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Global university alliances and the creation of collaborative advantage (0114)

Programme number: N11

Research Domain: Management, Leadership, Governance and Quality

Global collaboration is a growing feature of the higher education landscape. Despite this trend, little research has been undertaken into the organisations that facilitate activities. A study of university alliances can help illustrate how higher education experiences are evolving in a global context. This paper summarises part of a research project into the strategies of ambitious universities. The research draws upon a study of strategic documents, a series of interviews with key figures from within both universities and alliances as well as an analysis of ranking data.

The paper situates the phenomena of international collaboration within the context of international competition in higher education. The proliferation of university alliances has occurred just as the competition for academic talent and high fee-paying international students has intensified. Furthermore, attention has shifted from national to international rankings and league tables and an increasing number of universities have opened branch campuses outside their home territory. Universities are increasing competing on a global level. Considering these trends, global alliances represent a curious form of cooperation.

The presentation provides a brief overview of the types of collaborations that have developed in recent times. These agreements often represent something more strategic and substantial than a specific memorandum of understanding. Some of these alliances are bilateral arrangements such as the Warwick-Monash and Bristol-Kyoto partnerships. The Warwick-Monash alliance, for example, was designed to establish both universities as 'globally networked universities'. This partnership was proclaimed as a way of helping meet student, industry and government demand for universities to produce graduates with a global education, and generate research tackling strategically-significant problems that no single institution could address.

Many alliances are multilateral networks involving members across several continents. This paper involves a comparison of three multilateral alliances:

- ◆ Worldwide Universities Network (WUN): Established in 2000: 20 members
- ◆ Universitas 21 (U21): Established in 1997: 23 members
- ◆ Association of Pacific Rim Universities (APRU): Established in 1997: 42 members

Research into these alliances took place in 2012. The presentation outlines the role alliances play in the internationalisation of academic research and the student experience. Following a discussion of each alliance, the most pertinent issues are summarised.

Through a range of different activities these alliances provide the framework and channels that make internationalisation a reality for both academic faculty and the student cohort. Student exchange schemes provide a cultural and learning experience beyond the home university where a student is enrolled. They also add to the diversity of the campus receiving exchange visits. E-learning initiatives, such as Universitas 21's online Graduate Management School 'U21 Global' enable individuals anywhere in the world to access higher education through the internet. Mobility programmes facilitate

researchers from different parts of the world with similar interests to collaborate on projects of mutual interest. These schemes also bring together researchers from different contexts and cultures to address international issues, such as the Worldwide Universities Network's 'Global Challenges' of research questions. Furthermore, alliance membership encourages universities in different parts of the world to share best practice on a range of issues from curriculum design to governance. The objective of a network can also place higher education in a regional geopolitical role. For example, the APRU's strategic intent is to help university leaders contribute to the integration of the Pacific Rim community of nations. This objective is viewed as complementary to the objective of governments in the region to create a community of Pacific Rim nations through the activities of the Asia Pacific Economic Cooperation (APEC) forum. APRU was founded to 'stimulate cooperation in teaching and research on issues of major importance to the Pacific Rim community'.

The research applies to higher education the idea that alliance formation can lead to the creation of 'collaborative advantage'. The concept of 'collaborative advantage' draws upon the work of Professor Rosabeth Moss Kanter of Harvard Business School. This identifies the best possible outcome of alliances to be the opportunity for the creation of mutual advance, mutual learning, and positive organisational transformations (Kanter, 1994). The paper introduces five factors expected to shape the ability of global university alliances to create collaborative advantage. We have distilled these factors from our own research into universities and a review of the literature on corporate alliances.

1. The alliance's strategic intent
2. The comparative status of member universities
3. The opportunities created for mutual learning among members
4. The salience of the alliance inside member universities
5. The on-going relevance of the alliance and its capacity for change

Finally, the presentation attempts to summarise the benefits and value of network membership. It also presents the problem of how to measure and quantify these benefits in a meaningful way. The analysis identifies a range of factors that shape the ability of university consortia to create collaborative advantage for their members. It explores how global university alliances create new spaces in which specific, purpose-built and time-bound partnerships can be initiated. The research seeks to clarify how global university alliances facilitate the internationalisation of higher education and represent a valuable strategic resource for ambitious university leaders.

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