Trends Transforming the Universities of This Century: Virtualize, Disappear, or Transform

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In the last two hundred years, universities have evolved from colleges emphasizing philosophy and moral sciences to institutions forming the backbone of the science and technology revolution. But this transformation is not complete, for four trends promise to dramatically change the university of the next century: globalization, virtualization, multiculturalism, and politicization, driven by economy and efficiency, technology, values and rights, and power and politics. Operating at different levels, these trends are likely to change the fundamental nature of teaching, learning, and research. Globalism and politicization have existed for many years, whereas multiculturalism and Internet technology are newer trends. All four bring new models of who teaches, who learns, and through what medium and through what organizational structures these people teach and learn. This article explores the impact of these trends on the future of the university, presents possibilities for structural change, and offers probable scenarios for the future.

Globalization and Virtualization

Globalization—the continued expansion of corporate capitalism, including the reduction of the size and the legitimacy of the welfare state—reduces the funds available for the state to subsidize universities. Both Third World and OECD nations must respond to pressures to limit the amount of public funds for education. As with health and housing and other state distributions, education is being privatized.

To survive, universities are increasingly becoming reliant on corporate funding. For instance, California State University has been in the process of entering into a long-term partnership with various multinational high-technology corporations. This partnership gives the university technology that the state is unable to fund. As Robert Corrigan, the president of San Francisco State says, "If I had

my druthers, I think it's something the state should pay for, but as a President who can't get the money either from the students or from the state, I'm driven into working with the corporate sector" (Burdman and Angwin, 1997, p. A1).

But Lawrence Wiseman (1991) asks, once the university becomes just another business—with globalization and corporate affiliations merely first steps in the more fundamental cultural transformation under way—will it lose its "special character, some of its societal privilege," its moral authority and force, its link with civil society as a repository of truth and knowledge? Can a university both be a business and fulfill "its potential as an institution of noble and transforming purpose?" (p. 5).

There is of course resistance to the globalization of the university. Students in Germany protested en masse to changes in funding to the university, arguing about why they should undergo budget cuts considering that the university is increasingly subsidizing corporations, serving as the training ground for postindustrialism. But irrespective of protests, the long-term trend appears to be a consumer orientation in the university, with students participating in transactions whereby they gain some information and then move on to the next vendor.

Universities are also expected to become more competitive by reducing costs wherever possible. Tenure has become less common, workload has increased, and dissent has become even more difficult (Manicas, 2000). In response, academics have focused on issues of money and not on the broader issues of course content, the role of the administration, and academic freedom. The triangle of teaching, research, and service has become dominated by the search for grant dollars; the university has become ever more closely linked to the corporate world.

Globalization unleashes economic rationalism on universities, allowing a few of them to thrive and spread; at the same time, however, globalism creates the conditions for the demise of many universities as currently structured and understood, especially in the liberal humanist variants. This occurs partly through creating a new world intellectual underclass: in OECD nations, many academics work part-time with no job security, and in Third World nations, many suffer from rapidly diminishing wages. Also, for-

profit educational providers such as Murdoch's News Corporation use the Web and its future evolution to undercut universities' monopoly in the knowledge market. Over time, academics from all over the world will move to for-profit providers, further segmenting and breaking down the idea of the academy.

If the last decade has demonstrated that universities must globalize or die, the theme for the next decade for universities may be virtualize or disappear (that is, increase distance and Web-based learning and reduce administration through artificial intelligence systems). Everyone has joined in. Even the World Bank has created the African Virtual University. Higher education researcher Michael Skolnik describes the responses of the professorate to the virtual university on a continuum, from union action by some academics against downsizing and the cutting of positions and programs, to conversion experiences reminiscent of Damascus, wherein the academic goes Web (Inayatullah and Gidley, 2000). The virtualization of the university will not just be about the delivery of knowledge but also about its utility, the half-life of knowledge. Continuous education using multiskilling (that is, being engaged in numerous projects simultaneously—teaching, consulting, community service, administration—some through high-technology and some through traditional face-to-face communication) and other ways of learning will be far more important than the ability to concentrate on one task.

As universities have attempted to come to terms with the Internet, however, many have used ineffective methods. One Australian university's idea of becoming more interactive through the Internet has been to require lecturers to put their lecture notes on the Web. The result: lectures became even more rigid and boring. Instead of using the Internet for communicating information so that professors can concentrate on the more human needs in pedagogy (that is, encouragement, nurturing, and idea generation), universities can transform professors into information automatons. Instead of "sage-on-stage," one gets information retrieval system on stage. One European university, in an attempt to create a distance learning, flexible-delivery program, decided merely to put professors' books on its Web site, thinking that this was appropriate Web pedagogy. There was no understanding of the aesthetics and

mechanics of the digital era or of the use of abstracts, commentary, updates, and teasers of longer texts.

Although virtualization is supportive of dissent through cyber-lobbying, whereby the action of a few can challenge the power of state regimes, it cannot capture the dynamism of street revolution, of thousands of students marching (Inayatullah, 1999, p. 12). Nor can it capture the spiritual dimensions of exchange, nor are Web courses communicative except in the most shallow sense of information transfer. As feminists would remind us, the use of the new information and communication technologies are not communicative in the deeper sense of idea exploration, of conversation as method, as relationship, as a way of knowing the world (Harcourt, 1999). Even though virtualization might reduce the cost of education, as long as it remains information focused it will not be able to challenge traditional pedagogy (Inayatullah, 1998).

Still, virtualization creates the possibility of the decentralization of education, of deschooling society, of ending the monopoly control possessed by universities and disciplines. As Majid Tehranian (1996, p. 446) writes, "If all goes well, the entire human society will become a university without walls and national boundaries."

Multiculturalism

In its tokenistic form, multiculturalism has became a government fad of the last decade in postindustrial societies. Its goal has been not only to refashion the West to represent women and "other" cultures in institutions but also to legitimize feminist and non-Western ways of history, knowing, and futures. Its most controversial feature has been its excesses in the area of political correctness. In its deeper nature it is about inclusiveness (Sardar, 1998). At heart, argues Ashis Nandy (2000), multiculturalism is about dissent, about contesting the categories of knowledge that modernity has given us. Corporations provide specific types of education—generally, managerial and technical. Rarely do they provide education that contests cultural assumptions about westernization, development, and linear images of the future. Even with multiculturalism often criticized and co-opted, the future is likely to contain more emphasis on an ethics of inclusion than on a politics of exclusion.

Of course, the struggle will be long and hard, and more often than not, instead of new curricula there will just be more special departments of the Other. This situation represents a real fear, as it narrows the role of the Asian or African or Pacific intellectuals to that of "becoming otherness machines" (Suleri, 1989, p. 105). As Kwame Anthony Appiah writes (1992, p. 157), "Our only distinction in the world of texts to which we are latecomers is that we can mediate it to our fellows" and then regurgitate it back to the West as the view from the Other. In this view, whereas Western intellectuals produce general universal knowledge, non-Westerners merely write on what it means not to be part of that enterprise, becoming the official Other. This means that the European-industrial basis of institutional arrangements and knowledge is left untransformed as special departments of ethnic studies, women's studies, and the like are created. By merely expanding who teaches, this strategy buys off the need for foundational transformation of the nature of the university, of what is taught and how it is taught. As globalism continues in its varied oppositional forms, the multicultural challenge to the future of the university has become more pervasive—as critique of uneven capital accumulation, as authentic encounters with the Other, and even as cultural chic. The forces of multiculturalism, even if in the short term strategically co-opted by liberalism, are likely to increase in the future.

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Immigration patterns, the postmodern turn in the social sciences, feminism and womanism, the rise of indigenous movements, the spread of non-Western sciences (the civilizational perspective) are a few salient factors (Inayatullah, 1996).

Deep multiculturalism thus challenges what is taught, how it is taught, the knowledge categories used to teach, and the way departments enclose the "other." It provides a worldview in which to create new models of learning and new universities that better capture the many ways students know the world. As futures researcher Paul Wildman (1998) reminds us, this can extend to concepts such as multiversities and even "subversities" that encourage participation from scholars and students who dwell at the periphery of knowledge. In this form, multiculturalism goes beyond mere inclusion of "other" ethnicities, to a questioning of the whole paradigm of Western scientific rationalism on which centuries of university traditions are founded. In this perspective, multiple ways of knowing include spiritual or consciousness models of self, in which, as James Grant and Marcus Bussey assert, the main driving force in transforming universities of the next century is the deepening of knowledge through the development of our spiritual and emotional selves. Following grand thinkers such as P. R. Sarkar, this is the introduction of the Indian episteme with its multiple layers of reality, from the most superficial, the intellect, to the most profound, spiritual intuition.

The State and Education

In Asian, Middle Eastern, and African nations, these issues are not pivotal. It is the role of the state to

determine not only content, which occurs indirectly in the West, but also who gets to teach, who gets promoted, and ultimately in some universities, who lives and dies. In one case, Shahrzad Mojab discovered that when the Kurds attempted to set up their own university in Iran at the onset of the Iranian revolution, the result was the elimination of the physical site and many of the professors (Mojab, 2000). Tariq Rahman (2000) describes the politicization of the university in Pakistan that has bred a politics of escalating violence wherein student political groups bring guns to class to intimidate teachers and fellow students. Along with direct violence comes direct intervention by the State. Becoming tenured in Pakistan requires not challenging the current prime minister. Politicization in the north works through the commodification of knowledge and the creation of "Dean, Inc.," wherein deans become the vehicles for the corporatization of the university rather than mediating the concerns and needs of the professors and students the university. Yet in fact the commodified-corporatized university has its covert agenda: the end of the humanistic university. In the south, politicization is more overt and functions openly to maintain power over intellectuals, to ensure that they do not dissent. In both cases, intellectuals are forced to move to other spaces to create new forms of knowledge and community. Deans keep their positions, as in large corporations, by reducing costs and then moving up the promotion ladder. Western liberalism allows for individual dissent but not structural transformation, whereas non-Western universities tend to limit individual freedom severely, yet paradoxically are the sites of alternative universities that offer seeds of structural transformation. These alternatives include Islamic universities intent on developing curricula based on the Islamic paradigm, as well as the alternative Gurukul (the "house of the guru," the classical system of Indian education in India). The latter intends, at least as invented this century by Sarkar, to integrate practical participatory economic and social development with spiritual practices—philosophy with engineering, for example.

Likely Futures

Given the power of the four trends and drivers discussed, what then are the likely futures of the university globally?

Will it more and more resemble, in administrative structure as well as in academic content and policy, a large business, which to survive must remember that the student is always right, that the student is the customer?

Will it become a virtual university where those who create the most interactive courseware will be leaders, wherein loyalty to a particular university will no longer be important?

Will it become a multicultural, international institution creating curricula and hiring individuals that can speak to the students of the future?

Or will the university remain at the behest of the state, either beholden through grant schemes, through fear of sacking, or, in the most extreme case, through fear of violence?

From a certain metaperspective, with the exception of multiculturalism, these main trends and driving forces may bring the dehumanization of higher education. The massive forces of globalization have been largely responsible for bringing to an end the traditional humanistic dimensions of the university. The economics of globalism has led university leaders, usually administrators who have effectively appropriated the

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leadership role once held by professors, to believe that they must sacrifice the very traditions that once defined the core business of university life. In the restructuring process, academic tenure (not to mention freedom), research time (unless commercially funded), and noncommercially viable disciplinary streams (such as the humanities), have all but disappeared in the new "market-sensitive" universities.

The social costs of virtualization may be even greater. Feelings of alienation, fragmentation, and loss of meaning will undoubtedly continue to increase among students and probably also academic staff. As the human side of face-to-face collegiate collaboration and student-teacher contact diminishes behind the screen, the disillusionment already felt by many young people about the future is unlikely to improve. We are also yet to see the full extent of human "redundancy" in the higher education sector that will come when virtualization takes its expected place at the table. Considering experience in other industries, it is likely that what we have seen so far is just the beginning. Outside the ivory walls, the world for many is running out of control environmentally, economically, politically, and of course socially; to what extent are universities today providing the intellectual, professional, and practical resources to drive a positive transformation of global problems?

The answer is negative and cyclical; universities are no longer providing solutions, and the reason is economic rationalism, driven by the forces outlined. The key to breaking such cycles is inspired human agency. This break could occur if universities were centers

where humans joined their skills, knowledge, experience, wisdom in solving problems, and, most important, the social conscience to become sites of dissent against dehumanization and the will to become centers of action and praxis. Academics would thus become the scholar-activists Anne Hickling-Hudon describes as the soul of the Caribbean university (2000).

Role of the Academic

This new vision of the university of course begs the question, What is the role of the future academic? Is it sage-on-stage? Mentor? Broker? Communicator? Learning catalyst? Or meaning maker? And where in this is the public intellectual? Although many decry the end of the public intellectual, perhaps the issue is that public space has changed. Traditionally, public space has been associated with state space; however, a whole new range of spaces have opened up—cyberspace, local space, and global space, as well as the alternative spaces created by ecological, spiritual, womanist, and nongovernmental organizations. The issue is not that the public intellectual has disappeared but that new spaces for action and reflection have been created.

But one can rightly ask: What is the future for public intellectuals if universities are increasingly creating

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alliances with large multinational news and entertainment companies? Can a new breed of corporate intellectuals emerge who desire to ensure more equity, more concern for future generations in business itself? Can a corporate transformative space be created (the notion of the triple bottom line, encompassing profit, environment, and social inclusiveness/justice)?

While public space expands, for the university the most likely configuration is the division of universities into three spaces: (1) the elite brand-name universities, which expand outward spurred on by globalization and virtualization, (2) convenience-oriented megauniversities that through flexible delivery capture the majority of the world's students, and (3) smaller niche universities that focus on multiculturalism, action learning, or regional and local concerns.

In the long run, elite, Northern, wealthy universities are likely to buy up leading universities across the world—the victory of the multinational corporatist vision of the university. There will thus be a slow but decisive shift in the political economy of the university. While elite U.S. and British universities already define

legitimate research and legitimate knowledge, what is important for the future is that soon they will write courseware for universities all over the world. (And, of course, this will be franchised.) Yet if they do this, thus diluting their brand name, in the very long run the elite nature of such institutions will disappear. The elite universities will also lose staff as courseware developers develop their own links, becoming knowledge manufacturers and brokers.

However, if elite institutions do not follow this path, believing that they will retain their market share irrespective of virtualization and the impacts of globalization, new low-cost global players like the

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convenience-oriented University of Phoenix or rich mammoth multimedia players like News Corporation and Disney will step in; indeed, News Corporation has already announced its intent to enter the educational arena.

While large-scale, largely virtual universities will prosper, smaller niche universities such as Southern Cross University in Australia (focused on regional concerns) will prosper as well. Although one can make friends in virtual space, relationships are forged and authentic learning (rather than information gathering) is possible primarily in physical space. Indeed, research so far tends to show that it is mixed media that are the most effective—for example, virtual with face-to-face, or intellectual modes of knowing with teaching by example (Rahman, 2000).

Dissent and Transformed Consciousness

Thus the challenge to the elite university, and to the convenience-oriented university as well, might not come from the virtual or the globally elite university but from the transdisciplinary university that approaches issues of meaning in cross-cultural ways and provides methods in which to explore these issues from body, mind, and spirit. William Irwin Thompson's Lindesfarne, the Schumacher College, and Sarkar's [www.gurukul.edu] and Steiner's [www.goetheanum.ch] Web presences all experiment with knowledge that is practical yet approached with critical lenses in the context of self and social and spiritual transformation.

Thus, although the Internet is now ubiquitous, far more significant is transformed consciousness, either

in terms of gender and cultural awareness, wisdom, or higher consciousness. These niche players can keep dissent alive. Dissent reduces the excesses of any system, whether it contains too much bureaucracy, too much ideology, or too much globalism. It is the transformed university that can ideally keep the tradition of dissent alive.

The Web and globalism will end the monopoly of the traditional university and paradoxically place the transformed university simultaneously at the center of society. But of course it would be a very different university without the division of "heart" and "mind" (the enlightenment division under challenge by the non-West) or private and public (being challenged by feminism), as well as other segmentations. Knowledge would be complex, based on many variables, not divided into categories of science versus culture but far more interactive, including the pre- and postrational, empirical, and spiritual or idealistic approaches to knowledge.

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