



Academics without Borders

USF-AWB

Universitaires sans Frontières

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Shanghai University Ranking, international solidarities and USF-AWB

The famous "Academic Ranking of World Universities" (ARWU), sometimes called Shanghai Ranking, is based primarily on the quality of research and less on the quality of teaching and the suitability to the local socio-economic needs. The objective of this text is not to examine in depth the criteria of this ranking, but only to analyze a few consequences.

One of the practical consequences was exacerbating competition between universities and pushing some of them to regroup, while a trend of the last decades of the 20th century was rather to downsize (remember the slogan '*Small is beautiful!*'). So, from the international relation point of view, three major trends can be noted.

The first is the growth of the phenomenon of **predatory universities** seeking to attract the best students or the best teachers from developing countries sometimes shamelessly. In addition, this mechanism is sometimes amplified by the violence of the actual economic crisis in countries such as Spain, Greece and Italy. One of the consequences is to deprive these countries of the best elements, which will inexorably lead to their demotion in the Shanghai ranking.

Another trend is the establishment of international **partnerships to upgrade the Shanghai ranking**. Indeed, academics are pushed to constitute collaborations with universities located in developed or emerging countries, so leading to create research projects that will form the basis of articles for the most prestigious scientific journals. In this vision, foreign university collaboration is considered only to open partnership and to create complementarities for the highest levels.

The third trend is the reverse of the previous one, namely a **lesser commitment to the collaborations with universities located in developing countries**: indeed facing the strong incentives of the second trend, academics are reluctant to invest in time, to give specially-dedicated trainings and to fix classrooms for practical laboratories in these countries.

So, as this classification allows to identify and strengthen the 'best universities', it will bring down certain categories of universities which both are depriving from their most promising students and be excluded in international partnerships. Ultimately, it would be a downgrade in interna-

tional competition.

But the universities from these countries, especially the poorest, also want to grow in quality and expect a lot from developed countries. So what to do?

As you know, the NGO "Academics Without Borders-Universitaires Sans Frontières" is as a network of volunteer senior academics, eager to help universities in developing countries to improve education and training, to assist in the definition of long term research lines, and to ameliorate international and industrial relations within a sustainable development perspective.

We propose to higher education institutions located in developed countries which would not abandon the collaborations in international solidarity, to help them in this context. For instance we can negotiate a tripartite agreement (both universities plus USF-AWB) e.g. including joint training, advising on the organization of research, organizing placement in companies, etc.

Already, several meetings have been held with some officials in charge of international relations in some French higher education institutions in order to explain the position of USF-AWB in this context. But also these meetings have allowed to see concretely how effective actions could be carried out with the universities demanding assistance to partners in which too solicited academics could also be supplemented by retired teachers who have both time and skills.

If you are in this case, do not hesitate to contact us. ■

Prof. R. Laurini, President of USF-AWB.

USF-AWB presently looks for open positions:

- in Bhutan, a professor in civil engineering,
- in Indonesia a researcher on handicap,
- In a Guinean university (Conakry) several deans, one for a school of engineering, one for laws and political sciences and another one for economic and management sciences.

Please contact us for more details.

Similarly, if you are looking for academics with special profiles, we can inform rapidly. Presently our mailing list includes more than 4000 names throughout the world.