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Message from the Publisher

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The political climate globally is changing amid the COVID-19 pandemic. There are big political issues on the horizon that will alter the way the higher education sector operates in the near to medium-term. These changes include but are not limited to the outcome of the presidential elections in the USA; the deal between Britain and the EU; the ideological competition between the US and China; and a capricious rise in nationalism among other things. This issue of *Trends in Higher Education* explores these political developments and their implications for higher education institutions (HEIs) in the Caribbean region. For example, research is now showing that the COVID-19 pandemic has shifted focus from globalization of the HEI sector to one of regionalism. Indeed, a recent survey by Xiong et al (Sept 2020) showed that of 2,312 respondents from Hong Kong and Mainland China, 84% expressed no interest in studying abroad after the COVID-19 pandemic, while only 16% would consider pursuing further education overseas. Further, approximately one-third of respondents who would usually go abroad to study, in the post-pandemic period they have indicated that they would prefer to study in Asian countries and regions instead such as Hong Kong, Japan and Taiwan. Developments such as these, are expected to have serious implications for attracting international students for regional HEIs, in the future. As such, university planners will have to take these issues into account and revise their strategic and operational plans to fit these new realities, in the post pandemic period. This issue of 'Trends in Higher Education' provides a rich source of information on some of the most pressing political developments that are most likely to affect HEIs, both globally and regionally. I do hope you enjoy reading it.

Political Trends for Higher Education

Increased levels of geopolitical turbulence and change expected in the short term will most likely affect overall governance and policy priorities such as the outcome of the US Presidential elections, on November 3, 2020. Several other political issues are also likely to be of major concern because of the impact they are likely to have on trade, continued tension and conflict, and diplomatic relations. These include:

- (i) the ideological competition between US and China and its quest to defend/widen its sphere of influence
- (ii) competition and confrontational stances in the Arab Gulf and Eastern Mediterranean and the creation of a self-styled "caliphate"
- (iii) continued security dimensions of migration and refugee crises
- (iv) climate action politics
- (v) tech-wars
- (vi) rising nationalism and its impact on regional/global cooperation and multilateralism
- (vii) increased regional polarisation and competition
- (viii) increasing inequalities alongside economic downturns.

The surge of separatist movements in response to identity-driven movements and/or outraged and assertive nationalism is expected to continue in Asia (China and India), Europe (Scotland, Catalonia), North America (Canada - western provinces of Alberta, Saskatchewan and Manitoba and British Columbia, and Quebec). Meantime, there is also looming deadline on the determination of rules for the new Britain-EU trade deal. The European Union sees little chance for anything other than a narrow deal while Britain is holding out for a comprehensive, Canada-style free trade

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agreement. In mid-October, Britain indicated that there is no point in continuing the negotiations unless the EU position shifts.

Closer to home, election outcomes can also influence the content and priorities of public policy. Regionally, Parliamentary elections were held in three of the UWI contributing countries (St Kitts and Nevis, Trinidad and Tobago, and Jamaica) in which the incumbents were returned to office with the expectation that limited changes will be made to existing policies. It is uncertain what will happen in Belize, St Vincent and the Grenadines since elections will be held in November 2020.

Aligning of state interest to higher education

More utilitarian approaches to higher education are being adopted because of reduced appropriations in the United States. This has led to changes in policies and the development of future-ready agendas for wealth creation. Focus is now on career and technical education, postsecondary technical education, computer science, and STEM education to ensure that current and future workers have access to quality employment throughout their careers. Connecticut has furthered the education-workforce alignment agenda by introducing a tax credit for employers who help their employees pay their student loans and by appointing a workforce council “to close credential and skills gaps” (SCUP Spring 2020). South Carolina introduced a one percent cap on increases in tuition and fees at state technical schools, colleges, and universities to improve affordability (Alfuth 2019). Additionally, to propel economic development, policymakers will be need to:

- i. develop, pilot and sustain these new education and training strategies (NGA 2020).
- ii. build ecosystems to support lifelong learning and “innovate teaching and learning models to close the digital skills gap” and “increase investments to help workers succeed with a focus on tools like financial aid, career advice and information, portable credentials, and

“flexibility to succeed in the gig economy” (SCUP Fall 2020).

- iii. align economic recovery with environmental resilience actions to reduce carbon pollution and fight climate change which will require the higher sector to provide solutions through their research and their teaching mission to (re)train the workforce, and re-tool industries to compete through training and certifications (SCUP Canada Spring 2020).

COVID-19 Impact on higher education

Some experts hold the view that post-COVID-19 will be a period of ‘Great Reset’. According to SCUP (Fall 2020) among the political changes touted for the higher education sector are:

- i. Regulations relating to higher education, including rules guiding online education, credentials, and accreditation, may ease as policymakers look to spark more innovation, support cost efficiencies, and advance access in higher education through policies for financial aid and other supports, competency-based education, credentials other than degrees, adult education, and lifelong learning.
- ii. Universities should expect to feel continued pressure from stakeholders (e.g. policymakers, businesses, parents, and learners) to align their programmes and curricula more closely with the skills needed in the workplace.
- iii. Policymakers and businesses will look more favourably on modern technologies that capture and share records of student learning, particularly tools that track outcomes rather than inputs like credit hours earned.
- iv. The pandemic may continue to bring more lawsuits from students seeking refunds of tuition and fees after their university switched from teaching in classrooms to online learning. In the United States, as of May 2020, at least 100 class action lawsuits had been initiated, thus requiring the passing of legislation barring such suits.

These potential changes, if effected, will require HEIs to rethink their business model and to reconsider the most effective way to support learning and credentialing as well as creating an institution that the public trust.

Cross-border education and national policies

According to Professor Margaret Gardner, Vice-Chancellor of Monash University, “[g]eopolitical uncertainty will disrupt international education more lastingly than the current pandemic-induced border closures” (cited by Ross, Sept 2020). As countries turn inward, the free flow of knowledge and people across borders is being challenged and will affect the internationalisation agenda of HEIs. In this regard, Monash University has begun rethinking its approach to its offshore campuses in China, India and Malaysia and its outpost in Indonesia. Traditionally, first-year arts students had been guaranteed an offshore experience in such locations, partly to help cultivate Australia’s relationships with its neighbours. In the current climate, that university now plans to start some of its international students in intensive studies in offshore campuses before bringing them to Australia (Ross, Sept 2020).

The findings from a recent survey by Xiong et al (Sept 2020) showed that of 2,312 respondents from Hong Kong and Mainland China¹, 84% expressed no interest in studying abroad after the COVID-19 pandemic, while only 16% would consider pursuing further education overseas. Approximately one-third of respondents who will go abroad in the post-pandemic period would prefer to study in Asian countries and regions especially, Hong Kong, Japan, and Taiwan. The findings suggest that “regionalisation might become a new trend in international higher education in and after the COVID-19 pandemic” (Xiong et al Sept 2020). As Asian institutions improve in the Times Higher Education rankings and build reputation, it is expected that they will become popular destinations for Asian students. While “students may want to stay in neighbouring regions in which they can still entertain international

exposure and easily retreat to the homeland when necessary”, tensions with countries such as Australia; travel restrictions and border control of the major destination countries like the US and the UK; and news reports of discrimination against Asians in Western countries will significantly decrease international student mobility (Lau Oct 2020, Xiong et al Sept 2020).

India, the next frontier

India² recently said that it will open its doors to foreign universities as part of the new National Education Policy (NEP). The policy says that India will be promoted as a global study destination, and that international student offices will be opened at each hosting university. It also sets out provisions for Indian universities to open overseas branches and says that research collaborations and student exchanges will be increased. Experts see this as India’s long game in which foreign campuses might open-up but only in the next five or ten years. The policy seems to stipulate that only the top-100 universities in the world will be facilitated to operate in India. However, there are potential problems for international universities related to bureaucracy, hiring practices and finances.

Currently, the scope exists for joint programmes within the current institutional framework as demonstrated by several Indian Institutes of Technology (IITs) partnering with Australian universities or cooperation with world-class universities exemplified by Columbia University Global Center in Mumbai or the University of Chicago Center in Delhi. In light of the NEP, Deakin University has said that the institution would seek out partnership, but the model must be financially viable. They would pursue in-country delivery with Indian partners through hybrid transnational education

¹ As a primary source of international students to the several destination countries, the Mainland China sent out more than 710,000 students in 2019, among which 73 percent (518,300) were in the higher education level. See Xiong et al <https://www.researchcghe.org/perch/resources/publications/wp54to-publish.pdf>.

² India normally sends about [100,000 students a year](#) to Australia, putting A\$5.5 billion (£3 billion) into the economy. It is quickly catching up to China as the top source of foreign students. See Lau, Aug 28, 2020. <https://www.timeshighereducation.com/news/partnerships-not-branch-campuses-seen-likely-india>.

approaches. There are potential opportunities in credit-sharing, digital teaching and blended learning, or even, a “learning centre model” where a student taking online classes through an Australian university might complete laboratory work near home in India. A feasibility study is being conducted by the state of Kerala on the establishment of an education hub with overseas institutions (Lau Aug 17, 2020).

Judicial influence on higher education

Institutional policies and practices of HEIs are being legally challenged at district courts and the Supreme Court. It has brought into sharp focus what are the unique legal liabilities HEIs face and what can be done to protect the institutions from these challenges (SCUP Spring 2020). This has the “potential to reshape higher education by challenging everything from how colleges investigate sexual misconduct to whether they’re doing enough to protect students on campus” (Schwartz Sept 2020). For instance, advocacy groups are demanding legal accountability from HEIs in areas such as admission requirements and decisions, affirmative action, free speech on social and political issues, campus life and fraternities/sororities, how HEIs treat those accused of sexual assault, etc.³ Based on the court rulings, HEIs will have to make appropriate and necessary changes to institutional policies. The University of Southern California and other institutions in the state revised their policies to meet the court’s expectations that students accused of sexual misconduct must be allowed to question their accusers and other witnesses during a hearing in front of a neutral fact finder (Schwartz Sept 2020).

Political correctness and academic freedom

As microcosms of the broader society, university communities invariably have divergent views on a range of issues and “experience pressures to silence dissent” (Ross October 2020). This can

create challenges for senior administrators to balance competing interests of freedom of expression and preserving the institutional reputation. As universities increase their reliance on third-party funders, the risk of academics’ saying things that rile benefactors is growing especially, on matters of gender and race.

A report on political diversity in higher education by the right-leaning British think tank Policy Exchange found that:

- university staff oppose efforts to sack colleagues who produce controversial research.
- universities are an important reservoir of support for academic freedom - only 6-13% of academics are willing to back campaigns to fire academics who advocate unpopular views (Adams 2020).

The report recommended that the government should create a new position of director for academic freedom, attached to the higher education regulator for England, the Office for Students (OfS), and appointed by the Education Secretary. Also, it proposed that statutory duties of freedom of speech should be extended to include student unions.

Conflict between scholars’ ability to engage in free enquiry and open debate and neoliberal administrators’ policing of institutional reputations have led to a review of free speech at Australian universities. The University of Western Australia (UWA) invited an American endocrinologist for a speaking engagement. His views on the medical treatment of gender dysphoria caused an uproar among staff leading to a petition for the university to cancel the event. The event, which was later cancelled, prompted the Australian government to commission UWA chancellor Robert French, a former High Court chief justice, to review free speech at universities. During the review, no

³ For more information on these cases, see Natalie Schwartz, “These Lawsuits Could Change the Stakes for Higher Ed,” *Education Dive* (Updated Sept 4 2020),

<https://www.educationdive.com/news/higher-ed-lawsuits-tracker/561371/>.

evidence of a free speech crisis was found on Australian university campuses, but the presence of clumsily worded policies created the impression of constraints on free speech. A 'moral code' was drafted to help restrain "the exercise of overbroad powers" that might otherwise impinge on free speech and academic autonomy (Ross October 2020). Noting that the solution was warranted, the article references that "university statutes have suffered from "a problem of drafting" that becomes evident when pronouncements about academic freedom clash with those about misbehaviour. Policies about bringing the university into disrepute are "very vague" and leave vice-chancellors too much discretion over how to deal with offenders."

Additional restrictions to academic freedom was seen at Peking University where participants in foreign-hosted webinars/online conferences are required to provide documentation and wait for approval at least 15 days in advance (Lau Aug 28, 2020). However, this is not considered a major shift from current practices as rules are similar to existing practices for mainland Chinese academics wishing to travel in-person to overseas events. Human Rights in China (HRIC), a non-government organisation headed by a professor emerita of law at the City University of New York, noted the problematics in the circular by Peking University were that the requirement that an event's agenda and discussion topics be shared in advance, and that participants "keep secrets" during the event (Lau Aug 28, 2020).

The 2019 (against the proposed law allowing extraditions to mainland China) and 2020 (against the draft national security law) anti-government, pro-democracy protests in Hong Kong were led largely by university and high school students and saw increasingly violent confrontations between students and police and a large number of arrests. This impacted on teaching contact hours - "[b]etween civil unrest and the coronavirus crisis, there have only been a few weeks of in-person teaching at Hong Kong universities in the past six months" (Lau June 2020).

Beijing imposed a new national security law (NSL) in June 2020 bypassing Hong Kong's semi-democratic legislature that bans subversion, secession, and collusion with foreign forces, with severe prison terms for anyone found in contravention. The nature of the security law is likely to negatively affect academic freedom. It is speculated that universities might be a focal point for the national security law and as such, ordinary academic work (research and teaching) will be affected. Certain disciplines such as law, humanities, social sciences may be more affected. Griffiths (Sept 2020) noted that schools and/or libraries have been instructed to remove books with certain content or works by several prominent pro-democracy activist. Several professors and lecturers' contracts have been terminated for their pro-democracy stance.

Further, the extraterritorial nature of the security law has raised alarm. Some US and UK universities are adding warnings to courses that "may cover material considered politically sensitive by China" and "[s]ome schools will adopt code names for participants in certain classes, so that Chinese and Hong Kong students, thousands of whom study at US institutions, can take part without concern that they might face repercussions at home." Projects with "international partners will be vulnerable to additional layers of political vetting, and some of the otherwise legitimate projects may suddenly be seen as 'suspicious' because of international connections" (Lau June 2020).

Hong Kong has six universities in the *Times Higher Education World University Rankings 2021* of which five are in the Top-200. China has 91 with seven in the Top-200. It is unclear how in a growing climate of fear and censorship how the universities will be reshaped, but it is possible that Hong Kong's attractiveness as a destination will be affected.

Silencing student voices

India and Pakistan have seen a (re)emergence of youth and students as active participants in the framing of democratic rights. According to Jan

(2020), “[t]he states are using sedition laws to violently patrol the boundaries of acceptable speech and thought in the public sphere, exposing the vulnerability they feel in the face of righteous and peaceful criticisms of their exclusionary, divisive and dangerous policies.” Yet, there is growing resistance in both India and Pakistan against the authoritarianism engulfing the region. Two features stand out as salient in these burgeoning movements - they are led by young citizens advocating for the protection of basic rights to safety, employment and free speech and they base the legitimacy of their claims on the constitution.

Increasing student discontent and unrest was seen in 2019 in Pakistan after massive cuts to university funding and incidents of sexual harassment. An all-over Pakistan “Student Action Committee (SAC) was formed in late 2019. A charter of demands including the restoration of student unions (which was banned in 1984), protection from harassment, improved facilities, an increase in the education budget and a decline in tuition fees⁴ was prepared and a large-scale demonstration in 38 major cities was organised. The government charged over 300 persons with sedition for taking part in the countrywide Students Solidarity March and for chanting slogans against state institutions.

The growth of nationalism in India expressed through the ideology of the BJP/RSS (Bharatiya Janata Party/Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh) is premised on ethnic nationalism (Hindutva). In late 2019, students in India were protested against the Citizenship Amendment Act (CAA).⁵ For instance, at Jamia Millia Islamia University (Delhi) there was the use of teargas inside the university’s library as well as the police entering the campus without permission from university authorities leading to police and

student clashes, while at the National Law School of India University (Bangalore) protesting students were confronted by the police. As Marik (Oct 2020) noted “[t]he passage of the CAA triggered protests across India – with students at the forefront – that continued into the first couple of months of 2020, before the COVID-19 pandemic put everything on hold indefinitely.” With the novel coronavirus suspending on-the-ground student protests, student leaders and activists have been arrested and charged under the Unlawful Activities (Prevention) Act (UAPA), which merely requires suspicion (and no actual commission of a crime) to justify a person’s arrest.

Upping Equity, Diversity, and Inclusion Efforts

A recent report by the University of Manitoba suggests that Equity, Diversity, and Inclusion (EDI) has become a policy priority for institutions. The study took a deep dive into 50 policy documents (i.e. strategic plans, annual performance measurements and federally mandated EDI action plans) to see how EDI was addressed and framed in them, as well as the institutional initiatives that had been proposed and adopted by Canadian research-intensive universities (or U15). The research revealed that each of the 15 universities studied specifically addressed EDI in their strategic policy documents, most used broad and vague language when discussing EDI and only five universities included a formal definitions of EDI (Beaulne-Stuebing 2020). Moreover, the changes taking place on the campuses can be categorised into five approaches: political commitment; recruitment of equity-seeking students; supports for students in the form of scholarships, bursaries, services and curriculum adaptations; assistance for equity-seeking faculty with research grants and strengthening research areas that focus on topics related to

⁴ See ESSF. “Pakistan: The Students’ Solidarity March for Student Unions!.” <http://www.europe-solidaire.org/spip.php?article51437> for a list of demands.

⁵ The CAA was passed into law by the Indian government of the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) on December 11, 2019. The law states that fast-tracked citizenship would be offered to all illegal migrants

who had fled to India from the neighbouring countries of Pakistan, Bangladesh and Afghanistan before December 2014 on grounds of religious persecution. The exception, however, does not apply to Muslims. The CAA marked the first time that religion had emerged as a criterion for citizenship in India.

EDI; and celebrating EDI as part of the institutional culture. The Report also highlighted reasons for the growth of EDI initiatives and policy momentum - competition among universities to maintain or increase enrolment, and the equity targets set by Canada Research Chairs.

Since the release of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC) report in 2015, postsecondary institutions in Canada have been working to implement actions that move towards recognising and implementing truth, reconciliation, and rights for Indigenous Peoples. To that end, several initiatives have been introduced:

- investment in teacher training to help educators on integrating indigenous knowledge and teaching methods.
- relevant research and curricular reform -
 - Memorial University of Newfoundland introduced its Inuit Bachelor of Education programme, in which teachers learn to infuse Inuit culture into student instruction.
 - McGill University recently launched a new Indigenous Studies and Community Engagement Initiative, which will expand the existing Indigenous Studies minor programme to include major and honours programmes
 - University of Toronto has introduced a master's program in social work to help practitioners work with Indigenous people affected by generational trauma
 - some institutions have begun to integrate indigenous languages into their curricula (e.g. First Nations University of Canada, Algoma University, University of Sudbury, University of Alberta, etc.)
- hiring of more Indigenous faculty and staff (e.g. University of Toronto).
- improving access - Simon Fraser University signed an agreement with Langara College to make it easier for Indigenous students to transfer from the college to the university.

The murder of George Floyd caused outrage not only across the United States but also globally and led to 'Black Lives Matter' movement that drew attention to the goal of racial equity remaining unrealised and more importantly, the need for structural changes to address marginalisation, inequality and injustice.

The incident forced universities to confront its imperial and colonial past and recognise that it is not limited to EDI initiatives (McKie July 2020). University governing bodies are considered important to defining the process of institutional decolonisation which includes redefining the business model and exploring the often-unsavoury history behind many significant advances (Akinbosede June 2020). Also, universities started taking steps to advance racial justice through curricula, policies, name changes, and research. For instance, Boston University started a centre on antiracist research, while Yale University, City University of London and many other institutions have changed names of buildings and schools or toppled statues (e.g Rhodes Statue at Oriel College, Oxford) to remove their association with individuals whose beliefs or behaviours do not align with or reflect contemporary values (SCUP Fall 2020). Prairie View A&M University created a Center for Race and Justice and will require all incoming students to take a course on the history of race.

A report published by the Higher Education Policy Institute (HEPI) in July 2020 underscores that the decolonisation of UK universities is vital for the improvement of course curricula; pedagogical practice; staff wellbeing; and the student experience. It makes the case that meaningful engagement with decolonisation requires reassessing curricula and pedagogy, attainment and representation concurrently, (McKie July 2020). More specifically, the report puts forward five key policy recommendations based on the testimony of 16 respondents:

- i. Get educated about decolonisation and end its conflation with EDI initiatives

- ii. Reprioritise: decolonisation is both pedagogically necessary and academically rigorous
- iii. Fund BAME research
- iv. Tackle discrimination, hostility, and unconscious bias
- v. Institutionalise decolonisation: create departmental roles and engage students.

Conclusion

It is expected that given the political issues and geopolitical turbulences taking place across the globe, in the short-term, that higher education institutions will have to rethink their policies and practices and adjust to the new dynamic taking place in the sector. Free speech and academic freedom are likely to be 'hot-issues' at universities requiring new measures to allow for multiple and dissenting voices to be heard yet ensuring that there are policies that function that guide practices on campuses. Further, the sector is being challenged and constrained by courts of law and judicial decisions that will affect its policies and operations particularly, in student-university contracts, discrimination and equality, sexual misconduct, intellectual property, privacy, etc. It may require the expansion of university legal departments, introduction of mediation and conflict resolution programmes, and clearer policy statements and communication strategies. Additionally, the growing challenges to globalisation, will result in the convergence of nationalism and regionalism as such, we are likely to see both forces co-existing - with both interests looking to realise economic goals and assert their legitimacy on the world stage. Higher education policy is likely to become more compatible with economic goals while looking to promote/enhance a regional identity. Additionally, research collaboration, innovation efforts, and funding; staff and student mobility; student enrolment and attraction of academic talent; provision of transnational education; and public engagement will also be affected by the political issues and turbulences taking place globally and regionally.

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**UWI "Triple A" Strategic Plan:
Revitalizing Caribbean Development**
Did you know the three goals of the current Strategic Plan are: **Access, Alignment and Agility.**

To learn more about the Plan, click on the following link <http://www.uwi.edu/uop/strategic-plan-about-plan>