APHERP Senior Seminar Concept Paper
Creating Cultures of Quality within Asia Pacific Higher Education Institutions
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Introduction: Throughout the reach of higher education wherever it is found, issues of quality arise and, with very modest inspection prove to be marvelously complex and in many ways not a little puzzling—this, despite the fact that throughout the world quizzical minds of high quality and good intent continue to address the issue. In part, this situation arises because the notion of "quality" means many different things to many different people and in many different institutional contexts—which is to say that in a multitude of ways quality is situational—it means what it means to those addressing a given situation and circumstance. Yes, the *idea* of quality is familiar to us all: as Virginia Smith, the former president of Vassar used to say: "It may be hard to define it…but I *know* it when I see it." By which she also meant to imply, "and I know when it is absent from what I see."

Such a powerful intuitive sense of quality may serve individuals within the confines of a given program, or classroom, or faculty evaluation, or even overall institutional assessment, but in the contemporary world of higher education massification where the numbers of institutions, the numbers of students they serve, the complexity of the programs they invent and produce are all growing at unprecedented rates, far more effective precision is needed. And as we all know, this has been and continues to be the work in some way of all of higher education, made even more challenging by the increasing desire and need to develop <u>comparative</u> norms and measures that will allow some functional measure of comparability across a range of situations. These include, to name just a few: multiple institutions with differing missions within the same country as well as those that differ significantly in size and complexity; and even more daunting, those from different national settings and political jurisdictions throughout the world, including in growing numbers, those institutions that themselves purport to be trans-national or global. As Simon Marginson has argued in various situations (including global ranking endeavors), increasingly the meaning and value of higher education as a process and a product constitute a "good", or a "value" within national and international (global) markets, and as with any "product" in any "market," higher education requires *a functional currency* in order for "us" to "know" what a degree, certificate, or other higher education product is "worth" relative to others (Marginson and Sawir, 2005; Neubauer, 2011).[i]

   In what follows, we establish a frame for discussing a variety of perspectives that involve various notions, understandings and practices of quality in Asia Pacific higher education with the purpose of encouraging our contributors to this senior seminar to

identify and inquire into a particular aspect of quality or an important dimension of quality that has become manifest within their own institution, country or trans-national region. We do this not with any pretense that the result of such a exercise will prove comprehensive in any meaningful way, but that the papers that result from this effort and in this seminar will embody the insights and perhaps novel understandings of how quality (as a constantly dynamic and changing attribute) is being manifested, analyzed, and in many cases, measured within a range of specific institutions and historical contexts.

The Context

Of the myriad examples one might choose to initiate this conversation, one that strikes us as having been particularly useful was that of the Global University Network for Innovation (GUNi) conference in 2007 on the subject: "Accreditation for Quality Assurance: What Is At Stake?" The very thoughtful and far-reaching papers in that conference (published simultaneously in a volume with the same title: GUNI 2006) retain much of their relevance today. Of striking durability is the effort of Sanyal and Martin to enumerate the core meanings of quality.

- Providing excellence
- Being exceptional
- Providing value for money
- Conforming to specifications
- Getting things right the first time
- Meeting customers' needs
- Having zero defects
- Providing added value
- Exhibiting fitness of purpose

(Syndal and Martin, 2006, p 5.)

Our assertion is that virtually all efforts by quality assurance entities at whatever level, as well as efforts taken within higher education institutions, embody some understanding of and effort to achieve quality in one or more of these senses. As the GUNI work makes clear, it is useful to think of each of these as both a potentially useful dichotomy (the attribute meant to embody the concept is either present or absent), or more usefully as a continuum for which discrete indicators are sought to obtain some aspect of relative measurement for the attribute. Indeed, many higher education accreditation entities have developed metrics and rubrics to encourage the institutions they accredit to develop empirical referents for these attributes, which as the foregoing suggests are often at the conceptual level so vague as to defeat the potential notion of measurement. This also raises the predicament of "external" assessment versus or in alignment with "internal" assessment about which more will be said later.(See for example the WASC 2013 Handbook).

Efforts to develop useful understandings and measurement of quality within higher education contexts (as if the task were not difficult enough as it were) are further complicated by a broad range of structural factors that have emerged around and through the various dynamics and pathways of globalization. These often lead to a seemingly constant flow of forces of change throughout societies, some of which have affected higher education directly and some of which create a set of background factors that impinge on higher education's ability to pursue its various missions with effective modalities of performance across whatever levels of quality they are able to create and sustain. Among these (but certainly not exclusively) are:

- Privatization and the "incorporation movement". Privatization of higher education has long been a feature of many higher education systems (e.g. Japan, Korea, Philippines, U.S.), but over the past several decades one can observe a considerable expansion of the reach of private education as the dynamics of massification of higher education outstrip public resources to meet demand (Hawkins and Mok, 2015).
- Changes in funding patterns and sources. Economic globalization has both initiated and facilitated the spread of neo-liberalism, which at the government level creates arguments for reducing the relative scope of the public sector in relation to the private sector. The impacts on higher education have led in many environments to a relative decrease in government funding for private education and an overall cost-shift toward increased student tuitions.
- Autonomy. One companion of neoliberal influences on higher education has been the movement to provide higher education systems with greater "autonomy" from previously controlling governmental ministries. In many instances, the exchange for greater autonomy over higher education development and administration has been the companion reduction in governmental financial support (e.g. Indonesia, Japan, U.S.)
- Rapid expansion of HE in given environments. The rapid expansion of higher education throughout many Asian societies has been without historical parallel, as governments and societies have sought to create vastly expanded access to higher education as a necessary pathway to economic development and the ability to compete within the increasingly competitive global environment. (Neubauer and Tanaka, 2011).
- Rise of national agencies dedicated to quality assessment. Throughout the 1980's and into the 1990's and beyond, quality assurance entities were developed across Asia both within individual countries and as regional and transnational phenomena. These were assisted in no small measure by the various activities of UNESCO and its role both in developing the Chiba Principles and assisting in the establishment of the International Network for Quality Assurance Agencies in Higher Education (INQAAHE) and the Asia Pacific Quality Network (APQN). The result is a virtual ubiquity of higher education quality assurance endeavors throughout the region, albeit with significant differences among them in terms of the concepts they employ to assert quality, the tools they employ to measure

them and the policy consequences that flow across and within different countries from their operation. Once again, these intense external/national and international endeavors are increasingly bumping up against individual higher education institutional quality assurance policies and practices within or internal to the institutions themselves. (For example, See Hou, 2014).

- Diversification of HE systems. With massification and the expansions of capacity and the endeavors that have accompanied them, has come the creation and diversification of such systems themselves. It may be that the generalization holds that "the larger the system" the more diversified and complex it is (e.g. China, India), but it may also hold that even within smaller systems, diversity of structure, function and outputs may depend on factors of particular meaning to the historical development of that particular system. Such would certainly be the case with the distinctive role played by private non-profit HEIs in the United States, which were created in a historical period that actually predated that of what would become the dominant state form of public higher education. The Philippines would be another example as the complex development of public and private institutions, especially those with a religious basis, owes much to borrowing from "without" as it does to the particularities of politics and social differentiation within the Philippines itself. The critical point here is that massification is a complex blending of common and unique factors that need to be considered contextually and to some extent the meaning of quality is ultimately dependent on those contexts.
- Curricula changes and "alignment" issues. As higher education institutions become increasingly affected by the various dynamics of globalization (especially those that impact how societies, governments and their economies make resources available for higher education) the nature, shape and meanings embedded in curricula change also begin to change. If one can make a generalization about the current state of macro-curricular change in higher education, it is that the tying of higher education to national economies and HEIs' role in promoting innovation, privileges STEM related fields (especially in graduate education) and all their endeavors over other parts of the curriculum. This continuously shifting set of emphases within institutions affects how quality is both conceived and sought to be implemented across different segments of such institutions. (See, Hawkins, Neubauer and Buswan, 2015)
- Proliferation of multi-campus systems. Massification often results in the creation of multi-campus higher education structures, and with this structural arrangement often come new challenges across a wide range of issues, not the least of which are the relationships that need to be established throughout the system to that entity viewed as at the top of the decision making hierarchy. Such issues can include differences of mission between members of the system, and relationships between system members themselves. Issues of quality are complicated because to some degree the "responsibility" for quality outcomes is placed within the campus context (especially in the U.S. where institutional accreditation is the norm), but at some remove is dependent on structures, rules, procedures and

resources that extend beyond individual campuses. (Wu and Wu 2013; Timberlake 2004).

Quality Issues within the Context

Our intention in outlining these elements of a generalized "context" for contemporary higher education across international situations and borders is to underscore the point that irrespective of how higher education quality assurance activities are framed, made explicit and placed within an operational context we are suggesting that there exists a "continuous" context that has implications for obtaining measurement regimes, and assessment measurements, as well as implications for the locus of quality assurance (institution professional association, governmental body, public agency an so on)—the net result being a continual tension and interplay between HEI self assessment and external agencies.. And, it is both obvious and important to note that different institutions operating within different sub-contexts will experience such inputs and forces and respond to them within the immediate frames of reference within which such institutions exist. Thus, to return to our opening point, it is not only the overall effort to define and measure quality that is daunting, it is also the effort to do this within these larger contextual frames of reference within which any given institution must operate.

And yet, HEIs do continue to operate in this assessment environment in a variety of particular and innovative ways. A highly varied process of quality assurance not only exists, it has grown in scope and density over the past several decades. This has been especially the case as the particular challenges of seeking to measure and assure higher education quality across boarders becomes an ever-greater challenge with the continuous growth of cross border education and with the emergence of international and global higher education institutional partnerships.

The Task at Hand:

For the senior seminar that APHERP will conduct at Zhejiang University May 18-20, 2015 we are asking participants to look inward to their own institutions, or others known to them, to identify and describe efforts that are taken at the institutional level to identify, describe and analyze instances of quality invention and improvement. The motive for this comes from numerous conversations that the authors of this paper have had within higher education accreditation and quality assurance contexts and outside it seeking to identify, develop, perpetuate and (in the words of many accreditation documents) seek methods of continuous quality improvement.

In short, we seek in this seminar to explore the many different ways that quality issues are perceived, discussed and pursued among our participating institutions or those known to our participants. What does quality mean in the context of a given institution, and what does that institution do to create it, ensure and assure it, and render it demonstrable to others? (Especially in the eyes of those who may come from outside the institution to seek and measure it!) How, for example, are quality issues discussed *within* a given institutional context and then made part of the regularized activities of that

institution? How, to take another example, might individual efforts to create "quality moments" within a given educational program (perhaps for example through the introduction of freshmen seminars, or the options for some—all?—students to pursue a "do-it-yourself" (DYI) experience, etc.) be reviewed, evaluated and generalized through the broader curriculum.

We are all perhaps quite familiar with how quality assurance is pursued by external agency accreditation and assessment, usually through a centralized body such as a ministry of education of some variety. In this seminar we seek papers that will focus on the general question of "how is quality generated and maintained at the *institutional level*"? We recognize that the many institutions represented within APHERP are significantly different and see this as a virtue. We encourage participants to bring to the seminar a range of experiences that may help to educate and inform their colleagues. We also hope that in developing such papers participants can be sensitive to the various meanings of quality that emerge within these different institutional contexts, or the particular ways in which such institutions have themselves been affected by events within the more macro contextual levels that we have briefly described above.

Some areas, topics and issues relevant to *internal* institutional review that might be explored in our papers would be:

* Personnel review (faculty, department administrators, division administrators, vice chancellors (or vice presidents), CEOs –presidents, chancellors, provosts, etc.)
* Faculty recruitment, review, retention, dismissal—who does it?, how often?, checks and balances, and so on.
* Academic program review (how often?, how conducted?, rewards, sanctions, etc.)
* Overall institutional review—role of faculty, students, administrators, outside stakeholders, and peer review.
* Alignment of decentralized internal review by the HEIs, with more centralized external review often at the Ministry level—what value is added to quality by these two levels of review? (Hawkins 2011).

These topics are meant to be illustrative only but the goal is provide some illumination of the dynamics, tensions, predicaments and future trajectories of these two approaches to quality assurance.

Each seminar participant will be expected to contribute a paper. These will be fully discussed during the seminar (and notes taken). At the seminar's conclusion the papers will be developed into a prospectus for publication by a major international publisher. A seminar paper should not exceed 4000 words. When the papers are accepted for publication, the editor (s) will contact each contributor with discrete suggestions for revision. Contributors will also receive a copy of all discussion notes taken during the seminar, as these are often very useful to framing those revisions.

The general timeline we will follow will ask you to contribute a working title of the paper by April 15. By April 29 we would want an abstract of the paper. This allows us to develop an effective schedule for the seminar. The paper will be due two weeks prior to the seminar, which in this case is May 4. If you intend to present your paper with a ppt, this would be due to staff one week prior to the meeting.

References

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[i] Which of course, is <u>just</u> where rankings come into the equation.