

## **Higher Education Internationally and the Internationalization of Higher Education**

*International Visiting Scholar Luncheon Discussion*

*February 26, 2014*

*Notes from one discussion group*

Group: *Wu Zheng (visiting scholar), Veronica Fermatt, Yukari Okamoto, Russ Rumberger, Tine Sloan, Chryss Yost, George Yatchisin, and Andrés Consoli (group facilitator and note taker)*

### **Guiding discussion questions:**

1. First allow any visiting scholars in your group to share information regarding: descriptions of higher education system in their own region or country; and major challenges they perceive facing higher education in their own region.
2. What are some major differences that you perceive in higher education systems across the globe or major challenges that you perceive higher education systems across the globe are facing?
3. What do you see as goals in the internationalization of our own school?
4. What are some challenges that you face in your own international research and/or other international professional collaborations?

### **Discussion notes:**

1. Wu Zheng, visiting scholar in the group, shared information regarding the higher education system in China:
  - The central government in China operates much of the higher education system there. There are very few private universities in China. The central government sets the policies. There is no academic freedom as it is understood in the U.S. Moreover, there are 7 topics not to be discussed ranging from common values to human rights, in addition to the topic of not discussing that there are 7 topics one cannot talk about!
  - There is a quota system set by the Central Government, with very few slots at Chinese universities, that result in a ratio of 1 in 500 to 1 in 600 applicants per slot. In light of the high competition, many Chinese students opt to study abroad. The burgeoning middle class in China has invested in the education abroad of their children. Yet the students going to study abroad are not the top students in China. Moreover, many are not prepared to deal with some of the demands of the U.S. system, such as the SATs. Families are using agencies in China to help their children locate universities in the USA to apply to.
  - Chinese students must take a placement exam that lasts two days. Based on the results of that exam, students will be placed in a tiered system, with those scoring the highest being admitted into the top universities.

- Due to the limited vacancies, there is an “in-plan” and an “off-plan” arrangement where in-plan students will be at a university pursuing a degree while off-plan students may take courses but not be allowed to earn a degree. This has created a need for foreign universities to grant degrees.
  - The student exchange was described by Wu as ranging from incidental to intentional, the latter involving partners overseas.
  - There are only 100 accredited programs in the China. At the same time, there have been an “explosion” of offerings and graduates who cannot find jobs due to a market that is crowded with too many graduates.
2. What are some major differences that you perceive in higher education systems across the globe or major challenges that higher education systems across the globe are facing?
- The group was curious about the day-to-day experience of students in China. Wu indicated that it was not all that different from in the U.S. There is a focus on academics. Some of the comparisons with other countries include: book/theoretical knowledge emphasized in some countries while in the U.S., there is an emphasis on applied knowledge, although this is not a homogenous impression.
  - The group listened to the situation in Japan where there are not enough children in the population at the moment, and therefore there are not enough children in schools, forcing some schools to be shut down. Due to the shortage of students, universities are competing for them and are accepting less qualified students and more nontraditional students. There is an increased number of for-profit schools.
3. What are some challenges that you face in your own international research and/or other international professional collaborations?
- Above all, language barriers among both students and instructors are a challenge. The group emphasized language as a cultural expression and underscored that challenges were due to differences in cultural values, beliefs, and norms. Another important challenge concerned the differences between students and teachers, their perceptions of one another, and their expectations.
  - It was highlighted that U.S. students who go to China, as opposed to Europe, are reaching beyond their comfort zone. Over the summer, there were 70 students in Beijing while only 9 students during the year from the University of California Education Abroad Program (UCEAP).
4. What do you see as goals in the internationalization of our own school?
- Group members discussed a range of matters when attempting to address this question, including questioning if UCSB has been aggressive enough in pursuing an international agenda. At least one member indicated how controversial it is to have an international focus by a university whose mission is to educate the top 10% of high school graduates from California. People highlighted some of the advantages of having international students present on campus including their contribution to diversity, the exposure of domestic students to others, the higher fees that international students contribute, and

their perspective on issues, etc. People in the group expressed some concern with the back and forth emphasis of at times admitting international students, while at other times focusing on domestic students.

- An example was shared about the exchange of teacher education students with Singapore, Denmark, and Switzerland and the learning experiences resulting from that exchange, particularly the insights on sizable issues (e.g., how children are or are not trusted to take care of themselves; their ability to resolve conflict among themselves).
- Goals included creating bridges and opportunities to bring the world to our students, to challenge their comfort zone yet provide support to address those challenges (e.g., in the housing experience).
- It was highlighted that international students are opting to have the experience while domestic students are not. At least one member noted that international students tend to stay quiet and keep to themselves. How do we engage them? Among the proposed strategies were: matching and mentoring to overcome the barriers; food; music; dance; and films. It is important to emphasize not just memorandums of understanding (MOUs) among institutions but faculty interests as a way to advance internationalization.