

INTERNATIONAL HIGHER EDUCATION

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Introduction

This special issue of *International Higher Education* focuses on the many challenges relating to the COVID-19 crisis, how it is affecting higher education around the world at the national, institutional, and individual levels, and what some of the future implications may be. Without question, this unexpected global pandemic will have a very significant impact on higher education worldwide. This issue provides perspectives from the front lines of the crisis in real time and on all continents. We thank all our authors for providing us with information and insights in record time.

Postpandemic Outlook for Higher Education is Bleakest for the Poorest

Philip G. Altbach and Hans de Wit

In the midst of crisis, with the scope and outcomes largely unclear, it is too early to accurately predict the broader implications of the coronavirus pandemic for higher education or for society in general. We have argued (COVID-19: The Internationalization Revolution That Isn't, *University World News*, March 14, 2020—also in this issue of *IHE*) that the basic configuration of internationalization is likely to remain. And we think that, broadly, global higher education will remain fundamentally stable. But significant short-, medium-, and perhaps long-term consequences and disruptions are inevitable—becoming increasingly serious as the crisis continues. Our purpose here is to outline what we think are likely implications.

It is, of course, folly to overly generalize about the broad landscape of postsecondary education worldwide—with more than 20,000 universities and 200 million students. Higher education is everywhere segmented and differentiated, with public and private institutions with vastly differing resources and serving different needs. This is true within countries, and across borders. Thus, generalizing about individual countries or about the world as a whole is not very useful.

Further, so much depends on the broader political and economic realities that will emerge from the crisis. Without question, the global and national economies will take a massive hit. Low per-capita income countries are likely to suffer more and take longer to recover. Economic recovery will take time, with many arguing that implications will be more serious than the Great Recession, and it seems impossible that higher education will have a high priority in national recovery plans. Whether the current trends toward nationalism and populism in many countries will be strengthened by the crisis is unclear, but there are indications that these malign trends will continue.

The very future of globalization may be called into question, although the underlying realities of the twenty-first century will make its survival likely. Significant aspects of contemporary higher education depend on globalization: not only student mobility and internationalization initiatives, but also collaborative research, and, increasingly, global knowledge networks and other aspects.

Abstract

COVID-19 is creating a broad-based crisis for higher education globally. The implications include challenges to the internationalization of higher education—a key global element in recent decades, financial challenges, and others. Students and academic institutions in low-income countries and in less affluent parts of other nations will be especially affected.

Thus, fundamental elements of the global macroenvironment in general and of higher education are being threatened by the COVID-19 crisis, and this might negatively impact on support for internationalization, while international cooperation is needed more than ever.

The Fittest Will Survive

Research universities and top quality institutions that are globally and nationally recognized and have stable income streams, such as the Indian Institutes of Technology and elite American private liberal arts colleges and similar institutions worldwide, will recover more rapidly and emerge relatively unscathed from the crisis. Their role at the top of higher education will remain and perhaps will even be strengthened. These institutions are in general better able to protect their staff and students during a crisis and will be able to attract new students and overcome admissions disruptions and other instabilities.

At the other end of the spectrum, those institutions that are most at risk are poorly funded private institutions depending entirely on tuition fees—and half the world's post-secondary institutions are private. This reality affects especially low-income countries, where a low-quality private sector increasingly dominates higher education. Much of the global massification, as well as international student mobility, has been driven by the emergence of a middle-class—these groups are likely to be affected most by post-coronavirus higher education adjustments, as Simon Marginson pointed out in *Times Higher Education* and in *University World News* on March 26. One estimate for the United States is that perhaps 20 percent of postsecondary institutions will close.

Research

In the aftermath of the COVID-19 crisis, where the significance of research to manage and solve the crisis, invent vaccines, and support society with related crucial projects has become evident to policy makers and the public, it is possible that top research institutions, in particular those specialized in the life sciences, will receive greater emphasis and funding.

A Deep Financial Crisis

Universities, public and private, face immediate financial problems during the COVID-19 crisis since their campuses are closed. It is not clear how admissions will be handled for the coming year or two. Many universities have already stopped hiring new staff. For prestigious private universities, mainly in the United States, endowments have lost value with declines in the stock market. Most of them will recover, but for the mid-term, it will affect them. Because of massive expenditures aimed at stabilizing economies during the crisis, it is likely that future public allocations to higher education will shrink.

Increased Inequality

Higher education—globally and within countries—is characterized by inequalities of all kinds. The COVID-19 crisis is likely to exacerbate these inequalities, as highlighted above: private institutions catering for the masses will suffer the brunt of the depression, while, at the same time, there may be an increase in demand for community colleges in the United States and less expensive professional schools elsewhere. In times of unemployment, education is an alternative choice, but it has to be affordable.

Distance vs Face-to-Face Education

Universities worldwide have had to shift to 100 percent online teaching. There have been reports of significant success, but also of abject failure. Access to appropriate technology and internet speed—or even access to the Internet at all—is a significant challenge, reflecting, again, deep inequalities between students. While lessons are being learned, the skills of teaching staff upgraded (very much through learning by doing), and learning platforms and online curricula improved, we doubt that there will be a profound and lasting “technological revolution” in higher education. But the COVID-19 crisis will significantly expand the use of distance education. And from now on, teaching staff may become less reluctant regarding opportunities offered by hybrid teaching models.

Yet, for many reasons—community, prestige, teaching networking, and learning advantages, among others—students and academics will continue to prefer face-to-face higher education. The traditional university experience may increasingly become the privilege of wealthier students enrolled at top universities.

International Student Mobility

As we wrote in [our commentary on the short-term implications of the crisis](#), its impact on international student mobility is uncertain. Institutions and countries that have been dependent on revenue from international students will try as soon as possible to go back into the market. As Simon Marginson observes, that market will become a buyer's market with institutions "hunting for scarce international students for some years to come." But that market will be far more vulnerable, more competitive, and less massive, and the provision may shift to some degree from high-income countries to middle-income countries that can offer lower costs. Simon Marginson reckons that it will take at least five years to recover.

Maybe, but we will not go back to the *status quo ante*. The industry that has developed over the past decades—agents, pathway programs, and recruitment companies—will decline drastically and will need to adapt to new models to survive. Issues such as student safety and well-being will become more important push and pull factors in decisions of students and their parents.

Study abroad programs in which students participate for a year, a semester, or even shorter periods, may suffer even greater problems as students assess possible risks and challenges for experiences that are mandatory for their academic success. In Europe, the flagship program Erasmus+ might encounter serious cuts instead of its anticipated rise in funding. In the United States, one of the larger providers of study abroad, the Council on International Educational Exchange, has announced that it will eliminate 600 jobs.

No Academic Revolution

While it is impossible to make clear predictions in the midst of the most severe global health crisis in a century, implications for higher education will be considerable and mostly negative, amplifying gaps and inequalities between learners, institutions, and countries. There will be significant variations globally, with the likelihood that universities in the poorest part of the world will be affected more severely. ▲

There will be significant variations globally, with the likelihood that universities in the poorest part of the world will be affected more severely.

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Sustaining the Values of Tertiary Education during the COVID-19 Crisis

Roberta Malee Bassett

As of April 6, 2020, universities and other tertiary education institutions are closed in 170 countries and communities, and over 220 million postsecondary students—13 percent of the total number of students affected globally—have already had their studies ended or significantly disrupted due to COVID-19. What we are seeing globally is impact in every region and a notably pronounced effect on upper- and lower-middle income countries. In general, this distributed effect reflects the spread patterns of the coronavirus from the middle-income countries of East Asia to Europe and North America and,

Abstract

In the rush to respond to the COVID-19 pandemic—eliminating pathways for spreading the virus by closing physical campuses—institutions the world over turned their initial focus toward teaching, and, to a lesser extent, research. This response is important in the first flush of change. It is imperative, however, to maintain a commitment to some core values in tertiary education—such as equity and social responsibility—to ensure stability during and after the crisis.

to a lesser extent, Latin America. As the virus spreads into the African and South Asian regions, the numbers of affected lower-middle and low-income countries have risen. Few countries today are claiming no impact from the pandemic. Tertiary education around the globe has been affected in a way not seen since World War II.

In the rush to respond to the immediate health and social welfare threat—eliminating pathways for spreading the virus by closing physical campuses—institutions the world over turned their initial focus toward teaching, and, to a somewhat lesser extent, research. Key concerns have included: how do we teach to those we have an obligation to teach? How do we support research continuity where possible? This response is logical and important in the first flush of change. It is imperative, however, that those in a position to think beyond immediate survival—by providing remote learning via a plethora of modalities—keep an eye on core values in any tertiary education sector, so that when the crisis abates, fundamental values such as equity, a baseline assurance of quality, accountability balanced with institutional autonomy, academic freedom, and social responsibility remain within the mission of all tertiary education systems.

The Myth of Technical Adaptability in Tertiary Education

Online and distance learning have forced massive adaptation in how information is delivered, strongly impacting how (and whether) students learn. But the implicit bias in this move, which assumes and requires a level of technical capacity, has left literally millions of students without any form of continued learning once they left their campuses. There is a myth that tertiary students and tertiary education would be more easily adaptable to this remote learning environment, but why should this be? Students enrolled on campuses that are fully equipped with technology and infrastructure return home to the same neighborhoods as their primary and secondary school neighbors. If there is no internet penetration into their cities or regions to bring remote education to primary and secondary school students, there is none for tertiary. Moreover, tertiary education is a largely bespoke endeavor, where students craft their academic calendar according to their fields of study and their interests. Such academic work cannot be delivered by radio or television, as is an option for younger students.

Expanded Inequality in the Move to Online Course Delivery

As seen in Ethiopia and the Philippines, among a growing number of countries, students are now protesting the equity disparity that is exacerbated by access to distance learning technology. Students without access or the resources to afford the technology are being left behind. Student with learning challenges are being left behind. Students with disabilities are being left behind. Students who rely on their institutions for housing, food, healthcare, and community find themselves uprooted and uncertain about their options. Students who work on campus or receive scholarships as their main income are faced with a crisis of earnings. Institutions away from urban centers, often without robust infrastructure, are being left behind. Institutions with missions to teach those most likely to fall out of the education pipeline are being left behind. This was true before the pandemic, which is exacerbating the speed at which disparities are affecting student persistence and institutional survival. And this is true all over the world.

Few institutions, including the wealthiest and most respected universities, had emergency plans to instruct and inform their closures and moves to distance learning. Even fewer had plans for a sustained mass evacuation of their campuses. Now is a sound time, while leaders are living the experience, to study every step of this pandemic response to assess and document lessons learned, what they wished they had known and prepared ahead of time, what information is still needed to support their academic staff to become better at remote instruction today and for the remainder of this academic year, to plan for medium-term adaptations, and, eventually, a reopening of campuses with the resilience to face challenges of campus closures in the future. Such analytical efforts today can inform how management can provide a better support for students tomorrow and in the future.

What Can We Learn from the Crisis?

Education leaders and stakeholders must also seek and produce evidence from the learning sciences while embracing technological innovations, to ensure that this push to change the delivery of teaching to online or future blended platforms delivers on the promise of learning and skills development. Such changes must be studied for efficacy and to understand best what works and does not, and for whom. To date, most online learning approaches do not have comparable, evidence-based foundations or focus on the socioemotional skills delivered via traditional campus-based learning, and this should be concerning enough to drive investments in the science of teaching and learning.

In doing so, and while leading their tertiary education systems into the postcrisis world, policy makers and practitioners alike will need to focus their efforts on the most vulnerable students. They must ensure that teaching and learning solutions, technological set-up, infrastructure investments, and funding modalities are geared toward keeping these students engaged and connected, and support their learning process and outcomes. ▲

To date, most online learning approaches do not have comparable, evidence-based foundations or focus on the socioemotional skills delivered via traditional campus-based learning.

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The Impact of COVID-19 on Global Higher Education

Giorgio Marinoni and Hilligje van't Land

On March 11, 2020, COVID-19—an infectious respiratory disease caused by a novel coronavirus that emerged in Wuhan, China—was declared a pandemic by the World Health Organization. As of April 1, 2020, more than 3.4 billion people, representing 43 percent of the world population, are in lockdown in more than 80 countries and territories around the world.

Lockdown and social confinement measures have an enormous impact on higher education. Higher education has been disrupted as never before, but the fact that campuses are physically closed does not mean that higher education institutions (HEIs) have stopped functioning. On the contrary, faced with multiple challenges, they have had to respond quickly and find new solutions to previously unknown problems and new ways in which to continue teaching, conducting research, and serving society.

Challenges to Internationalization

The first aspect of higher education impacted by COVID-19 has been internationalization, in particular student mobility. At the beginning of the epidemic, HEIs in countries not yet affected had international students on their campuses who were citizens of affected countries, or had their own students on exchange at HEIs in affected countries. With the imposition of travel restrictions, international students deciding to interrupt their stay either managed to return to their home countries or found themselves forced to remain in their host countries. HEIs adopted different solutions to these situations, such as working with governments to ensure the repatriation of students and providing additional support to international students held up in host countries (e.g., allowing them to remain in student dormitories even after the end of term).

Abstract

The COVID-19 pandemic is having an enormous impact on higher education. In many countries around the world, campuses are closed and teaching has moved online. Internationalization has slowed down considerably. Despite these challenges, HEIs have reacted positively, often implementing new solutions to continue providing teaching, research, and service to society.

Collaboration with governments, businesses, and nongovernmental organizations is vital to ensure that no student is left behind.

Impact on Teaching

The lockdown posed other, more complex, challenges to campuses. The primary challenge related to continuing teaching when students, faculty, and staff could no longer be physically present on campus. The obvious solution was to expand online teaching. In a relatively short time, HEIs have been able to move whole programs of study online with some having to start a new term fully online. HEIs in China have been the pioneers of this evolution toward online teaching and were soon followed by HEIs in other parts of the world.

However, there are several challenges to moving teaching and learning online; the most obvious is unequal access to information and communication technology. In some countries, such as Brazil, internet access for students is so limited that some HEIs have decided to close completely. Moving their teaching online would only benefit a very small percentage of their student body, thus perpetuating and enhancing a huge inequality and disparity in opportunities, allowing rich students to continue their studies and leaving poor students behind. Another, less obvious, challenge is the quality of on-line provision when staff are unprepared, in a context of emergency.

In such cases, collaboration with governments, businesses, and nongovernmental organizations is vital to ensure that no student is left behind. This is the approach adopted by the UNESCO Global Education Coalition, an initiative to support countries in sharing and scaling up their best distance learning practices. The coalition's main focus is on primary and secondary education, but higher education is included as well.

Impact on Research

COVID-19 is having both negative and positive impacts on research. On the negative side, COVID-19 is making it impossible for researchers to travel and work together properly, and is therefore complicating the completion of joint research projects. On the positive side, many HEIs are committing their labs and teams to research on COVID-19, searching for a vaccine and/or for drugs capable of treating the disease, or collecting and disseminating information on the disease. The COVID-19 Data Center of John Hopkins University, for instance, tracks daily global trends on COVID-19 worldwide.

Societal Mission of Higher Education

Besides HEIs with medical hospitals, which are at the forefront of the fight against COVID-19, many HEIs around the world are helping their local communities by housing patients on their premises, making research publications publicly available, or informing local communities on preventive measures against the spread of the disease. While COVID-19 is an unprecedented challenge for HEIs around the world, HEIs are actively undertaking initiatives to fight the virus and minimize the disruptions caused by the pandemic.

Global Cooperation Paramount

Due to the unequal share of resources and capacities among HEIs around the world, global cooperation is paramount. Without cooperation, the search for a vaccine and/or a treatment for COVID-19 would be slower and inefficient; teaching would only be beneficial to part of the student population, exacerbating inequalities; and the benefit for society would be reduced to a minimum. We do not yet know the medium- and long-term effects of the pandemic on health, the economy, and the sociocultural dimensions of our societies, but they will be multiple and complex to mitigate.

Actions of the International Association of Universities (IAU) to Promote Global Cooperation

In order to promote global cooperation and support HEIs, the IAU has developed various initiatives. First, IAU launched a global survey on the impact of COVID-19 at HEIs around the world. The results of the survey will help better understand how the epidemic is affecting HEIs in different parts of the world. Once the pandemic is over, IAU plans to conduct a second version of the survey in order to monitor its medium- to long-term effects and map actions undertaken by HEIs both as immediate responses to the pandemic and for the future. IAU is also collecting and sharing resources on COVID-19 and will conduct a series of webinars reflecting on the future of higher education in a post-COVID-19 world.

This unprecedented crisis reaffirms that in such difficult times, sharing resources is the only way for the global higher education community to rise to the challenge and proudly claim its fundamental role in society. ▲

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Crisis upon Crisis: Refugees and COVID-19

Hakan Ergin

Without any doubt, the refugee crisis is one of the heaviest challenges that has ever confronted international higher education. Universities around the world are being approached by unexpected guests knocking at their doors and asking for access. Policy makers are being forced to reform their admission procedures for international students and to consider applications from refugees who, more often than not, lack necessary qualifications or the documentation thereof, such as proof of previous academic coursework and proficiency in the host country's language.

Inevitably, this "forced internationalization" requires universities to address serious issues: getting involved in the complex bureaucracy of assessing refugees' (often incomplete) qualifications, providing them with financial aid, helping them overcome their traumatic experiences, while they also have to cope with social tensions due to competition for university admission with local applicants. While universities around the world are struggling with these issues, matters have been worsened by the recent outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic. Drastic measures have been taken to protect international students and help them continue their programs remotely during the pandemic, but this is hardly an alternative for refugees due to obvious disadvantages.

No Sweet Home for Quarantine

Universities around the world seem to be responding to the COVID-19 crisis in the same way. They paused face-to-face classes and instead began teaching online, shut down campuses, and asked students to isolate themselves at home until further notice. Meanwhile, international students were immediately advised to return to their home countries before borders closed. These well-intentioned measures to protect students are without any doubt praiseworthy. However, most refugee students do not have comfortable homes in which to quarantine themselves. Due to health-related, financial, and academic disadvantages, refugee students are more vulnerable to the COVID-19 epidemic than their peers.

First and foremost, in terms of health, refugee students are more at risk than other students. Before the epidemic, most were provided psychological support by their universities' counselling centers. Face-to-face services are now suspended, like other on-campus services. The benefit of online psychological support is a question mark with respect to refugees.

In this turbulent time of the pandemic, refugee students are also financially disadvantaged. The vast majority have to work while studying, but the suspension of university services has resulted in a pause of on-campus employment. Outside of campus, the situation is worse. The economic recession caused by the pandemic and the imposition of curfews are hitting sectors where most refugees work informally, depriving them of their modest incomes. The World Health Organization has been repeatedly stating that during self-quarantine, everyone should ensure good nutrition to strengthen one's immune

Abstract

COVID-19 is an unprecedented test on higher education. What is unchanged, though, is that refugee students remain victims. Their disadvantages are health related, financial, and academic, making them more vulnerable to the pandemic than other students. It is aggravating that this virus has been associated with "otherness." Nationalists and populists point at refugees as scapegoats spreading the disease. This adds to the hardship that they are currently suffering and, post-COVID-19, will linger as a threat.

The coronavirus has been associated with “otherness.”

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system against the coronavirus. Unfortunately, for a refugee student without a regular income, this is an unaffordable luxury.

Finally, academic challenges magnify the hardships faced by refugee students. Universities are asking their international students to stay registered for online classes and complete them successfully in order to maintain their student status. However, efficiently attending online classes requires a good Wi-Fi connection and a computer equipped with a camera and microphone. In order to ensure the attendance of all students to online classes, some universities in various parts of the world started a new type of financial aid for students in need. Boğaziçi University in Turkey decided to pay the internet fee for two months for students who cannot afford it. Similarly, the Royal Melbourne Institute of Technology (RMIT) in Australia committed to pay up to A\$1,000 to students in need of financial aid, to help them cover the cost of internet connection, software, hardware, subscriptions, and other digital materials.

These inclusive practices are likely to increase refugee students' participation in online classes but are offered by very few universities. Therefore, online course requirements such as attendance check, in-class presentations, assignments, and overall evaluation should be redesigned in consideration of the special circumstances of refugee students. Otherwise, online higher education is not a level playing field.

Post-COVID-19 Discrimination at the Door

Refugee students are facing yet another serious challenge. The coronavirus has been associated with “otherness.” Countries closed their borders to protect themselves from contamination originating from “other countries.” President Donald Trump called the coronavirus the “Chinese virus.” In a time when “others” are under suspicion, refugees—the most alien group in society—attract negative attention. Refugee camps with few COVID-19 cases in low-income regions are reported in the media as highly dangerous places—although the numbers of coronavirus cases in big cities of higher-income countries are much higher. Hungary's nationalist prime minister, Viktor Orban, stated that “there is a logical connection between migration and the coronavirus as both spread with movement.” Matteo Salvini, the populist opposition leader of Italy, blamed African migrants, arguing that “the presence of the virus was confirmed in Africa,” while the number of the cases in Italy itself was considerably higher.

In pre-COVID-19 times, refugee students were already *personae non gratae*, considered to be a financial burden to national budgets and competing with local candidates for admission to university. With the current pandemic crisis, exacerbated by nationalism and populism, refugee students may easily become scapegoats, as they are already tarnished in the media as unhealthy and carriers of the virus. The best way to fight this misconception is to remind people of those refugees willing to risk their lives in their host countries. There are many cases of refugees with healthcare education and experience from their home countries, currently offering their expertise to fight the pandemic, but blocked from doing so because their background is not recognized. (In the United States, undocumented immigrants working in the healthcare system are even being threatened with deportation.)

The pandemic does not create discrimination, people do. Equity must be preserved in international higher education, and individuals, rumors, or ideologies must not be allowed to deprive refugees of the right to education, especially in this time of great stress for our societies. ▲

The Response of International Higher Education Associations to COVID-19

Gerardo Blanco and Hans de Wit

The ongoing coronavirus pandemic is causing significant concern within the higher education sector with devastating effects, in particular, on the student exchange community. Layoffs at many international exchange organizations testify to the gravity of the pandemic and are a warning of what colleges and universities may expect. Yet, COVID-19 can also be seen as a test of the ability of higher education institutions and their associations to adapt and accelerate the pace of change.

International education professionals have had to make difficult decisions to safely repatriate students and faculty, advise and reassure international students, and cancel exchange and study abroad programs, while also facing the enormous financial implications of their decisions. These professionals are members of numerous academic and professional associations, which, like in other academic fields, provide information and guidance, but are also expecting contributions from their members at a time when professional activity in almost every sector is in complete disarray.

Cancellations

The early months of 2020 witnessed an avalanche of conference cancellations. As the crisis expanded through Europe and North America, many organizations have had to cancel their events or hastily move them online. The Asia Pacific Association for International Education (APAIE) was the first one, and postponed its March 2020 Conference in Vancouver to next year. NAFSA: Association of International Educators, canceled its Annual Conference and Expo held at the end of May. The Comparative International Education Society (CIES) turned its 2020 conference into a virtual event. The European Association for International Education (EAIE) is tentatively planning to postpone its annual conference from September to October 2020, a period that will be exceedingly crowded if conference activities are at all allowed to resume in the fall. Such decisions have enormous financial implications as a result of prior contractual obligations with venues and vendors. The issue of refunds is being extensively debated on social media. CIES is issuing refunds only to students and low-income country members and is appealing to its members' understanding, while others are promising refunds but anticipate delays in processing them.

Decisions to cancel, postpone, or digitize conferences have clear parallels with decisions to cancel exchange programs, or advising whether or when international students and scholars should return to their home countries. These are momentous decisions that have to be taken rapidly, often with insufficient information, as nobody knows what borders will close or reopen, or whether commercial flights will be available. Canceling a conference can send the budgets of smaller associations into the red. The longer-term outlook is not promising: in the aftermath of the crisis, universities will likely implement austerity measures, starting with limiting travel and professional development funding.

COVID-19 has forced teaching and learning to innovate and, in a similar way, it is forcing the international education community to rethink how conferences and professional development should be delivered. When the pandemic passes, we will most likely be looking forward to connecting with each other in person again, but hybrid or remote participation from presenters, instructors, and members of the audience will likely be the new normal.

Abstract

COVID-19 impacts not only students and staff at colleges and universities, but also academic associations, including international higher education associations, forcing them to adapt how they provide support and expertise to their members.

The early months of 2020 witnessed an avalanche of conference cancellations.

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Professional Development and Public Engagement

Webinars and virtual town halls have become normal spaces for sharing expertise among colleagues grappling with similar issues. Many of these virtual forums are managed by international education associations. Resource pages with advice or information digests have been created. NAFSA, for instance, has made many of its COVID-19 resources accessible without requiring a membership. The Association of International Education Administrators (AIEA) is organizing virtual town hall meetings, and the European Universities Association (EUA) is replacing its annual conference with free webinars. Other associations such as the International Association of Universities (IAU), the Inter-American Organization for Higher Education (IOHE), and the Canadian Bureau for International Education (CBIE) are also organizing webinars on the impact of the crisis on internationalization and higher education. This is a positive development, which also demonstrates the concern of organizations to position themselves online as reliable sources of updates and expertise.

As representatives of large professional sectors, associations have mobilized to represent their constituents' needs before public authorities. AIEA has sent a letter to US legislators requesting financial relief for international exchange organizations, as part of the effort to stimulate the economy. The EAIE has addressed an [open letter to the European Commission](#), urging flexibility and a timely response on a range of fronts, in particular in support of Erasmus+ students and, in general, of students who have been adversely affected by the crisis.

During this period when people are locked in their homes and borders are closed, it is more important than ever that international education associations sustain their advocacy effort in favor of international exchanges and cooperation. ▲

COVID-19: An Unexpected and Unusual Driver to Online Education

Dodzi Amemado

Abstract

COVID-19 is creating havoc and contributing to a social panic that has led to a temporary closure of most campuses across the globe. It has become impossible to meet face-to-face for on-campus course delivery and in-person interactions, using the university's physical setting for intellectual and academic pursuits. This article discusses the implications of the shift to online education for higher education.

Based on statistics by UNESCO, as of March 23, 2020, 1.7 billion students and learners around the world were unable to go to school or university. This figure accounts for 90 percent of the world's student population. In the wake of this situation, a consequence of the COVID-19 outbreak, most universities have asked their faculty members to start teaching online, without gauging the challenges of teaching an entire curriculum in that modality. Many university administrations have been faced with the burden of moving hundreds of courses online at once. What message does this unexpected rush into online education send out to the higher education sector? What challenges are most often experienced, and what are the short-term and long-term implications of integrating online courses into higher education?

Increased Legitimacy of Online Education

With this sudden and unexpected rush, online education worldwide has come one substantial step further. Since the late 1990s, when the Internet started playing a role in course delivery, higher education institutions (HEIs) have been gradually leveraging this innovation and changing their strategic directions. Online instruction proved to be

convenient for working adults and appreciated by millennials. This encouraged universities to make use of online instruction to enrich course content and attract students. As new needs emerge among target groups, the legitimacy of online education keeps increasing and its *raison d'être* becomes irrevocable.

For instance, through flipped classrooms, making course materials available online is the best pedagogical technique to teach some academic topics. The benefits are not only pedagogical, but also social and economic. For digital natives, online is a preferred medium for social interactions, and their expectations around multimodality and online tools keep increasing. For working adults, taking online instead of in-person courses has an economic benefit. Online education also fosters a global knowledge society, international partnerships, and content sharing and regional collaboration among universities. It reaches out to refugees and prisoners, expanding the service mission of universities. In countries where higher education is weighed down by massification, online education may be part of the solution for increasing access. And now, online education is being used to circumvent in-person meetings out of fear of contamination from the coronavirus.

Challenges of Online Education

Delivering education online has been adopted by almost all universities around the world at different paces, ranging from the off-line, drop-and-go model to highly intensive, well-structured, and fully online programs. Yet, some challenges are still getting in the way of e-learning in higher education. At African universities, these are mostly relating to connectivity issues, lack of infrastructure, and cost of data, while in Asian countries, such as India and China, the most serious challenges are financial costs, regulations, the digital gap, and the cultural leap for teachers. In Europe, the main obstacles are students' self-motivation and self-organization skills in fully online educational settings. And there is a common misperception that teaching or taking courses online might be less demanding than face-to-face courses. Keeping up with the technology and getting faculty to adapt to the cultural change are seen as the main difficulties at North American and Australian universities. In Latin America, the obstacles are achieving a higher level of engagement among students and ensuring course quality. Without pretending to be exhaustive, this list helps explain the reluctance to online higher education at universities around the world—but progress is inevitable and becoming faster.

Short-Term and Long-Term Implications of the Online Shift

With the COVID-19 pandemic, all these challenges are hampering universities' efforts to shift online. A panel discussion hosted on March 20, 2020 by *The Chronicle of Higher Education* described the current endeavor of faculty rushing to develop courses online as "drinking out of a fire hose."

While this mandatory move online has taken higher education by surprise, the debate should not focus on the opposition between optimists and skeptics. (Optimists think that online education will become mainstream in higher education. Skeptics are doubtful that online education will play any major role in the future of higher education.) In the short term, the question might rather be how to make online education as good and reliable as possible, to maximize the quality of teaching and learning experiences and the level of satisfaction of all users, while it is the only option available for higher education. In the longer term, when the situation returns to normalcy, HEIs might consider including online education as part of their regular pedagogical offer. Making it mandatory for students to take some courses entirely online, as a few conventional universities are already doing, can be a starting point. For universities, following this path is in line with the prevailing digital culture in our society. The growth of online education over the past decade indicates an increasing structural shift for HEIs, and not in the sense of a replacement of on-campus education. Whether to achieve blended learning for on-campus students, or to offer fully online programs for distant learners, efforts should be encouraged to identify best practices, integrate new and emerging technologies, stimulate faculty to be nimbler and more willing to use these tools, turn conventional universities into bimodal institutions, and make access to online education more affordable, convenient, and engaging to learners from all walks of life.

The current crisis indicates that strengthening online education contributes to increasing public safety and public health.

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The current crisis indicates that strengthening online education contributes to increasing public safety and public health. In this regard, governments should be encouraged to make it more affordable and invest in universities' online capacity building, in order to protect the higher education sector in times of social uncertainties and global emergencies. ▲

COVID-19 and Internationalization: Mobility, Agility, and Care

Laura E. Rumbley

Abstract

Recent surveys on the impacts of COVID-19 on international education agendas and activities in Europe and North America provide important insights into challenges as well as responses taken by the sector. Mobility, agility, and care emerge as key themes framing the current situation and future prospects.

Several national and regional surveys are helping to establish a baseline of information.

As we enter the second quarter of 2020, the upheaval caused by the unfolding COVID-19 pandemic is both alarming and difficult to process.

Higher education is hit hard by these developments, and the internationalization agendas and activities of institutions particularly so, given their often heavy reliance on the physical movement and in-person engagement of students, faculty, and staff to advance core interests. The fast-moving nature of the COVID-19 crisis has made it difficult to grasp how the sector is experiencing these developments on a broad scale. However, several national and regional surveys are helping to establish a baseline of information. These preliminary findings are shedding important light on the immediate impacts being felt and responses being taken. They are helping to highlight gaps in resources and levels of preparedness for such crises. Crucially, they are also providing a foundation for understanding what may matter most as we emerge from this crisis: preserving meaningful mobility; ensuring ever greater levels of agility in response to disruption; and fostering the notion of care as a core value in our work.

Mobility: Situation Critical

The European Association for International Education (EAIE) conducted a survey in the period 19 February to 6 March 2020, aimed at individuals working in higher education institutions in the European Higher Education Area (EHEA). The goal of this exercise was to understand how the outbreak (not yet deemed a pandemic by the World Health Organization) was affecting the internationalization agendas and activities of institutions in the EHEA. Among other issues, the survey also sought to uncover how respondents' institutions were choosing to respond, how they defined their most pressing needs in the face of the current situation, and what they considered to be the most important mid- to longer-term considerations arising from the crisis.

Overlapping in the same time frame (February–March 2020), the Institute of International Education (IIE) conducted a survey on COVID-19 effects at US higher education institutions, while the Canadian Bureau for International Education (CBIE) did the same among Canadian institutions.

In all three cases, mobility stands out as the key internationalization activity bearing the brunt of the COVID-19 crisis. In Europe, for example, a majority of respondents (ranging from 51 to 57 percent) considered the effects on mobility—inbound and outbound, for students and for staff—to be “somewhat significant.” An additional 15 to 21 percent perceived these effects to be “very significant.” In the United States, respondents reported that a whopping 94 percent of study abroad programs to China had been postponed or

canceled. Close to 70 percent of the CBIE survey respondents indicated that outbound mobility as well as outgoing missions and travel delegations were among the international education areas most affected by the COVID-19 crisis. Incoming mobility and delegations/missions rounded out the top four most affected activities in the Canadian survey.

Mobility also featured among the top concerns for the future. Nearly 80 percent of Canadian respondents indicated that mobility-related activities were among their “institution’s primary concerns over the next 6–12 months.” In Europe, 291 individuals (out of a total of 805 survey respondents) answered an optional, open-ended question about future concerns, among which some 45 percent expressed concern about future outbound mobility prospects and 40 percent indicated the same regarding future inbound mobility.

The fast pace of developments of the COVID-19 pandemic means that the mobility picture today, not even two months after these surveys were administered, is decidedly different—and bleaker. The uncertainty around how mobility opportunities will be affected in the coming academic year also remains very high, and will clearly be a focal point for planning and recalibration on the part of European and North American institutions in the coming period.

Agility: Essential Ingredient

The need, and the efforts expended, to implement meaningful, timely responses to the crisis stand out as another key finding of the recent surveys in Europe, the United States, and Canada. For example, the EAIE research found that nearly 60 percent of respondents’ institutions were actively implementing a COVID-19 response plan, and another 14 percent were in the process of developing such a plan. In Canada, 45 percent of respondents indicated that their institution was currently implementing a response plan, while more than 43 percent reported a plan in development.

Beyond the existence of formal response plans, the surveys also shed light on some of the specific ways that institutions were trying to meet the needs of constituents. Communication and information dissemination efforts featured as a major—if not the major—action line in both North America and Europe. In all cases, however, the desire for better access to the most current intelligence, as well as to examples that can inform good practice, was evident. Waiting is one option: the IIE survey (which focused on the effects related to China programs and Chinese students) found that “about one in five institutions (20 percent) indicated that they do not have current plans in place for alternative recruitment, and many of these institutions indicated that they are waiting for the situation to evolve.”

However, with the closing of many national borders and the instigation of a wide array of travel restrictions since the administration of these surveys, action has overtaken a wait-and-see approach in many quarters. For example, the mass migration of teaching and learning activities to online platforms across Europe and North America in recent weeks shows that a focus on agility has clearly moved center-stage. Of course, the ramifications of these decisions on the “international experiences” of students and staff (not to mention the administrative implications of, for example, Erasmus mobility grant payments) will require a great deal more focus on just how “agile” our institutions and international partnership frameworks can really be.

Care: The Tie That Binds

The ability of the international education community—in Europe, North America, and elsewhere—to weather the storm created by the COVID-19 pandemic will depend on many factors; first and foremost, may be the ability to place “care” at the center of the effort. The fact that the EAIE, IIE, and CBIE surveys generated input from nearly 1,000 different institutions across both regions at a time of enormous professional (and potentially personal) stress for respondents, speaks to the seriousness with which European and North American international education professionals are taking this situation. There is a genuine desire to connect and pool information and intelligence.

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The nature of reported efforts also demonstrates that “care”—in the form of working to ensure student and staff safety and wellbeing, keeping relationships with partners warm, aiming to deliver messaging that is both accurate and reassuring, etc.—is actively informing approaches to this complex situation. Given the very real human cost of this pandemic, smart but, equally, sensitive responses will likely prove to be most effective for sustaining the field.

Moving forward, the early days’ data provided by these recent surveys will serve as an important benchmark against which further developments can be gauged and future responses to disruption can be thoughtfully crafted. ▲

COVID-19: The Internationalization Revolution That Isn’t

Philip G. Altbach and Hans de Wit

Abstract

The COVID-19 crisis will have major implications for global student mobility, with declines overall, most probably from China. Additional implications will be felt concerning internationalization generally. Universities and national systems relying on international student enrollments for income are likely to suffer a significant blow. However, overall, it is likely that the broader trends of recent years will continue, but only after considerable disruption.

The coronavirus crisis is upending higher education—as well as economies and the lives of millions of individuals around the world. Universities closed, with teaching canceled or put online. Conferences have been called off. Of direct relevance to international higher education, prospective students have been unable to take examinations, and international students have been unable to travel to their campuses or to return home. Study abroad programs have been canceled. Faculty members have been asked not to travel to affected countries—or to avoid foreign travel entirely. The immediate implications and inconveniences are likely to increase as the coronavirus spreads to more countries and affects larger numbers of people.

What will be the medium- and longer-term implications of the coronavirus crisis? Basically—not much! There are colleagues who see an unintended positive impact on higher education, in particular on the increase of online teaching and learning and the related cut in carbon footprint, and on more diverse international student recruitment policy, reducing dependence on one or two main countries, especially China. We are afraid that the realities and trends evident in international higher education are likely to remain, and that higher education will quickly return to normal routines—but perhaps with even less financial stability than is now the case in many countries and institutions.

Mobility

Without question, there will be declines in global student mobility and with particular implications for the number of students coming from China to the rest of the world. This temporary decline accompanies an end to the Chinese student boom of the past two decades. Thus, there is likely to be a significant temporary decline and longer-term, more modest decrease, although China will remain the largest single sending country for the foreseeable future.

Following the end of the coronavirus crisis, there may be a restructuring of mobility patterns. Over time, there have been changes in patterns and flows of international students. At one time, Iran was one of the main sending countries—it no longer plays much of a role. Brazil and Saudi Arabia have declined, while Vietnam and to some extent India have increased. Future increases will come from Africa—mainly from Nigeria and

Kenya. We have already seen destination patterns modestly swing away from Europe, North America, and Australia to Asia and the Middle East. Our guess is that overall numbers will not rapidly increase and may well somewhat decline, and that preferred destinations may change. The United States, increasingly seen as unwelcoming, will likely decline. But the traditional pattern of international study will continue.

Financial Dependence on International Students

Some receiving countries, most notably Australia and to a lesser extent the United Kingdom, and some less prestigious colleges and universities in the United States have become dependent on international student tuition fees as an important part of their financial survival. After all, international education is an estimated US\$300-billion-dollar industry globally. The coronavirus crisis shows that this dependence is deeply problematic: it is likely that institutions dependent on this income will face significant problems. The crisis might signal that seeing international education mainly as an income generator is undesirable from many viewpoints, but one has to fear it will not. Indeed, governments and academic institutions may double down on their recruitment efforts.

The crisis might signal that seeing international education mainly as an income generator is undesirable from many viewpoints.

Technology's Impact on Mobility?

Many universities are now teaching their students through distance education since campuses in many places have been closed, and much success has been reported anecdotally. It is indeed impressive that universities have been quickly shifting all, or a substantive part of their courses to the Internet. But we are somewhat skeptical that what is being offered is of high quality or that students are very satisfied with the new situation. Most faculty members worldwide are not trained to offer distance courses, do not have the sophisticated technology necessary for high-quality teaching and learning, and have not adapted their curricula to the Web. We know from our own experience over the past few years with our master's degree in international higher education at Boston College how difficult it is to create an interactive and effective classroom environment online, due to limitations in technology and lack of experience and appropriate equipment for students and staff. There are many aspects and modalities to take into account: asynchronized or synchronized teaching, how to manage group discussions effectively online, and how to organize assignments and exams online. These are only some of the questions that require attention. Of course, effective online learning and teaching are possible, but it takes time and support. Making these changes quickly is a guarantee of low quality. And quality drops further when most students are lacking sufficient equipment at home, such as poor internet connection or a lack of privacy. So, let us not idealize the current shift to online!

Some have argued that degree studies aimed at international students might increasingly go completely "online." This has been predicted before and has been modestly successful only for continuing education. It is much more likely that international students, for the most part, will continue to prefer the experience of studying in another country, also because many seek employment overseas, either temporary or permanent, following their studies.

The Impact on Study Abroad

Thousands of students from North America and Europe who were engaged in carefully planned, semester-long or shorter study abroad programs have been called home. While temporarily problematic from many perspectives, it is unlikely that these programs will suffer long-term declines. It will more likely increase the trend for shorter periods of mobility (less than eight weeks) and dependence on "safe" countries. As we have seen, France and Spain soon recovered their preferred status after the terrorist attacks they suffered, and the same will happen with Italy.

Strategic Planning

Without question, the coronavirus crisis is a serious problem for societies and individuals, and for higher education. But the crisis will eventually pass, and, at least in the areas of higher education internationalization, the status quo will largely prevail. There are many serious problems with internationalization and

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online delivery. These include overdependence on foreign student tuition fees in some countries, the carbon footprint of mobility (see the article of Laura E. Rumbley, *Internationalization of Higher Education and the Future of the Planet*, in *IHE* #100), quality standards, instability in mobility, and others.

Universities worldwide are doing an impressive job of crisis management in difficult circumstances, but learning longer-term lessons and effective strategic planning have not been a strength of the academic community. Will the current crisis be a wake-up call? ▲

Temporary Action or New Model Experiment? Teaching at Chinese Universities in the Time of COVID-19

Bie Dunrong and Liu Jin

Abstract

Online teaching is hardly a new feature at Chinese colleges and universities. However, during the COVID-19 epidemic, it has become the main mode of instruction and is being widely used in colleges and universities. The student participation rate and degree of interaction with teachers are very high. After the crisis, are the effects of this large-scale experiment going to disappear, or will some experiences and practices be retained and integrated into traditional classroom teaching?

Winter vacation is China's most festive holiday, during which time teachers and students return home from the colleges and universities where they work or study, to reunite with their families to celebrate the Spring Festival. The outbreak of the COVID-19 epidemic this year disrupted winter vacation plans. In order to contain the epidemic, campuses closed, teachers and students could not return to school, and colleges and universities had to rely on information and communications technology and develop online teaching, to ensure that the teaching load of the spring semester could be carried out as planned.

A Large-Scale Online Teaching Experiment

Online teaching is hardly a new feature at Chinese colleges and universities and has been developed to supplement classroom teaching. However, during the COVID-19 epidemic, it has become the main mode of instruction and has been widely used in colleges and universities. China has the largest higher education system in the world, with 2,688 colleges and universities nationwide as of 2019. According to statistics from the ministry of education, that same year, the number of students reached 30,315 million. After the Spring Festival, colleges and universities hastily developed new teaching plans to be implemented during the period campuses would be closed. Teachers received online training to become familiar with the requirements of online teaching and to align their classes to this new medium.

There are three basic forms of online teaching, including MOOCs, online real-time interactive teaching (ORIT), and video teaching. ORIT is the newest pedagogy to be implemented. Online teaching is now being implemented on a massive scale. Most teachers do not have any experience in online teaching, but have started teaching their courses online with great enthusiasm during the special time of the epidemic. Some foreign teachers who could not return to school on schedule after their vacation back home are overcoming the time difference and carrying out their teaching online from their home countries. Most theoretical courses are being taught online, while that is not possible for courses including practice and experiments. For example, Xiamen University is offering 3,475 online courses. Although, so far, no survey has been made on the quality of online

teaching, the phenomenon is undoubtedly of great significance as a national experiment and ensures that teaching can go on, even at a basic level, during the COVID-19 epidemic.

The participation rate is very high. From their homes all over the country, students access their online classes at the same time and interact with teachers and classmates on learning issues. Statistics show that the average student participation rate in the first week of online teaching exceeded 85 percent, and what is surprising is that online interaction between teachers and students is much more frequent now than ever before. One reason for that may be related to a sense of novelty and appreciation for the new medium among students, since it also fosters networks; another may be the strict discipline promoted by schools.

Online teaching needs strong technical support. Colleges and universities did not have much time to mobilize and prepare themselves; the number of teachers is massive, and students are scattered all across the country. It is therefore unimaginable that online teaching and learning can be carried out smoothly without efficient technical support from modern educational technology centers at colleges and universities. Meanwhile, educational technology enterprises, such as the MOOC platform of China University, Wisdom Tree, Online School, Rain Classroom, Tencent Class, and more, are also providing technology support and teaching resources for online teaching.

Is this large-scale online teaching experiment of higher education successful so far? It is too early to say, since teachers are still insufficiently skilled, and since, for various reasons, about 15 percent of the students cannot participate. Yet, there is no doubt that this is an important emergency initiative for colleges and universities, which may have a significant impact on future developments of higher education after the COVID-19 epidemic.

Hybrid Teaching

The COVID-19 epidemic will eventually pass, and colleges and universities will return to normal. Are the effects of this large-scale experiment going to disappear, or will some experiences and practices be retained and integrated into traditional classroom teaching? This is a question worthy of attention. The value of the experiment is not only to fill out a gap during school closure, but also to adopt new teaching ideas, methods, and techniques to improve campus education.

Scattered learning leads to wider outreach for universities and colleges. By not being located in the same space, teachers and students are constructing a new kind of learning community through the Internet. The advantage is that the “classroom” expands beyond the limitation of campus capacity, and allows colleges and universities to enroll more students. In 2019, the gross enrollment ratio of China’s higher education was 51.6 percent, which is far behind that of many high-income countries. Meanwhile, the average student enrollment of colleges and universities has reached 11,260. Obviously, with the need to expand access to higher education, the space of traditional campuses has become a limiting factor. Large-scale online teaching and learning catering to a scattered student population can contribute to widening access.

Online interaction helps to make up for the lack of regular classroom communication. A number of studies show that students in East Asian countries tend to speak less in the classroom and interact less with their teachers. But in the context of large-scale online teaching, students are more willing to interact with teachers, possibly because they find it easier, with the sense of distance, to express themselves in the virtual environment. In regular campus teaching, teachers can open an online interactive channel outside of the classroom, in order to provide students with the opportunity to communicate with them and answer all kinds of questions related to their study. Online teaching and open online interaction channels are conducive to stimulating and cultivating students’ autonomy, and encouraging them to develop a sense of ownership and initiative toward their own learning.

School–enterprise cooperation has led to the development of a comprehensive educational model for students at colleges and universities. In the context of this large-scale online teaching experiment during the COVID-19 epidemic, school–enterprise cooperation played a key role, and the technology and services of many educational technology enterprises have won the trust of colleges and universities. The teaching resources of educational technology enterprises can make up for the shortage of teachers and

Are the effects of this large-scale experiment going to disappear, or will some experiences and practices be retained and integrated into traditional classroom teaching?

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curriculum resources. By strengthening their cooperation with related enterprises, colleges and universities are able to provide more abundant, comprehensive, personalized, and high quality teaching resources to their students, including courses, learning materials, interactive communication platforms, and more—far beyond the limitations of campus resources. ▲

Abstract

Universities around the world responded to COVID-19 in different ways. Hong Kong, located close to the origin, was fast to react. Teaching and learning quickly migrated online and universities engaged with challenges in maintaining the quality of instructional delivery. Alongside inevitable downsides generated by real-time re-engineering of higher education, unexpected upsides were also registered. Drawing out the lessons from this most unusual semester will be a key task when campuses are again able to function properly.

Hong Kong Higher Education and the 2020 Outbreak: We've Been Here Before

Ian Holliday and Gerard A. Postiglione

Universities around the world are responding to COVID-19 in different ways. Hong Kong, located close to the origin, was fast to react. It learned useful lessons in 2003, when it was at the epicenter of the SARS epidemic, and again in late 2019, when anti-government protests engulfed university campuses and classes moved online. Globally, it has been one of the more effective jurisdictions in limiting COVID-19 cases and fatalities.

On the Heels of a Storm

Hong Kong's fall protest movement meant that universities ended the first semester online. That initial experience was rough-and-ready. Professors scrambled to complete their courses through lecture capture, uploaded materials, virtual seminars, and chat rooms. Still more challenging was the switch to online assessment with a lead time of only two to three weeks. Nobody could claim that everything went smoothly in those turbulent weeks.

Handling COVID-19 was also enormously complicated. The virus emergency flared in the second half of January, just days or at most weeks into the new semester. The Chinese Lunar New Year holiday, in the final week of the month, was both a help and a hindrance. It gave universities limited breathing space. It also meant many students had left Hong Kong, either to return to the Chinese mainland or to other countries. When the holiday ended and the virus arrived, some students did not, or could not, return. Before the government closed the borders to many nonlocals, universities arranged quarantine facilities for returning students.

Expertise, Autonomy, and Action

Some universities quickly became influential in controlling the spread of the virus. The Li Ka Shing Faculty of Medicine at the University of Hong Kong developed rapid tests for COVID-19 that have been adopted worldwide. In shaping wider responses, Hong Kong universities were largely unencumbered by government bureaucracy because of their high degree of institutional autonomy. They could therefore act quickly to sustain instruction, research, and knowledge exchange. Nevertheless, the government did create a shadow policy framework. In particular, decisions taken to close all schools initially for a few weeks and latterly for three months from mid-January to mid-April created a policy context that universities simply had to respect.

Within each of the major public universities, a task force typically composed of senior management and reaching out to deans for major issues was originally set up to address the student protests of late 2019. In early 2020, no more than minor personnel

changes were required for these core teams to go into action to address daily challenges of COVID-19.

The Greatest Challenge

From the outset, the greatest challenge was to maintain the quality of instructional delivery. The University of Hong Kong had to sustain course offerings for 30,000 students from 100 jurisdictions. It had to manage pressing issues of online access in many parts of the world. It had to respond to basic issues of internet penetration, especially when asking students to view and download quite large files of course materials.

As in most major universities, only a small proportion of academic staff had previously run online courses. Those few faculty who had created a MOOC were better placed, but they were a minority. Most faculty had experience conducting face-to-face classes supported by a website that stores course materials, videos, and PowerPoint presentations (PPTs), offers a chat room, and enables assignments to be submitted. The virus led to a rapid uptick in faculty engaging fully in online education, either grudgingly or enthusiastically. There was some resistance, and even enthusiasts found that an entire semester of online teaching bereft of face-to-face teaching generated quite a challenge. Indications are that class attendance is the same for online as for face-to-face courses. However, teaching online requires more planning and follow-up.

To support faculty taking their classes online, the University of Hong Kong ran an ongoing series of webinars. It also offered on-demand trouble-shooting services, with in-house experts reachable first through WhatsApp and then through Zoom. It made short videos covering an array of basic issues. It sent out bulk e-mails to all teachers on a regular basis to keep them abreast of developments. To support students, it issued regular bulk e-mails and maintained e-mail accounts through which students could receive real-time responses to issues and concerns. Maintaining good lines of communication has been essential throughout the crisis.

Some universities in Hong Kong retained some campus teaching, provided it did not undermine the core objective of a low-density environment. The University of Hong Kong identified components of its undergraduate programs that simply had to be taught on campus through laboratory, studio, and other sessions, and drew up schedules for final-year students to return in small groups, take these components, and graduate on time.

A challenge yet to be fully confronted is assessment. Short-term fixes adopted at the end of the first semester in Hong Kong were not entirely successful, and both teachers and students lost confidence in the assessment system. In the second semester, universities are somewhat better positioned, but still not fully prepared. Oral exams will replace many written exams, and assessment tasks will be substantially diversified.

Asking questions in a real classroom carries more social pressure than asking a question online or with a text message. Many faculty and students reported an increase in participation through Zoom tutorials, one of a small number of positives to emerge. Trust matters because teachers have to trust that students are actually online beyond the electronic indication that they are attending, though parallel issues also arise in face-to-face teaching.

With the worldwide cancellation of academic conferences, keynotes, and other overseas meetings, blocks of work time were reallocated. Staff meetings were conducted online. Academics and students saved commuting time. But working at home in Hong Kong is a different matter, as most local students share small accommodations without a separate study space. For this reason, universities kept libraries and learning commons open throughout the emergency, advising entering students on health and hygiene protocols.

Inevitable Downsides, Unexpected Upsides

Undoubtedly, there have been downsides to this semester of online teaching and learning. Students have had only a partial university life, and have often felt lonely, demotivated, and cut off. Clinical placements and internships have fallen away. Exchange programs have been curtailed. Even proponents of online learning yearn to see the return of campus activity and vibrancy. Maintaining research projects has been hard, especially when reliant on fieldwork. Links with the community, with other institutions, and with the wider world have all suffered.

Students have had only a partial university life, and have often felt lonely, demotivated, and cut off.

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Upsides, probably less visible but nevertheless tangible, have been registered above all in the fresh engagement with teaching and learning that has taken place in this most unusual semester. This is not to argue that tertiary education will be transformed. It will not. However, a platform for dialogue about new ways forward for teaching and learning now exists on many campuses, and senior managers have the opportunity to work with that.

Similarly, at a time when governments are giving subsidies of all kinds to business, they might consider funding universities to explore new forms of educational experience for students. While there is no escaping the fact the global pandemic has hurt universities everywhere, it has also diversified the educational experience. Drawing out the lessons from that will be a key task when campuses are again able to function properly.▲

India's Higher Education and COVID-19: Responses and Challenges

Eldho Mathews

Abstract

The impact of COVID-19 underscores the importance of developing a detailed crisis management plan and ensuring equity while promoting digital education in Indian higher education. The flow of Indian students to institutions outside the country is likely to drop if the existing situation does not improve within a few months.

India reported its first confirmed case of COVID-19 on January 30, 2020, after a student returned home from China to the state of Kerala in the south, and tested positive for the virus. The impact of the pandemic and the country-wide, total lockdown imposed from March 25th are challenging higher education institutions in new and different ways.

The impact is reflected by tremendous uncertainty from institutional to individual levels. Across the country, classes have been suspended; institutions have closed; university examinations scheduled for the months of March and April have been postponed; and entrance examinations for admission for the next academic year have been rescheduled. Most institutions allowed international students staying in their hostels to remain there and enjoy basic mess facilities. The ongoing crisis is affecting many students who had secured job offers through campus placements. It is also impacting those students who received admission offers from various foreign universities for the next academic year.

The outbreak has raised awareness within the government and among institutions about the importance not only of risk management, but also of crisis response strategies. Many scientific institutions have been responding to the crisis with great determination. While some provided cheaper COVID-19 testing facilities, others are involved in frugal innovation processes to fight the pandemic.

State and Institutional Responses

Either directly or through bodies such as the University Grants Commission (UGC), the government has taken proactive measures to address issues arising throughout the higher education sector as a result of the pandemic, and to keep students and the academic community safe. The UGC is the apex organization responsible for the maintenance of standards in higher education. It issued advisories to institutions to reschedule examinations, establish mental health helplines in support of students with psychosocial concerns, and in general to ensure the safety of students. It also formed a committee of experts to look at the prospects of preparing an alternate academic calendar.

Many higher education institutions have risen to the challenge and are working closely with the government. The central government has reportedly allocated the equivalent

of around US\$27 million to scientific institutions, industries, and start-ups to develop innovative solutions to prevent the spread of the pandemic. One of the biggest challenges facing the Indian health sector is the lack of ventilators. It is in this context that a few Indian institutions proposed a design for portable ventilators to save COVID-19 patients, which cost as low as US\$100 to 300 per unit.

While the Indian Institute of Technology (IIT) Kanpur's incubator company Nocca Robotics developed a ventilator prototype, researchers at IIT Guwahati are working on a project to develop a vaccine. IIT Bombay researchers, along with alumni, have built a platform, CORONTINE, to track potential/suspected (asymptomatic) carriers of coronavirus. IIT Delhi has decided to share its resources and has invited proposals to use its supercomputer resource PADUM for COVID-19 research. The Rajiv Gandhi Centre for Biotechnology in Kerala, a research institution under the central government, is in the process of developing low-cost rapid test diagnostic kits.

The pandemic is also creating opportunities for international partnerships. For instance, a faculty member at the Shiv Nadar University, Samit Bhattacharyya, is collaborating with scientists from different countries on a survey on COVID-19. Similarly, Bennett University organized a one-day online conference involving Indian and global experts in the fields of medicine, public policy, and technology.

The Challenges of Digital Transformation

Indian universities and colleges have now recognized the importance of e-learning and online programs and the crisis presents a range of opportunities for fast-forwarding their digital transition. Many institutions are utilizing the government's integrated learning platform SWAYAM and Direct to Home education channels SWAYAM PRABHA. Many institutions offer classes through Google Meet and Zoom.

This development also exposes inequities in the system. A recent circular to faculty issued by Suranjan Das, the vice-chancellor of Kolkata's Jadavpur University, echoes this reality. *The Telegraph* reported that Das requested faculty members to be cautious about conducting online classes or sharing digital content. The vice-chancellor wanted faculty members to consider the socioeconomic background of the students in the teaching-learning process, as many students cannot afford a computer at home. This underscores the importance of ensuring equity in the process of promoting online learning: while the internet density in India's urban areas is 97.94 percent, it is only 25.36 percent in rural areas.

The learning and communication strategies that some institutions adopted to stay competitive are worth mentioning. The Tata Institute of Fundamental Research, the Indian Institute of Science (IISc), and the Tata Memorial Centre recently launched a joint science communication portal to bring together resources in response to the COVID-19 outbreak. The Symbiosis Institute of Business Management in Pune launched an online synchronous lecture series titled "Learn from Home" to engage with students. And KREA University kept everyone—from staff to students and the general public—updated with information through its official website.

Possible Future Directions

The COVID-19 crisis is underscoring the importance of global and national interdependence in higher education and research to address societal challenges. As a result, scientific research through partnerships is expected to receive more attention in the future as a strategic priority. At the national level, programs such as Impacting Research, Innovation and Technology (IMPRINT), aimed at bridging the gap between scientific research outcomes and their translation into engineering and technological innovations, are likely to receive more attention.

It may be too early to assess the actual impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on the mobility of Indian students. The flow of Indian students to institutions outside the country will certainly drop if the situation does not improve within a few months. There is a strong possibility for a shift in student and parental choices in favor of institutions in the country instead of abroad, due to the general feeling in India about the permissive attitude of governments in Western Europe and United States toward public health during the pandemic. Prominent public and private universities in the country could tap

The COVID-19 crisis is underscoring the importance of global and national interdependence in higher education and research to address societal challenges.

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into this opportunity. A recent article by C. Raj Kumar, the vice-chancellor of OP Jindal Global University, underlines the importance of this possible trend of “transforming India from a ‘sending market’ of students into a ‘retaining market,’ and eventually even a ‘receiving market’ for foreign students.”

The economic impact of the COVID-19 pandemic could influence the growth rate of public funding for higher education in the future. The present crisis could also lead to finding new strategies to attract private investments in priority areas of scientific research and in creating new research and innovation ecosystems. ▲

Singapore Higher Education and COVID-19: An Early and Measured Response

Natalie Ang and Dave Stanfield

Abstract

By acting early and using a measured response to COVID-19, Singapore was able to keep higher education intact far longer than many countries. The government implemented rigorous contact tracing, social distancing regulations, and isolation strategies. With a recent surge in confirmed cases, the authors highlight several uncertainties for the coming academic year in Singapore higher education.

Singapore has received international praise for a proactive and transparent response to COVID-19.

Once it became clear that the coronavirus from Wuhan in China would inevitably land on Singapore’s shores, the small nation state’s higher education sector reacted quickly but in a calibrated fashion. This approach allowed Singapore’s tertiary institutions to continue operations for the better part of a semester with relatively minor modifications.

Singapore has received international praise for a proactive and transparent response to COVID-19. From the early days of the outbreak until now, citizens by and large have confidence that their government would manage this crisis well. Early intervention tactics included rigorous and quick contact tracing, incessant reminders to practice good hygiene, nationally enforced social distancing guidelines, required travel declarations, quarantine of those in close contact with confirmed cases, and a stringent stay-at-home protocol for those returning to Singapore from high risk countries.

The Singapore government releases detailed status updates every day with the number of new cases, which clusters they were linked to, how many patients are in the intensive care units (ICU) and the number discharged from the hospital. These labor intensive and tedious methods have largely proved effective. Despite the early arrival of COVID-19 on the shores of Singapore, the country did not report a death until March 21. Singapore tests widely for the virus and yet did not reach 1,000 total infections until April 1.

Keeping Higher Education Intact

The government’s measured response allowed much of life in Singapore to carry on as normal through the end of March. Schools, restaurants, and businesses remained open. Family and friends continued to meet and the ubiquitous Singapore malls stayed busy. Universities also remained operational until April, far longer than in many other countries.

As COVID-19 reached Singapore in January, strict measures were immediately put in place for higher education institutions. Protocols were rolled out in an orderly manner with students and staff working flexibly to align with ever changing directives from the government.

At the National University of Singapore (NUS), students, faculty, and staff were required to declare their travel plans and record their temperature twice daily on a centralized system. Students were told to self-isolate when exposed to someone with the virus, and those from the highest risk categories were transferred to a makeshift

on-campus quarantine facility. When the number of cases in Singapore started to rise, NUS stepped up safe distancing protocols. Sports training and other cocurricular activities were canceled or modified to reduce physical contact and dining halls started to offer more takeaway options to decongest eating spaces. Distance learning was introduced, initially in a hybrid form where some students remained in the classroom, while others participated online.

Contact tracing procedures were also put in place such as attendance tracking during events, mandatory temperature screening, registration of guests on campus, and instructors awkwardly required to snap photos of seating arrangements in the classroom. Responses were fairly uniform across Singapore's autonomous universities. These measures were mostly successful, allowing the semester to carry on in a semimodified form, but even in a country accustomed to strict regulations, compliance was challenging. Travel declaration completion rates were low, many students failed to report their temperatures twice daily, e-learning was difficult for many professors to navigate, and administrators debated about the best way to organize online exams to minimize cheating.

Meanwhile, outside of Singapore the virus spread rapidly, so the ministry of education made a prudent decision to recall all students studying abroad. International students were asked to go back to their home countries and local students were told to come home to Singapore. What followed was a mammoth task to account for, and relocate, thousands of students studying abroad. The task was carried out with a degree of precision and speed that would only be possible in a country like Singapore with a highly organized national government and effective crisis response plans. Many international students that were told to return home petitioned to come back to Singapore, where they had more faith in the healthcare system and government's response to the crisis than their own countries.

Pressing Pause

Despite successful mitigation measures, in early April, Singapore experienced a surge in local cases, spurring the government to take more drastic measures. A version of a lockdown, labeled a "circuit breaker," aims to limit the spread of COVID-19 using stringent and legally enforced safe distancing measures. Under the new bill that was passed, residents in Singapore are allowed to leave their homes only for a short list of essential reasons or face serious consequences for noncompliance.

At this point, most universities decided to move to full e-learning and required students to move home. NUS permitted students to stay on campus in residence halls but implemented strict regulations. For instance, students cannot visit each other's rooms or gather in groups to eat or socialize. Naturally, this has proven difficult for many residents, with international students especially feeling isolated and longing for home.

Moving Forward amid Uncertainties.

Like many countries in the world, uncertainty abounds for the next academic year, yet one can draw some reasonable conclusions based on how Singapore has managed COVID-19 until now. If the current circuit breaker measures prove effective in curtailing community spread, the government is likely to ease restrictions over the coming months in a predictably measured and calibrated approach. For higher education, that could mean a return to in-person classes below a certain size, ongoing temperature checks, and social distancing measures. In other words, universities would likely operate much in the same way that they have over the past two months—remaining in operation but with modifications.

If COVID-19 continues to spread locally at the current rate, most institutions will remain closed and start the new year in a full e-learning mode. The government may restrict student visas, which would have a significant impact on institutions and degree programs that typically count on a proportion of international students. Furthermore, local students with previously confirmed plans to study abroad are likely to be disappointed, as the government may ban students from leaving Singapore to participate in exchange programs.

Despite some degree of predictability, the impact on enrollment is difficult to ascertain. Admissions professionals face significant uncertainty, doubting whether historical

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yield models will lead to accurate predictions of a new incoming cohort. There are many questions with no clear answers. Will incoming students be interested in enrolling at a traditional tertiary institution with temporary e-learning provision or would they prefer to defer? For institutions with international student recruitment goals, what are the implications of admitting a class fully consisting of local students? For students who do decide to enroll for the next academic year, assuming in-person gatherings are still prohibited, how can first-year orientation programs be adapted to a virtual environment? For institutions that offer a residential living-learning experience or emphasize cocurricular learning as a key component of their education, what elements of those experiences can be adapted?

In the coming months, Singapore will continue to work tirelessly attempting to contain further spread of the virus, and the country will begin a gradual and steady return to normal. Higher education is likely to continue reflecting broader society. Institutions will slowly lift restrictions in a calibrated and measured way, mirroring Singapore's approach to containing COVID-19 all along. ▲

COVID-19 Pandemic and South Korean Higher Education: A Threat with a Silver Lining?

Bawool Hong

Abstract

South Korea has been heavily affected by the COVID-19 pandemic. Universities and policy makers have a choice on how to view this outbreak: solely as a threat, or as an opportunity to take in longer-term lessons in managing internationalization and student mobility and utilizing online technologies.

The current COVID-19 pandemic is posing several challenges to international higher education. In an age of rapid internationalization, universities strive for global institutional cooperation, actively promote overseas student mobility, and form international academic communities. This togetherness, in return, has made them more vulnerable to external threats than ever before.

The South Korean Outbreak

Such is the case in South Korea, where the coronavirus outbreak has brought about unprecedented challenges to the higher education system, not even experienced during the 2002 SARS and 2015 MERS outbreaks. After the first case of coronavirus emerged on January 20th, the epidemic spread at a rapid rate nearly leveling that of China, where the virus first originated. With over 160,000 international students studying in Korea, and thousands of foreign exchange students coming in on an annual basis, the ministry of education was quick to act by issuing a strict two-week quarantine policy on all incoming international students. This policy restricts the students to their dormitories and outlines firm measures to prevent the spread among local students. Universities quickly followed suit by canceling all large gatherings such as graduation and enrollment ceremonies, and postponing the start of semester by two weeks. In addition, most universities made it mandatory for all classes to be taught online for the first two weeks, and have now continued online classes indefinitely due to the ongoing coronavirus situation.

Thus, the college scene has changed drastically. Whereas normally, at this time of the year, newly admitted freshmen roam college campuses and faculty and staff prepare for the new semester, university campuses have in a sense come to a halt. Overnight, college towns have become ghost towns, most university facilities have been shut down, and foreign exchange students are canceling commitments and registrations left and right in

order to leave the country. International students, once seen in a positive light as new sources of enrollment (due to Korea's declining student population) and as a way to diversify student bodies, are now being seen as possible threats to campus safety, especially those returning from their winter break from heavily affected regions such as China.

Unprecedented Challenges, Unprecedented Changes

Nevertheless, amid these unprecedented challenges, several unexpected silver linings have emerged in the South Korean higher education system. In a short period of time, an educational revolution has erupted in terms of teaching and learning, as faculty members across the country are experimenting with new ways to interact with and teach students, as they simply cannot physically meet with students. From part-time adjunct instructors to senior professors nearing retirement, they have all been "forced" to try out new educational technologies and innovative methods of teaching. Even traditional faculty members who long believed in the superiority of brick-and-mortar institutions and face-to-face teaching are now "forced" to adapt to the changing times. Therefore, to make things easier, universities such as Korea University in Seoul have provided week-long seminars for all faculty members on how to successfully live-stream classes, pre-record lectures, and teach students through online platforms.

Staff members have also been "forced" to come up with innovative ways to carry out administrative tasks in response to the changing tides. Ewha Women's University, the first women's university in Korea, recently made national headlines when, for the first time in its long history, it conducted its graduation and enrollment ceremonies fully online via YouTube live streaming for all graduates and incoming freshmen. It was a huge success with over 2,000 parents and students in attendance and a program that included a university presidential message, a live talk show, and a welcoming performance from alumni and faculty members. These "forced" changes have also been felt at the government level. Since the dawn of the fourth industrial revolution, scholars and higher education practitioners have demanded that government officials change obsolete regulations and restrictions on higher education institutions so that they may compete in a rapidly changing world, with little to no effect. However, due to the coronavirus outbreak, policy makers at the ministry of education have been "forced" to modify a policy that previously prevented all universities from providing more than 20 percent of classes online.

Moreover, the threat posed by COVID-19 has unexpectedly created a new sense of solidarity between domestic and international students, university administration, and local businesses and communities. Chinese students, researchers, and professors at Korea Advanced Institute of Science and Technology (KAIST) in Daejeon recently garnered regional and national praise for their contributions to coronavirus prevention. After initially mobilizing funds to donate to China's coronavirus prevention, as the situation in Korea rapidly worsened, the group decided instead to send the donations and medical supplies to the city of Daegu, the most heavily affected region in Korea, where the majority of coronavirus cases have been reported. Furthermore, universities such as Kyungpook University in Busan have lent a helping hand not only to patients, but also to many local businesses and communities affected economically by the coronavirus outbreak, by drastically lowering rent on university facilities.

Lessons for South Korean Higher Education

At the end of the day, Korean universities and policy makers must ask themselves how they will view this inescapable global pandemic: solely as a threat, or also a stimulus for positive change in higher education? As mentioned in Altbach and de Wit's article in *University World News*, March 14, 2020, "The coronavirus crisis is a serious problem for societies, individuals, and for higher education. But the crisis will eventually pass." And I also agree with the authors that "universities worldwide are doing an impressive job of crisis management in difficult circumstances, but learning longer-term lessons and effective strategic planning have not been a strength of the academic community." Therefore, Korean universities and policy makers should be commended for the work done so far and continue to act with caution against the threat; but at the same time, they should use it as an opportunity to learn longer-term lessons in managing internationalization and student mobility and adequately utilizing online delivery and educational technologies.

Amid these unprecedented challenges, several unexpected silver linings have emerged in the South Korean higher education system.

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Final Remarks

This being said, even as I write this article, I sincerely hope for the world's quick recovery from the coronavirus outbreak, and my deepest condolences go out to all countries, institutions, and people devastated by this pandemic. Furthermore, I hope that, all in all, the international higher education community will come out on top of this setback more innovative and forward looking, and stronger than ever before. ▲

COVID-19 Threat to Higher Education: Africa's Challenges, Responses, and Apprehensions

Wondwosen Tamrat and Damtew Teferra

Abstract

This article examines the challenges and uncertainties that the African higher education sector is experiencing due to the outbreak of the coronavirus pandemic, and some of the responses so far.

The onset of the coronavirus pandemic became primetime news in Africa as the plight of its international students in Wuhan, China—where it began—took center stage. At the time of the outbreak, Hubei, the province where Wuhan is located, hosted around 5,000 of the nearly 82,000 African students in China.

In the early days of the crisis, concerns in the Global North focused primarily on the disruption that the pandemic would bring to student flows from China and its economic impact on their higher education systems. Efforts to prevent the spread of the virus ranged from extending or postponing academic terms to banning incoming students.

Most of Africa's initial response focused on repatriating students stranded in Wuhan or providing assistance from afar. Nigeria, Senegal, South Africa, as well as Algeria and its North African neighbors, succeeded in repatriating their students—an achievement that was much celebrated. Other countries lacking the readiness and the resources to do the same had to assume a low profile against public opinion, which favored repatriation.

Responses

Africa has taken the coronavirus pandemic seriously only in the last few weeks, following the confirmation of its first cases. Initial responses included the closure of schools and universities beginning mid-March. Increasingly, universities across the continent are setting up institution-wide task forces to mitigate the impact of the pandemic. Some are striving to participate in high-end research toward finding a cure for the virus. Many are attempting to shift to online teaching and learning through institutional, national, continental, and international initiatives.

Most plans are only at their initial stages of implementation and call for ramping up current efforts, forging wider cooperation, and sharing experiences and resources across the whole continent. Two major issues that hold serious implications in the fight against the pandemic are online teaching, which is now championed as an alternative form of educational delivery, and the economic impact of the pandemic on African higher education

Online Delivery

According to UNESCO, 9.8 million African students are experiencing disruption in their studies due to the closure of higher education institutions. The danger of contamination has triggered institutions to move their courses online. However, going online is not that simple on a continent where only 24 percent of the population [has access to the Internet](#),

and poor connectivity, exorbitant costs, and frequent power interruptions are serious challenges.

Increasingly, universities are partnering with internet providers and governments to overcome this critical challenge by negotiating zero-rated access to specific educational and information websites, as in the case of Rwanda, South Africa, and Tunisia. At the institutional level, a number of universities, such as the public University of Kwazulu-Natal in South Africa, and private universities such as Ashesi University in Ghana, are offering data bundles to their students and staff. Going digital effectively requires substantial coordination with, and swift support from, institutional and national service providers, regional entities, international partners, NGOs, the private sector, and ICT providers to rally behind such tools and platforms at little or no cost.

It is imperative to seriously seek alternative means and approaches, in order not to leave behind students with little or no access to electronic communication. The painful reality of the digital divide on the continent has to be strategically and systematically managed: reaching out to millions of marginalized students must become a national priority in this time of crisis.

While this is taking shape, institutions need to develop a comprehensive plan and a rigorous follow-up scheme to ensure that academics and students make proper use of digital platforms. This task cannot be left solely to the discretion of individual actors.

Reaching out to millions of marginalized students must become a national priority in this time of crisis.

Impact on Economy and Higher Education

Prolonged civil wars, Africa's economic downturn in the 1970s, structural adjustment programs in the 1980s, and the debacle of the flawed rate-of-return discourse are just a few of the challenges that have impacted higher education in Africa. In the last decade, though, many economies have been booming. Half of the fastest growing economies on the globe are currently located on the continent. Africa's growth performance (3.4 percent in 2019) was expected to increase to 3.9 percent in 2020. With an average of 5 percent of national GDP dedicated to education (one of the largest globally), the African region was beginning to witness a revitalization of its higher education sector prior to the onset of the crisis.

Most of Africa's 54 countries now have confirmed cases and fatalities due to COVID-19. Many have closed their borders and banned international flights. Trade is declining at an alarming rate. The Democratic Republic of Congo, Rwanda, South Africa, and Tunisia have announced complete lockdowns. Recent economic forecasts show that Africa's economy could experience a loss of between US\$90 billion and 200 billion in 2020, with the GDP shrinking by three to eight points. In South Africa, growth is expected to contract by 1.5 percent in the first two months of the outbreak due to its effect on key economic sectors such as mining and tourism. Ethiopia's recent request for assistance on behalf of the African nations to the G-20 forum, for a US\$150 billion emergency financing, the freezing of interest rates on loans, and the cancellation of debts, is an indication of the massive threat to the continent's economies.

Apprehensions and Opportunities

The continent's meager institutional and national capacities, weak healthcare systems, and gregarious way of life may prove catastrophic should the virus continue to spread at the same rate and intensity as in other critically affected countries. The impact of such a calamitous scenario is easy to imagine and frightening to predict.

The effects of the pandemic on Africa's nearly 2,000 higher education institutions cannot be overemphasized. If the crisis persists, it may seriously impact the commitment of governments toward higher education in the face of competing demands from the healthcare, business, and other priority sectors serving vulnerable segments of society. Further, global support to higher education, research collaborations, and partnership schemes, most often directed at critical areas such as strengthening PhD programs, could be massively scaled back.

African higher education institutions are expected to do more in the months ahead, while concurrently battling across many fronts. This includes addressing the more immediate challenges of the threat of COVID-19, seeking improved mechanisms for online delivery, and planning to address the long-term effects of the pandemic on institutional

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Abstract

COVID-19 will have serious consequences for the higher education sector in Africa. It will give rise to inequities resulting from the use of ICT, affect the quality of teaching and learning, jeopardize research funding, exacerbate graduate unemployment, and place private institutions at risk. Urgent action is needed at the level of each country for readiness when the crisis is over, otherwise recovery of the sector may be too slow, too late.

capacity. In the aftermath of the pandemic, cost recovery through financial contribution from beneficiaries in the form of fees or loan repayments will not be easy, since economies will have seriously declined—if they indeed survive a total collapse. The expansion of public universities will be abruptly frozen. Private providers, which are dependent on tuition and fees, will also be hard hit, with many facing downsizing or even closure, as they receive little or no support from governments.

On a positive note, this threat—and the approaches to overcome it—may be catalytic for long-lasting changes in African higher education. Among others, diversified means of educational delivery, in particular a nonresidential model, may become more mainstream, more acceptable, and more respectable. ▲

COVID-19: What Consequences for Higher Education in Africa?

Goolam Mohamedbhai

COVID-19 will leave no sector in any country in the world unaffected, and its consequences will be felt for years to come. At a time when huge efforts were being deployed to transform and improve higher education in Africa, there is a danger that COVID-19 will destabilize the sector, with serious consequences. This article highlights some of these consequences, to enable leaders of higher education institutions, policy makers, and other stakeholders to reflect on them and be better prepared to address them.

Inequities

As part of their lockdown measures to contain the spread of the virus, African countries have had no choice but to close their higher education institutions (HEIs). And HEIs have had no option but to have recourse to the use of information and communications technology (ICT) to deliver their programs online at a distance from their enrolled students. But the process has laid bare the digital divide within the African continent: between those countries that have better ICT infrastructure and the others; between HEIs within the same country, with some being far better equipped and experienced than others; and between students within the same institution—the rich who live in urban areas and the poor in rural areas, who can barely afford to access the Internet, when and if it is available.

It is true that the crisis has provided an opportunity for all HEIs to quickly improve and maximize their ICT operations. However, the majority do not have the capacity to fully deliver whole programs online. It is the few open universities in Africa that have that capacity, but their targets are mostly mature students, those in employment, and those wishing to upgrade their qualifications, not fresh school-leavers. While a significant number of African HEIs have been implementing blended learning (a mixture of face-to-face and online learning) in order to increase access and improve learning, hardly any had intended for their face-to-face delivery to be completely replaced. How then can African countries and HEIs deal with the inequities arising from the wide use of online learning, even for a relatively short period?

Quality

It is a fallacy to believe that online learning can be effective by merely posting a lecturer's notes online or having a video recording of the lecture. Yet, this is what is generally happening at present. Experience has shown that for online learning to be of any

quality, teaching materials must be prepared by professional instructional designers, lecturers must be pedagogically trained for delivering the programs, and students must be equally exposed to the pedagogy of online learning. Unprepared online delivery will have an impact on the quality of the programs.

At a time when significant achievements have been made in improving the quality of teaching and learning in African higher education institutions, this is an unfortunate development. The worst affected programs will be science and technology, as students will be unable to access laboratories for their practicals. Yet, science and technology programs are the ones that are most important for Africa's development. How can HEIs find alternative approaches to using laboratories and, subsequently, how can they mitigate the consequences of poor-quality programs as a result of unplanned online delivery?

The worst affected programs will be science and technology, as students will be unable to access laboratories for their practicals.

Pipeline Effect

Secondary schools, which feed students to HEIs, have also been closed. Already, it had been observed in many African countries that with the high increase in enrollments in secondary schools resulting from measures taken to improve access, the quality of students entering HEIs had deteriorated. The situation will be aggravated with the closure of schools, and HEIs will have to devise measures to cater for a poorer quality of student intake, perhaps by running remedial courses in the first year. Also, end-of-secondary school examinations are being postponed or canceled. What approaches should HEIs adopt in selecting their next cohort of students if examination results are not available? Here, national approaches covering the whole education sector need to be adopted.

Research

In order to improve the research output from Africa—which is known to be the lowest of any region—a plethora of initiatives and projects have been implemented over the past couple of decades, whether at the national, regional, or continental level. The emphasis has been on increasing postgraduate training, especially at the doctoral level, and facilitating research projects in HEIs with an emphasis on areas that are of priority to the development of Africa. And all indicators show that the initiatives are now bearing fruit.

However, the bulk of the research initiatives are funded by European countries, by agencies and foundations in the United States, and lately by China. Also, almost all the research is undertaken in collaboration with HEIs in these countries. As COVID-19 is impacting the whole world, and Europe, the United States, and China appear to be the hardest hit, can Africa continue to rely on research funding from these sources? Several of these countries will probably end up in recession and their HEIs will understandably give priority to redressing their own situation.

How then will research projects already initiated in Africa and funded externally be maintained? To what alternative sources of funding can African HEIs turn to undertake their research?

Graduate Unemployment

Almost every African country has lately been experiencing the challenge of graduate unemployment, and in some countries unemployment figures are alarming. From feedback obtained from employers, a major cause of the unemployment is the lack of “soft skills” in graduates: poor communication skills, lack of personal initiative, inability to work in a team, etc. The wide use of online learning because of COVID-19 will undoubtedly exacerbate the situation, as students will be working on their own. Here is an opportunity to actively involve employers to assist in providing the skills they need.

Unfortunately, for economic reasons, many potential private employers of graduates may be forced to lay off their staff, thus increasing unemployment. This will make it even harder for graduates to find employment. The social and political consequences of large-scale unemployment, especially among the educated youth, can be serious.

Private Higher Education Institutions

A characteristic of the higher education sector in African countries is the presence of private institutions. The number of private institutions is already significantly greater than public ones, and private student enrollment has steadily increased over the years,

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with some countries now having almost equal student enrollment in public and private institutions.

These private institutions usually operate along a business model and are heavily dependent on students' fees to cover staff salaries and operational costs. While public institutions may eventually receive assistance from the state to overcome the consequences of COVID-19, the private ones may be forced to stop their operations for lack of funds. Closure of these institutions would have a dramatic impact on the higher education sector and countries' economic development. What are the possible solutions? How can the state assist private institutions at such a time of crisis?

Action

Understandably, at present, African countries, as elsewhere in the world, are prioritizing the health sector to minimize contagion and limit deaths. They are also trying to assist the socially disadvantaged of their population. Economic recovery and support to other sectors of the economy will have to come later. But it is vital for each sector to start reflecting on the impact of COVID-19 and assessing its possible consequences, otherwise recovery of the sector may be too slow, too late.

This applies to the higher education sector as well. The approach must be holistic and involve all stakeholders, including the private sector. Each country should set up a task force on higher education under the leadership of the relevant ministry, to survey the situation, suggest immediate and short-term measures, and be ready to effect redress when the crisis is over. ▲

Leadership in the Time of COVID-19: Reflections of Latin American Higher Education Leaders

Daniel Samoilovich

Abstract

To navigate the storm of the COVID-19 pandemic, university leaders should consider its structural impact on teaching and learning, research and innovation, decision-making structures, and on their own role in providing the academic community with a strong vision. As Shakespeare wrote in *As You Like It*, "Sweet are the uses of adversity, Which like the toad, ugly and venomous, Wears yet a precious jewel in his head."

In the global crisis generated by the COVID-19 pandemic, we are witnessing a boost in the role of experts. Science is determining public policy decisions. At the same time, leaders across the board navigate the storm, at all levels. The reflections from some higher education leaders in Latin America, collected in this article, suggest some essential directions to senior management of higher education.

Change begins with creating a sense of urgency. There is definitely no want of urgency in the current crisis. Management challenges are cropping up: ensuring the continuity of classes; making educational resources available in a digital format; obtaining resources for university hospitals; mobilizing research groups capable of delivering potentially relevant contributions; giving interviews to the press—not to mention discussions with governments on regulations about distance education, or with teachers unions, which are not always in favor of the digital transition due to its impact on working conditions. Such an accumulation of difficulties makes rectors feel—in the words of one of them—"run over by reality."

This will be a period of experimentation in every sense. It will be important to shift one's mindset and, beyond the crisis, identify opportunities. During the emergency,

rectors and their teams should adopt a “test and learn” attitude, be ready to recognize what works and what is not working and adapt quickly, and in the process, also look for opportunities for universities to contribute to communities and organizations in their vicinity. This will provide them with an additional source of legitimacy.

What Impact Will the Crisis Have on Higher Education?

With great urgency, universities are migrating their courses online. For this to succeed, a massive teacher training effort is necessary, as evidenced by the enormous popularity of the course “Adapting My Class to a Virtual Environment without Succumbing in the Attempt,” organized by [Columbus](#) in collaboration with member universities. Basically, two attitudes stand out with respect to the transition to digital modalities, one reactive, the other proactive. The most advanced institutions are capable of monitoring the implementation of the new programs, solving difficulties in the provision of online courses and addressing questions related to assessing learning outcomes. In the short term, especially in Latin America, equity of opportunities is a crucial aspect of the transition: remote modalities create difficulties for students in areas with limited connectivity. This also shows the need for increased responsibility from the public powers.

Carrying on with academic activities implies mobilizing resources and goodwill. “There is initial commitment and enthusiasm among the majority,” says another rector, “but what is needed now is a ‘countercyclical’ pedagogy. Staying motivated is going to be key.” In the medium term, how much of the current transition will impact teaching–learning models when the crisis is over? The value of face-to-face education will surely be reassessed. There will be teachers and students who will be delighted to return to traditional classroom courses. But, undeniably, the virtual classroom is acquiring a new legitimacy.

Although we do not yet know how much will change in the organization of academic activities, the current crisis is likely to have a deep, structural impact on higher education.

Research and Innovation: Funding Scarcity and Societal Expectations

The social responsibility of universities is embodied in a rich combination of teaching, research, and societal contributions. According to Dolly Montoya, the president of Universidad Nacional de Colombia, “it is important to show the active participation of universities in accompanying and guiding governments, and helping them take the right measures at the right time. The Universidad Nacional has organized think tanks in all areas of knowledge, ready to start working on assessing and learning from this crisis to help shape public policy when all this has been overcome. We know that the world will not be the same.”

The foreseeable economic crisis will have an impact on funding. Research and development activities will have to compete for scarce resources with other public sectors—while expectations regarding their economic and social impact will increase. New national policies and institutional mechanisms for the future orientation of these activities will have to be considered and areas of strategic research will have to be identified.

Establishing Structures for Consensual and Effective Decision-Making

Two days after issuing a message to the entire academic community about sustaining academic activities, the rector of a well-known university in Brazil received an open letter from the teachers’ union. Because of its potential impact on working conditions, the union expressed objections against the rector’s call. This debate led a group of academics and experts, gathered by the Cartagena Group, to write a manifesto on “[Higher Education in the Face of the Coronavirus Crisis](#).” The crisis calls for strengthening *leadership*. Yet, stronger leadership requires greater transparency. Difficult decision-making in turbulent times such as those that we are going through requires a *reflection on decision-making*.

Universities have their regular statutory bodies: governing bodies, administrative boards, academic councils, etc. Without bypassing them, nimble and multifunctional teams with clear objectives and a common purpose can contribute to building trust and making decisions in line with institutional priorities. This crisis may give the opportunity to test forms of shared governance that integrate managers, academic leaders, and

Difficult decision-making in turbulent times such as those that we are going through requires a reflection on decision-making.

administrative personnel in a process of assessing the viewpoints of all engaged stakeholders when defining courses of action.

Creating a Sense of Community and Leading from a Distance

To ensure the physical and mental wellbeing of students and faculty, it is necessary to maintain a sense of community and common purpose. In the community, the individual is “at home.” The community protects, preserves, and respects individuals. It takes into account people’s needs, including emotional ones. The foundations of a caring culture are a common purpose and unified goals. While goals vary at the academic community level, addressing common problems that arise during this crisis and sharing common experiences may contribute to building community in a time of social distancing.

Leaders need to energize the entire university community by setting a clear direction and communicating it effectively. Presenting a clear vision and offering a realistic perspective can have a powerful effect on motivation throughout the organization. It is important for leaders to inspire and lead their administrative departments in their daily work, while physically apart. One way to do so is to increase levels of interaction. In this emergency, it is advisable to assemble a crisis management team to support the rector in reactive and proactive decision-making.

As the university returns to normal, new routines will have to be incorporated into a “new normal,” taking advantage of the structures, culture, processes, and technology developed during the emergency period, combining face-to-face and remote forms of work. ▲

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The Argentine University against COVID-19: Old and New Discussions in an Unforeseen Reality

Monica Marquina

Abstract

During the COVID-19 quarantine, old and new discussions emerged regarding virtual higher education. Under the current state of emergency, the University of Buenos Aires has postponed the start of the academic year from April to June out of concern for quality and social responsibility. Meanwhile, the vast majority of higher education institutions keeps supporting the right to education through distance teaching.

Since the beginning of the year, Argentina, like other countries in the Americas, has been witnessing the relentless spread of the COVID-19 virus throughout Asia and Europe. The first confirmed case of coronavirus in the country occurred on March 3, and the first death, ten days later. On March 20, the government issued a decree ordering “preventive and compulsory social isolation” for the entire population, suspending all nonessential activities as well as all domestic and international travel and transportation, and closing the country’s borders.

Universities have become leading players in the fight against COVID-19, acting within the framework of their social mission in multiple ways. For instance, they recruit volunteers to assist passengers arriving from international flights who must comply with a mandatory quarantine in hotels. These volunteers also help pack food that students usually consume in university dining halls for free or at low prices, and they give support to elderly living alone. Many institutions are contributing to the production of items in short supply, such as alcohol-based hand sanitizer and masks, and, in some cases, they participate in the production of respirators and hospital conditioning. University hospitals also carry out tests to diagnose the disease.

Most universities are working against the clock to ensure that their virtual platforms are set up for the courses scheduled for the first semester of the year, supporting teachers and evaluating options so that no student is left out because of limited means or technological capabilities. Several already have online classes under way or have even organized online dissertation defenses.

Argentina's Advantage in Distance Education

Argentina has a background that sets it apart from other countries in the region with regard to distance university education. This form of education began to expand at a fast pace at the turn of the century, with several universities at the vanguard of developments. In 2017, the university sector reached sufficient maturity to agree on a legal framework for distance education, based on quality standards, and establishing distance education on equal terms with face-to-face education. The Council of Universities, which represents all university institutions in the country, worked together with the Office of University Policies (SPU) on a regulatory framework specifying quality requirements for distance education. Since then, each institution offering full or partial distance education programs has had to set up its own Institutional Distance Education System, which in turn must be validated by the SPU based on a favorable evaluation by the National Commission for University Evaluation and Accreditation. In addition, each of these programs must be evaluated individually. The process implies that universities offering distance education programs must document how they organize themselves in terms of functional structure, technological infrastructure, specialized human resources, teacher training strategies, and research activity on this type of education.

These regulations are specific to online programs, which at most universities represent only a small portion of the total academic offering. Although it would be a mistake to expect that all courses programmed for the first semester of 2020 may transit to a virtual format overnight, the university system—unlike elementary or high school systems—is well prepared, on a structural level, to face these kinds of contingencies. There is a wealth of experience in distance learning that is currently being used to full advantage.

Yet, individual teachers face a heavy challenge when preparing virtual classes in record time and with different levels of institutional support. For many, the amount of work required is considerable, because of scheduling and lack of pedagogical experience. They have to “learn on the go.” For some, this is a good thing, whereas others struggle. In many cases, experienced educators work alongside young teachers, combining different types of knowledge.

Emerging Arguments against Virtual Education

Following a decision to extend the quarantine, old and new discussions began to emerge, with brand new arguments arising against virtual education, in addition to the traditional ones advocating that face-to-face teaching is irreplaceable. Working conditions for educators at home or lack of experience are arguments used by some unions to claim that it would be best to wait for the situation to normalize rather than offer low-quality teaching. The inequity of technology-mediated education is also a common issue, since many students do not have the means to access it.

Recently, the University of Buenos Aires, one of the main universities in the country in terms of history, number of students, and international recognition, established a new academic calendar postponing the start of the semester from April to June. While acknowledging that each faculty (school) can establish virtual modalities in line with the characteristics of its programs, the university passed a regulation whereby attendance to face-to-face classes is the only authorized option, citing social responsibility and quality concerns. Meanwhile, other public and private universities approved virtual classes as a means to sustain academic activity throughout the quarantine period.

It is important to highlight what each university can do, according to its means and possibilities, to ensure the right to education, in a situation where nothing is as it was and where it is crucial to maintain a pedagogical offer. In an unexpected moment of isolation, universities cannot afford to be absent. Moving forward, it is likely that, when activities go back to normal, a seed of change will have been sown. A change that will grow

Universities have become leading players in the fight against COVID-19, acting within the framework of their social mission in multiple ways.

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from the experience of each of those key actors during this unexpected and exceptional period: students, teachers, and institutions. ▲

The Impact of COVID-19 on Australian Higher Education

Betty Leask and Chris Ziguras

Abstract

With international students comprising over a quarter of its student population, Australia is vulnerable to global shocks. The initial impact of COVID-19 was to prevent thousands of Chinese students from traveling to Australia for the new academic year. The unfolding lockdown, a shift to online teaching, and collapse of part-time work are affecting international students deeply. However, universities have transitioned to online operations quite seamlessly, which might bring lasting cultural change to their operations.

Higher education has been one of Australia's top three exports for over a decade. In 2019, Chinese students contributed A\$12 billion to the Australian economy. The presence of international students generally, and of Chinese students in particular, has literally and metaphorically enriched campuses, classrooms, and research laboratories. International student visas allow students to work up to 40 hours a fortnight, and graduates are able to stay on in the country for between two and four years with full work rights. As a result, local communities have benefited from access to an enthusiastic, flexible, and diverse casual workforce. COVID-19 has put all of this at risk.

The movement of students from China to Australia prior to COVID-19 represented one of the largest education flows that the world has ever seen. In 2019, Chinese students comprised 28 percent of Australia's total international student population. The first wave of the COVID-19 pandemic in China came at the worst possible time for students from that country, as the academic year in Australia commences in March. At the time when Australia imposed restrictions on travel from China, there were more than 100,000 students there who had been accepted to study in Australia in 2020, but who were no longer permitted to enter the country. As the crisis unfolded in January and February, it quickly became clear that only a very small percentage of those students would be able to start the semester as planned. People were just starting to understand the personal cost for students, and the economic cost for institutions, of COVID-19. For students unable to leave China, the impact of the crisis on their lives was magnified beyond the immediate impact on their families, friends, and lifestyle. It was likely to be much longer-term, affecting their future plans for a professional career. For institutions, the economic cost was estimated to be in excess of A\$3 billion.

Early Days—Chinese Students Stranded

Some Chinese students did manage to enter Australia by spending two weeks in transit in a third country. By the time the semester started, though, many remained in China, some studying online, others having deferred, hoping for a mid-year commencement.

Australian universities worked hard to meet the needs of all three groups of students, including providing discounted fee tuition for those taking online classes in China; reorganizing on-campus teaching so that students who arrived later in the semester would receive the support they needed; delaying the start date of the semester; providing fee refunds and deferred payment; supporting students to resolve visa issues; resolving accommodation and employment arrangements; and offering dedicated support services for Chinese students. The latter included extended academic and welfare support, counselling, special helplines, and coronavirus-specific information guidelines.

Nevertheless, the crisis had an immediate devastating effect on both Chinese students and institutions. It caused major disruption to students' study, accommodation, part-time employment, and life plans, as well as mental wellbeing. Students and institutions

scrambled to manage the situation day by day, and week by week as the health crisis escalated.

Increasing Intensity—Studying under Lockdown

As the health impact of COVID-19 intensified in Australia in the following weeks, the crisis changed the lives of all students and staff. All teaching moved online. All study abroad by Australian students and travel by faculty was abruptly canceled. International students in Australia found themselves isolated and grappling with a new mode of study, and many lost the part-time work that they relied on to pay rent and buy food. Some returned to their home country, either deferring their studies or figuring that if they must study online, they may as well do that from home where costs are much lower and they are close to their loved ones.

At this point, a multibillion dollar economic stimulus package was released, including additional allowances paid to full-time domestic students as compensation for lost income from casual work. However, despite the fact that international students also lost their casual employment, the prime minister announced that if international students “are not in a position to support themselves then there is the alternative for them to return to their home countries.”

This “go home” response was broadly condemned by student groups and those in the education sector, who pointed out that many students are not currently able to return, and argued that Australia has a duty of care to all residents. The international education community, who had for years been working to have international students treated as an integral part of educational institutions and communities, was appalled at this callous disregard for their welfare.

State and local governments, and many businesses, have stepped up to provide moral and material support to international students, and the international students’ peak body (an elected group of students representing the interests of international students) has appealed to consular missions to provide additional support to their students in Australia. And while a number of institutions offered hardship payments to international students struggling to pay their bills, the government announced a coronavirus relief package for higher education that unashamedly focused on domestic students.

Looking Ahead

For Australian international higher education, the future undoubtedly looks very different now than it did three months ago. Australia’s borders will almost certainly be closed until after the beginning of the second semester in July, when many international students commence, so numbers will fall further. Significantly reduced enrollments of international students in the short to medium term will profoundly reduce class sizes and the teaching workforce, particularly at the master’s level. Around 46 percent of Chinese students are studying a postgraduate master’s program by coursework, many of them in business schools, which will be hardest hit.

The surprisingly smooth transition from on-campus to online teaching was made possible by huge investments in learning management systems and digitization of administrative services in recent years. While the take-up of some online systems in the past has been patchy, this crisis has forced the entire system to experiment with the new affordances of remote engagement, both for teaching and for institutional operations. Universities are planning to also deliver the second semester online, in order to serve new international students who will have to begin their studies offshore, and expecting that social isolation will continue in Australia for some time, although hopefully less intensely. ▲

The surprisingly smooth transition from on-campus to online teaching was made possible by huge investments in learning management systems and digitization of administrative services in recent years.

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Abstract

In response to COVID-19, Italy was the first European country to close its universities and switch entirely to online education. This has turned into an unprecedented national experiment that is highlighting the challenges and opportunities of online education in a system with only limited prior experience.

There Is Opportunity in Crisis: Will Italian Universities Seize It?

Fiona Hunter and Neil Sparnon

In the early phase of the coronavirus epidemic, when travel restrictions began to take effect, international mobility was the first preoccupation of Italian universities. International offices focused on returning Italian students stranded abroad and ensuring that international students could get home or were safe. This was followed by the suspension, postponement, rescheduling, and cancellation of international projects. The crisis spread quickly and Italy was the first country in Europe to suspend classroom instruction, moving all its teaching activities online. As many Italian universities had largely disregarded the opportunities of online provision, this was uncharted territory.

A National Online Experiment

The switch happened suddenly. Decisions that would normally have taken months were made overnight. At the institutional level, online platforms were identified and training for staff and students provided. At the national level, funding was identified to ensure all students had access. Decisions were made swiftly to ensure that the academic calendar could continue as planned.

As the semester unfolded, classes were underway, tutoring and counseling services were in place, and thesis discussions took place—all online. Academic staff learnt overnight how to move from the physical to the virtual classroom; how to livestream or narrate slides; and how to use chatrooms and polling functions to engage their students and find creative ways to provide a positive learning experience. Administrative teams worked tirelessly to support academic staff. University leaders developed new communication strategies making full use of social media, to ensure everyone was informed and reassured. There were emotional scenes as student doctors and nurses graduated and headed straight to emergency centers to deal with coronavirus victims, in a country that had become the European epicenter of the pandemic.

Was this business as usual? No. The transition to online learning—from a marginal to a mainstream academic activity—happened practically overnight. Even in normal times, this would be a complex endeavor requiring significant planning, resources, and training. Many Italian universities did not have the technological capacity, the academic expertise, or the experience to teach online effectively. Teachers reported feeling overwhelmed and underprepared. They struggled to adapt from in-person teaching and the demands of the online classroom. Workloads were heavier. Students were not always as comfortable as expected. They too needed time to adapt. Many perceived virtual learning as limiting and constraining. Those who have not adapted, have struggled. For them, online learning has been a poor substitute for the classroom experience.

Of course, there is nothing new in this. Online learning has been around for at least 20 years and, as both the pedagogy and technology have advanced, it has developed a unique and rich academic environment that is distinct from traditional forms of academic activity and, in some respects, better. Well-designed online learning is interactive and student centered. It is more flexible and accessible. A combination of face-to-face provision and online (blended) materials serves traditional learners well and offers the opportunity of personalized learning pathways. The days of videotaping traditional classroom lectures and posting links on institutional websites are long gone.

Policy Change Leads to Behavioral Change

Until this crisis, it had been possible for the higher education sector to acknowledge the potential benefits of online education, yet continue with traditional learning and teaching as if online did not exist. The coronavirus epidemic has changed all that. It has

forced engagement with online learning and related technology in a way that had previously been optional. The effects have been extraordinary. The crisis has broken down many of the societal, institutional, organizational, and personal barriers that have often precluded effective cooperation. Social distancing and self-isolation restrictions have forced people to work to ensure that they do not become professionally and intellectually isolated. Italian universities have adapted rapidly, discovering new ways of communication and collaboration. Virtual communities have been established across organizations, groups, and activities that never considered them until now. Many may prove to be more effective than when they inhabited physical spaces.

The crisis has affected behaviors more widely. People have united in the face of adversity, pulling together to offer encouragement and assistance. Teachers are helping teachers. Students are helping students. Teachers are acting as role models for students who despair, encouraging them to reflect on how they can learn in a crisis. They are doing so via a variety of social media platforms. Even those with less experience are acquiring new skills, discovering new ways of learning, cooperating, and building a sense of community. Management teams are communicating regularly to coordinate, inform, and reassure. Remote working and digital meetings are suddenly not just a marginal part of the working week, but are the principal means through which it is conducted.

A potential cultural shift is underway—one that should be captured and cultivated. In the depths of this crisis there lies a huge opportunity. A massive and unprecedented online learning experience is taking place across the entire higher education system, indeed the whole of society. It has the potential to bring institutional, sector-wide, perhaps even societal, improvement. The question is, can we seize it?

There Is a Future—And We Are Free to Write It

As we write, questions remain about how course assessments will be carried out in Italy, a system that relies heavily on individual oral exams over several weeks. It is not known whether any universities will reopen before the end of this academic year or whether they will even be able to reopen as normal after the summer.

Yet, the foundations of new models are often set during the darkest days of any crisis, so it is worth thinking about how the future will be affected by our current experiences. Many will want simply to go back to the *status quo ante*. However, the explosion in the use of online and virtual learning environments, and the associated shift in attitudes and behaviors, mean that even if this is desirable, it is not possible, in Italy or elsewhere.

In the foreseeable future, with many students choosing to stay home or postponing plans to study abroad, online learning will continue to offer competitive advantages to institutions with a strong focus on international mobility and/or a high dependence on international student recruitment. These advantages will be better understood and more widely appreciated. The coronavirus epidemic has shown how fragile our world is; how global problems need global solutions; and how cooperation and solidarity are more important than ever. It has also demonstrated how technology can promote learning, community building, and cooperation and how technology can improve our universities and make them stronger partners in society.

As we look still wider to the challenges of the environment and the need to communicate and collaborate more effectively while traveling less, an online approach to internationalization will represent a valid alternative for many—both short- and long-term—one with which they are now familiar. In the end, we may look back on this awful time as the moment when we, as advocates of internationalization in the higher education sector and society more generally, fully, and finally, embraced the potential of online education and collaboration. ▲

The crisis has broken down many of the societal, institutional, organizational, and personal barriers that have often precluded effective cooperation.

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The conference, marking the 25th anniversary of both the Center and *International Higher Education*, is intended to bring together senior academics and leaders in international higher education from around the world, alumni and friends/partners of CIHE, as well as other scholars, doctoral students, and postdocs with an interest in the field. The event will be organized around two tracks—international and comparative higher education, and the internationalization of higher education—and will include invited keynote presenters, panel discussions, and presentations of individual papers. Confirmed keynote speakers include Philip G. Altbach and Hans de Wit (Boston College), Simon Marginson (University of Oxford, UK), Rajani Naidoo (University of Bath, UK) and Ly Tran (Deakin University, Australia). It is our intention to publish some of the presented papers in special issues of *Higher Education* and *Journal of Studies in International Education* (there is no guarantee that a paper selected for inclusion in the conference program will be published in either journal, but all selected papers will be considered).

A modest registration fee will be charged to all attendees. The full call for proposals (for those interested in presenting a paper) and the registration link are both available on the [CIHE website](#). Paper submissions are due by May 15, 2020.

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