



Academics without Borders

USF-AWB

Universitaires sans Frontières

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Strengthening the links between Universities and Industries

In the context of sustainable development, it is important to state that university education will be not only compliant with the local business community, but must also targeted for full employment and innovation. Indeed, a virtuous circle of development can be established between these two sectors. Often people concerned with such prospects ask how to start this virtuous circle, beginning from a very low level of cooperation or possibly from no cooperation at all.

The following developments mainly concern the faculties of science and technology in developing countries.

The answer is that it is necessary to build a strategy of rapprochement which truly bear fruit after 5 or 10 years of constancy and firmness in the objectives, i.e. by constructing a long-term strategy. This strategy will be based on several components that will be rapidly detailed:

- integrating courses delivered by people coming from companies,
- developing internship in companies,
- define faculty governance of schools with enterprises,
- and integrating courses about the creation and development of new enterprises.

Thanks to courses taught by professionals coming from companies, students will have a more pragmatic view of industry. It is not to entrust these people with theoretical courses, but to ask them to benefit students with their own experience, particularly in solving practical business problems. However finding such people who must be available and good teachers, is often a difficult task, especially when the local economic sector is very weak.

Another aspect to strengthen the links between universities and industries is to organize work placements (or internships whatever is the name). These placements during a minimum of two months will allow students to become more familiar with enterprises. Two levels of placement can be defined; the first one sometimes called "blue collar" placement will allow students to know and to live working conditions "at the bottom of the ladder"; the second one sometimes called "white collar" placement will be chosen closer to the domain in which the students have decided to study and then to work. This category can also include internships made in companies for master dissertation. To achieve this goal, the concerned faculty or school must appoint a person possibly full time to solicit business, write placement agreements and ensure the proper functioning of placements in coordination with the industry

mentors. In addition, this person will ask the students to write a report that can help students in future years when they will chase for enterprise placements. Gradually, the number of companies accepting students should grow.

The more important aspect of involving business is to give them significant positions in council boards (called senates in some countries) in universities, faculties, departments, etc.. The solution is not to take one or two people as alibi, but to give companies a high level of power in universities. It was reported the case of a faculty that had an administrative board including two external representatives coming from local companies: those external stopped coming because they were never giving a voice and academic staff spoke only their internal problems without trying to open the debate to the economic needs. In the other side, in many French engineering schools, 50% of the administrators come from the business community, and even the president of such a board is always the CEO of a large company. These people can afford to conduct education to a better match, and in the other way any program changes proposed by the teachers must receive approval from the board.

If for legal reasons, high percentages are not possible, our suggestion is to create a sort of "Professional Improvement Committee" with such missions, namely offering courses given by professionals, considering the needs of the market and reorienting training so that students find jobs very quickly. This committee will be composed of representatives of both large and small businesses, of the local chamber of commerce, of local authorities officials responsible for economic development, etc.. We suggest to involve people who are motivated and available: the "sidekicks" are often more valuable than the CEO's for this task.

The last part concerns the training entrepreneurship. If courses in accounting and management are often offered, practical lessons on creating companies will soon become mandatory. These courses will include analyzes of opportunities, technology watch, the selection criteria for technology, marketing, business plans, financial management and human resources.

For all these aspects, the NGO "Academics Without Borders/Universitaires Sans Frontières" can help you analyze the business community, the construction of multi-partner strategy to strengthen the links between universities and industry as well as monitoring the progress of this long-term strategy of cooperation. ■

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