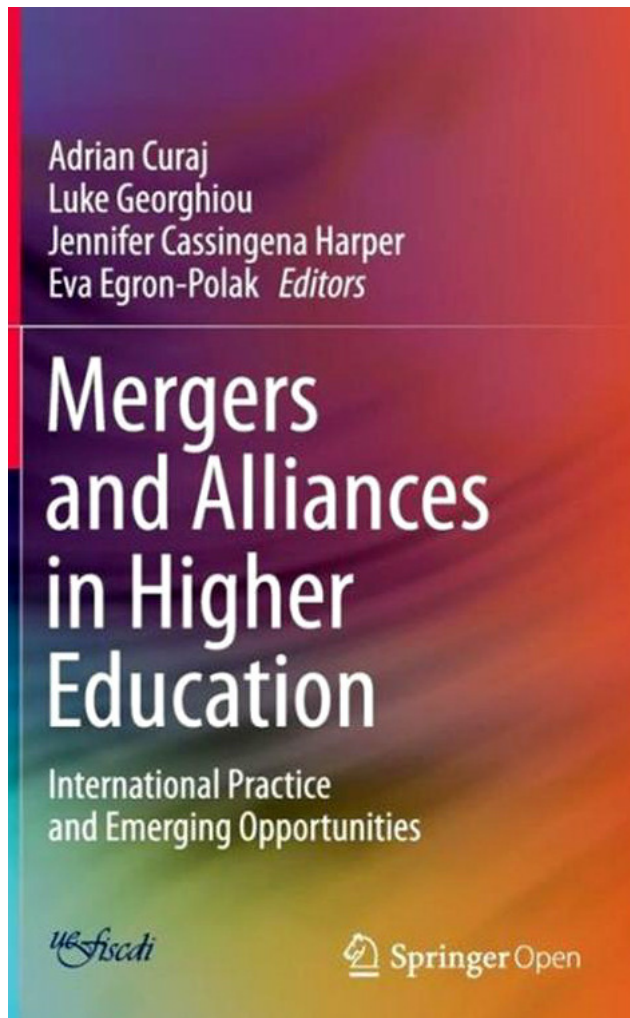


# 'Mergers' a gold mine of information

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*"Mergers and Alliances in Higher Education: International Practice and Emerging Opportunities,"* edited by Adrian Curaj, Luke Georghiou, Jennifer Cassingena Harper and Eva Egron-Polak. New York: Springer International Publishing, 2015. 307 pages, \$59.99.



“Universities are one of society’s most durable institutions,” Luke Georghiou and Jennifer Cassingena Harper explain in the introduction to “Mergers and Alliances in Higher Education: International Practice and Emerging Opportunities,” the new treatise on a growing trend in international higher education they co-edited with Adrian Curaj and Eva Egron-Polak. “Our concern in this volume is what happens when the circumstances prevailing at the time of foundation and developing during the subsequent evolution of the institution have changed so that it no longer meets the expectations of its stakeholders. Under these conditions governments or the institutions themselves may seek to redefine or reinforce their mission by combining the assets and capabilities of a university with one or more other institutions. This, as we shall see, is the essence of mergers and alliances in higher education.”

Georghiou is vice president for research and innovation at the University of Manchester; he is also chair of the Science and Technology Policy and Management Department. Harper is a member of the European Journal of Futures Research and the Higher School of Economics, Moscow; she has worked with the Malta Council for Science and Technology since 1989. Curaj is

a professor of research management and director of the Centre for Strategic Management and Quality Assurance in Higher Education at the Politehnica University of Bucharest. Egron-Polak is secretary-general and executive director of the International Association of Universities. In addition to the four primary editors, the 14 chapters comprising this comprehensive primer on the current status of global higher education include 20 supplementary contributors, representing a diverse cross section of international perspectives on academic administration and management.

As might be expected, “Mergers and Alliances” is painstakingly researched; an extensive list of relevant citations can be found at the conclusion of each chapter – most of which are relatively up-to-date (within the last five years or so), which lends credibility to the efficacy of the observations, conclusions and recommendations reached by the authors. As I made my way through the different

scenarios and case studies contained in this meticulous treatment of the subject matter at hand, I had the sense I was getting a fairly detailed and accurate account of a worldwide movement that has only recently started to reach our shores. The argument these writers make is very compelling. Case-in-point:

“While for years higher education has promoted the spirit of competition through knowledge, in contemporary society education must take into account the importance of sharing resources and engaging in partnerships,” Radu Munteanu and Dan Calin Peter note in “The Process of Merging Romanian Universities: Technical University of Cluj-Napoca – North University of Baia Mare,” the 13th chapter they co-wrote. “People everywhere now have an acute motivation to assimilate science through education, regardless of their professional background, and they are aware of the benefits accruing from the development of related technologies. This phenomenon is not simple, because the same people also have a definite need for culture, philosophical, historical and even artistic, the more they use technical achievements, in order to understand more correctly the significance of their own acts.”

The tome, and by most criteria that is an apt description of this book, is truly a compendium on the ongoing quest to make higher education a more efficient and effective proposition for an increasing number of the world’s citizens. There are chapters on colleges and universities in France, Romania, Sweden, Wales, Ireland, the United Kingdom, China, South Africa, Spain and Australia. Although the circumstances and conditions vary by region and country, the movement toward combining resources is unmistakable and the implications for institutions in the United States as well as the rest of the Western Hemisphere are obvious. Bigger may not necessarily be better, but duplication of services does have negative economic consequences that are becoming more difficult to ignore as globalization has precipitated a significant compression in the job market – especially for skilled labor – and a heightened sensitivity to the need to be more cost-effective, especially in the public sector. What the rest of the world is experiencing has repercussions for what we can expect in this country in the not-too-distant future. Consider the following:

“Productivity also lies in administrative efficiency and here there is a careful balance to be struck between relieving academics of as much of the administrative burden as possible while not creating a large and expensive bureaucracy which drives up overheads on research and teaching,” Georghiou explains in “Strategy to Join the Elite: Merger and the 2015 Agenda at the University of Manchester – An Update,” the 10th chapter in the book. “The nature of the modern university and the expectations society and the economy place upon it is itself evolving. Manchester is seeking to redefine the rules for excellence because those institutions in the present form may themselves not be fit to meet the challenges likely to be imposed upon Western universities.”

I found “Mergers and Alliances” to be a veritable gold mine of information and insights into the inner workings of higher education on a global scale. We tend to be somewhat myopic in the United States when it comes to how we view our colleges and universities; certainly we have an innate bias toward our system when it comes to assessing quality and efficacy. As we continue to move toward a more universal model with respect to how we deliver and assess the collegiate experience, however, it is important to recognize and accept that we are not necessarily at the center of the universe when it comes to innovation and creativity.

— Reviewed by Aaron W. Hughey, Department of Counseling and Student Affairs, Western Kentucky University.

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