

I. REASONS FOR ENGLISH-BASED HIGHER EDUCATION

According to a publication from the Institute of International Education entitled "Open Doors", 975 Vietnamese students enrolled in degree programs in the United States in the academic year 1996-1997 as international students. The number increased over 24% to 1,210 students in 1997-1998. It is anticipated that this rate of increase will continue during the next decade. Similarly, Vietnamese students also enroll in large numbers in other English-speaking countries such as the

above English-speaking countries have international recognition in the ever-increasing global market. ESC universities are generally accepted as being academically vigorous, reasonably current in technology, consistent in quality, well documented and accredited. As a result, their degrees uphold the highest respect in the global market.

(2) English as the international language: English is the international language of business, politics, science, technology and international travel. English is also used extensively by powerful international organizations such as the EU, NATO,

EBHE universities have higher chances of being employed by multi-national corporations both within their home country and in the global market place.

(4) Global economic power: These above countries are the home of the majority of global companies who make global economic decisions that affect the world market place. Students studying in these countries have a better chance to understand not only how multinational corporations function, but also about the thinking processes and logic behind the market.

(5) Leadership in innovation:

A THREE-INSTITUTION COOPERATION IN ENGLISH-BASED HIGHER EDUCATION

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United Kingdom, Australia, Canada and New Zealand. The English-speaking countries (ESC) have been experiencing continuous growth in international student enrollment, and the United States is the leader with 481,281 international students in 1997-1998. What is the strong market appeal or what are the main advantages of the English-based Higher Education (EBHE) for Vietnamese and other foreign nationals?

(1) Internationally recognized credentials: College degrees from the

ASEAN, UN, WB, etc. Further, business people use English to communicate with foreign customers, suppliers and business associates. Studying in an English-speaking country will help international students master the use of the English language. Students who master English during an EBHE degree program have the competitive edge in the global market and the science/technology-based professions.

(3) Employment opportunities: Students receiving degrees from

During the past few hundred years, the vast majority of innovations in sciences, engineering, technology and business processes have come from these countries. Students studying in these countries have a better chance to understand the forces behind the innovations so that they can emulate such forces at home.

II. CURRENT EBHE SITUATION IN VIETNAM

Certainly, EBHE is highly desirable and evidenced by the fact that hundreds of Vietnamese youths, mainly high school graduates, leave Vietnam every year for these English-speaking countries to work on their bachelor's degrees. Many of them leave with limited English proficiency and have to spend a year to study English before enrolling in their main program of study. As a result, it may take a typical Vietnamese student five years to receive his or her bachelor's degree while the domestic counterpart only spends four years to receive the same degree. The current method of delivery of EBHE poses the following difficulties that make the education highly inaccessible to Vietnamese and very expensive to Vietnam as a country.

(1) High costs: English-based education is very expensive according to Vietnamese standards. It may cost between US\$10,000 to 30,000 per year to attend a university in an English-speaking country. This is an enormous sum when comparing with wages of a common Vietnamese laborer who only makes about \$400 a year. A five-year English-based education may cost the student at least US\$50,000. This is a large sum that can be used for other types of investment in Vietnam.

(2) High risks: The current method of delivery of English-based higher education is risky for the following reasons.

+ English proficiency: Some students may fail if they can not master the English language.

+ Maturity: Some young people can not cope with the lack of family support, loneliness, homesickness and new culture associated with living in a new country. Consequently, they may not be able to study effectively.

+ Finance: The finance of the supporting parents might change adversely in three to five years and affect the student's ability to pay for the education.

+ Non-returning: There is a history of non-returning of talented young students once they successfully complete their English-based education in highly marketable fields such as computer, business and engineering. Consequently, Vietnam would face a brain drain situation.

(3) Few graduate studies: Currently, the vast majority of Vietnamese students who go for English-based higher education, pursue bachelor's degrees. Efforts should be made to promote overseas graduate studies that are much more valuable

to Vietnam as well as much shorter in duration. Master's and Ph.D. degrees are worth much more in Vietnam in terms of earnings power and prestige.

(4) Limited audience: The usual method of delivery in which the education is conducted in its entirety in a foreign country, has made EBHE available only to Vietnamese youths from very wealthy families. It is either prohibitively expensive to intelligent youths from less wealthy families or too long for currently working older people who cannot leave their jobs for several years to pursue a degree in a foreign country.

(5) Vietnamese universities yet to achieve a leading role: In all developed countries, universities play a significant role in preparing their citizens for the new jobs that are being created. Even though the Vietnamese economy needs a larger English-speaking workforce to work with foreign companies as well as to adopt new technology developed by English-speaking countries, Vietnamese universities have not played a leading role in this endeavor. New methods of delivery must be examined to provide Vietnamese universities a leading role in EBHE in the future.

(6) High rejection rate of student visas: Since the normalization of diplomatic relations between Vietnam and the U.S., a large number of Vietnamese youths have shown a preference for the U.S. as their destination for EBHE. However, the U.S. preference has run into a significant setback due to a high rejection rate of student visa applications by the U.S. Embassy. A plausible explanation for this high rejection rate is the abuse of the student visa status by many Vietnamese who use the student visa as a means to immigrate to the U.S. for better economic opportunities. Efforts should be made by the Vietnamese side to distinguish student visa applicants from economic opportunists, and help reduce the existing high rejection rate.

Certainly, English-based higher education is important to Vietnam's economic development as well as to its drive in becoming a significant contributor in the global economy. However, the above difficulties associated with the current method of delivery must be resolved to make EBHE more beneficial to Vietnam.

III. HOUSTON COMMUNITY COLLEGE SYSTEM AND ITS EBHE PROGRAM

Houston Community College System (HCCS) is the fourth largest community college in the U.S., serving over 53,000 students each year. It consists of five colleges and an extensive distant education program within the system to serve the very spread-out city of Houston. HCCS offers a total of 73 associate's degree programs plus a comprehensive transfer program to Texas universities. Students in the transfer program will select a set of courses at HCCS that fit into the first two years of a bachelor's program offered by a university in Texas. Additional information on HCCS can be found in its web site with the address of <http://www.hccs.cc.tx.us>. HCCS has offered a program in foreign countries known as one plus one program. HCCS and a Vietnamese university (the home institution) can cooperate to provide EBHE that is divided between the two institutions. A summary of the program appears as follows:

(1) One Plus One (1+1) Program: HCCS offers a flexible 1+1 program with two different tracks. One track leads to an associate's degree or the LAD track. The other track leads to the direct transfer to a university or the DTU track. In the 1+1 program, the home institution teaches the first year at home in English, and HCCS teaches the second year of an associate's degree program or a university transfer program. When attending the 1+1 program, students earn dual credits with both HCCS and the home institution. Students have a choice to do the second year on HCCS campuses in Houston, Texas, USA or via distant education in the home country. For those who belong to the LAD track, HCCS will award the diploma to graduates. For those who belong to the DTU track, they need to seek admissions from American universities to transfer the 1+1 course work and complete the remaining requirements of a bachelor's degree. Both LAD and DTU track students can transfer to an American university. However, LAD students would lose some credits while DTU students would not.

(2) Goal of the 1+1 Program: The main goal is educational infrastructure development. HCCS will help the home institution to develop its own EBHE program that conforms to American standards of quality. The same syllabi of courses as well as textbooks adopted by professors at HCCS will be used in both phases of the program. Instructors in the home country must possess academic

credentials equivalent to their American counterparts, i.e. at the minimum a master's degree with 18 graduate credit hours in the subject(s) to be taught. Next, HCCS will help train faculty of the home institution so that they can teach courses in the 1+1 program in English. HCCS will review periodically the program for quality and compliance to ensure that the home institution offers its students an education that is equivalent to that at HCCS. Finally, HCCS will help the home institution move quickly in the joint program by letting the home institution to do what it can do right away, i.e., the home institution will teach courses that require less English proficiency such as sciences, mathematics, computer programming and pre-engineering. HCCS will teach English-oriented courses such as English, social sciences, U.S. history, governments and fine arts.

(3) Tuition, fees and living expenses: While attending the first year at home, students pay tuition and fees that are set independently by the home institution plus an administrative fee set by HCCS to uphold the quality of the program. During the second year, students pay tuition and fees that are set by HCCS (about \$115 per credit hour and subject to changes). If students do the second year in the home country via distant education, an administrative fee set by the home institution is also added. The added fee is offset by the lower costs of living in the home country. Living expenses in Houston, Texas are between US\$6,000 and 8,000 per student per year for visa purposes. Actual living expenses may vary depending on the individual's life style. Among the 10 major American cities, Houston has the lowest costs of living.

(4) Admissions requirements: To be fully admitted into the first year of 1+1 program at the home institution, students must have a high school diploma from a twelve-year program and a minimum TOEFL score of 550. However, students can be partially admitted with a TOEFL score between 475 and 549. Partially admitted students can only take one course per semester and are required to attend appropriate English-as-Second-Language (ESL) classes. To be admitted into the second year of the program, students are required to obtain a minimum TOEFL score of 550. Further, they also need to have a minimum ACT score of 23, a minimum SAT score of 1070 (with minimum section score of 550), or a pass-

ing score on the Texas Academic Skills Program (TASP) exam. ACT and SAT stand for American College Testing and Scholastics Assessment Test, respectively. While the ACT and SAT exams are frequently available in the home country, the TASP exam is only available in Texas, USA.

IV. UNIVERSITY OF HOUSTON-CLEAR LAKE AND ITS EBHE PROGRAMS

The University of Houston System is a state-supported university system with over 50,000 students and four campuses that include the University of Houston-Clear Lake (UHCL). UHCL is an upper-level educational institution that serves a diverse student population from the state, the nation and abroad. UHCL offers a variety of bachelor's and master's programs in business and public administration, education, social sciences and humanities, and natural and applied sciences. The university emphasizes high standards for teaching and learning in undergraduate, graduate and professional programs. Each program develops the critical, creative, quantitative and communication skills of students. Information on UHCL's academic programs can be found on the Internet under the name <http://www.cl.uh.edu>.

UHCL has created innovative transfer programs that offer great benefits to both students and the home country. In these programs, UHCL and a Vietnamese university cooperate to provide EBHE that is divided between the two institutions. A summary of the programs appears as follows.

(1) Types of transfer program: There are two types of transfer program: undergraduate and graduate. At the undergraduate level, UHCL offers two programs. One program is a 2+2 program in which the home institution teaches the first two years at home and UHCL teaches the last two years of a bachelor's degree program in Houston, Texas, USA. UHCL will award the diploma to graduating students. The 2+2 program can later be expanded into another program known as 3+1 transfer program in which the home institution teaches the first three years and UHCL teaches the fourth year of a bachelor's degree program. At the graduate level, the home institution teaches about a third of the courses of a master's degree program, and UHCL teaches the remaining courses of the program. The home institution

teaches all courses of the transfer programs in English.

(2) Goal of the transfer programs: The main goal is infrastructure development. UHCL will help the home institution to develop its own English-based higher education that conforms to American standards of quality. Well-thought syllabi developed and textbooks adopted by professors at UHCL will be brought to the home institution. Next, UHCL helps train faculty of the home institution so that they can teach courses of the transfer programs in English. The home institution should move from 2+2, to 3+1 and eventually to a complete bachelor's program at the undergraduate level and from a third of the courses to a complete master's program at the graduate level. UHCL will review periodically the program for quality and compliance to ensure that the home institution offers its students an education that is equivalent to that at UHCL.

(3) Tuition, fees and living expenses: While at home, students pay tuition and fees that are set independently by the home institution. In general, living expenses are lower at home while attending the home institution. However, tuition, fees and living expenses are much higher at UHCL. The tuition and fees are about US\$330 per semester credit hour and subject to changes. Undergraduate and graduate students are required to take a minimum of 12 and 9 credit hours per semester, respectively. UHCL tuition and fees are about the same or lower than those charged by accredited public universities in major urban areas in the USA. However, they are much lower than those charged by private institutions in the USA.

(4) Admissions requirements: To be admitted into an undergraduate transfer program at the home institution, students must have a high school diploma from a twelve-year program and TOEFL score of 550 or higher. Upon completing all requirements at the home institution, students transfer to UHCL to complete the rest of the requirements and receive a bachelor's degree from UHCL.

To be admitted into a graduate program at the home institution, students must have a bachelor's degree from a four-year program and TOEFL score of 550 or higher. Partial admission is given to students with a TOEFL score between 500 and 549. Partially admitted students can only take one course per semester while attending appropriate ESL

classes. Students are also required to sit for either the Graduate Record Exam (GRE) or Graduate Management Aptitude Test (GMAT) and receive a satisfactory score on a suitable exam. Upon completing all requirements at the home institution including a minimum TOEFL score of 550 and a satisfactory GRE/GMAT score, students transfer to UHCL to complete the rest of the requirements and receive a master's degree from UHCL.

V. UHCL AND HCCS JOINT 1+1+2 PROGRAM

UHCL and HCCS are two Houston-based public institutions, and they are within driving distance from each other. Their undergraduate EBHE programs are quite complementary to each other. For those who want to receive a bachelor's degree from UHCL inexpensively, the 1+1+2 program is the way to go. Students can finish the first two-years' requirements of a bachelor's program at UHCL via the DTU track in the home country with courses offered by both Vietnam National University-Ho Chi Minh City (VNU-HCM) and HCCS. UHCL in collaboration with HCCS will offer admissions to graduates of the DTU track to attend UHCL.

VI. BENEFITS OF UHCL TRANSFER PROGRAMS

HCCS and UHCL's EBHE programs offer a number of benefits to its students, the home institution and the home country, i.e., Vietnam.

- Low EBHE risks for students: EBHE is a very expensive investment for Vietnamese students and their families. If students don't succeed, they may squander their family's life savings. By obtaining a satisfactory TOEFL/GRE/GMAT score(s) and doing a large portion of the degree program in Vietnam, students have overcome the initial challenges. As a result, their chances of success are much higher when they go to the USA to complete the remaining requirements of their degree program at UHCL. Next, HCCS will offer Vietnamese students who don't go to the US an opportunity to earn an American associate's degree.

- Low EBHE costs: Because a significant portion of a degree program is taught by the home institution, the tuition, fees and living expenses are much lower for students.

- Gaining of practical business/technical skills: As the fourth largest industrial city in the USA, Houston has many jobs that are

available to students with good English and technical skills. Students are allowed to work legally in their field of study after two semesters in residence under the programs named "cooperative education," "internship" and "practical training." Students are compensated for their work at the prevailing wages that are typically much higher than those of the home country.

- Fewer visa problems: The decision to grant a student an entry visa to the U.S. is entirely up to the U.S. Embassy in the home country. The transfer programs will distinguish their students from economic opportunists and therefore improve the chances of getting visas to go to the USA to attend UHCL. In the past few years, 99.7% of students from UHCL existing transfer programs with other countries have no problems in obtaining F-1 visas to attend UHCL to complete their remaining degree requirements. It is expected that Vietnamese students would have similar successes in obtaining F-1 visas from the US Embassy or Consulate in Vietnam to attend UHCL in the future.

- Broad audience: The transfer programs will make the stay in the USA much shorter; therefore, the education is affordable to more families and to older students who can only stay away from Vietnam for a short period.

- Graduate study: The graduate transfer program addresses an urgent need for overseas graduate training. Ideally, Vietnam should send the majority of its students overseas for graduate training only. Graduate training is much less expensive because it is much shorter than the undergraduate one is.

- Leading role for Vietnamese universities: The joint programs provide an opportunity for Vietnamese universities and their faculties to take a leading role in providing English-based higher education at both undergraduate and graduate levels to Vietnamese students and students in neighboring countries. As Vietnamese universities become proficient with one level, they can move up to the next program such as from 1+1, 2+2, 3+1 and eventually to a complete bachelor's program conducted entirely in English in Vietnam. Similarly at the graduate level, they will move from teaching a third of the courses to teaching a whole master's program in English in Vietnam.

VII. CURRENT STATUS OF HCCS AND UHCL'S EBHE PROGRAMS

UHCL has brought its transfer programs to nine universities that are located in seven countries, and HCCS has brought its 1+1 program to two countries. UHCL and VNU-HCM have signed a Graduate Transfer Agreement in July 2000 to bring UHCL graduate programs to Vietnamese students. It is anticipated that the graduate transfer program will be fully operational within a few months since the signing.

VNU-HCM is currently discussing and evaluating the 1+1+2 and 2+2 options put forward by UHCL and HCCS. A decision on which option to select will be made in coming months.

VIII. CONCLUDING REMARKS

EBHE is beneficial to Vietnam at the individual, institutional and national levels. Because of its extremely high costs, it must be pursued with caution to maximize its benefits and to minimize its risks and costs. The HCCS and UHCL models address well all major concerns that are associated with EBHE. Vietnam and its universities should adopt these models in preparing its students to go to English-speaking countries for college education.■

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