

DIVERSITY AND INTEGRITY IN THE SUCCESSFUL UNIVERSITY

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The Importance of Difference

Let us deal with some of the fundamentals right at the start. Success can mean many different things to many people. Is a university successful if it serves the national interest? Is it successful if it facilitates the international mobility of people and ideas? Is it successful if it educates students effectively? Is it successful if it plays a positive role in the community? Is it successful if it doesn't lose money? Is it successful if the Times Higher Education Supplement or Shanghai Jiao Tong University declares it to be successful? Everything depends on our point of view.

It may be easier to recognize lack of success, namely an institution that has little impact on its surroundings, little sense of its direction and purpose, limited vision, and little dynamism. We know when things are wrong, but are less sure when they are right.

If it is hard to assess success, it is almost as hard to define a university. Universities come in many shapes and sizes. They have different histories, a different mix of students and disciplines, different goals and aspirations.

We are gathered to discuss what makes a successful university. This agenda may imply that there is more agreement on these matters than I think there is; it may also mean that we are in danger of identifying a single model, a single institutional profile, for all to follow. Efforts at consensus building sometimes have the opposite effect: by developing a particular orthodoxy, they push alternative ideas into heterodoxy. Arguably, one of the most important roles that universities play in modern society is that they offer a location in which many heterodoxies can flourish and ideas can be tested - where freedom to think freely and to try out ideas is especially protected, and where a particular kind of intellectual risk-taking (which leads to innovation) is possible.

One thing is certain: it makes little sense to build institutions of higher education that are all the same, or even aspire to be the same. Yet many of the measures that we use to define success, because they are comparative, tend to force all institutions into the same mold. Recently I was talking with the woman conductor of a prominent American symphony orchestra. "I would not have become a conductor if I had not attended a women's college," she declared. Women's education may have a place in certain contexts and societies, including American society. By the same token, there are many institutions that put particular stress on the nurturing of the talent of those who have not had the opportunity to learn how to succeed in our competitive society because they are too poor or too marginalized to succeed on their own. There are plenty of highly successful tertiary-level institutions who are advancing knowledge in this way - not with those born to be leaders (those at the top of the socioeconomic ladder) but with the leaders who must be made, and the followers who must be encouraged to think for themselves. Some years ago, I presided over a university that took particular pride in teaching mathematics to students with so-called math anxiety. Its professors focused on this issue to an almost religious degree: to them, teaching mathematics was a calling, and understanding mathematics was a gateway to intellectual freedom. In truth, they were not wrong, and what they did for students surely had a major impact on those students' careers and everyone they came into contact with. But such educational leadership would not have made a dent in the university rankings that we are so familiar with.

This last point is important. We certainly need leading scholars are major innovators, but we also need a flexible, well educated workforce able to handle the technologies of today. A nation that produces only brilliant Ph.D.'s and fails to pay attention to undergraduate education will have difficulty maintaining its economic base - and also its political resources. A democratic

system requires a broadly well-educated electorate, among other things because these are the people who will vote to keep higher education alive and pass this legacy on to the next generation.

Strengthening Higher Education in a Changing Environment

There is hardly a nation in the world that is not currently engaged in strengthening and expanding its higher education system. It is doing so, first and foremost, to compete against others, or at the very least not to fall behind. Higher education is the key to building a knowledge-based society, to developing human capital, and to creating a vibrant economy. Yet less attention is given to factors less immediately economic. At gatherings like this one, and also in parliamentary chambers, we hear less about how universities contribute to the quality of life - except in economic terms - less about how university systems should be strengthened to augment the rule of law, or to assure full participation in the cultural life of the community, or to nurture artists and thinkers. Economic prosperity is vitally important, but so are intellectual and cultural prosperity. Life is not just about financial profit and loss, or just about earning power. Because economic prosperity is easier to measure, all too easily it takes priority over these other concerns. It is not mere sentimentality to demand of universities more than economic prosperity. There are huge opportunity costs in articulating the goals of higher education in purely economic terms.

While universities are elements in national higher education systems, they are also nodes in a worldwide scientific and cultural network. Paradoxically, they flourish best by cooperating with their competition. There has always been a tension, and divided loyalties, between professors' commitment to their institutions and their commitment to their disciplines, or between their pursuit of truth and their employment. One of the great challenges facing all higher education leaders is balancing those two commitments and translating them in educational terms.

To a degree never before experienced, we are today witnessing a great convergence of technical and scientific knowledge, aided by ease of communication of a kind that is enfranchising institutions that previously were marginal or non-existent: electronics overcomes distance, augments libraries, disperses teaching and learning. At the same time we are suffering from a fragmentation of common values outside the university that threatens the wellbeing of those within, and is itself a sign that we must do more to offer national and international leadership not just in science and technology, not just in the world of ideas, but also in the world of values. Again, a paradox: one of the major functions of a university is to pay attention to its own surrounding community - to what is unique about that community. Without the preservation of diversity we cannot have meaningful commonality and community. Globalization must be accompanied by localization: what has made companies like Microsoft and Google so successful has been their ability to adapt to local languages and local behaviors even as they expand across the globe.

But, I should add, we cannot imagine that the massive changes going on in our various societies will have no effect on the institution of the university itself. If other things are changing, and if the world is full of uncertainties concerning the shape of the future, we too are changing, and we are doing so with no clear sense of direction. It is common in the United States today to suggest that higher education is going through a period of crisis. Some of this crisis atmosphere is caused by drastic cuts in funding: the state is unwilling to invest enough money to sustain the system as it now is. Some of it is caused by equally alarming increases in the cost of providing higher education. By-products of these contrary pressures (falling income and rising costs) are twofold: huge increases in student debt, and instability in the professoriate, as adjuncts and teaching assistants are hired to do much of the teaching at lower levels of compensation. But a source of still greater uncertainty is the revolution in communication that we are currently experiencing. More and more education goes on line, MOOCs proliferate, classroom education

changes, and libraries transform themselves into data and learning centers. We simply do not know what the educational products and processes will be ten or twenty years from now, nor how higher education will be packaged. So, even as our politicians want to be able to boast of world-class universities in their countries and regions, the very institutions themselves may look quite different a couple of decades from now, and the criteria for world-class status quite transformed.

Rankings and the Threat to Diversity

In the balance between local responsibilities and global responsibilities the tension between orthodoxy and heterodoxy plays out in sometimes troublesome ways. In the race to establish world-class universities, we have succumbed to superficial definitions and a confusion in the relationship between globalization and localization. To compete in global rankings, for example, because of the way the ratings are set up, a university must be of a certain size, must be adequately (not to say generously) resourced, must focus on graduate studies even if it has a core of undergraduate studies, must contain a generous number of international students and faculty, and must speak English. Some of these criteria may well be a mark of quality; others less so. The emphasis on graduate study, for example, means that rankings tell us little or nothing about the quality of undergraduate teaching and learning. Indeed, a recent OECD comparative assessment of adult competencies tells us that the United States, apparently the world's leader in university education, fares badly in comparison with other developed countries.

Arguably, the last in my list of criteria, speaking English, which is essentially an accident of heritage and not an indicator of inherent quality, is the most decisive. The Academic Ranking of World Universities (Shanghai Jiaotong), the Thomson-Reuters Times Higher Education World University Ranking, and the OS World University Rankings, along with most other such measures, favor English-speaking universities overwhelmingly. This supposed superiority may simply be because the universe of English-speaking universities is large and hence such universities tend to do well in studies of reputation.

Language and Rankings

With regard to language, we are in real danger of confusing cause and effect. There is no question that the English language has become the lingua franca of the engines of globalism and of the world of technology and science. The universities of those countries for which it is the native language, or a widely used adopted language, rise to the top. Do they do so because they have easier access to the international network (in which case their success, even if it may seem unfair, is success none the less) or do they do so because their presence in an English-speaking environment makes them better known by a wider number of people, and therefore gives them higher status? To put it in other terms, do English-speaking institutions maintain their superiority essentially by gaming a system that handicaps everyone else?

Universities that speak widely diffused languages, like German or Spanish or French, tend not to flourish in such rankings. This apparently depressed condition may in some ways be a sign of strength: they are sustained by linguistic platforms that are self-sufficient to a degree that, say, the linguistic platforms of the Scandinavian countries are not. Thus they are more dependent on English. Many established disciplines have a rich literature (original and translated) in such languages as German, Spanish and French, and so they have less need to use the linguistic resources that are enjoyed by English speakers. It is the very self-sufficiency of these countries that makes them invisible and inaudible to speakers of English (who are increasingly monolingual).

The German higher education system, for example, is not organized according to the star system that obtains in many other countries, notably the United States. Resources are spread more evenly, as is talent. While concentrations of talent may constitute a net positive, its

dispersion may be a positive too. As for the French system, while it is widely believed, both by the French and by others, to lack the flexibility and nimbleness of some other systems, it is not apparent that merely joining institutions together in alliances and mergers (the desire of the moment, advanced by the Law of July 22, 2013) will do anything other than make French institutions look more like institutions in other countries and therefore more eligible for a place in the rankings. It may actually detract from the overall quality of France's leading institutions, the *grandes écoles*. Here, too, we may not be dealing with questions of quality so much as with questions of historical accident and the simple fact that the university rankings favor a particular type of university over other types.

This is not to say that there are no values that raise these leading institutions above others. Money is certainly a factor, as the huge resources of American universities make clear; but also technology transfer, citation, and the like may be authentic measures of quality. However, here again language is a major factor. Numbers of citation indexes accept material only in English, and numbers of abstract services collect only abstracts in English. So the citations of scholars working in major European languages other than English appear less often in the indexes, thereby depressing their ratings.

Conclusion

Thus, we can conclude that recent years have put pressure on universities to conform to single, measurable patterns, some of which are less valuable as indicators than others. In part, this pressure has come not so much from within as from those who hold the purse strings - particularly national policymakers. Hardly surprisingly, they want value for the public money they invest. Universities have done a poor job of demonstrating how their missions vary and ought to do so, and policymakers have done a poor job in assessing professorial output, often valuing conformity over originality, and linguistic unity over linguistic pluralism. It is easier to develop common metrics, producing an air of false objectivity, than to assess institutional success individually.

There is much more to be said about these issues than time permits, and others will certainly take up this theme. Let me conclude then, by asking what criteria of success we should pay attention to. In addition to solvency and good management (which are necessities rather than successes in themselves), six criteria strike me as particularly important:

- **Diversity.** Every university serves several publics - young people, the worldwide scientific and intellectual community, civil society in all its manifestations, and, to a greater or lesser degree, the needs of the state. The relative importance of these publics will vary, but a university that pursues only one of its various public missions at the expense of all others cannot be fully effective. Furthermore, universities have traditionally been great social levelers by bringing together talent from different socioeconomic backgrounds. This process is important both politically and economically.
- **Clarity and responsibility.** Every university must be well organized and operated, with power shared among faculty, students, and administrators, clearly delineated for each constituency. The faculty role should be more than mere execution of others' agendas: there must be room for original thought and action.
- **Distinctiveness.** Not all universities are the same. Each country's universities are derived from differing goals and priorities, and different public missions. A good university will have its own mission, its own strategy and mechanisms for maintaining consensus around both mission and strategy. Mere comparability across regional or national boundaries is not a criterion of success, nor should we allow our politicians and policymakers to believe that it is.

- **Integrity.** Every university must exercise integrity in its evaluation and credentialing of students. The value of its programmes depends on it.
- **Autonomy.** Every university, if it is to pursue and expound knowledge effectively, must enjoy a measure of autonomy. If we treat it like a branch of government, it will not foster the innovation that we expect from successful universities. Autonomy in turn implies academic freedom.
- **Advancing knowledge.** Every university must make a positive difference to the knowledge and skills of its students, and have a positive impact on the growth and organization of knowledge and the well-being of society in general - nationally and internationally.

The biggest problem, we have to conclude, lies in defining success. Success is not quantitative but qualitative. For example, a successful faculty is not one that publishes a lot, but one that contributes assertively to the advancement of knowledge; not one that teaches a lot, but one that teaches well. Nor should a university be judged on reputation and popularity: the pursuit of university ratings may have made some universities better, but it has made too many the same. The measures that we use continue to fall well short of the ideal.