

**Report on Working Group 2:  
"Advantages and Disadvantages of Joint Programs and Double Degree Programs"**

EAHEP Workshop on  
"Student Mobility, Joint Degree Programmes and Institutional Development"  
16 February 2009, 2:00pm  
Crowne Plaza Mutiara Hotel, Kuala Lumpur

Reporter: Juditha Ohlmacher, University of Liberal Arts Bangladesh

Chair: Prof. Hassan bin Basri, Universiti Kebangsaan Malaysia

Speakers: Dr. Churnrurtai Kanchanachitra, Mahidol University, Thailand

Dr. Rainer Stachuletz, Berlin School of Economics, and State Bank of Vietnam

Prof. Zhaohui ZHANG, Southwestern University of Finance and Economics, (SWUFE), Chengdu, China

The three speakers had diverse experience with joint/double degree building.

- Dr. Churnrurtai Kanchanachitra, of Mahidol University, Thailand, is at an Asian university setting up joint degrees with the United States.
- Dr. Stachuletz is from the Berlin School of Economics, which has created a full joint curriculum / double Masters degree with a SWUFE, a reputed Chinese University. The program is called CEEBS ( Chinese-European Economics and Business Studies), and was started in 2007 and with support from AsiaLink.
- Prof Zhang is from the Chinese partner in CEEBS - SWUFE in Chengdu, China. The CEEBS Masters program is very young - only in its 2nd intake of students.

Professor Basri defined the mission of the working group as:

**"To explore the advantages and disadvantages of formal Joint- and Double-degree programs as opposed to other kinds of traditional programs such as: study tours, student exchange, and credit transfers programs."**

The issues can be broken into the following general categories:

1. Advantages to students.
2. Disadvantages to students.

3. Advantages to universities.
4. Disadvantages to universities.
5. Stickiest of all disadvantages – financing!
6. Assessment of traditional student exchanges/credit transfers.

All three speakers generally agreed on the Advantages and Disadvantages of the joint/double degree programs for students, so these will be summarized below. However, dissent came up during the Q&A.

Note: These points are not presented in chronological order of their presentation, but are re-arranged for better understanding of the issues.

## **Points of Consensus:**

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### **1. Advantages to students:**

It was generally agreed that the main advantages are to the students, in several forms:

- Diversity of setting and experience
- Chance to improve language – particularly English – skills
- Opportunity to learn a different culture in-depth (as opposed to as a tourist).
- Gaining of international perspective. Learn to analyze international trends.
- Improves breath of experience.
- Improves global social awareness and global citizenship in both Asian and US/European students.
- Gaining the ability to adjust to the international labor market.
- International transferability of credentials.
- More cost- and time-effective, when weighed against pursuing a full degree in a foreign country.
  - Saves on travel and accommodation expenses.
  - Reduces cost of gathering information.
  - Reduces uncertainty in mobility.
  - Simplifies legal processes for exchange/movement of students.
- Most importantly, improves the overall employability of student both at home and abroad.

## **2. Disadvantages to students:**

- Difficulty in adjusting to new culture.
- Possibility of failure of courses due to adjustment issues, with subsequent loss of morale and faith in the joint degree system.
- While it contributes to improving breadth, mobility may not improve depth of experience.
- Much higher financial burden for students than if they just stayed home, especially if no grants or scholarships are available.
- Money required for travel makes it inaccessible to lower-income students, with the potential to increase the gap between privileged and under privileged groups.
- The more universities required for travel, the greater the cost to students. (No more than 2 recommended)
- Home countries may not recognize a joint degree if the foreign university is not accredited in the home country.
- Employers may not recognize or be allowed to hire a student with a joint degree for the same reason.

## **3. Advantages to universities:**

- Improved competitiveness in home country vis-à-vis other local universities (as international degrees are held in higher esteem by local audiences).
- Actual improved quality of education by ensuring international standards and training.
- More opportunities for close collaboration between universities with complementary competencies.
- Creating centers of excellence, by
  - Fully utilizing existing academic resources.
  - Coordinating courses via academic collaboration
  - Facilitating academic research and cooperation.
- Faculty exchange brings its own advantages, such as knowledge sharing and knowledge generation.

## **4. Disadvantages to universities:**

- Legally difficult to implement
  - Home countries do not have legal framework for joint certification.
  - Home countries do not recognize - or will not accredit - foreign universities.

- Foreign countries may have more and different regulations, such as polices on sexual harassment, labor laws, or safety on campus.
- Immigration formalities may not be easy to deal with.
- Requires more attention, compared to developing own programs.
- There is sometimes faculty resistance to use of English in the home country.
- Redundancy or inefficiency in curricula due to lags in communication.
- Difficult to convince home university authorities of the importance of a joint program, from an administrative POV.
- Many Asian universities do not have autonomy, and find it difficult to convince government authorities.
- Difficult to administer, requiring extra staff and funding.

## 5. **Stickiest of all disadvantages – Financing!:**

### Students

- While it is often said that a joint or double degree program is "cost effective" for the student, this can only be judged against whether the student would have gone abroad for a full degree program.
- In fact, travel costs can add a significant burden to a student who otherwise may have chosen a cheaper location or not gone abroad at all.
- There are limited funds available to students for travel via scholarships and grants.
- Students may be eligible for scholarships only if they reside or register in one of the countries, for example, in the United States.
- Possibility of increasing privilege gap.

### Asian Institutions

In addition, when the institutional costs were considered, it became obvious that the costs of joint/double programs were quite high.

- Professional staff are needed full-time just to manage, do recruitment, marketing and administration.
- Faculty exchange for co-teaching or Training of Trainers adds extra expense.
- Local faculty with international certification or training may command higher salaries.
- Local regulations may put limits on ability to charge tuition (such as in Germany).
- Universities cannot provide scholarships for all students. However, they can provide management of scholarship programs.

- There is often redundancy of administration, faculty, and curricula which is difficult to eliminate.
- It is not clear yet whether the costs will be recouped by higher enrollment in the local university.

## 6. Assessment of traditional student exchanges/credit transfers:

### Advantages:

- Easier to manage and administrate by the universities.
- Fewer legal hurdles between countries.
- Less expensive for the institutions.
- Less expensive for the students due to less time/no time spent in foreign country.

### Disadvantages:

- Too short to allow for full cultural integration or exchange.
- Often no support to adjust to or interact with new environment and culture.
- Students do not gain a truly international experience.
- Students do not have a chance to become fluent in English.
- Does not help improve education standards in the home country.
- Degree is not recognized or accorded high status internationally.
- Students are not necessarily more employable in the host country or abroad.

## **Points of Dissent**

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While in general the advantages to the students was easy to understand and justify, the advantages to the home universities was a point of contention.

- If indeed these programs are not cost-effective for the institution, then why are they doing it?
  - Political? – government mandates
  - Ideological? – spread of democracy/secularism, etc
  - Fashionable? – to talk about "globalization"

- Which direction is the student flow? Are these programs more beneficial to Asian students than to European?  
Note: Prof Basri gives the ratio as 3:1 – Asian to Europe : European to Asia
- Is the advantage, then, more to western cultures and not Asian?
- Does this exacerbate a Brain Drain? Or will the Brain Drain will happen anyway?
  
- Is mobility and student travel necessary or can students gain from double degrees taken solely in the home country?
- Perhaps only credit agreements are needed instead of joint programs, with no travel required.
- Perhaps travel should be optional but not obligatory?
- Does this go against the most essential spirit of joint degrees, namely, the cultural exchange?
- Can home countries actually provide international standards of education?
- While faculty and curricula can be certified by international certification and inspections, still the best and most imaginative results come from joint curricula building.

## Open Questions

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- Is travel/mobility an essential part and *sine qua non* of joint/double degrees?
- If the programs are not cost-effective to the institution, then are they sustainable?
- Joint degrees seem to actually improve employability – but do they necessarily improve academic and research quality?

## Best Practices and recommendations

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In general, the experience with joint degrees and double degrees has been fraught with legal peril in the Asian universities.

Some conclusions and recommendations drawn from the discussion were:

- Joint curriculum easier to handle than the joint degree from the legislative point of view.
- Double degree is often easier to accomplish than joint degrees, from both legal and administrative points of view.
- In order to get around the issue of inability to award single degree with multiple logos, one must be willing to be creative, for example, offer temporary solutions such as issuing a local degree along with a separate certificate signed by all partners.
- A lot of time, patience, and research is needed.
- Most likely best to start off with natural relationships like academic collaboration or student exchanges and build upon long-time relationships, before finally launching into a joint or double degree program.
- Education of government and university authorities should be taken up far in advance.
- Administrative management of program must be taken very seriously.
- Investment in administrative staff is a must.
- Do not expect immediate higher reputation or results.
- Do not partner with or require travel to more than 1 other university.
- Possibilities for financial assistance:
  - Government
  - Asia Link
  - Corporations

## **Concluding Words**

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- These programs will not give an instant advantage but academic standards will rise.
- Yes, they will cost money, no doubt to institutions, but so does all education. In the end, perhaps, they will be better for society.