

## ***Panel 2: Assessing the Life-Cycle of Student Progress: Admission to Career Outcomes***

### **Panel Summary**

The second panel of the Global Summit was the first in a series of sessions focusing on specific topics and themes related to the uses of technology in graduate education. Speakers for this panel focused on the tools and processes that are often used by graduate institutions to assess students at various points on the “life cycle” from admission, to enrollment, to completion. Such tools might best be described as fitting somewhere between two categories of tools outlined by **Zlatko Skrbis** (Monash University) in Panel 1: administrative systems and “value-adding technologies” that support institutional best practices. Much more than technologies for measuring institutional outputs, technologies for enrollment management, and alumni tracking often serve to support on ongoing improvements in student success rates and the quality of programs overall.

Speakers representing institutions in Canada, China, Germany, the Netherlands, and Italy addressed topics and questions that concerned both the collection of assessment data and the use of these data by universities:

- *Technology Tools for Graduate Recruitment and Admissions:* How can graduate institutions use technology to enhance graduate student recruitment and admissions? Which social media or web-based tools are most effective in attracting students to your university? How can new technologies improve the review of student applications and enrollment management?
- *Tracking Student Progress through Degree Completion:* How have technology assessments of student progress, time-to-degree or degree completion at your institution? How does your institution use these assessments to enhance program quality?
- *Innovative Approaches to Tracking Alumni Careers:* How can technology tools help graduate institutions gather information about alumni careers in ways that are affordable and valued by the faculty as evidence of program effectiveness? How can resulting data be used to enhance graduate student preparation for their careers?

Opening the session, **Jay Doering** (University of Manitoba) and **Gu Jibao** (University of Science and Technology of China) addressed the rapid transformations in recruitment and admissions processes at their institutions. Dr. Doering explained that information technology permeates nearly every aspect of student recruitment and application review at his institution, highlighting specific tools for marketing, event management, and social media communications, while Dr. Gu presented a hybrid approach in which web systems to facilitate the student application process and program marketing have been combined with in-person recruitment fairs.

The next presentations, which focused on tracking student progress through and beyond a degree, highlighted the growing use of technology-enabled tools to collect student data with the goal of improving graduate programs. Several presentations gave attention to centralized

administrative systems for managing enrolled students, tools that have only recently been brought into use in countries where PhD candidates have traditionally been tied to institutions through informal relationships with research supervisors. **Hans-Joachim Bungartz** (Technische Universität München) explained that in Germany, a country with a history of supervisor-based institutional affiliation, his university's shift to a centralized system of institutional "membership" has been an important step toward understanding who PhD candidates are, and how many are tied to his institution. In describing the relatively new monitoring system at his own university, **Gerard van der Steenhoven** (University of Twente) emphasized that the relatively new online enrollment management system is used to facilitate improved supervision and timely completion.

Such feedback mechanisms can also serve as an important dimension of alumni career tracking efforts. In a presentation on technology-based methods for monitoring PhD placement, **Andreas Frijdal** (European University Institute) described his institution's efforts to better understand the career pathways of PhD graduates through periodic, online surveys. This effort not only serves to locate EUI's alumni network, but also to assess the content and structure of doctoral education at the institution and to recruit new doctoral candidates based on alumni placement. Dr. Frijdal noted that while the Internet has supported the processes of alumni tracking, it has also raised new challenges such as "survey fatigue" among research subjects.

### **Discussion Themes**

Electronic systems for managing applications and enrollments raised questions about the interface between technology and admissions decisions. In the face of technologies that allow institutions to make a decision about a student application within one day, some participants expressed concern that new admissions tools might lead to rushed decision-making about graduate applicants. Implicit in many comments was the view that technology should serve as an enabler of admissions decisions, not the driver of them, and that institutions should have the flexibility to design admissions processes in ways that ensured the quality of admitted students. A number of participants also noted the need for refinements and new innovations in technology-enabled admissions. For example, **Mark Smith** (Purdue University) underlined the need for a system of electronic credential verification regulated by agreed-upon protocols. Such a system would allow universities not only to speed up the time-consuming process of credential verification, but also ensure that credentials such as transcripts had not been altered from their original form.

Technologies for alumni tracking also received significant attention. **Kyung-Chan Min** (Yonsei University) observed that placement surveys often entail multiple challenges, including identifying up-to-date alumni addresses, achieving a good response rate, and finding the resources and staff to manage the process. Dr. Frijdal explained that technology has made it easier to identify participants as well as to survey them, because the majority of his institution's graduates are academics who maintain professional web pages. It is worth noting that while the Internet has become a valuable source of information for many institutions seeking to identify their alumni, challenges remain for verifying the accuracy of some alumni information.

An underlying theme in these conversations was the need for institutions to take a thoughtful, strategic approach to managing institutional changes related to the implementation and integration of new technologies. One participant noted that placing technology officers in high positions of administrative leadership is a trend that can help institutions more effectively implement technology innovations, and that problems ensue when technology roles are viewed

as merely supportive functions. Adequate levels of support staff to oversee technology integration processes are also important: **Brenda Brouwer** (Queen's University) said that institutions should avoid the error of placing all of their resources in new tools without also investing in the staff needed to sustain them. Finally, it was observed that graduate leaders must take the time to explain how changes in technology platforms will ultimately enhance the productivity of faculty and staff. The disruptions involved in change will be better received if there is a belief that tools for managing administrative processes have a clear return for students, research, and the institution as a whole.