Welcome to this special COVID-19 issue of the OEA newsletter. As our regular activities were curtailed, we thought we’d take a different approach to The Bridge #14 by including a number of perspectives about how life has changed as a result of lockdown and other various effects of the pandemic. We hope you’ll enjoy it and that you are safe!

1. Local outreach efforts for the purpose of branding NSU (embassies, high schools, NGOs, etc.): Total = 28

2. Programs organized by the OEA, foreign and local dignitaries, delegates, scholars, academics’ visits to NSU (largely resulted from local/international outreach efforts):
Total = 61

3. International visits for the purpose of academic understanding, exchange, and collaboration (i.e., universities):
Total = 27

4. Academic Collaboration (e.g., joint research, faculty & student exchange): Total = 30 MOUs signed + 62 pending (as a result of outreach and visits to universities and subsequent follow-up) 22 left to reach the Vice Chancellor’s goal of 150

5. Products created by the OEA:
   • NSU Research Foci 2020
   • Design for the MDS brochure
   • Bi-monthly newsletter called “The Bridge.”

6. The Office of International Affairs oversees the oversight and support of NSU students who come to the OAA to explore credit transfer and study abroad opportunities for postgraduate studies. This also includes the following students who already went for their higher studies:
   • 4 students to Canada
   • 2 students to Australia
   • 2 students to USA
   • 1 student to UK
   • 1 student to Malaysia
   Total = 265

Services provided to the international students at NSU include: visa extension, exit visa, information and orientation programs for the new international students enrolled at NSU.
Total = 250+

7. Office of Alumni Affairs (OAA Officer joining on November 07, 2019 after a one-year +vacancy)

Events:
Alumni Networking Session, February 29, 2020 at NSU Plaza Area.
(Discussions were held with the alumni and a soft announcement of launch of NSU Alumni Association was given to the alumni.)

Current activities in process:
• MoU with Bangladesh Alumni Foundation (BdAF) of USA regarding scholarship to potential candidates in final stage and awaiting approval of Vice Chancellor.
• Design of NSU Alumni Association’s website currently under brainstorming process.
• Framework of NSU Alumni Association’s Mission and Vision under process.
• NSUA constitution in the very final stage.

Planned events which could not be held:
NSU Alumni/faculty members and international students ‘Iftar Party’ was on planning stage (jointly by OIA and OAA) but could not be executed due to the covid-19 situation.
have shifted chaotically by destination country as the virus has spread (1, 2, 3). Some students say that they might enrol in online degrees, but many more want to pay partial tuition if their standard degree programs are online only. Up to a fifth of them might not leave their home countries, with a tenth of them planning to skip college altogether. The real challenges posed by the pandemic arrive when the normally complex and challenging processes begin. For instance, a Korean graduate student who has received admission with full funding (via research assistantship) recently wrote to a colleague here that she was told by the visa office in Seoul to expect the interview in about nine months. There is less than two months’ time before the fall semester begins here.

When a visa is delayed or denied, that blows apart all other plans. So does parents losing the source of income on which a child’s study abroad would depend, or travel disruption, quarantine measures along the way, qualifying tests, exam results, or family or personal health. That is to say nothing about a mother’s or father’s extreme anxiety when sending a child thousands of miles away at a time when any system is becoming vulnerable to the disruption (4). “My family is now scared to send anyone anywhere,” said one student in one of the surveys (2), “be it a foreign nation or just a trip to the grocery store!” And yet another was worried that scholarships will be harder now for someone like them without sufficient means.

As the last student’s concern indicates, the global pandemic is further exposing extant fault lines in international education, which was increasingly driven by market forces, with shrinking opportunities for global social mobility among the less affluent. Facing decreasing public support, public universities have increasingly used international students to address the gap, with their private counterparts facing less competition. If the booming new middle classes especially in populous countries shrink, experts say that this “market” could face collapse, or serious disruptions for at least half a decade (5). The global map might also shift toward new directions and dynamics. “What we’re now going to see is a shift of part of the [student] traffic…” says Prof. Simon Marginson of Oxford University, “going into other East Asian countries. That effect is likely to be permanent” (5).

Whether they like it or not, universities must rethink how they support international students in the new “buyer’s market.” The hype of online education is being exposed, spotlighting how international students learn and grow far beyond the classroom. Most importantly, international students could be viewed through more lenses than mainly as customers: as a global talent pool, as new generations who must approach global challenges more successfully, as neighbors’ children from a bit far away, and, regardless of nationality or other labels, as individuals with tremendous potential and aspirations.

Earlier this week, I emailed my student Ali, one of 5.3 million whose education is more uncertain than that of those who study nearer home—because I didn’t want to use his story in this essay if he or anyone around him isn’t doing well. I was relieved to hear back, within hours, that the “situation here is not that bad. I go out almost on a daily basis. … There are more mangoes in the tree than last year.”

The big picture of international education might change fundamentally. But we must also focus on one aspiring student at a time, each student who crosses oceans of both water and hardships to realize his or her potential, as engineer, economist, or physicist someday. We must cultivate an optimistic outlook when they say, like Ali did in the middle of a global pandemic: “I will be returning to campus for fall semester.”

References
1. Quacquarelli Symonds (June 2020). How covid-19 is impacting prospective international students at different study levels: A comparative overview of how undergraduate, postgraduate, and postgraduate research students are responding to the coronavirus crisis. Quacquarelli Symonds.

Author: Dr. Shyam Sharma is Associate Professor and Graduate Program Director in the Program in Writing and Rhetoric at the State University of New York in Stony Brook. His scholarship and teaching focus on international students and education, writing in the disciplines and professional communication, cross-cultural rhetoric and issues about language and language policy, and new media and online instruction. His works have appeared in a wide variety of venues, including a Routledge book on international students, based on data gathered from 35 US universities. He writes an op-ed column on higher education in the Republica, a sister publication of The New York Times in Kathmandu. He is recipient of the Nepal Vidya Bhusan gold medal and the K. Patricia Cross Future Leaders Award from the Association of American Colleges and Universities. He facilitates faculty training, research- and teaching-based collaborations, and institutional exchanges, online and onsite, across South Asia.

From OP Jindal University, India

From Global to Glocal: A New Direction for Higher Education Internationalization

In the wake of the COVID-19 crisis, just as we are examining our supply chains and our health care systems, we have an unprecedented opportunity to rethink our approach to internationalising our universities. Looking for quick-fixes at its juncture, will mean losing an important learning opportunity. For instance, now that the excessive reliance of internationalisation on international travel is exposed, we should be asking not just how much mobility is needed but also, what kind of mobility. A healthy dose of intentionality is called for at all levels of design and implementation of international strategies. This transformation can only be realised, I would argue, if we move away from the entrenched and hegemonic understanding of what it means to think, be and do “global”.

As educators, we have been told our job is to mould students to fit patterns premised on an inexorable march towards an eventuality - globalised utility maximisation - that purportedly defies the complexity, circularity and idiosyncrasy of history. In the post-COVID scenario, however, we can no longer deny that globalisation is expected to unfold in ways that do not strictly conform with once sacrosanct assumptions and textbook definitions. Just as governments will restructure supply chains to emphasize proximity and predictability, universities will be required to demonstrate dynamism in their international strategies. Education in general and higher education in particular needs to go beyond preparing students for a global world – we have a responsibility to shape minds who will ethically harness globalisation in the service of sustainability, equity and humanity, rather than a cookie cutter graduate army that has internalised “winner takes all”. If there is one lesson policy-makers have drawn from the pandemic, it is that the cause of the “global” must not be advanced at the cost of the local and the regional. As well-meaning practitioners invested in finding the best way forward, the post-COVID world invites us to shed the deadweight of “best practice”. Institutions in the Global South have every reason to invest more in learning from each other. International education is needed now more than ever but only if it is rooted in the genuine acknowledgement that learning is equally available everywhere. The binaries of work-life, home-office, online-offline have snapped and cleared the way for a new language free from simplistic othering.
The post-crisis recovery and reconstruction of higher education must be mindful of those global dynamics which exacerbate inequality and ultimately enhance our vulnerability to future shocks. There is no denying that how we create and disseminate knowledge is exactly such a global dynamic – if not the most significant one. For guiding lights, we may turn to our wisdom traditions that proclaim the unity of nature and our inner and outer worlds and our inherent humility which reassures us that if our challenges are shared, so is our will and ingenuity to meet them. As I have argued elsewhere, spiritual education with a focus on sustainability opens up the unique possibility for the higher education internationalisation project to strengthen the positive impact of globalisation.

Author: Kalyani Unkule, Director of International Affairs and Global Initiatives at O.P. Jindal Global University and Associate Professor at Jindal Global Law School. Her monograph "Internationalising the University: A Spiritual Approach" was published by Palgrave Macmillan in 2019.

From UniSA, Australia

Who Would Have Thought?

Earlier this year in February whilst visiting Dhaka, a now customary trip in my work calendar, I conducted a student seminar at NSU. Never would I have imagined that only a month later I would be directed by the Vice-Chancellor of my University to work from home and the Prime Minister pleading with the Australian public not to leave our homes unless strictly necessary. By the same token thousands of students would never have considered online studies as the only option to continue their degrees while in lockdown at home due to a pandemic, yet they had no other alternative. We are now living in a different world than the one we inhabited four months ago. When asked to write about how I thought COVID-19 had changed international education, my immediate reaction was flexible delivery.

In markets where online studies have not been a popular studying option due to the perception of being of low quality or the authorities ban on foreign online studies, suddenly students are now exposed to the great offerings many universities have in this space. I know the quality out there because I did my second post-graduate degree online. When I started my online studies, I was very impressed with the platform, delivery, content and support offered by the institution. The last QILT* survey in Australia showed that 86% of all students in Australia doing undergraduate online studies were satisfied with online learning resources and teaching quality, and at UniSA these indicators are even higher. I think the pandemic gave online study and unparalleled platform to a segment of the global market that had a very low awareness of its possibilities.

This flexibility will now also have major repercussions later when those students currently studying will graduate and start looking for jobs. A report from consultancy Building 20, based on a survey of 423 Australian office workers in May found that overall 51% of the respondents preferred remote working and even more interestingly managers are the ones with the higher preference (57%) to continue working remotely once the pandemic is under control. This is a lot higher than pre-pandemic. This new age in education delivery will come in many ways and shapes. The options will be moulded by how the pandemic continues evolving and the restrictions that come with it. As COVID-19 continues crippling economies around the world, many people will look at micro-credentialing and upskilling possibly with short online courses. The aim, once the local economies reactivate, is to be more marketable in a challenging job market post-pandemic. To this aim the Australian government facilitated legislation and resources to help people embrace this underdeveloped aspect of education.

Lastly, this situation we find ourselves in may well be a catalyst for transnational education to take front page in international education as mobility among countries is hindered by border closures. A mid-term strategy to overcome all the traveling restrictions is bringing our product to the markets where there is appetite for it through partnerships with local institutions allowing universities like UniSA to cater for the demand of quality Australian education in country, even if the borders of many nations continue being closed. We certainly live in a different world but still a world full of opportunities and possibilities.

*2019 ComparED (QILT) Student experience survey (Undergraduate, External Study Mode)

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NSU staff also shared their observations about COVID-19

The Opportunities and Challenges of International Education Under the Impact of Covid-19

It may be something that none of us thought of when the epidemic has developed to such a degree. I have to say that COVID-19 has affected all aspects of our lifestyle and education style in a short time. It's not saying we start a new teaching and learning style. Long-distance teaching and learning all have known depended on the development of IT technology in the last 20 years. We predicted today's scenario many times in the past. But when these things happen in our life, we still feel that it is not easy to accept. We have to face and take our attention very seriously about online learning much more than ever before. They are not pretty good as we expected. The combination of the most advanced technology and education seems not so friendly and even makes the online class so dull.

Why is this? According to a language teaching survey, when teachers and students discuss online classes, the most satisfying thing is convenience. The students said that I could even be in class or sign in while I was in travel or bed. The most dissatisfying is that the students couldn't have eye contact with teachers, and lack interaction between teachers and students. The teaching process is like a designed processor program, the professor's jokes were no longer funny, and the classmates' pranks were gone. If COVID-19 profoundly affects our education, then we should rethink how technology serves education? And how online learning can provide what we need? How to bring caring and interaction into the online class? Educational institutions need to embrace new information technology and promote education to engage in new technology development to find a way to resolve the current problems. And also, online teaching and learning need much more offline service and support than we imagined. All of these call on more research and exploration.

From a social perspective, education is a system. When the pandemic strikes, the entire system of education has been hit. Technological progress, and educational opportunities, social equality become severe problems. How to obtain and allocate educational resources involves all parties of society both in the national and global level. For developing countries, they need not only domestic consensus but also the support and help of the international community. The allocation of educational resources is an opportunity to achieve collective progress and a challenge to avoid new inequality as well in the era of science and technology.