

The World University Consortium: a new kind of consortium that includes all stakeholders and promotes through empowerment a systemic, interdisciplinary, intersectorial, intercultural and sustainable education.

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Abstract

WUC is a non-profit university consortium, different from the traditional university consortiums, as it includes a wide range of stakeholders in a working alliance to develop an integrated paradigm of scientific knowledge and best practices to effectively address the complex global challenges affecting local communities and different nations. The mission of WUC is to involve all the stakeholders in a process to promote accessible, affordable, quality higher education worldwide based on a human-centered approach that shifts the emphasis to active learning that enhances the capacity of students to think and discover knowledge for themselves; contextualized knowledge within a trans-disciplinary conceptual framework reflecting the complexity and integration of the real world; acquisition of knowledge, skills and values relevant to each individual's personal development and career – an educational system better suited to develop the full potentials of social personality and individuality for productive engagement, social welfare and psychological well-being.

The objectives of World University Consortium (WUC) are:

- (a) Global Forum – to create a global platform, forum and clearing house for exchange, promotion and dissemination of ideas and best practices, learning tools, metrics, systems and alternative approaches in the field of global higher education.*
- (b) Research – to conduct and promote research on new courses, learning methods, educational systems and metrics for assessment, evaluation and accreditation.*
- (c) Best-practices – to identify global best practices and develop effective global models and strategies -- Open Systems – to foster development of open learning systems that support the objectives of accessibility, affordability, quality, and employability.*
- (d) Content Enrichment – to develop and promote development of courses, curriculum and other educational materials that embody the following criteria --*
 - Person-centered – emphasizing self-guided learning, critical and original thinking, inspirational forms of instruction, learning to learn, learning by teaching and sharing with others, edutainment and experiential learning*

designed to develop the full personality of students and equip them with the values, knowledge and skills needed for personal accomplishment and contribution to social advancement.

- *Transdisciplinary -- courses and curriculum that reflect the complex interrelationships between all human activities and all fields of knowledge.*
- *Value-based transcultural and culture-specific methods, courses and content reflecting universal human values.*
- *Socially relevant – appropriate to the needs of the 21st century.*
- *Creativity – independent thinking, innovation, creativity, leadership and full employment*
- *Global Citizenship – knowledge, perspectives and values needed to promote peace, tolerance, cooperation, harmony and human unity.*

We are living in a fast-changing world confronted with a wide range of complex challenges that threaten human security and welfare and pose catastrophic risks to global society. We are not only unprepared to tackle these challenges, but even deny their existence in a desperate defence that underlines our deep feelings of impotence. International institutions, nations, politicians, decision-makers, opinion-makers, business people, professionals and people from all the walk of life are ill-equipped to diagnose and act effectively to address these challenges. These challenges are immense. The inertia and resistance of conservative social forces are forbidding. This makes any call for action appear to some people utopian and unrealistic. Yet continued failure to act is the most unrealistic course of all.

Nobel Prize recipient and World Academy Fellow Paul Crutzen reminds us that nowadays human activities are the main variable impacting the planet's life forms and that there are mounting challenges to be faced. There's an urgent need to foster new and solid bases for a sustainable global society by re-examining the dynamics of global economic, political, human, social and cultural constructs.

Education is the only known social technology capable of preparing humanity to consciously surmount the barriers to effective action. Education plays a crucial role in the social construction of reality. The world today urgently needs a paradigm change in education in order to enable people to deal effectively with the mounting challenges facing humanity.

The World Academy of Art and Science (WAAS) was founded by eminent intellectuals following the catastrophic consequences of the Second World War. It is presently composed of 700 individuals from around the world who excel in their fields and are also animated by a vision and commitment to work - to address the world's pressing issues. In recent years the Academy in association with other leading organizations conducted an in-depth examination of global challenges and possible remedies at a series of international conferences at the UN in Geneva, in Trieste, Washington DC, Ottawa, Library of Alexandria, and University of California at Berkeley. Participants in these conferences concluded that a quantum leap forward in the quantity, quality and content of higher education is urgently needed to prepare humanity to meet these challenges effectively. As a consequence, the World Academy issued a call last year for a rapid and radical transition toward a new paradigm in global Higher Education (HE) and joined with nine other charter members to found the World University Consortium (WUC).

The history and sociology of science show that paradigm changes occur when the existing paradigm proves unable to offer effective concepts for the interpretation of new phenomena and unable to provide effective tools to govern these phenomena. A new paradigm retain parts of the old paradigm that are still working effectively and rearranges them with the new gestalt in order to understand and manage what we call reality in more effective ways than was possible under the

previous cosmology (Kuhn, 1962). A new paradigm in education will build on the cumulative accomplishments while seeking to overcome the limitations that prevent the existing system from meeting the growing demand for universal accessibility, higher quality and new content. It will offer people and organizations the opportunity to develop and apply effective tools to better diagnose and manage the various issues they need to face in their professional, social and personal lives and more general challenges that impact all forms of life in our planet.

This goal cannot be achieved by the traditional top-down approach. The WUC is not a traditional university consortia. It is open to all stakeholders willing to participate in a working alliance to develop an integrated paradigm of scientific knowledge and best practices; to develop effective solutions to the various complex global challenges affecting local communities, different nations and the whole planet.

WUC aims to create a process of knowledge creation and sharing through an active international network to benefit global society, to enhance diversity, to share ideas and expertise, and to learn international best practices from each other, with shared commitment to shared values in education grounded on equal rights and opportunities, freedom, creativity and excellence in research, scholarship and sustainable education. The process will include all aspects and dimensions, including assessment of needs and feasibility studies, monitoring and quality control of the results, and identification of the common denominators of best practices. Stakeholders will be participating in the largest action research ever carried out in order to develop sustainable world class research, education and knowledge.

WUC aims to address cultural, environmental, social and political issues of common interest to world communities by promoting communication and active collaboration between universities, local governments and local communities, non-government organizations, and interested individuals. WUC will facilitate the creation of a safe place and a stimulating mental space where universities and stakeholders can more effectively join together to evolve effective responses to the present urgent needs of society at the local and global levels, to effectively cooperate and create new approaches to tap the full potentials of human capital.

WUC will involve in this process UN Agencies, NGOs, public and private organizations, industrialists and labour unions, teachers associations, university professors associations, students associations, pedagogic associations, sustainable entrepreneurs, technology firms, Academies of Science, opinion makers and all those interested to meet, collaborate and cross pollinate.

WUC will facilitate the creation of joint research projects, joint project development among students, professors and experts in interdisciplinary, intersectoral and intercultural cooperation for the development of a new, integrated paradigm of scientific knowledge and education. WUC will create and share a global vision, similar values and a commitment to educating future world leaders.

WUC will empower all the stakeholders to create and share new knowledge to improve human and environmental living conditions, building bridges across boundaries of diverse cultures and academic disciplines, promoting awareness of the frontiers of human understanding, creating new knowledge through collaboration in research and innovation.

All the participating stakeholders will be actively involved in this strategic change process and contribute to the betterment of their local and national communities, to a renaissance of scientific and educational excellence and to fulfil their core values and mission.

The pressure of rising social aspirations and the opportunities afforded by recent technological innovation combine to generate unprecedented opportunities for a paradigm change in higher education. The main focus of the Consortium will be on a core set of critical issues:

Accessibility: First and most evident is the enormous and ever-mounting pressure of suppressed demand from the world's youth. In almost all countries today, the demand for access far exceeds the capacity of the system. Moreover, that demand is expected to skyrocket in the coming decade as aspirations and expectations continue to rise. The existing system, already fraught with strong budgetary pressures and high faculty vacancy rates, is incapable of meeting the soaring demand and will necessarily have to turn to new models and more effective delivery systems. No democratic society can ignore or resist the incessant demand for more and better education.

Quality: There is also growing recognition of an equally great need to radically overhaul the quality of education everywhere. The quality gap between the top colleges and universities and the prevailing average is immense and ever expanding. Even the best of the best are failing to meet the needs of rapidly changing employment markets and rapidly evolving social conditions.

Learning about Learning: The process of learning itself remains an undeveloped subject. We know a lot about how to teach but little about how people actually learn. A massive effort is needed to rediscover the fundamental principles of education and recast them in today's content. That means adopting flexible student-centred methods suited to the different ways in which different people learn best.

Independent Thinking: The instant availability of information at our fingertips compels us to shift the focus from the object (knowledge) to the subject (student) and place emphasis on methods designed to fully develop the student's critical and creative faculties, rather than merely trying to stuff empty heads full of information.

Transdisciplinarity: Humanity's persistent problems reflect inherent deficiencies in our approach to reliable knowledge. Never has there been a greater need and opportunity to break down the structural rigidities and intellectual boundaries between disciplines to approach real-world issues from a comprehensive, integrated perspective.

Customization: Like consumer products, higher education has become increasingly massified and standardized, at a time when the world urgently needs greater diversity of perspective and understanding to overcome the problems generated by uniformity and conformity. Emerging technology now makes it possible to create flexible innovation delivery systems catering to individual needs.

Relevance: Most education still resides in ivory towers and air tight compartments at a time when society desperately needs new approaches to equip youth with the knowledge, interpersonal skills and values needed for individual accomplishment, leadership of change and global citizenship.

Lifelong Learning: Given the rapid pace of social change and the frequency of changing positions and occupations, a new paradigm is needed in which education and employment constitute a double-helix, proceeding in tandem throughout life.

A revolution in Higher Education is upon us and no force or agency on earth can ultimately prevent it. The question is not whether change is in the offing, but whether that change will be in the desired and most desirable direction. WUC has been established to attempt to steer the momentum toward the best possible future. No single organization, nor even a consortium of institutions, can hope to accomplish this transition by their own power. But it is conceivable that a consortium of committed stakeholders which includes universities, research institutes, NGOs, corporate and government agencies joining together and working in concert with other groups may be able to act as a powerful catalyst, pointing the way toward a better future.

We believe that in this period of human history the development of accessible, affordable, quality higher education worldwide based on a human and person-centered approach is urgently needed.

Increasing the capacity and improving the quality of higher education are important ambitions. Students should not only be taught about existing knowledge in specialized areas of expertise. They should learn how to learn, how to contribute to the development of new knowledge, and should be stimulated to think critically, with ethical consciousness and fundamental human values functioning as the underlying basis for all learning.

Higher education institutions are under pressure to focus less on quality and more on efficiency based on quantitative measures. Universities become financially dependent on fulfilling such quantitative efficiency requirements. Under such conditions there is less and less time and space available for critical thinking. Among professors, academic environments and universities there seems to be a growing concern about these aspects of the current development of higher education. This concern is shared by many individuals, organizations, institutions and corporations outside academia. Thus, there is not only a need for change in higher education, but also a great potential to support the mission and perspectives promoted by WUC. WUC should mobilize and involve as many of these potential members and partners as possible, starting with the most enthusiastic and devoted supporters.

The mission of WUC is to evolve and promote development of accessible, affordable, quality higher education worldwide based on a human-centered approach that shifts the emphasis from specialized expertise to contextualized knowledge within a trans-disciplinary conceptual framework reflecting the complexity and integration of the real world, from teaching mastery of a field of knowledge to learning that enhances the capacity of students to think and discover knowledge for themselves, from theoretical mastery to acquisition of knowledge, skills and values relevant to each individual's personal development and career – an educational system better suited to develop the full potentials of social personality and individuality for productive engagement, social welfare and psychological well-being.

We at WUC are committed to the highest values standards for global higher education. These standards include a commitment to universal human rights as well as the highest ethical and moral standards inherent in all forms of high education.