

Response and Reaction

energy studies, and international relations.

What are the “objective criteria” that the ministry will use to determine who belongs to the “Top 30”? Among the examples they give are the following: the number of research articles published in refereed journals, the number of times faculty members’ articles are quoted by other scholars, the number of papers read at international conferences, the number of presentations by graduate students at academic conferences, and the number of patents approved and those pending. Still in the realm of the quantitative, evaluators will judge universities by the number of Nobel Prize winners on the faculty, recipients of honors from the Japan Academy of Science, Ph.D.s on the faculty, and faculty with experience in studying overseas.

Another criterion will be the number of research grants faculty members have received, both from the government and from private sources. Solid connections with business will also be considered important, especially in joint research projects. Universities will also be judged by the professional performance of graduates on completion of their graduate studies, the number of graduate degrees conferred, and so on. And the final set of criteria concerns the overall administration of the university: how much leadership does the president exercise? how much importance is placed on faculty development? how is the university evaluated from outside? how good is the library? the computer facilities? are class evaluations by the students being carried out?

The heavy emphasis on science, engineering, and medicine as key areas, and the criteria for evaluation play to the strengths of the national and public universities. So much so, that soon after the ministry published this plan, a prominent weekly magazine (the *Asahi Weekly*) made its own prediction of who would be listed in the “Top 30,” and only one private university (Keio) made the grade. Prestigious Waseda University was the only other private university to place even in the “Top 40,” according to the *Asahi* ranking.

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Three years ago, the University Council, made up of educators, businesspeople, bureaucrats, and so on issued an excellent document on the reform of higher education in Japan. Among other things, the report stressed the importance of undergraduate education and of the liberal arts to provide a broad perspective before specializing in one particular area. It particularly encouraged each university to emphasize its own uniqueness and individuality, which was very reassuring to private universities. Now the Edu-

cation ministry seems to be moving in a different direction. The emphasis is on competition and particularly on the graduate level in science and engineering research.

At the moment there are 649 four-year universities in Japan: 99 national, 72 public, and 478 private. This year 30 percent of the private universities failed to reach their quota of incoming freshmen. With these latest developments in Japanese higher education, how many private universities will be forced to close their doors or else merge with other institutions during the next few years?

Stay tuned for further developments. ■

“Pseudo U” or “What’s in a Name”?

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In the lead article in *International Higher Education*, fall 2001, Philip Altbach makes an important and provocative attack on “The Rise of the Pseudouniversities.” His “pseudouniversities” are for-profit postsecondary institutions specializing in high-demand fields. Altbach articulates arguments often made about these institutions and raises several interesting points. Unlike more zealous critics, he neither advocates closing pseudouniversities nor denies their value. But, he declares “it is time to call a halt” to allowing these institutions to label themselves as universities. Only a rash response would attempt a blanket defense of pseudouniversities or a full refutation of Altbach’s case. Given the surge of pseudouniversities, however, it is worthwhile to engage in debate about how to depict them most accurately. What follows raises doubts about the case for denying the U. in Pseudo U.

Much of this debate depends on comparisons to other forms of higher education. Altbach calls pseudouniversities “an entirely new model.” Although it is appropriate to identify how pseudouniversities differ from classical universities, and to make a strong case for certain classical forms, we cannot assume that what has “been at the heart of the university” is what should remain there. Who decides what financial, governance, or curriculum changes are permissible without surrendering the university nomenclature?

More importantly, to what *present* reality do we contrast Pseudo U.? The bulk of public and nonprofit private institutions routinely and legally called universities cannot all be considered high-quality research universities. By the faculty or research or other standards of Altbach’s true university, woefully few institutions in the developing world merit the name. Rectors of Latin America’s national uni-

versities commonly decry the use of “university” by most public and private institutions other than their own, though even most of their institutions are Altbach-like universities in only certain respects. Nor is it just an issue of academic quality. If universities must have academic freedom, then Peking University drops off a list that also could not include any universities of the former Soviet Union. Indeed, the same fall issue of *International Higher Education* describes the following public university realities: ethical erosion in South Korea, declining public support and increased consultancy dependence in Australia, academic and other collapse at the University of El Salvador, and the neglect of knowledge contexts in African universities. Who may cast what stones about the U. in Pseudo U?

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What is a “Real University”?

Higher education is notoriously ablaze with definitional ambiguities. If we clamp down on what is a “real” university, need we likewise figure out where to clamp down on what is “real” higher or tertiary education or “real” research or training or “real” master’s or doctoral levels or “real” private or public institutions? There is a case for enhanced clarity on any of these scores, but the case is hardly a clear-cut one. Altbach notes exactly that when he poses the question “is there a problem?” This is a complex question. Whom must we protect from what? Recent empirical work in the United States strongly indicates that students and faculty at for-profits do not feel deceived but instead are quite satisfied. It is hard to imagine that many enter the University of Phoenix anticipating a classical university education—or that employers hire them anticipating that they have gotten a University of California–like education. We need much more research to determine the situation regarding students and for-profits elsewhere in the world. Meanwhile, we know that public university students in many countries feel deceived regarding their education and its value.

Altbach legitimately raises the issue of protecting “the traditional universities and their critically central functions.” It is often tricky, however, to distinguish between protecting such functions and simply protecting embedded institutional interests. Legislation to restrict the use of terms like university is often driven by political interests as much as any educational reason. Also, although Altbach aptly admonishes traditional universities not to surrender public missions to surging commercialism and managerialism, it would be a stretch to imagine that such commercialism is

provoked mostly by the success of for-profit pseudouniversities. We might just as well hope that the latter give some latitude for the public universities to hold more than otherwise to noncommercial functions.

Government Interests in the “University”

Whatever efforts we make toward clearer labeling and distinctions within our academic work, we should be wary about the political labeling process. Initial surveying by the Educational Commission of the States indicates that most U.S. states do not have separate regulations for for-profit and nonprofit higher education institutions. More generally, compared to other countries, the United States (trusting relatively nonintrusive private accreditation agencies) has been historically less consumed by the idea of officially proclaiming what is what, including what is a university, and this posture has been favorable for competition and innovation. On the other hand, where countries like Brazil have legislated the prerequisites to be a university, they have contributed to the rise of what we might call pseudo-faculties, pseudo-research, pseudo-master’s, and pseudo-full-time academic staff.

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Pseudo U. does not deserve a free pass from regulation just because it does not live off public money, and it certainly should not get a free pass from the kind of scrutiny Altbach introduces. Needed now is ongoing research and debate, especially focused on the reality of Pseudo U. within the reality of the higher education overall. Meanwhile, let us remember that Shakespeare invoked the rose not to attack sloppy terminology but to uphold the pre-eminence of reality over labels.

Erratum

In Damtew Teferra’s article *The Knowledge Context of African Universities* (IHE 25, page 24 first column) under the subsection “Importing Knowledge” SAREC should have been identified as the Swedish Agency for Research and Cooperation with Developing Countries.