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Curricular Joint Ventures and Their Implication for Graduate Programs in the GCC.

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Graduate Education in Middle Eastern countries is increasingly becoming the focal point of discussions relating to international and cross-border Curricular Joint Ventures (CJV's). The concept is not entirely new in Western countries where projects such as the Cornell School of Hotel Administration, Nanyang Technological University's Nanyang Business School, and the International Hotel Management School (HMS International) setup a joint Cornell-Nanyang School of Hospitality Management in February of 2003 (Nanyang, 2005), enrolling its first cohort of students in 2004 in Singapore (Cornell University, 2006). Similarly, NIH's Graduate Partnership Program links laboratory research with graduate programs in universities such as Georgetown University, George Washington University, John Hopkins University, Karolinska Institute (Sweden) and the University of Cambridge, to name a few. (NIH, 2006). Closer home there are partnerships between the University of Alberta International (University of Alberta International, 2006) and programs in Iran, Kuwait, and in Saudi Arabia.

Motivating Factors for CJV's

When looking at the development of CJV's, one must first look for the reasons why institutions wish to participate in such joint ventures. The most prominent reason for doing this is the *prestige* it brings to the institution or program. Often universities that are establishing new graduate programs wish to attract applicants to their program showing that the curriculum leading to a degree is comparable to that of a well-known Tier 1 university such as Harvard, Stanford, MIT, GWU, or Oxford. This prestige factor is particularly important to institutions ((Slaughter & Leslie, 1997; Marginson & Considine, 2000) as it gives the aura of high academics that inevitably transfers to other graduate degree programs within the university. Following prestige, the next most important factor is that it is a means to *generate revenue* in a highly competitive market, particularly for public institutions competing with often well-funded private institutions (Hearn, 2002). For many institutions, their very

survival depends on attracting both faculty and/or students from out of their locale to bring in much needed revenue in order to maintain or reach a certain status level. Lastly, particularly in this part of the world is the issue of *access to well-qualified faculty* with both the theoretical and practical experience in their particular fields. To the chagrin of many educational institutions, the faculty members sought with terminal degrees have not had the experience to go along with the degree, thus sometimes impinging on the quality of their curricula and negatively impacting both revenue and prestige of the institution.

Response from “For-Profit” Institutions

To deal with these issues, CJV’s in “for profit” institutions have developed *partnerships* for differing reasons (Eckel, 2003). These include but are not limited to the establishment of *common goals* which would focus attention on teaching and curricular activities that often include faculty and staff development. **Positioning** in the market-place is crucial to securing revenues, and for reaching untapped students left on the periphery of current programs. As institutions look ahead, the importance of access to the latest technology to facilitate *seamless communication* between partners is crucial to recruitment of clientele including the retention and expansion of programs. *Program mobility* and *flexibility* are essential ingredients especially early in the 21st century where rapid changes are occurring and institutions of higher education must have an immediate response in order to meet the needs of the market place. Thus, CJV’s are an example of program mobility that is characterized often by *complex collaborative arrangements* and use of technology to create new instructional programs thus opening up whole new student clientele waiting to be tapped. In the GCC, if this were to be introduced or expanded, the recipients of these programs need no longer look elsewhere as they have done for the past decades, but can achieve their professional and practical goals within the region.

Constructs of CJV’s

Jane Knight (2003) constructed a model for cross border education which more closely aligns itself with the special demands of higher education. The cross-border education model includes the following provisions: *people* comprised of educational personnel such as students, faculty, or researchers going abroad for educational purposes; *program mobility* made up of educational programs going across borders routed via distance learning through web-based, video conferencing, or other means of joint academic programs; *providers* are those institutions or other providers who go or invest abroad for educational purposes; and then there are the *projects and services* comprising partnership programs or commercial contracts for research, curriculum design etc.

Composition of Partnerships

What then are the types of partnerships and how might they impact decisions made by GCC graduate programs within the sphere of higher education institutions?

- ✚ Have a *common core of courses* agreed upon by participating entities. This common core of courses should make up **60-70%** of the program with the balance allowing for internal variations based on local accrediting policies or state mandated content.
- ✚ A *common curriculum* developed by a joint committee of participating entities. This curriculum comprising the objectives, goals, content, assessment tools, procedures, assignments, projects and the textbooks are jointly agreed upon. Examples of extremely successful “for-profit” organizations are Webster University and the University of Phoenix who have developed this to the ultimate. These institutions developed programs where they brought in teams of curriculum developers who developed the details of the content and substance of each curriculum. This common curriculum is then utilized by all centers scattered across the United States where faculty are generally local hires from those areas. The secret to their success was that faculty were generally hired and trained to use the electronic tools and means of communication no matter which part of the

country they happened to be thus minimizing regional differences and maintaining content integrity.

- ✚ The remaining courses in any CJV *should reflect the regional concerns, interests and locally-mandated requirements*. Again, these should be carefully constructed using the same guidelines used for the development of the aforementioned curricula. However, this group of courses should not be overlooked in the development of partnerships. Many a partnership can fall apart where this component is overlooked or deliberately omitted.

Locus of Control

- ✚ The *locus for control* of any such CJV is always a bone of contention. This is a matter that needs to be tackled and agreed upon from the outset thus preventing the issue from raising its ugly head (which it will sooner or later). Procedures should be set in place to deal with problems of this type before they arise and not after the fact. In the GCC, where dealing with differing standards involving higher education, the potential problems must be dealt with in such a manner as to include both for-profit and non-profit institutions. *Regional program* and institutional *accreditation regulations* often become sources of wedging differences among participating institutions. As difficult as this may be, the issues must be tackled and creative solutions presented to which CJV institutions choose to acquiesce.
- ✚ Historically, leading western institutions have *dictated the rules and procedures* to which participating institutions have had to adhere. While this was needed to maintain program quality, consistency and integrity, certain standards and procedures were dictated by institutional leaders along with their accrediting bodies and any deviation from this often resulted in losing prized and touted accreditation. The problems arising from this often lead to a clash of ethical, cultural, social needs, along with changing entrepreneurial objectives. This enforcement of rules and procedure is an issue that the GCC graduate

CJV institutions must keep in balance with their initial desire for prestige or meet the dictates of their entrepreneurial needs.

✚ A more recent approach to CJV's involving the retention of control at the local institution is to introduce "*glocalization*" in which a program is under local control but which reaches out to well-established institutions in the selected programs and have them guide in the institutionalization of the program. This allows the host institution to retain local control, yet reap the benefits of faculty and leaders from the established university to build viable bridges and ultimate exchange of students and faculty while synonymously enhancing the prestige of the fledgling programs whether they reside in recent or well-established universities.

At the turn of this century, CJV's were not really a typical or viable activity. However, in the last couple of years or so, a growing interest is evident resulting from the mushrooming trading activities of the region because of its pivotal position in a rapidly changing Middle East. The same points brought out by Eckel (2003) which were addressed to the United States can be adapted and asked of our present condition in the GCC. However, *if entrepreneurial activity* is important for GCC colleges and universities, *if technology* and changing faculty roles facilitate engagement abroad, *if international activity* is an educational plus and enhances institutional prestige, *if international student markets* exist, why is GCC engagement with other institutions to deliver academic programs seemingly limited? What are the hurdles that must be faced?

Hurdles Facing CJV Partnerships


CJV partnerships must be aware of hurdles that must be crossed for participating universities in the GCC to truly have success and positive growth. It must be understood initially that international CJV's are not trivial undertakings. Many hurdles exist, including:

✚ **Basic Services:** Whereas in the recent past, students and proponents of higher education in the region were attracted by an international or an American brand name, this is no longer a given as times are changing due to geopolitical forces at work. (Green et al, 2001). Negotiating quality assurance mechanisms, setting market-appropriate tuition and fees; gaining approval to offer degrees are often excruciating and painful exercises that must be endured. In addition to this international and cross-border CJV's additionally require a significant investment of time and money. Most CJV's to date have been the province of those institutions that can make such investments.

✚ **Conflicting Use of Resources:** Long established universities facing financial restriction will face challenges convincing members of the board along with senior members of the faculty involved in decision-making to take actions that would further dilute the already scarce resources available. *Time and money* are basic commodities that must and will be expended often leading to the dichotomy of involvement with international or cross-border ventures and attending to the ever-present student and faculty needs at home. This can present very difficult choices as the returns on investment are at best, uncertain, and will most likely not be immediate.

✚ **Presence:** Trade in the GCC is exploding and it is in the best interest of regional governments to grasp the opportunities now by establishing a broader higher education presence in the emerging market despite the financial risks because failure to do so will have a far-reaching affect on the future growth opportunities within the region. Higher education institutions in the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia and in the region are taking a look at CJV's and are becoming increasingly aware of the tremendous startup costs such as those involving travel, instruction, IT infrastructure, and marketing. However, in the history of the Middle East region and particularly the GCC, *conditions are ripe for change and growth*. Most of the regional governments are actively promoting the

development of higher education institutions both public and private including non-profit and for-profit institutions. These institutions might have an advantage over the established institutions because they are not bound by the same barriers of institutionalization that have engulfed and enshrouded the long-established universities.

 **Enrichment:** Finally, and perhaps most importantly, international and local institutions of higher education engage in what might be termed entrepreneurial education for varied reasons ranging from a need to enrich the learning environment of both students and faculty. This exposure to diversity of cultures, ethics, and the mores accompanying them, will have a far-reaching impact on the futures of the participants. It cannot help but do so and lead to more tolerance and understanding. After all, what is the purpose of education? Isn't it meant to lead to the intellectual, spiritual, social, physical, and ethical development of peoples, irrespective of race or creed. In addition to this, CJV graduate partnerships by-and-large are directed to meeting the needs of their partners. There must develop a *symbiotic relationship* in which one needs the other in an atmosphere of mutual trust and respect. But then of course, there will always be those institutions whose motivation is derived from a purely entrepreneurial base in which the rewards appear as nuggets of gold that are so enticing and need careful excavating (Slaughter & Leslie, 1997; Kirp & Roberts, 2002.). However, what these entrepreneurs must understand from the start that getting into this is a long-term venture and that eagerness to start this and begin to see the profits must not overshadow the regulations and procedures governing solid educational practice.

Reason for Graduate CJV's and Lessons Learned

Despite the hurdles mentioned above, why do graduate programs in institutions around the world engage in cross-border educational CJV's? While there is no single or precise response that can cover all cases, there are some reasons that have emerged and resulting

lessons we have learned from them. For example, large research universities want to project an image of being a “world-class university” thus leading to the foremost need or wish of a university and that is to *garner prestige and fame*. Added to this is the opportunity when joining with other such prestigious institutions, to develop unlimited intellectual firepower that often tends to *smother competing forces*.

Then there are those institutions that are closely in touch with their clientele by keeping in touch with their growth and needs. These institutions keep their ears to the ground and *rapidly respond to the changing needs* caused by population growth, exploding trade growth, and the need for expanding intellectual endeavors. Thus *they fulfill a niche in the marketplace*. The survival of these institutions can best be aided through participation in CJV's, thus maintaining a dynamic and vibrant program. This in turn provides the opportunity for for-profit institutions and CJV's to introduce their curricula abroad as a means of *leveraging revenue* (Eckel, 2003).

Condition for Success of CJV's

One must never overlook the fact that there is always and will always be an *element of risk-taking*. In order for graduate programs in institutions of higher education to enter CJV's, there are at least a couple of conditions that must prevail. There must be a *certain level of returns assured* by at least keeping investment costs at a minimum. Then there would have to be partners identified who could *guarantee access to certain technologies and markets*. Provided these exist, then the joint ventures at least have a chance of survival by bringing together facilities, clientele, and programs that would make this a viable course to follow. It is within this context that higher education institutions and trade organizations will be tied in a symbiotic relationship. Economies in GCC countries are expanding and with it comes a growing demand for prestige which can be aided by CJV's especially during this period of growth and expansion. It is within this context that we see trade organizations such as the

WTO taking into consideration the prerogative of education establishments to set admissions standards, establish recognition criteria, determine curricula programs and at the same time accommodating state criteria and standards while reserving the right to give preferential treatment to indigent students and personnel that could be in the form of tuition assistance or travel incentives.

Curriculum Joint Ventures open doors for graduate programs that would not be able to meet the needs of entrepreneurs, for-profit or non-profit organizations wishing to provide a service to its clientele. Stating this in Ellsworth Statler's words "Life is service. The one who progresses is the one who gives his fellow men a little more, a little better, service" (Cornell, 2006).

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