

BACKGROUND PAPER: HISTORY AND FUTURE PROSPECTS FOR GLOBAL U7 CONSORTIUM

Korea's Inha University in Incheon has had longstanding relationships with other universities around the world. With the continuing globalization of the education market more focused partnerships are required. Responding to the challenge, Inha University has sought to develop networks with globally-recognized universities by its fiftieth anniversary in April 2004. On that occasion, Inha University will launch its road map for the future. This vision will advance the strategies and action implemented since President Seoung-Yong Hong commenced his term of office at Inha University in 2002.

Since that time, President Hong and key faculty have sought to widen and deepen the level of cooperation with globally-recognized universities. After extensive contacts, Inha University and a selected group of institutions have discussed the establishment of a Global University Consortium, which will lead to the signing of an agreement by the respective Presidents in April 2004. Collaboration between faculty and administrative staff, notably heads of international cooperation offices of both Inha University and other universities, have elaborated the idea of the Consortium, particularly through joint steering committee meetings in Cheju Island and Xiamen, and courtesy visits.

The outcome of these interchanges has been the decision to proceed with the establishment of the Global U7 Consortium comprising Australia's RMIT University, Melbourne, China's Xiamen University, France's University of Le Havre, Israel's University of Haifa, Korea's Inha University, Incheon, and from the United States the University of Washington, Seattle, and the University of Rhode Island, Kingston.

Rationale

The Global U7 Consortium is proposed at a time when major challenges are confronting higher education stemming from globalization, the resulting complexity and competitiveness of both labor markets and product markets, and the increasing rapidity of technological change. The world is shrinking, and people and institutions are becoming more interdependent than ever due to developments in communication technology and the free movement of capital across national borders. Globalization can be a whirlwind: local, national, and regional economies have become interlocked and interdependent. In addition, computer-mediated technologies provide a highly cost-effective way to obtain much of the information and knowledge that are used to be provided by universities. Therefore, there is reason to believe that much higher or tertiary education will be electronically delivered in the near future. These recent developments in communication technology create serious problems for "traditional" residential universities.

Many institutions may disappear in the future. Those that survive may have to offer students what they cannot get from virtual universities and they may become more highly selective and expensive. Thus, recent developments around the world pose serious challenges for higher education. Globalization of the product- and service-markets, including the educational market and rapid improvements in communication technologies, requires a completely different approach to education. Before education itself can become a global enterprise, bridges must be built across longstanding cultural boundaries and academic disciplines. Educational institutions must take a leadership role in both envisioning and preparing for the needs likely to emerge early in this new millennium.

The current system of university education with all the required educational courses and research at a single institution is unlikely to persist in the future. Yet universities lend themselves to the unbundling of resources and capacities to maximize their education potential. The new unbundled system will involve open arrangements of ‘contracting in’ and ‘contracting out’, and the exchange of students and faculty with allied universities, and joint cooperation in education and research. On a global scale universities are not each other’s competitors. Strategic competition derived from a global alliance of universities will strengthen and diversify capabilities, and provide more scope and capacity to innovate. Thus, the proposed Global U7 Consortium will give allied institutions several key advantages that are complementary, cost-saving and, above all, beneficial from an educational perspective.

Major Activities

Recognizing the need for Global Logistics, Business Administration and Advanced Technologies, (e.g. information technology, bio-technology, nano-technology), the Global U7 Consortium will concentrate its cooperative and collaborative efforts on education, joint research and building administrative capacity to meet this demand. Envisioning a long-term blueprint for a state-of-the-art globalized education system, the Consortium’s objectives seek to provide for: (1) cross-cultural education through student and faculty exchange and working towards the adoption of innovative curricula; (2) interdisciplinary activities by conducting joint research and expanding outreach programs; and (3) global cooperation among university administrations.

Upon signing the Agreement of Global U7 Consortium in April 2004 the President of Inha University (Seoung-Yong Hong) will become the inaugural Chair of the Council of Presidents for three years. During his term of office the Secretariat of Global U7 will be based at Inha University and Professor Young-Tae Chang will be the Secretary-General. A Global U7 web site (<http://u7.inha.ac.kr>) has been established to report progress on the Consortium. Also three Interim Coordinators have been appointed who will work towards establishing the composition and terms of reference for the proposed Working Committees on Education, Joint Research and Building Administrative Capacity.

The first initiative of the Global U7 Consortium will be the proposed Language Training Center at Songdo New Town, Incheon. The Language Training Center will evolve with English as the language of instruction, eventually incorporating the languages of other Consortium members such as French, Korean and Mandarin. Other initiatives include the establishment of a Public Service Institute for building administrative capacity and a Conference on Ports, Multimodal Transport, Logistics and Environment at the University of Rhode Island.