The Bologna Process and the Transformation of European Higher Education

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EDU562001va16-1166-001 (leadership in Global Education)

August 4, 2016
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This is the journey that the Bologna Process has taken.

In September 1988 The Rectors of European Universities sign the Magna Charter Universitatum in Bologna, Italy, outlining the founding principles of what will be known as the Bologna Process.

In April 1997 they formed the Lisbon Convention. UNESCO and the council of Europe draft the Lisbon Convention on the Recognition of Qualifications Concerning Higher Education in the European Region. The convention defines the framework for mutual recognition of studies, certificates, diplomas and degrees to promote academic mobility among European countries.

In June 1999 there was the Bologna Declaration. Education ministers from 29 countries signed the Bologna Declaration. The declaration builds on the themes of the Sorbonne Declaration but added focus on transparency and comparability of European degrees and a promise to cooperate in the field of quality assurance.

In March 2001 the Salamanca Convention was held. European university representatives gather in Salamanca to take a common position in preparation of their minister’s next follow-up meeting, which was scheduled to take place in Prague.

Also in March 2001 was held the Goteborg Student Convention. Representatives of students in Europe (ESIB) formally adopt their position supporting the Bologna Declaration.

May 2001 was the first follow-up meeting in Prague. The National authorities, the European Commission, universities and students got together. The focus of the process was extended to the realms of lifelong learning and higher education marketing.

In September 2003 there was a second follow-up meeting. The National authorities, the European Commission, universities and students got together. The focus of the process was extended to the realms of lifelong learning and higher education marketing.
The third follow-up meeting was held in May 2005. Ministers took stock of the progress of the bologna Process and set directions for the further development towards the EHEA (European Higher Education Act) to be realized by 2010.

The fourth follow-up meeting was held in May 2007 in London. Ministers issued the London Communiqué to note the progress made to date.

2010 marked the final step in the Bologna Process as a new era of the EHEA was ushered in. Bologna is now in a “homework mode,” with higher education institutions and related groups rethinking and fine-tuning elements of the many objectives and initiatives that were introduced during the past several years. To date, most progress has occurred in the areas of undergraduate access to the next educational cycle and in external quality assurance systems. “The number of students enrolled in courses in the first two cycles has increased significantly and there has been a reduction in structural barriers between cycles,” so noted the ministers of education for the Bologna countries in their “London Communiqué” published in May 2007.

The Bologna Process is positioned to serve the academic needs of pan-European countries in these ways.

(1) It increases the mobility and employability in Europe of European University Graduates.
(2) It enhanced the competitiveness of European higher education to the world
(3) It created participative equity among European Universities
(4) It will help bridge the racial, social, economic and gender gaps in access to higher education.
(5) The international Diploma Supplement (DS) is an important tool to assist in the transparent recognition of academic and professional qualifications, including degrees, diplomas, and certificates.
(6) It insures quality. Degree Programs from participating countries will be quality degrees.
The Bologna Process will support the academic initiatives in the U.S. in these ways;

It will bring about a paradigm shift in the way U.S. educational institutions evaluate, admit, and educate students.

The United States must at least consider the concept of “Bologna-Compliant Degrees” for students who intend to work abroad.

The United States must now consider the concept of offering degrees that can typically be completed in three years.

Students from China and India specifically who once came to America for a quality education may now choose a European University because they can complete their chosen program in three years

Here are three (3) additional ideas that may improve the flexibility of universities in Europe.

(1) Give language course credits for persons currently fluent in multiple languages. Actually design a test out oral exam and give the student actual credits as if he/she completed the course.

(2) Accept for admission to departments that are in the same field (e.g., history to history, French to French, physics to physics etc)

(3) Require more meaningful prerequisites and stop requiring those that will not enhance the student’s ability to gain a quality of life. (There was a required course on the Dewey Decimal system)

(4) American High Schools (The state of Georgia specifically requires the passing of a state-wide exam to successfully get his or her HS diploma. I would suggest a discipline specific test used by each member of the Bologna Declaration. That would satisfy future employers of the high quality of the each of the member University programs.
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