# An International Educational Literacy: Students, Academics and the State

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## Abstract

*Universities are no-longer isolated places where the intellectually or socially advantaged undertake research and contemplation. Universities are central to social and economic policy and can be used to meet the social and economic requirements of the new globalised environment. This paper explores the role of the internationalisation of universities in Australia, facing the challenge of globalisation, in light of declining government support of higher education institutions. A large part of internationalisation involves an increase in international student numbers, and this alongside changes in internal governance, is changing the role of academics within universities. This paper examines the new demands for an international educational literacy, examining the effect of these demands on academic professionals.*

# Managing Internationalisation in Universities

There are several dimensions to an internationalised university, however, Adams (1999) states that an internationalised university primarily has:

> *Acceptance of an ethos and culture within the university which transcends dependence on any single or recognised view of knowledge and practice, thereby embracing a global, international and multicultural orientation in teaching and learning that will enable its graduates to contribute productively in a global society and as well as within different specific cultures and countries.*

A market has developed that demands universities accept such an ethos and embrace internationalisation. This is the result of a number of developments and trends at the world level, which have a direct bearing on education. These include:

- globalisation of economies, trade, finances, services, labour and education;
- increased communication and cultural awareness; and
- a newly evolving relationship between higher education, the state, the market and the community as a whole.

These new relationships press for increased responsibility and a balanced sharing of costs among stakeholders (UNESCO, 2003). Students are drawn towards universities that can provide them with the skills needed to pursue an international career or to pursue a multicultural career in their home country. Students are also attracted by the possibility of integrated educational experiences abroad and by a liberal arts education for the broad range of skills that will be developed with an international focus (Whalley, 1997). Many universities are now offering these opportunities and to be competitive in the market, universities must continue to develop these programs and continue to internationalise the curriculum.

The motivation to internationalise the curriculum in Australia is both economic and social. Government funding is rapidly declining and revenue from fees and charges associated with international students is a very important source of income for universities. Additionally there is a necessity to provide an international education so that graduates are equipped to deal with greater global interdependency with regards to political, environmental and social issues. The economic motivation is associated with the potential for economic gain through the international student market. Between 1998 and 2002 revenue from full fee paying overseas students rose from 701 million to 1423 million. Between 2003 and 2004 the number of international students in Australian universities increased by 6% putting further emphasis on the contribution of fees and charges to total revenue. Demand for Australian education has been predicted to increase nine-fold over the period 2000-2025 (IOP Education Australia, 2002b, cited in Devos 2003).

These figures illustrate a growing market for international education. (UNESCO, 2003). The social motivation to internationalise the curriculum arises out of a necessity for the Australian education system to develop at the same pace as other globalizing industries. In an age with threat of terrorism, global security needs to be redefined by those who are educated in international relations. Even at home, there are substantial demographic changes occurring as a result of changing patterns of immigration. If there is one common factor that can be associated with inter-cultural violence it is ignorance of cultures around the world and ignorance of the history of nations.

It may be an idealistic vision but, higher education is the perfect tool to dissolve this ignorance and the only hope to maintain global peace for future generations.

> *The realisation before us now is that the question is not whether international education should be a significant part of our universities; without it, what we call education is incomplete and insufficient for our contemporary and future needs. (King & Fersh, 1992 cited in Whalley, 1997, p10)*

A university education should develop graduates who can identify the major historical background, demographic trends and economic and political trends which provide the context for international, intercultural relations in their field of study. If graduates are aware of this context and they can identify the major limitations and problems that arise in their personal and professional lives as a result of ethnocentrism, they will be better employees. In order to provide students with this international education, it is necessary that universities have willing, enthusiastic teachers who recognise the needs of such students. Sizer (2001) argues that universities have become too important in the present-day "knowledge economy" to be left to their own devices. Knowledge is now the driving force of modern industry and the primary commodity being traded on the market. Therefore a society's primary knowledge-building facilities - namely, universities - carry the responsibility of determining the well-being of entire countries or regions (Taylor & Braddock, 2005).

# The Effect of Internationalisation on the Governance of Universities

For a while, it seemed that the norms of the academic profession, such as tenure, peer review, and autonomy in curriculum matters, were fixed amid the immense changes occurring in the rest of the university system. Obviously, most of the changes discussed in this paper cannot fully occur without the support of academics but at the same time these changes seem to have a force of their own which is putting enormous pressure on academics to provide support.

It would be incorrect to ascribe any and every social change to unseen universal forces of terrifying power. However, it is also unhelpful to deny the trend of globalisation (Marginson, 2000). The essential feature of the new global world is more intensive contact between people through the compression of space and time. This contact and increased level of communication cannot be ignored by academics. In fact such changes are of particular benefit to academics, as the disseminators of knowledge and the facilitators of research in our society. In many respects the era of globalisation brings with it new positive potential for universities and academic work, both teaching and research. As Van Vught (1999) notes, Universities can become parts of broader problem-identification and problem-solving networks, and develop strategic relationships with other producers of knowledge. Van Vught adds that the transfer of knowledge from academic researcher to the wider world where it will be applied is no longer a single stage at the end of the process of discovery when it is passed like a baton from a research institution to its client. It is more like a team sport in which a successful result is achieved by continuing interchanges between collaborating partners (Taylor & Braddock 2005).

The earliest descriptions of university organisations assumed the dominance of academic ways of working, and the arguments in favour of them were convincing. Academics constitute the main production units, and their ability to produce requires considerable freedom.

> *The academy's desired state was one in which 'academic autonomy' whether defined and guaranteed by law, by financial independence, or by customary tolerance, is thus the necessary safeguard for the free and unfettered discharge of every university's primary duty, which is to permit intellectual non-conformity as the means of advancing knowledge. (Kogan, 1999, p265)*

However, non-conformity implies lack of hierarchy and this assumption about academic life allows for a highly selective and idealistic account of what actually goes on in professor-led systems where the subordination of competent academics has frequently been the norm. Traditionally, universities have been governed by collegiate decision-making and academics exerted influence in their workplace through democratic forums (Marginson & Considine, 2000). In recent years there has been a move away from decision-making in collegial forums and executive decision-making has taken its place. Many academics see this change in conflict with the traditional idea of the university but others support the changes, which they view as a welcome relief from the once-all-to-familiar world of all-powerful professors, privilege and inefficiency (Taylor &Braddock, 2005).

# The Effect of Internationalisation on the Academic Profession

Internationalisation has not only affected the internal governance of universities but has also influenced the role of the teacher in the classroom. Between 1987 and 1996 Australia's international student body grew from 17,000 to over 72,000. Between 1996 and 2001, Australia's international student body more than doubled again (Braddock & Loxton, 2003). This unprecedented growth demonstrates the necessity for teachers to be qualified to teach the international students that are bound to come before them in the classroom. The behavior of international students in the classroom may be influenced by linguistic proficiency, cultural conventions or educational background (Soonhyang, 2005). Teachers and students are traditionally seen as an archetypal role pair in most societies.

When the teacher and student come from different countries, confusion can sometimes occur because of the different ideas about teaching and learning that are embedded in their different cultures. The language and examples used to describe the content from a local perspective only, will have little applicability to the interests of an international student (Centre for Staff Development, University of Western Australia, 1995).

In some cultures, to question a lecturer is to attack his/her competence. Students whose learning experiences have been shaped by this silent tradition are uncomfortable with posing questions and critique, especially if this is directed to a person of higher status (Johns, 1994). Teachers interpreting this behavior from their own cultural perspective may believe this behavior indicates a lack of interest or understanding. This is just one example of a cultural misunderstanding with serious consequences for the student and the process of internationalisation.

Academics are faced with a learning process of their own, to become familiar with specific cultures and to become 'global persons' so that they know how to operate internationally. It is important that they understand differences in communication style, power distance and the effect of hierarchy in Asian cases (Bodycott, 1999). In the contemporary university the role of teaching has changed. Teachers must not only be knowledgeable about a subject but also must be effective communicators so all students can understand and effectively apply the information. Soonhyang (2005) identifies some common problems experienced by international students, and provides some pedagogical suggestions. Some researchers have documented that international students who do not fully understand the language often have problems taking notes in class. A teacher can reduce the severity of this problem by speaking clearly and at a reasonable pace, avoiding inaccessible vocabulary and culturally specific words, and making good use of non-verbal communication strategies such as visual aids, gestures and eye contact (Soonhyang, 2005). A lack of second language confidence can also cause problems for international students. Soonhyang suggests teachers design and use low-anxiety-provoking "structured" small group activities and then report to the class and be patient when waiting for oral responses or participation.

In recent press there has been a tendency to blame the apparently high failure rate of international students on Australian universities market-oriented policy in recruiting full fee-paying students, regardless of their English-speaking capacity (Four Corners, 2005). Devos (2003) states that public debate over academic standards in Australian Universities was precipitated by the release in 2001of a press release by the Australian Institute on the preliminary findings of its study on "Academic Freedom and Commercialisation of Australian Universities: perceptions and experiences of social scientists".

The purpose of the study was to explore social scientists perceptions of academic freedom in an environment of commercialisation (Kayrooz et al., 2001 in Devos, 2003). Devos suggests that the findings from the study received very little coverage and she explores how the media discourse focused on a perceived link between international students and falling academic standards. She notes that it was, and still is, common practice to use the terms "international students" and "fee-paying students" interchangeably despite the fact that 62% of postgraduate students are fee paying, and 13% of all students are international. In other words, most local coursework postgraduate students pay fees (Devos, 2003). The following comment made by Devos (2003) illustrates how a reactive response to internationalisation such as that taken in the media, erases the possibility of informed debate which is necessary for academics to maintain their academic integrity in the 'new' model of university.

> *The debate that occurred at this time is remarkable for the failure to engage in a reflective way with questions of how you maintain integrity in your teaching practices at a time of increased commercialisation, including pressures for increased entrepreneurial activity on the part of the university and their staff. (Devos, 2003, p165)*

Several factors may influence the intellectual output of international students in Australian universities, however it is clear that to survive, Australian Universities must be appropriately prepared to teach international students. If university staff are trained specifically in regards to teaching international students, it is more likely marks will be satisfactory. If teachers are open and honest about the hurdles that they face when teaching international students, universities will at least be absolved of responsibility should the outcome be the same.

Despite the potential for gain, internationalisation certainly puts pressure on academics. Welsh notes, that the politics of internationalisation among academic staff are frequently complex and difficult (Welsh, 1997). While the tangible benefits are real, they also extend to include the greater and freer flow of ideas and practices, and the potential to breakdown insular and narrow canons of practice and ideology (Welch, 1997). Internationalisation also foregrounds academic attributes such as technological competence, communications and linguistic competence and it creates a more competitive market where these attributes are recognised and valued. To overcome these pressures and maximise the gains available through internationalisation, it is essential that universities and academics have a strategy rather than simply reacting to the changes that present (Marginson, 2000). Leask (1999) refers to good practice for teachers to be internationalised and specifically suggests that this can be achieved by:

- Developing international contacts in the professional area;

- Being informed on international issues, standards and practices in the discipline;

- Referring to international examples and perspectives from the discipline; and

- Making time available specifically to meet with individual international students to discuss professional and study related matters.

Some further general features of such a strategy are discussed in the next section.

# An International Educational Literacy

In the past international students have been students travelling to a foreign destination to study in a foreign institution however, with the development of online delivery international students may be re-defined (Lee, 1997). Thus in the information age of the 21st century, all students are potentially international students, seeking quality education normally with vocational purpose from a global selection of recognised providers. A new literacy, an intercultural/international literacy, is crucial to meeting the challenge of globalisation successfully (Marginson, 2000). One way to develop this literacy is firstly, to introduce an international comparative approach to subjects that are currently taught from a national perspective. Secondly, new international subjects such as Asian Law or African politics and globalisation could be introduced so that students have the opportunity to learn about other parts of the world. Curricula should prepare students for defined international professions and lead to internationally recognised professional qualifications, so that universities continue to meet the needs of the global vocational market. Interdisciplinary programs could be introduced such as region and area studies.

To complement these programs, universities could provide curricula in foreign languages as well as training in intercultural communication (Whalley, 1997). A classroom is a meeting of the minds in which each party needs to have a sensitive understanding of the others culture, identity and beliefs. International students face special difficulties which an alert teacher can help to resolve (Kogan, 1999). They also present a unique opportunity to explore differing cultural views and understandings regarding the particular course content. This will expand the market for international education, boost national economies and prepare students for the working world of which they will become a part. The internationalisation of the curricula needs to be driven by academics. According to Marginson (2000) the maintenance-and in some universities-restoration of academic control over teaching and learning, within institutionally determined priorities, is crucial to the long-term health of universities.

> *It is essential that academics play a part in the implementation of new technologies, external networking with government and industry and most importantly, the development of teaching material and methods of teaching. (Marginson, 2000, p.31)*

This is particularly the case in the context of internationalization where significant changes are necessary to meet new demands in universities. The implementation of internationalising strategies can be broken down into two categories, firstly, the internationalisation of formal curricula, that is, course objectives, course content and instructional resources. The second category includes operational areas such as teaching/learning strategies, assessment strategies and extra-curricula activities (Whalley, 1997). If both these categories of curricula are addressed in the internationalisation process, universities will gain the full benefits that such changes bring with them. Internationalised learning is not only about international knowledge but rather a set of skills that are defined within international consciousness or global awareness and perspective. It is a way of thinking rather than a defined category of knowledge. Engaging students with their international peers in the mutual construction of international knowledge deserves recognition as a central pillar of an internationalising methodology.

# Declining Government Commitment to Universities

Since 1986 the total number of students in Australian universities has increased by two-thirds. Despite the increase, there has been little change in the real value of government funding of the universities. In fact since the early 1980s federal government funding to universities has steadily declined, forcing universities to seek and obtain funding from alternate sources. The proportion of the total costs of universities that are met by government has fallen from 87% in 1986 to 57% in 1997 (Dawkins, 1998). The University of Wollongong for example, has experienced a decline in government funding from 82.8% in 1987 to 70% in 1999. At the University of Newcastle the proportion of non-government income has increased to 47.4% of the total income (State Public Services Federation Group, 2001). This poses a serious problem for Australian Universities. The incentive to globalise is there but the capacity to appoint and retain innovative and internationally competitive staff is diminished. The expansion of the Higher Education system in Australia has been paid for by HECS, international and postgraduate fee payments, continuing education and fee-for-service-teaching, commercial research and consultancy, revenues from university properties and investments, bequests and donations and other private sources (Marginson, 2000). These are plausible sources for supporting universities with funding but in the short term, average academic workloads will increase as new international activities and functions are added onto the old local/national activities (Marginson, 2000).

It is important not to see globalisation as a sudden, crushing force but rather a continuous development. Universities have been in the process of change for many years and change is not always bad.

> *There is little to be gained by lamenting the passing of the collegial era, when the veneration of knowledge was often a cloak for the monopolisation of knowledge by closed professional elites, resources were shrouded in mystery and women, junior staff and students were excluded from power. (Marginson, 2000, p31)*

There were features of the old system that were questionable and necessitated review just as there are features of the new system that require such inquiry. What is important is not to reject change and lament the past but to prepare for that change sufficiently and maximise the benefits that change may offer. Embracing change does not mean forgetting what Australian universities are for or forgetting what makes each university distinctive. Some academics interpret, being useful to business as being like business or, interpret the desire to excel in a market as a rush to imitate and a struggle to compete (Marginson, 2000). Corporatisation of universities is inevitable but it can take more than one form. It can be configured as friendly (corporate organisation maximises the conditions enabling academic performance) or hostile (corporate organisation is focused on securing control and the transformation of academic activities). The latter view sees corporate practice as a monster that will swallow the will of the academic profession. However, the corporate and the academic do not have to be mutually exclusive (Marginson, 2000).

# Conclusion

There is growing demand for Australian universities with an international and multicultural orientation in teaching and learning. Students are drawn towards universities that can provide them with the skills needed to pursue an international career. Declining government funding has created an economic incentive to internationalise Australian universities so that educational providers remain competitive in the global market. Additionally, there is a social incentive for higher education to remain relevant to a rapidly globalizing world in which, trade, finance, services, labour and other sectors continue to internationalise. The development of a new model of university has altered the governance structures within institutions and affected the role of academics. It is important that academic autonomy and freedom is maintained despite the transition from collegial decision-making to executive governance. In many respects the era of globalisation brings with it new positive potential for universities and academic work, both teaching and research. Academics will play a central role in developing new teaching techniques and curricula to suit an international university. A calm response to the transition is needed to facilitate informed debate, which is necessary for academics to maintain their academic integrity in the 'new' model of university. The Australian university can only be redesigned with the help of the government, private enterprise and academic input. This is necessary if Australian universities want not only to survive but to be competitive in a world market and maintain a professional academic culture. It is essential that academic staff engage more fully in strategically important areas such as new international forms of curricula, global relations and external networking with industry and government to achieve these goals.

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