

AAU COLLOQUIUM

Henry Rosovsky

Higher education has never been more important than it is at this moment, but neither developing countries nor donor agencies have grasped that importance. His study considers five separate topics:

1. The first relates to the public interest in higher education. The key finding is that market forces will not deliver all that is necessary for higher education.
2. A rational national system is a necessary condition for higher education to perform its role in developing countries.
3. There is nearly complete agreement in the developing world that prevailing governance practices and customs are a key obstacle—perhaps the key obstacle—to improving the quality of higher education.
4. In the critical area of science and technology, the north-south gap is large and growing. It will not be closed in the near future, but perhaps we can stop it from widening.
5. General or liberal education is needed in the developing world. It is not a luxury, especially for future leaders in developing countries.

The long standing problems are well known:

1. The professoriate is often poorly trained.
2. In much of the developing world, learning is purely by rote.
3. In many parts of the developing world, corruption and politicization affect the selection of faculty and administrators.

Finally there are some important realities:

1. The first reality is the tremendous expansion of higher education in the developing world. Everywhere in the developing world enrollments are rising more rapidly than population.
2. The second is the consequence of that expansion, which I called “uncontrolled differentiation”. Since the 1980s, private, for-profit education has been the most rapidly growing sector of tertiary education in the world...particularly Open Universities. These new pressures, piled on old problems, have created inescapable declines in quality.
3. The third, and perhaps the most fundamental, is the knowledge revolution through which we are now living. Unlike earlier industrial revolutions, it is closely tied to higher education as a producer and consumer of its benefits.

When these notions are combined with globalization, the “American model” of competition and desires for economy and efficiency, policy makers in poorer parts of the world increasingly may be tempted to rely on market forces. If higher education is really desired they might reason, the private sector will take care of it.

But private markets will not deliver all that is needed in higher education. For example, they will not provide instruction and research in the humanities or the basic sciences, because there is no money to be made in either.

This source of bias stems from the fact that higher education creates valuable public goods that do not enter into the rate-of-return calculations. Higher education, for example, contributes to the spirit of enterprise in a country, to leadership, governance, culture, university research, and democracy. This list can be very long.

All too often, leaders are ambitious to create an Oxford rather than a system to address national problems in higher education. Policymakers should be urged to look at the state of California, which has probably the best comprehensive public system of higher education in the nation.

The desirable features of a system are clear. A system must be stratified and tiered so as to provide both excellence and mass education—all the way from research universities throughout vocational and distance learning. Ideally a national system would include public and private institutions—a requirement that creates sensitive political issues. Competition should be encouraged within categories.

The remedies are obvious, although not easy to implement: There are the tried and true: protection of academic freedom; shared governance; selection based on merit; mutually-agreed rights and responsibilities between the faculty and the institution, perhaps with an explicit social contract (how I wish we had that in this country); financial stability, and clear boundaries for students.

While there is a need for a better scientific base in developing countries, they also voice a plea for general or liberal education. It is eccentric because liberal education is not part of the continental tradition on which most of the universities in the developing world are based. In the continental system, general education is assigned to secondary schools, and university training is highly specialized. But we know for a fact that the secondary schools in these countries are no longer capable of providing general education, if they ever were.

Do academics from richer countries have any special responsibilities here. We have a particular responsibility for placing the case for higher education in the developing world before donors, public and private. We should not advocate just for ourselves and ignore 85% of the world's population.

Humanities, basic science, and liberal education are not playthings for the wealthy; they are necessary components of higher education if it is to fulfill its role in development.

H.G. Wells said, "Human history becomes more and more a race between education and catastrophe." 85% of the world's population are losing that race.

A new issue in Africa is the increasing number of offshore providers of higher education. The largest number of MBA holders in Africa have degrees from the Open University of the UK rather than from any single African university.

I do not believe that the U.S. practices of university governance should be imposed on the rest of the world. Nothing has a stronger cultural component than governance. What is it that political groups take such an active role inside universities?

I feel that the role of humanities in developing countries, especially given the concern to preserve national identity, might be even more important than in the developed countries.

Universities have been in existence since medieval times and we have changed all the time. That we should suddenly lose our capacity for change is a great misconception. In fact, I don't know of anything that changes as continually as fine universities. The changes will not be revolutionary; they will be evolutionary.

Zhihong Xu, Peking

Currently 11 M students in higher ed. Peking has 36,000 students.

Trying to shift away from Soviet system. Have exchange programs with more than 180 universities, including 37 American universities.

Luis Alfredo Riveros

See the challenge of preserving local and national cultural identity, even as globalization creates a multicultural world. Through research and the creation of knowledge, universities are expected to be protectors and cultivators of national culture, values, and traditions. That mission will need to take into account the new global scenario.

A second challenge stems from the need to answer multiple, complicated questions in scientific and technological research.

A third challenge derives from the fact that the marketplace is becoming a key element in shaping university development around the world. To some degree, the marketplace is substituting for the role traditionally filled by the state in financing and promoting university activities.

Latin American is recognized generally for unequal income distribution, poor access to culture and education, and low valuation of the individual and human life.

The challenges of globalization:

- The need to develop new rules and create new international institutions.
- The need to redefine the role and scope of nation-states.
- The need to protect all cultural traditions.

All these challenges mean new tasks for the university, which will become more integrated across national borders.

General Discussion

Vest: Sociological studies have suggested that young people now entering universities have a much greater sense than their predecessors of working together cooperatively and forming teams. In the Media Lab experiment linking 2,000 young people from around the world, the number one item on their manifesto was “We must preserve our local and national cultures”.

Hong Kong: The problem really starts in the developing countries. When their young people receive postgraduate education overseas they are exposed to different concepts, governments, and ways of life. If one or two come back, that’s fine. But when there is a mass return of these young people with different ideas, that’s when trouble can start.

Aga Khan

Quality education at all levels is, and has been, critically important for all societies. In the developing world, education offers the poor opportunities for new futures: for women, higher status and new role in their families and communities; for migrants, an asset that is portable.

Universities can make a difference in developing new models and standards for society by inculcating in its students the skills of critical thinking, analysis, and problem solving underpinned by a strong grasp of moral reasoning, ethics, and respect for others.

While our world may be changing at a rate unprecedented in human history; the change is not all positive. Higher education as a public good and the reevaluation of the public returns on investment in higher education.

ICT is also very important and will open up dramatically expanding international linkages and the reach of educational programs in both spatial and temporal terms.

One lesson is clear: the mastery of the essential elements of ICT will have to be a part of the experience of every university student rather than later.

Mentions Grossman and Minow who note “the Internet and digital communication are being largely wasted in America as a resource for the kind of broad education the future demands...Entertainment of marginal quality dominates commercial attempts on the Internet to reach a mass audience while the treasures of U.S. libraries, schools, and museums are locked away for want of money to make them available to the full American audience”.

William Mitchell:

Remote education is disadvantaged because it does not offer the value-added that comes from proximity to the instructor and from cross-fertilization with other students. Because users need facilities and training to draw on remote education and shape it to their needs, it carries high overheads, particularly at the outset.

On the positive side, remote education offers advantages of scale. It dramatically increases the reach to scattered rural communities, which still represent the vast majority of the developing world's population. It adds the possibility of bringing important expertise into remote and isolated concerns. It creates opportunities for cross-cultural experiences.

He contends that efforts to combine distance education with classroom learning can reap the benefits of what he calls "educationally mediated globalization" which respects and incorporates intellectual diversity and cultural pluralism.

Building capacity for moral reasoning and moral judgment is a key goal of higher education. Worry that advances in science are crowding out parts of the curriculum devoted to the study of the great humanistic traditions that have evolved in all civilizations throughout human history.

The complexities of world problems and societies today require people educated in broad humanistic traditions in addition to the guidance and direction provided by the teaching of their religion. This history of the 20th C is replete with examples of the danger of the systematic propagation and uncritical acceptance of dogmas, ideologies, and even theologies.

The identification of new sources of finance for higher education has to be a high priority. It will be essential to identify private sector funding and to create a regulatory environment that encourages private companies to support higher education.

It has been said that the Internet is the most important development for education since the printing press. Perhaps. But it is grossly underused for education, at least for now. Universities should take on the task of developing educational materials, resources, and programs for the Internet.

Let us remember the historic role of the university in the study, interpretation, and transmission of the great humanistic traditions of the world. Our search for global peace in an interconnected, crowded world with rising expectations needs to understand and internalize these lessons more than at any time in the past.