more diffi-

cult to implement in teaching. Stifling requirements for accreditation and access to graduate programs, especially in professional fields such as law, are impeding factors.

- *Selectivity*: Excellence may have been embraced as a principle for more differentiation, since selective admission of students has been adopted in legislation for these kind of programs, and though the option to select undergraduate students was established in the Higher Education and Research Act, few undergraduate programs other than UCs have opted to implement it.¹⁷ While selective admission to graduate programs has become more common, there is still some reluctance surrounding such practices in undergraduate programs because it is seen as “elite” and runs counter to the idea(s) of equal access and widening participation.
- *Internationalization*: Internationalized curricula and international classrooms became mainstreamed in both legislation and accreditation, and teaching in English became broadly popular in Dutch research universities in around one-third of undergraduate programs and three-quarters of graduate programs. However, the use of English should not be attributed to the UC model. Rather, internationalization has been encouraged since the early 1990s, and was spurred by the implementation of the Bologna Declaration. Brexit further increased the number of international students in the Netherlands, up to 40 percent of first-year students in research universities.¹⁸ This is a contested trend due to funding and housing issues, resulting in a political pushback on teaching in English and international recruitment.

With their special legal status, higher student funding level, and residential housing, UCs seem to be well protected against these and other pushbacks that may occur. The impact of the UC model on the European higher-education scene has also been limited. Some liberal arts colleges already existed in Eastern Europe (accredited by U.S. institutions) and some initiatives were undertaken in Germany, the United Kingdom, and France.¹⁹

In the rest of Europe, such initiatives are less likely to emerge bottom-up, as they did in the Netherlands. This can be explained by more top-down steering and/or lower levels of autonomy. System change in Germany is driven more by regulation, may fail (for example, the Gesamthochschule reform), or may be more formal and slower, as in the implementation of Bologna.²⁰ In France, the drive for differentiation is limited due to the existence of the *Grandes Écoles*, which already provide an elite branch of higher education, but with a more professional focus.

Thus, the disciplinary orientation of most curricula remains dominant, with no general return of liberal arts and science education in Europe, staying far away from the status it has had in the United States. Moreover, pushback on the liberal aspects of the model is emerging across Europe.

American universities can draw three lessons from the European UC experience. First, liberal arts and science education can be offered as a more affordable model. Even though U.S. students pay full fees in Dutch UCs, the whole experience (including room and board) would generally cost half the price of its U.S. equivalent. The three-year European bachelor's program is publicly funded, in contrast with the mostly private four-year programs in the United States.

European UCs benefit from the breadth that European secondary education offers, especially the Northwestern European type of gymnasium (six-year top programs that train students in math and sciences, as well as classical and modern languages) or schools offering the International Baccalaureate. Both types cater already at the secondary level to a substantial part of the general education that is offered in four-year U.S. undergraduate programs.

Second, a twenty-first-century liberal arts education requires an integral science component. These competencies cover scientific reasoning, formal logic, numerical and statistical skills, and digital readiness for engaging with artificial intelligence; natural science insights for addressing climate change and other global challenges beyond opinions; and problem-solving skills necessary to really “help make a better world,” so desired by many students.

In other words, narrow humanities-based programs would fall short, even more so if they are exclusively English-taught and predominantly oriented on Western intellectual traditions. Because, third, a modern liberal arts education needs a genuinely global scope for which intercultural and foreign language skills are indispensable. The twenty-first-century version of the “well-rounded person” is definitely multilingual and digitally savvy. It goes without saying that for offering such an education, the faculty body needs to be at least as international and diverse as the student population, both key conditions for a twenty-first-century college with a global mission.

In this final section, I return to my analysis of why the (re)introduction of LAS fit so well in the timeframe around the turn of the millennium. I offer three types of arguments in favor of LAS in the twenty-first century.²¹

- An *epistemological* argument favoring interdisciplinarity as the way to approach the “big challenges” both in science and society.
- An *economic* argument emphasizing the importance of “twenty-first-century skills” with a view to the employability of graduates.
- A *moral and social* argument underlining educating the whole person, both intellectual and personal development, emphasizing social responsibility and democratic citizenship.

At the beginning of this essay, I sketched the utilitarian approach by which the promises of LAS for interdisciplinarity and twenty-first-century skills were

easily embraced into a converging agenda for undergraduate education serving the needs of the global knowledge economy. However, the social-moral dimension, relating to the humanistic tradition of the liberal arts, was more complex to (re)define in the “new global century,” as it seemed to be characterized by divergence in the political and ideological sense. Tensions between the economic/utilitarian and the social/moral arguments may undermine humanistic traditions and values.²²

In this new global (neo)liberal era, how were *liberal* values to be assessed? And how should citizenship be understood? As national (citizenship for nation-building), patriotic even, regional (for example, European or Asian), global, or cosmopolitan? Could it be taken for granted that it always implies democratic citizenship and that liberal values would be seen as global values indeed? The question of whether a liberal education can actually exist in an *illiberal* context at all deserved further reflection with regard to recent and seemingly ongoing developments in Europe and beyond.²³

As much as liberal values and democratic citizenship were (too easily) taken for granted in the early 2000s, the more they have come under attack in the following decades through today. From a backlash against globalization, and throughout a series a social and economic crises, populism and (neo)nationalism regained support around the world and are increasingly affecting higher education.²⁴

Europe is back from its “holiday from history,” and learning the hard way that liberal values are not globally shared, not even within Europe, as was expected after the fall of the Berlin Wall. The world is not flat and history has not ended after all.²⁵

Liberal education became a target of illiberal regimes. The Central European University was banned from Hungary. Smolny College (St. Petersburg) was closed as “an undesirable organization,” not seen to be feeding into “patriotic citizenship.”²⁶

Illiberal reactions to higher education are a threat to academic freedom, but may also come *from within*, associated with “wokeness” and “cancel culture.” Some UCs are considered hotspots of such trends. Why would LAS students especially go against liberal values, academic freedom, or freedom of expression? Academic freedom is a foundational right to free inquiry, as well as the value of respecting divergent opinion. It is the cornerstone of an academic culture of civility, now endangered by the polarization besetting society at large.²⁷ Is it ignorance, freedom taken for granted, or a lack of awareness that radicalized individualism, identity politics, cultural wars, can lead to fragmentation or even atomization of a college community?

Is liberalism’s ever increasing stress on personal autonomy trumping the academic community as a collective good? There is little optimism for LAS if it is both challenged from outside and demolished from within.

Hence UCs are faced with the challenge to reconsider the LAS mission in this new reality, and support students in being truly inclusive, in finding nuance and intellectual humility, in understanding the validity of other perspectives, and in overcoming value judgments and national(ist) lenses to develop empathy. It is a formidable task for university leaders to ensure that future generations are aware of the virtues and values of an open and democratic society, ready to engage in a world where Western universalism and liberalism are being challenged, and to commit to the international solidarity needed for the world's most pressing problems to be solved. The best hope is a liberal one indeed: that the best brains will remain free from being domesticated by national or disciplinary boundaries.

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ENDNOTES

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Global Education without Walls: A Multidisciplinary Investigation of University Learning in Online Environments across Disciplines

Olga Zlatkin-Troitschanskaia

Increasingly, students use the internet for self-directed learning in higher education, requiring them to develop skills to determine which information is reliable and accurate. Although the need to understand, evaluate, and promote such skills is crucial, little is known about the students' search for and use of online sources (and the key influences of those sources) in higher education. Current research indicates both that students need specific skills to successfully engage and learn with online materials, and that university practitioners need to rethink their curricula and instructional approaches for online teaching in the age of ChatGPT and other AI-supported tools. Interdisciplinary theoretical and empirical methods can help us gain a deeper understanding of how students develop the various skills required for successful online learning, and how we can support them across domains.

In large-scale national and international longitudinal assessments of studies in various academic domains, higher-education students showed partly negative learning trajectories. In other words, they demonstrated less correct content knowledge at the end of their studies, as outlined in this volume of *Dædalus*. The international and interdisciplinary PLATO (Positive Learning in the Age of InformaTiOn) research program, with a hub in empirical educational research in Germany, was conceived in the wake of this major insight.¹ Currently, PLATO involves over twenty collaborating universities located in several countries, including the United States, Canada, Japan, the Netherlands, and Switzerland.

In PLATO, we found that these results were not adequately explained by typically surveyed influence factors in education – such as demographics, prior education, or courses attended. In search of fuller explanations, we expanded our scope to include expertise from various disciplines, like linguistics, media studies, and communication sciences. Early jointly developed surveys focused on students' learning input (that is, frequency of use of various media, sources, and information) for ac-

quiring knowledge and preparing for exams. Students reported using a broad range of sources for learning, acquiring domain knowledge, and preparing for exams; most frequently, they stated using online media and sources, for example, through a Google search or nowadays by using AI-supported tools like ChatGPT. Through our consultations with faculty and subsequent reviews of teaching methodologies across disciplines and countries, as well as a systematic literature review, we gained two persisting impressions.

First, higher-education practitioners realized students use the internet as their main source for acquiring study-related information, and faculty suspected a potential negative influence on student learning (though were not aware of the exact extent beyond anecdotal evidence).

Second, skills relating to the use of the internet for successful learning were not specifically fostered in most of their courses. In part, faculty members considered this to be the responsibility of secondary education and university library courses (for beginners) that presumably offer training in academic research skills. Also, lecturers relied on acting as authorities in their field and providing students with a selection of sources they considered scholarly. Notably, sources separate from those selections, particularly internet sources, were frowned upon or considered less relevant by faculty.

To be sure, there were exceptions. Some lecturers used illustrative examples cropped from online media and discussed them in class, as well as offered specific tool acquisition lessons (such as database use). However, even here, for technology to work effectively during class, faculty members usually had students prepare (download) all necessary software and materials beforehand, typically from a curated, university-hosted repository or course platform (e-learning). Sometimes, e-learning spaces were also used for jointly preparing course deliverables (for example, creating a team wiki, asynchronous course discussions, and file upload).

We considered these strategies to be didactic “safe spots” on the internet, where lecturers can monitor and steer students’ development of media literacy skills, and moderate their collective learning process. The use of electronic materials – such as digitized (scanned) books, research studies, and databases – was not discussed, but implicitly accepted as far as the local university library would offer access to them. Apparently, there was a sizable gap between faculty members and students’ expectations and practice regarding the use of internet sources, including the acquisition of literacy skills for conducting research online.

In our pursuit of a broad multidisciplinary research agenda with the PLATO program, we are currently focusing on three areas. In our studies, we directly assess students’ actual internet use for solving typical generic and/or domain-specific tasks (for example, preparing a lesson plan in teacher education or a diagnostic plan in medical education) in a realistic (online) environment. We also analyze in greater detail students’ internet skills based on collected data in real time

in major study domains, including economics, teacher education, medicine, and law. And we pay particular attention to the skill set of Critical Online Reasoning (COR) in general (GEN-COR) and domain-specific (DOM-COR) tasks, with three main facets:

- searching for and selecting information (online information acquisition, OIA),
- evaluating sources for credibility cues (critical information evaluation, CIE),
- reasoning with evidence from multiple sources and synthesizing it into an evidence-based argument (reasoning based on evidence, argumentation, and synthesis, REAS).

We strive to control for a suitably challenging range of sources and information problem requirements (such as types of information needed, complexity of tasks, including presence or absence of biased sources, controversial topics, ready-made judgments by authors and users), ensuring not all sources and information are trustworthy. In other words, we recreate authentic conditions of self-directed studying on the internet (beyond curated e-learning spaces).

While tasks can be designed to assess secondary skills, like selection and specific judgments, we found that some of these skills, such as searching, could only be validly assessed in a real online environment. For the assessments and training, we continuously vetted search prompts and preselected real online sources (for evaluation) to provide up-to-date realistic challenging tasks, based on a set of joint design criteria and scoring rubrics. Given the large variance of online sources, our focus was on whether and when students take certain actions (for example, leaving a suspicious website) and consistency between their claims of trusting sources, stable reasons for their claims, types of sources cited, appropriate confidence level, and safeguarding against gullibility and incredulity error.

In the PLATO setup, researchers from education, media, and computer sciences collaborate for two primary purposes. First, they keep assessments and training materials up to date regarding specific affordances and challenges online. For example, how and when do they choose to use AI-supported tools like ChatGPT? And second, researchers support educational technology software development. A dedicated IT project supports linkage of the resulting big educational data in meaningful ways and following the highest privacy standards. For instance, when solving generic and domain-specific performance tasks, whether for research or study purposes, whether required or voluntary, students log onto our prepped virtual computers. This way, we can track students' real behavior on the internet without constricting their study habits. This setup has given us unique insights into the websites students visited for research and the time spent on each, with an opportunity to map students' navigation routes, and document their preparation to complete different tasks, alongside their troubleshooting processes.

Another integral part of PLATO is our connection of learning material to students' demonstrated comprehension. By analyzing accessed website content and comparing it with student responses, we found this process requires collaboration among several disciplines (such as education, linguistics, and computer science). We seek to obtain indicators from students working on challenging tasks: where do they go to gather data for higher education, and how do they attempt to use that data to complete required tasks? With these questions in mind, we aim as well to identify promising cues and patterns in the source information (metaphorical framing) that may have led (or misled) students to provisionally trust, reference, cite, or ignore certain sources and pieces of information. While most students performed in the upper half of scores on generic tasks, which were focused on solving everyday online information problems, students performed considerably worse when solving domain-specific tasks in their own disciplines.

The results are clear. We find a need for promoting DOM-COR skills among students within and across academic domains. Because students did not succeed in transferring their often highly developed generic skills in solving domain-specific tasks, we conclude and recommend that support in DOM-COR should be specifically integrated into regular academic studies. While students were typically able to research, evaluate, and process suitable sources and content on everyday issues on the internet, they had more difficulties successfully applying these skills to the research and argumentation processes for preparing domain-specific tasks, such as legal opinions in law or diagnostic plans in medicine.

So far, the log data of student-accessed websites showed that subjects accessed many more established specialized databases when solving tasks in their field. We have one possible but yet unexamined explanation for discrepancies found between performance in GEN-COR versus DOM-COR tasks, which differed across domains: Students may be more versed in using general search engines; or rather they may be less proficient in using domain-specific databases established in disciplines like medicine and law when compared with research via Google. In comparison with economics and education students, students from medicine and law generally showed more use of their domain-specific literature or databases. These databases are, in turn, more strongly promoted in their studies. The latter cohort of students also perceived greater support regarding the information evaluation and argumentation skills in their studies, which enable them to evaluate the quality of online research more effectively and to incorporate it into their academic and/or professional work.

Further, we discovered that initial situations vary based on the major sources of challenges within different domains. Namely, is there a set of online resources (for example, databases and references) used as a base source in the discipline, topic area, information type, and language; and are students aware of it and able to use it? Here, the focus is on competent use. Otherwise, students will need to

find and piece together information from diverse, possibly new web platforms. In this case, the skill focus is on searching and quality evaluation.

To provide a couple of examples, consider medical and law students' practices when researching data online. Medical students in Germany currently have a go-to didactic database to answer most of their questions. They may occasionally carry out their research elsewhere in case of a newly discovered variant or new treatment, or to verify a rarely used relation between symptoms and treatment. By contrast, law students need to reference a specific law and guideline, most of which are available in print, but are often more conveniently accessible online, and sometimes, they need to read up on specific court decisions and interpretations.

In both medicine and law, various client-facing internet resources are useful for beginners, but less so for professionals. What's more, numerous advocacy and business (or sponsored) websites may advance partially biased interests. For teacher trainees, there is a wealth of open educational resources available, and some educational science databases, but no unified one-stop resource.

All of the professions that have been the focus of PLATO thus far deal with similar situations. They involve patients, clients, or students who can search the internet, but who usually rely on sources that require less specialized knowledge and are easier to understand compared with databases geared for professionals. Consequently, misconceptions among higher-education students and even graduates, or between professionals and their misinformed, distrusting clients (due to unskilled internet use), are predictable problem areas that could be addressed in problem-based teaching approaches to foster students' COR skills.

In our assessments of the promotion of COR skills in academic studies, the results point to specific deficits in critical research, as well as the evaluation and integration of online sources into one's argument. These deficits manifest in lower performance in subjects' research and processing of sources in domain-specific tasks. To be sure, the students were often able to research, evaluate, and process appropriate sources and content to check everyday facts on the internet, but they had difficulty successfully applying the respective skills to their domain-specific tasks (such as legal opinions). In terms of professional practice, assessed deficits among graduates could mean that the content found and used in information research (for example, within medicine or legal databases) was incomplete, partially incorrect (or wrongly interpreted), or not up to date. Needless to say, any or all of these factors can significantly impair the overall quality of the professional decision and action (for instance, legal opinions or diagnostic plans).

Vast personal differences between students' performances on domain-specific tasks also suggest that stronger individual support is needed here. At the same time, the findings indicated overall that COR skills should be promoted more strongly in curricular training to teach students to apply them within their respective domains. This requires the integration of targeted courses to promote these

specific skills effectively in standard curricula. The discrepancies between generic and domain-specific skills suggested that COR skills should be promoted not only in general but in connection to domain-specific training.

DOM-COR training is still in development and needs to be tailored to each discipline (and possibly by course focus as well). However, we were able to easily elicit faculty- and student-offered examples in class through questions framed for group discussions. Some examples: “How did you find this type of information? Why did you think it was reliable? Who found ‘the best’ source? Did you come across less reliable or misleading sources? Whose interests might have influenced that source? Why might people believe it?” Even before the availability of more training, free and wide-ranging discussion can be encouraged by faculty as a means of catalyzing reflection about relevant DOM-COR skills.

One current PLATO research program examines possible trade-offs between the quality and comprehensibility of online information. We suspect that particularly low-performing students – that is, those who have difficulty understanding academic sources and research studies – will more often turn to diverse internet sources, and will therefore require personalized training. From our studies and experiences so far, we have found that both students and lecturers consider GEN-COR and DOM-COR skills to be important. They have voiced interest in learning about credibility cues, research training, (lacking) epistemically grounded discussions of information quality online, and internet “tricks of the trade.” However, without training, students will likely continue to use information they found online to study on their own without support.

We have delivered an initial dedicated GEN-COR and DOM-COR training program in three domains (law, medicine, and teaching), and we have shown the extant databases, how to search them using specific keywords and operators, as well as selected quality cues to check on websites. This newly developed training, in combination with the domain-specific assessments, represents an approach to systematically offer targeted support based on students’ identified strengths and weaknesses in using online information.² At the same time, our findings indicate that promoting COR skills should be addressed more strongly in the regular curriculum, thereby teaching students these fundamental skills in dealing with a continuously updating digital media landscape.

Looking ahead, recent developments in AI-based search software, such as ChatGPT, are expected to change affordances for internet searches, and consequently task requirements – both for search sub-skills, and also for reasoning in terms of synthesizing information. These challenges can be addressed empirically and through logging search efforts, by expressly allowing or forbidding the use of selected platforms in accomplishing or researching tasks. Still, adjustments need to be made to tracking navigation and scraping sources.³

In a similar vein, the effectiveness of critical thinking training has been examined in a few studies and meta-analyses, highlighting different opportunities to include the development of critical thinking skills both within domain courses and as general training.⁴ Those studies also point to challenges in applying generic skills to domain-specific tasks. Research on misinformation indicates that various perceptual and analytic routes can contain important cues and reveal source reliability or one-sidedness. They also suggest a wealth of corresponding training approaches, such as logical training, rhetoric moves, debiasing, emotional introspection, empathy, and perspective-taking, in addition to specific lenses for larger systemic biases from sociology, history, media studies, and critical literacies in the humanities.⁵

Most approaches, however, still largely lack integration with online sources. In terms of opportunities for future work, educational researchers should collaborate across disciplines to narrow the gaps. Our review highlighted many formidable challenges that need to be addressed for assessing and teaching critical use of online information sources fairly (and compassionately, given prior misconceptions). Complexity seems to have increased by orders of magnitude: “rationality” is claimed even by monocriterion advocacy groups, and calls to “think critically” and “do your own research” are used even by demagogues, who encourage closed groups of followers, one-sided agenda and interpretations, cherry-picked data, loaded delivery, and persuasion by (algorithmic) repetition with a science-like look. Applying critical thinking skills to available data can leave inexperienced reasoners with the impression of having successfully uncovered revelations that are wrongfully ignored for their inconvenience rather than incompatibility. In the online environment itself, many platforms are suspected to invite and even train students to become cognitive misers, while aggravating tendencies that invite poor reasoning (for example, sensationalism turned to clickbait), while including hard-to-detect bias (as in those that surface through algorithms). The task for assessment developers and educators is to tease these variants apart, increase awareness of online challenges without ostracizing or overpowering students, and reinforce common standards for thorough thinking and evidence that are demonstrably beneficial for students in our digital age.⁶

Looking back at the data collected and analyzed through PLATO over the last seven years, we can conclude that interdisciplinary and cross-domain analyses allow for significant progress in theoretical modelling and empirical explanations. Further, one discipline and/or one domain could never achieve these advances alone. For instance, through the multi- and mixed-methods analyses of the same data corpus, using different analytical perspectives and approaches with multiple data triangulation and validation, we can gain a considerable amount of new knowledge as well as high-quality results. At the same time, it requires elaborate research workshops and discussions with multiple steps (such as the joint inter-

pretation of the results). Overall, such interdisciplinary collaborations are associated with relatively high transaction costs and challenges, and require much more time in the research process. Additionally, multiyear communication processes are needed to develop a “common” language in the project, in which all researchers from the very different disciplines (currently over fifteen in PLATO) can effectively work and also successfully publish their findings. Joint interdisciplinary publications are a great challenge in and of themselves and require much more time than a conventional publication in one’s own discipline. There is also a permanent tradeoff between meeting standards in one’s own discipline and being comprehensible to a broader interdisciplinary research community.

To conclude, complex phenomena such as positive or negative learning in different settings in higher education (such as print versus online materials) can only be explored comprehensively by consolidating different areas of expertise in international interdisciplinary research teams such as those presented here. Interdisciplinary international collaborations require a group of discerning researchers who are willing to transcend the boundaries of their own disciplines and bear the relatively high costs in the long run. In this way, we can gain a deeper understanding of challenging issues like engaging student learning, studying with the internet in the digital age, and finding valid solutions to problems that arise from new technology.

AUTHOR’S NOTE

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Educating Students for Climate Action: Distraction or Higher-Education Capital?

Fernando M. Reimers

This essay examines how universities are responding to demands to educate students for climate action. I argue for a whole-of-university approach, in which sustainability becomes part of the mission of the university, and translates into reimagined forms of education, research, outreach, and management of the university operations. This approach runs counter to the most common response of universities, incremental to new demands, and is likely to take place only in institutions with greater capacity for innovation. Strategy and knowledge are key resources to support such innovation, drawing on the comparative analysis of the global experience of higher education, as there are already high rates of institutional innovation globally in educating for climate action.

Higher education in the remainder of the twenty-first century will be shaped by how universities respond to new demands to address the pressing complexities of finding a sustainable way of life. This essay examines three ways universities could respond to those demands, and suggests that strategy and knowledge of comparative experience could help.

A recent study of higher education in the United States underscores the central mission of universities: supporting the development of higher-education capital – namely, the capacity to engage deeply with intellectual topics – which is undermined when universities pursue too many other missions.¹ Agreeing that the primary goal of universities is teaching and learning, it is also the case that the analytic, reasoning, and communication skills that students develop in universities (their higher-education capital) are acquired in contexts related to their setting. Focusing on sustainability, which includes existential challenges for humanity (such as climate change, democratic decline, or war), provides a capacious framing that allows the leaders of universities to elicit the support of many constituencies. In this essay, I focus on one component of sustainability: addressing climate change.

There is great heterogeneity in how universities approach educating for climate change. After examining three approaches that have been followed, and discussing how to evaluate their benefits and costs, this essay favors a whole-of-university approach that supports pathways to transition toward a green economy, where

every student has multiple learning opportunities to develop the competencies to contribute to adaptation, mitigation, and reversal of the effects of climate change, as individuals, citizens, and professionals. This is different, and more challenging to do, than providing students opportunities to learn the science related to climate change, what I could call “climate literacy.”

The varied responses from university leadership to these demands constitute a global laboratory from which we can learn. This variation is shaped by widespread contention over whether universities can (and even should) pursue this focus on climate change, by their choice of which metrics can and should be used, and by faculty capacity, university leadership, and organizational effectiveness. The path of least resistance for universities is to respond to these societal demands in shallow and cosmetic ways, adding some courses or initiatives aligned with climate change, and producing some superficial changes that improve public metrics such as creating a required course on climate change or a new degree on climate change, without meaningful changes to the experience of most students on campus. This facile course of action will be ineffective in helping us tackle climate change and is the *least likely* option to contribute to the formation of higher-education capital.

In contrast, meeting these heightened societal expectations will require greater integration of research, education, outreach, and management of university operations to advance sustainability. If successful, it will lead to a more fundamental reimagining of the student experience, one that engages all students over extended periods, integrating action and reflection on action with deep learning from different disciplines. This more demanding path is also *more likely* to support the development of higher-education capital.

The new societal and student demands that universities address sustainability could signal the exhaustion of the post-World War II order for higher education, shaped by the primary goal of democratizing access.² Institutions of higher education have been called to reimagine their role in society, and their mission to serve as catalysts “for a rapid, urgently needed and fair transition towards sustainability.”³ Adding to these demands from alumni, civic leaders, donors, academic leaders, and governing bodies of universities, as well as the public at large, are demands from students, the most educated generation in human history.

This burgeoning interest in getting universities to address the effects of climate change stems also from the considerable increase in the number of institutions and students in the Global South, where the challenges are greater. The number of students in higher education is expanding exponentially, from 100 million in the year 2000, to 250 million in 2020, and projected to be 594 million by 2040, with most of this growth taking place in middle-income developing countries and very limited increases in North America and Europe.⁴

At its General Assembly in 2015, the United Nations adopted a framework to guide efforts toward a more inclusive and sustainable world: the UN Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), also known as the 2030 development agenda. The seventeen SDGs are understood to be interdependent, so that climate action, for instance, is interdependent with other SDGs such as gender equity, education, sustainable cities, and no poverty.

The growing adoption of the SDGs by many higher-education institutions reflects the globalization of ideas about the mission of higher education, much like the model of a “liberal arts education” has spread globally. Studying universities’ varied efforts to advance these goals furthers our understanding of the effects of globalization on universities overall, especially in how they redefine their mission. Such study can also support innovation based on global experience.

There have been several efforts, led by university consortia, UN agencies, and organizations of civil society to support the alignment of higher-education institutional strategies with the SDGs 2030 agenda. The National Committee for the 2030 agenda in Norway is a recent example. Composed primarily of higher-education institutions, it prepared a report calling on universities to align their work more intentionally with the advancement of the 2030 agenda. The report was presented at the UNESCO biannual conference on higher education, which was held in Barcelona in May of 2022.⁵

To support exchange across universities to impact climate action, in 2008, the Hamburg University of Applied Sciences launched the International Climate Change Information and Research Program, focusing on education, communication, and information on climate change. This program convenes a biannual conference on universities and climate change. Similarly, the International University Climate Alliance is a consortium of fifty-six research universities collaborating to exchange practices on research and education about climate change. And in the United States, the organization Second Nature has worked with universities since 1993 to help them integrate sustainable practices in the management of their physical infrastructure and in their programs.⁶

Times Higher Education (THE) has created a novel set of global rankings of universities, the impact rankings, which allow participating institutions access to the self-reported evidence describing each institution’s initiatives to meet the SDGs.⁷ These impact rankings have made innovations in higher education more visible than they would have been otherwise. Without them, the advances would have been known only to those at their respective institutions. For example, Amrita University, a small private university established in 1994 in Coimbatore, India, operating in seven campuses and offering 207 degrees to 18,000 students with 1,700 faculty, was recognized in the last round of the impact rankings as the most impactful university in India and the 41st most impactful university in the world, to a great extent because many of its programs focus on improving human conditions

in rural communities and among the poor, and require that students spend part of their time living in poor communities so that part of their studies can contribute to those efforts. Other efforts to make innovations in higher education in climate action more visible include various awards, such as those managed by the Times Higher Education to recognize exemplary practices, including in environmental leadership, in the United Kingdom, Asia, and the Arab World.⁸

Underscoring the challenge of finding adequate metrics to support efforts to educate communities about climate change, the impact rankings are imperfect. Two of the indicators address climate change, but only partially. First, SDG 13 (climate action), which integrates indicators on research for climate action, low-carbon energy use, outreach climate education efforts, and commitment to carbon neutrality; and second, SDG 17 (partnerships for development), which includes indicators of education about the SDGs for university students, as well as research into partnerships to advance the goals, and publication of reports on the SDGs. None of the indicators provide information on what proportion of the students at the institutions learn anything about climate change, or about the type of educational experiences they have access to, or what they actually learn.

Universities must face three central curriculum questions as they seek to address climate action: Who should be taught, what should be taught, and how should it be taught? This curriculum redesign needs to be aligned with scenarios for a transition to a new economy, which forecasts the impact of climate change on jobs, and include alternative scenarios that adapt to and mitigate the effects of climate change, drawing out the skill requirements of those jobs. The International Labor Organization estimates that a transition to a green economy will eliminate 6 million jobs and create 24 million new jobs by 2030.⁹

But if it is to reinforce higher-education capital, the integration of climate education in the curriculum needs to be deep and rigorous, and engage most students. A fragmented approach to sustainability education might lead to a few (or many) new courses in the curriculum, creating multiple possible avenues that some students may take to reach recognition, study, or even action around one or some of these societal challenges. But they may not follow any pathway that supports progression from novice to expert understanding, or connects these routes to the rest of their academic journey. The result of such a fragmented approach would be that only some students would learn something about sustainability, with no assurance that those opportunities were in fact pursued by all students, and no guarantee that anyone gained the competency to advance sustainability from their eventual professional paths.

In contrast, a whole-of-university approach to teaching climate change would provide coherence in learning opportunities across subjects, throughout the classroom experience and the lived experience on campus. This thorough connection is

more likely in contexts in which there is coherence across curricular, research, outreach, and infrastructure efforts that support student engagement at growing levels of depth and complexity with the subject. Further, students will likely benefit more when university efforts occur across multiple subjects that develop a full range of cognitive and affective dispositions toward the challenges of climate change, as aligned with a green economy transition. But scholarly research on how universities approach climate change education remains scant: “Climate Change Education [CCE] has been an under-researched topic. There have been only a few attempts to conceptualize CCE and define the associated skills, knowledge, and competencies.”¹⁰

A survey administered to 212 university staff in 45 countries found high variability in how institutions approached climate change, most of them focusing on reducing their carbon footprint and only 20 of them mentioning curricular approaches.¹¹ These curricular approaches in turn were heterogeneous, including *piggybacking* (adding climate change education to existing courses or programs), *mainstreaming* (integrating climate change education broadly across the curriculum), and *specializing* (creating specific disciplinary offerings). Another study found very limited references to climate change in most disciplines.¹²

There are very few evaluations of education programs about climate change. On balance, they suggest that simply teaching students *the facts* about climate change produces knowledge but not commitment to engage in addressing it. Instead, the combination of teaching the science of climate change along with opportunities to design and execute ways to make some difference produce both knowledge and the disposition to engage in climate action efforts. Experimental studies of climate education curriculum in Sweden show that knowledge-based curriculum alone is not correlated to behavior, whereas knowledge-based curriculum integrated with civic engagement with climate action led to competency and actual engagement.¹³

A review of 220 studies of climate change education conducted between 1993 and 2014 concluded that most of them framed it as STEM education or part of environmental education.¹⁴ A recent review of 70 studies on the effectiveness of climate change education concludes that most of them focus on outcomes such as individual energy conservation, with less than a handful addressing effects on collective action of societal transitions to noncarbon fuels.¹⁵ Additionally, many studies examine whether climate change education supports understanding of climate change, not on whether they help students identify pathways for climate action.¹⁶ In other words, they emphasize climate literacy, rather than the development of skills that can support the transition to a green economy. Perhaps the most robust challenge: most studies on climate change education document very limited impact on attitudes and behavior, and in some cases, a negative relationship between knowledge and behavior.¹⁷

Across these reviews, a pattern emerged. Universities have approached climate change education in at least three ways: 1) through the introduction of a required

course on the subject, 2) through the organic incorporation of climate change education in the curriculum, and 3) through the intentional integration of climate change across the curriculum.

While requiring students to take a course on climate change has the appeal of apparent simplicity, there is no evidence that this approach has been easy to implement or led to depth of understanding. Given the distinction between climate literacy and helping students develop specific competencies that support a transition to a green economy, a required course is more likely to contribute to the former than to the latter. In 2019, the government of Italy took the unprecedented step of mandating a required module on sustainability for all schools and, in partnership with the Sustainable Development Universities Network, an elective interdisciplinary course for universities:

[This] elective online module for all university students of all disciplines, [was] shaped around the interdisciplinary nature of the concept of sustainability, focusing on the intersection of economic, social, and environmental dynamics. This module, known as “lecture 0,” was designed as propaedeutic to any course of further specialization, with a view to training students to think in an integrated fashion across natural and social sciences.¹⁸

The implementation of these programs, however, has been challenging. As of 2021, only twenty universities offered lecture 0 (from here, Lecture Zero) – even though eighty universities were part of the Sustainable Development Universities Network.¹⁹ The lack of faculty capacity undergirds these challenges. Nonetheless, some universities have engaged more deeply with climate change education, adopting practices the proponents of Lecture Zero hoped all universities would. For instance, the University of Dar es Salaam in Tanzania requires all students to gain a basic understanding of climate change and sustainable development.²⁰

A single course designed to educate all students presents a major challenge: finding the faculty who will teach it. An obvious risk in finding the right instructor is that such a “service course” would be taught to very large groups of students, perhaps requiring faculty to extend beyond their usual expertise, and unlikely to have the experience required to help students connect what they learn about climate change to their professional paths. The evaluation of the benefits and costs of such an approach should include what students learn in terms of depth and rigor of knowledge, competencies, and dispositions – and how these lessons inform how they plan to address climate change from their intended professional paths.

A more organic, evolutionary way for universities to include climate change education in the curriculum is to build on the existing interests and expertise of the faculty, as they conduct research or create programs on the

topic. This approach is more likely to emerge in universities with a strong overall commitment to climate action, where there are already programs in place and research in progress, which are more likely to benefit some students than all students. Most of the examples available in sources like the impact rankings are of this sort.

The University of Tasmania, Australia's fourth oldest university, leads the THE rankings on climate action. This affiliation can likely be credited to their many research publications on climate action, as well as their low-carbon energy tracking and their commitment to carbon neutrality – the university has been carbon-neutral certified since 2016. A chief sustainability officer oversees a strategy to advance the school's "holistic institutional sustainability initiatives."²¹

Climate change education is integrated into several courses in various disciplines, such as natural sciences, geography, education, sociology, law, philosophy, and health. The courses include elective classes such as responding to climate change, introduction to the science of climate change, our changing climate, climate change economics, politics and planning, and planning and management for climate change. So far, these courses are the result of organic development. The university is mapping the entire curriculum to identify where education about the SDGs currently exists. They have examined the idea of requiring a course on climate change for all students, but discarded it in favor of a set of transversal competencies, which include sustainability, that could be developed through a variety of pathways and prerequisites, each appropriate to the respective disciplines and fields of study.

Scientists at the University of Tasmania have written research papers on climate action to promote the country's Climate Action Plan. Their Climate Futures Research Group works with industry and government, providing models to support climate-attuned decision-making. They have also advanced several initiatives to educate the community about climate, through their Curious Climate program, which provides students and teachers in local schools an avenue to ask questions about climate change and have them answered by climate scientists.²² Those questions and answers then become public information. The scientists at the University of Tasmania have also aligned their operations with climate change mitigation strategies, including divesting from carbon-intensive fuels, reducing carbon emissions and carbon in infrastructure, and decarbonizing their operations.

Ranked third in the impact rankings for climate action, Wageningen University and Research in the Netherlands, formerly an agricultural college, focuses on improving and preserving the contributions of nature to quality of life, in food and the living environment. The university's strategic plan addresses four main challenges: climate change, overpopulation, malnutrition, and overconsumption. The plan articulates the transitions necessary to face these challenges and aligns the actions of the university to support those transitions, such as the tran-

sition to circular agri-food systems. The strategy explicitly states another goal: to make an impact that responds to societal needs and the SDGs.

Research at the Wageningen Institute for Climate Research is structured around three main issues: enabling climate action, managing the future biosphere, and advancing circular systems. Courses about climate change and sustainability are integrated throughout the curriculum of all programs and are also available as extension courses or MOOCs (Massive Open Online Courses) for professionals.²³ Such alignment of university strategies with sustainability and climate action has resulted in an abundance of opportunities for students to develop competency in multiple fields, across the curriculum.

The collective benefits of these organic approaches are twofold: 1) instruction is more likely to be led by experts, and 2) it will be well-aligned with coherent programs related to climate. For universities with faculty whose expertise is outside of climate change education, the inherent need is to hire faculty who could (and would) build those programs. Evaluations of this approach should focus on whether a strategy that builds on existing faculty strengths gradually expands to engage more among the nonexpert faculty. Doing so will create a series of concentric groups of interested faculty. In a hub and spokes model, a strong core of expert faculty and robust climate education programs would contribute to building capacity and interest among peripheral faculty, whose primary work is in other domains. From there, all the faculty involved could collaborate across disciplines to determine how to make the lessons accessible to students, depending on the pedagogical methods used in their respective majors, starting with the proportion of the students who are already engaged with such programs.

A more ambitious strategy to educate students about climate change is to integrate this subject across the curriculum, so that all students develop the knowledge and skills they need to contribute effectively to climate action from a variety of disciplinary and professional paths. While this is the most transformational of the strategies, it is also the one likely to take more time and to require more institutional resources, including innovation based on comparative experience, for effective implementation.

For example, the Instituto Tecnológico de Estudios Superiores de Monterrey (Tec), the fifth most highly ranked university in Latin America in the THE impact rankings, has integrated the SDGs into their institutional strategy and released periodic institutional reports of university initiatives aligned with the SDGs. Their strategic plan aims to support human flourishing, a process understood to require capabilities to participate in multiple domains so that “each person can relate to the community and the environment to create a better world, with respect for human dignity.”²⁴ One of the pillars of the institute’s strategic plan is sustainable development, explicitly aligned with the SDGs. Another pillar is education: they

aim to ensure all students and faculty are knowledgeable about climate change and sustainability.

Their goal is to educate leaders committed to advancing a sustainable future, and with the SDGs as a framework, they plan to include climate education and sustainable development in the curriculum by 2025. As a first step in that process, they mapped the integration of the SDGs in the entire university curriculum, finding that 19 percent of their subjects reference at least one SDG, and that one-fifth of their academic programs include SDG 13 (climate action).

They also decided that several of their schools (engineering, humanities, social studies and government, architecture, art and design, business, and medicine) would include at least one required course that relates the discipline to climate change. They have also created a series of electives focused on climate education in which students from various careers and disciplines collaborate on projects with civil society organizations.

Future plans entail updating the curriculum to include courses on sustainable development in alignment with cognitive, socioemotional, and behavioral goals. These plans to revise the curriculum focus on reimagining a series of transversal or intersecting competencies across all fields of study, including those for sustainability. These efforts have supported opportunities for faculty to learn about climate change education. They have also included a section on sustainable development in the surveys of graduates to assess how they advance sustainability.

The most recent social impact report of the Tec describes 820 initiatives aligned with the SDGs that make visible a ubiquity of opportunities for student engagement with the SDGs. The approach adopted by the Tec illustrates how integrating the SDGs into the strategy of the university can result in intentional infusion of climate change education across the curriculum. Because these opportunities are integrated within the curriculum of the various departments and disciplines, it is more likely that students will learn how to address climate change within their specific profession than from efforts to offer “generic” climate education courses to all students, disconnected from the rest of their studies, as is the case with the required Lecture Zero course in Italy. This approach is more likely to support the development of competencies that contribute to a transition to a green economy, rather than basic climate literacy. In addition, the integration of sustainability competencies as part of the curriculum-wide transversal competencies are likely to reach more students and offer deeper learning experiences that develop a breadth of skills related to climate change action. Further, the novel action projects that bring together students from diverse disciplines to collaborate with organizations of civil society in addressing various effects of climate change will allow them to gain procedural, rather than conceptual, knowledge. The experience of the Tec also underscores how important it is to offer faculty opportunities to develop the knowledge and pedagogical skills to teach this novel curriculum.

Another institution pursuing a whole-of-university approach to educating about climate change is The University of Victoria (UVic) in Canada, a highly ranked university on climate action in the Times Higher Education impact ranking. Their comprehensive approach to climate provides coherence to activities in academics and curriculum; research and innovation; communications; finance; operations; and external, Indigenous, international relations, and community and government interactions. Climate change education and sustainability are integrated into the curriculum across majors. Their programs and courses blend academic and experiential learning. UVic's university-wide strategy includes measurable targets, for example, methods to infuse climate education throughout the curriculum and to create new programs:

Strategy 7.1. Provide a new lens to existing, and develop new, academic programs and learning outcomes to include climate and sustainability content that actively engages with the challenges posed by colonization and inequities.

ACTIONS

- Provide all undergraduate and graduate students with access to climate and sustainability-related curricula and programming.
- Create a Sustainability Literacy Assessment to evaluate the success of the university's sustainability education initiatives and gain insight into how these can be improved.
- Engage with expertise within academic units and programs, relevant research institutes on campus and affiliated organizations to develop climate and sustainability content.
- Through the development of a community of practice, offer support and mentorship to instructors seeking to integrate climate change and sustainability into their teaching.

Strategy 7.2. Develop diverse, innovative, cross- and inter-disciplinary graduate programs and experiences focused on climate and sustainability challenges.

ACTIONS

- Create a climate and sustainability academic working group to review current content, identify existing barriers to cross-disciplinary teaching collaborations at the graduate level, generate interest and potential for new collaborations.
- Expand non-credit options on climate change and sustainability in existing and new areas.²⁵

The plan also includes strategies to expand the faculty's capacity to teach about climate, a cornerstone of the success of any effort to transform the curriculum in practice.

While these integrated efforts across the curriculum appear promising, we do not yet know whether the many opportunities they have generated have led stu-

dents to follow rigorous pathways building mastery in their respective concentrations or professional paths. In this case too, developing faculty's skills and experience stands as a significant challenge of this approach.

Some have proposed a more immersive form of the whole-of-university approach to applying the SDGs at schools: making the university a "living lab" for the SDGs, a microcosm in which those goals are pursued and reflected in everything the university does.²⁶ One such example came in 2016 from Utrecht University in the Netherlands, where they aligned education, research, and operations with sustainability. This effort resulted in the creation of a series of "Pathways to Sustainability," integrating the work of over twelve thousand scholars addressing climate action through thirteen research centers and five hubs focused on food, negative emissions, cities, water, and a circular economy.

An evaluation of this whole-of-university intentional integration, as with the preceding two, should weigh the benefits to students – how many of them learn, to what level of depth and expertise – against the costs, with particular attention to whether the proliferation of pathways results in shallow engagement through projects with little results, undermining serious development of higher-education capital.

In these ongoing efforts to support the transformation of higher education toward more effective climate education, we need better metrics and more research to identify education approaches that are coherent and rigorous, and which encompass a sufficiently large set of student experiences to enhance their knowledge about climate change. At present, most of the efforts made visible by the THE impact rankings merely capture the existence of varied initiatives to advance sustainability, not their integration or cohesion from the point of view of the student experience. We cannot easily discern from those rankings which of the three approaches discussed here is pursued by each institution. When metrics are too simple, they can allow institutions to report surface-level changes, improving their standing in those rankings without corresponding substantive changes in the student experience. In effect, the institutions only *declare* a commitment to climate change, rather than demonstrate that they *achieve it*.

Given the nature of complex challenges such as climate change, a superficial declarative approach to addressing them in the curriculum is not only inadequate, but also a distraction. A cursory reading of the latest report of the International Panel on Climate Change makes evident that this multidimensional challenge requires concerted efforts across many domains, not just advancement in knowledge in the disciplines that focus on partial aspects of the challenge, such as atmospheric chemistry, meteorology, or oceanographic geochemistry.²⁷

A whole-of-university strategy fostering integration across the disciplines – across core activities of research, education, outreach, and operations, and across

the varied learning opportunities that students engage in, both curricular and co-curricular – would be a more appropriate response to the complexity of the challenge, albeit extremely difficult to carry out and costly. The benefits of such an approach are discernable. Disciplinary integration between the sciences, technology, engineering, the arts, humanities, and social sciences is of the essence to address the multifaceted issues of sustainability and climate change. Integration across research, teaching, extension schools, and operations can create synergies that transform the culture of the institution in service of a seamless and coherent student experience clearly aligned with sustainability. Curricular and cocurricular learning opportunities would help students progressively and coherently master the competencies necessary to understand how they could mitigate the effects of climate change and contribute to sustainability in their respective fields, in this way gaining not only “climate literacy,” but also the skills to support a transition to a green economy.

But the costs of such an ambitious – and perhaps idealistic – approach are also discernable. For this reason, a whole-of-university approach to support interdisciplinary integration across activities requires innovation to make the project feasible. Otherwise, the premise runs counter to how universities typically work, and therefore what university administrators are most likely to do. Such innovation can be supported by strategies based on comparative knowledge garnered from all universities, rather than a narrow set of “peer institutions.” Considering the efforts at the University of Tasmania or the Tec of Monterrey, integrating the SDGs into a school’s strategy can stimulate innovative projects to educate for climate change. We can also learn from the “global laboratory” constituted by other universities, such as the THE impact ranking, an incipient example of a global observatory that might support novel approaches to learning about the effects of climate change.

There are many ways in which universities can have an impact on climate change. They can educate their students about it. They can support their faculty’s efforts to develop new curriculum and teaching methods. They can host projects to inform the public on topics related to climate change. They can partner with institutions that are developing alternatives to adapt to, mitigate, or revert climate change. They can manage their resources, particularly their infrastructure, in ways that foster sustainability, such as reducing their carbon footprint. Institutions can pursue each of these initiatives independently and incrementally. Or they can try to create synergies across them in a coherent whole-of-university approach.

An essential element to unleash such an approach is a university strategy, and efforts to monitor the actions that are taking place reflecting the strategy, as I outlined through the example from Tec. Perhaps most important, making this strategy and the associated metrics public allows the institutions to challenge them-

selves using benchmarks to track their growth, and to contribute to advance similar efforts in the larger ecosystem. In effect, the institutions participating in the THE impact rankings are already doing this important work.

The analysis of these three approaches to educate about climate change shows that while efforts integrated with a university strategy are more likely to create synergies across the curriculum, research, outreach, and the operational management of the university's resources, they are also more complex and costly than more superficial approaches such as adding a required course to the curriculum. Clearly, equipping most students with the skills to support a transition to a green economy will be more challenging than providing them with climate literacy. It is also likely to be the most effective approach in a world in which most people believe they know how to reduce their environmental footprint but are unable to recognize the most impactful ways to do so.²⁸

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Online Learning & the Transformation of Global Higher Education

Richard C. Levin

This essay examines the global impact of online education in the decade following the widely publicized introduction of MOOCs (Massive Open Online Courses) in 2012 – exploring the demographics and preferences of learners, the effectiveness of online learning, the surprising and substantial impact on the labor market, and the implications of scalability for reducing the cost of education. The essay concludes that online education has broadened the range of activities undertaken by leading universities and will continue to dramatically expand the population of learners with access to low-cost, high-quality education.

In 2012, online education burst into public view with the publication of a *New York Times* article entitled, “The Year of the MOOC.”¹ The article described the sudden growth in popularity of Massive Open Online Courses and the startup platforms that provided them (Coursera, edX, and Udacity). A balanced and judicious account, it nonetheless precipitated an avalanche of fears and hopes. Faculty questioned the effectiveness of online learning, but nonetheless feared that the MOOC would replace classroom teaching, reduce the demand for professors, and transform them into teaching assistants. By contrast, trustees hoped that online instruction might reverse, or at least arrest, the relentless increase of tuition, and they urged presidents to invest for fear of missing out. The trustees of the University of Virginia even attempted to fire their president over her reluctance to embrace technology with the alacrity that they expected.² Universities around the country rushed to sign up with edX, a nonprofit joint venture of MIT and Harvard, or Coursera, a for-profit startup founded by two Stanford professors. European, Latin American, and Asian universities soon followed. By mid-2014, Coursera and edX had more than one hundred fifty unique university partners between them, most of which ranked in the global top 200.

A decade later, some early goals have been met and others have not; some fears remain while many have been laid to rest. As is typical of overhyped innovations, imagined revolution has given way to evolution. Slowly and steadily, online learning is transforming postsecondary education around the world, both inside and outside the academy, in ways that were not fully anticipated in 2012.

Online education predates the Year of the MOOC by four decades. In 1971, the Open University began to televise courses throughout the United Kingdom. Two years later, Jim Gibbons at Stanford conducted fascinating experiments combining videotaped lectures with live, onsite tutoring, anticipating lessons relearned in the MOOC era.³ Education scholar Linda Harasim is often credited with offering the first fully online, for-credit university course in 1986 (accessed primitively by dial-up modems over landline telephone infrastructure), although Harasim herself identifies numerous precursors elsewhere between 1981 and 1986.⁴ The University of Phoenix began offering fully online bachelor's and master's degrees just three years later, and other for-profit organizations, as well as nonprofits, followed shortly after. A decade later, at the turn of the millennium, top-tier universities entered the arena, offering single courses via streaming video, but Fathom (Columbia), E-Cornell, and AllLearn (a joint venture of Oxford, Stanford, and Yale) failed to achieve scale or commercial viability. In 2008, a new venture, 2tor (later renamed 2U), developed a platform for hosting online degrees offered by established universities such as the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill and the University of Southern California, and received a share of tuition revenue for supplying the technology, assisting with course production, and recruiting students – chiefly through paid advertising.

By the Year of the MOOC, there were 7 million students enrolled in at least one online course through a U.S. university, and 1.5 million enrolled in fully online degree programs.⁵ Most online degree programs charged tuition fees comparable to those paid by students on campus, and enrollment was typically less than enrollment in counterpart programs on campus. The MOOC promised something radically new and different – famous professors from top universities, massive scale, and low cost. For the first time, institutions of higher education could imagine achieving high quality, wide access, and affordability in the same offering.

Such imagining was possible only because MOOCs, unlike most online degree programs then and now, did not require the presence of a live instructor. Students watched videos, took quizzes and tests, and worked on collaborative projects with each other asynchronously, which meant that the same course could reach large numbers in different time zones at low cost per student. Asynchronous courses and degree programs built upon them had the potential to increase the number of students reached by a single faculty member from tens or hundreds to tens or hundreds of thousands, or more.

In this essay, I hope to shed light on the current and future impact of online learning on global higher education. To do this, I will begin by asking two questions about the demand for online postsecondary education: 1) who are the learners? and 2) what do they want to learn? The answers are surprising, especially to faculty and administrators in traditional higher education. I will also discuss who is supplying educational content online, how it is delivered, and whether it is effec-

tive. Finally, I will offer a perspective on two further questions: 1) can online education serve the learning needs of the global workforce in an era of rapid technological progress? and 2) can online education help universities around the world in their quest for the holy grail of high quality, accessibility, and affordability?

In 2012, the conversation among U.S. academics assumed that the audience for MOOCs would be pre-college or college-age students, principally residing in the United States. But, contrary to expectations, a 2015 Coursera survey revealed that only 11 percent of surveyed learners were under age 22, just under half were 22–45 years old, and the balance were over 45 years old.⁶ And the learner population was, and remains, overwhelmingly international. By the end of 2022, only 21 percent of Coursera’s learners resided in North America. The rest were distributed around the world: 32 percent in Asia, 18 percent in Latin America, 17 percent in Europe, and 10 percent in the Middle East and Africa. Apart from the United States (19 percent) and India (16 percent), no single country has more than 10 percent of the learners on the platform.⁷ These demographics have profound implications for the future of higher education. They demonstrate that the principal consequence of putting courses online has not been to transform teaching and learning on campus, but rather to extend the reach of universities beyond customary geographic and demographic boundaries to millions of learners around the world beyond the normal age of university students.

It is worth dwelling on this point. There are 19 million students enrolled in institutions of higher education in the United States and approximately 250 million enrolled worldwide. Enrollment in online courses will come to dwarf these numbers. By the end of 2022, Coursera alone had 118 million registered learners, growing at an annual rate of 22 percent. Putting university courses on Zoom during the early years of the COVID-19 pandemic to meet the needs of on-campus students was a transient accommodation. Reaching hundreds of millions who are not currently enrolled in higher education is a revolution.

In the early days at Coursera, the entire staff assembled weekly for updates from the leadership team. At the close of each meeting, one of the employees would relate a “learner story.” More than any quantitative evidence, these stories drove home the extraordinary impact of online courses on learners outside the traditional reach of higher education. One moving example was the story of an unemployed taxi driver in Tennessee who – after losing his home, being abandoned by his family, and suffering from depression – took an online writing course that gave him the confidence to enroll in a nearby state university, complete a degree, and get a job as a writer. Another was the story of a woman in Bangladesh who, after escaping from an abusive husband and fleeing to another city, took online business courses that prepared her to open what became a successful bakery. These are only two students among many whose lives were transformed by access to online education.

In the Year of the MOOC, as universities rushed to sign on with Coursera and edX, their faculty and administrators assumed that a large audience would be available for courses across a wide range of subject matters in the liberal arts and sciences. Enrollments were widely distributed and remain so. But in 2013, once Coursera began to charge learners for certificates of successful completion, courses imparting job-relevant skills in business, technology, and data science produced over 80 percent of its revenue. A year later, when Coursera and edX began offering sequences of courses from university partners, these skewed heavily toward practical subjects in business, technology, and data science. At the same time, Udacity abandoned its efforts in general education and concentrated its courses and “nanodegrees” entirely on computer science and data science. Reflecting these developments, Coursera’s survey of fifty-two thousand course completers in 2015 found that “educational benefit” was the principal motivation for 28 percent of those surveyed while “career benefit” motivated 52 percent.⁸

The early MOOC platforms’ experience with vocationally oriented learners was paralleled by the emergence of scores, if not hundreds, of start-ups offering “microcredentials” through live “coding bootcamps” as well as online instruction in computer skills. None has achieved the scale of the MOOC platforms, but some have partnered successfully with universities to offer instruction on campuses. Microcredentials – a category that includes certificates of completion of MOOCs and multicourse sequences – have become a labor-market currency, especially in the technology sector. Jobseekers list these credentials on their resumes and LinkedIn profiles, and recruiters pay attention to them.

In 2016, a study of three thousand candidates for software engineering jobs found that completing Coursera and Udacity courses was the single best indicator of success in technical interviews.⁹ In a more recent survey, 86 percent of employers agreed that microcredentials strengthened a candidate’s job application, and 74 percent believed that earning such credentials improved a candidate’s ability to perform well in an entry-level position.¹⁰

Career-oriented courses and programs – especially those focused on the acquisition of business, computing, and data science skills – remain the principal source of enrollment and revenue for online providers. In 2022, they accounted for three-quarters of Coursera’s 39 million enrollments. Nonetheless, liberal arts subjects continue to flourish online. Of the sixteen Coursera courses with over one million cumulative enrollments, seven are liberal arts courses spanning the disciplines of psychology, neuroscience, economics, English, and Asian languages.

Universities hoping to reach off-campus audiences can post courses on their own websites or YouTube channels, and can also partner with a third-party platform to gain the advantages of potentially larger enrollments, likely lower costs of attracting those enrollments, and technology that

supports a more interactive and personalized learning experience. After the Year of the MOOC, dozens of platforms emerged to work with universities to offer single courses and/or collections of courses (specializations, nanodegrees, micro-master's, and other certificate programs). Among these were Future Learn in the United Kingdom, FUN in France, Swayyam and Simplilearn in India, and Chinese University MOOC (previously known as I-Course), Xuetang X, and CNMOOC in China.¹¹ Universities seeking to offer accredited degree programs, certificates, or executive education programs online can provide them on their own websites or use a third-party platform such as 2U, Noodle, and Coursera (each based in the United States), or a number of strong competitors in India such as UpGrad, Eruditus, or Great Learning. In all these cases, the courses, programs, and degrees carry the university's brand name. Some faculty have operated independently of their institutions by authoring their own courses on platforms such as Udemy or Teachable.

Online postsecondary instruction is not limited to the offerings of universities or freelance university faculty. Well before the Year of the MOOC, Skillsoft, Lynda.com, and others offered video libraries of short courses on business topics over the internet, taught chiefly by instructors with industry expertise but no academic affiliation. When the MOOCs revealed the enormous latent demand for job-related skills acquisition in business, technology, and data science, the field exploded. Hundreds of start-ups in the United States, Europe, India, and China began to offer courses and certificate programs in computing and data science taught by industry experts, wholly online or in hybrid format. Udacity was a pioneer in this movement. It pivoted from Stanford professors to industry experts as instructors as early as 2013. By 2016, even Coursera had begun to offer specializations and certificate programs under the sponsorship of leading companies such as Google in technology and PricewaterhouseCoopers in business. By the end of 2022, it had over 110 industry partners offering job-relevant courses alongside more than 185 universities providing education in both academic and professional subject matter. When a professor at the University of Michigan offers his #1-rated course on introductory programming in Python through Coursera, he is competing not only with courses offered by other professors on edX or Coursera, as well as industry experts on Udacity, Udemy, Skillshare, Great Courses, Codecademy, and Data Camp, but also with courses offered by Google, IBM, and Meta experts on the Coursera platform.

The ecosystem has continued to expand. By the end of 2022, there were at least 256 companies offering online or hybrid instruction in either postsecondary academic subjects or workforce skill development. One-third of these companies are based in North America, 23 percent in Europe, 16 percent in Latin America, and 10 percent in South Asia, with the balance divided evenly among Southeast Asia, Australia, the Middle East and North Africa, and Sub-Saharan Africa.¹²

No one claims that an asynchronous, large-scale class can replicate the learning experience of the live, on-campus seminar involving a professor and ten to fifteen students. In such a setting, an excellent teacher can help a student master far more than the subject matter. Students learn how to form and defend an argument, and how to find flaws in the arguments of others. In short, students develop, through regular practice, the ability to think critically and independently. To date, this experience has not been replicated online *at scale*. Holding a synchronous online discussion with twelve people can produce all or most of the educational benefits of a physical classroom, but without realizing the access and affordability benefits associated with large-scale MOOCs.

The small seminar focused on developing the capacity for critical thinking is not, however, the norm in on-campus higher education worldwide. Lecture courses focused on content mastery account for a much larger share of enrollment. And there is evidence that asynchronous, scalable online courses produce better mastery of content than live lecture courses. Perhaps the most careful study of the subject was undertaken by physicist David E. Pritchard at MIT, who found through pre- and posttesting using edX technology that learning gains in his introductory physics MOOC exceeded those in the traditional, live introductory physics lecture courses studied earlier by physicist Richard R. Hake, although they fell short of the learning gains realized in courses using interactive pedagogy.¹³ Moreover, the learning gains experienced by the 1,080 study participants in Pritchard's MOOC did not differ significantly across cohorts defined by educational background.¹⁴

Why might learning be more effective in asynchronous online courses than in traditional live lecture courses? First, many studies have shown that retention improves dramatically by breaking lectures into short segments and interjecting quizzes at regular intervals of six to ten minutes, a standard feature of Coursera and edX courses. Such practices have long been recommended for live teaching, but they remain far from universal. Second, several online platforms offer learners the opportunity to vary the instructor's speed of delivery from one half to double the number of words per minute – helping learners who are having difficulty and preventing those who find the material easy from becoming bored. Third, online platforms typically have a replay button, so learners who fail an in-video quiz, or who otherwise have difficulty understanding the first time through, can watch a video segment again and again until the material is understood. Fourth, some platforms – Coursera among them – employ algorithms to detect learners having difficulty and guide them to review relevant earlier segments of the course. Fifth, some courses, especially those in the computer science and data science domains, weave interactive exercises throughout the lectures, enabling students to master concepts through practical application.

These observations about the effectiveness of online learning help to explain some of the reactions of teachers and students who were forced to go online

during the COVID-19 pandemic. In general, teachers found interactive seminar classes worked better online than they expected, while lectures fared worse. The first of these impressions is understandable: conversation tended to work reasonably well in classes small enough to fit everyone on a single Zoom screen, even if the experience did not fully replicate the chemistry of live classroom interaction. The second impression is also understandable: given the overnight switch from the classroom to Zoom, most instructors were unaware of what had been learned about teaching lecture classes effectively online, and they simply replicated what they did in the classroom. Uninterrupted lectures of fifty or seventy-five minutes did not hold the attention of online learners who might otherwise have been mesmerized by the live presence of a charismatic lecturer. Moreover, in synchronous online lectures, students lacked the advantages of slowing the instructor down, or hitting the replay button, or receiving algorithmically driven guidance when they were confused. Some of the deficit of synchronous online lectures can be mitigated by recording them and making them available for replay.¹⁵

For many students, particularly those in residential universities, moving classes online was unpopular, because they were deprived of live interaction with fellow classmates as well as the instructor. Overall, however, student reaction was positive. A survey published in April 2021 found that 73 percent of students would like to take some fully online courses in the future.¹⁶ Many working adults attending late afternoon or evening classes at community colleges or state universities embraced online learning because it brought the benefit of eliminating a commute after the workday.

Recent advances in artificial intelligence, and especially radical breakthroughs in natural language-processing algorithms, promise quantum improvement in the effectiveness of online learning, but the inaccuracy of forecasts in the Year of the MOOC cautions against offering predictions with any confidence in the Year of ChatGPT.

A major surprise of the last decade is that online education has had a more profound impact on the labor market than on university campuses. Technological and demographic factors have created unprecedented demand for job-relevant training, and online instruction has provided a low-cost solution that has already reached significant scale, with the potential to grow ten- or one hundredfold in the years ahead.

Since the advent of distributed computing in the 1980s, digital technologies have spread across virtually every job and profession. Technology has created entirely new categories of jobs (for example, data scientists), changed the mix of skills required for most jobs (such as auto mechanics), and rendered many jobs obsolete (including telephone switchboard operators). Numerous studies document the shifts in demand for labor across job categories and skill requirements, and

most project substantial further change in the years ahead.¹⁷ These technology-induced changes in the demand for labor have been exacerbated in the United States and other developed countries by declining working-age populations – a joint consequence of long-term decline in birth rates, decreased legal immigration, and retirement of the large “baby boomer” generation. Among the consequences of these trends are substantial shortages of labor in job categories where demand is growing and technical skills are required, and a pool of unemployed or underemployed workers whose jobs have been replaced or substantially altered by technology. The solution to this problem is accessible, affordable skills training to prepare workers, from entry-level to midcareer, to fill vacancies in new or substantially altered job categories, or to retrain them for employment in established job categories.

At the entry level, this need for job-relevant skills acquisitions is well-met in countries with strong vocational education or apprenticeship programs, such as Germany, Sweden, Switzerland, and Singapore, but much less well-met by U.S. community colleges that are underresourced and torn between providing students with technical training and a pathway to four-year colleges. Online instruction is beginning to fulfill this need with microcredentials, in some instances integrated into community college curricula. Such credentials vary widely in quality and likely will not flourish without some mechanism for accreditation and accountability. But some offerings seem promising. Google, for example, offers five entry-level certificate programs that run six to eight months and train entry-level IT support staff, data analysts, project managers, user experience designers, and digital marketing specialists. These and more than twenty-five other entry-level certificate programs designed by leading companies (Meta, IBM, Intuit, Salesforce, and others) are available for just \$39 or \$49 per month on the Coursera platform. By the end of 2022, nearly 6 million learners had enrolled in entry-level certificate programs.

Providing low-cost, effective, and at-scale training and retraining for midcareer workers has been an elusive goal of many governments for decades, while most companies have focused their training resources on “onboarding” new employees rather than “upskilling” to help employees move up the ladder, or “reskilling” to assist workers in switching jobs, or adapting to changing skill requirements in their current jobs. Increasingly, however, companies are incorporating online resources into their training programs to upskill and reskill their employees, and governments are relying upon them for use in retraining the unemployed or underemployed in need of new skills. Leading online platforms such as Udemy, Coursera, Pluralsight, InStride, Degreed, and Guild Education have emerged to meet these needs in recent years, alongside earlier suppliers of shortform videos such as Skillsoft and LinkedIn Learning (formerly Lynda.com). Pluralsight, which is focused on digital skills training, claims to serve 70 percent of Fortune 500 com-

panies, and over 18,000 business customers in all. Coursera serves nearly 4,000 business customers, and it also supports over 430 workforce training programs for governments in over 100 countries. Workforce training provides a substantial opportunity for higher education to expand its reach and social impact. Although one might expect Coursera's industry partners to dominate its skills training activities, universities account for 44 percent of course enrollments by learners subscribed through companies or government agencies.

Because companies value online offerings for ease of use, low cost, and a curricular breadth impossible to replicate in-house, their use is likely to continue to grow rapidly, especially in imparting digital and technical skills.¹⁸ Live training will not disappear. It is still the medium of choice for developing company culture, teamwork, and other "soft skills," as well as for satisfying the desire of senior executives for "high-touch" contact with professors from leading business schools.

The experience of early and midcareer learners of relatively low educational attainment has somewhat modified the optimistic conclusion of early studies finding learning gains at all educational levels. Government agencies and nonprofits offering workforce development programs have found that unemployed and underemployed learners do not flourish in a purely independent, asynchronous learning environment. Some degree of regular interaction with live teachers or mentors improves their performance. In response, a host of new start-ups have emerged to provide the "hands-on" contact with users of high-quality asynchronous online courses and certificate programs.¹⁹ Perhaps the new AI technologies will enable realization of the benefits of this kind of personalized support at greater scale and lower cost.

It is well known that the cost of higher education rises faster than inflation. But why? Two distinguished Princeton economists, William Baumol and William Bowen, provided the explanation of this persistent phenomenon more than a half-century ago.²⁰ They did so with reference to the performing arts, but the same logic applies to education.

The idea is simple. Productivity (the amount of output per worker) tends to increase over time in many sectors of the economy. The production of a gigabyte of computer memory requires only a minuscule fraction of the labor that was required forty years ago. Consequently, the price of computer memory has declined. By contrast, there is no productivity growth at all in chamber music. Labor input (a quartet, for example) stays constant over time, and, unless the size of the concert hall grows, output (in the form of tickets sold) also remains constant over time. Since inflation is just an average of all price changes in the economy, prices in sectors with high-productivity growth will rise more slowly than inflation, while prices in sectors with low-productivity growth (such as the performing arts) will rise faster than inflation.

The dynamics are no different in higher education. If the average number of students in a seminar remains fifteen, average enrollment in lecture courses remains 100 students, and a faculty member's teaching load does not increase, the cost of educational services and the resulting prices (tuition and fees) will rise faster than inflation. There is only one way to reverse this tendency: the productivity of the university's scarcest resource – its faculty – must increase.

Herein lies the promise of online education: it can provide at least a partial cure for the Baumol-Bowen "cost disease."²¹ By increasing the number of students a faculty member teaches, the incremental revenue from online instruction can help moderate the rise of on-campus tuition, while also supporting financial aid and other university investments.

Further, online education can be priced well below the potentially unsustainable level of on-campus tuition. In 2014, Georgia Tech priced its pioneering OMSCS (Online Master's of Science in Computer Science) degree at \$6,800, an 83 percent discount from its on-campus program. Coursera quickly followed this example, pricing its degrees well below comparable on-campus programs. Although many universities still price at on-campus levels, 2U, the largest of the online degree platforms, began to discount the degrees of some of its partners after it acquired edX in 2021. The benefits of low-cost online degree programs are beginning to accrue globally. By the end of 2022, eleven of the twenty universities offering degrees on Coursera were located outside the United States – in the United Kingdom, France, Italy, India, Australia, Mexico, Colombia, Chile, and Peru.

A decade ago, faculties in the United States and Western Europe feared that MOOCs created by top-tier universities might become widely used as a substitute for the professorate in the rest of academia, and the prospects facing graduate students seeking academic employment, already grim in many disciplines, would become even grimmer. It still seems unlikely that this will happen any time soon on U.S. and European campuses. But consider the question from the perspective of a country like India, with 37 million university students in 2020 and a declared policy objective of *doubling* the gross enrollment ratio by 2035. Given the growth rate of the population, this objective of the government's National Educational Policy would require an enormous investment in faculty, staff, and brick-and-mortar facilities. The goal is almost certainly unattainable without the use of scalable online resources.

Coursera began licensing courses created by its university partners to a few universities in India, Central Asia, and the Middle East as a pilot project in 2016. After the formal launch of Coursera for Campus in 2019, when the start of the COVID-19 pandemic disrupted teaching and learning around the globe, Coursera responded by offering its entire catalog, free of charge, to any accredited universities that desired access. After the emergency protocols of the pandemic were dropped, Coursera resumed charging universities very modest licensing fees. At the end of

2022, 437 universities were subscribers, and 88 universities (nearly all in developing countries) were offering credit for Coursera courses created by leading universities. Some institutions supplemented the imported credit-bearing courses with resident faculty facilitation. Others offered them stand-alone.

In the Year of the MOOC, the educational activities of nearly all the world's leading universities were no different than they had been fifty years before. Institutions offered high-quality undergraduate and graduate degree programs to full-time students on campus. Over the next fifty years, their educational mission will expand. Universities will offer online bachelor's and master's degree programs, online courses for credit on campus and off, courses and degrees for enterprises and government workforce-development programs, and courses for universities in developing countries enabling expanded accessibility and improved quality. A university's "students" will no longer be concentrated among those between eighteen and thirty years of age. Entry-level and midcareer workers and professionals seeking career advancement, or wishing to change careers, will turn to universities to enhance their skills, and lifelong learners will enjoy access to liberal arts courses well into retirement. The social impact of universities will be greater than ever before, as hundreds of millions of learners around the world will have lifelong engagement with high-quality education, and access to opportunities that they never imagined possible.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

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- ⁶ “Impact Revealed: Learner Outcomes in Open Online Courses,” Coursera, September 2015, https://d396qusza40orc.cloudfront.net/learninghubs/LOS_final%209-21-.pdf.
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- ⁹ Aline Lerner, “Lessons from 3,000 Technical Interviews...or, How What You Do after Graduation Matters Way More Than Where You Went To School,” *Business Insider*, December 30, 2016. Only three characteristics had a significant correlation with performance on technical interviews: whether applicants had worked for an elite company, whether they had graduated from a “top computer science school,” and whether they had posted a Coursera or Udacity certificate on their LinkedIn profiles. The effect of completing a MOOC was the most strongly correlated, with an effect size more than double that of attending a top school. Moreover, the effect of completing a MOOC was far greater for those who had *not* attended a top school.
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such resources were readily available only in a small fraction of developed-country institutions, and not at all in most of the developing world's colleges and universities.

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Minerva: The Intentional University

Teri A. Cannon & Stephen M. Kosslyn

Minerva University is a pioneering educational institution established in 2012 with the goal of redefining liberal arts education for the twenty-first century. Addressing widespread concerns about the effectiveness of traditional higher education, Minerva adopts first principles thinking in its pedagogy, emphasizing practical knowledge, active learning, and global exposure. The curriculum is constructed around two distinct types of learning objectives, Habits of Mind and Foundational Concepts, which ensures that students develop critical leadership and problem-solving skills. Leveraging advanced technology and a science-based understanding of learning, the university supports a diverse and international student body through a global rotation model. Students live and work in up to seven different cities around the world. Minerva's outcomes, including high graduation rates and alumni success, attest to its effectiveness and suggest that its innovative approaches can serve as a model for educational reform.

Minerva University's origins date back to 2012, when the founders took a fresh perspective and considered what a liberal arts education for the twenty-first century should provide. At that time, deep concerns about the quality and effectiveness of higher education had been raised, including in surveys of employers who found college graduates unprepared for work; low completion rates at all but the most prestigious universities, coupled with heavy student debt; and increased rates of access to higher education without success for underserved students. The value of a college education was being questioned at the same time that more access to it was being provided. For-profit open-access colleges were seeing massive growth, which raised questions about how to protect consumers without stifling innovation.

At this dynamic moment, Minerva set out to reinvent the aspects of undergraduate university education that no longer fit the times and needs of society. Minerva is something new in higher education, not just because it was a Silicon Valley-based start-up initially funded with venture capital financing, but also because it was designed according to first principles (that is, specific foundational propositions and assumptions). At the time, Minerva's founders realized that most traditional universities were not acknowledging or responding to the educational demands of an increasingly complex world. The founders saw the need for

individuals who have the knowledge and intellectual skills to solve complex problems and make good decisions, who are global and interdisciplinary in approach and perspective, and who are from diverse cultural and socioeconomic backgrounds. Minerva provides a model of a different way to create and operate a university with low costs, access to qualified students, a student-centered approach, goal-driven methods, and outstanding results for alumni as measured by learning and postgraduate outcomes. Advances in our understanding of how students learn – and in the use of technology to improve, assess, and deepen learning – were also key components of the design.

Minerva's initial model emphasized reinventing the curriculum to focus on "practical knowledge," basing pedagogy on the science of learning, educating students from across the world and sending them on a global rotation program, fostering impactful student experiences outside of class, and implementing a new faculty and staff model. Minerva Project, the for-profit entity that was funding this work, partnered with the Keck Graduate Institute (KGI) to establish the "Minerva Schools at KGI." Under this agreement, Minerva's educational program was offered by KGI and overseen by its president and board as one of three schools within the graduate institute. KGI is a private non-profit entity that offers graduate programs in the life and health sciences and is one of the seven Claremont Colleges in California. This "incubation" partnership enabled the Minerva Schools to start as an accredited program, a prerequisite to attracting the kind of well-qualified students, faculty, and staff needed for a new, innovative, and rigorous educational experience.

In 2019, the non-profit and tax-exempt Minerva Institute took over the funding of the educational programs and began preparing for the Minerva Schools to gain accreditation separate from KGI. In June 2021, Minerva University was accredited by the Western Association of Schools and Colleges Senior College and University Commission. Since its inception twelve years ago, Minerva has continuously refined all aspects of its model while retaining the fundamentals that went into the initial plans.

Many aspects of Minerva have proven to be highly effective and enduring, beginning with its selection and orientation of students. Minerva designed its own methods for identifying and attracting qualified students, screening applicants, and preparing them for a rigorous academic curriculum and a global rotation. Although Minerva has refined its outreach process over the years, it continues to focus on finding high-performing high school graduates from all over the world who are eager to try a new way of learning, be part of a globally diverse community, and study in many countries. Students who want to experience a conventional campus with sororities, fraternities, or athletic programs are quickly filtered out. Admissions screening involves review of high school trans-

cripts, a set of Minerva-developed “challenges” that cover both cognitive and noncognitive skills, proctored writing exercises, and a portfolio of student work and achievements beyond required academic work. Screening and orientation also include extensive interviewing with students and their families; online discussions and events with faculty, staff, and current students; practice in mock classes using the Minerva Project’s proprietary online learning platform; and weekends spent with first-year students to simulate the academic experience. This comprehensive approach to attracting, selecting, and preparing students seems to work well: nearly all first-year students continue to the second year, with a first-year attrition rate of about 5 percent.

Another effective and enduring aspect is Minerva’s curriculum, which is driven by first principles that focus on providing the knowledge and skills students need to become leaders, creators, problem-solvers, and innovators in the twenty-first century. At the outset of their studies, students take four rigorous “cornerstone courses” that constitute a highly structured general education program. These year-long courses are centered on two types of learning objectives: habits of mind (skills that should become automatic with practice) and foundational concepts (fundamental concepts that can be built upon). Together, these objectives are referred to as HCs. All students take the same four cornerstone courses. Following this, they choose a major (along with one or more concentrations and courses in other majors); some choose to double major.

The ways this curricular model plays out are exemplified by the experience of two highly successful alumni. One student from the European Union – who has lived in several countries, speaks multiple languages, and now works for the United Nations – valued the opportunity to take courses in several disciplines. He also appreciated not having to select a major and concentrations in his first year of study. He found the HCs to be a great educational innovation well matched to his natural curiosity. Similarly, an alumnus from East Asia, who is graduating from a prestigious law school in May 2024, reported that she used the concepts from the cornerstone courses throughout her studies and in law school.

Even though students live together, all classes are small seminars that are taught synchronously online using the Minerva Forum, Minerva Project’s proprietary, custom-built software system that facilitates active learning. This approach relies on the mutual interaction of three factors. First, the content is intentionally designed to achieve specific learning objectives. Second, the pedagogy is specifically designed to use active learning to help students master that content. Such learning requires students to engage in activities like debates, role playing games, and problem solving. The third factor is technology designed to facilitate the pedagogy and the assessment of student learning. This technology plays a key role in recording and providing data about student behavior and performance. These data, in turn, become part of a feedback loop that is used to improve all three fac-

tors. The university's pedagogy and technology are informed by the science of learning, which guides how both are developed and refined.

In addition, classroom learning is integrated with experiential learning, which takes place as students engage in applied projects in cities around the world. These projects draw and build on what they studied in class. An early alum who cofounded an organization that promotes educational innovation and technology cited the chance to lead groups, be entrepreneurial, and learn to think from multiple interdisciplinary perspectives as key benefits. Even though he sometimes found achieving the right balance difficult, the experience of doing different kinds of applied learning, while having to prioritize academics and projects, prepared him well for life after Minerva. Another alum, an aspiring journalist, felt like she did not get a break for the entire four years, surviving on five hours of sleep and lots of coffee and ramen. Yet she also excelled by being proactive and staying ahead in all her classes.

Minerva faculty members are committed to teaching. Although they are encouraged to do research, publish academic papers and books, and present on their work (especially research on learning), faculty members are evaluated on their teaching, contributions to continued innovation at Minerva, and impact on the Minerva community. After their first year, faculty members work on three-year contracts, which are renewed only if they have proven to be effective teachers. However, they are not simply dropped in the deep end and expected to swim. Not only do faculty members participate at the outset in an extensive orientation to train them to teach with “fully active learning” methods, but every class is recorded, and the recordings are used to provide faculty with feedback on their teaching to help them improve.

Because all Minerva classes are seminars, faculty walk a fine line between allowing students to explore while also keeping them focused on the learning objectives. One professor found that he loved not having to lecture and enjoyed the process of nudging students in seminars so that they addressed the learning goals. He found it particularly gratifying when students would spontaneously lead the discussion in productive directions, minimizing his role.

Minerva is also committed to helping students become self-sufficient and resilient, as well as preparing them to use their education to benefit the world. They work and live together in cohorts of about one hundred fifty students. Minerva provides support for mental health and other related services, coaches in their first year, and intensive advising to help them as they develop and identify their purpose and life goals. Minerva staff help students find summer internships, research positions, and volunteer work that will prepare them to achieve their professional goals, and Minerva provides them with lifetime services as they move through their careers. Given Minerva's emphasis on solving complex prob-

lems and contributing to the world, it is fitting that most students engage in projects that help them forge a path ahead after graduation. The alum who is graduating from law school this year confided that she struggled in a philosophy class and sought support from the professor, who helped her learn how to organize her thinking more systematically and serves as a mentor and guide to this day. Another alum, who is now a journalist, got extensive advice from the coaching and talent development team on career exploration. They also used every opportunity to treat curricular and extracurricular projects as investigative journalism.

In developing students' values and attitudes, Minerva leans into its mission to "nurture critical wisdom for the sake of the world." It places special value on an applicant's commitment to do something to make the world a better place. Several of the HCs (that is, the learning objectives of habits of mind and foundational concepts), which students learn during their first year, focus on ethics and social responsibility. These objectives are reinforced during the four years of study. Also in the first year, students engage in a civic project, working with a diverse team of peers to present solutions to a vexing problem identified by a sponsoring organization. Students also develop an understanding of Minerva's integrated learning outcomes (ILOs). These ILOs are reinforced across the four years students spend at the university. They include listening and empathizing, making a positive contribution, treating everyone with respect, engaging in civil dialogue, recognizing their own biases, exercising cultural humility and awareness, and improving the lives of others. Along with these objectives and outcomes, students are expected to engage in volunteer work and civic projects throughout all four years. Postgraduate results attest to alumni's strong commitment to continued work and further studies that contribute to the common good.

Minerva set out to be a global institution by intentionally building a student body, faculty, and staff that now represent more than one hundred countries. Moreover, Minerva created a global rotation to six cities outside the United States (currently Seoul, Hyderabad, Berlin, Buenos Aires, Taipei, and London), where students spend one semester in each city. We understood that teaching students to solve the world's most complex problems requires interdisciplinary and globally diverse teams, and the ability to see problems from multiple perspectives. Students greatly value the global experience and often work after graduation in cross-cultural teams, global organizations, or countries different than their country of origin.

When we ask graduating students what they valued most about Minerva, they often cite the global community of friends and colleagues they were part of, and the experience of having lived and learned in multiple cities, developing a global perspective and an appreciation of different cultures. However, some students have found the global rotation challenging and exhausting. Alumni sometimes cite the frequent moves to a new city and related travel requirements to be stress-

ful. Nevertheless, nearly all complete the global rotation and view it as an extraordinary learning experience. One alumnus who is starting a job working on global climate change utilized counseling and psychological services to get him through rough spots. In fact, about 50 percent of students take advantage of these services at some time during their first year.

We learned a lot in the process of implementing the ideas behind Minerva. When we discovered that some feature or practice was not working well, we quickly took steps to revise it. In what follows, we note cases in which we identified areas for improvement and development, along with how we responded. One overall observation: students who are the most successful, both academically and in terms of their personal trajectory and growth, are those who really believe in the Minerva model, who lean into the opportunities for learning, who develop close relationships within the Minerva community, and who get the most out of the global rotation. One other attribute is also connected to these positive outcomes: the extent to which the student plots out their own Minerva journey, identifying their purpose, setting early goals, and building their portfolio of experiences toward their chosen objectives.

This drive and the confidence that a Minerva education engenders have resulted in students starting businesses and nongovernmental organizations and getting into some of the most competitive graduate and professional schools in the world. The few students who are not well matched to the Minerva model are identified quickly, given the small classes and cohort-based community, and leave voluntarily within the first semester or two. Some of the mismatched students have included one who didn't like being required to go to class and one who found that she did not like taking classes on her computer. A few students early on came to Minerva mistakenly thinking they could party heavily, which is not tolerated or even feasible with the workload in and out of class.

One problem we identified early was that most instructors seem to gravitate toward teaching the way they were taught, which typically involves asking students to listen to lectures and write down what the instructor says. Minerva, however, relies entirely on active learning in small live seminars. Although the basic idea of active learning is simple, it is not simple to implement. Part of the issue is that active learning depends on having specified clear learning objectives in advance, which then define the targets of active learning exercises.

In many traditional courses, such clear objectives are not defined, let alone used as guides for teaching. Sometimes faculty members struggle with adhering to the learning objectives as they conduct their seminars. For example, sometimes faculty allow class sessions to veer into tangents, and do not cover all of the material that address the learning objectives. Another part of the problem is that faculty sometimes feel that if they aren't talking, they aren't teaching. It requires delib-

erate effort to present and discuss the empirical results that counter this perception. This did not always work.

The most extreme example of a failure to adjust to the Minerva teaching model was a faculty member in the university's early years who could not resist the temptation to lecture. This resulted in his dominating the sessions with asides, sometimes by dwelling on personal anecdotes that barely touched on Minerva's learning objectives. He would not change his approach despite numerous discussions and tutorials that he resisted and resented, and he ended up resigning midterm, which disrupted the class and required one of the college heads to finish teaching his course. Minerva addressed these sorts of challenges by modifying processes for hiring to ensure faculty commitment to active learning, by greatly enhancing orientation, training, and mentoring of new faculty members, and by developing lesson plans for each course that are directed toward students' mastering the established learning objectives for the class.

We have also found that as faculty become more experienced and comfortable in the digital classroom, they may sometimes start improvising and drifting from the lesson plan. In some cases, this is warranted, such as if students clearly have difficulty understanding the material. In other cases, it is not. For example, one faculty member loved the idea of making students struggle and then springing a "reveal" at the very end of class. This was effective sometimes but was not designed in advance to ensure that the struggle was productive – and often seemed intended more to keep the faculty member stimulated than to help students learn. Because all classes are recorded and the college heads and other peer mentors review those recordings periodically, we know when instructors consistently deviate from the lesson plans. When that happens, the appropriate head talks to those instructors about why we have shared lesson plans and why active learning is important. One college head reported, "In my experience, this has been a friendly conversation where they weren't trying to go rogue but might have been slipping into some old habits or believe the course should be revised and are actually doing things that will probably be implemented in a summer revision cycle."

When they first encounter active learning, many students not only don't like it, they also don't believe that it's effective. Like faculty members, they are accustomed to a model of mainly listening and taking notes in class. However, studies have consistently shown that active learning does produce better outcomes than traditional teaching methods. One way to make students more comfortable with active learning is to explain at the outset that, although they may not believe they are learning much, and would rather be told what they need to memorize, active learning will help them learn better. Additionally, they will come to enjoy the process of this learning style after they get used to it. Another step to address students' perceptions was to provide extensive opportunities

for applicants to have active learning experiences on our platform before they enrolled. Finally, students receive formative feedback right away, which helps them see the effectiveness of this model. In our experience, students adapt well to the learning model within the first few weeks of instruction.

All that being said, we have found that some of the principles of active learning are easier to implement than others. For example, the principle of deep processing – which states that people are likely to understand and later recall material that they pay attention to and think about in detail (even if they don't try to learn it) – is easy to implement in active learning exercises. In contrast, the principle of deliberate practice, which states that learning is enhanced by using feedback to focus on the most challenging aspects of a task, is harder to implement. In this case, the instructor may need to identify a problem that only a particular student has, give that student immediate feedback, and then help the student improve – all of which is difficult in a group setting.

One challenge we observed early on was the variability in student engagement in the global rotation. For example, Betsy (fictional name) ventured out and took advantage of the opportunities in the cities, exploring museums, parks, and cheap eateries. Her classmate Sam, however, tended to stay close to his dorm room and was slow to engage with the local setting. To maximize the value of studying with students from all over the world, and going on the global rotation, Minerva established its set of integrated learning outcomes, which include one focused on developing global skills, understanding, and perspective. This outcome along with four others guide the programs that support student growth and development.

Specifically, the five integrated learning outcomes are self-management and wellness, interpersonal engagement, professional development, civic responsibility, and intercultural competency. Each area is integrated with the HCs that students learn in their academic coursework. After the first few years, Minerva added a required integrated learning course to give students a structured opportunity to attend to their growth and development in these areas, including the ability to be self-aware and identify aspects for further self-growth. For example, students identify cultural biases they may have before they travel to a new country, and then assess how they developed during their semester in residence there as they leave. This course is a half credit each semester for all four years. The learning is largely experiential and includes individual self-reflection and collaborative activities. Although this course has provided a structure that promotes regular reflection and growth, the course is “Pass/No Pass,” and so not all students give the course the attention it warrants.

Operating in seven very different countries requires a high degree of skill, adaptability, creativity, and persistence. In addition to the practical challenges of finding appropriate housing, arranging visas, selecting academic partners, and identifying civic projects, we need to be alert to geopolitical matters. Some of the

urgent issues that have arisen include threats from North Korea to South Korea, fears about Taiwan being attacked by China, and supporting large numbers of students from countries at war – like Ethiopia, Ukraine, and Russia. These geopolitical challenges affect visa policy too. For example, Pakistani students cannot get visas to study in India. Some countries do not recognize Bosnia, so a Bosnian citizen cannot get a visa to those locations.

We also needed to adapt to how each country responded to the COVID-19 pandemic (which varied from complete lockdown to expensive quarantines to few restrictions). Students experienced unexpected consequences from emergency-stage lockdowns, including a group that had to stay in Buenos Aires for many months. Two students used that time well and invented a robotic device that is now being patented. Minerva's global model requires a strong local staff to support student needs and to lead the programming on the ground, including the sponsored "civic projects" that enable students to apply what they are learning and work side by side with locals. To address the challenges posed by this aspect of Minerva, we have plans and criteria for choosing cities and countries, identifying housing and visa pathways, creating consistent week-by-week plans for activities in each city, hiring many local staff and training staff, and establishing protocols for emergency and crisis management.

Although the model works well, no two cities provide a perfectly comparable experience for students. For example, in some cities, Minerva partners with a local university that sponsors student visas by enrolling the students. This model, in place in two cities, has the advantages of connecting Minerva students with other university students in that city and of providing learning opportunities, such as research labs and cultural instruction. In countries where Minerva can sponsor student visas directly, costs are lower, and staff must develop relationships that provide opportunities for exchanges between Minerva students and other university students and faculty members.

The efficacy of a Minerva University education is demonstrated by the results: high retention and graduation rates (about 90 percent, despite the demanding academic program and global rotation) and the extraordinary achievements of alumni. Among the first four graduating classes, more than 90 percent graduated with well-defined career goals and have taken steps to advance them. Of those graduates, 15 percent have been admitted to prestigious graduate and professional schools; another 15 percent started their own ventures; and the rest are employed in a variety of jobs related to their studies. Many are working directly on solving complex global problems. For example, two Minerva graduates started a company that deploys new carbon-capture technology in global shipping.¹ Another established a global network of educators who are making powerful reforms in education (all three alumni were named on the "30 Under 30" list

published by *Forbes* magazine).² Another Minerva alumnus was named a Rhodes Scholar.

Many of the virtues of Minerva are difficult, but not impossible, to implement at a traditional university. They require a pedagogical shift in the faculty to a student-centered, active-learning approach. They also require faculty to become comfortable using new technology to teach. And students need to embrace not only the active-learning approach, but also an international perspective, which is not for everyone. That said, the innovations in pedagogy and assessment of student learning have wide applicability and can be integrated into standard curricula – especially now, after the emergency stages of the COVID-19 pandemic, when many faculty have experience teaching online and can appreciate the value of Minerva’s innovations. In addition, institutions seeking to instill a global perspective or “internationalize” can benefit from the applied and experiential learning model and the ways that Minerva builds global understanding, perspective, and citizenship among students.

A little more than ten years old, Minerva University will continue to innovate while adhering to its student-centered and mission-driven ethos. Building on its global and innovative curriculum and teaching methods, the university plans to expand its graduate-level offerings in innovative ways and to increase its undergraduate enrollment, while also enhancing the educational experience and preparation of students to tackle the world’s challenges. Scaling the model while preserving Minerva’s distinctive elements and character is the next phase of its development.

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ENDNOTES

- ¹ Alisha Fredriksson and Roujia Wen founded Seabound, based in London. See “Climate Takes The Stage Among This Year’s 30 Under 30 Europe Social Impact Entrepreneurs,” *Forbes*, March 6, 2023, <https://www.forbes.com/sites/oliviapeluso/2023/03/06/climate-takes-the-stage-among-this-years-30-under-30-europe-social-impact-entrepreneurs>.
- ² The Transcend Network hosts a six-week program three times a year for founders of companies specializing in edtech, connecting those entrepreneurs with other investors. Alberto Arenaza cofounded The Transcend Network in 2019 after graduating from Minerva. See “30 Under 30–Education (2022): Alberto Arenaza,” *Forbes*, <https://www.forbes.com/profile/alberto-arenaza> (accessed April 22, 2024).

The Role & Rule of Rankings

Gökhan Depo

This essay explores the impact of global university rankings on higher education, with a focus on their historical evolution, limitations, and flaws. I examine the detrimental consequences associated with manipulating the ranking systems, and their resultant financial repercussions, which lead to diminished trust in higher-education institutions. I call for a comprehensive evaluation, urging stakeholders – especially governments – to recognize the subjectivity and limitations inherent in rankings that inform policymaking decisions related to higher education. I propose strategies for improvement, such as broadening the criteria used for rankings, and specialized rankings that highlight the unique strengths of various types of institutions, like public engagement, student satisfaction, diversity, and sustainability. Collaboration could enhance ranking accuracy, while also acknowledging the significance of ranking systems in shaping higher-education decisions and policies.

Individuals and organizations use university rankings for various purposes. Prospective students and their parents often use them to determine which university to attend, while higher-education institutions use them as a benchmarking tool to evaluate their relative performance in comparison to other colleges and universities. Employers may use university rankings to identify top institutions or departments for recruitment purposes.¹ For media outlets, university rankings generate interest and increase readership. Government officials use university rankings to inform policymaking decisions related to higher education. Finally, there are those who watch them as a spectator sport.

These rankings, however, have several fundamental flaws and limitations that make them an unreliable and subjective tool for evaluating universities. This is a consequence of their methodologies, in which narrow and quantifiable metrics, such as research output and reputation surveys, are emphasized while other criteria like teaching quality are often disregarded.² The ranking often fails to accurately reflect the quality and diversity of a university's programs, faculty, and students.

As a result, rankings can perpetuate unequal distribution of resources and opportunities as prestigious and large institutions with greater resources often perform better in the rankings than newer or underfunded institutions. At the same time, rankings might also inflate the quality of a university's program.³ When the

rankings are used to allocate funds or create programs – or cut existing programs and defund certain disciplines – significant issues emerge.

On the one hand, policymakers may find rankings useful to identify areas of strength and weakness in a country's higher-education system, which can inform resource allocation and policy decisions to improve competitiveness. On the other hand, rankings may be problematic if they are given too much weight or are not based on comprehensive and diverse criteria. Emphasizing research output or reputation may overlook important objectives like access and affordability, leading universities to prioritize the former metrics over the latter.

To enhance the quality and reputation of their institutions and programs, countries often review and modify their higher-education policies, and international rankings play a significant role in shaping these policies worldwide. For example, Japan has implemented various initiatives, including their "Top Global University Project" in 2014, to support the development of world-class research universities and increase the international competitiveness of Japanese universities. In order to improve its performance in international university rankings, France has introduced a performance-based funding system and a national strategy for research and higher education, including their Investments for the Future program. Germany's Excellence Initiative and Russia's Project 5–100 promote the development of world-class research and higher-education institutions in their countries.

China is also among these ambitious countries. A global superpower and ever-rising contestant to the United States in many areas, Chinese universities' rise to global prominence was no simple task, yet it was achieved in a spectacular fashion. When it comes to rankings, the rise of Chinese universities is, relatively speaking, a recent trend. It reflects the rapid development and growth of the Chinese higher-education system that shows the enterprising aim of the Chinese government, which, over the past decade, has made significant investments in research and development. China has increased efforts for international collaborations and recruitment of top faculty, which led to a significant increase in the number of publications and patents. Naturally, these rapid improvements have translated into an impressive (and perhaps unprecedented) performance in international university rankings. China is among the top performing countries, having institutions placed in the top 100 universities by every major ranking table (and five universities in the top 50 of the QS World University Rankings, one of the most well-known global ranking lists). Their positions in the rankings demonstrate the country's growing influence and competitiveness in the global higher-education landscape.

Conversely, in recent years, North American and European universities have seen a decline in dominance in global higher-education rankings due to such factors as the rise of new economic powers in Asia and increased investment in higher education by other regions of the world. While the U.S. and European universities may have been slow in responding to this competition, there is no evidence

to suggest they did not take the challenges seriously. The emergence of dynamic economic forces in Asia and increased investment in higher education by governments around the world have contributed to the decline of U.S. and European dominance in global rankings for higher education.

The phenomenon of university rankings is not without controversy. Some scholars argue that the university rankings are oversimplified, aiming to measure the values that cannot be quantified, and do not (and cannot) accurately reflect the quality of an institution.⁴ Overprioritizing rankings can also create pressure to focus on factors solely emphasized by the rankings themselves rather than those that measure the quality of education provided to students. There are also examples of universities manipulating the rankings to advance their positions. Different countries use international university rankings to inform their higher-education policies and set goals for improvement. It is crucial for government officials (and their related organizations, institutions, and departments) to consider the limitations and subjectivity of rankings when using rankings to guide policymaking.

A clear example of the limitations of using university rankings to inform policy is evident in the context of immigration. Some governments use university rankings to determine eligibility for visas and residence permits. For example, the Dutch government only recognizes schools listed in three major international rankings tables for its “highly skilled migrant visa,” and the United Kingdom offers a visa for graduates of universities that ranked within the top 50 positions on two or more international rankings lists. These rankings, however, are updated annually, making it uncertain if a university will be eligible in subsequent years. For instance, alumni from the University of Wisconsin–Madison were eligible for a visa in 2020 but not in 2022. This shows how rankings can be useful but unreliable, and that other sources of information should supplement their use in decision-making. Understanding the history and development of university rankings can provide insight into their current significance and future trajectory.

The first example of university rankings can be traced back to psychologist James McKeen Cattell (1860–1944), a professor at Columbia University. In 1910, Cattell published a list of institutions based on the number of eminent “men of science” (in the German sense, *Wissenschaftler*), a term that referred to faculty who actually conducted research. He measured only the quantity of faculty, not the quality of research. His list included the following institutions: 1) Harvard, 2) Chicago, 3) Columbia, 4) Yale, 5) Cornell, 6) Johns Hopkins, 7) Wisconsin, 8) U.S. Geological Survey, 9) Department of Agriculture, 10) MIT, 11) Michigan, 12) California, 13) Carnegie Institute, 14) Princeton, 15) Stanford, 16) Smithsonian, 17) Illinois, 18) Pennsylvania, 19) Bureau of Standards, and 20) Missouri.⁵

Harvard had the largest faculty at the time, so it was ranked as the top institution since Cattell did not consider the quality or distinction of the faculty. If such factors

had been taken into account, other universities may have been ranked differently. Clark University, for example, which was known for its highly distinguished faculty, could have been at or near the top of the list. This illustrates the limitations of Cattell's rankings, which were more focused on quantity over quality.

Despite Cattell's priority, many scholars consider chemist Raymond Mollyneaux Hughes's rankings list in 1925 as the first "proper" example of university rankings. Following a more comprehensive methodology than Cattell, Hughes based his rankings on peer surveys, and measured the reputation of individual departments within universities rather than ranking the universities as a whole.⁶

The landscape today is quite different. In the past, the peer reputation or number of distinguished faculty members at an institution was deemed sufficient to rank the institution. Currently, there are thousands of institutions, in hundreds of different systems, catering to millions of students. It is impossible to rank them properly – certainly not simply by counting the number of esteemed faculty members or by relying on faculty perceptions. The problem, however, is that the public still wants to know which university is "better," despite the fact that universities serve a diverse body of students with a variety of interests. It is not surprising that institutions regularly update their websites or promote on social media their position in the latest rankings – in fact, though hardly surprising, they often advertise their position on lists where they are ranked the highest.

For prospective students, or perhaps scholars, seeing where a certain institution is ranked might be important. Rankings provide a straightforward list, purporting to identify the best institutions using a range of metrics through a form that is often more digestible than complex reports for readers who are already educated on a given subject. This simplifies decision-making for all stakeholders, as the ranking order in any given list is always clearly defined.

The importance of international university rankings lies in their capacity to compare schools across different countries, resulting in a clear and straightforward list of institutions. Ideally, rankings would foster the exchange of best practices, but in reality, they establish a hazardous playing field in which elite institutions are privileged.

There are numerous university rankings published by various organizations all around the world, each using its own methodology and criteria. There are, however, three widely recognized major international rankings: the Times Higher Education World University Rankings (THE), the QS World University Rankings (QS), and the Academic Ranking of World Universities (ARWU), otherwise known as Shanghai Rankings.⁷ Widely followed internationally, these three rankings have a significant impact on a university's reputation and the decisions of students globally. One notable exception may be students in the United States. As a higher-education powerhouse, and the leading country in pretty much every internation-

al ranking, the United States has its own prominent university ranking list, the *U.S. News & World Report Best Colleges Rankings* (U.S. News).⁸

As a result of the different methodologies used by each ranking, there are clear differences in their respective outcomes. While the top 20 institutions are more or less the same in each table, with relatively small variations, the disparities become increasingly pronounced beyond the top 50. For example, in 2022, the University of Minnesota, my alma mater, ranked 44th by ARWU, 86th by THE, and 186th by QS! This drastic discrepancy, from 44th in the world to 186th, illustrates the impact of the specific criteria and methodologies used by each ranking system.

What methodologies do these tables use? At the time of writing this essay, THE evaluates a university based on thirteen performance indicators that measure a university's research productivity, teaching, citations, international outlook, and industry income. It is important to note that the methodology of THE has been significantly updated for its 2024 lists to ensure it accurately represents the outputs of the diverse range of research-intensive universities worldwide, both presently and in the future.⁹ QS determines its world rankings based on six performance indicators: academic reputation (40 percent), citations per faculty (20 percent), faculty-student ratio (20 percent), employer reputation (10 percent), international student ratio (5 percent), and international faculty ratio (5 percent). Much like THE, QS has introduced more transparency for its 2024 rankings, implementing its largest methodological enhancement so far, introducing three new metrics: sustainability, employment outcomes, and international research network.¹⁰ ARWU evaluates universities based on six performance indicators that are grouped into four categories: quality of education, quality of faculty, research performance, and per capita performance.

In the United States, U.S. News evaluates universities based on seventeen key measures across the following categories: graduation and retention rates, social mobility, graduation rate performance, undergraduate academic reputation, faculty resources, student selectivity, financial resources per student, average alumni giving rate, and graduate indebtedness. The weight of each indicator varies, with graduation and retention rates receiving the highest weight at 22 percent and alumni giving rate receiving the lowest weight at 3 percent. It is important to recognize that the categories used in these rankings are self-reported, which means the institutions provide the data that the ranking organization uses to assign their positions on the list. In another significant update, the latest iteration of U.S. News has introduced new metrics encompassing measures of first-generation college student success, postgraduation earnings compared to those of high school graduates, and a heightened emphasis on graduation rates among students receiving federal Pell Grants. It has also eliminated five metrics from its methodology, including class sizes and alumni giving, while preserving others like the peer survey.¹¹

More rankings systems are available to stakeholders, some of which rank institutions as a whole, while others focus on specific areas. For example, the National Taiwan University (NTU) World University Rankings sort universities based on their position in the “Performance Ranking of Scientific Papers for World Universities,” which evaluates productivity, impact, and excellence in research. In 2023, NTU listed the top ten universities as: 1) Harvard, 2) Stanford, 3) University College London, 4) University of Oxford, 5) University of Toronto, 6) Johns Hopkins, 7) University of Washington, Seattle, 8) MIT, 9) University of Cambridge, and 10) University of Michigan, Ann Arbor.

Similarly, University Ranking by Academic Performance (URAP), produced by the Middle East Technical University in Türkiye, ranks universities based on their performance in research and academic productivity. Their top ten universities in 2023 were: 1) Harvard, 2) University of Toronto, 3) University College London, 4) University of Oxford, 5) Tsinghua University, 6) Stanford, 7) Zhejiang University, 8) Université Paris Cité, 9) Shanghai Jiao Tong University, and 10) Johns Hopkins.

The Leiden Rankings in the Netherlands focus on the scientific impact of universities as measured by bibliometric indicators, such as the number of publications, citations, and collaboration networks.¹² U-Multirank, produced by the European Commission and several European higher-education associations, allows users to compare universities on a variety of indicators, including teaching, research, and international orientation.¹³ Universitas Indonesia’s GreenMetric ranking, in operation since 2010, measures the environmental sustainability performance of universities around the world.¹⁴ Webometrics, published by the Spanish National Research Council, ranks universities based on their online presence and impact.¹⁵ The Washington Monthly College Rankings evaluate colleges in the United States based on their contribution to the public good in three areas: producing research, promoting social mobility, and encouraging public service.¹⁶

The SCImago Institutions Rankings (SIR) rate academic and research institutions based on their research performance, innovation outputs, and societal impact.¹⁷ SIR groups institutions by country and sector, and their ranking is based on a five-year period. Their list includes various indicators such as normalized impact, excellence with leadership, output, scientific leadership, international collaboration, patents, and societal impact. As it also includes companies and government institutions, it is not surprising to see a list that starts with a university followed by a company (for example, in the 2023 overall rankings, the Chinese Academy of Sciences holds the top spot, with Harvard ranking 4th, Google at 5th, Microsoft at 20th, and MIT at 31st).

Academic Influence provides university rankings on its website using a unique methodology that distinguishes them from others.¹⁸ They use machine learning to collect and analyze open-source data from publicly available sources like Wikipedia, Crossref, and Semantic Scholar. They argue that their rankings are objective

because they occur without human intervention once the data are gathered. In 2023, the top ten most influential universities were listed as: 1) Harvard, 2) Columbia, 3) Chicago, 4) University of California, Berkeley, 5) Yale, 6) MIT, 7) Princeton, 8) Stanford, 9) University of Michigan, and 10) Cornell.

It is important to note that there is no centralized website or index that aggregates all global university rankings. However, in 2015, geographer Vladimir Moskovkin and colleagues proposed a methodology that calculates the Aggregated Global University Ranking (AGUR) by using machine-learning and mining-data algorithms to compare and aggregate positions from various global rankings.¹⁹ In 2019, the University of New South Wales in Sydney developed the Aggregate Ranking of Top Universities (ARTU), which uses THE, QS, and ARWU to generate an aggregate score.²⁰

There are also websites, like TcPalm, that use data from the National Center for Education Statistics (NCES) and the Department of Education on crimes occurring on college campuses to compile a “college crime ranking.” These rankings track the number of crimes that occur both on and off campuses at colleges, universities, and postgraduate institutions. Users have the option to select a category (such as criminal offenses, violence against women, hate crimes, arrests), choose a specific year between 2014 and 2020, and pick a specific state or the entire country. The platform then generates a ranking of institutions based on the number of reported incidents in the chosen category and timeframe.

While it is possible to scrutinize each ranking criterion from a scholarly perspective and provide a scientific explanation for its accuracy and importance, what matters to many people is the final product: a list in descending order. International university rankings can be a useful tool for comparing universities and identifying trends and patterns in higher education. As a scholar of higher education, however, I emphasize that it is nearly impossible to create a comprehensive and inclusive ranking table that caters to all students from all backgrounds with different personal agendas. An accomplished Chinese student who is eyeing a prestigious U.S. university will probably have different criteria in their decision-making compared to an accomplished American student aiming for the same university. Whether in Finland or Türkiye or the United States or China, it is important for stakeholders, especially students, to consider multiple factors when making decisions about their education.

We should acknowledge that “Rankings are here to stay.”²¹ Regardless of individual opinions on rankings, their influence on the higher-education sector is undeniable, and international university rankings have been playing an important role in higher education for decades now.

On the one hand, university rankings can help students, researchers, and policy-makers to make more informed decisions (such as where to study or collaborate),

and enable university leaders to focus on certain areas that are beneficial to students. On the other hand, methodologies and criteria used by ranking systems are not without bias. They are subjective in various ways, which leads to unfair or inaccurate representations of universities. Simply put, the playing field is not level.

Rankings have been creating pressure on universities to prioritize certain metrics over others, potentially leading to a narrow focus on research and internationalization at the expense of other important aspects of higher education, such as teaching and service.²² Perhaps one of the most notable examples of the impact of subjective methodologies used in rankings surfaced early in this decade, when two highly prestigious universities in the United States made headlines with their decision concerning the U.S. News rankings.

In 2022, both Harvard Law School and Yale Law School withdrew from the U.S. News rankings because of concerns about the ranking system's methodology and incentives. Harvard had previously expressed concerns about the ranking's impact on socioeconomic diversity and allocation of financial aid based on need, as well as the heavy weighting of test scores and grades.²³ Yale Law School had similar concerns. In mid-January 2023, Harvard Medical School announced its decision to withdraw from U.S. News rankings due to concerns that rankings encourage institutions to prioritize boosting rankings over nobler objectives. Other prestigious medical schools in the United States followed this decision, indicating a trend that could spread to more universities and departments.

Rankings not only put pressure on universities to prioritize certain metrics over others, but also create a highly uneven playing field. The decision by Harvard and Yale's law schools to stop participating in the U.S. News rankings highlights the impact of these subjective methodologies on universities. It is, therefore, important for universities and ranking systems to collaborate and ensure that the ranking process aligns with the best ideals of education and does not compromise the quality of education for students.

The practice of universities attempting to manipulate ranking criteria and provide misleading information to improve their rankings, commonly referred to as "gaming the system" is, unfortunately, widespread. This problem of manipulating ranking data has been observed across the higher-education spectrum, from lesser-known institutions to world-renowned universities, on multiple continents.

When success or failure is defined solely by numerical metrics, the potential for corruption increases. The famous principle in the social sciences known as Campbell's Law states that "the more any quantitative social indicator is used for social decision-making, the more subject it will be to corruption pressures and the more apt it will be to distort and corrupt the social processes it is intended to monitor."²⁴ In other words, the more that a particular metric or indicator is relied

upon to make important decisions, the more likely it is to become distorted and unreliable. There are various reasons why this could happen, such as manipulation and other corrupt practices to achieve a desired outcome, or simply because the metric becomes less useful or relevant over time as conditions change.

For many institutions, placing high in the rankings is one of the most important goals, because an undetermined but possible large portion of their revenue depends on their performance in the ranking leagues. The significant impact of rankings on the reputation and perceived quality of an institution has become such an important aspect of the global higher-education landscape that universities and higher-education systems around the world have become increasingly focused on improving their rankings, with some resorting to gaming the system by finding ways to manipulate the ranking criteria in their favor.

This tactic comes with serious consequences, both for institutions and ranking organizations, but also for the larger higher-education community, such as the broader network or ecosystem of institutions, organizations, professionals, students, policymakers, and stakeholders involved in higher education. Institutions engaging in such tactics risk losing funding, damaging their reputation, and facing long-term consequences such as a decline in the quality of education offered and difficulty attracting top students and faculty. While these actions undermine the integrity of institutions, and lead to a lack of trust in the reliability of universities, they also reduce confidence in higher education's overall trustworthiness.

A recent scandal at Columbia University highlights the question of the trustworthiness of university rankings. A mathematics professor accused the university of submitting false statistics to U.S. News rankings, resulting in a significant drop in the university's ranking. Columbia acknowledged the errors and pledged to improve. This raises the concern that if a highly prestigious institution like Columbia felt the need to submit false data, what does this say about the trustworthiness of rankings for other, less scrutinized universities?

The answer is straightforward: as long as rankings remain significant, there will always be attempts to manipulate the system. The success of these attempts will vary depending on the type of manipulation. There have been – and, unfortunately, will continue to be – instances in which universities are accused or found guilty of corrupt practices that manipulate their rankings. Some may resort to “buying citations” from highly cited researchers, while others may falsify student selectivity data, or overstate GPA and enrollment data.²⁵ These examples emphasize the need for transparent and reliable ranking methods, as well as regular audits and checks to guarantee the accuracy of data used in these rankings.

Overall, it is important for universities to approach the ranking process with integrity. Universities need to prioritize the ethical reporting of data, and the ranking organizations should have more robust ways of verifying said data. As Campbell's Law highlights the dangers of overreliance on quantitative indica-

tors in decision-making (and underlines the need for multiple sources of information, as well as a more nuanced approach to evaluation), it is the ranking organizations and universities' combined responsibility to prevent such efforts to game the system.²⁶

It is evident that current major university rankings favor certain types of institutions over others. Universities lacking certain facilities or departments, especially those without medical schools, face a significant disadvantage in traditional rankings. At this time, health-related research is the largest global field of science and accounts for about one-third of all publications, and rankings give considerable weight to the number of publications.²⁷

Nevertheless, there is strong evidence that universities focusing on specific areas of study can still achieve success in those areas, even with lower rankings in standard evaluations. For instance, Wageningen University & Research in the Netherlands has been consistently named the world's most sustainable university by UI GreenMetric since 2017, and University of California, Davis, holds the top spot among U.S. institutions in the same evaluation, ranking fifth in the world. This pattern offers a different starting point for considering rankings from a constructive perspective.

Since rankings are an integral part of the higher-education sector, and because they will in all likelihood maintain their importance for the foreseeable future, efforts to ignore rankings or replace them with alternative evaluation methods will probably not succeed in the short term. While we cannot completely eliminate rankings – nor should we necessarily endeavor to do so, as there are areas in which they have positively impacted higher education – we can work toward improving their diversity and reliability.

Improving university rankings is not an easy task. It requires a combined effort of universities, ranking organizations, and, to some extent, governments. One solution would be to diversify the ranking criteria by including highly important but often disregarded factors such as student experience, service for the public good, diversity of campuses, and public engagement efforts. Rankings should also aim to represent the experiences of different constituents (in other words, students, faculty, staff, and perhaps even the community members outside of those on campus). For greater fairness and precision, rankings should concentrate on particular elements of educational institutions, rather than providing a blanket approach and drawing generalized conclusions.

A shift toward more specialized rankings that focus on individual areas instead of the entire institution could level the playing field and allow for a more informed and comprehensive assessment, eliminating certain advantages held by established institutions in the English-speaking world and showcasing unique strengths in areas that have not been previously emphasized. This approach could

lead to a more informed and dynamic understanding of higher-education institutions, and help drive improvements in transparency and outcomes.

Furthermore, rankings can (and should!) use the measure proposed by Wendy Fischman and Howard Gardner called Higher Education Capital (HEDCAP), which encompasses the ability to attend, analyze, reflect, connect, and communicate on important issues.²⁸ Factors that contribute to the development of HEDCAP may be difficult to demonstrate despite the benefits of a college education. For instance, an increase in HEDCAP over the course of matriculation should be included in rankings as a metric for assessing the effectiveness of colleges and universities in instilling these essential skills in their students.

University rankings have always been susceptible to disputes. Recently, the number of controversies and scandals surrounding university rankings has risen sharply. This has led to a growing realization that the existing ranking systems need improvement because they do not produce fair and comprehensive rankings. Moreover, those that are attempting to use novel approaches and create unconventional lists are either underdeveloped or have not captured the attention of stakeholders outside the rankings community.

International ranking tables have typically focused on certain measures such as research output and reputation, which have exacerbated the inequality between the old and prestigious institutions and the rest. In the short term, the controversies surrounding the rankings and changing demographics in higher education will most likely push ranking organizations to be more forward-thinking, include more criteria in their data, and alter their methodologies to reflect the diversity of institutions across the globe. This will likely provide temporary relief to universities' objections to rankings, but the law and medical schools' boycott of the U.S. News has opened Pandora's box and will likely spread to other schools and rankings in the near future.

In the long term, I anticipate that university rankings will be characterized by a greater focus on nontraditional areas such as public engagement, student satisfaction, diversity on campus, and sustainability. Public engagement is particularly critical as it demonstrates the commitment of universities to serving the communities of which they are a part, and the positive impact they can have beyond the traditional areas of teaching and research. I believe it is only a matter of time before this becomes a major section of its own in international ranking tables.

Another important criterion to assess would be democratic values on campus. Global Public Policy Institute (GPPI) in Germany conducted a study in 2021 on academic freedom, published as "Academic Freedom Index."²⁹ GPPI does not rank the institutions, but instead, they list the countries based on their universities' level of freedom. I believe that incorporating democratic values into rankings could provide valuable insights and add a new dimension to the ranking systems.

It would be interesting to explore this further and see how it can be done in a fair and unbiased manner.

A comprehensive ranking system that takes into account not just the academic achievements, but also the values and practices that the university promotes, such as democratic values and open-mindedness, can be quite useful for stakeholders. Measuring democratic values on a campus might be challenging as it can vary greatly across different countries. What is considered a minor comment in the United States might be a reason for termination in Türkiye – or even a more serious outcome in China. Hence, finding a universal “common denominator” for democracy on campus that is not biased toward a specific country would be difficult.

In the future, I envision university rankings that are more tailored to specific areas and needs. These rankings will be narrower in scope but provide greater detail within their focus area. This will be beneficial for both students and higher-education institutions, as it will allow institutions to experiment and excel in specific areas, and create a more level playing field in terms of competition. Because the current system of rankings is often criticized for being too broad and not highlighting institutions’ unique strengths in particular areas, a more specialized ranking system that reflects the diversity of institutions and, above all, meets the needs of a diverse body of students would provide a more accurate picture of each institution’s strengths and weaknesses.

University rankings have become a common tool in higher education, used by various stakeholders for a range of purposes. Despite their undeniable popularity, they are often criticized for their reliance on narrow, quantifiable metrics and their inability to capture essential elements of higher education such as service, teaching, and public good mission. Despite the criticisms, university rankings continue to play a significant role for decision-making and resource allocation for government officials, as well as marketing purposes for university administrators. University rankings may be useful tools for institutions to measure their perceived prestige and reputation; however, they do not always provide students and parents with a complete picture of what a college or university can offer. Factors such as class size and retention rates can be important considerations when selecting a school, but they do not necessarily reflect the quality of education that students will receive – or their overall experience at the institution.

There is a clear need to improve the diversity and reliability of university rankings. This can be accomplished through a concerted effort between universities, ranking organizations, and governments, and by moving toward the creation of specialized rankings that consider a wider range of criteria beyond traditional metrics. Nontraditional metrics, such as public engagement, student satisfaction, diversity, and sustainability might offer a more comprehensive and nuanced understanding of higher-education institutions. In light of these potential improve-

ments, the future of university rankings will likely involve a shift toward increasingly tailored and specialized rankings, offering a more informed and dynamic perspective on the state of higher education.

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ENDNOTES

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Higher Education in the Twenty-First Century: What's the Mission?

*Kate Abramowitz, Wendy Fischman &
Howard Gardner*

The “mission” of a sector of society can encompass a range of possibilities. Sometimes, the mission is broad. Sometimes, it is narrow. Sometimes constant, sometimes changing. Missions serve as guideposts. They articulate a central purpose or goal, which should help to structure decisions and actions: as examples, who should be served, exactly what should be done, how the work is carried out, which measures can determine whether the mission is actually being realized, and, if not, how a course can and should be corrected.

Whole sectors or spheres can have missions. Broadly speaking, the health care sector works to provide physical and mental well-being for individuals and society. Within the sector, one encounters a range of professionals (researchers, nurses, doctors, pharmacists) as well as settings (hospitals, offices, laboratories, clinics). Some personnel are focused on a particular area, illness, or demographic group, while others are generalists. Some institutions are private; others are public; a few are composite. The direction or foci may shift as the needs of individuals change, or societies evolve, or as the leadership across organizations changes. But the fundamental purpose of restoring or maintaining health is not – and should not be – obscured or lost.

This might seem straightforward so far.

However, as we turn to the sector of higher education, the concept of mission becomes more vexed. As early as the sixteenth century, the Jesuits used education as a way of defining the word mission – to educate and spread the word of Christ. But as colleges and eventually universities spread throughout the world, the mission broadened from religious purposes – for example, preparing young people for work in secular professions, training scholars in the sciences and other disciplines, or giving members of certain demographic groups an opportunity to meet peers, as well as individuals from other, more diverse backgrounds.¹

In the United States, the missions of the earliest institutions of higher education were rooted, at least in part, in Christian (Protestant) values. Universities

sought to respond to a need for a learned clergy; indeed, roughly half of Harvard College's earliest graduates went on to become ministers. Over time, however, the religious mission of American universities began to fade. Modeled after German institutions that focused on training students for specific professions, higher education increasingly centered on preparing citizens for work and contributing to society, notably in science and technology. In these ways, the sector broadened its mission to meet new needs. By the nineteenth century, universities began to feature a plethora of professional schools, along with a broader, more secular curriculum. And as the twentieth century unfolded, increased funding for public education attracted more citizens with varied backgrounds, interests, and aspirations.²

Today, as evidenced in this volume of *Dædalus*, tertiary institutions all over the globe exist for a range of purposes – to provide professional training, to teach and conduct research in an ever-expanding array of disciplines, to educate underserved populations, to focus explicitly on globalization, climate change, the arts, and/or to cultivate specific political viewpoints and orientations. Indeed, many of the institutions have different stated missions. Even within one country or region, institutions of higher learning may be “all over the map.”

Like health care organizations, educational institutions within and across countries may not have precisely the same mission. But we contend that, at the very least, each institution and its stakeholders should have clarity about its own central mission.

Our own extensive research focused on liberal arts and sciences (hereafter, “liberal arts”) at universities in the United States provides a troubling perspective, one that might come to pass soon for others around the world. We have observed and documented a disturbing lack of consensus among key stakeholders about the purpose(s) of higher education, both within single institutions *and* across the sector.

Based on in-depth interviews of more than two thousand individuals across ten disparate campuses, we have found striking dissociations. Most notable, while students, parents, alums, and trustees view university primarily as the necessary path toward a future job, most faculty and administrators believe that the university experience is an opportunity for intellectual transformation, the time and place to prepare students for lifelong learning and citizenship.

We suggest two reasons for this major misalignment.

One explanation is what we call *mission sprawl* – the promotion of multiple missions on a single campus. Rather than a set of focused goals, we find that institutions that invoke the liberal arts attempt to pursue a myriad of goals for too many disparate groups of people, thus obscuring their own primary reason(s) for existing. As examples, in their mission statements, many institutions of higher learning trumpet keywords such as *leadership*, *globalization*, *career preparation*, and *social*

and ethical services. As shown in the word cloud in Figure 1, the list goes on! While an entire sector may be able to address this gaggle of promises, it is difficult – indeed impossible – for a single institution to take this all on, in addition to intellectual development. In an effort to please its customers, a vast number of institutions of higher learning have lost a sense of the who, what, where, and why, as each relates to their mission.

A second explanation for these misalignments among stakeholders involves universities that not only try to do too much, but also appear to be conflicted about what they are trying to do. Sometimes, single institutions promote explicit missions, clear and accessible statements of intent often found on their website and in their brochures, alongside implicit missions, underlying messages that all too often conflict with what is stated publicly. These inconsistencies and conflicts are signaled by placement of buildings on campus, decisions about securing and allocation of resources, and/or the ways in which “success” is publicly defined (for example, by employment statistics and salaries of graduating students).

Our own university exemplifies this tension. Harvard College (for undergraduates) has long promoted *Veritas*, or truth, as its motto and on its logo (the *Veritas* shield). However, this word does not appear in the official mission statement (nor does it appear in the mission statements of any of Harvard’s other graduate and professional schools). If you talk with any Harvard student about his or her college experience, rarely, if at all, would you hear the word “truth,” nor would you likely hear it from a parent or a member of one of the governing bodies. It is fair to say that at this institution, “truth” is overlooked, or even, taken for granted.³ Further, as recent events have documented, various constituencies have strikingly different aspirations.⁴

In what follows, we place the mission of higher education under a microscope. Specifically, we identify four key dimensions of a mission for higher education: audience, content, place, and intended impact. One might call this a journalistic or interrogative approach, an attempt to gather the key parts of a school’s story – the *who*, *what*, *where*, and *why* we mentioned above – with the ultimate goal of helping individual institutions, as well as the overall sector, to achieve clarity on missions in general.

The institutions described in this volume provide illustrative examples of how one might consider missions. While it may be easy to answer just one of these questions (that is, focusing entirely on “who?” or “why?”), a more challenging task for leaders in higher education would be to identify where their institution lies along *all* of these dimensions. If institutions of higher education can answer these four questions, we believe they will be well equipped to align stakeholders around their priorities and to hold themselves accountable to their goals. But identifying and articulating a clear mission is just the first step. It is also important

Figure 1

Common Terms in Higher-Education Organizations' Mission Statements



Source: Data from the authors' study on mission statements. Image via WordClouds.com, <https://wordclouds.com> (accessed April 29, 2024).

to consider how to demonstrate and measure progress toward achieving it, as well as identifying barriers and attempting to remove them.

Like any business trying to understand its customers or clients, institutions of higher education cannot realize any sort of goal for their students without a deep understanding of *who* is on campus. Indeed, most universities include a word in their mission statement about an intended *audience* – a group of individuals that the institution aims to serve. This dimension of mission is crucial, not only in guiding students who are making decisions about where to matriculate, but also for universities as they think about how to address their population's specific desires and needs.

In the United States, a number of institutions define their audience in terms of a particular demographic or geographic group. Historically Black colleges and universities, women's colleges, and Hispanic serving institutions are clear examples of institutions that have an explicitly stated mission to serve students of a par-

ticular identity. For this type of school, the audience is the defining or distinctive feature of the mission, a characteristic that sets it apart from other institutions of the same size and selectivity level.

Serving a particular target audience can also be a driving force for many schools around the world. In some cases, entire universities are founded on the premise that they will cater to a specific population or demographic group. Sometimes, these are populations facing societal barriers, such as unequal access to higher education and/or to positions of leadership.

Take the example of the Asian University for Women (AUW), a private university located in Bangladesh. As described by Kamal Ahmad, AUW is designed to serve female students in different parts of Asia who would not otherwise have access to an undergraduate degree.⁵ Founded as an antidote to gender-based discrimination in many parts of Asia, AUW's mission focuses on empowering women who have been economically or socially marginalized by society. In order to align its audience with its goal of promoting intercultural understanding, AUW recruits students who demonstrate particular characteristics in their application – for example, tolerance and a desire to combat injustice. While the school is still meant to serve an international student body and has now reached women from seventeen countries, AUW homes in on an audience that is more narrowly defined than that at most other institutions.

Alternatively, other institutions take a deliberately wide-ranging approach to their audience, seeking students from a multitude of ethnicities, socioeconomic levels, and/or geographic regions. A textbook case is New York University Abu Dhabi (NYUAD), a collaboration between NYU and the Emirate of Abu Dhabi. A liberal arts university, NYUAD is part of NYU's global network of schools and one of its three degree-granting campuses.

In her case study, Mariët Westermann describes how NYUAD's undergraduate student body has been designed to be quintessentially international, representing students from one hundred twenty-five countries.⁶ While Emirati citizens make up more than one-fifth of the student body, the overall student population is meant to represent a wide range of nationalities, languages, and ethnicities, with no majority group. As with AUW, NYUAD's admissions officers look for certain qualities in prospective students that align with the school's broader goals, such as a desire to learn alongside individuals from different countries who carry differing backgrounds and opinions.

The school's focus on attracting an international audience is an important piece of NYUAD's broader goal of educating global citizens and fostering intercultural understanding. Despite the school's distinctively international audience, other dimensions of the school's mission, such as its particular location, have come to the forefront of public discourse. The decision to place the institution in a region with a difficult history of human rights has long proved contentious among some facul-

ty members and students at NYU's home campus.⁷ Though the school has assured these parties that NYUAD will maintain the same level of academic freedom that exists in New York City, this is a case in which different dimensions of missions have the potential to clash or diverge. What does it mean for such an internationally diverse audience to study and take courses in a country that places constraints on freedom of academic expression? This factor signals possible tension between the school's audience, the *who*, and the content that is allowed, the *what*.

In addition to audience, a mission might also refer to the content, or subject matter, an institution focuses on. For some institutions, a content-centered mission may revolve around a particular educational program or set of courses. The Massachusetts Institute of Technology focuses on educating students in science and technology. St. John's College, which contains campuses in both Annapolis, Maryland, and Santa Fe, New Mexico, is best known for its distinctive curriculum focused on great books. Indeed, at the center of many of the innovations described in this volume is the curriculum – crafted and shaped to meet identified needs pertaining to specific knowledge and/or skills, economies, and political contexts.

The recently launched London Interdisciplinary School (LIS) foregrounds a mission that is driven by its innovative curriculum and pedagogy. The school addresses a seeming shortcoming in the UK higher-education system – a lack of courses that cut across disciplines and a discrepancy between what students are learning in the classroom and the problems they might wish to address in their future careers. As its name signifies, this school embraces a deliberately interdisciplinary approach to teaching and learning, one that pushes students to explore issues in technology, climate change, and other contemporary problems from a variety of angles. Notably, the institution distinguishes itself from schools with a liberal arts mission by emphasizing practices of *integration* and *synthesis*. According to Carl Gombrich and Amelia Peterson, students at LIS learn how to make the fields “speak to each other.”⁸ Whether graduates will ultimately pursue distinctive careers or do so in innovative ways remains to be determined.

Minerva University is another example of a school that is driven by a distinctive general education program. Like The London Interdisciplinary School, Minerva University was designed with the goal of preparing students to address and perhaps contribute to the solution of complex contemporary global problems. As described by Teri A. Cannon and Stephen M. Kosslyn, Minerva's curriculum addresses this goal not only by exposing students to a variety of academic areas, but also through a strong focus on the development of particular skills and capacities.⁹ Minerva's courses aim to provide students with cognitive tools, such as “habits of mind” – critical thinking techniques that become internalized over time. So far, its graduates are an impressive lot. Time will tell whether Minerva can catalyze other such educational entities.

In considering the question of *what*, course offerings and curricula are not the only answers. Many institutions of higher education – including some with religious underpinnings – center on the dissemination of particular values, principles, and beliefs. What Isak Frumin and Daria Platonova describe as the socialist model of education was founded with the explicit goal of shaping a “new Soviet person.”¹⁰ In the wake of Soviet nation-building in much of the twentieth century, higher education was meant to produce individuals with a deep understanding of Marxism as well as a commitment to the collective state good. Although values-based (or “class-based”) education was a core pillar of Soviet education, it can also be found to varying degrees in other models of higher education. As Frumin and Platonova note, a focus on character development – or what is sometimes now referred to as “formative education” – has grown in popularity around the world.

Universities will also be shaped by the location in which learning is taking place: the *where*. In most cases, a university will operate statically in its home country, the region in which the school was conceived. In other cases, universities may intentionally operate outside of their home country, providing students with opportunities to learn in new cultural, political, and economic contexts – ones connected organically and organizationally, or set up on an ad hoc basis.

Consider the case of Northwestern University Qatar (NU-Q). For this institution, geographic location is a paramount part of the mission. As described by Marwan M. Kraidy, the campus is a part of Education City in Doha, Qatar, a multicultural city with a large number of expatriates.¹¹ Northwestern’s decision to form a partnership in this region was deliberate; the school has a specific mission of developing research and teaching capacity in the Global South, a phrase that refers to economically disadvantaged nations within the Middle East, Latin America, Asia, and Africa. Furthermore, NU-Q views the Global South not as a geographic region but as an “intellectual space” – an area in which to develop scholarship that may well be distinct from that of the West. This commitment to the Global South may show up in other dimensions of its mission. For instance, the curriculum intentionally features authors from Arab, African, and Asian countries.

Notably, NU-Q enjoys support from its host country in carrying out its mission. The project grew out of a partnership between Northwestern University and the Qatar Foundation for Education, Science and Community Development. As demonstrated earlier by the case of NYUAD, however, a school’s values and aims for students can sharply conflict with the agenda of those in power in the region. Additionally, what it means to serve the “Global South” remains unclear – as does how that constituency relates to BRICS.¹² The degree of economic development or opposition to Western developed or democratic societies and values needs to be clarified.

A stark example of these challenges is Hungary's recently shuttered Central European University (CEU). As described by Michael Ignatieff and Ágota Révész in separate contributions, CEU was Hungary's last independent university in Budapest.¹³ Founded and funded by Hungarian American philanthropist George Soros, who sought to create a top-tier research university that could serve as a "hub" for students in the Central-Eastern European region, CEU was designed to be a center that would promote critical thinking on complicated issues and foreground the values of an open society.

Despite the university's laudable reputation in Europe and in the world, the institution was ultimately shut down by Hungary's Prime Minister Viktor Orbán. An autocratic leader, Orbán saw the institution as a threat to Hungarian national sovereignty and perhaps to his own increasingly authoritarian rule. This governance decision, which sparked large protests in Budapest, demonstrates the push and pull that can emerge between an institution's locale, on the one hand, and defining aspects of missions for liberal education, such as the principle of academic freedom, on the other.

Going beyond a specific location, online forms of education are becoming increasingly popular. These offer learning opportunities, degrees, certificates, and other types of credentials to students of all ages, including a growing number of adult learners. In his essay, Richard C. Levin describes the outpouring of online offerings, from university-led courses held remotely to start-up platforms focused on the acquisition of vocational skills.¹⁴ This mode of education has already made an enormous impact on the sector, primarily by expanding access to faculty-led courses around the world and broadening the province and scale of higher education. We cannot predict how education will be affected in the long term by large language models and other AI-supported tools, but they hold the possibility to both promote and distort current approaches to teaching and learning.

Missions for higher education can and, we believe, should illuminate a university's greater purpose, footprint, or influence in society. While the *what* may drive an institution forward, it can also beg the important question of "*for what?*" What is the larger impact the school is trying to create in the world or in a given community? What will student learning lead to? This dimension of mission may in fact be the crux of our journalistically inspired framework. Institutions must be able to shape and clarify a *raison d'être*, or a strong sense of *why*.

One way to conceptualize an institution's impact is by considering the influence of the university on individuals. Hardly worthy of debate, one fundamental purpose of all institutions of higher education should be the learning that takes place in the classroom. Indeed, mission statements for universities frequently include phrases such as "intellectual discovery" and "transformation."

Documenting students' intellectual growth throughout the university experience is one way to understand a school's impact. Several tools can help, such as oral or written exams, public performance, and standardized tests administered and scored by external entities. Olga Zlatkin-Troitschanskaia describes an innovative way of understanding students' learning trajectories today – during a time in which they are increasingly gathering information from online sources.¹⁵

Specifically, the PLATO (Positive Learning in the Age of InformaTiOn) research program seeks to understand how students navigate and acquire knowledge online, as well as their capacities for skills such as “Critical Online Reasoning.” PLATO stands out as a noteworthy effort to investigate what most institutions of higher education seek to accomplish (that is, student learning), or at least what many *say* they prioritize. And, importantly, it documents the numerous forms of mislearning across fields of study – and how they might be addressed.

An additional way to conceptualize impact is by examining the role of higher education in furthering national interests. Traditionally conceptualized as a public good, universities have been seen by some countries as instrumental in driving economic growth or global influence.¹⁶ For example, in his essay on higher education in India, Jamshed Bharucha describes how a sizeable youth population has been seen as a “source of economic hope” for the country.¹⁷ Hence, new policies in the country have sought to expand higher education to reach a greater proportion of the university-aged population in India. As another example, Frumin and Platonova describe how Soviet education was traditionally seen as a way to develop a “state good,” which meant that universities were viewed as a mechanism (or “engine”) for advancing communist ideals, aspirations, and accomplishments.¹⁸ Although the Soviet system, once supported and nurtured, no longer exists, its methods and goals can still be seen in many places.

Beyond individual students and countries, higher education can also aspire to improve society and the world. A number of schools have begun to examine their broader impact by concentrating on climate change and sustainability. For these schools, intended impact does not focus on enriching individuals, but rather on enriching the greater good.

The University of Tasmania in Australia, cited by Fernando M. Reimers in this volume, has an explicit mission of centering rigorous climate action efforts.¹⁹ One way of capturing this kind of influence is through the Times Higher Education impact rankings, a measure of how well universities address the United Nations' Sustainable Development Goals (or SDGs). As Reimers notes, the SDGs have been integrated into the missions of several institutions of higher education around the world, but their short- and long-term effects remain unknown.

Notably, problems can emerge when there are misalignments or disagreements within an institution around the school's sense of *why*. Such misalignments seem to have played a role in the dissolving of Yale-NUS College, a short-lived but

noteworthy endeavor born out of a partnership between Yale University and the National University of Singapore (NUS). At the project's inception, Yale and NUS shared a clear impetus for the partnership: to expand liberal arts education in Singapore. Despite this mutual intention, the project proved to be rife with challenges. The Yale administration was viewed in Singapore (and perhaps elsewhere) as trying to impose a set of political values on the institution. Simultaneously, faculty members on the home campus worried about the preservation of academic freedom in a context that was vulnerable to Singapore's nationalist trends and policies. As the partnership dissolved, NUS demonstrated a different vision for the school – one emphasizing specialization (with a few common courses) over the broad liberal arts agenda that Yale had embraced.

As Pericles Lewis, the founding president of Yale-NUS, writes in this volume, “in any institution, multiple goals are pursued by multiple constituents.”²⁰ When these goals are too far away from one another, however, we find that institutions will be troubled. Alignment around the question of *why* is instrumental to institutional success – and may even be necessary for its ultimate survival.

In this essay, we have provided one possible framework for thinking deeply about missions in higher education. Specifically, we tease apart four essential elements of a mission: audience, content, place, and intended impact. If institutional leaders seek to define their university's central purpose – and hold their institution accountable to that purpose – this framework may prove a helpful place to start.

But articulating a central mission is just one piece of the puzzle. As the value of higher education is being currently questioned, doubted, and scrutinized around the world, we believe that it is crucial for institutions not only to think deeply about mission, but also to align stakeholders around the facets of the mission. Alignment occurs when the expectations and goals of all stakeholders (in this case, students, professors, administrators) are in sync with one another and when they are mindful of the priorities of the institution and of the broader sector. Based on our own earlier studies of how professionals in various domains carry out high-quality and socially responsible work, we have found that alignment of the key parties is critical to the health of any sector of society.²¹ When reflecting on the alignment within an institution, university leaders might ask themselves: What are the goals of this university? What are our students' goals? Does the faculty body share these goals? If not, what can we do to address these discrepancies?

Writing in early 2024, we realize that alignment has become an especially critical goal for the United States. Indeed, situated at Harvard University, we can confirm that disagreements surrounding the central mission of higher education are all too evident. In the midst of a series of high-profile presidential resignations at universities nationwide and fierce attacks on universities from many political

corners, the purpose of higher education – or the *why* for the sector – has become a contentious issue. At the extremes, some constituents posit that the university should focus primarily on the goals of diversity, equity, and inclusion, while others argue with equal fervor that institutions should prioritize free speech, argument, and debate above all else.

Though the goal of creating strong alignment around the mission of higher education may be a lofty one, we believe that the pursuit of common ground is essential – not only for the flourishing of individual institutions of higher education, but for the thriving (and indeed, survival) of the sector at large.

As the essays in this volume suggest, missions for higher education are wide-ranging. Many institutions focus sharply on serving a particular audience, while others focus on specific skills and areas of knowledge that students should acquire. Some institutions craft a mission that centers on their schools' respective geographic locations, while others are preoccupied primarily with their university's larger footprint in the world.

Our discussion of the fourth dimension addresses the impact and influence of mission – the *why* of higher education. Both Zlatkin-Troitschanskaia and Reimers focus on the effect of specific academic programs on students – in one case, how students process new information (and misinformation), and in the other, how students come to care about climate change.²² But as social scientists, we know that demonstrating the overall impact of the higher-education experience is extremely challenging. At the same time, it is important to find ways to demonstrate its “value add” – the ways in which it can and *should* make a difference for individuals and society.

In the United States, there have recently been efforts to assess the impact of the standard four-year education in the liberal arts. As an important example, the Collegiate Learning Assessment (CLA) was launched in 2000. In this standardized test, students are not probed for content knowledge, but rather for skills involving critical thinking and problem-solving. Analyses of the CLA point to disappointing results from students – sociologists Richard Arum and Josipa Roksa found that 45 percent of students indicate little to no significant change over the first half of the undergraduate experience.²³ Other efforts to measure impact have been more encouraging. In 2021, social psychologist Richard Detweiler published an empirical study affirming positive outcomes of higher education across one thousand individuals.²⁴ However, while he collected promising and rigorous data, the study was based on retrospective accounts of the undergraduate experience from ten, twenty, and forty years earlier. We do not know whether these graduates are truly different – and if they are, why. Nor do we know whether similar effects could be documented today.

In our own national study of higher education in the United States, we put forth a new measure called Higher Education Capital (HEDCAP).²⁵ This instru-

ment aims to focus assessment of intellectual capacities over the course of the undergraduate experience. Accordingly, HEDCAP denotes the ability to attend, analyze, reflect, connect, and communicate on issues of importance and interest.

Specifically, we blind-scored one thousand student interviews about higher education, looking for evidence as students discussed the university experience. Among the varied responses, we considered as evidence any questions that clarified or lent insight to our understanding of students' experiences; connections between different questions throughout the interview; clear articulation of a point of view with coherent examples; and/or description that included comparison and contrast of their own perspectives to others'. In brief, we assessed their ability to engage in and carry on a conversation about something they knew well! We used a simple scoring method, ranging from little to no HEDCAP to a lot of HEDCAP. Importantly, we found that while most students across ten schools show evidence of "some" HEDCAP, in comparing first-year students to graduating students, across all schools, the data show "growth" over the duration of their university education. But more important, HEDCAP improved much more on certain campuses than on others. Determining the reason(s) for this pattern would be crucial to replicate this result elsewhere.

HEDCAP is our own attempt at demonstrating that higher education can – and should – make a difference in the subsequent lives of its graduates. Some of the national and international ranking systems also attempt to do the same, by comparing the academic "quality" of institutions. But as Gökhan Depo points out, rankings are not only flawed – they do not capture what we think should be one of higher education's primary goals.²⁶ One might even assert that rankings contribute to mission sprawl! Indeed, while the Times Higher Education World University Rankings are widely regarded around the world, their criteria prioritize research productivity, citations per professor, and industry income – rather than student learning, which HEDCAP and the CLA at least seek to address. According to the criteria featured in the rankings, one might assume that the sector promotes individual prestige, productivity, and profit, rather than intellectual capacities and growth.

To prove its worth beyond jobs and employment for individual gain, we need to be clear about the original educational aims of higher education and hold institutions and stakeholders accountable to delivering on what the mission promises. And to use the example of our own home institution, if seeking "truth" represents the key purpose of an institution of higher learning, every stakeholder – including faculty and administrators on campus – should be able to easily articulate that mission and ultimately embody it.

To be sure, change and innovation are necessary for *any* sector. If a sector is to educate a diversity of students from around the world so that they can address new health, environmental, and political challenges, constant adjustments need to be made. As several essays in this volume testify, new institutions have been

developed to educate those individuals who have been underserved and did not have access to a quality education, new teaching pedagogies and academic programs have been created to engage students in “real world” problems, and even the physical boundaries of buildings and classrooms have been stretched to new places – online and across the globe. However, especially at this time of change, we need institutions to double down on the central animating idea of mission and make their own mission clear and verifiable. And, to put our cards directly on the table: we hope to preserve what has, at its best, been special and distinct about higher education – providing for all students a rich intellectual experience, one that should last a lifetime and contribute to a larger collective good.

AUTHORS’ NOTE

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