

RESPONSE TO
SHIFTS IN HIGHER EDUCATION IN EUROPE AND IMPLICATIONS FOR
EUROPEAN NAZARENE COLLEGE
BY JAYME HIMMELWRIGHT

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Jayne Hammelwright has provided a clear and accurate description of the Lisbon Agenda and the Bologna Process. As she reports, both of these initiatives seek to unify and coordinate the various systems of higher education in the emerging united Europe: The purposes are to codify a three-cycle degree system which allows for transference between programs regardless of which nation earlier studies have been pursued. Prior to the Lisbon and Bologna dynamics, this was problematic to institutions such as European Nazarene Bible College (now European Nazarene College, or EuNC) located in Busingen, Germany, which not only served students from throughout Europe, but also allowed for curricular design that enabled its students to gain an American Baccalaureate degree through partnership with Mid America College (now University). I, as former dean of EuNC, recall assessing transcripts from various nations and qualification levels and the inherent desire for both fairness in placement and for transparency so that students sensed the fairness of the evaluation. In a few cases, the perceived fairness was the larger issue, for some were convinced that their own qualifications and the systems of their home country exceeded those of other nations including other parts of Europe. These issues have faced other institutions serving the total European Continent rather than a singular nation.

A summary review of the literature concerning the Bologna Process is of interest. For instance, upon reading various articles one could argue, at length, on the relative merits of the Bologna process and the political agendas that gave rise to its development. Some would question whether the agenda were more about European political unity rather than educational quality. Others propose that the quality for which the process aspires may not respect the uniqueness of the strengths of each European educational system. Furthermore, as Kwick argues (2004)¹ the reforms are dependent upon funding to actualize their changes—a hindrance to newer members of the European Union. These are the very systems, Kwick argues, that would best be served by the reforms of the Bologna Process. While one can contest these premises, the article is just one of many which suggest that there are challenges emerging that were not anticipated nor provided for in the earlier formation of the process. Lydia Mechtenberg and Roland Strausz argue (2007)², that some participants see quality and mobility as competing elements and that conditions must be carefully analyzed to assure that both are simultaneously possible. Of interest are the bibliographies of these and other articles which demonstrate the extent of the debate surrounding the reforms and their implementation.

Notwithstanding these deliberations, I believe Himmelwright is accurate in her assessment that this is a “Shift in Higher Education in Europe” and that it has positive “Implications for European Nazarene College.” Not to be overlooked is the goal of mobility of students and faculty. Within what is being referred to as the Global System of Nazarene Higher Education, one can demonstrate numerous examples of working toward recognition of one

another's awards as far as accreditation restrictions will allow. Bridging and other service options are also very evident across the Nazarene system of higher education. But beyond that there is the need for recognition and articulation within the higher education community beyond our own church. I am confident that the Bologna Process will assist this with regard to EuNC. For instance, it is anticipated that degrees granted through EuNC and ENBC will nest more easily within other European educational systems as a result of the three-tier understanding of Bologna. This is important for those who seek either employment with European employers or further studies with universities which may have had difficulty in previous times in understanding the Bachelor of Arts degree and where it nested within other awards. The Church of the Nazarene can grasp this opportunity to explore other nuances of the Bologna process that may go far beyond Europe as we seek similar goals in our global system of higher education.

Bologna is about the reform and change: As with any systemic change, there are always competing values held in tension: With regard to the Bologna Process, the following tensions come immediately to mind: Quality (as perceived or valued by local settings) in tension with (1) Mobility of both students and teaching faculty members and (2) local unique views of higher education versus global educational norms and values, to name just two. There is also a question on the extent of the system being unified. For instance, some could argue that "quality enhancement" of individual programs is restricted in the Bologna Process due to its Eurocentric nature, whereas it could benefit from broader perspectives from non-European partners as well. Additionally, as one reads numerous articles reviewing the process, further tension points become evident. It could be fairly suggested that the globalization versus localization of quality is a major challenge facing the process in the years ahead, particularly as the European Union continues to grow with newer members bringing their own particular histories, values and inputs not only into education, but into the union as well.

As one views both the dynamics leading to Lisbon and then to Bologna, driven partially by Europe's quest for Union, and when one also views the growing desire to enhance the global nature of the Church of the Nazarene, it is within reason to suggest that parallels between the two institutions exist: The denomination is constant in its desire to be a global and worldwide denomination. For example, it has re-minted its headquarters as a "Global Ministries Center." Its Board of General Superintendents serves the global denomination rather than singular regions alone. Its educational leaders from throughout the world meet in such events as the International Course of Study Advisory Committee and through the auspices of the International Board of Education. These meetings have consistently demonstrated the church's willingness and ability to negotiate the path that accommodates both the local needs and cultural ethos on the one hand, and the nature of the global denomination on the other. The progress toward this end is also evolving and increasing with time.

It can be further suggested that the corresponding educational challenges facing both the Church of the Nazarene and the European Union may include the following issues:

- There are **resource implications** for reform, partnership and mobility. Each institution has norms and goals which are worthy: The ability to achieve these are sometimes linked toward resources not the least of which is human resourcing. We applaud the tremendous outcomes being achieved by our smaller institutions. On the other hand, when new expectations are placed upon them to also facilitate global faculty initiatives, it is incumbent on all partners to consider the impact this may have

on a smaller organization already stretched in its personnel and resources. Even when volunteer services are offered, there are still demands upon the smaller institution in hosting, in housing arrangements etc., which sometimes stretch the smaller institution beyond the pale of possibility; and

- **The expansion of participation beyond its own borders.** In light of Bologna, Europe is encouraged to look beyond Europe for further cross-pollination of educational progress. Furthermore, non-European institutions are challenged to review the goals of the Bologna Process and explore ways in which they, too, can be a part of the mobility and transferability that sweeps European thinking. With regard to the Church of the Nazarene's higher education network there are challenges ahead as well. When one views the Resource Institute for International Education and its goals, and when one considers the further implementation of those goals, it is incumbent upon the denomination to explore partnerships beyond our own family of institutions. For instance, the Church's value on higher education has equipped more Nazarene academics than are currently employed within Nazarene institutions. Some of these hold key teaching and leadership positions both in non-Nazarene Christian Universities and in secular universities. These people continue to be loyal to the Church of the Nazarene and are involved in the ministries of their local churches and districts. Just as some would urge Europe to think beyond Europe in its Bologna Process, likewise it would be healthy for the Church of the Nazarene to find ways to bring these Nazarenes involved in other forms of higher education to the table of decision-making and global service. Thus, the system would be even further enhanced with the wealth of information and perspective gained from wider practice of the higher educational profession.

In summary, I again thank Jayme Himmelwright for an accurate and historic description of the winds of change crossing European higher education and the pressures upon the institutions within this continent of historic leadership in University level education and research. Further, she is to be commended for her suggestions that this directly impacts EuNC as it becomes increasingly European in its leadership and direction. This paper should stimulate further exploration of the values and directions of numerous international educational settings and how these changes impact a church, which itself is global rather than federated. While the paper is well presented and meets its own aspirations, it does remind us that there is much thinking and writing that we, as a global community, need to do within the pages of this journal and beyond.

¹ Kwick, Marek, *The Emergent European Educational Policies under Scrutiny: the Bologna Process from a Central European Perspective*, European Educational Research Journal, Volume 3 Number 4, 2004. 759-776.

² Mechtenberg, Lydia and Roland Strausz, *The Bologna process: how student mobility affects multi-cultural skills and educational quality*. International Tax and Public Finance, Volume 15, Number 2 / April, 2008. 109-130.