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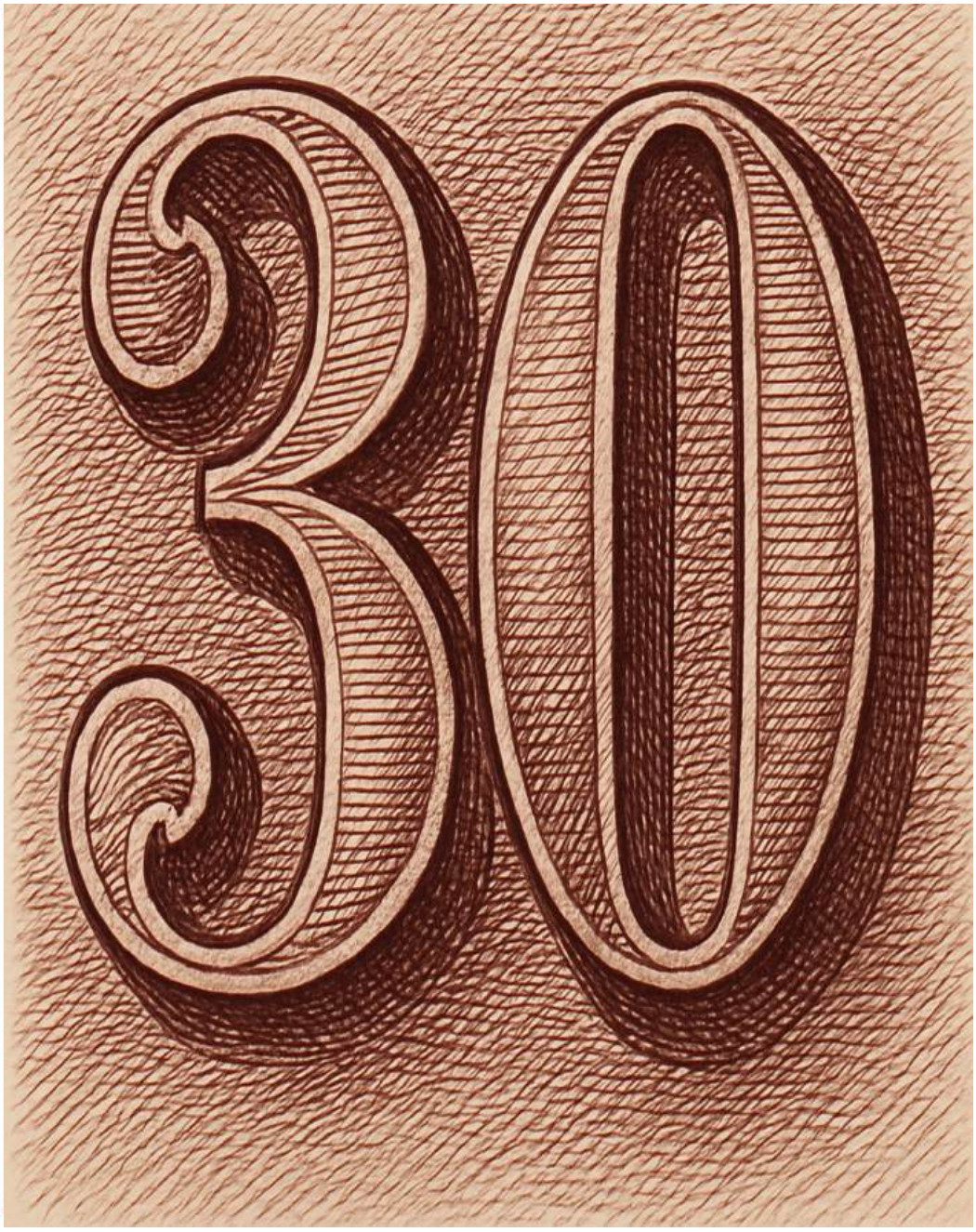

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Published since 1995 by the Boston College Center for International Higher Education (CIHE), *International Higher Education* (IHE) is the world's oldest continuously published source of news and analysis of global higher education. Our mission is to provide insightful, informed, and high-quality commentary and analysis on trends and issues of importance to higher education systems, institutions, and stakeholders around the world.

As such, since our establishment, IHE has aimed to be globally representative, both in terms of the topics covered and the authors represented. Our contributors are drawn from a broad network of distinguished international scholars, policy makers, and leaders, who are well positioned to offer critical perspectives on key issues and trends that shape higher education worldwide. Our aim is to expose readers to a broad range of issues and concerns facing contemporary higher education, and to provide timely, accurate, and insightful analyses of key higher education developments across a diverse global context.

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EDITORIAL

Global Higher Education Transformation: The 2025 International Crisis

Hans de Wit, Philip G. Altbach and Chris R. Glass

Higher education has faced many challenges in its long history, including the 30 years in which *International Higher Education* (IHE) has been in press. Some of these crises have been called existential, such as the move toward neoliberalism at the turn of the twenty-first century, the financial crisis of 2008, and the COVID-19 pandemic, as well as several technological innovations, such as distance education, MOOCS, and currently artificial intelligence (AI). Yet each time higher education recovered, and its essence for economy and society, for innovation and change was reconfirmed.

However, global higher education is currently under stress as perhaps never before. Many of the characteristics of the current crisis in higher education are unique. As Angel Calderon states in *University World News*: "The global higher education and research scientific community is entering into unchartered territory, and this is likely to result in detrimental impacts for the sustainable development agenda." In this editorial, we describe some of the primary characteristics of the current crisis and ask: Is the 2025 international crisis truly different? Will it transform higher education fundamentally? Is Western dominance in higher education coming to an end?

Geopolitical Realities and the Rise of Nationalism and Populism

Top of mind in 2025 are the geopolitical conflicts evident in much of the world, combined with the rise of nationalism and populism. In many ways, higher education is a pawn in a complex set of fundamental and rapidly changing geopolitical realities. These are well known. The conflict between China and the Western world continues. The Russian invasion of Ukraine also continues and has resulted in a break between Russian higher education and the Western world, largely restoring the cleavages of the Cold War era, with the important exception that, under the Trump administration, Europe no longer sees the United States as a reliable ally. The Trump-inspired tariff wars, now getting under way, may have an impact on higher education by ramping up national hostility. National and regional knowledge security concerns are eclipsing the value of international academic collaboration.

The issue of immigration is also of paramount importance in most high-income contexts. While complex and with many national variations, the politics of the wealthy world are increasingly opposed to large-scale immigration, regardless of rational economic arguments or humanitarian needs. Of course, immigration policy has direct implications for student and faculty mobility—in most cases making it more difficult to gain access for study or employment.

The dominance of the Global North—a result of strong cooperation in the spheres of trade, defense, education, and research—is under enormous internal threat due to the shifting, inward-looking "America First" position of the Trump administration in the United States. This enhances the self-confidence of Asia, in particular China but also India, to position itself as the new global power. The implications for higher education and research globally are still to be seen, but recent events will for sure have an enormous impact. Budget cuts for higher education in the United States and also in much of Europe are also affecting research universities for the first time, thus weakening scientific capacity in the West.

Although information technology has been influential in universities for decades, current advances in AI represent a fundamental shift with transformative potential across teaching, research, and institutional governance.

Financial and Demographic Constraints

Higher education faces a combination of financial challenges, due to a combination of factors playing out in many countries, and to changing demographic realities. In the Global North, massification of enrollments has been achieved. Many countries now face a decline in the number of young people, leading to enrollment declines and accompanying financial crisis. In much of the Global South, the challenge is the opposite—supporting massification *and* the growing numbers of students seeking access. With more than 250 million students studying in over 22,000 universities worldwide, higher education continues to be truly a global enterprise. However, with decreasing public funding and ongoing demand, we will witness further privatization of the public sector and expansion of private

postsecondary education, including online education, which will raise additional concerns about ethics and quality.

Big Data, Technology, and AI

Higher education worldwide is rapidly being reshaped by emerging digital technologies, big data, and AI. Although information technology has been influential in universities for decades, current advances in AI represent a fundamental shift with transformative potential across teaching, research, and institutional governance. On one hand, AI-driven tools can greatly enhance efficiency, enable deeper insights through data analytics, and personalize educational experiences, potentially democratizing access to quality higher education globally. On the other hand, these same technologies introduce significant ethical dilemmas and practical challenges. Issues around data privacy, algorithmic biases, and potential threats to academic and scientific integrity are growing concerns that institutions must urgently address. Additionally, digital divides between technologically advanced and resource-limited institutions risk deepening inequalities within global higher education. The ability of universities worldwide to adapt thoughtfully and ethically to these fast-paced technological changes will profoundly shape the future landscape of higher education. Global higher education is at the beginning of the impact of AI—but the result will no doubt be more far-reaching than the changes from earlier technological innovations.

From Westernization to Internationalization?

Finally, global higher education is, for the first time in recent history, becoming less international. For the past several centuries, higher education has become increasingly international (albeit largely dominated by Europe and North America), due to the mobility of students, academics, and ideas. There are now more than 6 million mobile students per year—reflecting complex global mobility patterns that include significant South-to-North movement but also growing South-to-South, North-to-South, and North-to-North flows—as well as an untold number of postdocs, mobile professors, and others. International branch campuses, now numbering more than 300, and other types of transnational education are also part of this global environment. The number of students participating in cross-border programs and institutions is now close to surpassing the number of internationally mobile students. Similar to the case of student mobility, in cross-border delivery, the traditional dominance of the Global North is likely to be threatened as a result of recent events. The current internationalization ecosphere, South–North student degree mobility and North–South mobility in transnational education, development cooperation, and accreditation will be dramatically challenged, although, at this point, it is impossible to accurately predict specific trends.

Internationalization has so far been a Western concept. Now, its dominance is more challenged than ever, which is in itself a good and necessary development. More concerning is the fact that core values that have always been advocated for by the West and in particular the United States—such as academic freedom, academic integrity, as well as responsibility of society for higher education and of higher education for society—are no longer guaranteed. It remains to be seen if these academic values will survive the current transformation as well as the other challenges outlined here.

The articles in this special anniversary issue, celebrating 30 years of IHE, seek to unpack many of these complex, deeply challenging, and generally negative realities, as ever taking a global perspective and stressing the implications for higher education internationalization. Unfortunately, at the present moment, we cannot present a rosy future for one of the world's most important intellectual and economic enterprises—global higher education. We can, however, provide a platform for the articulation of a research agenda that might help to mitigate many of these challenges and perhaps even help to safeguard higher education's future.

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30 Years of International Higher Education, a Field of Study and a Publication

Hans de Wit and Philip G. Altbach

Over the past 30 years and 123 issues of *International Higher Education,* both the world and higher education have changed enormously. The publication has both followed these changes and made adaptations to them, but, in essence, its guiding principles, as well as its unique position, have remained the same.

In its first issue (Spring 1995), Philip G. Altbach wrote that *International Higher Education* (IHE) would provide information and analysis not available elsewhere and serve as a forum for information, debate, and discussion about the central issues facing higher education, with a particular concern for universities in what was then called "the Third World." He stated: "*International Higher Education* is the first publication to approach higher education with a commitment to exploring the spiritual and moral responsibilities of academic institutions and academic communities throughout the world." Thirty years and 123 issues later, both the world and higher education have changed enormously. IHE has both followed these changes and made adaptations to them, but, in essence, its guiding principles, as well as its unique position, have remained the same. In 2020, a study of the first 100 issues of IHE confirmed that the journal's content had remained both geographically diverse and thematically rich, giving voice to a broad range of scholars, policy makers, and practitioners from all regions around the globe. This has not changed over the past five years. The 2024 book *International Dimensions and Trends in Higher Education in Troubled Times*, which offers a selection of 100 IHE articles published between 2018 and 2023, illustrates this clearly. It shows "an effort to foster a common identity, values, and social responsibility, while challenging existing norms and advocating inclusivity and civic engagement." As Philip G. Altbach wrote in issue 120 in 2024: "We have kept to these core missions during three decades of ongoing dramatic changes in the landscape of global higher education—notably dramatic massification, the emergence of the global knowledge economy, the flowering of internationalization, and, recently, significant geopolitical tensions."

What Makes IHE Unique?

At the time of the foundation of the Center for International Higher Education (CIHE) and IHE in 1995, as we wrote in our account of the history of CIHE, "there was no established field that stressed postsecondary education in the global context. And although it has matured, it is still marginal in relation to its importance." There have been other centers and publications addressing international higher education, but the continuity of CIHE and IHE is unique. In large part, this is due to their functioning as an international network, a model which provides a global platform for analysis, discussion, and dissemination. What other dimensions make IHE unique? It was open access before the concept even existed, and continues to be so. Its open access has allowed for a wide circulation of its articles, through partnerships with *University World News*, the International Association of Universities (IAU), and associations of universities in Africa and India. It is not only published in the dominant English language but also translated into Spanish, Portuguese, Vietnamese and, until recently, Russian. There is a Chinese edition with a selection of articles from IHE, and, in 2025, the first annual issue of *Ta'leem* will be published, with a selection of articles from IHE translated into Arabic. These factors make IHE likely the most widely distributed and read publication on higher education in the world.

We have kept to these core missions during three decades of ongoing dramatic changes in the landscape of global higher education—notably dramatic massification, the emergence of the global knowledge economy, the flowering of internationalization, and, recently, significant geopolitical tensions.

Another factor is its style. IHE is not a magazine nor an academic journal. It is focused on policy and practice in international higher education. Providing news is not its primary focus; there are other sources that do so. It also does not include references (although it now includes links to other sources), and it is not exclusively research-based, although it is referenced and cited quite frequently in scholarly and professional publications.

Is There a Future for IHE?

Given the increase in attention to and dissemination of trends and developments in international higher education, is there still a need for IHE in the coming decades? Its evolution over the past 30 years has prepared the publication for its future. It has evolved from a small print issue mailed around the globe to an online publication that allows access both to entire issues and individual articles. After an appreciated short period of five years with the German publisher DUZ Verlags- und Medienhaus (issues 100–120), it has returned home to CIHE, guaranteeing its autonomy and dissemination without subscription costs.

As we wrote in the 2024 book, IHE "is an invitation to reevaluate our understanding of the international dimensions of higher education on a global scale, emphasizing the ever-evolving nature of the field."

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GEOPOLITICS AND ACADEMIC FREEDOM

National–Global Upheavals are Destabilizing Higher Education

Simon Marginson

Amid growing nativism and migration resistance in Western politics, coupled with geopolitical conflict between the United States and China, the local and national identities of Anglophone and European higher education institutions are increasingly in tension with their global activity and commitment to cross-border cooperation based on academic freedom.

Higher education is active on more than one geographical scale. Institutions are rooted in cities, regions, and nation-states. They are also international and global in character. Mostly the national and global agendas of higher education institutions synergize with each other.

However, at particular times and places, and in global geopolitics, the national and global in higher education can find themselves in tension. We are now in one of those times.

The double geography of higher education is crucial to its identity and autonomy. Institutions draw meaning, resources, and people from local and national society, while at the same time their global mission entrenches an identity that is never wholly suborned by territory-bound authorities. The forms and imaginings of knowledge are universal, especially in the natural sciences, and when unimpeded ideas and people move readily across borders. It has long been the case, from the Buddhist monasteries in Northern India between 500 BCE and 1200 CE, to the medieval European universities, and the scholarly Islamic madrassas.

Higher education was never more internationalized than in the 20 years after 1995, quickened by the Internet, the cheapening of travel, and the widespread growth in educational participation, university infrastructure, and research science, and facilitated by the broad support of most national governments for open cross-border connections. It was not a just or egalitarian internationalization—it was often neocolonial in form, dominated by the English-speaking countries and fostering brain drain and capital transfers from the Global South to the Global North, but openness and collaboration delivered all-round benefits.

However, while participation and research continue to grow, in most of the Euro-American West, the favorable policy conditions for cross-border activity have vanished. The consensus on global integration has gone. Multipolarity in political economy, science, and higher education, especially the rise of China, has detonated comfortable Western assumptions about natural supremacy. In a world slipping from control, American strategists now judge that free trade helps China and the Global South more than their own country. Western working class communities that gained nothing from globalization oppose all cross-border openness. Frictionless trade has given way to trade wars, and multilateral cooperation on climate change is breaking down. Universities, seen as bastions of liberal cosmopolitanism, are taking intense flak in some nations including the United States.

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Since Brexit and the first Trump election in 2016, the populist-conservative singular blood-and-soil version of national identity and resistance to migration have reshaped Western politics. As far-right parties strengthen in the polls and elections, mainstream political parties and governments give more and more ground to nativism. While antimigration ire is mostly directed at refugees, not international students, governments under pressure to cut back incomers and told by business to maintain economic migration are capping and cutting international student numbers. Students are the soft policy target. This dynamic has sharply reduced incoming numbers in Australia, Canada, Denmark, and the United Kingdom, and

threatens to do so in the Netherlands (the Trump government may follow, too). Soft power and revenue goals are receding. Hard power and securitization are now more important.

The most sinister change has been triggered by US/China geopolitics. The government of the United States wants to slow China's rise by radically reducing cooperation in universities, science, and technology. The strategy is unlikely to succeed—it fosters self-sufficiency in China rather than weakening its science—but has done immense damage, reducing open scientific cooperation to techno-nationalism and national security politics. The discriminatory 2018 China Initiative in the United States led to no prosecutions for "spying" but victimized dozens of American faculty, mostly of Chinese descent. The number of student and faculty visas for Chinese citizens entering the United States has dropped by two-thirds since 2015, there have been incidents of severe border harassment, Confucius Institutes across the West are closing, and American university presidents no longer visit China. China–US joint authorship has been the most productive in world science, but joint projects and papers are now falling sharply.

Coercive interventions by national governments pose an existential challenge for higher education, especially for the leading research universities. To what extent are they willing to operate independently of government in the international context so as to sustain their global mission and the foundational principles of institutional autonomy and academic freedom?

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GEOPOLITICS AND ACADEMIC FREEDOM

Knowledge Battlegrounds: Navigating Security Imperatives in Global Academia

Alma Maldonado-Maldonado

This paper explores the interplay between academia and geopolitics, revealing how universities have become battlegrounds for national security interests. The paper unveils four dimensions: security-driven internationalization constraints, the allure of global talent mobility, the digital espionage in academic settings, and the politicization of knowledge. In a world of intensifying rivalries, the article presents urgent questions about preserving academic freedom amid competing national desires in a context where higher education is crucial for development and innovation.

Higher education is profoundly intertwined with geopolitical and national security dynamics, and universities are subject to international influences, security issues, policy agendas, and national interests. Relevant topics in our field include international students and national security; research collaboration and espionage; campus radicalization and extremism; regional cooperation; high-skilled migration; soft power; authoritarianism and repression on campus; and the global impact of China. Here, I focus on four topics: internationalization and security dilemmas; talent mobility and security; cybersecurity and digital espionage in universities; and the politicization and weaponization of knowledge.

Internationalization and Security Dilemmas

Current events around higher education institutions in the United States showcase higher education as a site of political conflict. The government's mandate to proscribe all offices related to diversity, equity, and inclusion that collaborate with higher education institutions, funding cuts for international cooperation projects, the cancellation of 83 percent of USAID's collaboration projects, and the discontinuation of Fulbright scholarships without prior notice all exemplify ways in which higher education can be leveraged for geopolitical ends.

Following September 11, 2001, concerns regarding internationalization dynamics and student exchanges were expected to continue in terms of attracting international talent and restricting some nationals from studying abroad or studying certain subjects. Nationalism has also affected relations between higher education institutions and national authorities: higher levels of nationalistic policy making have coincided with increased efforts by governments to control what academics do and research.

However, this phenomenon is hardly restricted to the American context. Three well-documented occurrences illustrate a similar dynamic operating elsewhere in the world: the relocation of the operations of the Central European University in Hungary to Vienna; the government take-over of the National Autonomous University of Nicaragua, and the gradual destruction of institutions like the Center for Research and Teaching in Economics (CIDE in Spanish) in Mexico.

In a world full of geopolitical tension and mistrust, higher education research needs to examine ways to preserve higher education capabilities, openness, and collaboration. This should form a critical part of the global academia and national security agendas.

Talent Mobility and Security

Talent mobility is another contentious area. Outside of the European Union, open regional borders for highly skilled migrants and students were nonexistent decades ago. While North America was the first region to sign a free trade agreement, talent mobility was excluded. Individual countries have, however, enacted policies to attract talent. For example, Australia, Canada, New Zealand, the United Kingdom—and even China and India, long known as primarily sender countries—have modified their migration policies to become receiving countries.

More comparative research is needed to understand policy changes and patterns and provide theoretical explanations behind these changes. We need to study cases like Latin America which, compared to other regions, is not part of the global talent exchange landscape, despite attempts at participation. Latin America currently hosts only about 2.2 percent of the world's international students each year. Mobility out of the region also raises important questions. Over 50 percent of skilled Latin American immigrants in the United States work in jobs that do not match their training level. Similarly, Brazil and Mexico each account for only about 0.5 percent of approved H-1B visa petitions (visas for highly skilled migrants) in the United States, a very slim amount in comparison with other countries like India (60 percent).

Cybersecurity and Digital Espionage in Universities

One of the main challenges for universities is to increase their capabilities while preserving openness and collaboration. Concerns regarding espionage and intellectual property loss are expected to continue to rise in many countries as part of policies toward developing science, technology, and innovation and controlling high-skilled migration. Security concerns affect relations with some countries, such as the case of China in the United States. Scholars of certain nationalities (i.e., Iranian or Russian) also face employment restrictions in different parts of the world.

Politicization and Weaponization of Knowledge

Higher education can be instrumental in influencing ideologies, imposing agendas, and obtaining technological advantages. An important issue to be included in the research agenda are discussions around policies to maintain independence while balancing national and global security.

States use academic institutions to exert soft power, gain technological advantage or attack ideological enemies. Examples include political situations during the governments of Jair Bolsonaro in Brazil (2019–2022), with ideological interventions in the selection of university rectors (presidents); Evo Morales in Bolivia (2006–2019), with the increase of political control over the public university system; and Nayib Bukele in El Salvador (2019 onward), with the surveillance of academics critical of government policies. These regimes, while ideologically dissimilar, have all attacked higher education institutions as enemies of their governments and used financial leverage to influence institutional policies.

Final Remarks

In a world full of geopolitical tension and mistrust, higher education research needs to examine ways to preserve higher education capabilities, openness, and collaboration. This should form a critical part of the global academia and national security agendas.

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GEOPOLITICS AND ACADEMIC FREEDOM

Fundamental Values at the Crossroads Between Politics, Policy, and Research

Sjur Bergan

The fundamental values of higher education have become the subject of political debate, policy measures, and increased academic attention, largely due more to a backlash against democracy than to any concerns about quality. This article describes such developments in Europe and suggests elements that could be included in a strengthened research agenda that has academic, as well as political and policy relevance.

Over the past 10-15 years, the fundamental values of higher education have gone from being taken largely for granted to becoming the subject of political debates, policy measures, and increased academic attention. These values are now under attack in several countries in Europe and beyond. As a result, a number of European organizations have chosen to reiterate the importance of these fundamental values to the functioning of higher education. When Belarus—a country with significant limitations on democratic values, including academic freedom, institutional autonomy, and the freedom to organize—applied to join the EHEA in 2015, the EHEA responded by creating a roadmap with explicit reference to fundamental higher education values to accompany the country's admission. The EHEA itself also adopted a defined set of values and a common understanding, while, within the European Strategy for Universities, the European Commission is developing guiding principles for fundamental academic values.

The renewed prominence of these fundamental values is almost entirely attributable to concerns about the backlash against democracy in Europe and other parts of the world. The argument that fundamental values are also essential to ensuring the quality of higher education and research has featured less prominently in public debate. The Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance in the European Higher Education Area (ESG) do not address values, and suggestions that the revision of these standards include considerations of them were received with skepticism by the main quality assurance actors in Europe. The mandate given by the Tirana ministerial conference to review the ESG also does not refer to fundamental values even though the Communiqué is explicit that "[h]igher education can only fully develop its missions when its fundamental values are respected."

The close link between fundamental values and policy implies several challenges to research, which is largely undertaken on the assumption that democracy—and therefore also the fundamental values of higher education—are desirable. Challenges to these values, and perhaps in particular to academic freedom and institutional autonomy, come almost exclusively from outside of academia, even if the acts and arguments of some members of the academic community provide ammunition to the populist right, notably with allegations of "wokeness" and anti-Semitism.

Ultimately, the key question for both research and policy development may be this: What conditions and measures are particularly significant in ensuring that higher education and research contribute to the kind of societies in which we would wish to live, characterized by democracy, inclusion, and quality? The answers to this question can be found only through research and sustained reflection.

Toward a Research Agenda

In the face of political movements that question the value and pertinence of academic knowledge, the need for intensified research around fundamental values is more important than ever. While there has been extensive research on the state of academic freedom and institutional autonomy, researchers have focused less on the other fundamental values.

Exploring academic integrity, student and staff participation in higher education governance, and public responsibility *for* and *of* higher education should therefore be an important part of the

research agenda. Not least, research is needed on how these values *interact*. Do they support each other—or is there real or potential contradiction between them? Can an institution or a higher education system honor the fundamental values by implementing some while neglecting others?

In Europe, the dominant aspect of institutional autonomy and to some extent the other values has been the legal relationship between public authorities and the academic community. Research is needed to develop a more nuanced understanding of the fundamental values as well as of the proper roles of and relationship between public authorities and higher education institutions.

The lack of research on the role of fundamental values in enhancing quality deprives the academic community of arguments that could possibly convince those less receptive to arguments of democracy. Such research could address questions like: Do the fundamental values enhance the quality of higher education and research? If yes, how, and what policy measures are required?

Assessing the extent to which the fundamental values are a living reality is no small task and constitutes an obvious research challenge that the EHEA has started working on, but that will nevertheless require increased research in the years to come, including in parts of the world other than Europe.

Ultimately, the key question for both research and policy development may be this: What conditions and measures are particularly significant in ensuring that higher education and research contribute to the kind of societies in which we would wish to live, characterized by democracy, inclusion, and quality? The answers to this question can be found only through research and sustained reflection.

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Academic Freedom at a Crossroads

Daniela Craciun

Academic freedom is eroding, not just in authoritarian but also in democratic contexts. Novel challenges arising from geopolitical tensions and shifting political ideologies threaten academic freedom. The resurgence of "flying universities" as innovative institutional responses to these challenges draws attention to the need for coordinated policy responses across actors and contexts. Cross-regional and cross-disciplinary research is needed.

Over the past 30 years, the 1995 film *Forrest Gump*'s famous line—"Life is like a box of chocolates, you never know what you're gonna get"—has proven true in many ways. For higher education, this period brought profound transformations, especially an expansion of international cooperation and student mobility, and a surge in academic freedom and institutional autonomy. However, in recent years, these trends have been increasingly questioned, challenged, and even dismantled, as geopolitical tensions, nationalist policies, and ideological shifts toward populism, illiberal democracy, and autocracy reshape the landscape of global higher education. In many ways, these developments have caught higher education by surprise.

Take, for example, academic freedom, i.e., the freedom of academic staff and students to research, teach, learn, and disseminate knowledge within and outside the higher education sector. In recent years, we have witnessed a global erosion of academic freedom, even in democracies. The Academic Freedom Index, which monitors the global state of this fundamental academic value, reveals a disturbing trend: in the last decade, academic freedom has declined in 22 countries representing more than half of the global population, including major democracies like Brazil, India, the United Kingdom, and the United States. The European Parliament Academic Freedom Monitor also documents decreasing *de jure* and *de facto* levels of academic freedom in many European Union member states.

Threats to academic freedom come from various sources, including governments, institutional leadership, civil society, and private actors. These threats undermine both "negative freedom"—the absence of external barriers to academic inquiry—and "positive freedom," which implies conditions that enable free intellectual exploration, such as institutional autonomy or adequate labor and financial conditions. While, traditionally, protectors of academic freedom were the first to be attacked, nowadays threats to conditions promoting academic freedom can be just as insidious.

Flying Universities

In addition to domestic challenges, geopolitical crises are posing new threats to academic freedom. Together, these developments have brought about existential challenges to universities and have driven institutions, staff, and students across borders. Hence the return of "flying universities," a concept originating in nineteenth-century Poland, where they were created to provide an alternative independent educational space free from political reprisals. These universities "flew" from place to place to avoid detection, which is how they got their name. Today, flying universities take many forms: universities in exile (e.g., European Humanities University), invisible universities (e.g., Off University, Spring University Myanmar, Invisible University for Ukraine), refugee education initiatives (e.g., OLIve—the Open Learning Initiative), and cross-border flying universities (e.g., Central European University). These institutions arose not only as safe havens for learning but also as centers of resistance, providing a platform for critical thinking, academic freedom, and the continuation of the mission of higher education. Although extreme, the return of flying universities demonstrates the demand for unconventional institutional responses to authoritarian pressures and geopolitical tensions.

The return of 'flying universities' demonstrates the demand for unconventional institutional responses to authoritarian pressures and geopolitical tensions.

At the policy level, we have also seen a number of initiatives to protect and promote academic freedom. Take recent policy initiatives in Europe, where overall levels of academic freedom are still relatively high compared to other regions of the world. In the European Higher Education Area, the Bologna Process

proposes common definitions of fundamental values in higher education, including academic freedom, and is developing a monitoring framework to ensure that member states honor their commitments. The European Commission seeks to promote respect for academic freedom in response to democratic backsliding by proposing a set of guiding principles for scientific research. The European Parliament puts out a yearly academic freedom monitor and seeks to establish enforceable protections at the level of the European Union. The Council of Europe has started the project "Academic Freedom in Action" to highlight higher education's essential role in supporting democratic values and institutions. The challenge lies in coordinating these initiatives to avoid redundant efforts, promote synergies between policies, ensure practical implementation, and monitor development.

Academic Solidarity

Understanding the new threats and broader impacts of academic freedom erosions is crucial for effective policy action. While research on this topic has expanded, a comprehensive comparative examination across regions and disciplines is needed to identify commonalities and differences in how academic freedom is shaped, contested, and defended in varying sociopolitical and institutional landscapes. Further development of methodological tools to measure and monitor academic freedom across contexts should be part of this endeavor. The return of flying universities also offers a fertile ground to investigate alternative models of institutional resistance and the role of academic solidarity in times of geopolitical tensions. Even though nationalist tendencies lead to deinternationalization and clamp down on mobility, threats to academic freedom travel across borders, highlighting how interconnected the challenges faced by academic institutions worldwide have become.

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Artificial Intelligence, Big Data, and the Role of Universities

Rajani Naidoo

Artificial intelligence (AI) and big data are transforming economies, societies, and institutions, raising critical concerns for democracy, intellectual autonomy, and global citizenship. While AI offers immense benefits, it is also leveraged by tech elites to consolidate power, erode regulation, and act against the global good. This article discusses some of these key dimensions and outlines some important research directions, including prioritizing interdisciplinary research on how political and economic power can leverage technology to harness or prevent AI from being deployed for the benefit of people and our planet.

Escalating advances in technology, including artificial intelligence (AI) and big data, are reshaping global economies, societies, and institutions with significant implications for democracy, critical thinking, and global citizenship. What roles does AI play in society, and in light of that, what greater responsibilities emerge for universities? New technology has brought unimaginable benefits as well as dangers. Here, I focus on the dangers and highlight avenues for university-based research.

AI, Power, and the Erosion of Democracy

Advanced technology is represented as politically neutral, enhancing convenience and productivity, and creating a better world. However, Julie Cohen has highlighted how the "tech oligarchy" harnesses extreme wealth and technoscience to impose their visions on our collective future. Technology is ideologically positioned as the main source of progress, and regulation is scapegoated as the enemy of innovation. In addition, political leaders such as Donald Trump and tech giants such as Elon Musk engage in coordinated action to challenge democratic institutions, erode human rights. and reinforce discrimination against women, people of color, and the LGBT+ community. Through their actions, they are paving the way for a shrinking government and civil society and facilitating the transfer of political and economic power to tech elites who aim to fashion society in their own interests.

Universities, as institutions dedicated to knowledge, critical inquiry, and the public good, can play an important role by prioritizing interdisciplinary research on how political and economic power and technology work together to harness or prevent AI from being deployed for the global good. The refusal of the United States and the United Kingdom to sign the 2025 Paris AI summit declaration with its focus on sustainability, human rights, inclusivity, and the future of work suggests that we need creativity in securing space for innovation within corporate and government-funded research to support the future of people and our planet.

> We are thus left with big questions for research: what is thinking, what is consciousness, and what does it mean to be human?

The Double-Edged Sword of AI in Education

The meshing of AI into the lives of students through personalized learning, support for those that are disabled, and remote access for those in countries engulfed in conflict is empowering and contributes to the common good. However, it also raises questions around the goals of universities in nurturing empathy and supporting students to engage in dialogue to build democratic societies. Digital platforms co-opt the language of democratization, while powerful predictive AI algorithms drive recommendation engines which reinforce political divisions. In addition, digital platforms reinforce short attention spans, reward instant gratification, and provide smooth interfaces between humans and machines to remove discomfort. The danger is that students are not encouraged to apply sustained effort to complex tasks, nor are they equipped to evaluate colliding ideas and navigate conflict. While virtual reality holds the promise of enabling students to stand in the shoes of others to facilitate understanding and empathy, it is not

clear, as Yuval Noah Harari suggests, whether such simulation and artificial mimicry truly advances these dispositions.

Research on pedagogy that goes beyond teaching students about algorithmic bias and engages them in truly understanding the potential and limits of technology is required. It is also important to study how to balance the excitement of what is technically possible with moral questions about what is socially desirable. How we teach generative AI skills to enhance rather than atrophize human skills, and the interaction of the digital and the human in equipping students to grapple with democratic values and global citizenship, are fundamental to the commitment of future generations to human-centered technology.

AI in Scientific Research: A Boon or a Threat to Intellectual Autonomy?

New technologies such as AI and big data clearly enhance university research. At the University of Exeter, our Responsible Climate Interventions combine machine learning and environmental economics to maximize carbon sequestration and realize the cobenefits of biodiversity and flood risk mitigation. Scientists from McMaster University (Canada) and MIT (United States) used AI to discover a new antibiotic in a very short space of time to treat a deadly superbug. However, blind faith and overreliance on technology lead to a loss of intellectual autonomy and an illusion of choice. AI functions like an oracle, with big data and technology giving it uncontested authority and the semblance of neutrality. The danger, as Shannon Vallor argues, is that decisions on the future of humanity will be based on the patterns that are already engraved in our recorded data, which are in turn based on the values of the tech oligarchs who have the power and resources to shape our world, a world that is heading toward a social and climate catastrophe.

Finally, AI raises questions around what it is to be human. AI dominance reduces the totality of human beings to numerous data points as inputs for machines. At the same time, AI is attributed with human attributes with labels such as "copilot." Neil Postman warns that a culture which seeks its authorization in technology will have us believe that we are at our best when we act like machines. We are thus left with big questions for research: what is thinking, what is consciousness, and what does it mean to be human?

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The Political Economy of Datafication and Platformization: Digital Transformation in Higher Education

Janja Komljenovic and Ben Williamson

Platforms, data, and artificial intelligence (AI) are impacting higher education systems and universities internationally. They raise challenges, including locking in institutions to corporate technologies, monetizing data, and interfering with academic governance. Future research is required to examine the concrete effects of platforms, data, and AI in context-specific settings, and to understand their underpinning political economy and future impact on international education and its constituents.

Platforms, data, and artificial intelligence (AI) are impacting higher education systems and universities internationally. They raise challenges, including locking in institutions to corporate technologies, monetizing data, and interfering with academic governance. This article examines some of these critical challenges.

Platformization

Higher education systems worldwide have developed digital ecosystems. These include digital infrastructure, which is often offered by Big Tech, such as Microsoft, Google, and Amazon Web Services, and organized via cloud services. University enterprise solutions, such as student systems, human resources, or customer management services, are provided by educational technology (EdTech) incumbents and are, in some places, being replaced with or moved onto cloud providers. A myriad of specific EdTech products and services are provided by digital platforms, such as virtual learning environments, digital libraries, and plagiarism-checking tools; they support teaching and learning, research, and institutional management. Many commentators call this profound transformation the "platformization" of universities.

Universities invest high amounts of labor and resources to make these digital infrastructures and platforms interoperable and to enable digital data flows within and beyond their institution. Ideas about the value of data motivate imaginaries of the digitally transformed university. The platformized university, it is argued, benefits from organizational efficiency, automating processes, personalizing learning, learning and business analytics, and scaling provision to larger audiences through digital formats like microcredentials, stackable degrees, boot camps, and the like.

Datafication

Such a digitally transformed platform university needs data. This includes merging administrative data, collected by universities from students, staff, and other organizations, and digital user data, collected by digital platforms as students and staff interact with various apps and software. Universities are building "data lakes" for data collection, aggregation, cleaning, processing, and the production of different data outputs that would support their aims. At the national level, many higher education authorities have created national or international higher education data systems to monitor higher education quality, support future skills management, and aid policy. At the higher education market level, EdTech companies aggregate student and staff data to innovate new products and services, or offer data insights and metrics, driven by their business models and data monetization strategies. Higher education is thus marked by datafication, a dynamic where activities, behaviors, and processes are turned into data to be analyzed and used.

> These contractual lock-ins enable corporations to control data flows, set terms of use, and introduce new AI features, mostly without transparency and public scrutiny.

There are increasingly new ways to define valuable data. Academic publishers have recently signed agreements with global AI companies to provide academic content to train large language models. The deals are worth millions to publishers, with AI companies gaining value from access to high-quality,

standardized content to improve AI performance and offer new services. This poses significant downstream threats to academic research, teaching, and students' learning, as automated "research" services are offered that can synthesize research literature, generate summaries, and even produce "original" academic articles or assignments. Both Big Tech and EdTech companies foresee AI becoming seamlessly integrated into all university activities.

Impacts

Platformization, datafication, and AI have profound effects on the higher education sector as a whole, all of its core practices, and its students and staff. This sectorial digital transformation is marked by shifts in the governance regime, as students and staff are required to accept terms of use issued by EdTech platforms, and universities sign long-term contracts with vendors, which are often hidden from stakeholders and the public and classed as commercially sensitive. These contractual lock-ins enable corporations to control data flows, set terms of use, and introduce new AI features, mostly without transparency and public scrutiny. Overall, this dynamic represents structural privatization of the sector, dominated by proprietary technology, and governed by contract and property law. While universities face legal, technological, and economic lock-in, individual staff and students face different kinds of challenges to their educational and social rights, with less room for collective action.

Future Research

Platforms, data, and AI in international education demand dedicated research to investigate their context-specific effects and the political economy that underpins them. Contextual studies should examine how platforms and AI are interweaving with existing educational practices in ways that reflect their political and economic contexts of application. For example, how is AI deployed in institutional settings marked by politically motivated attacks on academic freedom or diversity and inclusion policies? What kinds of big data are deployed to support institutional decision-making, particularly in contexts characterized by serious financial constraints and efficiency efforts?

Research on the political economy of big data and AI in international education should also seek to better understand the monetization of data through platforms, the extraction of value through infrastructure contracts, the political and economic drivers of AI, and the ways in which long-term subscription agreements act to "lock-in" institutions to contracts that serve private rather than public interests. At the individual level of students and academics, we should understand how they make sense of these new regimes of higher education governance via contracts and terms of use, as well as the effects on their agency and academic autonomy.

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Big Data and Academic Profession Studies: Toward a New Research Agenda

Marek Kwiek

The keyword for the future of academic profession studies is complementarity. Insights from surveys, whether large- or small-scale, differ fundamentally from those from interviews—but together, they can advance the field both theoretically and empirically. Big data should therefore complement surveys and interviews, while macro-level analyses should accompany micro-level studies.

The impact of the increasing globalization and digitalization of science on the higher education research field is potentially high. A business-as-usual approach—in the face of new opportunities and competitive rival fields pursuing similar research agendas—limits the attractiveness of the field to scholarly and policy communities. The increasing availability of digital data on scholarly activities will have a powerful impact on the field.

The Rise of Data Science

Traditional social scientists must now compete with data scientists and computational social scientists, who increasingly focus on issues long explored in higher education research. To remain competitive, the field must embrace new tools and datasets emerging in data-intensive social sciences.

There is growing pressure—both within and outside academia—to use much larger datasets to draw valid conclusions. The pressure to quantify academic careers is increasing, as small-scale academic surveys lose traction in the social sciences. Small sample sizes limit the scope of analyses and weaken policy implications. Low numbers of observations by gender, academic discipline, institutional type, age group, or productivity class reduce analytical power and weaken policy implications. To go beyond standard analyses (in use for several decades now) and to show the ongoing attractiveness of the survey instrument in academic profession studies, future surveys need to use questionnaires returned from larger numbers of scholars. This is the way major competitors to the field—data analysts and computer scientists—currently do their research.

Opportunities for Higher Education Research

The field faces significant opportunities if it understands how globalization-related advances are already used in competing fields for scholarly and policy attention. Digital data on research funding, productivity, collaboration, impact, and mobility can now be explored at an unprecedented scale and with utmost care for detail. The study of the academic profession can be transformed beyond recognition.

However, these opportunities come at a cost: intensified competition. Various fields and subfields now study academics and their institutional settings, making higher education research one of many fields focused on academic careers. Equipped with traditional methods and small datasets, the field risks losing ground to those harnessing big data—especially large bibliometric datasets such as Scopus, Web of Science, or OpenAlex. The question is where future data, interpretation, and knowledge of the academic sector will be located.

The keyword for the field's future is complementarity. In academic profession studies, big data should complement surveys and interviews; macro-level analyses should accompany micro-level studies. Insights from surveys, whether large- or small-scale, differ fundamentally from those gained through interviews—but together, they can advance the field both theoretically and empirically.

Specifically, numerous traditional higher education issues are being increasingly studied in what is termed the "science of science," quantitative studies, and "research on research." The social sciences have entered a golden age, with scientists involved in the above data-intensive fields using big data sources and computational power and skills as part of the big data revolution.

Academic profession studies face data science as their primary competitor. Large-scale studies of academic careers, based on

hundreds of thousands or millions of individual career and publication portfolios, challenge small-scale, survey-based research in both scholarly and policy terms.

In the contest between the approaches using surveys and those using big digital datasets, the traditional small-scale survey approach is losing. The contest extends far beyond what is more widely read and cited to encompass what is valued in scholarly terms (prestige and status generation) and what is fundable (resource generation). New research from computer scientists examines social stratification, academic career structures, and recognition systems across disciplines and countries.

However, these studies rely heavily on theoretical frameworks developed within higher education research. Our theories from the past five decades remain the foundation on which the field's future can be successfully built. Today, the field needs to be aware of what the expansionary, competing fields can offer its academic and policy communities, while also not losing its distinct identity. The best way forward is to keep its sophisticated level of theorization, while incorporating new methodological tools and digital datasets for its purposes. That means asking the same fundamental questions that have been asked for decades—i.e., about themes such as productivity, collaboration, impact, and mobility—in addition to new ones, but using new data-intensive approaches, methodologies, and data sources made available by the digital revolution.

The Way Forward

Future studies of the academic profession (and academic careers) may usefully combine bibliometric and survey-based tools, datasets, and methodologies to explore entire populations of academics by combining publication and citation data, large-scale survey data, massive (possibly artificial intelligence-assisted) interviews, and (wherever possible) biographical and career data derived from national registries of scientists and commercial datasets on academic careers. A combination of approaches seems likely to enhance our understanding of the changes and complexity of academic work under powerful political and economic pressures.

The keyword for the field's future is complementarity. In academic profession studies, big data should complement surveys and interviews; macro-level analyses should accompany micro-level studies. Insights from surveys, whether large- or small-scale, differ fundamentally from those gained through interviews—but together, they can advance the field both theoretically and empirically.

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AI, DATA, AND DIGITAL TRANSFORMATION

Rankings in the Age of Surveillance Capitalism

Ellen Hazelkorn

University rankings are now a global phenomenon. Having begun as a transparency and accountability instrument, they have morphed into an indicator of global competitiveness for knowledge and talent and have been transformed from an information tool into a complex global intelligence business. In our current data-driven age, the concepts of "monopolies of knowledge," "information asymmetry," and "surveillance capitalism" can help us better understand how the fusion of data and capitalism are influencing and shaping the future of higher education policy, practice, and research.

The concepts of "monopolies of knowledge" and "information asymmetry" describe conditions in which access to/control over information and power relations become intertwined, leading to circumstances whereby one group has more or better information than the other. Unequal knowledge fosters centralization of power. The theory of "surveillance capitalism" takes this scenario a step further, describing the new economic order in which the human experience is the "free raw material for hidden commercial practices of extraction, prediction and sales" and data is the "new frontier of power."

What Does This Have to Do with Rankings?

Global rankings emerged as a phenomenon beginning in 2003 with the publication of Academic Rankings of World Universities (ARWU)—better known as the Shanghai Rankings. The importance of data for measurement and comparison was not new, stretching back to the late nineteenth century. In the twentieth century, there were increasing calls for enhanced accountability and public sector reform. UNESCO and OECD began compiling statistical information in the 1960s, followed by national rankings, such as *U.S. News and World Report* (USNWR) in the 1980s. However, the global rankings marked a significant departure.

For many people, rankings were seen as a transparency and accountability instrument to enhance student choice. Their key innovation was the simplicity of an international comparative framework. Rankings stand in sharp contrast with traditional academic approaches, such as quality assurance, which are guided by norms of peer review. By holding a mirror up to universities and nations, rankings succeeded in challenging long-standing assumptions or self-assertions about quality, status, and reputation in a simple yet dramatic fashion.

Global rankings quickly acquired a powerful dimension—benchmarking research became a tool promoting "world-classness." In recognition that knowledge and talent are the essential currencies of the global era, universities and research were transformed from national institutions to instruments of geopolitics and geoeconomics. Rankings portray a global chess game with different institutions and countries jockeying for positions.

However, rankings are more than a report card. Rankings have expanded their geographical range, consolidating their position as purveyors of all information and analysis about universities and research. Rankings are now the basis of a complex global intelligence business. The main global rankings—ARWU, *Times Higher Education*, QS, and USNWR—are each part of for-profit corporations providing a range of services. *THE*'s empire is growing, having recently acquired Education World Forum.

> The theory of 'surveillance capitalism' describes the new economic order in which the human experience is the 'free raw material for hidden commercial practices of extraction, prediction and sales, and data is the new frontier of power.'

Rankings are also a profit center—a mechanism for data collection and warehousing, and the basis for sophisticated analytic tools and associated consultancy services. This is where the real money and power lies. As one ranker mentioned privately to me, "As you know that rankings themselves cannot

make money, one has to find funding or make money to support ranking activities; it's not an easy task."

This has propelled corporate integration, consolidation, and concentration across rankings, publishing, and big data, creating a substantial end-to-end knowledge intelligence gathering, warehousing, and analytics business. Getting ahead and being visible is critical in a competitive geopolitical world. Without the data, it is not possible for governments or institutions to govern, steer, develop, and monitor their systems/institutions or achieve their objectives. They become easy prey, providing vast amounts of data to play the rankings game, and then seeking consultancy to stay ahead, with implications for national sovereignty and institutional autonomy.

There is a familiar "grooming" pattern, beginning with creating a targeted ranking for a region, say Africa, Central Asia, or the Middle East. This excites and worries universities and governments, as illustrated by this UWN article. A conference is then organized, in which the university/government pays all the costs, followed by consultancy, e.g., as announced in this "news item" in *Times Higher Education*.

How Can Research Help Us Understand These Dynamics Better while Also Helping Governments and Institutions Craft Better Responses to Challenges?

Over the last 20 years, we have analyzed rankings as an endogenous model, looking at their methodologies, indicators, and impact on higher education. But much has changed. Rankings are part of a wider transformation impacting higher education. Concepts such as "monopolies of knowledge," "information asymmetry," and "surveillance capitalism" could be very helpful for understanding the role that rankings and similar tools play, alongside the ethical, proprietary, and governance challenges they present, in a technology- and data-driven world. We need to ask: How is the fusion of data and capitalism influencing/shaping higher education and research? What more can we learn about the rankings business model? To what extent do rankings encourage policies and practices that undermine universal higher education? And at a time of declining public trust, to what extent has higher education's own sluggish response to genuine demands for greater accountability and transparency about its value and contribution to individuals/society opened the door to rankings and the privatization of public data?

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Internationalization in 2025 and Beyond: Taking It to the People

Laura E. Rumbley

Profound cracks are emerging in the social and political orders of many liberal democracies today, notably in the United States and Europe. This is placing internationalization in higher education under unprecedented pressure. Strengthening the foundation of research on internationalization's societal impact and sharpening the approach to dissemination of research findings are key responses to this watershed moment.

As the first quarter of the twenty-first century draws to a close, profound cracks are emerging in the social and political orders of countries long considered to be vibrant democracies and well-regarded examples of functional civil society. The United States under a second Trump administration may offer the clearest example of these disturbing developments, but similar trends are playing out across Europe and elsewhere. Closed borders and closed minds have typically led to poor outcomes for individuals and societies, and examples of the folly and destruction wrought by unbridled nationalism, xenophobia, and authoritarianism have long served as important reference points for how *not* to ensure social progress. Yet, here we are—again. Against this backdrop, proponents of internationalization in higher education—whose *raison d'être* can be encapsulated in a desire to facilitate international engagement in order to enhance individual and collective well-being—are left wondering: where did things go so wrong, and what will it take to right this ship?

In addressing these core questions, two (longstanding) issues loom large.

Internationalization Research Today: Fragmented and under the Radar

The first is that, despite an explosion of interest in and research around internationalization in higher education, serious gaps in our knowledge persist. We continue to suffer from a lack of high-quality, large-scale, and (importantly) longitudinal data that shed objective and unambiguous light on the impact (positive, negative, and neutral) of internationalization. The data we do have are tantalizing in their indications of positive effect but are decidedly piecemeal in nature and tend to lack the "bottom line" kinds of insights that resonate with policy makers and concerned citizens alike.

The second problem is that internationalization in higher education—what it is and how it makes a difference in the lives of individuals and communities—is largely invisible or under-/unappreciated by those not directly engaged in it, which is the vast majority of our fellow citizens. Widespread lack of exposure to internationalization, or outright disinterest in this issue, may be explained by several factors. First, high percentages of people worldwide simply do not participate in higher education, so conversations about this level of education may be considered largely irrelevant. Additionally, local and national interests often take precedence over matters considered to be external or tangential to those contexts, even in the higher education sector. Indeed, despite exponential growth in the field of international education in recent decades—from academic mobility programs to internationalization of the curriculum, university partnerships, multinational research projects, and more—the fact remains that most members of our academic communities, let alone society at large, are not actively involved in internationalization.

> Strengthening the foundation of research on internationalization's societal impact and sharpening the approach to dissemination of research findings are vital priorities for the years ahead.

In sum, most of our fellow citizens are either unaware or relatively unmoved by internationalization's potential to deliver important individual and societal dividends. At the same time, our knowledge base continues to need significant shoring up.

These are daunting realities. Luckily, previous research and analysis have offered clear signals for a way forward.

Getting Serious about Documenting and Disseminating Societal Impact

Ten years ago, the authors of the European Parliament study "Internationalisation of Higher Education" offered a definition of internationalization that made explicit reference to internationalization's role in making "a meaningful contribution to society." And in 2019, the Internationalisation in Higher Education for Society (IHES) initiative took the call to action embedded in that definition one step further and began to expand our understanding of good practice in terms of engaging internationalization stakeholders beyond higher education institutions. Now in 2025, however—despite many important developments in the interim—internationalization is under serious threat. The need to provide policy makers and the public at large with clear information about how internationalization can strengthen our ability to serve our societies' interests has reached a new, critical level.

To address this, a key stream of research should receive high and sustained levels of attention. Specifically, fundamental questions of societal impact that matter to policy makers and citizens at large deserve urgent attention. Researchers around the world must develop clear(er) indications (and endeavor to keep this data up-to-date) about the effects of internationalization in higher education on our economies, our social welfare, our safety and security, and our quality of life.

In tandem, collaboration with experts on information dissemination and public awareness campaigns is urgently required. The research community must commit to public discourse in new and dynamic ways in order to engage policy makers and average citizens in constructive conversation about the facts related to internationalization.

Thoughtful scholars have long emphasized that internationalization is not an inherently good or bad phenomenon. However, the international education landscape is currently being buffeted by social and political forces that lack comprehensive, credible data for decision-making. Strengthening the foundation of research on internationalization's societal impact and sharpening the approach to dissemination of research findings are vital priorities for the years ahead.

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REIMAGINING INTERNATIONALIZATION

Rethinking the Internationalization of Higher Education as a Transformational Educational Endeavor

Betty Leask

In today's interconnected and fragile world, the values that have traditionally driven the internationalization of higher education (IoHE) are more important than ever before. This paper argues that, for IoHE to deliver on its promise, it is critical that we rethink it as a transformational educational endeavor for all students. Practical strategies and a preliminary research agenda to support this are provided.

The internationalization of higher education (IoHE) has the potential to contribute to the creation of a better world, but delivering on the promise requires ensuring that internationalization is equitable and accessible to all students. Accessibility has been at the center of discussions concerning internationalization of the curriculum (IoC) and internationalization at home (IaH) for two decades. Today, both IoC and IaH are widely recognized as core educational projects of relevance to *all* students' development as human, social, and economic beings. However, these are generally seen as discrete approaches. A combination of the two —internationalization of the curriculum at home (IoCaH) —would position IoHE as a potentially transformational educational endeavor, in which faculty and student affairs staff play a crucial role. However, traditional approaches to supporting IoCaH must be radically changed in order for IoHE to reach its full potential.

Internationalization of the Curriculum at Home

It is strategically appropriate to bring IoC and IaH together because both recognize the relationship between internationalization, the quality and relevance of study programs, and activities in the informal curriculum. They have complemented each other for two decades but together, they are much more than the sum of their parts. However, IoCaH will not develop across the institution without strategic thinking and action. Its complexity requires resourcing to maximize impact through innovation and curriculum renewal, including consideration of complex issues such as decolonization of the curriculum, cognitive justice, and the integration of the UNESCO sustainable development goals into the curriculum for all students.

The focus of IoCaH is on purposeful planning and reform of formal, assessed learning and informal experiences on campus and in communities. The purpose of both is to develop all students' international, intercultural, and global perspectives and capacity to use a range of "soft" skills (for example, critical thinking, problem-solving) to analyze and take individual and collective action on local/global issues. IoCaH combines the strength of research and scholarship conducted in both areas and provides some useful directions for future research.

It is strategically appropriate to bring IoC and IaH together because both recognize the relationship between internationalization, the quality and relevance of study programs, and activities in the informal curriculum. They have complemented each other for two decades but together, they are much more than the sum of their parts.

The Need for IoCaH Training and Development

Previous research into both IoC and IaH has demonstrated the importance of ensuring that those who plan, manage, and support student learning in the formal and informal curriculum have appropriate training and development opportunities as part of institutional internationalization strategies. For example, when it comes to the formal curriculum, curriculum designers

and faculty will need to lead positive disruptions to change the taken-for-granted approaches to IoC at home and abroad, and many may feel unprepared to do so. There is a range of constraints to their work, such as an absence of references to curriculum, teaching or learning in internationalization policies, lack of curriculum flexibility and capacity for academic staff to make adjustments to curriculum content and learning outcomes, and finally, limited fiscal and human resources to support IoC.

Several factors have been proven to support faculty as leaders of IoCaH, who would be open to new ideas, knowledge, and perspectives beyond the Western canon and keen to engage in interdisciplinary conversations. These attributes may be influenced by people's lived experiences, disciplinary/professional affiliations, and confidence to challenge the epistemological and ontological positions of colleagues. These matters deserve further investigation.

A recent study, *Disrupting Internationalisation of the Curriculum in Latin America | Higher Education*, identified the need for specialized professional learning programs to support IoC. Key findings included that professional learning should be approached as a continuous process, responsibility for which is shared by institutions and individuals. Furthermore, it should be approached as (1) career-wide and self-directed; (2) needs- and practice-focused; (3) interdisciplinary, interprofessional, and interpersonal; and (4) collaborative and integrative. This framework invites institutional action and provides a valuable foundation for future research.

We also know that the professional learning needs of staff will almost certainly change over time and look different across universities. However, similar models can also be employed. For example, the value of using communities of practice to support professional learning specifically for IoC has been repeatedly demonstrated. What these communities explore will vary in different places over time, but how faculty and staff are supported to establish and maintain them may be the same. Resources that have been developed to support IoC and IaH may be tested and modified in different contexts, offering rich opportunities for future research.

Support for the professional development of faculty is a critical component of IoHE as a transformational educational endeavor. Traditional approaches based on activities disconnected from their responsibilities for IoCaH are not sufficient to ensure that all students receive a high-quality internationalized education. What is required are evidence-based, well-resourced, whole-of-institution approaches that treat professional learning as a continuing, active, social, and practice-related process. In relation to IoCaH, this means programs specifically designed to support staff as leaders of IoHE in the university and more widely, in the local and global community.

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REIMAGINING INTERNATIONALIZATION

The Recurring Tide: Politicization and the Future of International Higher Education

Santiago Castiello-Gutiérrez

The politicization of international higher education is not new, but a recurring pattern shaped by global shifts. This essay traces historical debates documented by *International Higher Education* over the last 30 years, analyzing how past challenges—nationalism, economic rationales, and security concerns—mirror today's discussions. By recognizing these cycles, we can explore strategies to move beyond reactive policies and foster more purposeful and sustainable internationalization approaches.

History may not repeat itself, but it often rhymes. We tend to view our current times as uniquely challenging, a departure from all that came before. However, a closer look reveals that many of the debates and issues we face today are echoes of past conversations. Luckily for us, Boston College's *International Higher Education* (IHE) has been documenting these discussions for the last 30 years, providing invaluable insights into the cyclical nature of internationalization in higher education. In this essay, I reflect on what the next 30 years might look like by analyzing how the past informs the present and considering what type of future might therefore await us.

A deep dive into the IHE archive reveals several overarching themes. Our understanding and definitions of internationalization have evolved, as have the rationales driving institutional engagement. However, a sense of politicization and economic impact has remained prominent, alongside aspirations for internationalization as a force to effect positive change.

Internationalization Through Cycles and Waves

In 1996, Barbara Burn—then president of the Association of International Education Administrators—shared concerns about how the November 1994 election in the United States presented a threat to federal support for international education in the country's colleges and universities. Twenty years later, with Brexit and Trump taking global headlines, conversations returned to this fear. The rise of nationalist sentiments and protectionist policies once again placed international education in the crosshairs, demonstrating the cyclical vulnerability of the field to political shifts.

Hans de Wit's 1999 IHE essay highlighted shifting rationales for internationalization. He discussed how the once-priority political approach was being relegated to favoring economic rationales consistent with the rise of globalization. Current debates echo another shift calling to move beyond economic rationales and to return to a political and "more optimistic view of international education as a force for peace." Yet, de Wit's 1999 article warned us of the dangers of doing so by posing the following questions: "Whose concept of peace and whose understanding of the world would be served? Have higher education systems in the rest of the world ever been in the position to promote their own understanding of these issues on equal terms with the American and European academic world?"

> Internationalization's future depends on our ability to learn from the past, adapt to the present, and proactively shape the future.

These types of questions resonate today. We have observed numerous calls to change our approach to internationalization toward one that is more "intelligent," "purposeful," "critical," and "solidary," among many other adjectives. However, the recent emphasis on "responsible internationalization," as highlighted by de Wit and Glass (2024), reveals a concerning trend of (re)politicization in a now multipolar world that, without a clear understanding of historical context and power dynamics, risks being just another turn in the cycle.

In 2004, Philip Altbach declared "the end of civic diplomacy and international education" following the securitization policies introduced in the United States after the September 11 attacks.

His reflections included: "The buzz in student dormitories and faculty offices from Mumbai to Montevideo is that America no longer welcomes foreigners… [The United States] remains a favored destination for foreigners wishing to study overseas... [they] like US universities and American culture, but feel that access is no longer possible or worth the trouble or achieving… There is still a reservoir of support for American education and culture… but it is quickly being drained."

Since 2004, the United States has more than doubled the number of international students and scholars. In fact, since 2005, the only thing that stopped a yearly increase in the number of international students was COVID-19. Yet, Altbach's 2004 words were equally applicable in the United States during the 2016 election, and the same arguments now inundate our conversations under this second Trump era.

These examples raise a critical question: can we break this cycle? Are we destined to repeat the same debates with different players every decade? While I certainly do not want to minimize the size and seismic impact of current challenges, I want (and need!) to remain cautiously optimistic. Internationalization's future depends on our ability to learn from the past, adapt to the present, and proactively shape the future.

Charting a Course for the Future

If the past teaches us anything, it is that once our collective panic eases and we find ourselves transitioning from shock and complaints to innovation and action, we will probably be in a better position to work toward the more equitable, meaningful, and impactful internationalization that we have been writing about for the past 30 years. Education, with its inherent connection to democratic, liberal, and moral ideals, remains a powerful force for positive change in the world. It is a force worth fighting for, and a force that, if guided by the lessons of the past, can help us build a more just and interconnected future.

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Shifting Research with International Students Away from Documenting Experiences Toward Transforming Practices

Jenna Mittelmeier

This article critically reflects on research with international students in higher education and its preoccupation with documenting "experiences." A substantial knowledge base already exists regarding broad and undefined student "experiences," often resulting in repetitive findings. A move toward evaluating and evidencing structural practices, rather than individual experiences, is suggested as a possible remedy, urging scholars to (re)consider how our work can contribute toward deconstructing and addressing known challenges rather than continuing to document them.

Intensive research with international students has been around for three decades. This flourishing research area led us to publish the book *Research with International Students: Critical Conceptual and Methodological Considerations*, evaluating and critiquing existing research practices on this topic. Within this book, the subfield's critical introspection was identified as an "ongoing conversation," and this article reflects on where this conversation might go next.

There have now been thousands of articles published on this topic, and one challenge is what researchers can add to the significant foundational knowledge that already exists. One growing critique is that the subfield frequently produces repetitive findings, particularly through its widespread preoccupation with documenting "international students' experiences."

On the one hand, prioritizing "international students' experiences" represents the subfield's recent person-centered approach. Early research was often positivistic, frequently focusing on evaluating stress and coping mechanisms through psychological lenses. The growth in research which centers students' voices has been a conscious shift away from extractive research which views international students as subjects to research *on*.

On the other hand, a collective preoccupation with documenting experiences is the subfield's significant weakness. "Experiences" are often undefined and underconceptualized (as well-argued in Andrew Deuchar's work), frequently too macro and vague in nature. The result has been predictable findings with key challenges exceptionally well-documented and largely unchanged for decades. There are, for example, hundreds of articles about international students experiencing challenges with language, encountering new academic practices, racism and xenophobia, developing supportive peer networks, and so on. For more than 30 years, research has often identified recurring phenomena, albeit situated within different contexts and subpopulations.

Cycles of Repetitive Research

Research with international students is too often an ongoing cycle of similar arguments repeatedly rediscovered and repackaged as new and innovative. This persistent focus on "experiences" is frequently framed as a research gap—"no one has ever documented the experiences of subpopulation X in context Y"—despite later presenting findings which mostly align with existing knowledge: struggles and challenges with the same repetitive issues, limited spaces for enacting agency, and a need for more support.

A major question then is not how can we ensure that more experiences are documented, but rather how can we dismantle the inequalities and injustices our work repeatedly uncovers?

A major question then is not how can we ensure that more experiences are documented, but rather how can we dismantle the inequalities and injustices our work repeatedly uncovers? Documenting experiences has been a valuable starting point, particularly as many critical issues have been historically ignored

in practice, but we are unlikely to dismantle inequalities by naming them alone. The subfield needs something more—or else we will find ourselves in 10 more years making the same arguments about how existing structures are unjust.

Therefore, a shift in research agendas is required: away from stagnant documentation toward evaluating evidence-based approaches to transform existing practices and structures. This means a renewed focus on specific and named practices to move from mere documentation toward lasting and transformative change. A challenge I raise to the subfield: if we have decades of research recognizing that problems exist, what are we going to *do* about them?

Key Research Directions for the Future

A starting point is embedding greater diversity in what we choose to research, supplementing work embedding students' voices to also center the people and processes which perpetuate their unequal experiences. This means renewed evaluation of specific structures: the policies, pedagogies, curricula, extracurricular spaces, support structures, and other spaces where unfairness subsists. For example, it is not enough to state that international students experience challenges with language; we need to shift toward interrogating the specific structures which render their existing linguistic resources invisible and fail to support their transition into a new language environment. A stronger research subfield is one which evaluates named structural inequities, rather than labelling individual deficiencies.

A shift toward practice also enables researchers to build evidence for actions which enact change by creating demonstrable impact on students' outcomes and experiences. At present, existing research on evidence-based practices is limited in scope, often evaluated within a single context, and frequently centered on researchers' own classrooms. This piecemeal approach to evidence creation means that there are severe limitations for creating an overarching understanding of *what works* across contexts, disciplines, and settings. A more relational approach to research is needed, through ambitious cross-contextual, interdisciplinary, and international collaborations that interrogate structures and practices.

Altogether, the subfield is presently at a crossroads, and decades of existing research should leave us questioning: What comes next? How can we move from a field preoccupied with repetitive findings about broad "experiences" toward one that enables specific transformative practices around the problems we already know exist?

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STUDENT AND SCHOLAR MOBILITY

Embracing Complexities: Transformations of International Student Mobility amid Global Turmoil

Liz Shchepetylnykova and Sevgi Kaya-Kaşıkcı

Although scholarship on international student mobility (ISM) is extensive, the evolving landscape of ISM, with increasingly diverse rationales, actors, and modalities, requires new data and forms of understanding. This article reflects on the new developments in ISM in the context of postpandemic and geopolitical turmoil. We conclude by urging scholars to engage in critical examination of the dominant theories and concepts informing our understanding of mobility.

The last three decades transformed international student mobility (ISM), democratizing cross-border higher education as ISM reached an unprecedented seven million participants. Increasingly heterogeneous actors, including governments of countries on the periphery of global higher education, challenge the power previously embodied in transnational flows of learners. The peripheries of the global higher education system are slowly assuming agential roles, embracing diverse rationales and emerging technologies to steer ISM flows. In this context, we reflect on key transformations in ISM to identify critical directions for future research.

Metamorphosis of International Student Mobility

While ISM has been the focus of researchers' attention for many years, existing scholarship has a limited understanding of the relationship between different drivers of mobility. Outside of dichotomous concepts (e.g., push and pull factors), little consensus emerges on the connection between ISM rationales (political, economic, academic, sociocultural, and humanitarian), with scholars generally treating them as independent, hierarchical, and even convergent. However, the growing complexity across these drivers is becoming more evident with the emergence of new regional hubs outside traditional Anglophone destination countries. Recently, the ISM landscape has become multipolar, with a more dense, connected, yet diverse network structure reaching beyond core high-income countries, as international students embrace opportunities closer to home. These shifting flows have enabled transformations in the size and structure of ISM, attracting previously excluded students to study abroad.

In addition to goal-directed and voluntary participants of ISM, the largest post-World War II refugee crisis forces displaced learners to engage in transnational learning. ISM experience has become a pathway for displaced learners, despite various political and legal restrictions at the national and international levels. Unlike traditionally mobile students, refugees fleeing violent conflicts and natural disasters often face restricted options in study destinations and may end up being forced to enroll in departments outside their interests or at newly established universities. Further, national policies and visa regimes constrain opportunities for the free movement of displaced populations. However, governments and universities have increased efforts and incrementally reformulated their policies to expand access and support for refugees in higher education.

The metamorphosis of ISM requires reimagining the definition of mobility itself. While traditionally defined as students crossing borders for education, ISM now extends beyond this conventional framework.

The meaning of ISM is changing with cross-cultural learning becoming more accessible within one's classroom. Once a necessity during the COVID-19 pandemic, virtual mobility has become an opportunity in the "new normal" with increasing integration of educational technology. The abundance of virtual learning opportunities allows students to participate not only in short-term exchanges but to complete full degree programs

online. Virtual mobility aligns with the goals of decreasing carbon emissions to address the mounting climate crisis. Researchers, policy makers, and administrators may take advantage of these developments to integrate ISM more effectively with global sustainability goals.

The metamorphosis of ISM requires reimagining the definition of mobility itself. While traditionally defined as students crossing borders for education, ISM now extends beyond this conventional framework. Recent trends demonstrate the limited capacity of this definition to integrate new modalities and experiences of displaced learners. The complex intertwining of ISM with geopolitical rivalries, technological advancement, and diverse regional perspectives demands a holistic analysis of macro-, meso-, and microlevel rationales that drive participation in ISM.

Future Research Directions

To further understand the complexity of ISM, scholarship should seek to offer more nuanced and inclusive theoretical approaches, grasping a diversity of perspectives and experiences. Established theories and definitions have certain boundaries. First, they offer limited explanations of how actors, rationales, and modalities of ISM interact and shape one another. Second, they are mostly utilized to explain ISM through a center–periphery framework, which falls short of explaining regional dynamics. We see this challenge as an opportunity for future research to embrace engaged methodologies that bring multiple stakeholders into the process of knowledge cocreation to unpack the interconnected dimensions of international student flows.

As the movement of students is increasingly influenced by insecurities, scholarship needs to turn attention to understanding the relationships among geopolitics, technology, and human agency in ISM. Refugee and climate crises, along with the changing world order, reshape societal expectations and implications of ISM. At the dawn of the artificial intelligence revolution, some scholars discussed a bipolar world scenario, but history rarely repeats itself. Thus, we suggest remaining critical of dichotomous thinking by investigating a range of possible shifts in the global world order and their potential influence on mobility trends and structure.

Overall, the trends, flows, and trajectories of ISM are undergoing a continuous transformation, as the ecosystem surrounding it is shaped by geopolitical dynamics, international relations, national-level policies, and the varying agential capacities of students. Within this landscape, further research is imperative for understanding the potential impacts of macrolevel forces on individual student experiences.

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The Value of Study Abroad Beyond Labor Market Benefits

Georgiana Mihut

When students cross borders to study, they gather a deeper understanding of different people and contribute to the public good. However, the value of study abroad is often justified not on the grounds of tolerance, but because it brings *labor market benefits*. A dilemma emerges because studies increasingly show fewer labor market benefits for study abroad participants. This raises questions about how we judge, promote, and foster the value of study abroad and about the related research agenda.

The focus on labor market benefits to show the value of study abroad—instead of public good benefits—offers three advantages: consistency, complementarity, and cross-ideological appeal. First, the argument is *consistent* with the human capital and employability discourse that higher education stakeholders hear all the time: graduates with higher education degrees are valued by the labor market and rewarded with higher wages. The claim that study abroad is valued by employers and thus rewarded by the labor market easily fits into the existing narrative about the (individual) benefits of higher education.

Second, the employability argument also allows study abroad to differentiate itself from the benefits of domestic education, because study abroad imparts unique skills and signals on participants that *complement* domestic education. The additional skills provided by study abroad to individuals include cross-cultural competencies and foreign language skills. Study abroad itself can also be seen as a complementary signal to employers that make hiring choices from among many similarly qualified candidates. These added skills and signals are seen as the mechanisms through which study abroad participants gain additional labor market returns.

Lastly, the justification for study abroad on labor market grounds has *cross-ideological appeal* at a policy level. This justification allows governments with contrasting ideological positions, such as China, Norway, Saudi Arabia, and the United Kingdom, to fund study abroad. Of course, at these policy levels, the rationales for study abroad are more complex, span both socioeconomic and geopolitical aspects, and differ between countries. Some governments fund both incoming and outgoing international students (e.g., China, Norway, Wales, and the European Union through the Erasmus+ program), while others focus only on supporting outgoing domestic students (e.g., the United Kingdom, following the introduction of the Turing scheme). But, even for governments that actively recruit international students (e.g., China, Romania, and Wales), part of the intent is to attract international talents that can then contribute toward domestic labor markets.

> But to continue justifying the value of study abroad, considering mixed labor market benefits, we need to reemphasize the contribution of study abroad to the public good.

What Is the Concern?

There are two main concerns with justifying the value of study abroad by relying on labor market impacts. First, it undermines the transformational and public good value of study abroad. Second—and this is the argument I want to emphasize here—it is somewhat misleading. Recent rigorous studies, including several systematic reviews, have shown small and mixed labor market benefits to study abroad. These effects further weaken after accounting for differences in personal characteristics between students who choose to study abroad and students who do not. These mixed benefits are seen primarily with regard to graduates who work in large multinational companies and to students in a subset of countries. It also seems that employers do not actually favor applicants who studied abroad in the hiring process. Gaps still persist in our understanding of the labor market benefits associated with study abroad. For example, we know less about these benefits in low- and middle-income countries. But the current evidence suggests that it is misleading to tell prospective participants that study abroad will lead to

better employment prospects. As such, it is important to justify the value of study abroad on non-labor-market grounds.

What Is the Value of Study Abroad?

In addition to individual benefits, the value of study abroad rests in its contribution to the public good, including by building trust between people and encouraging global citizenship. A public good-centered view of study abroad can also emphasize nonfinancial individual benefits, such as happiness, learning, and transformational experiences. By emphasizing the public good value of study abroad, we are also more likely to create study abroad experiences and opportunities that actually result in public good.

How Can Research Support This Vision?

Some evidence suggests that study abroad fosters trust, political participation, and happiness, and thus can be seen as a contribution to the public good. But very few studies prioritize this research agenda. More research is needed to understand if and how study abroad contributes to the public good. Interventions are also needed to test ways through which more public good outcomes can be derived from study abroad. As researchers engage with this topic, we need to account for the fact that inequalities persist in access to, experiences during, and outcomes following study abroad. As such, when researching the outcomes of study abroad, it is important to account for the (self-)selection of students into study abroad opportunities by employing quasi-experimental research approaches.

As nationalism, anti-internationalism, and dehumanization of the other grow both within and across countries, the importance of study abroad increases. But to continue justifying the value of study abroad, considering mixed labor market benefits, we need to reemphasize the contribution of study abroad to the public good. A rigorous research agenda is needed to help understand and foster the public good contribution of study abroad.

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Higher Education Under Fire: Equity Policies in a Polarized World

Jamil Salmi

Universities have faced an exceptional wave of backlash against the promotion of equity in access to and success in higher education in recent years, even in countries with a long democratic tradition. This article analyzes the forms and consequences of this backlash and outlines the type of research needed to monitor the impact of measures and actions to continue the promotion of equity and inclusion in higher education.

Around the world, many young people face challenging circumstances beyond their own control due to discrimination on the grounds of race, gender, sexual orientation, geographical origin, socioeconomic background, or other attributes that drastically affect their educational opportunities. At the tertiary level, they encounter additional barriers related to the cost of studying, lack of social capital, insufficient academic preparation, low motivation, and lack of access to information about labor market prospects.

After decades of relentless efforts to improve equity in access to and success in higher education, universities have suddenly come under fire. In 2022, the Taliban-led government of Afghanistan prohibited all female students from accessing university education. In Hungary, the government revoked the accreditation of gender studies programs at all universities in 2018 and stopped funding them. Since 2022, the US state of Florida has passed bills forbidding public universities and colleges from spending money on equity and inclusion programs, restricted academic freedom, and eliminated sociology, Black history, and gender studies programs. These measures have led to censorship of textbooks and banning of hundreds of books in libraries.

These examples are but three illustrations of an exceptional wave of backlash against higher education equity programs in recent years, even in countries with a long democratic tradition. While the United States is the most glaring case, especially after the elimination of affirmative action by the Supreme Court in June 2023 and the systematic dismantling of diversity, equity, and inclusion programs, first in Republican states and now nation-wide after the reelection of Trump, political hostility toward the equity and inclusion agenda has spread to many parts of the world.

The reversal against equity promotion policies has taken several forms: exclusion of targeted groups (women, LGBTIQ+, members of ethnic minorities, and low-income students), elimination of equity promotion measures, prohibition of courses, censorship, and book banning. In the same way as Senator McCarthy used the threat of communism to purge universities in the United States from suspected communists in the early 1950s, the term "woke" has become a negative catchword justifying the removal of opportunities for students from underprivileged groups and the condemnation of scholars researching social justice issues not only in the United States, but also in Australia, France, Germany, Hungary, Poland, and the United Kingdom.

> Perhaps the most adequate strategy to thwart the backlash against equity policies is to build and disseminate a strong body of evidence to explain why equity and inclusion are indispensable to maintain high-quality universities in democratic societies.

Even though the span and gravity of restrictions vary substantially from one country to another, it is perplexing to witness the convergence of higher education policies followed by the Taliban in Afghanistan, Iran's ayatollahs, the prime minister of Hungary, and the Republican party in the United States, whose members have not hidden their admiration for Viktor Orbán. There is a clear alignment between actions targeting universities in Hungary and Governor DeSantis' laws against equity promotion in Florida. A direct connection can also be found between the antigay policy of several African

countries and the influence of evangelist churches from the United States who have supported them with millions of dollars, together with the Russian government.

Besides the exclusionary nature of the measures taken against equity promotion programs for the groups directly affected, the backlash is adversely impacting higher education in the form of attacks against academic freedom, reduced institutional autonomy, loss of independence of accreditation agencies, a climate of fear in academic communities, and unhinged hostility of politicians against universities.

Looking forward, it will be important to monitor how higher education systems and institutions recover from the present backlash against equity promotion policies. In countries still governed by the rule of law, using democratic processes is the most effective way of reversing the negative consequences of the anti-equity backlash. The 2023 changes of government in Brazil and Poland meant that the anti-LGBT and antigender studies agenda was abandoned. Another option is to demand compliance with international legislation commitments and adherence to the democratic principles that underlie equity promotion policies. Universities could also find indirect ways of overcoming access barriers when affirmative action is prohibited, for example by using proxies such as income and signs of resilience to identify and support underprivileged students.

Perhaps the most adequate strategy to thwart the backlash against equity policies is to build and disseminate a strong body of evidence to explain why equity and inclusion are indispensable to maintain high-quality universities in democratic societies. While the attacks against equity are ideological and often based on misrepresentations and inaccuracies, academic research on the impact of equity promotion programs must remain objective to demonstrate how these efforts can correct past injustices and eliminate existing disparities in access and success.

Democratic countries that have allowed the "thought police" to interfere with academic freedom and put restrictions on equity promotion programs in higher education ought to ponder the wise observation offered by Bertrand Russell when he was asked how fascism started: "First, they fascinate the fools. Then they muzzle the intelligent."

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Equity in Higher Education: An Unfinished Agenda

N.V. Varghese

Equity is a global concern and a national commitment. Many equity policies have succeeded in improving higher education access among underprivileged groups, but their effectiveness in enhancing learning and graduate outcomes needs empirical validation. The challenge lies in ensuring that institutional strategies extend academic support and offer initiatives to develop inclusive campuses. Recent policy reversals indicate that the fight for equity in higher education should be more resolute and steadfast.

Inequalities have become a central concern in public policy discussions in recent decades. While, in the past, discussions used to concentrate on income inequalities, the focus has gradually and steadily shifted toward social inequalities.

Empirical studies have shown an overlapping relationship between income and education. In fact, education has emerged as the single most important variable explaining wage differentials among individuals. Education has been found to have an enduring impact on earnings, intergenerational mobility, cumulative marginalization, and durable inequalities across generations. Therefore, combating education poverty has become a priority area for ensuring equity. The UN Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) 4 and 10, along with the global commitment to "leave no one behind," have become the core of the transformative promise of the 2030 agenda.

Expansion, Diversification, and Equity

Expansion of higher education benefits the poor in terms of access to higher education. However, expansion unaccompanied by targeted equity policies may not favor the less-privileged. The massification of the sector has softened inequality indicators wherever equity policies are in place. Similarly, a diversification of the system benefits the less-privileged. Many high-income countries have succeeded in diversifying the system and reducing inequalities in access to higher education. The European and American higher education systems diversified in the 1960s and 1970s, benefiting the disadvantaged groups. The higher education sector in the less developed countries, however, remained less diversified and relatively elite during these periods.

Equity Policies across Countries

The most common strategies utilized to promote equity are quota-based prioritization and unequal distribution of resources in favor of the disadvantaged. Equity policies across countries can be broadly classified into three types. First, equity policies based on social criteria. Countries with wide social diversity have generally adopted admission policies favoring the disadvantaged groups. Many countries in Asia and Africa, for example, have followed social criteria as the basis for equity policies. Second, equity policies based on economic criteria. Countries with relatively low social/ethnic fractionalization indices tend to follow economic criteria as the basis for promoting equity. Third, equity policies based on regional criteria. Countries with a high degree of regional disparities often follow geographical quota as the basis for admissions, as well as the opening of new institutions.

Equity policies have succeeded in expanding higher education to disadvantaged groups and in reducing inequalities in access. However, in the absence of adequate academic support programs and inclusive institutional strategies, success in access has not yet fully translated into success in learning and labor market outcomes.

Occasionally, countries follow a combination of these criteria. Many African countries, for example, have student sponsorship schemes. Many middle- and high-income countries and countries in transition support disadvantaged students via special grants. Some countries have established institutions specifically for ethnic minorities and disadvantaged groups.

Equity policies have succeeded in improving access to higher education for disadvantaged groups. However, whether or not they have succeeded in extending this success to learning and graduate outcomes is debatable.

Challenges to Equity Concerns in Higher Education

A number of challenges have limited the potential for equity policies to achieve these additional, yet equally important, goals.

First, elitism in higher education stands in the way of progress. The positional nature of higher education makes equity and fairness difficult to attain. Elite institutions are not keen to expand enrollment. In reality, the students compete for places in the best institutions, and elite institutions compete for the best students. Admissions is a competition between elite institutions and elite students, leaving behind those from underprivileged groups. The elite universities in the United States and the United Kingdom draw a major share of students from high social groups and top income brackets.

Second, it remains challenging to ensure equity in student outcomes. Studies have shown high dropout rates and poor learning and labor market outcomes among students from disadvantaged groups. It seems that success in equity policies aimed at improving access has not translated into enhanced learning outcomes. The challenge to evolving institutional strategies to provide academic support and to develop inclusive campuses remains an unfinished task.

Finally, equity policies have been reversed in many contexts, undermining much of the progress made thus far. The United States Supreme Court decision on affirmative action in June 2023, the new laws enacted against diversity, equity, and inclusion programs in the United States, and the curbing of subsidies and financial aid in several other countries, for example, have all harmed the equity policies that target disadvantaged groups.

Conclusion

Equity policies have succeeded in expanding higher education to disadvantaged groups and in reducing inequalities in access. However, in the absence of adequate academic support programs and inclusive institutional strategies, success in access has not yet fully translated into success in learning and labor market outcomes. Furthermore, the policy reversals witnessed in recent years may halt the progress made in equity so far. The fight to improve equity and build an inclusive higher education system should be more resolute and steadfast.

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One-Size Student Financial Aid Cannot Fit All

Ariane de Gayardon

Higher education faces financial pressures due to rising costs and constrained public funding. While grants and student loans are key financial aid instruments, neither alone is sufficient to support students efficiently. Grants support low-income students but are costly for governments, while loans offer sustainability but raise concerns over debt burdens. Efficient financial aid requires a targeted mix of loans and grants. Future research should explore how to optimize aid distribution, ensuring accessibility while addressing diverse student needs.

Times are tough for higher education institutions around the world. Rising costs fueled by inflation, diverse crises, and competing national priorities have constrained public funding for higher education. This is problematic in a sector that has historically been and, for most countries, remains largely reliant on public funds. Despite talks about differentiation, philanthropy, and entrepreneurship, among other topics, the reality is stark. Beyond public funds, the most reliable and sustainable source of revenue for higher education is the student. The recent history of higher education funding has, therefore, been dominated by debates around increases in cost-sharing, hikes in tuition fees, and the concept of higher education as a private good.

The Growing Importance of Student Support

Behind all this, another reality looms: 18-year-olds cannot pay thousands of dollars for their studies and have no assets of their own. Adding tuition fees to the already high cost of living associated with studying and delaying (full) entry into the labor market creates huge imbalances based on family resources. Governments need to intervene in some way to guarantee equity in access to and success in higher education. Student financial aid is the answer to these concerns.

Student aid comes in many forms, the main two being grants or student loans. Grants are a historic form of aid. They are nonrepayable and are mostly awarded based on merit or need. Grants have been lauded as financial instruments that give a clear signal to students, are easy to understand, and are appealing to everyone. Because of these qualities, need-based grants are probably the best financial instrument for access and equity, helping students from low socioeconomic backgrounds afford higher education. However, the direct cost of grants to governments means that, in many countries, grants have failed to keep up with costs and are no longer sufficient to cover the entirety of students' study expenses. Merit-based grants can also be criticized because they tend to be awarded to students from high socioeconomic backgrounds who arguably do not need them.

Student loans, on the other hand, are appealing to governments because of the prospect that some of the costs they incur will be recouped. Loans can be made more widely available than grants with little targeting, and income-contingent repayment is seen as a positive solution to lessen the burden on graduates. Yet, the constant talks of student debt crisis and attempts in some countries to offer debt relief and redesign loan systems point to widespread issues with student loans.

An efficient financial aid system is a balancing act that targets reach and maximizes value. It should fully support the poorest students financially in ways that would not deter them from the opportunity that is higher education.

Toward a Balanced Financial Aid System

The problem is that a good financial aid system cannot be one-size-fits-all. An efficient financial aid system is a balancing act that targets reach and maximizes value. It should fully support the poorest students financially in ways that would not deter them from the opportunity that is higher education. It should partially support middle-class students, topping off what their families can contribute, while letting students from high socioeconomic backgrounds pay for their studies, bringing in needed revenues for institutions. At the same time, it should not be too complicated a financial instrument as to limit public costs associated with its administration. It should furthermore be easily understandable for future students weighing their options.

Research Directions

Research on student financial aid should help determine this balance. Instead of comparing financial aid instruments and pitting grants and student loans against each other, research needs to consider them as complementary parts of an efficient system. Grants and student loans should be researched together, in recognition of the fact that these financial aid instruments are not aimed at the same groups of students and do not serve the same purpose within the wider higher education system. The system and mix of instruments should try to respond to the spectrum of students that enter higher education today and their specific needs.

An important part of this research will be to determine what is palatable to different types of future students. Are student loans appealing to middle-class students as an affordable way to access higher education? Would students from low socioeconomic backgrounds accept loans for tuition but be more receptive to grants for the cost of living? Of course, it still has to be determined how to decide which students get what, and to what extent approaches to financial aid can be personalized. This will require a deeper understanding of how the family and higher education spheres intersect.

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The Shifting Center: The Global South's Rising Role in Future Higher Education

Marcelo Knobel

This article examines how demographic shifts and changing knowledge production patterns are repositioning the Global South from the periphery to the center of future higher education. As Africa's youth population grows and Southern research networks expand, traditional North–South dynamics are transforming. To maintain relevance in this evolving landscape, higher education institutions must develop new frameworks that recognize the Global South's strengths.

Demographic and geopolitical change and new means for producing knowledge are bringing international higher education to a critical inflection point. As we look toward the mid-twenty-first century, the traditional North–South dynamics in higher education are undergoing a profound transformation, with implications that demand urgent attention from institutional leaders, policy makers, and researchers alike.

The Implications of Demographic Change

One of the most striking developments shaping the future of higher education is the changing global demographic balance. For example, by 2050, Africa alone is projected to account for nearly 40 percent of the world's youth population, while many countries in the Global North are grappling with aging populations and declining university enrollments. This transformation represents a fundamental restructuring of the knowledge economy's future talent pool.

Leading universities must recognize that the needs and potential of talent in the Global South will become central to the future of higher education. The diverse knowledge systems and innovative possibilities present in the Global South must be met with responsive frameworks to replace traditional—and increasingly obsolete—knowledge transfer models.

Shifting Knowledge Production Landscapes

Today, the Global South has become a significant contributor to research and innovation. Countries like Brazil, India, Nigeria, and South Africa are setting research agendas and pioneering innovative approaches to address global challenges. This is particularly evident in areas such as climate change adaptation, sustainable development, and public health, offering insights from historically underrepresented viewpoints in academia.

The rise of research networks centered in the Global South, coupled with increasing South–South collaboration, presents a challenge to traditional metrics of academic evaluation. Leading institutions must reassess how they evaluate research quality and impact, moving beyond citation indices that often favor Global North perspectives and publications.

However, substantial barriers remain, including underfunding, infrastructure gaps, and limited access to global research networks. Meaningful collaboration will be key to ensuring that knowledge produced in the Global South gains appropriate recognition with opportunities to contribute internationally.

> Institutions that effectively engage with and learn from the Global South will be best positioned to maintain their global relevance. The future of international higher education lies in fostering global partnerships that recognize and leverage the diverse strengths of all participants.

Resilience Against Attacks on Science and Higher Education

The current context of complex geopolitical realignments has direct implications for higher education. Many leading universities are experiencing political and ideological pressures that threaten academic freedom, institutional autonomy, and even the value of science itself. In some countries, universities and researchers face funding cuts, political interference, and growing restrictions on free inquiry. Traditional patterns of academic mobility and research partnerships are being disrupted

by new visa regimes, funding mechanisms, and political alignments.

These issues require a coordinated global response that transcends traditional geographic and institutional boundaries. For universities seeking to maintain their global standing, resilience is essential. Diversifying international collaborations, strengthening support for academic freedom, and proactively engaging with emerging centers of knowledge production in the Global South are key ways to build that resilience.

Future Research Directions

Looking ahead, several critical research areas demand attention. First, we need more sophisticated analyses of knowledge production and circulation patterns in the Global South to understand how different knowledge systems interact and contribute to global understanding. Second, research must examine how institutions can build effective partnerships that acknowledge and address power imbalances while fostering mutual benefit. This includes studying successful models of South–South cooperation and their implications for global higher education. Third, we need to better understand how demographic shifts will affect student mobility patterns, curriculum development, and pedagogical approaches, including how digital technologies can create more inclusive and accessible forms of education. Finally, higher education institutions must address how they can maintain academic integrity and freedom in the face of political pressures, while remaining responsive to local and regional needs.

Conclusion

The future relevance of higher education institutions will depend on their ability to adapt to and engage with these shifting realities. Besides a clear strategy for effective communication, success will require moving beyond traditional models of international engagement to develop new frameworks that recognize and build upon the strengths and perspectives of the Global South.

Institutions that effectively engage with and learn from the Global South will be best positioned to maintain their global relevance. The future of international higher education lies in fostering global partnerships that recognize and leverage the diverse strengths of all participants. Any institution seeking to remain relevant in the rapidly evolving global academic landscape must operate within the reality that the Global South is no longer at the periphery of higher education—it is central to the sector's future.

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The Twin Challenges for Tertiary Education in Low- and Middle-Income Countries

Roberta Malee Bassett and Koen Geven

Since the turn of the twenty-first century, tertiary education enrollments have exploded globally, particularly in low- and middle-income countries. This expanding demand for tertiary education presents two central challenges for policy makers: managing the pressures on quality, relevance, governance, and equitable access; and managing the financing of the sector. Effective responses will involve substantial investments in infrastructure, training, diversification of delivery, and regulatory reforms.

Since the turn of the twenty-first century, opportunities to access tertiary education have exploded globally, particularly in low- and middle-income countries. In 1990, 52 million students were enrolled globally, of which 34 million (or 65 percent) were in low- and middle-income countries. In 2020, 228 million students were enrolled globally, with 173 million (or 76 percent) in low- and middle-income countries. Using demographic trends, we project that by 2040, 447 million students will be enrolled in tertiary education globally, out of whom 365 million (or 82 percent) will be enrolled in low- and middle-income countries. Global expansion of tertiary education follows patterns of growth seen in primary and secondary education, which are now nearly universal around the world, and is expected to continue due to high demand. Just like in high-income countries, tertiary education in low- and middle-income countries is often associated with better job prospects, higher wages, improved marriage prospects, and better educational outcomes for children.

The Twin Challenges for Tertiary Education Policy Makers: Expansion and Financing

Two central challenges for policy makers will define the era of tertiary education reforms to come: managing the inevitability of expansion, and managing the resultant financial costs. The first challenge involves addressing the pressures on quality, relevance, governance, and equitable access that come with rapid expansion, especially in low- and middle-income countries. Overcrowded classrooms, insufficient resources, and a strain on academic staff are just a few of the challenges facing institutions, which must continue to strive to deliver quality and relevant programs in the face of these strains. In low- and middle-income countries, as much as in high-income countries, a rapid expansion of tertiary education also comes with changing political demands on tertiary education systems, which often involve difficult tradeoffs for policy makers.

The second challenge is managing the financial cost of expansion, determining where to focus public resources and how to balance these costs between taxpayers, students, and families. Governments in low- and middle-income countries currently spend just over a trillion dollars (1,042 billion purchasing power parity-adjusted US dollars, expressed in 2017 values). If governments maintain current levels of per-student funding, these budgets will rise by an additional 945 billion dollars (purchasing power parity-adjusted, expressed in 2017 values) in order to sustain this coming expansion. (Note that this is a conservative amount, unadjusted for inflation or for capital cost increases that are likely needed to fund this expansion). If governments prove unwilling to foot this bill, then these funds will need to come from households, with subsequent effects on affordability.

> Managing these issues and the related costs of this expansion will perhaps be the single most challenging tertiary education reform effort undertaken in the two decades ahead.

Approaches to addressing these challenges will vary by country and depend on a variety of economic, political, and social factors. In many countries, expansion necessitates substantial investments in infrastructure, such as lecture halls, laboratories, and digital tools, as well as the training and hiring of new faculty members. Effective responses will also involve changes to regulations around tuition fees, student financial aid, and market

entry and exit of different providers. We will likely see more experiments with programs like "targeted free tuition," income-contingent loans, and payback mechanisms, as well as greater acceptance of private tertiary education provision to meet demand and remove cost from public budgets. Managing these issues and the related costs of this expansion will perhaps be the single most challenging tertiary education reform effort undertaken in the two decades ahead.

Bespoke Solutions for Effective Reforms

It is important that we remain humble in our search for answers to these challenges. While we have a fairly good idea of the problem, we don't know enough about the cure. There are many unanswered questions that research can help address, both in terms of policy and economics. In the policy domain, it would be helpful to better understand the distinct organization of tertiary education in low- and middle-income countries. Developing effective policy reforms requires robust data, as well as creativity and adaptability to support solving specific policy problems with contextually relevant policy solutions. It will be important to understand the kinds of institutional capacity that is required for policies like income-contingent loans, or how regulation for private sector tertiary education does (or does not) escape policy capture from elite public education or low-quality private institutions. The economics literature has perhaps even more work ahead, as it is just starting to recognize the value of tertiary education in low- and middle-income countries. Economists might focus their attention on better understanding the dynamics of higher education markets, including how supply evolves to meet an expanding and diversifying demand. There will be important questions about the effects of pricing policies and student affordability on extramarginal students, which may be quite distinct from the experience in high-income countries. By asking these questions, we will greatly expand our current knowledge of tertiary education. After all, the vast majority of students in the world now study in systems and institutions about which we still know very little.

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An Uncertain Financing Future for Higher Education in the Global South

Rebecca Schendel

External funding plays an important role in the financing of higher education in many low- and middle-income countries. With many countries withdrawing from their development commitments (most dramatically the United States), governments and institutions are now under pressure to identify new, more sustainable sources of funding. However, it is unclear how this might work in practical terms. It will be vital to monitor the impacts of these changes in both the short and long term.

External funding has long played an important role in the financing of higher education systems across the Global South. After years of relative neglect by international organizations and bilateral donors, higher education is now prioritized in most national development strategies and is supported by a broad range of multilateral, bilateral, and private donors. Donor support for higher education has also evolved into a more complex, multipolar space during this period, with a number of former aid recipient countries (e.g., China, India) and private donors (e.g., MasterCard Foundation) assuming newly important roles in the sector. External funding supports all aspects of higher education in low- and middle-income countries and takes a wide range of forms: from individual student scholarships to national and regional capacity-building initiatives to partnership funding for institutions working on collaborative research projects. Although support for higher education is generally quite a small proportion of the overall funding for overseas development assistance, in relative terms, external support is particularly important for the higher education sector in many low- and middle-income countries, given the challenges in raising sufficient public funding to support higher education, particularly in rapidly massifying contexts.

External support for higher education in lower-income contexts is also a highly uneven landscape, with certain donors playing an outsized role. International and supranational organizations, such as the World Bank and the European Union, are particularly influential, as are a handful of bilateral and private donors, which provide significant funding for higher education institutions in Africa, South Asia, and Southeast Asia. In recent years, the United States, along with Germany and Japan, has provided the largest amount of bilateral support for institutions based in the Global South. As a result, the Trump administration's January 2025 decision to freeze nearly all US development assistance will have a dramatic impact on higher education systems and institutions around the world.

The disappearance of US development assistance has exposed the precarity of national and institutional budgets that rely excessively on foreign support. Many have rightfully argued that the current moment offers an opportunity for higher education systems across the Global South to finally move away from foreign assistance and reclaim the ability to assert their own priorities. However, the pragmatic reality is that alternative sources of funding are not without their own drawbacks and challenges, nor is it guaranteed that they will materialize.

The disappearance of US development assistance has exposed the precarity of national and institutional budgets that rely excessively on foreign support.

Multilateral organizations may be able to fill some gaps left by the withdrawal of the United States, but this is not guaranteed, given that US contributions to international organizations are also questionable for at least the next four years. It also seems unlikely that European institutions, such as the European Commission, will be able to step in, given rising populism in the region, as well as the likelihood of increased spending needs in other areas, e.g., defense. If any new support does arise, it is most likely to come from newer donors, such as China, and/or from private actors. The question is what form such support will take and how much involvement recipient governments and institutions will have in determining how such funding can be used.

Clearly, the most sustainable alternative in the long-term is for governments to move away from reliance on foreign support for higher education. However, this, too, is easier said than done. The prospect of increasing public support for higher education is certainly very unlikely in many lower-income contexts,

particularly given that the US freeze on development assistance will have a significant impact on national budgets overall. Without external support nor public funding, institutions are likely to be forced to either raise their own revenue—either via tuition or other forms of commodification—or significantly reduce their costs, perhaps by limiting their support for nonteaching activities or by attempting to leverage technology to reduce the cost of operations. Either of these alternatives could be detrimental for equity, student learning, and research capacity, with potentially disastrous consequences for the countries involved.

If there is any good news, it is that we know more about financing models for higher education today than we have at any other moment in history, given the explosion of higher education research around the world over the past few decades. This wealth of knowledge offers leaders a remarkable opportunity to make evidence-informed decisions when seeking to address the current crisis. Whether that opportunity is taken up will be an important question to ask in the coming months and years. Regardless, it will be imperative for researchers to carefully document the changes in flows of external support for higher education that will likely continue to occur over the next few years, as well as to monitor the impacts that such changes will have on recipient governments and institutions around the world.

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International Trends in Higher Education and Sustainability

Tristan McCowan

Sustainability has become one of the buzzwords of higher education in recent years, leading to a raft of strategies, initiatives, and even rankings. However, there are significant gaps in the knowledge base, with research focusing mainly on curricular interventions and campus operations, and the changes in practice have often been superficial. In order to fulfill its potential in addressing the socio-environmental crisis, a deeper transformation is needed in the university's role as a knowledge institution and in its relationships with society.

Since the turn of the millennium, sustainability has become one of the key narratives shaping practice and research in higher education. Universities are increasingly using ideas of sustainability—and specifically the United Nations' Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), adopted in 2015—as a reference point for their activities, including mapping existing work, aligning new initiatives, and evaluating impact. These developments have been encouraged by the emergence of sustainability-focused ranking and assessment tools, for example Green Metric, QS's Sustainability Ranking, and *Times Higher Education*'s Impact Ranking. There are also a growing number of international associations promoting sustainability in the sector, including the Sustainable Development Solutions Network and University Leaders for a Sustainable Future.

Yet this rising agenda is not without its complexities, sceptics, and detractors. The term "sustainability" itself is notoriously vague, and can be used in ways that seem contradictory to the intention (for example, the financial sustainability of an environmentally-destructive corporation). There have been criticisms of "greenwashing," with institutions publicizing their environmental credentials for the purposes of market benefits and student recruitment. Conversely, there are those who oppose the agenda altogether, on the grounds that it is too politicized for a nonpartisan institution like the university, that it is a passing fad or—more radically—that concerns about climate change and associated ecological threats are overblown.

Research in this area has grown apace with its increasing prominence in practice. A systematic review carried out by the Climate-U project showed an increase in publications on university responses to the climate crisis from just one article a year in Web of Science journals in 2003 and 2004 to 24 a year in 2018 and 2019. There is even a dedicated publication in the *International Journal of Sustainability in Higher Education*. Most of the research literature has focused on the integration of sustainability into university curricula and campus operations. In relation to the former, there has been a predominance of appreciative case studies (of the "me and my classroom" type), showing inspiring examples of practice on a small scale, but not necessarily accompanied by significant evidence of impact or of the factors underpinning it. Literature on the operations of institutions has focused on carbon emissions, divestment from fossil fuels, and efforts at greening campuses. There has been much less attention to the shaping of research agendas, the contributions of higher education to public debate, and their engagement with external communities, all vital parts of higher education's contribution to addressing the crisis.

> The university sector needs to have a 'constructive' as well as a 'projective' and 'expressive' role, critiquing and reimagining the meaning and manifestations of sustainability. It must be at the forefront of public debates on the future of the SDGs after 2030, and the forms of social organization that will allow us to live together and thrive as a species.

Future Directions

In summary, both action and research on sustainability in higher education have increased rapidly in recent years. Yet the transformation of institutions needs to be much deeper than that

seen to date. There are five areas in particular in which attention is needed. The first of these relates to connections. A much closer understanding is needed of the ways in which initiatives in different areas of the university interact, between curriculum, research, campus operations, and public engagement. Moreover, synergies need to be sought between the sustainability learning (of students) that takes place within institutions and the learning of the institution itself in becoming a sustainable university.

Second, this article has assumed thus far a direction of influence emanating from the university to the natural environment, but the worsening environmental impacts will unfortunately bring more attention to the threats directly facing universities. These will be direct—through wildfires, floods, rising sea levels, and extreme weather—but will also be indirect, for example, through financial constraints.

A transformation is also needed in the ways in which universities carry out research on climate. Multidisciplinary, interdisciplinary, and transdisciplinary perspectives are needed, and coproduction of knowledge with communities, at best underpinned by a dialogue between academic knowledge and diverse forms of indigenous and local knowledge.

Building on the point above, a far greater geographical diversification is needed in terms of voices, contributions, and perspectives. The climate crisis and other sustainability challenges will only be solved through vibrant higher education systems in all countries, as well as collaboration between them.

Finally, the university sector needs to have a "constructive" as well as a "projective" and "expressive" role, critiquing and reimagining the meaning and manifestations of sustainability. The university sector needs to be at the forefront of public debates on the future of the SDGs after 2030, and the forms of social organization that will allow us to live together and thrive as a species.

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Shaping Africa's Higher Education: Future Directions for Research

Wondwosen Tamrat

Continental aspirations for African higher education emphasize the need for comprehensive reforms in access, equity, quality, financing, governance, international partnership, research and innovation, and community engagement. Changes and future research in these critical areas will enable African higher education institutions to contribute their share to the continent's transformation on par with the rest of the world.

Higher education in Africa plays a crucial role in reducing poverty, driving technology and innovation, and fostering the continent's socioeconomic growth. It has the potential to transform the continent's rapidly growing population into a demographic dividend while addressing the diverse challenges facing the continent.

Captured in the African Union's Agenda 2063, the continental aspiration for a prosperous, integrated, and peaceful continent envisions an "Africa with well-educated and skilled citizens underpinned by science, technology, and innovation." This vision places higher education and higher education institutions at the center of Africa's transformation and development. Given their potential to tap the talent of the youth that constitute 60 percent of the continent's populace, Africa's universities are key to driving knowledge production, economic growth, social transformation, and global competitiveness.

Currently, African higher education faces a range of challenges and ongoing debates that involve issues of access, equity, quality, financing, governance, international partnership, research and innovation, and community engagement.

Challenges and Developments

Historically, access to higher education in Africa was limited to a small elite, to the neglect of rural populations, women, people with disabilities, and marginalized communities. Enrollment and access have improved over the past three decades, but the rapid expansion of higher education has brought the deterioration of educational quality. Moreover, the rise of private institutions and privatization in many African countries have sparked debates about the commercialization of higher education and its negative impact.

African universities fail to produce highly skilled, innovative, employable, and civic-minded graduates due to outdated and irrelevant curricula. Key issues such as employability skills and indigenous knowledge systems are rarely recognized. The sector has seen some changes in curricula and national and regional quality assurance mechanisms have been introduced in many countries, but given the continental need, challenges related to access, equity, curriculum relevance, and maintaining educational quality remain.

African universities are known for lack of academic freedom and institutional autonomy, as well as ineffective governance systems. Many universities are plagued by political interference, inefficiencies, and corruption, which hampers their ability to function effectively and undermines efforts to improve teaching, research, and community engagement.

The future of Africa depends on a higher education system that is responsive, inclusive, adaptive, and transformative. Research plays a pivotal role in pushing the frontiers of the sector, addressing multifarious challenges through evidence-based insights, identifying solutions, and guiding policy directions.

Africa has limited capacity to drive its socioeconomic development through cutting-edge research and innovation. It invests only 0.78 percent of its GDP in research and development, far below the global average of 1.93 percent, and contributes less than 1 percent of global research.

Another significant issue is the growing emphasis on internationalization and partnership. There are concerns that

the partnership schemes adopted by African universities lead to a form of dependence and academic neocolonialism. There is also the challenge of brain drain, which deprives countries of much-needed talent.

Most of the continent's challenges in the higher education sector are driven by a lack of resources and infrastructure (classrooms, digital libraries, research laboratories, e-platforms, etc.), lack of trained faculty, and inadequate funding, all of which are still persistent challenges for many African universities.

Future Research Priority Areas

Sustaining progress and development in African higher education requires prioritizing research in areas that facilitate and strengthen higher education's role in continental transformation and development.

The issues of access, diversity, and equity will remain key research areas on the continent. Research into improving gender parity and inclusivity in all their dimensions, barriers that hinder participation, and schemes for lifelong learning and recognition will not only help identify solutions for improving access, but also facilitate learning and mobility.

There is a need to explore mechanisms for improving university curricula and relevance, strengthening connections between universities and industries to ensure the alignment of academic programs with the job market, and prioritizing emerging needs such as the inclusion of African knowledge systems into university curricula.

Research on governance and financing should explore issues of academic freedom and autonomy, decentralization, sustainable and alternative funding mechanisms, and mechanisms for enhancing institutional efficiency and accountability. More research is needed on ways to promote integrity through ethical leadership and to address the challenges of corruption.

Similar efforts should be exerted in interdisciplinary research and an examination of the relationship between universities and local communities to help solve pressing global challenges and social issues like poverty, unemployment, climate change, health crises, and sustainable development.

Research should be conducted into ways to improve research funding, infrastructure, technology (including artificial intelligence and online learning), mentorship for emerging scholars, doctoral education, regional and global partnerships, mobility of institutions, students and faculty, and harmonization of qualifications and accreditation.

Conclusion

The future of Africa depends on a higher education system that is responsive, inclusive, adaptive, and transformative. Research plays a pivotal role in pushing the frontiers of the sector, and addressing multifarious challenges through evidence-based insights, identifying solutions, and guiding policy directions. Addressing the key research priorities will be essential in ensuring that African universities remain relevant and competent in driving social, economic, and environmental changes in the continent.

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Private Higher Education: Advancing Discovery

Daniel C. Levy

The vast global expansion of private higher education to over 80 million students, a third of total enrollment, and near ubiquity by country, has brought formidable additional differentiation and complexity within the world's higher education undertakings and stakeholder configurations. Leading research has captured vital dimensions of this differentiation, including through private-public and private-private comparisons. In addition to the dissemination of this discovered knowledge, the further expansion of knowledge rests largely upon building directly upon the considerable advances.

When *International Higher Education* debuted 30 years ago, private higher education (PHE) had already leaped toward a significant minority of the rapidly expanding global higher education total enrollment, appearing in all regions. During these last 30 years, PHE's enrollment has catapulted to over 80 million, peaking at and sustaining a one-third share of the total, and appearing in nearly all countries with 10,000 total enrollments or more. Fortunately, research is shedding increasing light on this expanded reality.

What Has Been Discovered

The astounding PHE expansion has happened overwhelmingly in low- and middle-income countries. Whereas Africa and the Arab region remain probably in takeoff stages, Asia and Latin America weigh most heavily. India alone has surged to 23 million private enrollments, compared to 5 million in the historically leading United States (now fourth behind also Brazil and China). Precisely in the last 30 years, PHE has expanded unexpectedly in Western Europe (from 1.5 million with 12 percent of total enrollment to nearly 4 million and 20 percent). Moreover, PHE continues to evolve through new structures and functions, with recent scholarship distinguishing fresh manifestations from modestly modified historical repetition.

Nor does this widespread PHE presence simply resemble public higher education. Ample resemblance is evident, including where widespread copying of public practice (for ease and legitimacy) flanks one key private characteristic (e.g., lingering religious or family ownership). Additionally, notable blurring between sectors occurs over time (e.g., tuition at public universities or regulations on PHE). But large abiding contrasts remain between the sectors regarding programs, teaching-research-service mixes, ties to business and to government, who governs, who even participates, degree of secularism, and much more. Perhaps the plainest abiding contrast lies between public higher education's large dependence on government financing and the yet far greater PHE dependence on private financing.

Perhaps the plainest abiding contrast lies between public higher education's large dependence on government financing and the yet far greater PHE dependence on private financing.

All such salient private-public differences, along with the blurring of them, come into sharper empirical relief as we analyze inside each sector. In turn, the intersectoral comparisons then can illuminate private-public comparisons. For example, early evidence from the recent expansion of legally for-profit PHE shows how it makes PHE overall differ even more sharply from the public sector on matters such as program offerings. Meanwhile, the clearest gain from penetration within the private sector has been increasingly accurate profiling of the increasingly complex private sectors. We can identify "identity" institutions, mostly religious but also gender and ethnic ones, the mission challenges they encounter and the pockets of resilience that exist. Likewise, we see how and why elite institutions are rising fast, even as world-class private universities remain almost singularly an American reality. At the same time, we are making progress in distinguishing among the vast majority of PHE institutions that are academically non-elite—including distinguishing between those which are merely "demand-absorbing" and sometimes predatory, as opposed to those that attract students for their primarily job market focused programs. We also discover in what regions and subregions these non-elite types come principally in nonprofit or for-profit legal form.

How to Discover More

How can we advance further knowledge about PHE? A conventionally crafted research agenda would encompass an ample list of needs. Beyond the formidable strides governments and UNESCO have made in gathering enrollment data, governments and international agencies could gather data on many additional financial, governance, programmatic and other activity indicators. Perhaps regional agencies in developing regions could narrow the gap between their reach and that of their more developed counterparts. More social scientists should bring their disciplines' concepts and methods to the task. More studies of PHE should adapt methods from the best studies of public higher education. Perhaps both social science and education research graduate programs could incentivize students interested in studying aspects of the too-often ignored private sector of higher education. Most such empirical studies could be carried into normative or policy terrain as well. All such steps—but also countless more—could well advance our knowledge of PHE.

In the face of such seemingly endless possible steps forward, however, we might emphasize a single scholarly norm that is far too often violated when it comes to PHE: reading before writing. As outlined above, much of importance has been discovered in the last 30 years. Basic general tendencies have been identified, along with tendencies to the exceptions. Developed conceptual categories have already been employed in different settings, facilitating comparative analysis. At least on enrollment, we have sturdy comprehensive global and regional datasets. None of this argues for mere emulation in research approaches. It does argue, however, for building from extant knowledge, understanding it, extending it when possible, criticizing, debating, and revising when warranted. Such study will never become as common as unmoored descriptive works about "PHE in country X," but the roots in research that has built our present knowledge are already sprouting major branches. One good example is the unfolding Routledge book series, *The Global Realities of Private Higher Education.*

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PRIVATE HIGHER EDUCATION

Rethinking Private Higher Education for Changing Realities

Elizabeth Buckner

The rise of private higher education has transformed the global higher education landscape. Despite its expansion, private higher education remains contentious, often seen as low-quality and profit-driven. Yet, private universities often fulfill key national goals, expanding access, supporting socioeconomic mobility, or offering distinctive educational models. This article calls for deeper scholarly engagement with private higher education as a lens for examining broader debates in higher education systems.

The growth of private higher education over the past four decades has transformed the global higher education landscape. Private institutions now enroll approximately one-third of all higher education students. Growth has been particularly strong in the Global South, where privatization helped fuel massification. In these countries, private universities tend to differ in important ways from their public counterparts. The modal private university globally is demand-absorbing, founded after 1990, teaching-focused, and for-profit, which often implies lower admission and academic standards.

Yet, outside of a few notable exceptions, private higher education has never been respected as being as high quality or as legitimate as public universities. Policy debates concerning private higher education often frame it as necessary but undesirable—necessary, because it provides access to higher education that the public sector cannot or will not provide, yet undesirable because it cannot be trusted. Unlike the public higher education sector, which is typically owned and operated by governments and funded in part by public revenues, the private sector is typically a tuition-dependent sector that operates with market logics. In its worst forms, it becomes a predatory consumer product. Media depictions of private higher education abound with institutions that seemingly "sell" degrees to those who are willing to pay for a credential that requires very little effort. In other cases, private universities can be outright predatory, returning a profit to investors while taking advantage of students' aspirations for education and mobility, leaving them with a useless degree, expensive debt, or both.

In reality, most private universities operate within a grey zone, somewhere between the predatory and the public. Private universities are usually smaller than their public counterparts. They offer a narrower range of degrees. They typically have lower standards for admission. Their faculty likely have less experience and higher teaching loads. They typically return some profit to their founders. They are rarely research-intensive powerhouses or providers of elite education for the most meritorious.

As long as we view private higher education as offering only second-rate education that cannot be trusted with advancing the public good, we likely miss out on a deeper understanding of the role that it plays in helping societies meet their broader goals, including economic development, individual mobility, and ideological pluralism.

Yet, private universities play a role in advancing both individual and national educational goals. They provide students with degrees and pathways for desired futures, including employment, migration, or further study. Private universities may serve as an outlet for individual preferences that the state, on behalf of a larger public, is unwilling or unable to offer. The private sector may provide a religious education to those who desire it or a small close-knit learning community for those who would not thrive in large universities. Similarly, private universities may offer novel models of pedagogy and instruction not available elsewhere. In some countries, private investment has been called upon to build the physical infrastructure of a higher education system. As long as we view private higher education as offering only second-rate education that cannot be trusted with advancing the public good, we likely miss out on a

deeper understanding of the role that it plays in helping societies meet their broader goals, including economic development, individual mobility, and ideological pluralism.

Directions for the Field

The private sector has primarily been studied by those interested in the specific policies and practices of private universities. However, debates over private higher education reflect some of the most significant questions about higher education, including how much autonomy universities should have over what they teach, who should profit off students' educational aspirations, and what quality really means. Moreover, how governments answer these questions tells us a lot about the state's goals and the broader society it serves. Private higher education has been underappreciated as a site for exploring larger questions in a given society or at a given moment and deserves further attention.

Relatedly, as we contemplate the future of global higher education, many of the realities about private higher education that we have taken for granted for at least three decades are in flux: in contrast to its earlier expansion, in a growing number of countries where populations are shrinking, private universities are the first to close, with major consequences for faculty and staff, students and local communities. Private universities may offer insight into what is to come for the sector.

Meanwhile, the private sector is also becoming increasingly diverse, with new and different models emerging, including semi-elite, research-oriented, and transnational. In some countries, private universities are establishing their reputations, with public counterparts now acknowledging private universities as real competitors. Elite flight to private universities is occurring in some countries, as many upper-middle-class families recognize the potentially better labor market outcomes, caring campus communities, or state-of-the-art facilities that some private universities offer. While private universities' impact on inequalities has long been a concern for the field, a broader shift in preferences would raise real concerns over the role of private universities in exacerbating inequality and potentially undermining public higher education. It deserves to be closely monitored.

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QUALITY

International Trends in Accreditation and Quality Assurance: Challenging Possibilities

Gerardo Blanco and Andrés Bernasconi

Accreditation has emerged as the most widely adopted approach to ensuring higher education quality around the world. While this approach allows variations, it provides a common language shared by different systems and academic traditions. While cooperation across agencies will continue to intensify, the future presents the risk of undue governmental intervention.

Over the past three decades, nearly every country and jurisdiction around the world has adopted some form of accreditation. The practice of accreditation is almost five times as old as that, having first been formally established in the United States in 1885. However, the near-universal introduction started in the mid-1990s, coinciding with regional and economic integration across countries, especially in Europe. Accreditation is far from monolithic: It can focus on programs, academic units (schools or faculties), entire institutions, and even multicampus systems. Accreditation approaches vary and, importantly, there is not a standard duration for a program or institution to remain accredited before its next review. Policy effects of accreditation also vary. At the same time, accreditation encapsulates a sense of assumptions. It is a voluntary but consequential process conducted by relevant peers. Governments oversee, and often fund, accrediting agencies, but these agencies or accreditors remain independent in their decisions, often acting by delegation from the government. Accreditation processes involve a self-study, which is a rigorous and evidence-based exercise of demonstrating how an institution performs against a set of long-term standards and its own stated mission. While accreditation outcomes are summative—accreditation is granted or not—the focus is on improving what the institution or program already does well. These principles make the concept of accreditation strong and provide a common language for quality assurance across otherwise very distinct systems.

Accreditation Trends and Challenges

In addition to the widespread adoption of general accreditation processes, a significant minority of programs and institutions now seek recognition by an agency outside of their own country. Accreditation or recognition of professional programs, such as in medicine or engineering, is also increasingly adopting global standards. Accreditors often work with each other to refine their practices and to develop solutions to address issues of shared interest, such as the pervasive issue of identifying and confronting diploma mills and predatory providers.

Looking ahead, the international agenda for accreditation presents significant challenges. Like credential recognition, mutual recognition of accreditation across countries has proven an enduring problem, despite accreditation providing a shared understanding of principles and practices. Accreditation has been particularly challenging for transnational education. Who should accredit a branch campus or cooperative cross-national universities, or online programs made available across jurisdictions?

> Accreditation's legitimacy stems from the fact that it constitutes a peer-review process. While accrediting agencies are sometimes funded or overseen by national governments, their independence, closely connected to university autonomy, is paramount.

The rise of microcredentials, most of them powered by blockchain technologies and offered by organizations outside higher education, opens another question: Will accreditors engage with providers that issue microcredentials but that are not higher education institutions in the traditional sense? Another challenge is the proliferation of the types of indirect stakeholders now deemed relevant for higher education, and therefore, for accreditation, such as professional and scientific associations, labor unions, industry guilds, or the K-12 school system. Also expanding are the notions of the public good for which higher education is held responsible, which may impact accreditation, too.

However, there is a more significant threat emerging that puts the very core of accreditation at risk: undue government intervention.

Accreditation's legitimacy stems from the fact that it constitutes a peer-review process. While accrediting agencies are sometimes funded or overseen by national governments, their independence, closely connected to university autonomy, is paramount. This reality is changing. The United States is perhaps the paramount case, where a hostile takeover of foreign aid and a dismantling of the Department of Education are unfolding. President Trump campaigned with the promise to "fire the radical left accreditors that have allowed our colleges to become dominated by Marxist maniacs and lunatics," while Project 2025 called for "attacking the accreditation cartel." Among such rhetoric, the higher education community needs to stand together to preserve one of the best approaches available to ensuring the quality of programs and institutions, while remaining open to change to accommodate society's shifting expectations.

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QUALITY

Articulating Fundamental Values through the European Quality Assurance Framework

Maria Kelo

This article describes the current debates taking place in the revision process of the European quality assurance framework (specifically, the Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance in the European Higher Education Area), focusing on questions related to the evaluation and assessment of fundamental academic values through quality assurance standards.

In the past two decades, European higher education cooperation has been significantly facilitated by the creation and use of a common framework for quality assurance, one that is quite unlike any other regional framework in the world. It is stakeholder-created and stakeholder-driven, accepted as the shared framework by 49 higher education systems across Europe, and includes a voluntary regulatory system. Its key components are the Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance (known as the ESG) in the European Higher Education Area (EHEA), adopted in 2005 and revised in 2015, and the European Quality Assurance Register, founded by the main European stakeholder bodies in 2007.

The ESG have guided the development of quality assurance systems across Europe and supported the creation of both a common language and a shared understanding of the key components required at different levels to ensure and demonstrate quality in a transparent, fair, and reliable manner. The strong role of stakeholders in both the drafting of the ESG documents, as well as in their implementation at different levels (European, national, institutional), has supported the building of a community of practitioners and researchers that believe in the framework and its benefits.

Current Revisions

No matter the strength of the standards, regular revision of any quality assurance standards is considered advisable. In this spirit, the EHEA ministerial conference in Tirana, Albania, in May 2024, mandated the authors of the ESG to revise the document once more. The changes in the higher education sector, as well as in the societal context, have brought up a long and complex wish-list of topics to be addressed in a future edition of the ESG. While the authors of the ESG stress that not everything that is important for and in higher education can or should be addressed by European-level quality standards, a number of specific topics, such as the social dimension of higher education (including student rights, support, and diversity) and digitalization, deserve to be considered for inclusion in the forthcoming ESG 2027.

A Focus on Academic Values

Perhaps the most interesting and complex topic under discussion is a more explicit integration of fundamental (academic) values—such as academic freedom, public responsibility of and for higher education, participation of stakeholders in higher education governance, and academic integrity—into the ESG. Even in their current format, the ESG are deeply connected to the fundamental values of higher education. The ESG emphasize transparency, accountability, and the centrality of students in the learning processes, all of which align with core values such as academic freedom, inclusion, and democratic participation. Indeed, by ensuring quality and fostering trust in higher education institutions across borders, the ESG help strengthen the European Higher Education Area as a space built on cooperation, mutual recognition, and shared values.

Perhaps the most interesting and complex topic under discussion is a more explicit integration of fundamental academic values—such as academic freedom, public responsibility of and for higher education, participation of stakeholders in higher education governance, and academic integrity—into the ESG.

At the same time, there is a strong feeling that Europe has changed since 2015 and that values which we had been taking for granted have been shaken by wars, nationalism, and the questioning of scientific evidence and academic freedom. Institutional autonomy, freedom of research, and public responsibility of and for higher education are no longer automatically respected all across the EHEA, and it is necessary to discuss whether and to what extent the fundamental values should be addressed through explicit standards and requirements within the ESG.

Despite—or rather, because of—the importance of this topic, the technical and conceptual issues related to the integration of fundamental values into the ESG need to be carefully discussed. What kind of standards should be in place, and what kind of indicators and evidence can be reasonably and reliably provided to assess compliance with them? Are the current quality assurance processes, which still rely highly on national agencies, independent as they may be, appropriate to monitor adherence to fundamental values?

Questions about values are particularly acute in the context of international cooperation, which has also undergone significant evolution in the past few years. On the one hand, many European universities are now engaged in more in-depth international cooperation, with the support of the European Universities' Initiative and the establishment of over 60 European university alliances. On the other hand (and for very different reasons), cooperation and conditions for cooperation with institutions outside of our continent need to address concerns and match regulations related to national security and the use of research results. Could the introduction of fundamental academic values into the ESG support international cooperation? Indeed, what would international cooperation look like in the next decade without a solid foundation of shared values?

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QUALITY

Corruption in Higher Education: Old Problems and New Challenges

Elena Denisova-Schmidt

Corruption in higher education threatens academic integrity and public trust in universities worldwide. Issues like bribery, plagiarism, and AI-assisted cheating are exacerbated by financial pressures and political influences. Addressing this crisis requires governance reforms, ethical awareness, and global collaboration to preserve education's core mission and prevent further erosion of academic standards.

Corruption in academia is not just a peripheral issue—it is a systemic crisis that threatens the legitimacy of higher education worldwide. From bribery in admissions and degree mills to plagiarism and artificial intelligence(AI)-assisted cheating, corruption has infiltrated every level of academia, at all types of universities, in both low-income and middle- to high-income countries. As universities face increasing financial pressures, globally competitive institutions tend to prioritize rankings and political interests over academic integrity, which can create improper dependencies within the higher education sector. Not only does corruption undermine the quality of education, it also erodes public trust in universities as important societal institutions that are expected to conduct research, teach students, and offer services in an ethical manner.

Key debates on this issue center on whether academic corruption is a reflection of broader societal norms or a distinct phenomenon requiring unique countermeasures. Some argue that corruption in higher education is inevitable given the massification and commodification of higher education, and the influence of political and economic forces. Others contend that universities have a moral responsibility to uphold integrity, as they shape future leaders, policy makers, and professionals. Additionally, the rapid rise of AI technologies has exacerbated these challenges, rendering traditional anticheating mechanisms obsolete, and forcing institutions and faculty to rethink assessment methods and adjust policies.

Addressing and Mitigating the Right Issues

Key debates also involve the definition and scope of academic corruption. In some countries, corruption can be endemic, and minor deviations—like students who occasionally cheat or authorship for sale among faculty—might be indulged to some extent, as bigger and more urgent problems require more attention and action. In some countries, anticorruption efforts can be effective and progressive but highly politicized, like closing "fake" programs or "fake" universities for offering too liberal and democratic agendas or deducting points from students for citing "unappropriated" authors. Ambivalence is the next key topic in the debates surrounding corruption in higher education. The "Operation Varsity Blues" scandal in the United States in 2019, involving prospective students entering colleges through "side doors" by falsifying SAT exams or manipulating sports achievements, is a great example of the ambivalent behavior of parents, who equate the use of such services with acting as caring parents. Last but not least, some forms of corruption can be less visible to outsiders and are therefore seldom addressed in public discussions and policy making, although they are by no means less important, such as sextortion or sex in exchange for grades, promotions, or other benefits.

Corruption in academia is not just a peripheral issue—it is a systemic crisis that threatens the legitimacy of higher education worldwide.

Addressing academic corruption requires a multifaceted approach—one that goes beyond policy reforms to actively reshape institutional culture. Universities must not only strengthen their governance and enforcement mechanisms but also foster ethical awareness among students, faculty, staff, and other stakeholders. Moreover, international collaboration is essential for tackling cross-border fraud, fake credentials, and unethical research practices. Without urgent action, the erosion of academic integrity will continue to deepen global inequalities and compromise the fundamental purpose of education.

Next Steps

Corruption in higher education is a fast-growing interdisciplinary field that uses various theoretical perspectives, research designs, and methods to examine different stakeholders in academia. Despite the growth and significance of the field, there has been a call for a holistic theoretical approach and a strong need to further develop the theory. While theory-building is important, it is crucial to develop innovative approaches to mitigating corruption in all environments, even those determined to be endemically corrupt. Additionally, it is important to look at secondary schools, assuming that students who cheat at university have had some experience perpetuating or observing misconduct in the past. Starting to analyze this issue before they enter university could prevent and/or combat cheating within higher education institutions more efficiently. It is also important to observe all technological trends, including AI, as well as their challenges and opportunities. Because of the rapid spread of technology, scholars, educators, parents, and other decision-makers remain unaware of many cheating techniques, particularly those used by young people. Finally, while international students are the focus of mainstream coverage on academic integrity, it is important to remember that domestic students also engage in misconduct. Whether domestic students simply do not get caught as often or international students are the subject of bias should be studied. Overall, in order to advance the research agenda on academic integrity, the field would benefit from close cooperation among scholars and practitioners around the world, and from conducting, publishing, and reflecting studies in languages other than English.

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DOCTORAL EDUCATION

Defining the Doctorate in Africa: Aligning Purpose with Context

Sioux McKenna and Patrick Onyango

A rapid rise in doctoral education across the African continent has occurred without sufficient engagement as to the purposes of a doctorate. The assumption that the doctorate drives the knowledge economy is evident in national policies, implicitly or explicitly, but there is neither interrogation of this supposedly causal relationship, nor deliberation as to how the doctorate might be positioned as a common good in postindependence countries.

Over the last several decades, there has been a rapid growth of higher education in Africa. The number of universities, for example, increased from 170 in 1969 to 2,389 in 2023. The increase in the number of universities on the continent has been accompanied by calls for more doctorates, with organizations such as the World Economic Forum indicating that Africa needs a million more doctoral holders if it wants to participate more evenly in the global research community.

Partly in response to such calls, governments of various African nations have put in place policies that set targets for increased doctoral outputs, specify supervision regulations, clarify credit requirements, and so on. But they say little about *why* we need more doctorates or what *purposes* they serve.

What is clear from these documents is that national-level efforts to increase the number of doctorates are driven by the assumed causal relationship within the "knowledge economy" between doctoral education and "development." There is little interrogation of the validity of such claims nor of the extent to which the doctorate is the appropriate vehicle for driving economic growth. What is missed in these narrow assumptions is reflection on the colonial history of the doctorate in Africa. This means there is a lack of national-level deliberation about what the doctorate might mean for a postindependence context. There is thus little consideration of how positioning the doctorate *primarily* or, in some cases, *only* as a means of economic growth might constrain its potential to act as a public good, addressing social injustices and contributing to the forging of strong democracies.

Until the turn of the twenty-first century, a disproportionate number of African scholars attained their doctorates in the Global North. Those who returned and joined the higher education landscape designed programs that followed the structure and assumed purposes of the doctorate in the Global North. This remains the predominant approach guiding the design of the doctorate in Africa, despite the diversity of linguistic, cultural, and socioeconomic contexts on the continent.

Some countries are making deliberate efforts to match the doctoral curriculum to the prevailing job market. While this is largely a positive move, positioning skills-based training for industry as the *key* purpose of doctoral education has the potential for the doctorate to be conceptualized primarily as a commodity. The consequences of constructing the doctorate—and by extension knowledge—as a product are numerous: time to completion becomes the focus instead of quality; production is foregrounded over the nurturing of a researcher; and the product is accompanied by a requirement to produce journal articles, which has led to the proliferation of predatory publications.

What is needed for doctoral education in postindependence universities across Africa are spaces to discuss the purposes of the doctorate with a greater reflection on taken-for-granted and often problematic assumptions.

What Is Needed?

What is needed for doctoral education in postindependence universities across Africa are spaces to discuss the purposes of the doctorate with a greater reflection on unchallenged assumptions across countries, national policies, and within institutions. Such discussions should not attempt to pin down

the doctorate to a narrow, shared purpose—rather they should open spaces for reflection on taken-for-granted and often problematic assumptions. They should allow for far-reaching, impactful, and decolonial approaches to be applied to the highest formal qualification. These discussions must take the prevailing realities of doctoral education on the continent into account: small and ever declining number of supervisors; most candidates pursuing their studies on a part-time basis; disproportionately older students; and with most candidates being self-funded, alongside a small but significant number receiving support from funding bodies in the Global North.

The absence of discussion at continental, national, and institutional levels about what a doctorate is *for* has the potential for generic, decontextualized assumptions to hold sway. Explicit conversations about the nature of the doctorate should enable consideration of how context matters in the conceptualization of doctoral purposes and practices. For universities in Africa, such aspirational, future-focused discussions require critical introspection about colonial legacies.

Ironically, such careful reflection on context in framing the doctorate's purposes can pave the way for increased internationalization. When a country, an institution, a doctoral advisor, or a doctoral candidate can articulate what a doctorate is for and critically engage with the many unspoken assumptions about the doctorate, they will be well-placed to share experiences across a range of contexts. If we know what we want the doctorate in our own countries in Africa to be, we will be better placed to contribute with confidence in other contexts.

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DOCTORAL EDUCATION

Doctoral Education: Riding the Waves of Changes in Academia

Maria Yudkevich

This article focuses on key challenges for doctoral education in the context of changes in university systems across the world. These include the mismatch between PhD production and the needs of academia, demand for rethinking PhD training models across various disciplines, and barriers to academic mobility in faculty recruitment.

The diversity of models and formats of doctoral education reflects the diversity of national academic systems. Given that, one commonality has existed for a long time and remains to this day: postgraduate education has traditionally been seen as a key institution to train and recruit next generations of university faculty. PhD graduates are expected to dream about becoming professors. However, current trends show that fewer and fewer PhD graduates associate their future with academia. In 2019, about 41 percent of doctorate recipients with definite employment commitments (excluding postdoc positions) in the United States reported that their principal job would be in academia (with 12 percent among engineering graduates and 17 percent in physical sciences and earth sciences). The number of PhD graduates who go into the nonacademic labor market is on par with those who go on to work in universities. Several factors are contributing to this. First, there is increasing competition for research and analytical skills from a number of industries (such as IT or biotechnologies). Although there are countries and disciplines that exhibit exceptions, PhD holders' salaries are usually significantly higher outside academia, and nonacademic jobs do not necessarily mean giving up research.

Another factor is related to changes in conditions within academia. These include cuts in financial support for research (among other things, reduced funding for postgraduate positions) and the expansion of postdoc positions. The latter lengthens the path to a tenured or long-term appointment, reducing the number and share of these positions, and augmenting recruitment and promotion requirements.

There are alarming voices saying that the flow of students into doctoral schools is declining. Given the overproduction of PhD students in many countries, this may not necessarily be a bad thing, but it may lead to adverse selection: the best graduates do not enter academia (voluntarily or involuntarily). Thus, a long-standing question becomes even more salient: are universities able to attract the best and brightest, or do they lose out in competition with the nonacademic sector? This question asks for critical reflection on the future of doctoral education.

Questions for Reflection

Overproduction of PhDs may persist in specific disciplines (e.g., humanities) where universities rely on doctoral students in teaching or research. However, imbalance emerges at the national level as well. While in some countries there is an overproduction of doctorates (China and Germany, for instance), in other national systems there is an underproduction of academic staff (e.g., Japan and South Africa). What could universities on both sides do to offset such imbalance? How should the programs that target highly qualified returnees be designed to achieve maximal impact? How effective are these programs?

PhD graduates are expected to dream about becoming professors. However, current trends show that fewer and fewer PhD graduates associate their future with academia.

It is also important to ask how doctoral students entering universities are affected by neoliberal trends in higher education, such as the risks and challenges posed by the decline in the number of tenure contracts, the increase in teaching contracts, and the decline in labor guarantees, as well as the lack of empirical quantitative estimation of corresponding losses.

Funding models are also an important consideration. Institutions must determine the best model of funding for doctoral education given the current conditions, i.e., with reduced state support for science in general, as well as for PhD

programs specifically. Given that these programs now train more personnel for the nonacademic market than for academia, from the state's point of view, there is an argument for them to attract more external resources.

Other questions arise around quality. It is important to ask what role industry could play in funding doctoral education and to question how industry funding would relate to the wider context of relationships between universities and industry in the context of the knowledge economy. Will all universities in the future be able to afford doctoral programs? Already today, the question of quality standards is a pressing issue for schools offering doctorates in many countries. How can institutions generate (or maintain) a high level of quality against the background of decreasing funding?

Finally, what skills should be the focus of doctoral education? Today, models of doctoral education that emerge in different disciplines (such as education, law, or business and administration) already take into account the fact that a substantial share of graduates are preparing for a career outside the academic sector. What consequences might this stratification lead to in the future? Shall we expect new models in traditional science disciplines as well? How can these models reflect the currently blurring boundaries between university and industry, as well as between traditional disciplines? Despite the development of interdisciplinary research, doctoral training today is embedded in traditional disciplinary discourse and discourages boundary crossings and high-risk projects in general. How does the choice of interdisciplinary topics as a dissertation research topic affect subsequent success on the labor market?

Answers to these questions can provide valuable insight, as governments and institutions around the world look forward to the future of doctoral education.

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ACADEMIC PUBLISHING

Academic Publication Drive, Games, and Consequences

Yingxin Liu and Hugo Horta

Contemporary academia is marked by intense competition, where the significance of academic publications is constantly emphasized. In this publication-driven academic environment, there are several key trends: a dominant "publish or perish" culture; papers in international journals serving as the currency of prestige while also being insufficient to ensure survival or success; the "dismissal" of other publications; peer-review processes coming under pressure; and research funding being turned into an end, rather than a means to an end.

The academic profession has been changing globally, with research taking center stage. Publications are now crucial, not only for the advancement of knowledge, but also for academic recruitment, career advancement, job stability, and recognition within and across institutions and research fields. Several salient trends are shaping the landscape of knowledge production in academia.

"Publish or Perish" Prevails Alongside the Rise of "Get Visible or Vanish"

Nonstop publishing during the postgraduate period and throughout the career is now essential, with publications becoming the "hard currency" to secure job opportunities, career stability, and standing. Yet, despite the continuous publishing of high-quality work being seen as a "tried-and-true" route to entry and survival in academia, it may not be enough for many academics. The "visibility" of research outputs matters more than ever, and academics are compelled to magnify influence and extend reach (including in social media) to foster citation numbers and attain broader recognition. The "get visible or vanish" dynamics have recast the rules of the game in academia, placing additional stress and workload on academics. The focus on knowledge production is shifting to a combined focus on producing and spreading the word about research outputs. Just as in commercial sectors, producing a product is not enough; one must also market and sell it. These trends have led to large numbers of papers being published, to the prevalence of short-term research cycles (supported by research funding expectations), increased pressure on the peer-review system, and claims of decreasing scientific breakthroughs.

Discrepancies in the Recognition of Research and Publishing Efforts

Furthermore, the word "publication" is now equated primarily with papers published in indexed international peer-reviewed journals. Books, book chapters, and other publications are usually dismissed, as are publications in national languages, to the detriment of the humanities and social sciences, as well as national communities. Publishing quality is often judged by the rankings and related metrics of journals, despite extensive criticism by academics, librarians, and scientometricians as being inadequate to serve such purposes.

> The sustainability of any system requires balance. Currently, the academic research system is becoming increasingly unbalanced.

Still, universities regularly adhere to journal listings as benchmarks to assess the work of academics. Such practices shape publishing choices, fostering journal fetishism, constraining the dissemination of research to target audiences, and often undermining interdisciplinarity. Since the incentives are all on the side of publishing, imbalances in the publishing process are now entrenched. The ever-growing number of paper submissions to international journals overwhelm editors and reviewers alike, leading to slower, biased, and conflicting review processes, and dissatisfaction with peer review. Even though peer-reviewing has a central role in science, there is little to no reward or recognition for doing this job. Therefore, it is unsurprising that a growing number of predatory journals offer expedited "review" and publication processes for a fee, or that

many paper submissions and reviews show evidence of misconduct and unethical behavior, such as the use of artificial intelligence-generated texts.

Research Funding as an Output Measure to Support Research

Many of the trends above also relate to research funding, which is becoming increasingly competitive. Research funding is shifting from being a means to an end (resources to do research), to being an end in itself. Recruitment and career progression depend on obtaining research funding almost as much as publications. Here, too, as with publishing, status signals matter. It is not only about obtaining funding; the source of funding is crucial, with grants from international research-funding agencies, as well as top-tier national ones, receiving greater recognition. Lower success rates in obtaining funding from a given agency amplify its perceived value compared to that from agencies with higher success rates. The trend parallels the trends in publishing.

Conclusion

The sustainability of any system requires balance. Currently, the academic research system is becoming increasingly unbalanced. There is an overemphasis on publication numbers and metrics, and, although these are relevant and should not be dismissed, they cannot be everything or even most of the equation. Evaluation and assessment systems ought to be broader in scope and recognize that academia's contribution to knowledge and society is multifunctional and often rooted in intangibles. These cannot be easily captured with existing metrics, particularly not in the short term. Unheard-of research can have a profound impact decades later. Indeed, uncertainty and timing are key to innovation and adoption. A whole-rounded system is necessary for science and academia, because academic research and activities deal with intricate challenges, necessitating a complex array of activities. For the sake of a sustainable academic system, rewards and career schemes should consider a multitude of tasks and outputs, or alternatively, support specialization within academic careers.

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ACADEMIC PUBLISHING

A Crowded and Growing Shelf

Gregory M. Britton

Books once defined scholarly communication. However, declining institutional support and library purchasing are reshaping scholarly communications, academic publishing, and the nature of academic work itself. What emerges is a different publishing landscape and experimental forms like open access and open peer review. At the same time, many scholars are shifting their communications to faster moving and more democratic digital forms.

Half a century ago, books were the coin of the realm in scholarly communication. They were the way academic knowledge circulated across time and space. University libraries amassed books in their collections. Scholars conducted seminars around current and classic works, their own offices proudly lined with books in their field. Students were given "required reading" lists about which they were tested. The book was a technology for transmitting information, but it also triggered others to shape and refine those arguments into seminar papers, articles, and, well, other books.

Academic status, tenure, and promotion at many universities usually followed authorship. Writing an important book made *you* important. The book recorded and shared scholarship, but it was also a credentialing mechanism for many scholars.

The ecosystem, to greatly oversimplify, looked like this: libraries, funded by their universities, could afford to buy books. These purchases, as well as ones from other scholars and students, were enough to sustain scholarly publishers who, in turn, invested in selecting, vetting, and publishing books by scholars. Universities used that selection by presses as a shorthand for a scholar's quality—those books were peer-reviewed, after all—and would award tenure and promotion partly based on publications. Scholarly publishers were not getting rich, but they made enough to sustain their work.

Market Forces and Adaptive Responses

As institutional budgets declined and costs rose, libraries shifted their shrinking resources away from books toward "big deals" with multinational journal aggregators. They also created ways to share a single copy of a book between institutions. The result was that book sales fell. Twenty years ago, a humanities monograph in the United States might be expected to sell 800 to 1,000 copies, which was enough to cover publication costs. Today, that same monograph might sell only 300 copies, an unsustainable level that threatens the entire system.

Framing this as a crisis overlooks what might instead be an evolution or adaptive response to market forces. Scholarly publishers responded the way you would expect actors in a market economy to behave. They reduced their publishing in fields that undersold, they raised prices, and they shifted their resources to books that might appeal to larger readerships, i.e., trade books for more general audiences and textbooks for students. This left scholars and institutions to rethink how they measure quality and how they communicate.

> Now, at the end of the first quarter of the twenty-first century, scholarly communications look very different. The book persists, but it is not the only way scholars exchange ideas. Today, in addition to journal articles, symposia, and conferences, academics participate in new media and more public-facing work like blogs, webinars, podcasts, and other social media.

Other publishers began offering their books open-access, essentially making them available digitally for free. The advantage of this is immediate global access for ideas. The problem, however, persists in finding sustainable funding for publishers' work including editing, managing peer review, securing permissions, book production, and marketing. Open access works remarkably well when those publishing costs can be sustained.

With a book contract harder to come by, scholars look for other avenues to publish their ideas. Academic fields are often divided into "article fields" or "book fields;" that is, those that value publication in one form or the other. STEM disciplines, for

example, have long been journal fields, whereas the humanities and social sciences have traditionally seen books as leading the conversation. As publishers shrink their programs in underselling fields, some disciplines look to journals as avenues to publish.

The Future of Scholarly Communication

Now, at the end of the first quarter of the twenty-first century, scholarly communications look very different. The book persists, but it is not the only way scholars exchange ideas. Today, in addition to journal articles, symposia, and conferences, academics participate in new media and more public-facing work like blogs, webinars, podcasts, and other social media. These newer forms have different affordance than books; they are inexpensive, easy to access, and fast. Moreover, they offer instant global reach. Rarely are they peer-reviewed or edited, and many of those forms lack what scholars consider adequate citation. It is a different form of scholarly communication, and it has become remarkably influential.

This disruption in the traditional forms of scholarly communications challenges academic publishing and raises questions about the future. With many more avenues for scholars to communicate with their peers and beyond, will we see a democratizing effect on access to scholarship itself? How will we measure the quality and impact of work that may escape peer review? Will scholars embrace new forms of review to encompass this new work? How will institutions assess this new work and the quality of the scholars who produce it?

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