

University Research and Training into the 1990s
A Comment on INTERNATIONAL EDUCATION by Dr. John W. Ryan

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Introduction

Dr. John W. Ryan's discussion of International Education provides much substance for thought. Clearly, as he outlines, the past decade has seen the international context for scientific and educational exchange transformed in a way that promises to change our understanding and style of interuniversity cooperation. Dr. Ryan is undoubtedly correct in identifying the mystique of economic development as one of the driving forces of the expansionist decades of the 1950s and 1960s, a belief that helped inspire American universities to become engaged in a broad range of international projects and activities.

Perhaps at that time the prescriptive approach to international scientific and educational cooperation of which Dr. Ryan speaks may have had its place for countries without strong educational traditions of their own. This approach helped prepare and develop excellent scholars and institutes around the world with the assistance and collaboration of foreign universities and institutes and often with considerable training in the United States and Western Europe.

Scholars and scientists from this generation, however, have in subsequent decades developed the skills and tools to identify their own scientific agendas. The maturation of this generation of scholars, coupled with a variety of changes in our world order, has brought about a fundamental modification of the environment for international scientific cooperation.

The Indications of Change

To add an example to the trends so ably outlined in Dr. Ryan's comments, let me speak for a moment about international students and international studies.

Foreign students have been with us since soon after the founding of our universities. Over the years they have come from various parts of the world in response to fellowship opportunities, missionary activity, or development programs. Generally they have come as individuals, although from time to time a group program appeared. They took regular courses plus perhaps some special language training, and they returned home with our knowledge delivered as we thought appropriate.

Today, however, we see foreign students whose interest in our educational skills and services has changed. No longer satisfied to take whatever program we offered, our foreign students and especially their official sponsors have definite ideas of their own about what type of higher education their students need, how they should get it, what they should pay for it, and how agreement should be reached. This assertive stance often shocks and puzzles us, but we should be delighted because it means that our foreign students and their sponsors are now prepared to become collaborators in the educational process, not simply unknowledgeable consumers of education.

We find ourselves discussing special curricula, new delivery systems, and special programs tailored to the needs of our counterpart institutions and governments. This encourages us to reexamine our own procedures and content, frequently bringing an improvement in or readjustment to what we offer our domestic students. The introspection assures us that the education we provide and the cooperative programs we develop overseas become the joint responsibility of the participants and that the design responds to the needs and capabilities of a true partnership.

This is not to imply that the relationship between major

universities in developed countries and those in developing countries always involves institutions with equal resources and skills. Of course not, but our counterparts overseas now have the sophistication to diagnose many of their own requirements and the skill to help design programs that meet those needs.

We discover greater and greater involvement of government agencies in the process of defining and directing international educational and scientific exchange. In many countries our participation with host institutions is mediated not by and international agency or the United States government, but by the government of the host institution's country.

This point, mentioned in Dr. Ryan's remarks, forces us to develop much more sophisticated cross cultural skills if we want to participate in the second stage of university development and scientific cooperation in the developing world. Now and increasingly in the future, the easy relationship of United States university, United States government agency, and United States educational values and assumptions gives way to the much harder but more valuable confrontation of values and assumptions between societies and cultures with quite different expectations, goals, and capabilities.

Education and science cost money, often quite a lot of money, and with the changes in the sources of funds (from unilateral grants and loans to multilateral assistance and host country financing) it is only fitting that the education and science purchased meet the perceived needs of the purchaser. In many cases, the agenda for educational cooperation comes via the host country's national government, complicating in some ways our ability to cooperate with counterpart

educational institutions but aiding in other ways by committing the national governments to the goals of educational collaboration once it has been accepted.

The Universities and the Challenge

As this world environment for education and science has changed in ways Dr. Ryan discusses, the universities have responded, albeit slowly, in many areas. If we in the major research and scientific universities want to capture the initiative in international education, training, and science, we must move with more skill and speed to respond to what has become an increasingly complex and changeable environment. Dr. Ryan comments on aspects of this problem, but let me mention some effects of the pace of change.

From the experience of the past decade, we know that Dr. Ryan is correct in assuming that the apparently stable, large-power dominated world of the 1950s and 1960s will not return soon. Instead we can expect to exist in a world with many influences, many centers of power and wealth, many sources of wisdom and expertise. Moreover, because of the multiplicity of medium level world centers and the inability of the great powers to control or manage events, rapid and sometimes dramatic change will characterize the world of the next few decades.

Change, of course, does not always mean war, revolution, debt, and destruction. It also brings computers, telecommunications, satellites, and advances in health. Some of these advances occur with dizzying speed, such as has happened with computers and communications, others take much longer such as health and nutrition. The pace of change, however, appears to be accelerating in many areas spurred on by rapid communications, efficient media, and computerized skills.

Universities, by nature stable and enduring rather than fast moving and innovative, must learn to respond quickly to these changes instead of waiting for lulls in the activity to design responses. We must learn to design and execute useful, effective programs of scientific and educational collaboration in the space of weeks, not months, months not years. We must learn how to adjust our designs quickly and relatively painlessly to accommodate changes in the project environment.

If universities fail to become flexible providers of knowledge and skill, we will lose the initiative in science and education to private commercial concerns selling these skills either outright or as part of industrial expansion plans. If universities want to define the content and capture the direction of educational and scientific development, we need to learn the new skills of rapid adaptation and quick flexible cooperation.

Such a challenge does not imply a diminution of standards or quality, only a flexibility in delivering and arranging the quality content and the high standards of performance. As Dr. Ryan so correctly notes, "quality and performance always do well."

Dr. Ryan mentioned the difficulties that come from political complications, especially in the conduct of collaborative research and training activities. These problems have serious consequences, to be sure.

However, complex, multilateral cooperation managed by universities offers one way to minimize problems of this kind. Carefully designed programs with content prepared in cooperation with host governments and host institutions can also reduce political difficulties. Even so, much political content can never be eliminated, and this should not be taken

as grounds for dismissing knowledge that carries political content. Since governments are, by definition, in pursuit of political and social goals, much of the burden of effectively managing this problem rests with the universities where cooperative traditions provide the experience for solving such issues.

Even with the best of cooperation, political controversies and social issues may well arise in the course of educational exchange, but universities should be prepared to tolerate complex political and social environments until quality education no longer is possible. When quality can not be delivered, rejection and isolation are not appropriate responses. Instead, universities must develop flexible means of continuing what can be done, discontinuing what can not, and avoiding any obligation to validate or reject particular political or social approaches.

Such an objective stance can prove difficult to maintain, for all universities are part of the cultures and societies that support them and find it almost impossible to avoid direct involvement in issues of value, worth, and justice. These political and social issues may be the greatest challenges of all.

Conclusion

As Dr. Ryan indicates, we can not survey the entire panorama of educational change that faces us in the decade of the 1990s. But the challenges are evident. If we meet them, Dr. Ryan correctly notes that the opportunities for dynamic educational leadership will grow, enriching our intellectual and research capabilities and maintaining the position of higher education at the center of major issues of economic and social development. I should add that if we fail by emphasizing our

internal difficulties and retreating to defend the rigidities of the past years, the international leadership and initiative will pass to other institutions whose educational and scientific capabilities may be less than ours but whose cooperative and innovative skills allow them to capture the lead in international scientific cooperation and training.

It is my belief that our universities have the skills to lead international educational and scientific cooperation into the 1990s, and I am convinced that the result of our cooperation will be a dynamic, complex, fast moving, and effective network of universities, providing quality research and training in a cooperative and collaborative context.

It promises to be an exciting decade.

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