The Quality-Trade Nexus: How Globalization of Quality Standards and Educational Marketing Interact

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Abstract

Since the Second World War, international education has grown at a rapid rate, and studies like IDP’s Global Student Mobility predict continued strong growth well into the future. The GATS and various FTAs (AUS-US, APEC, etc.) are intended to strengthen and further boost educational trade. These trade regimes require the development of standards; the international standards bodies and quality agencies are the result. Cross-border accreditation of institutions and programs is increasing, as is the development of mutual recognition agreements (MRAs) between counterpart quality agencies. All of these activities are intended to facilitate the international flow of students and skilled labor.

How do existing and emerging quality regimes affect trade? Or, more to the point, how could these regimes affect trade? How can institutions leverage quality regimes to their competitive advantage? How can new quality regimes to facilitate trade be created? Drawing on the most recent research into cross-border quality regimes — undertaken by the author and the Center for Quality Assurance in International Education — this presentation will identify critical trends which can inform both institutional strategy and tactics.¹

I. Globalization, Trade Agreements & Higher Education Harmonization

Over the last two decades, higher education has found its purposes evolving beyond simply serving needs found within its national boundaries. Although the scientific community has enjoyed a long history of communicating internationally for research purposes, the opportunity for global interaction across all disciplines and professional education areas now has become reality. Higher education is delivered on a transnational basis; professional licensure is made possible without studying physically in the country of licensure origin; and institutions of higher education are discovering that to ignore the demands of the global knowledge marketplace is to ignore a healthy future for themselves, their students and the countries in which they operate.

With ever-increasing prospects of student, academic and professional mobility, the need for international standards and international approaches to quality grows. The development of comprehensive trade agreements — global and bilateral — is generating a call for academic and professional qualifications which are portable. Such qualifications need to be based not only national standards, but also international standards of professional preparation and practice.

Institutions throughout the world are seeking external assurance that their offerings meet global standards. The practice of dual accreditation (i.e., securing accreditation not just domestically but also internationally) is becoming common practice in such professional areas as management education and engineering. The process of officially recognizing

professional quality assurance status and qualifications – Mutual Recognition Agreements (MRAs) – is becoming increasingly popular among countries entering Free Trade Agreements (FTAs), such as Australia and the United States.

National systems of higher education, as well as their individual institutions, need to be vigilant in keeping pace with global movements in academic preparation. The Bologna process is clearly one of those movements. Among its top three priorities for Europe are: i) establishing effective and cooperative quality assurance systems, ii) developing a system of credit transfer to enable student mobility, and iii) developing a two-cycle degree system (undergraduate and postgraduate).

The dramatic rise of “regionalism” is a bi-product of globalization. Emerging economic areas/trade blocs such as the European Union (EU), the Asia Pacific Economic Cooperation (APEC), the Australia-US Free Trade Agreement, the Free Trade Agreement of the Americas, ASEAN and others are just some obvious examples of this trend.

*Regional Integration and Development*, a recent co-publication by the World Bank and Oxford University Press asserts that *regionalism* is accounting for why countries are adopting: i) more outward-looking policy perspectives, ii) greater liberalization of national policies, and iii) a greater sense of equality of partnership with other countries.2

Around the Pacific Rim, activities related to global, regional and bilateral trade agreements, regional and international associations, and inter-governmental organizations are contributing to an increasing sense of connectedness and, through these closer relationships, a new form of “peer pressure” driving countries to enhance domestic policy and practice.

Of course, national higher education systems are not immune to the dynamics of regionalism. To the contrary, by its basic nature of inquiry higher education traditionally has sought to respond to changing national circumstances and has looked beyond national frontiers to seek new truths and new ways in which the educational enterprise can ensure continuous improvement. With the rise of regionalism (one dimension of globalization) and an increased sense of their status in the global marketplace, countries are recognizing the critical role played by higher education in national economic development. Indeed, the 1998-99 World Bank publication, *World Development Study*, claimed that “Knowledge has become the most important factor in economic development.” The Bank subsequently stated:

> The last decade of the 20th century saw significant changes in the global environment that, in one way or another, bear heavily on the role, functions, shape and the mode of operation of tertiary education systems all over the world, including those in developing countries...Among the most influential changes are the increasing importance of knowledge as a driver of growth in the context of the global economy, the information and communication revolution, the emergence of a worldwide labor market, and global sociopolitical transformations.3

The quality of the higher education sector, and how that quality is defined, evaluated and monitored, is therefore key not only to the social and economic well-being of a nation-state, but also is a determining factor related to the status of that higher education system within a region, and the overall quality of a region’s higher education sector in a global context:

As knowledge becomes more important, so does higher education...The quality of knowledge generated within higher education institutions, and its availability to the wider economy, is becoming increasingly critical to national competitiveness.\(^4\)

The emerging trade agreements have profound effects on the following rapidly changing dimensions of higher education:

- National higher education policy liberalization;
- Common standards for professional education (leading to greater student and labor mobility);
- Mutual recognition of academic credentials;
- Cross-border provision of higher education by private providers;

and, whether or not educational institutions are aware of it,

- Perceptions of quality among prospective students; and,
- Marketing activities designed to grow cross-border provision.

In each of these matters, the activities of national accrediting bodies play a vital role – and universities can influence the direction of evolutionary developments.

... Virtually all regions of the world are deeply involved in and heavily influenced by global, regional and bilateral trade agreements. While an agreement such as the European Union is for the purpose of more comprehensive economic union aimed at ultimate unification of judicial, legislative and executive policy, the agreements in East Asia and the Pacific region are more traditional trade agreements – aimed at the removal of tariffs on goods and services and the liberalization of investment and domestic policies, including those related to educational services. The largest regional trade bloc is the Asia Pacific Economic Cooperative (APEC), which is scheduled to become a free trade agreement (FTA) in 2020.

The European Union has made it imperative for member countries to have national higher education quality assurance systems for purposes of mutual recognition and in order to participate in discussions related to common standards for professional education and practice. Similarly, other trade regions, including the Pacific Rim, will be required to promptly follow suit or be left behind.

Attention is already being paid to regional and global standards in the professions. China has adopted US accrediting standards for architecture and is doing so for construction; Japan has adopted global standards for engineering (through the Washington Accord); there is already an “APEC Engineer” and “APEC Architect”; Australia, Hong Kong and New Zealand incorporate international evaluators into their local quality assurance processes; Singapore welcomes foreign accreditors into its higher education system; and several Australian universities have undergone foreign accreditation in areas as diverse as business education,

veterinary medical education and distance education. Accredit ing bodies in the region are, or will, become a critical part of the economic viability of their respective nations and the region. And, as a consequence, harmonized systems will create opportunities for cross-border educational expansion.

Will a country be less competitive without a national accrediting system? Absolutely. The Australians found that it was necessary for their credibility as a major cross-border supplier of higher education that they not simply claim that they had high quality institutions, but also back that up through the establishment of a national third-party system of quality assurance to validate such claim. The Australian Universities Quality Agency (AUQA) was consequently founded in 2001. It is becoming increasingly obvious that any country without a national accrediting function will not be taken seriously in the global marketplace. An obvious corollary of this is that greater harmonization of quality assurance across professional disciplines will create greater advantage in the global marketplace.

**The General Agreement on Trade in Services (GATS)**

The General Agreement on Trade in Services (GATS) of the World Trade Organization (WTO) extends the call for member countries to liberalize not only trade in goods (the GATT), but also the substantially larger and more complex domain of services. In response to the GATS and other trade agreements, a great many countries are seeking to liberalize their education policies. A clear example of this is the Law on Promoting Private Education in the People’s Republic of China, passed by the 31st plenary session of the National People’s Congress (NPC) standing committee held on 28 December 2002. Under the pretense of “revitalizing China through science and education”, the law enables private education at all levels to operate in China. A small number of institutions of higher education were given permission to officially collaborate with foreign institutions in offering a degree, and approximately three dozen were given permission to initiate electronic learning (including partnerships with foreign providers). Although the number of foreign private institutions approved to award their own degree (rather than through a Chinese university) is still very small, the new Law and policy shifts are nevertheless evidence of massive liberalization taking place in Chinese higher education.

As of January, 2005, the GATS negotiation process, initiated with the Uruguay Round in 1995, has progressed through the three main stages of negotiation: i) proposals, ii) requests and iii) offers. The round, initially expected to conclude in 2005, may need to be extended. In the Pacific Rim region, the United States, Japan, New Zealand and Australia have submitted negotiating proposals in educational services to the WTO; Korea announced its intention to do so in April, 2003; and most other countries have made public actual or planned policy liberalization in anticipation of their participation in the global trade agreement.

**Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation (APEC)**

One-third of world trade takes place within free trade agreements – two-thirds if APEC is included. The twenty-three (23) member countries of APEC include Australia, Brunei Darussalam, Canada, Indonesia, Japan, Republic of Korea, Malaysia, Mexico, New Zealand,

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Papua New Guinea, Philippines, Singapore, Thailand, United States, China, Hong Kong (China), Taiwan (China), Mexico, Papua New Guinea, Chile, Peru, Russia, and Vietnam.

As stated earlier, APEC is not scheduled to become a free trade agreement until 2020. In the interim, however, there are a number of official activities taking place for purposes of fostering regional harmony, including here are some activities related to higher education. APEC Education Centers have been established at designated universities in member countries. An APEC Education Foundation was established several years ago through the efforts of the Republic of Korea and the United States. Mobility schemes, such as APEC Engineer and APEC Architect will be discussed below. Until it becomes a free trade agreement, APEC activity remains unbinding on its members. APEC’s strength lies in the opportunity it creates for formal deliberation on issues of common concern and in its collaborative activity.

Other Regional Agreements

Additional regional agreements which are key to Pacific Rim mobility are:

- North America Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA: Canada, US and Mexico)
- Free Trade Agreement of the Americas (The Americas, North and South)
- Market of the South (MERCOSUR: key South American countries)
- ASEAN University Network

Of these, NAFTA has acted as a catalyst for the major professions to consider their commonalities across borders; at least nineteen (19) accreditors accredit programs or institutions in both the United States and Canada. But MERCOSUR has accelerated the need for MRAs, most recently defining common accreditation standards for the areas of medicine, engineering and agriculture.

Regional Mobility Schemes

A number of mobility schemes have emerged in recent years in the Pacific Rim, some related to students and their study abroad; others related to professional mobility. Some of these schemes are directly related to processes of quality assurance; others are indirectly related to quality. Although the primary purpose of these schemes is liberalizing policy related to professional mobility, it is interesting to note that as countries adopt and implement regional/global standards for professions in particular or higher education in general, one can expect to see a trend toward reduced education-related immigration and emigration – assuming that the local economy keeps pace with the upgrade in educational standards. Specific mobility schemes will be discussed below:

- APEC Professions

  Australia has promoted the development of professional mobility frameworks within APEC, based on the premise that it is crucial for Australian graduates to have their qualifications recognized internationally, beginning with engineering and architecture. The *APEC Engineer* lists “suitably qualified and experienced engineers who have been assessed according to agreed criteria, thus providing individuals with improved access to independent practice in all participating APEC economies. The *APEC Architect*
project, which is now under way, aims to establish similar mobility arrangements for experienced architects in participating APEC economies.”

- **JABEE and the Washington Accord**

  Through an increased awareness of international benchmarking and assurances that local qualifications are globally mobile, Japan has recently created its first professional accreditation body for engineering, Japan Accreditation Board for Engineering (JABEE). As with engineering program accreditors globally, JABEE’s goal is to be recognized as a member of the *Washington Accord*, a multi-lateral agreement begun in 1989 among professional engineering degree programs. The Accord, shepherded by the US Accreditation Board for Engineering and Technology (ABET), recognizes the substantial equivalence of programs accredited by member bodies and recommends that graduates of these programs be recognized internationally as having met the academic requirements for entry into the profession. The Washington Accord is a model for MRAs which are critical to professional mobility and the quality of professional education at the tertiary level.

- **UMAP and UCTS**

  Founded in 1993, the University Mobility in Asia and the Pacific (UMAP), a voluntary association of governmental and non-governmental representatives in the region with the purpose of achieving enhanced international understanding through increased mobility of university students and staff. UMAP members and their universities are working toward standard arrangements for the recognition of study undertaken by UMAP students and have agreed to pilot a UMAP Credit Transfer Scheme (UCTS). Though university participation is voluntary, the objective of the UCTS is to increase student mobility by ensuring that credit is received by students for study undertaken when on exchange with other universities. The UMAP International Secretariat is in Japan. It is notable that a similar mechanism, the European Credit Transfer System (ECTS) is now underway in Europe.

**Bilateral Agreements**

While the promises of regional and global trade agreements are being fulfilled, bilateral free trade agreements remain a popular form of economically linking two countries. Many bilateral agreements have been concluded or are nearing conclusion, including the United States and Australia; the United States and Singapore; the United States and Japan; the United States and Vietnam; the United States and Chile; and the United States and Canada. Central to these FTAs are issues of investment and mobility, including the qualifications of professionals and the assurance of quality of general academic degrees.

A mere decade ago, few persons engaged in higher education would have suggested that any trade agreement – global, regional or bilateral – as having any impact on higher education, including its quality and the mobility of its graduates, and especially its marketing.

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In the 21st century, countries that ignore internalizing these powerful external dynamics do so at their own risk. And in globalize markets, change can happen alarmingly fast. National accrediting bodies can no longer limit their scope of knowledge to their own systems. Regionalism as a powerful means to globalization is the present reality, and it will only grow in strength. **It is foreseeable that quality assurance will become regionalized in a fairly short time.** Were we to guess the progression of regionalization in quality assurance, it would begin with bilateral MRAs for academic credentials, followed by regional accrediting functions for those professions with the most mobility (e.g., engineering), evolving over time into a region-wide process for assuring quality in higher education regardless of physical location. Eventually, we anticipate global processes to emerge. The basis for this has already begun as several Southeast Asian countries are now discussing the feasibility of a sub-regional system of standards development for higher education through SEAMEO. And, as of September, 2004, the Asia Pacific Quality Network (APQN), a network of all national quality assurance bodies in that region, has legally incorporated and will enter into activity which most probably will lead to region-wide processes of quality assurance, including in education, over time.

**II. Emerging Patterns of Cross-Border Recognition**

Accreditation, audit and related quality assurance schemes (here referred to collectively as “accreditation”) are systems for recognizing educational institutions and professional programs affiliated with those institutions for a set level of performance, integrity, and quality which entitles them to the confidence of the educational community and the public they serve. In the United States, this recognition is extended primarily through non-governmental, voluntary institutional or professional associations. These groups establish criteria or standards for accreditation, evaluate institutions and professional programs at their request, and publicly designate those which have achieved accredited status.

While in most other countries educational standards are established and maintained by a central governmental agency, in the United States public authority in education is constitutionally reserved to the fifty (50) states, which jealously guard their governing prerogative. This decentralization has spawned a need for regional and national accreditation bodies. And, while it is basically a voluntary, nongovernmental process, accrediting decisions are called upon in many formal actions – by governmental funding agencies, scholarship commissions, foundations, employers, counsellors, and potential students. American accrediting bodies have, therefore, come to be viewed as quasi-public entities with certain responsibilities to the many groups which interact with the educational community.

For most of the past 100 or so years, postsecondary accreditation was a uniquely American educational phenomenon which evolved in two variants:

**Institutional accreditation** developed as universities/colleges and secondary schools in various regions of the country formed associations to develop common standards and to address shared concerns, such as articulation with secondary schools, transfer credit practices, and admittance to graduate education.

**Specialized accreditation** was derived from professional associations and educators in professional fields that joined together to provide quality assurances concerning educational preparation for entry into professional practice. Specialized accrediting bodies accredit programs, or schools in the case of single-purpose institutions, that prepare
professionals, technicians, or members of special occupations. Specialized accreditation usually applies to fields in which there is a recognized first professional degree and where health, welfare, safety, and professional competence are matters of academic, professional, and public concern. Each specialized accrediting body has its distinctive definitions of eligibility, criteria or standards for accreditation, and operating procedures which have been developed through the cooperation of educators and practitioners as well as with others within their communities of interest, that is, educational institutions, employers, and public agencies. The crucial dimension of quality in specialized accreditation is the adequacy of the educational program as it relates to professional expectations and requirements for entry and practice in the field.

Accreditation and related quality assurance processes allow prospective students to know that their credentials will be widely accepted. Conversely, they allow institutions to market educational services to prospective students who may be far afield in terms of their normal institutional range and unfamiliar with an institution’s particulars.

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The United States has the oldest system of accreditation in the world, and one which has served as a template or model for many which have since developed elsewhere. American higher education has – and still does – dominate educational exports globally. American universities have become the “gold standard” against which other systems are measured, even as competitors become more numerous and effective.

Until recently, however, very little was known regarding the diffusion of US accreditation processes: that is, the degree to which US accreditors accredit foreign institutions and/or enter into MRAs with their counterparts overseas. An understanding of these patterns can inform institutional programming as well as international marketing.

During the first half of 2005, the Washington DC based Center for Quality Assurance in International Education and I undertook a comprehensive survey of all US accrediting bodies, in order to better understand their international activities.

Surveys were sent to ninety-eight (98) institutional and professional higher education accrediting bodies. Of these, fifty-six (56) responded, comprising 57% of the entire population of accreditors.

**Countries undergoing US accreditation**

Remarkably, we discovered that institutions in the following thirty-five (35) countries have now undergone US institutional or professional accreditation:

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This number is far greater than any estimates that were provided to these researchers prior to fielding our survey, and was greater than even our early estimates predicted.

**Patterns of Mutual Recognition Agreements**

Seven (7) American accreditors now have mutual recognition agreements with counterpart bodies in seven (7) countries, including: Australia, Canada, Hong Kong, Ireland, New Zealand, South Africa and the United Kingdom, with another one soon to be concluded in China. Fields covered include Architecture, Construction, Dentistry, Engineering, Health Informatics, Landscape Architecture and Pharmacy.

A further six (6) bodies have expressed an interest in negotiating new or additional MRAs in the future, including those representing Counselors, Dentists, Dietetics, Nurse Anesthetists, Physical Therapists and Physician Assistants.

The following charts illustrate patterns of MRAs and accreditation across a range of professional fields. Note that only fields whose accrediting body answered affirmative to having MRAs or accrediting foreign institutions are included here:

![Patterns of Mutual Recognition Agreements Chart](chart.png)

### Professional Accreditors (non-health related)

- **Architecture**: Y N N
- **Aviation**: N Y Y
- **Business**: N Y Y
- **Construction**: N N Y
- **Cosmetology**: N N N
- **Engineering**: Y N N
- **Forestry**: N N Y
- **Industrial Technology**: N N M
- **Interior Design**: Y N M
- **Landscape Architecture**: Y N M
- **Maritime**: N Y Y
- **Music & Recreation**: N Y Y
- **Planning**: N Y N
- **Teacher Education - 1**: N N M (1)
- **Teacher Education - 2**: N Y Y (1)

### Health Profession Accreditors

- **Anesthesiology**: N Y M
- **Allied Health**: N Y M
- **Blood Bank**: N Y Y
- **Cardiology**: N Y Y
- **Dentistry**: N Y Y
- **Dental Hygiene**: N Y Y
- **Medical Laboratory**: Y M Y
- **Medical Informatics**: N Y M
- **Medical Physics**: N Y Y
- **Nursing**: N N Y
- **Occupational Therapy**: N Y Y
- **Optometry**: N N Y
- **Orthotics & Prosthetics**: N N M
- **Osteopathic Medicine**: N Y Y
- **Pharmacy**: Y Y Y (4)
- **Physical Therapy**: N Y Y (3)
- **Radiological Technology**: N Y Y (3)
- **Surgical Anesthesiology**: N Y Y (3)

### Notes:

1. The U.S. has two competing teacher education accrediting bodies with differing policies toward international accreditation.

   - Y = Yes; N = No; M = Maybe

   - **(1)** No MRA presently, but willing in principle.
   - **(2)** Will not accredit foreign institutions, but will undertake a Review & Recognition for ‘Substantial Equivalence’
   - **(3)** Authorized to accredit foreign institutions, but no such institutions yet.
   - **(4)** No longer accrediting foreign institutions, but grandfathered programs remain. Willing to consider accrediting Australian institutions.
   - **(5)** No longer accrediting foreign institutions, but grandfathered programs remain. May consider accrediting Australian institutions.
III. Leveraging Quality Regimes to Competitive Advantage

The forgoing discussion has established that both cross-border accreditation and MRAs can lubricate the international flow of students. Universities can utilize both to advance their internationalization. However, while have complete control over when and why to undertake a foreign accreditation, their involvement in the development of MRAs and utilization of existing MRAs is far more opaque. In these final paragraphs, we will briefly address both approaches and their respective opportunities.

Pursuit of Foreign Accreditation

Foreign accreditation – like any accreditation process – implies a substantial and ongoing investment on the part of the university. A self-study activity is always required, followed by an on-site visit by the accrediting commission, the cost of which is borne by the institution and which can be quite substantial. Annual fees must be paid to the accrediting body and, of course, re-accreditation must be addressed periodically with its concommittant expense. Nonetheless, there are at least five (5) motivating factors which can lead institutions to undergo foreign accreditation:

1) **Quality Assurance** – Some national quality assurance processes are long-established and are widely acknowledged to be among the most rigorous in existence. Institutions in countries without mature quality assurance systems, or where there is no quality assurance approach for specialized fields, often find that undergoing a foreign accreditation provides a baseline measure of how they are doing and establishes benchmarks for future development. Short of achieving "accreditation", some institutions choose to be externally reviewed by foreign accreditors to discern similar benchmarking outcomes. One example of this process is currently underway in the United Arab Emirates, which is having its teacher education reviewed by the US-based National Commission on the Accreditation of Teacher Education (NCATE).

2) **International Marketing** – In the globalized environment in which institutions now operate – with increasingly sophisticated and discerning students who are shopping for qualifications which will be most advantageous to their future success – accreditation by a globally recognized authority can be the tipping point for decision making, especially in markets where students may be accustomed to brand signifiers of quality (i.e. ISO 9000 and countless retail consumer brands). The clamour among business schools to obtain accreditation through the Association to Advance Collegiate Schools of Business (AACSB) and/or its European counterpart, EQUIS. The University of Sydney and US-based Thunderbird School of International Management are examples of institutions which have opted for to undergo both accrediting processes.

3) **Market Access** – In some cases, lucrative educational markets have been foreclosed to graduates of non-domestically accredited institutions. In cases where there is substantial opportunity for a foreign provider to compete in a restricted area, there may be justification for the institution to undergo a foreign accreditation simply to gain market access. Early in 2005, four Australian universities (Deakin, USQ, UNE and Monash) were accredited by the US-based Distance Education & Training Council (DETC), specifically so that they could overcome a regulatory hurdle and offer distance education courses to active-duty military personnel.
4) **Graduate Mobility** – Accreditation, especially in the regulated professions, provides an easier pathway to licensure in the United States, as well as in many other countries. Institutions which selectively undergo the process can substantially broaden the opportunities for their graduates, by substantially reducing regulatory hurdles to professional licensure. The Saskatchewan Institute for Architectural Technologies likely undertook American Council for Construction Education (ACCE) accreditation so that their graduates would be employable in the vastly larger economy of their “neighbour to the south.”

5) **Prestige** – Increasingly, some institutions undergo foreign accreditation for no other reason than to demonstrate to their peers and the world that they rate as “World Class.” By undergoing a rigorous accreditation review – even in a narrow specialized discipline – the entire institution can benefit from the reflected glory, which can show tangible benefit in peer-based global institutional rankings. One explicit reason Murdoch University of Australia undertook the American Veterinary Medical Association accreditation was to be perceived in the first rank of international veterinary institutions.8

In the end, all of these can add up to increased ability to attract international students, greatly ensured employability of graduates, and more significant mentoring relationships with rising institutions in emerging economies, as well as with foreign governments.

**Pursuit of MRAs**

Unlike pursuit of foreign accreditation, MRAs are not something entered into by institutions – but rather by their national accrediting bodies. While institutions are often members of their respective accrediting commission (or subject to a national body that has a similar role), they are not normally in the habit of advising quality agencies on the nature of their cross-border linkages. This is the result of a historic distancing between accrediting commissions and the bodies that they accredit. When accrediting bodies do undertake MRAs, it is often driven more by concerns regarding the mobility of labor and international employability, than by concern for international student mobility.9 Conversely, when MRAs are not pursued, it is often a consequence of protectionist tendencies within the domestic profession – interests which do not necessarily correspond identically to those of educational institutions.

*From a prescriptive standpoint, institutions should assume a far more strategic position regarding the development of MRAs in fields which are of strategic import to their own development.* Where international opportunities exist, but MRAs do not, universities may want to collectively encourage their professional accrediting bodies to become more proactive. Where MRAs already do exist, universities need to explore how these agreements can be leveraged to increase the effectiveness of their own cross-border marketing and international engagement. To date, few institutions have effectively utilized those MRAs that do exist to advance their institutional interests.

Last, given that the discussion this far has been largely theoretical, I would like to provide one more practical illustration of how the research described here can be utilized to the advantage of globally ambitious institutions.

8 Leventhal, op.cit.

9 In the public health fields other factors may drive MRAs. For example, concerns regarding the global blood supply and uniform blood handling standards will likely drive MRAs in the area of blood management education in a much more significant way than any concern for labor or student mobility.
Our survey research revealed that the American Council for Construction Education (ACCE) has already entered into an MRA with the UK Chartered Institute of Builders (CIOB). Now, both the ACCE and CIOB have been working with the China National Board of Construction Management Accreditation to raise that body up to an international standard, with the ultimate objective being to enter into a tripartite MRA.

But why are the Chinese interested in MRAs in construction education? Do they intend to attract construction students from around the world? Are they looking to develop study abroad programs for Americans and Britons? In fact, their needs are driven by the demands of the construction marketplace in China. China is heavily dependent on foreign construction companies to undertake its many building projects, both within China and in within its sphere of influence. Many foreign construction companies – particularly those from North America – will only hire managers who have graduated from accredited programs, and whose professional competence can be assured to meet a certain quality standard. American and British nationals are not available in sufficient numbers to manage China’s numerous ongoing projects. It is therefore in China’s national interest to develop educational programs that are equivalent to those available in its major trading partners – and to then have these programs either accredited abroad (less desirable for reasons of nationalism and convenience) or recognized through MRAs.

In the interim, a substantial opportunity exists for savvy universities with US or UK accredited construction management programs to leverage their expertise, both to build beachheads in China through the education of Chinese students, as well as through institutional agreements whereby they serve as mentor institutions to Chinese universities seeking to achieve world-class standards in the field. These mentoring arrangements alone can be lucrative and, of course, open up additional unanticipated opportunities across the board. The University of Cincinnati is one university that is deeply involved in mentoring Chinese universities in the area of construction management, and its initiative in this area – as well as similar international initiatives in other disciplines – has been largely driven by a profound understanding of the emerging processes of global quality assurance.