

## **The Globalization of America's Research Universities: Does the Globalization Mission Pose a Moral Dilemma?**

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*A dilemma resides in the interaction between intellectually free and independent universities and colleges that exist in areas with repressive governments/regimes. Given a repressive indigenous cultural, religious, and political climate, can and/or will those governments keep their hands off the curriculum, the conduct of instruction and research, the contents of libraries, as well as the composition of faculty and student bodies? The academic mission of America's research universities is tripartite in nature, embracing: (1) the transmission of existing knowledge, i.e. teaching; (2) extending the boundaries of knowledge, i.e. research; and (3) the development of a capacity for critical thinking in student minds, and the exercise of that capacity by the faculty.*

### **THE GLOBALIZATION EXPLOSION**

Globalization is the catchword of the age. Interaction proceeds among nations at a feverish pace: affecting all spheres of life, economic, political, social, scientific, entertainment, and education. Given impetus by rapid advances in communication technology, we are texting and twittering our way to constant electronic transmission of information, both ideas and data. Of course, the flow of goods and services also proceeds apace. It should occasion no wonder that America's higher education institutions have jumped into this hyperactive milieu; proliferating inter-university semester abroad programs, as well as special certificate or degree programs, e.g., Executive MBA programs. In addition, some U.S. universities and colleges have established full-scale stand alone and satellite colleges and campuses abroad; for example, in the United Arab Emirates (UAE) and China, as well as Latin America and India.

A dilemma resides in the interaction between intellectually free and independent universities and colleges that exist in areas with repressive governments/regimes. Given a repressive indigenous cultural, religious, and political climate, can and/or will those governments keep their hands off the curriculum, the conduct of instruction and research, the contents of libraries, as well as the composition of faculty and student bodies? It is an understatement to say there is room for skepticism. Nonetheless, there is a significant and influential body of opinion, especially among academic administrators, that favors operating in areas with repressive governments, perhaps most spectacularly in the United Arab Emirates and China. They believe that the benefits of intellectual interaction, even under some limitations, outweigh the effect of the limitations.

## **UNIVERSITIES OPERATING IN THE UAE AND CHINA**

As of March 2013, six international universities have free standing campuses in the UAE: The American University in Dubai (AU-Dubai); Michigan State University Dubai (MSU Dubai); Canadian University of Dubai (CU-Dubai); Boston University Institute for Dental Research and Education Dubai; American University of Sharjah (AUS); and New York University in Abu Dubai (NYUAD). In every case, the name of the operation specifies its location in the UAE, thereby distinguishing it from the home institution. Presumably, degrees issued by the UAE institutions would also indicate the distinction. In the case of the Boston University Institute, the school warns that it is not a branch of Boston University in Boston. NYU AD is a dramatically different creature, representing President John Sexton's plan to create the first truly global research university. The other four institutions supply a variety of undergraduate and graduate degree programs, but do not have the over-arching ambition of creating a full scale research university clone of the home institution.

China is the host to a number of foreign universities that partner with Chinese institutions, and offer joint programs of study. These programs usually involve a period of study at the partner institution for Chinese students. Under this umbrella, multitudes of Chinese students attend American and other partner institutions. There are two institutions that depart from this pattern; Xian Jiaotong-Liverpool University in Suzhou and NYU-Shanghai. Each is an independent institution, designed to offer undergraduate and graduate degree programs. Each is intended to emphasize teaching and research, with a commitment to foster critical thinking. Xian Jiaotong-Liverpool is approved by the Chinese Ministry of Education, and expects to enroll some 10,000 students when fully developed. All teaching is in English, since most professors will be foreigners, presumably, but not entirely, English. All students will have the option of completing their degrees in the UK or in Suzhou. Graduates will receive their degrees from XJTLU and the University of Liverpool. NYU-Shanghai is essentially a replica of NYU-Abu Dhabi. Both are intended to be clones of NYU-New York, i.e. a full blown, top flight research university. The three, in combination, would constitute the world's first truly global university. Students and faculty would be able to move from one location to another, as they broadened their intellectual exposure.

## **THE ACADEMIC MISSION**

The academic mission of America's research universities is tripartite in nature, embracing: (1) the transmission of existing knowledge, i.e. teaching; (2) extending the boundaries of knowledge, i.e. research; and (3) the development of a capacity for critical thinking in student minds, and the exercise of that capacity by the faculty. It must be explicitly understood and accepted that teaching shuns indoctrination, which is the enemy of science as it seeks to build blind acceptance of dogma. It must also be explicitly understood and accepted that research must be impartial, objective, and freely available. It must not be bought and paid for, in efforts to doctor research to uphold predetermined conclusions, no matter how great the temptation. Finally, and perhaps most important, it must develop the capacity for inquiring minds to seek evidence as the basis for conclusions, and conclusions must be based on logical and rigorous analysis, that is replicable, unsullied by bias. These three aspects of the academic mission comprise its core values. They can often prove uncomfortable as they question a society's culture as handed down by posterity.

## **NYU: THE FIRST GLOBAL UNIVERSITY**

NYU-New York, in addition to its two clones in Abu Dhabi and Shanghai, has some 10 other more limited operations outside the US. These will be available to students seeking to broaden their intellectual exposure. With freedom of movement for students and faculty among NYU's locations, a truly global institution becomes a reality. But, what sort of academic creature will Abu Dhabi and Shanghai be? We turn to the mission statement for the answer; which is unequivocal. The vision is to be counted among the world's great research universities. Speaking about NYUAD, but applying equally to Shanghai, the

mission is to be “the first comprehensive liberal arts and science campus in the Middle East to be operated abroad by a major American research university.” (NYU–Abu Dhabi) That statement is fleshed out with an explicit commitment to these guiding principles: (1) to be a research university, with a fully integrated liberal arts and science college; (2) to equip students for leadership in all areas of human endeavor; (3) to foster curiosity, creativity, and critical reflection; (4) to stimulate advanced research through the NYUAD Institute (a major research center), designed to be an integral part of both the undergraduate and the graduate programs; and (5) along with NYU-NY and NYU-Shanghai, to be the backbone of a fully connected global network university, possessing a unique capacity for faculty and students to access the assets of the entire university system.

The language is beautiful, entirely consistent with the tripartite academic mission of America’s top research universities, as well as the broader scope of higher education in the western world.

## **REPRESSIVE GOVERNMENTS AND THE ACADEMIC MISSION’S VALUE STRUCTURE**

Can this value structure survive, let alone flourish, in areas with repressive governments, cultures, or regimes? President John Sexton of New York University answers affirmatively, as indicated in his master plan for NYU as a global university. He has also expressed sensitivity to the value structure of the host government; although this aspect of the enterprise will only be revealed with the passage of time. Significantly, in discussing the culture and customs of host countries, a statement about NYU-Shanghai points out that: “We may not agree with everything they do, but as guests in their countries, we should respect their customs and beliefs”. Hmmm! What does that mean? To be specific, does it mean that a professor in a course in Politics should not discuss Bahrain’s forceful repression of its majority Sunni population by its Shiite ruling family? We will see the relevance of the question below. Was the fact that the government of Abu Dhabi (The UAE has 7 emirates, of which Abu Dhabi is one) donated \$50 million to NYU, and financed the construction of the campus in Abu Dhabi a material factor in NYU’s decision to establish NYUAD? Further, a significant part of NYUAD’s operating budget is financed by the government, as well as by tuition.

In 2011, at a State Department reception, Hillary Rodham Clinton lauded President John Sexton’s “vision to expand his university internationally while maintaining its reputation for excellence and academic freedom.” (Staff writer, March 10, 2013) But, at its home in Washington Square, everyone was not so convinced. A significant part of the Arts & Sciences faculty scheduled a five-day vote of no confidence in Dr. Sexton’s leadership, reflecting a sentiment that he is autocratic, and ignores faculty input about the university’s global mission, as well as his grand plan for NYU 2031. The plan envisages the construction of six million square feet of additional space at Washington Square, NYU’s home base. Andrew Ross, a Professor of Social and Cultural Analysis, commented: “He (Sexton) has a very evangelical sense of purpose that does not extend beyond the concept that the university should be an entity of his own making”. President Sexton has not been insensitive to this groundswell of faculty discontent. In an e-mail sent before Christmas 2012, he wrote: “We have taken some steps to provide for improved faculty input and critique. I know more must be done, and during the winter recess I will be reflecting on how I can help to achieve that.”

Great Britain, perhaps reflecting its past imperial glory, supports globalization by English universities. Those institutions share the Academic value structure that characterizes America’s research universities. But, they explicitly support sensitivity to host countries cultures and societal values. Representatives from academe, government, and business, numbering over 1,000, gathered at a Going Global Conference in Dubai. Yet, the UAE had interfered with a planned international conference on the Arab Spring, to be held in the UAE. The London School of Economics and Political Science was the sponsor. One of its professors, Kristian Coates Ulrichsen, was invited to be the principal speaker. An internationally known expert, he was an outspoken critic of suppression of protests against the government of Bahrain (one of the UAE member states). Emirati authorities asked that he be dropped from the program. The request was widely condemned in academic circles, and led the London School to cancel the conference. Another conference on higher education, scheduled to be held in Dubai, was also

cancelled in protest against the interference by UAE authorities.(Lindsay, March 2013) The reaction of the British Council, the British government's cultural and educational arm, was markedly different. Jo Beall, the Council's director of education, said: "Countries of the Gulf Cooperation Council, of which the UAE is a member, are at the 'cutting edge' of efforts to internationalize higher education, and that holding the conference in Dubai 'contributes to the sterling efforts being made in countries like the UAE and Qatar to open their societies to international debates'." Apparently, the sterling efforts suffered some tarnish, and lost some shine (Lindsay, March 5, 2013). In an extraordinary example of double-talk, she added: "Every country has a right to issue visas to whomever it wants.", and, by implication, to deny them, presumably to contrarian professors and others like them. She went on to say that, as alumnae of the London School, she had "sympathy" for the university's position.

Among the participants at the Going Global Conference in Dubai, Jo Beall was not alone in her criticism of the London School's cancellation of the International Conference on Bahrain. Many argued that foreign universities must abide by the rules of their host countries. Warren Fox, executive director for higher education at the Knowledge and Human Development Authority (a Dubai government agency that accredits and regulates foreign higher education institutions), was blunt, as might be expected of an employee of the government of Dubai. He said: "Foreign universities are guests in the United Arab Emirates and need to be "aware of the environment they're entering...If universities decided they could only go to countries with the same cultural and political values, they wouldn't go abroad at all...And I think they should, because of the benefits to students and to universities". Sheikh Nahayan Mabararak al Nahayan, the UAE's higher education minister, told the conference that his government provides a "safe, tolerant, and prosperous environment for many people from around the globe". What makes the UAE so significant is the scale of its operations with foreign universities. The UAE is host to 37 international branch campuses, some of which are full-fledged, degree granting undergraduate colleges associated with famous western universities, e.g. NYU, Sorbonne, London School of Economics and Political Science). Perhaps most significant was Davids Willetts' (British minister of state for universities and science) remarks, in an opening address to the Going Global Conference, describing the UAE as "a valued partner of the British government and the British education sector". It is important to note that everyone cited above is associated with government, either in the UAE or Great Britain. No doubt that association influences heavily the opinions they expressed. It seems safe to presume that the opinions of the faculty attending the conference were more varied, with a substantial body of opinion decrying government interference, as an infringement on academic freedom and its tripartite value underpinning.

Fairness demands that we are cognizant of this fact: the free universities of the US, Canada, England, and Europe are not altogether free of pressures to influence the opinions expressed on their campuses. But, such pressure does not originate in government agencies. Rather, it will emanate from various pressure groups, e.g. faith based believers in the biblical story of the creation of the universe, as opposed to science based proponents of Darwin's theory of evolution, who battle over school curricula and teaching. Research has to combat the financial temptation of sponsors who seek support for their products and/or services, e.g. pharmaceutical companies. Scandal has been attached to faculty who have been bought and paid for. More subtle and perhaps more sinister are faculty who propagate their pet ideas or ideologies to captive student audiences in class sessions, typically in the social sciences, as contrasted with the hard sciences (math, physics, chemistry, meteorology, geology, etc.).

## **MOOCS AND ON-LINE HIGHER EDUCATION PROGRAMS**

Technological advances have spawned a vast explosion of college level courses; a large portion now available at no charge to students around the world. The free tuition offerings (MOOC, i.e. massive, open, on-line courses) are supplied by non-profit universities through a corporate, *profit seeking* entity called Coursera, as well as edX (MIT and Harvard), Udacity, and Khan Academy, as well as others. Tuition charging courses are supplied by established for-profit corporations; principally the University of Phoenix (Apollo Group), Kaplan University (Washington Post), and Walden University, etc. Only tangentially do we consider here the quality of on-line courses in transmitting knowledge, or developing critical thinking.

Presumably, MOOC courses will meet the test, given the parentage described below, although that is not a guaranteed outcome. Also, there is some skepticism about the performance of the traditional for-profit universities.

Coursera was established by two Stanford U. professors in 2002: Andrew Ng and Daphne Koller. Their aim, in addition to making college level courses available world-wide, was profit. Since they didn't charge tuition, they sought revenue through a combination of fee charges (certificates, placement, tutoring, sponsorship, etc.). Initially backed by venture capital, more recently they sought financing by traditional non-profit university investors, plus non-investor participating universities. These investors also supplied the course offerings necessary to the viability of the enterprise. As of March 2013, there were 62 universities participating; several of those universities have equity positions in Coursera. The original university investors embraced four of America's most prestigious universities: Stanford, University of Michigan, Princeton, and University of Pennsylvania. The academic standing of these institutions, undoubtedly, facilitated acceptance of the supplied courses. Collectively, the 62 universities participating in Coursera are offering over 100 courses, to some 2.7 million students. They are doing so through MOOCs. As of March 2013, the American Council on Education had approved four courses for college credit; originally, five courses were approved, but one was subsequently dropped.

MOOC was developed by Sebastian Thrun and David Stavens in a Harvard-MIT joint venture, edX, to which each institution contributed \$30 million. In the summer of 2012, they were joined by the University of California-Berkeley, creating a powerful triumvirate. Courses are offered, in English, to participating institutions through open-source software developed by edX. Those institutions are welcome to introduce similar offerings of their own. Also, there are plans to allow them to offer their courses on the edX website. edX plans to create on-line learning software that goes beyond videos of lectures to interactive experience. College credit is not provided upon course completion, but certificates of successful completion will be available for a fee. The design of a viable business model is under study. (Kolowich, March 1, 2013) Udacity, which competes with Coursera, is a for-profit university created by Thrun and Stavens, as well as Mike Sokolsky, a partner. As of February 2013, it offered 20 active courses, with the expectation that they would serve some 400,000 users. Udacity was financed by a venture capital firm, Charles River Ventures, plus \$300,000 of Thrun's own money. In addition, Andreesen Horowitz, another venture capital firm, provided an additional \$15 million in October 2012.

Khan Academy is a non-profit educational website created by Salman Khan in 2006. It offers over 4,000 micro lectures, through video materials stored on You Tube. Available in 19 languages, including English, German, Spanish, French, Russian, Chinese, Hindi, and Arabic, it covers 17 subject areas, ranging from mathematics and medicine to economics and computer science. As of mid-March 2013, it had delivered over 240 million lessons.

*The Chronicle of Higher Education* published, in March 2013, the results of a survey of faculty who participated in creating and teaching MOOC courses. (Kolowich, March 18, 2013) The surveyed professors were tenured, and members of the academic establishment; making their opinions especially significant.

- Asked: "Do you believe MOOCs could eventually reduce the cost of attaining a college degree at your institution?"
  - Answered: 64 percent responded affirmatively (24 percent said significantly, and 40 percent marginally).
- Asked: "Do you believe MOOCs could eventually reduce the cost of attaining a college degree in general?"
  - Answered: 86 percent responded affirmatively (45 percent said significantly, and 41 percent marginally).
- Asked: "Did teaching a MOOC cause you to divert time from other duties, such as research, committee service, or traditional teaching?"
  - Answered: 81 percent responded affirmatively (55 percent said yes, and 26 percent somewhat).

- Asked: “Overall, do you believe MOOCs are worth the hype?”
  - Answered: 79 percent said yes, and 21 percent said no.

The survey response is positive, and strongly so. But, there is a jarring and contradictory note in the survey results.

- Asked: “Do you believe students who succeed in your MOOC deserve formal credit from your home institution?”
  - Answered: 72 percent said no, and 28 percent said yes.
- Asked: “Do you believe your home institution will eventually grant formal credit to students who succeed in your MOOC?”
  - Answered: 66 percent said no, and 34 percent said yes.

These latter responses reveal strong reservations. While those reservations may relate to the intellectual substance of the MOOC and/or the learning that the student takes away, as compared with traditional classroom experience, it might also reflect worry about its impact on the job security of the faculty; or both. Our judgment is that the MOOC is here to stay, and will have a major impact on higher education, both domestically and internationally. (Popp, March/April 2013) But, the reservations are serious, and the ultimate outcome will probably reflect an evolution of MOOC content and delivery systems, in addition to the learning students take away. There is also the nagging and basic question of whether MOOC courses will carry degree granting credit that is transferable to established degree granting institutions. William G. Bowen, president emeritus of the Andrew W. Mellon Foundation and Princeton University, wrote these words of caution: “There is a real danger that the media frenzy associated with MOOCs will lead some colleges (and, especially, business-oriented members of their boards) to embrace too tightly the MOOC approach before it is adequately tested and found to be both sustainable and capable of delivering good learning outcomes for all kinds of students.” He went on to add: “Uncertainties notwithstanding, it is clear to me that online systems have great potential. Vigorous efforts should be made to explore further uses of both the relatively simple systems that are proliferating all around us, often to good effect, and sophisticated systems that are still in their infancy – systems sure to improve over time.” (Bowen, March 25, 2013)

We would be remiss if we failed to note Senate Bill 520, introduced in the California State Senate on March 13, 2013 by its president pro tem, Darrell Steinberg. Should it become law, which is not a foregone conclusion, it would have, through adoption by other states, a potentially enormous impact on America’s higher education system. It would do so by mandating an unprecedented partnership between traditional public colleges and perhaps eventually other on-line suppliers of courses. It would compel state colleges and universities to accept credits earned in MOOCs, and it would apply to students in the three tier California higher education system (the University of California, California State University, and the state Community Colleges); but only those students on a waiting list for admission to specified basic courses that were already full (there were 472,000 such students in the Fall of 2012). . The specified courses, numbering 50, would be identified by a nine member faculty council established in 2012 to oversee open source digital textbooks. The courses would be those lower level courses that students most need to fulfill general education requirements. The council would review and approve which on-line courses would be allowed to fulfill the requirement and count for credit as conferred by the state colleges and universities. Of course, Sebastian Thrun of Udacity and Daphne Koller of Coursera greeted SB 520 with enthusiasm. But, faculty representatives, both union and non-union, expressed skepticism. They focused on such issues as: the academic rigor of the on-line courses, as well as the high dropout rate of students who typically populate the on-line course segment of higher education. (Jenkins, March 18, 2013) There is also the stubborn fact that not all students have ready access to fast internet connections. Many on-line courses rely on hours of video lectures, which work best with broadband connections. Unfortunately, only some two-thirds of American adults have broadband access at home, leaving an unserved large population.

Consideration of MOOCs is relevant here because they are available to students internationally, including those in countries with repressive regimes. The ability of those regimes to affect course content

is inhibited significantly, as against the influence they can exert on satellite programs operated by international universities. The difference will assume even greater significance, if and when MOOCs achieve degree granting credit that is transferable to established universities and colleges. Plainly, at such time, the rationale for establishing satellite campuses and programs will be undermined. However, should the existing satellites and programs seek to incorporate MOOCs into their curricula and degree granting structure, a hybrid is created that has great potential for enhancing intellectual freedom.

## **THE MORAL DILEMMA**

At the outset, we must state, unequivocally and categorically, that there is a moral dilemma. It results from the inevitable collision between the free inquiry and evidence based conclusions of critical thinking, so basic to the academic mission of western research universities, and the urge to indoctrinate and self-preserve of repressive governments. Although the mission statements of the satellite programs in the UAE and China are in harmony with the western academic tradition, the reality on the ground may not be, often in small ways, but sometimes in large ones, e.g. the London School of Economics case. Does this mean that we should withdraw and save our souls? Unlikely! Viewed pragmatically, too much is already invested for a retreat, and our consciences can be calmed by a recital of the benefits that do accompany the existing international programs; while imperfect, intellectual horizons are stretched and inquiry encouraged. Repressive governments are given pause before they lay a heavy hand on the academic institutions operating in their countries; all of which is to the good, and not to be lightly dismissed. We can expect the existing programs to continue, although future expansion may be problematic. The entry of MOOCs on the international higher education scene underlies that judgment.

With MOOCs, the rationale for establishing satellite campuses and programs is undermined. Students in the UAE and China, as well as elsewhere, can enroll at no charge and take the courses offered. The thorny issue of degree granting credit by an accredited college or university remains, although it is presumably overcome when the American Council on Education approves and accepts a MOOC course for credit bearing transferability. More to the point, a repressive government's urge to control course content is severely weakened and rendered largely ineffective. Ferment is the order of the day, and the western world's academic ideal will likely grow in influence. From our point of view, that is an outcome to be desired.

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