

THE BOLOGNA PROCESS WITHIN THE EU: WHAT IT MIGHT MEAN TO AMERICAN HIGHER EDUCATION AND THE WDSI

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ABSTRACT

Globalization is not just about increasing economic interdependence. It can also be identified with the creation of a number of regional organizations, including NAFTA (economic) and the European Union (“EU”, political). From the EU, in an attempt to unify itself further politically and economically, has arisen the Bologna Process in educational reform. From its standardizing of academic degrees and language use (chiefly English), a host of operational issues result, such as from where come the instructors and to where are students sent. These operational matters introduce such additional considerations as multi-culturalism and the Web. To date 46 are committed to the Bologna Process. Other nations are seemingly poised to join the Process.

INTRODUCTION

This paper is an attempt to familiarize members of the WDSI with what is occurring within 46 nations, including all 27 in the EU and many others to its East including Turkey, Russia and the Ukraine. The population of the EU is nearly 500 million. The 46 together possess almost 800 million inhabitants. Discussions have also taken place with most of the nations of Latin America and the Caribbean, with whom certain members of the EU share a colonial past. The bad news (perhaps) is that fewer students will be coming to America full-time, than without the Bologna Process. The good news (most likely) is that the degree structure and curriculum reflect American academic tastes, and that the desired language of additional instruction is English. However, Europe tends to want American professors for more than two weeks at a time. The most economical solution should be of special interest to WDSI, with its concern for both instruction and research.

We must qualify the four writers of this paper, as much of what we write is drawn from the work we do week by week and year to year. If you will, we are perpetrating “action research”. Beckman taught at CalState San Bernardino for 12 years before resigning to move to Europe. He has been a Professor of International Management in Fulda for 5 years. Opel has been a faculty member in Fulda for 31 years, been the University President for 5 years, and the Business School Dean for 6. Neuert was at Fulda in Business for 14 years and is the founding CEO of an innovative public/private foundation, which will include a public University of Applied Sciences (granting degrees through the Masters) and a public/private, doctorate-granting University which also does research independently of the doctoral programs. Marks has been at San Bernardino for 16 years, has been Dean of the School of Business and Public Administration there, and has taught in Fulda for two full semesters. For purposes of citation, we principally reply upon internet sources in English. There are many sources in German, hard copy and online, but we assume few readers know the language adequately or have easy access to the articles.

GERMAN HIGHER EDUCATION AND THE BOLOGNA PROCESS

Broadly, German higher education can be divided into those “professional” schools which grant Bachelors’ and Masters’ degrees (Fachhochschulen and Hochschulen), and the Universities (Universitäten) which are very research-oriented. What would be Kindergarten-12 in the U.S. does not necessarily include Kindergarten, in the country which invented the concept. Rather, the German 1-13 grades give us the range of years for those who go on to higher education. Higher education thus starts at what would be the Sophomore year in the United States. However, German vocational education is excellent, so many students depart the school system legally at an earlier point, for a variety of careers through a level of knowledge sometimes at the level of the American Junior College.

By number there are 159 Fachhochschulen and 173 Universities in Germany (5). Some put the number of the former, due to very specialized institutions such as in design and some engineering applications, at as high as 172.

What would be the State University System in California enrolls about 590,000 students with a student faculty ratio of about 1:15 (2) in Germany. Professors in this system generally teach 16 units a semester (12 hours in class). University professors normally have half that load, but are required to produce an adequate amount of research of some specified quality on an ongoing basis. University professors typically have at least one part-time secretary and of course their graduate students to assist them in their research. Currently there are 1.4 million University students (2) with a student-faculty ratio of about 1:60. Two of the five authors are involved with such research universities, part-time. We discuss, however, only these professional Fachhochschulen and Hochschulen.

The training of the Ph.D.’s for these Fachhochschulen and Hochschulen is a normal Ph.D. program, but at some point the candidates decide that they will do 3-5 years of work in an private or public organization AFTER their degree, rather than continuing to work with a research-focused Professor and awaiting a “call” for a University post. The reality seems to be that many of these “applied” professors find teaching and consulting of greater personal satisfaction than the “pure” research prescribed at the German Universities.

The Bologna Process commenced in 1999 in the Northern Italian city of that name. The Education Ministers of all 15 of the then EU member states were present. Their aims were to harmonize higher education degrees across the EU, and to make curriculum changes which would benefit their nations. All current EU members are a part of the Bologna Process. Each of them has officially adopted the Process, with a review every 2 years done at a physical meeting of Education Ministers. Most recently, the odd-numbered year was 2007, and the meetings were in Great Britain. Currently the Benelux countries have the responsibility for 2009.

There are many sources of information in English on the Bologna Process. In fact, students and faculty of the Fulda Business School have published on the subject (9). However, good summaries are available on the website of the European Commission (4) and that of the Benelux (Belgium, Netherlands, Luxembourg) body which has taken over the Process until 2009 (8).

At the former site there is an insightful 7 page communiqué which was issued by the Education Ministers of all 46 nations on 18 May 2007. This Ministers’ document is of course very political, in that it cites national sovereignty and academic independence as paramount. That said, it is agreed that the process is moving forward adequately. Quite significantly, the communiqué states: “There is an

increasing awareness that a significant outcome of the process will be a move towards student-centred higher education and away from teacher driven provision” (4). They are not speaking of easy education, but that education which is relevant to employability. Employability includes an enormous number of issues, notably, continuing education. Such “continuing education” here indicates successive degrees within one academic specialty, as well as on occasion between academic specialties. Thus, for example, a Master’s in IT can easily be combined with one in Business. Since higher education in Germany is normally virtually free to the student, the cost then becomes the students’ time, under increasingly flexible class schedules as employment is assumed. This is a political as well as academic issue, as student/faculty visas, residence permits and limited employment permits are under the control of each sovereign nation. Such issues apply to all non-nationals, even from within the EU.

For purposes of business education—which of course is a professionalizing endeavor like medicine or engineering--the four content issues are, in addition to technical content: internationalization (culture and language), social competence (team building, leadership, communication), research (including practical business research), and employability. The latter is heavily influenced by the three former, as we all know. As perhaps the reader is aware, Germans take their professional education very seriously. One of the standard observations made about Daimler buying Chrysler in the late 1990’s was that 9 of the 11 most senior Germans present in Detroit had Ph.D.’s in engineering, business or law.

The Process reaches each institution through the public accreditation process. As curriculum, faculty and internationalizing arrangements are evaluated, we are informed school by school as to what is acceptable. Unlike with the AACSB, for example, these comments have the force of law—all public institutions must move towards accreditation, using what are public standards. Private institutions must be accredited to have their courses and degrees accepted, or to have their students receive public financial support.

The Meaning of Bologna in the EU, from a German Perspective

Kufstein and Fulda represent different elaborations of the Bologna themes of language/culture, social competence, research and employability. Kufstein sends their English-language program students overseas for a semester to one of 140 Universities, the particular university being selected by each student. Kufstein currently has 300 students overseas.

In contrast, Fulda has 3 partner Universities, 2 in America and 1 in Australia. About 105 students will be leaving for their semester abroad in the next cohort. On the visiting students’ side, Kufstein has 78 currently and Fulda just a handful.

As regards teachers in Kufstein, a number of native speakers of English from the British Commonwealth are available to teach shorter courses of 30 hours, half of the usual 60 hour courses given in Fulda. There are several full-time professors who received their degrees from U.S. business schools. In turn, Fulda has one permanent American professor and an additional 1 or 2 visiting from Australia or the US every semester.

In addition, Fulda makes an effort to send its German professors to 1 of the 3 colleague schools every few years, for from a few weeks to a full semester. To date 7 have done so.

Other efforts at efficiently using English-speaking professors at Fulda include a mixed online/inperson course and a new videophone system for use with the EU Consortium, which we will now introduce. With regard to the mixed model, Fulda has twice used a CalState accounting professor to post online

exercises for two months, while a German colleague taught in German from the same English-language accounting text. She then has come to Fulda for a month of face2face (F2F) instruction, while the German professor was available to explain to students the English-language instruction during his office hours. Both professors participated in the Final examination, a portion in German and a portion in English.

The videophone system will be used initially with the Consortium, as defined immediately below. Of course, the system has the capability of dealing with administrative and scientific matters, as well as immediately educational ones. Our EU Consortium currently contains Kufstein (Austria), Fulda (Germany) and one institution each in France, Spain and Latvia. We are negotiating for others in Poland, Russia and the Ukraine. All of these are current Bologna Process signatories. The Consortium is meant to be more than a Web entry for students, but rather an institutional collaboration. Such collaboration is totally dependent upon active participation by a few professors at each institution. The general rule for at least the smaller Fachhochschulen is that professors carry this internationalizing burden in addition to their normal teaching and research.

Social competence for us is simply the avoidance of strict one-way lecturing. Students can meet in smaller groups in class, to discuss and then present findings. Student groups can make occasional Power Point presentations. Naturally, student leadership and communication are a part of these small group dynamics.

The research which we view as important is the more practical business sort. It is the kind that companies and, more generally, organizations require of their employees. Budgets, projects and all sorts of business plans are encompassed by these research projects.

Employability is enhanced by internships and practical theses done for the internship employer, in our Fulda experience. Virtually 100% of the German students who have done such internships and practical theses in Germany have been offered permanent positions. For international students the numbers are not as high, as is also the case in the United States in business. However, our international students who return to their homes in the Middle East, Latin America, Middle East, CIS and Asian nations seem to have employment, whether with German or other companies.

POSSIBLE MEANINGS OF THE BOLOGNA PROCESS FOR THE WDSI

One part of the meaning is the growth of undergraduate and graduate enrollments in the United States. As the EU becomes more “consumer friendly”, and as China, India and the Middle Eastern Gulf States hold on to more of their own students with various educational arrangements, America will notice some effects upon foreign student enrollments. Such is happening apparently now (10). One trend, we expect, also, is more semester-length student exchanges between America and the EU. There is also the possibility of dual degrees. Our German institution is involved with both.

Another part of the meaning is that more foreign internships seem inevitable. For example, in our German Hochschule our 35 student “International Management” major has grown to three times that number. Thus we have to place more than 100 students at our 1 Australian and 2 US universities for the first semester Senior year. We don’t know if we can do so, even with some other state university systems open to us through State-to-State compacts. The limitations are chiefly about reduced tuition arrangements for these students. Thus, we are investigating internships in America with German

companies. These internships are most easily tied to educational arrangements with American universities.

As Bologna tells us to internationalize, we of course want English-speaking professors with us. However, this is difficult to arrange, as we require them to teach at least 12 (9 contact) hours a week and to read some theses during the course of a semester. We also have limited funds, so at most we can have 2 visitors plus the permanent American professor. As noted before, we have developed a combination online/F2F (face2face) model, and will shortly be introducing video conferencing. Our version of Black Board is called “Moodle”. We believe most American universities use online instruction to at least support live instruction, so there is nothing new here.

The research component is critical for the German Universities, but enters our Hochschule curriculum through mandatory bachelor’s and master’s theses. Since many of these involve empirical research while doing internships, we find both library/online and empirical organizational research are practiced. And most of these theses are quite well done. Our non-German students can write their theses either in English or German, while our German students normally must write in English. This linguistic internationalization can be quite demanding when one must do research in other than her/his native language.

Perhaps more interesting to members of the WDSI is the opportunity for shared research. Kufstein currently has professors with Doctorates from schools such as Wharton and Duke, so the research culture is certainly shared. But Germany, which gave America the Baron von Humboldt-created model of the researcher-teacher, certainly has thousands of qualified researchers, who additionally speak and write at least adequate English as part of their research and publication activities. Students can be part of this research mix, as we all know how important students are to our research. Most of you probably use graduate students. In Fulda Beckman uses both graduate students and undergraduates—under his strict supervision.

THE MAIN POINT FOR THE EU AND POSSIBLY THE US: EMPLOYABILITY

With its nearly 500 million people, the EU sees within its membership widely differing levels of national income. Since most collegiate education is publicly financed, it would seem logical that employability should be a strong element of educational reform. As we all know, appropriate employability brings income both to government and the private sector. Since the EU is now 27 nations with nearly as many languages spoken widely within at least one of them, English has conveniently for Great Britain and America been selected as the de facto language of the EU. And this of course reflects international business, entertainment and politics. It certainly has aided Germany, which is an enormous exporter from its lands, and active in fabrication/selling around the world. In fact, Klaus Kleinfeld, former CEO of Siemens and currently COO of Alcoa, has stated that 40% of the recorded employment within Germany supports exports (personal interview).

Parenthetically, we add that limited student fees are coming to Germany, with provision made for scholarships for the needy. Thus, personal jobs are added to partial scholarships—all built on essentially free education. The employment rewards for students can be considerable. Indeed, many of the managers educated in Germany are non-Germans who have come to Germany, learned the language, gotten German degrees, and then moved into employment with German companies in their homelands. However, there is another group of native German speakers who have also learned good English, so that their options have been greatly enlarged. We have graduated many of both groups: Germans with good

English, and Chinese or Russians (say) with good German and English. As managers, they are double- or triple- threat, as it were.

The challenges which remain under Bologna are a bit simpler for the Fachhochschulen and Hochschulen, in our opinion. It is essentially more of the same, for at least international business studies. However, the Universities have the challenge of keeping more of their Ph.D.'s and providing them with world-class laboratories. In 2004, one out of seven German Ph.D.s went to America, and 3 out of its 4 Nobelists in the hard sciences also worked there (3). As we write, however, the just announced Nobel Prize winners in Chemistry (1 German), Physics (1 German local to this school and 1 Frenchman), Medicine (1 American, 1 Englishman, and 1 Englishman turned American) reflect a world which the EU seeks: research eminence for its 27 members. With little tradition of private funding, this puts enormous financial pressure upon economies which use less credit and provide more comprehensive "safety net" social benefits to their peoples, than in the United States. Consider them far more "cash and carry" in both private and public finance than in America.

For America also it appears that "more of the same" is indicated. Needed is more quality education for an increasingly complex technological and globalized world. And needed also are more international students to provide much of the student body, especially in technology and, we would add, management.

In a challenging article within the *Dean's Perspective* of this organization's magazine, Bagchi and Donnelly cite the need for mandatory internships/practical projects and the same practical experience for professors (1). This the Fachhochschulen have done. Our challenge is less with domestic company culture than the languages and cultures outside the homeland.

From this place in Europe we see the globe as increasingly tri-centric: North America, East Asia, and the EU. We believe that each of the three has an enormous future. The efficient growth of each will depend in significant part on how well we professors do our job.

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