

As a member of the Middlebury College community, you have Web access to the full digital archive of *Foreign Affairs* magazine. To obtain permission to reproduce this article for classroom use, contact the [Copyright Clearance Center](#).

## College Goes Global

[William R. Brody](#)

From *Foreign Affairs*, [March/April 2007](#)

Summary: The market for higher education, like others, is becoming increasingly globalized -- and dominated by U.S. institutions. But despite predictions that U.S.-based global universities will surge as geographic and disciplinary barriers come down, the era of the global "megaversity" may not quite be at hand.

*William R. Brody is President of Johns Hopkins University.*

### THE COMING TEST

In June, students of Shengda College, in Xinzheng, China, staged one of the most disruptive and violent protests since pro-democracy demonstrators took to Beijing's Tiananmen Square in 1989. Riot police were called in, the campus was locked down, and the college headmaster eventually resigned. The students rioted because they had received diplomas imprinted with the name of Shengda College rather than ones with the name of the more prestigious Zhengzhou University, the college's nominal mother school, which they claimed had been promised to them. They felt cheated after having paid five times the tuition that Zhengzhou University students pay, and they worried that getting the lesser degree would shut them out of China's economic future.

The unusual cause of this rampage reveals much about the role of higher education in today's global marketplace. Implicit in the incident is the recognition that a college degree is an indispensable passport to the globalized knowledge economy of the twenty-first century. Higher education, once the rarefied province of the elite, is now viewed by most nations as an indispensable strategic tool for shaping, directing, and promoting economic growth. There was, of course, an explicit message in the Shengda students' actions as well: a diploma from the "right" university is incomparably more valuable than just any old degree. Meritocracy be damned: pedigree counts.

Both of these messages would seem to bode well for U.S. universities. Since the end of World War II, the United States has been recognized as the world leader in higher education. It has more colleges and universities, enrolls and graduates more students, and spends more on advanced education and research than any other nation. Each year, more than half a million foreigners come to the United States to study. A widely cited article written by researchers at Shanghai Jiao Tong University that looked at the academic ranking of universities worldwide based on faculty quality and research

#### SEARCH ARCHIVES

[Advanced Search](#)

#### HOME

#### THE CURRENT ISSUE

#### BACKGROUND ON THE NEWS

#### BROWSE BY TOPIC

#### BOOKS

#### BACK ISSUES

#### ACADEMIC RESOURCE PROGRAM

#### SEARCH

#### ABOUT FOREIGN AFFAIRS

#### SUBSCRIBER SERVICES

#### NEWSSTAND FINDER

#### PERMISSIONS

#### ADVERTISING

#### SPONSORED SECTIONS

#### INTERNATIONAL EDITIONS

#### SITE MAP

#### CONTACT US

### CFR.org

A daily guide to the most influential analysis from the Council on Foreign Relations, publisher of *Foreign Affairs*.

**INTERVIEW:** A Primer on Ukraine's Political Crisis  
[April 18, 2007](#)

**INTERVIEW:**



Print



Email to a Colleague

#### Subscriber Login

Email address:

Password:

Subscribers, [login](#) for instant access

— ADVERTISEMENT —

— ADVERTISEMENT —

— ADVERTISEMENT —

#### Newsletter

Subscribe to the free, bi-weekly *Foreign Affairs* email newsletter.

- [Subscribe](#)
- [Current newsletter](#)
- [Newsletter archives](#)

#### Newsstand Finder

Find *Foreign Affairs* at a newsstand near you.

Enter U.S. ZIP code

- [Browse U.S. & Canadian locations](#)
- [Browse international locations](#)

French Presidential  
Election Wide Open  
[April 17, 2007](#)

**BACKGROUNDER:**

Balance of War  
Powers: The U.S.  
President and  
Congress  
[April 17, 2007](#)

output found that more than half of the top 100 universities in the world -- and 17 of the top 20 -- were in the United States.

It would also seem that higher education is a market ripe for globalization and that U.S. universities -- by right of their acknowledged achievements, outstanding reputations, and considerable advantages in size and wealth -- are predestined to take on the world in the way that Boeing, IBM, Intel, and Microsoft have done within their respective industries. But as the president of a U.S. university that has operated one campus in China for two decades and another campus in Italy for more than half a century, I can say that consolidating U.S. dominance in international education will not be as easy or as likely as it seems.

The evolution of the global higher-education market, and the United States' predominant role in the field, is of great and increasing consequence both in the United States and abroad. How should U.S. institutions of higher learning -- and, in particular, the United States' world-renowned system of private and public research universities -- adapt to this changing environment? Is this field, like so many others in the past, destined to see the emergence of a handful of global players -- educational powerhouses -- that come to dominate and define it? Will the twenty-first century be the era of the "Global U"?






### TRAINS, PLANES, AND UNIVERSITIES

When Johns Hopkins University was established in 1876, its founders hoped to depart from existing models. They took the highly unusual step of recruiting Daniel Coit Gilman, from the University of California, Berkeley, as the university's founding president. This choice was no small departure from established norms: to recruit in California from Maryland just seven years after the completion of the transcontinental railroad was an adventurous undertaking (at a time when trains averaged speeds between 25 and 35 miles per hour).

In those days, most scholars, and most people, were not freely mobile. This limitation had an important implication for faculty. If you were to become a scholar in Mesopotamian history at Johns Hopkins, for example, and you knew more than any other scholar between Washington, D.C., and New York City, you would have been in a good position to become a tenured professor. Even if you were not particularly accurate in your knowledge of the subject, your shortcomings would go undiscovered for months or even years. The diffusion of knowledge was slow, and, as a result, expertise was assessed within a local or regional context.

Today, knowledge is disseminated in seconds, and flawed information is quickly exposed. This is the effect of the "IT-IT phenomenon": cheap international travel and ubiquitous information technology combine to disassociate expertise from place. Speeches and papers appear on the Internet as soon as they are delivered or published. Theories are proved or disproved through an international network of scholars who have immediate access to the latest discoveries. Physicists in Ukraine, for example, debunked the "discovery" of cold fusion within days of the announcement in 1989. Since international air travel has become relatively affordable, the experts who generate such knowledge are also mobile.

#### SPECIAL FEATURES

-  [How to Promote Global Health](#)
-  [Roundtable on the Iraq Study Group Report](#)
-  [9/11: A Roundtable](#)
-  [What to Do in Iraq: A Roundtable](#)
-  [Confidence in U.S. Foreign Policy Index](#)

[Complete list »](#)