As the global marketplace promotes the acceleration of international linkages, branch campuses, single purpose programs and other forms of transnational education, **quality** remains the key to their sustainability. But it is not always easy to sustain quality at remote locations. For reasons of custom, law, language, cost or just plain convenience, the challenges to providing a quality educational program can be difficult. This article means to provide a context for why higher education is exploding throughout the world; the challenges confronting education providers and a practical guide to sustaining quality.

**Context: The Global Marketplace**

According to the 1999 World Trade Organization’s Education Service Report, the global market for higher education and training was estimated at US $27 billion in 1995. IDP Australia estimated that in 1999, there were 48 million learners in the world, 17 million in Asia. This compares to their projection that in the year 2025, there will be 159 million learners, 87 million in Asia. In 1997, U.S. education and training services totaled more than $8.5 billion and ranked among the country’s top five service exports (ITA, U.S. Department of Commerce), placing the U.S. among the top three higher education exporters world-wide – the other two being the United Kingdom and Australia.

Why is higher education growing at such a rate? Some of the key reasons lie in improved access, readiness for a more diverse range of providers and in the globalization of the professions. The umbrella for these three key reasons is the global marketplace, promoted by regional and international trade agreements. And, of course, the new technologies are enabling communication with far greater ease than even a decade ago.

**Access.** The Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development, the Paris-based intergovernmental organization for the world’s primary economic powers, has always held that there is a direct relationship between the quality of a country’s higher education system and the health of its economy. Most OECD member countries boast at least 25% of their populations educated at a tertiary level. As countries begin to embrace the reality that more of its population educated at higher levels will only serve to improve the state of the country, avenues are opening for second country providers to offer higher education services in those countries. Regardless of the extent of the country’s wealth, no country exists at present which can sustain expanding its **state funded** higher education
system, especially those which are tuition-free. Examples of improved access are found in policy announcements by various governments:

**Japan**, where approximately 35-40 percent of the population is educated at a tertiary level has recently announced that it will seriously consider recognizing online education provided by higher education systems other than its own.

**China**, which educates but 3-4 percent of its 1.2 billion people, has in recent years approved a large number of linkages with its state universities and in recent months has recognized certain state universities to provide online education with the assistance of second country providers.

**Malaysia** in the 1980’s recognized that it would be unable to educate more than 6 percent of its population through its own institutions and began partnering with international institutions to supplement its system of higher education. In recent years, this has led to the authorization of foreign universities on Malaysian soil.

**Diversity.** Hand in hand with access lies the need for diversity among nation’s tertiary institutions. This includes: universities which differ in emphasis and offerings, depending on their location and national labor needs; postsecondary institutions with vocational and occupational purposes; and the provision of private tertiary education. Too many tertiary education systems are characterized by “cookie cutter” universities; the lack of skill development education and training institutions; and state funded institutions only. These systems only serve to restrict access to education and training. Key to their expansion is the improved openness to private education and training, provided by both in-country providers (a key example being the explosion of private providers in Central/Eastern European countries in the early 1990’s). Because higher education has been the traditional responsibility of national governments, private education (profit or non-profit) is viewed, often without cause, as second rate if not trustworthy. Even public institutions providing education services across borders need to be reminded that they are seen not as public but as private providers. A global campaign concerning the positive contributions of the private education sector would be an interesting, and probably fruitful exercise.

**Globalization of the Professions.** The global marketplace has accentuated the need for cross-border movement of professionals, thus providing additional pretense for international trade in education and training. Whether a new airport needs building in Hong Kong; a new accounting structure needs developing for a multi-national corporation based in Tokyo; an agricultural product needs tending in Africa; or a new information technology system requires attention in Buenos Aires, multiple professions are facing the need to prepare themselves for the global marketplace through higher education and professional development. This phenomenon is reflected by the two most quickly growing areas for transnational education: information technology (IT) and management education (the MBA). Among the professions, the most rapidly globalizing are those related to engineering and construction (including architecture) and accounting. Not far behind are medicine and specialized nursing (such as nurse anesthetists) and international law. The Center for Quality Assurance in International Education which I direct has,
since 1993, hosted an annual conference and produced a publication series on *The Globalization of Higher Education and the Professions*. Additional information on the journeys of the various professions and the impact this has had on the provision of cross-border education can be found by contacting the Center, beginning with its Web site: www.cqaie.org

**The Trade Agreements.** Within a decade of speeches, my one transparency which depicted the few bilateral and regional trade agreements in building block formation, has been replaced by three transparencies, listing only the regional trade agreements, and a fourth sheet describing the *mother of all trade agreements*, the World Trade Organization (WTO). The expanding export market in higher education and training and the new corporate development programs, accelerated by the new technologies, are but indicative of a larger activity: regional and global economic growth and subsequently increased academic and professional mobility. Generally speaking, trade restrictions based on national borders are increasingly at risk. The tenets of most of the recent trade agreements hold to principles of non-discriminatory treatment for service providers, including transnational education providers and the professions. The General Agreement on Trade in Services (GATS) of the World Trade Organization has begun to have an effect on business as usual by encouraging the development of common educational standards, mutual recognition and the liberalization of the processes by which professionals are permitted to practice.

**The Challenge to Transnational Education Providers**

As reported to the Office of the U.S. Trade Representative by the **National Committee on International Trade in Education (NCITE)**, [administered by the Center for Quality Assurance in International Education] higher education and training take on numerous forms when exported:

- **Branch Campuses**: campuses set up by an institution in a country to provide its educational programs to foreign students.
- **Franchises**: an institution (A) approves an institution (B) in another country to provide one or more of A’s programs to students in B’s country.
- **Articulation**: the systematic recognition by an institution (A) of specified study at an institution (B) in another country as partial credit towards a program at institution (A).
- **Twinning**: agreements between institutions in different countries to offer joint programs.
- **Corporate Programs**: many large corporations offer programs (some for academic credit from institutions) which cross national borders.
- **Companies**: which sell curriculum and training services.
- **Distance Education Programs**: those distance education programs that are delivered – through satellites, computers, correspondence, or other technological means – across national boundaries.
- **Study Abroad**: students from country (A) go to country (B) to live and study at an institution in country (B).
This same report by NCITE to USTR continues to report that, even with principles of non-discriminatory treatment for service providers, including institutions of higher education or the professions, the trade agreements are still too young to have provided the panacea needed for free trade in education services. Therefore, the challenges faced by cross-border providers are still many:

- In addition to not qualifying for benefits, students face difficulties in translating degrees obtained from foreign universities into national equivalents. Qualifications authorities in some countries have difficulty recognizing foreign educational credentials, whether received inside the country or out, as viable for positions such as those in the civil service.

- Other common barriers include custom regulations that limit the movement of education and training materials across borders. For example, medical and health related educators report that some of their materials that show the naked body in part or in whole are restricted from entry into countries with certain religious beliefs.

- In some cases, the flow of educational context is inhibited by telecommunications laws restricting the use of national satellites and receiving dishes to national entities.

- Existing barriers can limit the movement of persons, such as visas that are unnecessarily difficult or impossible for students, teachers, trainers, and administrative staff to obtain. In some countries, the acquisition of visas and work permits for teaching and administrative staff is tied to national politics related to imported education. Visas may also pose problems for third country learners (students from country C attending a university from country A with an educational program in country B).

- Foreign currency controls also pose problems for education and training entities wishing to establish themselves in other countries, with measures limiting direct investment by foreign providers (equity ceilings).

- Countries disregarding international agreements concerning intellectual property rights may also deter providers from bringing their materials across their borders.

Additional information on NCITE and barriers to education trade can be found at Web site: www.tradeineducation.org

**Toward Sustaining Quality**

The procedural and legal challenges outlined above, when coupled with the arduous task of “simply” moving from one culture to another, makes the provision of education and training across borders a true “labor of love”. The first thing to potentially suffer is the basic quality of the program or degree being exported. In the last couple of years in
particular, the United Kingdom has been criticized by Ministries of Education in such
countries as Israel and India for allowing its universities to franchise with poor
educational and training providers in those countries. (Franchising is the practice of an
institution (A) approving an institution (B) in another country to provide one or more of
A’s programs to students in B’s country.) The United States is no stranger to criticism by
receiving countries, and the Australians, the newest and, relatively speaking, most
successful providers, are being touted as aggressors in the educational marketplace. (The
Canadians and New Zealanders claim themselves more gentle, but it is probable that they,
too, will hear the cries of nouveau imperialism through education.) Recently, the
government of Greece passed a change to its Constitution that no longer recognizes
universities and education providers in its country which are not Greek, a move made
purportedly to protect its citizens from charlatans. The Chinese government generally
will only allow degrees to be given through its own universities; and the Hong Kong
government has devised a process for the approval of “non-local” education providers
because of the deluge of providers into that region of the world.

Faced with increasing attention on the problems related to the global education export
market, UNESCO and the Council of Europe formed a Working Group on Transnational
Education which met multiple times in 1998 and 1999 and developed a report for its
member countries which includes principles of good practice. These principles are not
unlike those produced by the regional accrediting bodies in the United States in the late
1980’s/early 90’s and those of the Higher Education Quality Council (currently
incorporated into the Quality Assurance Agency) in the mid 1990’s. It was my pleasure
to be the official U.S. representative to this Working Group although the U.S., U.K. and
Australian representatives distinctly felt the tension between those representing providing
countries and those representing receiving countries.

So, practically speaking, what should education and training exporters or wantabes
consider when exporting a program or degree across borders? The Center produced a
book published by The College Board entitled, Ambassadors of U.S. Education: Quality
Credit Bearing Programs Abroad (Editors John Deupree and Marjorie Peace Lenn)
which provides detail through case studies of experience in exporting by some of the
country’s major education providers. But for purposes of this article, the following is a
quick and dirty checklist of usual problem areas and questions for exporters to ask
themselves as they either commence or continue their offerings – whether actual
(physically based) or virtual (online or some form of distance education):

- **Mission:**
  Is the exported program or degree in keeping with the mission of the host institution?
  Who at the providing institution knows that the program is being exported? Who else
  needs to know?

- **Control:**
  At the heart of quality is who is in control. Is the governance of the exported program
  in control by the institution offering the degree? Is the academic program, teaching
  staff and all other key operations within reasonable control of the providing
  institution?

- **Academic Program and Teaching Staff:**
What language is going to be used to teach the curriculum? Are the instructors qualified to teach the curriculum? Do they have equivalent qualifications to the home institution? If tutors are used, are they qualified to supplement the teaching of the curriculum?

- **Learning Resources:**
  Is there the adequate provision of library resources to support the curriculum? Are there laboratories and instructional equipment available appropriate to the curriculum?

- **Students:**
  What is the language requirement for admitting students? If it differs from the home institution’s requirements, can that be justified? Are students being admitted which you know can successfully complete the program?

- **Student Services:**
  Is the providing institution providing appropriate services to support the academic program for the students, such as hostels, cantinas, academic advising, and other support networks?

- **Physical Resources:**
  Unless this is an online program, is the physical plant for the educational entity appropriate and adequate for the program?

- **Financial Resources:**
  Are appropriate fees, including tuition, being asked for services rendered? Are profits appropriately shared between maintaining a quality program and sending a percentage to the home institution? Is the home institution in control of the financial resources?

Educational institutions and entities experienced in (externally) globalizing will soon be joined by those which have just begun to think about (internally) internationalizing. Some will globalize without ever moving (through electronic means) while others will make acquisitions or will build academic campuses throughout the globe. The trends outlined in this article are propelling change in ways never seen before.

[Note: The Center for Quality Assurance in International Education (CQAIE) and its National Council for International Trade in Education (NCITE) invite you to participate in its activities and avail yourselves of its research and publications, starting with the Web sites cited in this article: www.tradeineducation.org and www.cqaie.org.]

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