

## **International Branch Campus Issues**

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This memorandum is intended to provide an introduction to some of the key issues relating to the phenomenon of branch campuses worldwide. We mainly summarize some of the key points made in L. Verbik and C. Merkle, (2006). *The International Branch Campus: Models and Trends*, published by the Observatory on Borderless Higher Education, London. Additional insights are added as well. This memo and the OBHE report provide an overview of branch campuses, with data from a variety of countries. A new report specifically on US branch campuses abroad, Madeleine Green, et al, (2007). *Venturing Abroad: Delivering US Degrees Through Overseas Branch Campuses and Programs*, published by the American Council on Education, provides some detail on the US experience. The authors note that there is no comprehensive analysis of this theme anywhere and no reliable statistics concerning the extent of the phenomenon. The demise, just a month ago, of the Australian University of New South Wales' campus in Singapore after considerable investment and effort by UNSW, and problems with other Australian initiatives, is an indication of the volatility of this sector.

### **Overview**

- ❑ Significant growth over past decade
- ❑ US leads internationally with in terms of overseas branch campus activity but “more and more countries are engaging in branch campus development” (p. 2)
- ❑ Diverse geographic spread of initiatives, but “financial incentives” do seem to spur activity in particular countries/regions
- ❑ 3 main approaches to establishing/funding branch campus are identified:
  1. self-funding
  2. external funding—more common among newer initiatives
  3. provision of facilities—more common among newer initiatives

US has had branch campuses overseas since at least the 1950s

- ❑ Originally designed for institutions' own study abroad students or locally based US military personnel
- ❑ Since 1990s—much bigger operations (in terms of both academic activities and physical plant) catering to local and/or international students

Why?

- ❑ Concerns over quality and ed provision abroad in situations where the home institution didn't have total control
- ❑ Incentives—external support and/or regulatory environments favoring branch campus developments
- ❑ Interest in diversifying and becoming less dependent on international student recruitment to the home campus

### Other issues driving/informing OBHE study

- ❑ No official, comprehensive list of international branch campuses appears to exist anywhere.
- ❑ Lack of global consensus on a definition of branch campuses.
- ❑ “little to suggest that branch campus development has peaked” (p. 24), although it may have reached a “saturation point” in some places, such as Singapore and Hong Kong
- ❑ Growth driven by opportunities for external funding, increased competition in int’l ed and greater regulation of transnational ed around the world
- ❑ However, nothing indicates that “fully-fledged branch campuses will become the dominant type of transnational education in the near future” (p. 24), given their resource intensiveness and the “significant financial and reputation risks” (p. 24) that accompany them

### Definitions

Some subjectivity involved in determining what exactly a branch campus is. The OBHE puts forth the following as a definition of a branch campus:

“...an off-shore operation of a higher ed institution which fulfils the following criteria:

- ❑ The unit should be operated by the institution or through a joint-venture in which the institution is a partner (some countries require foreign providers to partner with a local organization) in the name of the foreign institution.
- ❑ Upon successful completion of the study programme, students are awarded a degree from the foreign institution.”

OBHE’s report excludes

- ❑ joint degree programs
- ❑ institutions where one or more foreign or domestic institution’s programs are offered
- ❑ programs offered through a partner institution
- ❑ branch campuses that have evolved into fairly independent institutions in their own right
- ❑ “foreign-backed” universities (p. 4)
- ❑ “international universities” modeled on a foreign country’s higher ed system but without formal ties to a specific institution (American University of Beirut, of Cairo, etc.)

### Opportunities

Rationales

- ❑ To diversify modes of delivery to international students and be less dependent on recruitment to the home campus

- ❑ To collaborate more easily with foreign academic institutions and industries
- ❑ To generate revenue
- ❑ For strategic internationalization
- ❑ To reach new markets and students
- ❑ To contribute to HE capacity building in countries with less developed HE sectors
  
- ❑ To enhance overall international profile and reputation
- ❑ To reclaim/reframe historical linkages to contemporary advantage

#### Benefits

- ❑ Control over ed provision and quality
- ❑ Simplicity—no need to enter into potentially complicated partnerships
- ❑ Establishment of “a full and distinctive corporate presence in another country”
- ❑ Brand name enhancement
- ❑ Competitive advantage over competitors’ offerings

#### Risks

Info about risks appears to be more widely available, and more regularly accessed, now than in previous years.

Branch campus development must be understood as an entrepreneurial activity that (a) implies a certain amount of risk that must be understood and accepted going in, and (b) may not yield positive results (espec. financially) for some time, although “brand recognition” and reputation enhancement may come more quickly.

Risk areas include:

- ❑ Financial loss—these risks tend to be greatest
- ❑ Operational challenges
- ❑ Market fluctuations
- ❑ Damage to institutional reputation—these are also fairly considerable risks

Regulations:

- ❑ Complex and fast-changing landscape for national regulation of transnational provision
- ❑ Relatively few countries have specific regs in place for foreign providers, but this number is growing—South Africa’s effort to tighten its regulatory framework has had a major impact on foreign providers there by demanding a much higher level of commitment to quality, planning, oversight, and transparency of operations (*OBHE Breaking News Article-6<sup>th</sup> August 2002*)
- ❑ Also growing are the numbers of countries seeking to regulate the export activities of their HE institutions (major examples being the UK and Australia)—trying to ensure that provision abroad is comparable in quality to provision at home

## Major Players

### Branch campus providers:

- ❑ OBHE's report identifies 82 international branch campuses.
- ❑ North to South trend dominates
- ❑ US clearly dominates (50%), followed by Australia (12%-- has been more active than the UK for a full decade), the UK (5%-- more recently pursuing branch campuses than Australia), and Ireland (5%)
- ❑ South to South activity is rare (India and Pakistan the rare exporters to places like Dubai's Knowledge Village)

### Why US dominance?

- ❑ History—have been setting up overseas operations for several decades
- ❑ Invitations—have been actively courted by proactive hosts (Singapore, Qatar, etc.)
- ❑ Post-9/11 environment—perception is it may be easier to take the ed overseas than get the students into the US

### Branch campus hosts:

- ❑ UAE (20%)—almost all in its Knowledge Village
- ❑ Qatar (9%)
- ❑ Singapore (7%)
- ❑ Canada (6%)
- ❑ Malaysia (6%)—[good overview on situation in Malaysia in OBHE *Breaking News Article* 11<sup>th</sup> November 2004]
- ❑ China (5%)
- ❑ Support, funding, and infrastructure make all the difference in terms of attracting branch campuses

### Providers and hosts:

- ❑ UK
- ❑ Australia—[A lot going on here. On the one hand, Australia has had some highly public setbacks in terms of overseas failures in the last year and is seen to be reigning in this activity to some degree, shutting down some operations abroad (see OBHE *Breaking News Articles*-1<sup>st</sup> June and 10<sup>th</sup> July 2007) and applying tighter quality assurance controls (see Aussie govt's *Transnational Quality Strategy*). Meanwhile, the development of South Australia's 'University City' initiative raises Australia's profile as a branch campus host in its own right.]
- ❑ Canada
- ❑ Netherlands
- ❑ France

\* “The only country which seems to be almost untouched by branch campus developments is the US, which in general exhibits very limited transnational activity.” Interest by Latin American universities in the growing US Hispanic community may

change this reality over time. There is evidence that this situation has changed since the OBHE

### **Branch campus interests, activities, and characteristics**

#### Degrees and subjects

- ❑ 23% offer only Bachelor's degrees
- ❑ 58% up to Master's degrees
- ❑ 5% up to Ph.D. level
- ❑ 5% offer pre-Bachelor's only programming
- ❑ 66% teach more than one subject area
- ❑ 74% offer some courses in either business, IT, or both

#### Facilities, enrollment, and tuition

- ❑ Fairly incomplete for the 82 institutions included in the study (see p. 9)

#### Funding

- ❑ Model A—Fully funded by institution
  - May be a fading model, as more institutions seek collaborative arrangements, although the benefit of this model is autonomy of decision-making and quality control
- ❑ Model B—External funding
  - Funding may come from host government funds/support or private companies or other orgs, in the home or host countries, or elsewhere
  - This model has come on the scene mostly during the last decade
  - Often linked to a national strategy for internationalization by the host country
  - Obvious benefits, however institutions need to carefully consider issues of mission and whether they can cover costs not provided for by the host.
- ❑ Model C—Facilities provided
  - Newest model but quickly growing
  - Key examples are Knowledge Village (KV) (est. 2002, Dubai) and Education City (EC) (est. late 1990s, Qatar)
  - Most often found in economically advanced states of the Gulf due to availability of resources (public and private \$), lack of local HE capacity (i.e., need and interest in developing this), and a concentrated strategy for reform of local economy (e.g., moving away from reliance on oil revenues)
  - South Korea and to some extent Japan seem to be moving toward “special zones” for foreign investment to facilitate developments along these lines but don't have the investment resources of KV and EC.

Underhill, W. (2006, August 21). Sowing seeds: From Cornell in Qatar to Monash in Malaysia, satellite campuses are a booming business. *Newsweek, International Edition*.

“When it comes to education, location isn't everything; provenance is.” (Underhill, W.)

“A branch campus is about commitment—not just renting out your name” (Stéphan Vincent-Lancrin, OECD)

Number and diversity of players in international branch campus game are expanding:

- ❑ For the US, this means more competition in this area
- ❑ lesser-known (particularly non-US) universities expanding abroad have less to lose and more to gain, whereas big-name US universities have a lot on the line in terms of their already-established international reputations/”brand names”

Benefits of the branch campus movement are multi-faceted:

- ❑ Students get good educational options without the costs of travel
- ❑ Host countries get “top-rated schools to plug the gaps in their own educational systems”
- ❑ Local economies gain access to research facilities for economic development and income from students attracted from throughout the region
- ❑ Incoming institutions are able to internationalize their profiles and reputations, and can provide good overseas gigs for their faculty and students while exercising potentially better quality control than through distance education on franchising
- ❑ The US can reap important public diplomacy benefits—“This is a good way for the United States to represent itself overseas, particularly in Arab countries where in the past most of the trade has been in guns and oil” (Antonio Gotto, dean of Weill Cornell Medical College in Qatar’s Education City)

Challenges:

- ❑ Meeting host governments’ expectations, including “performance targets” tied to ongoing financial support
- ❑ Potential exists for flat-out “bad fits” (LER’s term), in the form of culture clashes and low enrollments, etc. (à la US expansion into Japan in 1980s)

Imperatives:

- ❑ Government support for higher education in many countries (US, UK, Australia) is falling, making it important for institutions to generate new sources of income
- ❑ International student recruitment to home campuses is becoming increasingly more competitive globally
- ❑ More home-grown options for HE are cropping up around the world (good example being China), so it makes sense to start competing on that turf
- ❑ More English-language programs are available in more places around the world—US can’t expect students to continue coming here for that reason, and have new opportunities to compete in English-speaking environments in many more countries

Key Issues and Questions
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Branch campuses seem to make good sense and have good potential for long-term success under the following conditions:

- ❑ Generalized economic growth and dynamism in the host country
- ❑ Unmet demand for higher education in the host country
- ❑ Widespread use of English in the host country
- ❑ Meaningful host country incentives to foreign providers, in the form of funding, facilities, favorable tax and/or regulatory arrangements, etc.
- ❑ Host country interest in curbing the outflow of domestic students and professionals through study abroad and brain drain
- ❑ Reasonable levels of competition among foreign providers in the host country or region
- ❑ Sound strategic planning to balance higher education imports and domestic capacity in ways that benefit both sides
- ❑ Stable, transparent, and appropriate regulatory environments for foreign providers (for accreditation, quality assurance, etc.)
- ❑ Host country-foreign provider relationships that are built on the concepts of partnership and commitment

Branch campus experiments can end disastrously:

- ❑ Closure of University of La Verne Athens in Fall 2004 (OBHE *Breaking News Article*-1<sup>st</sup> November 2004) provides example of a situation with multiple layers of problems
  - Questionable internal controls
  - Poor management of relationship with Greek partner
  - Insufficient oversight of foreign/private educational provision by Greek authorities
  - Very negative financial, political, legal, and public relations consequences
- ❑ UNSW Asia was launched in Singapore by Australia's University of New South Wales in an effort to establish Asia's first foreign comprehensive university. It closed its doors on 28 June 2007 after just a few months of operation, citing an unviable financial outlook, mostly due to poor enrollment levels—current and projected. Major issues: tuition (was very high, prompting the question “why not just go to nearby Australia itself at that cost?”); programming (does Singapore just lend itself more naturally to specialized foreign programming rather than a comprehensive university?); poor financial planning (“ ‘You can’ set up such a big venture without an established stream of income,’ claims Professor Simon Marginson... ‘because you can’t subsidise the majority of your costs for very long”)

Host countries may have various rationales for seeking to import branch campuses:

- ❑ Qatar appears to have both foreign policy objectives and domestic educational and economic development goals: “Qatar, which is an ally of the American government and currently hosts the Pentagon’s Middle Eastern headquarters for the war in Iraq, is aiming to improve the quality of education for its citizens, while increasing its ties with the United States” (OBHE *Breaking News Article*-2<sup>nd</sup> April 2003)
- ❑ Presence of competitive foreign branch campuses can be used to address unmet demand for higher ed in-country, and be a tool for improving domestic higher ed

- provision over time, as in Malaysia (OBHE *Breaking News Article-11<sup>th</sup>* November 2004)
- The planned “University City” in the state of South Australia seems to be the first example of a Western country actively courting international branch campuses. The goal seems to be to continue to attract large numbers of Asian-Pacific students to Australia; raise the level of research and overall competitive performance of Australian higher education, by placing high-quality foreign providers in the mix; and derive real economic benefits for the local economy hosting the institutions

Important tensions are revealed in the international branch campus movement in some contexts

- Taiwan, for example, appears to have authorized foreign provision of higher education “ ‘in order to comply’ with WTO negotiations, but did not necessarily reflect a desire to open up the market to foreign institutions” (OBHE *Breaking News Article-10<sup>th</sup>* May 2005), since it already has excess capacity. Along with Japan and Korea, Taiwan struggles “with wanting to both protect and challenge domestic higher education, and both internationalise and retain a strong national identity” (OBHE *Breaking News Article-10<sup>th</sup>* May 2005).
- In Greek Cyprus, the government’s support of a branch of Harvard University’s School of Public Health has prompted outcry from the local higher education sector, particularly private universities. Private colleges there have “long complained of second-class status” and are critical of the government’s plan to “lavish millions on a prestigious foreign university rather than support domestic providers” (OBHE *Breaking News Article -11<sup>th</sup>* June 2004)
- In Vietnam, government and international donor agency support of foreign institutions (Australia’s RMIT and US’s Roger Williams University [whose branch campus in Vietnam is called American Pacific University] has been criticized by locals who argue that “the funding should have been invested in bolstering the research capabilities of existing universities.” In addition, critics say that the high tuition charged and only modest scholarship programs offered by the foreign institutions do not serve national objectives to educate more underprivileged students, nor are the ‘Western-oriented’ curricula, ESL, and US-based college prep courses relevant to Vietnam (OBHE *Breaking News Article-14<sup>th</sup>* January 2006).
- The India Institute of Management-Bangalore (IIM-B) was initially thwarted initially the government of India in its effort to accept Singapore’s invitation to establish an operation there. “India’s Human Resource Development Ministry did not express the necessary support for the venture (the current charter for the institutions reportedly does not permit off-shore operations and would have to be amended) citing the need for all six IIMs to focus on meeting domestic demand for high quality education, rather than spending time and resources catering for students abroad” (OBHE *Breaking News Article-6<sup>th</sup>* February 2006).

Beyond this specific example, it’s interesting to note that “discussions about foreign provision [in India] seem to have been dominated by rhetoric emphasizing the negative aspects of transnational education... However, with



significant unmet demand, higher education participation rates of less than 10%, problems of brain-drain and under-funding..., policy makers may find it hard to employ or uphold a protectionist stance on the import of foreign education. In addition, with (an albeit limited number of) Indian institutions looking to offer courses abroad and a range of bilateral trade agreements with other countries in place, India will find it increasingly difficult to justify attempts to prevent foreign providers from entering the country” (OBHE *Breaking News Article*-6<sup>th</sup> February 2006)

Proactive host countries have different strategies for attracting foreign branch campuses:

- ❑ Qatar offers significant financial incentives (OBHE *Breaking News Article*-2<sup>nd</sup> April 2003)
- ❑ Singapore offers access to Asian markets and the opportunity for incoming institutions to raise their international reputations and profiles (OBHE *Breaking News Article*-2<sup>nd</sup> April 2003)
- ❑ South Korea (OBHE *Breaking News Article*-16<sup>th</sup> September 2005) and Japan (OBHE *Breaking News Article*-24<sup>th</sup> March 2006) are exploring special investment zones and other incentives to make themselves more attractive to high quality foreign providers (both are cited in the OBHE branch campus report)
- ❑ Thailand touts itself as a safe, central, cost-effective location for foreign providers, and is explicitly linking internationalization to widespread systemic reform of the higher ed sector. Interestingly, there was talk of the establishment of a branch of Al-Azhar university to serve the region’s Muslim population, but LER can’t find any evidence that that’s happened yet as of 2007... Likewise, OBHE reported that Thailand had been selected to host China’s first-ever foreign branch campus, affiliated with Jinan University, which focuses on educating China’s non-mainland populations-- but LER can’t find any evidence that that’s happened yet as of 2007... (OBHE *Breaking News Article*-12<sup>th</sup> March 2004)

Some countries present special challenges for foreign providers:

- ❑ Security questions in the Middle East (OBHE *Breaking News Article*-2<sup>nd</sup> April 2003)
- ❑ Repressive governments or societies, for example in the Middle East (OBHE *Breaking News Article*-2<sup>nd</sup> April 2003)
- ❑ Government interference in curricula, for example in Vietnam where Communist ideology course requirements have been instituted (*Chronicle of Higher Education*, 24 June 2005)
- ❑ National language and religious/moral education requirements, for example in Malaysia (OBHE *Breaking News Article*-11<sup>th</sup> November 2004)

Branch campuses can fulfill unique roles in some societies → consider the fact that such a large percentage of female students is enrolling in Qatar’s Education City programs (Cornell’s Medical School program there is 70% female) . What are the longer-term ramifications of this? The unintended consequences, positive and negative?

Increasing geographic diversity for branch campus expansion:

- Netherlands Business School (NBS) in Nigeria (OBHE *Breaking News Article-4<sup>th</sup>* April 2004). Why Nigeria?
  - Huge youth population—potential for market expansion
  - Widespread use of English language in Nigeria—not a lot of use of Dutch around the world and the Netherlands already has a lot of experience providing high-quality academic programs in English!
  - High unmet local demand for higher education in Nigeria
  - NBS is starting small and working with a local partner (African Leadership Forum, ALF) with whom it has a compatible mission
  - NBS is targeting individuals in senior positions—LER’s thought: wisely taking a low-risk strategy to begin
  - Netherlands has already been “crowded out in the major Asian markets by universities from Australia, UK and USA” so they’ve decided to focus on “innovation and competitive advantage, whether in terms of subject niches [e.g., technical education in Singapore], cultural affiliations [in Indonesia and South Africa], or underdeveloped markets such as Nigeria”
  - Challenge for Netherlands in Nigeria is the sustainability of economic and democratic reforms on the ground.
- Chile in Ecuador (OBHE, *The International Branch Campus*, 2006 report)
- India in Singapore and UAE (OBHE, *The International Branch Campus*, 2006 report)
- Iran in UAE (OBHE, *The International Branch Campus*, 2006 report)
- Ireland in Bahrain, Malaysia, Pakistan, and UAE (OBHE, *The International Branch Campus*, 2006 report)
- Italy in Argentina (OBHE, *The International Branch Campus*, 2006 report)
- Pakistan in Kenya (OBHE, *The International Branch Campus*, 2006 report)
- Philippines in Vietnam (OBHE, *The International Branch Campus*, 2006 report)
- Mexico possibly in the US (OBHE, *The International Branch Campus*, 2006 report)

Field of regional education hubs getting more crowded

- Now 4 Middle Eastern hubs for transnational education:
  - Knowledge Village (Dubai, UAE)
  - University City (Shar’jah, UAE)
  - Education City (Qatar)
  - Higher Education City (Bahrain, as of 2007), described in-depth in OBHE *Breaking News Article-16<sup>th</sup>* January 2007
  - and a 5<sup>th</sup> in planning stages:
    - Academic City, (Abu Dhabi, UAE)
- In Asia:
  - “Study Korea” project aims to raise number of international students studying in South Korea from 17,000 to 50,000 over the next 5 years,
  - Australia builds its “University City” in South Australia
  - Singapore consolidates its position
  - Malaysia aspires to more international students

- Thailand trying to position itself as a friendly, lower-cost destination for the region's mobile students

This involves a lot of branch campus activity—are we reaching/will we reach a saturation point here? how many “regional education hubs” can any one region sustain?—question also raised by OBHE *Breaking News Article*-16<sup>th</sup> January 2007

### Concluding Thoughts

- Commitment and long-term planning seem to be key when it comes to branch campus success. Rather than making the decision to establish a branch campus *strictly* for financial and branding reasons, it seems that institutions would be wise approach the establishment of a branch campus in almost the same way as they consider the establishment of a fully-fledged new college or university—**what role is this institution meant to play over time in a particular set of institutional, local, national, and international contexts? This is actually a very complex question!**
- In addition to the significant amount of real activity going on, there's also a lot of “vaporware” out there i.e., there's a lot of talk about branch campuses that never materialize into anything. Branch campuses are big, shiny manifestations of internationalization, but they're not the only part of the phenomenon that matters.
- At the present time, branch campuses, like much else in the broad area of higher education internationalization, is a “wild west” of unregulated, often ill thought out, initiatives by a host of players—governments, private enterprise, academic institutions (for profits and non-profits) and others.

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We have not done a thorough scan yet of the journal literature on this topic. Our initial impression is that there is very little available on this theme. We are in the process of searching the periodical literature. Our own Center for International Higher Education website is a good starting resource.

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