

Then, the results of the four selected university rankings need to be normalized at the country level so that the size effect is neutralized. More specifically, the number of top universities in each country is weighted by the higher education-aged population of the country. This indicator can be seen as reflecting the “density” of world-class universities in each country. First, there is no significant correlation between the number of top universities in a country and their density. Second, the normalized results of the four-selected university rankings are very similar; their methodologies differ substantially on some points but also share common features. Third, countries that can boast at least one of the top 400 universities in each of the four rankings constitute a rather homogenous club of less than 40 members, mostly high-income economies. Across the four rankings, density of top universities is the highest in small and rich countries—Denmark, Switzerland, Sweden, and Finland, followed by Ireland, the Netherlands, and Hong Kong.

SIMILARITY OF RESULTS

The four normalized university rankings, produced by U21 (2012 edition), leads to a clear conclusion: a strong and positive correlation between the two sets of results. To double check this finding, correlations are also examined for the 2013 editions of both Shanghai and U21 rankings, and the results show an even stronger association. A further test is administered, correlating the results of each of the four U21 categories with those of the major university leagues. The correlations are significant, and the relationship is largely positive, regardless of the university league considered (Shanghai first) and the U21 category selected (resources and output strongest). The only noticeable exception to the convergence of the two types of rankings is the United States, which comes first under U21, but does not show among the winners of the university leagues when analyzed in terms of density.

THE CONVERGENCE OF RESULTS

These comparisons may lead to the idea that a high density of world-class universities guarantees a country as a world-class higher education system. They may also give the impression that the similarity of results between U21 and university rankings means that the former effects are not more informative than the latter. Three types of observations suggest that such conclusions are not warranted. A first one is that U21 selects 50 countries among the G20 members and countries which perform best in the National Science Foundation international ranking of research institutions; thus, although the pool of U21 countries is slightly larger than that of “the big three” university rankings, the mode of selection of these countries constitutes a twofold bias to-

ward wealthy countries and those heavily investing in research. Second, U21 incorporates some of the indicators of the university rankings (Shanghai and Webometrics) in its own measures and even counts the number of world-class universities among its measures of output, which certainly explains the US exception. Finally, a reclassification of all 22 measures confirms the heavy bias toward research. Therefore, the convergence of the two types of rankings is almost inevitable and is a logical consequence of the methodology used by U21. Finally, a critical element to keep in mind is that a world-class higher education system is an elusive concept including many dimensions, running from equity in access, to internal efficiency, to teaching and learning, to relevance within the socioeconomic fabric of the country, and to external efficiency. Indeed, these dimensions are difficult to capture, and despite U21’s laudable attempts to reflect several of them, they fall short of fully account for all the complexity and diversity of national higher education systems.

ROOM TO IMPROVE

Comparing national higher education systems across countries remains a priority. U21 has taken bold steps in that direction but needs to go further: to demonstrate its usefulness. Two routes are critical: first, digging further into the structure of the systems, so that the rankings are better contextualized; second, expanding the number and diversity of the countries to be ranked—data permitting so that the exercise is more inclusive. Taking these routes would certainly lead to results more clearly differentiated from those yielded by university rankings and would contribute to meeting the high expectations created by the U21 initiative. The U21 rankings illustrate the vast potential of system rankings, as important complements to university rankings and as contributors to better informed decisions by higher education policymakers. ■

Outcomes Assessment in International Education

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Due to the growing trend in higher education accountability, many postsecondary institutions are now measuring student learning outcomes, related to global or inter-

cultural learning. However, a closer look is required at those assessment efforts, which although growing in popularity are not always designed well, executed effectively, or leveraged to maximum effect.

Often times, institutions engaged in outcomes assessment within international education will do the following: Have one person or one office “do the assessment”; use only one assessment tool (usually a pre/post tool); and use that particular tool because another university or all universities in a certain group are using it. Sometimes an institution will even design their own tool, often not vetting it for reliability or validity.

Far too often the assessment effort is an afterthought or an ad hoc effort, without sufficient work exerted at the planning stage, without clearly articulated goals and outcome statements, and without an assessment plan in place. Furthermore, the institution or program may simply shelve the data it has collected, claiming to have done assessment, ending the process there, and repeating this process again in subsequent years, as long as funding or staffing is available. The assessment data are rarely provided back to the students for their own continued learning and development that are crucial in intercultural learning. We outline several principles to ensure quality assurance in the student learning outcomes assessment practice in international education.

A ROAD MAP

Higher education institutions embarking on assessment efforts will often start by asking, “Which tool should we use?” While this may seem like a logical place to start, it is important to first ask “What is it that we want to measure?” This question will lead to a closer examination of stated mission and goals that determine the appropriate assessment tools. When considering an assessment agenda for an international education program or initiative, it is helpful to step back and reflect on the following three questions, to help create an assessment road map: (1) Where are we going? (mission/goals); (2) How will we get there? (objectives/outcomes); and (3) How will we know when we have arrived? (evidence). Possibly, the evidence of student success goes beyond counting numbers (which are the outputs) to perceptions of students’ learning (indirect evidence such as through surveys or inventories) and actual learning (direct evidence of student learning such as assignments in e-portfolios). This crucial alignment of mission, goals, and outcomes will naturally point to which tools/methods are needed to collect evidence that these outcomes have been achieved.

NO PERFECT TOOL

Assessment tools must be aligned with stated objectives

and selected based on “fitness for purpose,” rather than for reasons of convenience or familiarity. Too often, institutions or programs seek the one “perfect tool,” which simply does not exist, especially for intercultural learning. In fact, when assessing something as complex as global learning or intercultural competence development, rigorous assessment involves the use of a multimethod, multiperspective approach that goes beyond the use of one tool. Furthermore, it is critical that institutions thoroughly explore existing tools in terms of exactly what those measure (not just what tools say they measure), the reliability and validity of the tools, the validity of the tool in that particular institutional/programmatic context, the theoretical basis of the tools, and including how well the tools align with the specific outcomes to be assessed. The prioritized outcomes will vary by the institution, so there is no one-size-fits-all approach when it comes to assessment tools.

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As to decisions about assessment at preliminary (“pre”) versus concluding (“post”) stages of a program or course, good assessment means efforts are also ideally integrated into programming on an ongoing basis, avoiding the reliance on snapshots only at the beginning and/or end of a learning experience. Furthermore, the most meaningful and useful assessment of intercultural learning arguably contains a longitudinal component and provides feedback to students.

WORKING FROM THE PLAN

Another key principle of good assessment is that efforts need to be holistically developed and documented through an assessment plan. An assessment plan outlines not only what will be measured and how the data will be collected, but also details about who will be involved, which needs to be more than one person or office), the timeline, implementation details, and how the data will be used and communicated. This last point is crucial; there must be a use for the data (i.e., for student feedback, program improvement, and advocacy) or there is no need to collect the data. In particular, offices should not be collecting data and then trying

to determine “what to do with it.” Spending 10 percent of the time in the beginning to develop an assessment plan and thinking through these issues is time well invested in the later 90 percent of the effort that goes into assessment.

A TEAM EFFORT

Often, assessment can seem quite overwhelming and daunting, especially if only one person or office is tasked with doing it. Effective assessment actually involves an intrastitutional team of stakeholders, which is comprised not only of international education experts but also assessment experts, students, faculty, and others who have a stake in international education outcomes. Senior leadership and support play a critical role in the success of assessment efforts. Once assembled, this intrastitutional team prioritizes outcomes to be assessed, conducts an audit of assessment efforts already underway, and adapts current assessment efforts to align with goals and outcomes—no need to reinvent assessment efforts or add expensive ones when they may not be necessary—before seeking additional assessment tools/methods that collect evidence needed to address stated goals and outcomes.

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CONCLUSION

There are other principles of effective assessment that might include utilizing a control group, best practices in terms of sampling, the use of longitudinal studies, and so on. This article has outlined a few principles as a call for further reflection and discussion on what truly makes for rigorous outcomes assessment in international education. While it is commendable for institutions to be engaged in outcomes assessment, it is important to take a closer look at the quality of the assessments being done. Guiding questions can include: How well are assessment tools/methods aligned with mission and goals? (Exactly what do those tools measure and why are they being used?) Is there more than one tool being used? Is there an assessment plan in place? How are assessment efforts integrated throughout a course or program, beyond pre/post efforts? How are the data being used? Is more than one person or office involved in assessment efforts? Is the assessment plan itself being reviewed regularly for improvement?

If higher education institutions are serious about in-

ternationalization, assessment, and student learning, such efforts are effective, resulting in outcomes that are meaningful for all involved, including our students. ■

APEC's Bold Higher Education Agenda: Will Anyone Notice?

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Since the Asia Pacific Economic Cooperation organization (APEC) was established in 1989 to foster economic cooperation across the Asia Pacific it has not been particularly interested in higher education, but that might be changing. During Russia's chairmanship of APEC in 2012, the organization's leaders committing to promoting cross-border cooperation, collaboration, and networking. But whether the organization's new aspiration for regional engagement can be translated into practical measures that affect institutions, students and educators remain to be seen.

A TRADE LIBERALIZATION MEETS CHINESE REGULATION

Since at least the mid-1990s, APEC expressed an interest in expanding foreign investment in education and training. Australia, a key provider of cross-border higher education in the region, was the driving force behind early APEC international education projects, while playing a similar role within the World Trade Organization and the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development. In an effort to engage APEC in the Millennium Round of the General Agreement on Trade in Services negotiations, it organized a “Thematic Dialogue on Trade in Education Services” in Hanoi in 2002 and sponsored a series of research projects: *Measures Affecting Trade and Investment in Education Services in the Asia-Pacific Region* (with New Zealand, 2001), *APEC and International Education* (2008), and *Measures Affecting Cross-Border Exchange and Investment in Higher Education in the APEC Region* (2009).

China was much more interested in projects focusing on effective national regulation of cross-border provision. After introducing new guidelines for foreign providers in 2003, China sponsored a project that Australia and New Zealand were keen to partner in, culminating in an awkwardly titled report, *Improving the Institute Capacity of*

Higher Education under Globalization: Joint Schools among APEC (2004). More recently, China held an APEC seminar in Shanghai followed by the report *Capacity Building for Policies and Monitoring of Cross-Border Education in the APEC Region* (2011).

While coming at the challenge of governing cross-border higher education from opposite poles, both the Australian and Chinese-led projects emphasized the importance of national regulation and quality assurance. In an effort to develop such capacity across the region, Australia and the United States led APEC projects on the development of national quality-assurance regimes in 2006 and 2011, respectively.

These various forums and reports provided some opportunities for information sharing between midranking officials from across the region, which may have contributed in some small part to policy convergence, especially by exposing officials in emerging economies to the practices of more developed systems. However, such concerns did not figure large on the agenda of APEC's education ministers. There was rarely even a mention of higher education in the statements of APEC Education Ministerial Meetings before 2012.

WHAT IS GOING ON IN VLADIVOSTOK?

In 2012, education ministers agreed to ramp up APEC's role in educational cooperation, dubbed the “Gyeongju Initiative,” and immediately the Russian Federation volunteered to lead a higher education initiative during the year in which Russia assumed the rotating leadership of the organization. APEC trade ministers then called for both expanding “cross-border trade in education services and deepening educational cooperation in the Asia-Pacific” (my emphasis). They asked officials to examine ways to “better facilitate mobility of students, researchers and providers in the region.” A month later, the Russian-sponsored higher education conference in Vladivostok “Shaping Education within APEC” adopted the trade ministers' list and added two more points: “Increasing the interaction between higher education institutions and increasing data collection on trade in education services.”

In committing to “educational cooperation and promoting cross-border exchange in education services,” APEC has wisely framed aspirations in terms that are broad enough to be meaningful within both the education and trade sectors. These aspirations were duly endorsed by APEC Economic Leaders' Meeting in Vladivostok in late 2012. Russia had since sponsored a second APEC Conference on Cooperation in Higher Education in Asia-Pacific Region early in 2013, again in Vladivostok.

So Russia seems to have very successfully put cross-border higher education on the top of the APEC agenda.

Russia does host a large number of international degree students, 129,690 in 2010 according to UNESCO figures; but a small proportion of these are from APEC member economies, with the vast majority coming from former Soviet states. Also, Russia has not previously been active in this space within APEC.

The location may provide some clues. The Leaders' Summit took place on the newly built island campus of the Far Eastern Federal University, which was constructed in time to host the summit and will then provide facilities for the university. The university's Web site states that “The main target of the FEFU Strategic Program for 2010–2019, supported by extensive federal funding, is to make FEFU a world-class university, integrated into the education, research and innovation environment of the Asia-Pacific region.” So, the city of Vladivostok and this international university, in particular, appear central to Russia's efforts to expand its educational engagement with the region.

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ONGOING TENSIONS

In August last year, I facilitated an APEC forum in Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia, sponsored by the Australian Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade that brought together trade and education officials, scholars, and representatives of educational institutions from 14 countries. Much of the discussion focused on ways to enhance institutional capacity to support a widespread desire for greater international engagement—for recruiting international degree students, engaging in exchange relationships, collaborating with foreign institutions to deliver international programs, internationalizing research, or teaching. However, in order to further opening education systems to allow more mobility for students, scholars, and providers, there are still clearly significant differences of opinion between and within countries. Several participants argued that because of the different stages of development of national systems there is not a level playing field, and that introducing greater international competition for domestic providers would undermine their national development strategies.

It is not uncommon for incumbents in any protected industry sector to oppose measures that would allow competitors to enter their markets. In some ways, universities behave no differently than the events of other service pro-