

## Academic Globalization: Open Discussion part 1

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### Discussion

#### Stuart Umpleby

Last year I gave a plenary address at the WMSCI conference on academic globalization (<http://www.gwu.edu/~umpleby/academic/index.html>). The basic idea is that due to the internet and international travel academics can now easily collaborate with colleagues at universities in other countries, either for teaching or research. Although universities continue to be separate in administration and somewhat competitive in attracting students and faculty, faculty members increasingly co-author papers with colleagues on other campuses. In terms of communication there is now one global university. The opportunities for collaborative research are just beginning to be explored. To begin the discussion, I passed out copies of the results of the planning meeting that was conducted last year and reviewed briefly the vision, obstacles, strategies for removing the obstacles and actions to implement the strategies, which are described in the report. See [http://www.gwu.edu/~umpleby/academic/2007\\_WMSCI\\_PSP\\_academy\\_globalization\\_Results.doc](http://www.gwu.edu/~umpleby/academic/2007_WMSCI_PSP_academy_globalization_Results.doc). We also conducted some open discussions, and the notes are at the link above. I suggested that this time we have an open discussion to compare our views about academic globalization. I asked people what they had been doing in the past year that was related to academic globalization.

#### Norbert Jastroch

We now have many international students in our classes.

#### Howard Stevenson

Yes, we are working with students from around the world.

#### Robert Hudson

There are several issues involved in academic globalization:

1. World student market
2. Reputation of institutions
3. Preparing students for the world they will live in
4. Building institutional capacity

Kees Pieters

There is now a global arena for theories. People strive to get meta theories accepted.

Chalene Helmuth

There are cultural differences. Who will be the experts?

KP There is increasing interest in Europe in teaching “big history” from chemistry to global societies. Much of it makes sense. We need these daring theories.

SU Over the years I have encountered a cultural difference between North America and Europe where North Americans look for meaning in applications and specific examples. Europeans look for meaning in larger categories or more general conceptualizations.

KP Changes in the developing countries are currently very interesting.

Yongging Ma In 1995 I received a PhD in physics in Plymouth, UK. In 2004 I changed to library management. Asian students tend to be good in science and math but not in the social sciences and humanities. Chinese universities need to ask how to improve. People in China do not understand the basic idea of a copyright.

KP In the Netherlands students are encouraged to pursue their own interests. Students from Romania and Bulgaria need more guidance. They are accustomed to doing what they are told.

SU In the U.S. we say that universities engage in education, research and service. In Russia universities did education. Research was done by the institutes of the Academy of Sciences. Service to the community was not seen as a university responsibility. However, today the idea of service-learning as a pedagogical method is beginning to be adopted in universities around the world.

NJ What are global means for academic teaching and learning? Are we moving toward one common curriculum? Service-learning is a small idea relative to “big history.” Could service-learning be a culturally invariant idea?

Iehab Al Rissan Each country has its own cultural, political, and religious regime. People in the Middle East are concerned about the stability of the region. Globalization should not be interpreted as cultural homogenization.

Howard Stevenson There are global brands and national preferences. Maastricht U. teaches in English.

KP The issue is not just English. The U.S. degree system is spreading through the Bologna Process. There are advantages in one degree system, in master of science degrees.

NJ One dominant system is a risk not a certainty.

KP Why did English become the common international language? English has a simple grammar. Sentences can have a wide variety of structures. Proper English is not as rigid as some languages.

Fred Welsch Spanish grammar is easier than English. However, English requires only about 200 words to express most ideas even though it has a large number of words. There are about 600,000 English words, 450,000 German words, 150,000 Spanish words, 80,000 Chinese words. Globalization is not standardization. English helps countries diversify. The European Union has helped countries rediscover their national and sub national cultures. France and Spain are examples.

NJ 500 years ago the language of science was Latin.

IAR Language is a tool.

KP Math is also a unifying language.

SU There have been periods of globalization before. The earlier periods were driven by religion, trade, or political empire. Academic globalization is more benign, more decentralized. Ideas can originate in any country and can be adopted at a speed controlled by the receiving country. The values of the academic community – openness to information, promotion of people based on merit, science-based decisions – are compatible with self-determination, equal opportunity, free trade and democracy.

RH We are currently facing a number of global challenges – climate change, energy, trade, travel, food shortages.

SU These global challenges will encourage research and sharing of knowledge.

NJ Societal challenges have to be understood.

RH There is a divide between “the stuffed and the starved.”

KP These challenges have precedents. In the past the Middle East was ahead in developing knowledge.

IAR Trade has pushed globalization. Does trade have value?

CH Although there are now more foreign students, there are still xenophobic attitudes.

SU: Lawrence Harrison (see *The Central Liberal Truth*) has written about progress-prone and progress-resistant cultures. He worked for many years in the U.S. Foreign Service, primarily in Latin America. He sought to understand why President Kennedy's Alliance for Progress did not have more impact. Also, the World Bank has published many reports seeking to understand why, after spending billions of dollars for 60 years, so little has been accomplished in some countries, particularly in Africa. There has been an evolution in thinking about what is needed to promote development. 1) Building or rebuilding infrastructure (roads, electric power, water systems, etc.) worked in Germany and Japan after World War II. 2) Macro-economic policies – stable currency, balance between taxes and expenditures, etc. -- led to growth in the Asian tigers. 3) Microfinance has worked well in South Asia. 4) Cultural beliefs and values are, according to Harrison, important in Latin America and other countries. 5) Social capital, empowerment, community organizing, and education at the grass roots are ideas that may help to bring about cultural change.

FW Inglehart has produced a world values survey [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Ronald\\_Inglehart](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Ronald_Inglehart). It covers issues related to health, education, and income. If culture matters, education can help. Development of trust is very important.

IAR How have exchange programs been evaluated?

SU That is an interesting question. Exchange programs are becoming more common. It seems students like them. Faculty and students seem to feel they are worthwhile. Low cost international travel makes them possible. There may, indeed, be formal evaluations.

KP There was free travel for scientists in Europe in the past.

RH Currently 3% of U.S. students will have a foreign experience.

FW In Europe at least 50% of students have studied abroad in 2 other countries.

IAR Study abroad programs should be directed at very different cultures, not for example, Americans going to England. Students from Saudi Arabia have problems in the U.S. but not in other countries in the Middle East.

KP Students should stay abroad for more than a few months. Otherwise their conception of cultural differences can be very superficial.

FW The regional studies people in academia are important. There are 8,000 members of the Latin American Students Association in the U.S. Interest is rising in area studies.

SU Scientific ideas take root in different ways. For example, Marxism led to totalitarian one party states in Russia in China, social democratic parties in Europe and support for labor unions in the U.S. Also, an idea that was resisted for years can sometimes rather

suddenly be accepted. Examples are the Copernican or heliocentric view of the solar system, continental drift, the theory of evolution, and psychotherapy.

KP 1950s ideas are becoming popular again, for example information theory, self-organizing systems, and complex systems. There are new names for old ideas. Science itself is evolving. The research subject chooses its methodology.

KP Anthony Damasio [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Antonio\\_Damasio](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Antonio_Damasio) in *Descartes's Error* links biology and the humanities. Theories of rationality go beyond disciplinary impact.

HS I worked for a time in Chungking, China. People in Chungking knew their educational system was inadequate. It emphasized memorization. Students lacked creativity and initiative. However, there was resistance to change among parents who favored a Confucian education, based on a hierarchical model of social relationships. The educators in Chungking were very self-critical of achievement gaps between China and the West.

YM In China for a long time only .1% of students went to university. However, education was the only way to get a good job, earning more than 2 cents per day. China was closed to foreign ideas for many years.

KP Shanghai has anarchistic ways, perhaps because it is a port city. Chinese research tends to be very focused and narrow. Perhaps the idea is that they can be creative later.

YM China has a goal of having over 1,000 universities, with 20 among the top 100 universities in the world.

HS Europe can not compete on labor costs with Asia. Europe must constantly increase its productivity. However, Asia is narrowing the gap in both productivity and labor costs.

SU Other ideas related to academic globalization are 1) a trend to increase funding for think tanks and 2) the concept of "intellectual cities." The president of New York University has suggested that there are just a few "intellectual cities" around the world that generate most of the new ideas. Each region should have one or more "intellectual cities" in order for the region to have global influence.

IAR Expanding universities requires capable people. Many countries need engineers. There is often a conservative style of teaching. The curriculum that a U.S. or European university offers in a foreign country is not always the same as the curriculum at the home university.