The Changing Social Ecology of Higher Education in the Asia Pacific Region

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Five Dimensions to the Changing Ecology of HE

Loose construction of “ecology”: relationships between organisms and their multiple environments—Contemporary globalization as the overall ecology

- The unplanned privatization of public higher education
- The structure of the “alignment dilemma” and increasing income inequality
- Demographics
- Implications for HE of the Asian Century
- Changes in the nature of what we mean by “learning” and “learners”
Some Cautions

- Many notions—some competing—of what we mean by Asia-Pacific (e.g. does it include older “geographic” Asia; or the rim, or is it an inter-active/network notion?)

- The explosion of regional organizations and reconstituting ideas of “regional”: from “old” region meaning geographic proximity and exchange to more recent notions of region meaning nature and density of exchanges.

- Asia as the “big two”, includes: Japan & China, plus the US—half of global GDP and 1/3 of population represents the core of 21st century global political economy—add India and it is nearly 2/3’s of population, etc.

- The shifting role of the U.S. in the Asia/Pacific equation: fore-runner or outlier

- Evaluating the impacts of higher education changes—especially in “learning”. Can the center hold?
Unplanned Privatization of Public Higher Education

- The empirical results of 20+ years of neoliberal impacts on higher education structure and budgets: “independence” “autonomy” “partnering with private sector” “entrepreneurial” “managerialism” “autonomous cost centers” – all add up to less money for public higher education and resulting shifts in costs—in many locations of U.S. state governments pay less than 30%, and in some cases as little as 15%

- Continuing re-definitions of HE as a contributor to the public good... what are the purposes of higher education in society?
Consequences

- Social/structural implications on what institutions can do and seek to do
- Selected exceptions to institutions serving specific national purposes: e.g. international rankings, serving specific industry sectors,
- Re-valuing of academic “subject matter” with strong bias toward occupational related subjects
- Re-defining of the professoriate into structured class system
- Implications at some point for historic notions of academic freedom and shared governance
- Progressive “unbundling” of higher education institutions
The Alignment Dilemma

- Why it is a dilemma and not a “policy problem”
- Three interactive phenomena: rapidly shifting demand in workforce needs; exponential knowledge/information growth; cost
- Shifting political ground of HE as a traditional political constituency with declining status—in U.S. viewed as “too expensive and not doing its job.”
- Re-constitution within other institutions of traditional functions of higher education: knowledge creation; knowledge transmission; knowledge conservation
- Role of increasing inequality as redefining higher education with vocational emphasis
- Increasing evidence that institutions other than traditional universities can perform some or all of these functions more rapidly, cheaper, and with significantly higher reach and integration: e.g. Google as a HEI
Demographics

- Aging and birth rates—across region and across globe
- Three basic cycles (1) matching capacity with access; (2) maintenance—focus on quality and capacity and access come into relative balance—gradual shifts to
- Over-shoot (Korea, Japan, Taiwan); maintenance—(Thailand); under-shoot (Philippines, Indonesia, India, Pakistan, Laos, Cambodia)
- Hi-bred demographics, e.g. California, Australia?
- Each produces a different “structural driver” (what education is “for”) and contributes to reconstruction of HE
Eight Dimensions of Changing Ecology of Learning

- Changing characteristics of learners
- Emergent trends—including technology—impacting the learning process
- Shifting methods and expectations for engaging content
- Determining content
- Changes taking place within higher education organizations
- Changes in the frameworks of higher education
- Changes in credentialing
- Changes in policy
Changing Characteristics of Learners

- Very nature of persons presenting to higher education processes is in the midst of significant transformation. U.S.: average age of undergraduate 28.4; average # of jobs by age thirty-five 13.8

- Variations can be observed throughout the world—driven largely by demography, work force change, shifts in income

- Significantly complicates traditional ideas of what to “teach” to whom, under what circumstances, and why

- Increasing evidence of shift from teaching paradigm to learning paradigm

- In relatively highly integrated systems (albeit decentralized) such as U.S. dynamics leading to entirely new conversations
  - About what learning is
  - Who pays
  - What quality might be under such conditions of change
  - How to measure and certify any of it (Ewell 2010).
Shifting methods and expectations for engaging content

Even a modest review of this set of change dynamics will direct attention to the complexities of participatory learning including:

- Self-learning (DIY—including MIT?!), peer to peer (P2P)
- Dissolution of conventional modes of authority/expertise
- Disruption in production, evaluation and distribution of knowledge
- Networking, interactivity as core to learning
- Collaborative, collective, social enterprise (vs. individual performance)
- Importance of learning how to re-mix, re-purpose, redistribute information—24/7 within HEIs.
- Integration of mobile learning into teaching, learning, research and outreach
Determining content

- Efforts to apprise the effects of such diverse inputs as new and emerging digital literacy requirements (visual, information, digital, new media, digital production, programming)
- Rapid shifts in the currencies of knowledge
- Increased focus on outcomes— and skills and meta-skills
- Implicating the relevance of differential intelligence research
- Knowledge seekers as researchers
Changes taking place within higher education organizations

- Changes range from:
  - demand for evidence-based outcomes from multiple constituencies (parents, government, public, etc.);
  - need to oversee and monitor cost control and affordability;
  - efforts to improve the currency and perception of higher education;
  - the deployment of cost, result-effective technology;
  - adjusting faculty resources to succeed in the new ecology;
  - efforts to reinvent the college labor force;
  - Also: progressive unbundling of components of teaching/learning;
  - course design, use of externally generated content (e.g., MIT/Yale), content delivery, assessment, mentorship;
  - outsourcing of components of the educational enterprise (recruiting, marketing, design, delivery and assessment, etc.) (Palmer and Zajonc, 2010).
Changes in the frameworks of higher education

- Notions of new forms of portability for degrees and certificates, greater comparability and compatibility of academic programs, transferability of credit, and transparency of such processes.

- Often associated with notions of competency based degrees, and the proposal of new kinds of institutions might arise from active cooperation between existing institutions and those arising out of sympathetic industries.

- Relative importance of non-degree HE—examples: Harvard/MIT; Stanford; Khan Academy; TED lectures for the internet

- Sometimes phased in public good language, as in the development of relevant and beneficial institutions—to point of rethinking the commercial bases of intellectual property regimes.

- Linked closely to global and international possibilities of cooperation that may lead to the emergence of new institutional forms—multi-campus global university networks (Clayton 2010; Thomas and Brown, 2011).
Changes in credentialing

- All prefigure fundamental changes in ways that credentialing, quality assurance, and accreditation conducted—a conversation on what degrees mean and what should they mean?

- Specific endeavors include:
  - Shift from credentialing programs and institutions toward students, competencies and measurable outcomes.
  - Constant and continual efforts to create common degree frameworks out of systems that have been developed and nurtured to excel as separate institutions.
  - Effects are occurring simultaneously with increasing pressures to develop forms of international recognition and accreditation to provide recipient institutions with effective currency in global competitiveness.

- See Lumina Foundation of a common degree framework for the bachelor degrees (AAC&U 2011).
Changes in policy

As stakes in the “higher education game” continue to rise, especially with respect to costs and alignment or mis-alignment with rapidly changing employment markets, one can expect

- national policy environments will reflect some of the tensions of change noted above
- new policy interests will be expressed in shifts toward greater accountability and transparency—irony: less public money will be accompanied by increased public demand for accountability—classic symbolic politics
- demands for better metrics
- evidence of effective returns on productivity
- efforts to sort out proper relationships for public/private partnerships, especially as for profit institutions broaden their cross-border reach and come to be major actors within regional higher education arrangements.
Some Resources

- Draft Inventory—the early steps toward creating a conversation among the full range of participants within higher education creating and being “acted upon” by such changes

- Initial steps toward creating a resource bibliography

- If you are interested in receiving a version of this (from 2012), drop me a line: deanen@hawaii.edu
An Example of Drilling Down
Changing Learners

- Demographic shifts and increasing diversity
- Higher education preparedness
- Generational shifts in behavior, expectations, and capacities
- Expanded lifespan of learners
- Economic gap between those who have an education and those who don’t
- Gap between US and global competitiveness
- Desire of students to have meaning and make a difference
- Global Society changing the way students want to learn; redefining time/space paradigm of how learning “wants”
- Students need to act and feel connected and supported
- Too Dependent on technologies
- Web generation; highly connected; consumer oriented
- Gap between preparation of entering students preparation need for anything else
- How to address non-degree seeking life-long learners
- Need to work erodes time to study
- Multi-modal engagement 24/7 is normal...
- Yearning for transformational learning
More drilling down: Emergent Trends

- Changing approaches in delivery of content:
  - Dispersed, decentralized
  - Virtual, hybrid
  - Customizable
  - Cross-disciplinary, cross-institutional, transnational

- Applying research from the neuroscience of learning

- Engaging learners as producers of knowledge

- Greening of higher education in curriculum and on campuses

- Career driven “Roll your own Degree” programs aggregated from a variety of accredited institutions

- Increasing emphasis on the learner’s needs (not on number of credits, classes, etc.)

- New roles for faculty to serve as mentors, guiding students through learning

- Resurgence of applied learning through service learning, internships and apprenticeships

- Awarding of credit for prior, documented, competency-based, authentic learning and personal work experience

- Adoption of a world view of higher education (e.g., New Zealand’s inquiry based education)
Initial Resource List

- AASHE — Association for the Advancement of Sustainability in Higher Ed: http://www.aashe.org/
- Brown, J.S. (Jan-Feb 2008). Minds on Fire: Open Education, the Long Tail, and Learning 2.0.
- Carnegie Mellon Open Learning Initiative (OLI: http://oli.web.cmu.edu/openlearning/index.php); Open University of Great Britain; etc.
- ECAR Study of Undergraduate Students and Information Technology 2010: http://www.educause.edu/Resources/ECARStudyofUndergraduateStudents/217333


Khan Academy, available at: http://www.khanacademy.org


KnowledgeWorks Foundation. 2020 Forecast: Creating the Future of Learning. http://www.futureofed.org/forecast/. Although focused on K-12, the interactive 2020 Forecast map is a useful tool for exploring some of the major drivers of changes in the learning environment.


OpenLearn (http://OpenLearn.ac.uk/); MIT OpenCourseware (http://ocw.mit.edu/index.htm)