

## ***Panel 6: Engagement with External Organizations***

### **Panel Summary**

Technology tools are often credited with making higher education communities larger and more global because they allow institutions to expand their communications and networks. Despite promises that technology can broaden and globalize our campuses, however, are concerns that a larger world comes at a cost. As contacts and networks are multiplied, will relationships between potential students and research partners become less substantial and meaningful? Will an increase in the number of relationships via technological means cause institutions to lose control over the ways in which they define and serve their communities?

The final summit panel explored these issues in relation to several common institutional efforts to engage with external organizations. Speakers from Australia, Japan, South Korea, and the United States focused on three specific types entities—global rankers, international partners, and media outlets— giving consideration to the following topics and questions:

- *Technology and University Rankings:* What are the impacts of technology-enabled university rankings, both positive and negative, on your institution? What impact do rankings have on delivery or re-structuring of graduate education? Are their general good practice guidelines for responding to university ranking schemes?
- *Building International Networks:* How can technology help graduate institutions to build or develop networks with international partners, including other academic institutions, organizations and companies? How important is “face-to-face” contact in relation to electronic or “virtual” communication and collaboration?
- *Engagement with the Press:* How can graduate education leaders proactively use and engage with electronic media outlets in order to effectively share their messages with the public? How can this communication skill be imparted to current graduate students?

Universities need to be strategic and thoughtful in forming relationships to the external organizations and groups referred to above, and in some cases, they must prepare their graduate students to develop productive networks with them.

The first set of presentations, by **Kyung-Chan Min** (Yonsei University) and **James Wimbush** (Indiana University), addressed universities’ relationships to global ranking systems. Both speakers emphasized that while there is a danger in attributing too much importance to ranking schemes, advances in technology have enhanced the usefulness of the institutional data that can now be collected through these systems. Dr. Min noted that in Korea, the growth in ranking systems has fueled innovation at Korean universities as well as increased investments in higher education. Rankings have also enhanced the recruitment of students and faculty, Dr. Wimbush explained, and at Indiana University, business analytics software purchased by the university has enabled the institution to better assess the strengths of its graduate programs. At the same time, it is important to understand the purpose and power of various evaluation systems: Dr. Wimbush underscored the importance of distinguishing between technologies that can be used to assess performance metrics internally versus those that have value for comparing institutions.

For the next subpanel, **Toshio Maruyama** (Tokyo Institute of Technology) described his institution's approach to internationalization and the creation of global opportunities for graduate students. At Tokyo Tech, online lectures have been an important part of a joint master's degree program with Thai universities, allowing partners a "convenient" means of communication and connection. However, the university views face-to-face international experiences for graduate students as a more effective way of building collaborations. Recently, it has invested resources in three major global networks that involve exchanges of students and faculty. This combined approach, one in which technological communication is used alongside direct communications, is similar to the strategies for online education that were presented in Panel 4: Online Graduate Education: Curricular Innovations.

**Alan Dench** (University of Western Australia) concluded the formal presentations by discussing his university's approach to engaging with official press outlets and social media. Dr. Dench outlined two key aspects of a strong university communications strategy: identifying the messages one wants to share as well as their audiences, and understanding how the various media used to communicate messages have the potential to shape university news once it leaves one's campus. Beyond these principles, a particularly effective strategy for demonstrating returns on investment in graduate education is to connect graduate student research and the public good. In this endeavor, graduate students can and should learn to become their own best "press agents."

### **Discussion Themes**

Summit participants used the discussion period to delve further into the topic of global ranking systems. **Liviu Matei** (Central European University) called attention to the great variety in ranking schemes, their purposes, and their impacts on different global graduate education communities. Rankers can also vary by country and region, he noted, and include governments, media outlets, universities, and in Europe, a new web-based platform ("U-Multirank") that allows for comparison of universities according to a range of criteria chosen by the user. How universities respond to the rankings they are given is highly dependent on these rankers and other variables. For example, a university may be less concerned about the particular ranking it receives if students in that country do not use this information to guide their decisions about where to pursue graduate study. This was stated to be the case in Germany, where, as **Hans-Joachim Bungartz** (Technische Universität München) explained, the graduate community finds comparisons of graduate programs to be more meaningful than comparisons of university quality.

A second central theme in the discussion was the role that universities can and should play in responding to the rankings given to them. There was strong consensus that universities should be active players in shaping appropriate and meaningful criteria by which graduate programs can be assessed and compared. **Debra Stewart** (Council of Graduate Schools) said that in the United States, the Assessment of Research Doctoral Programs conducted by the National Research Council (NRC) has created an opportunity for doctoral institutions to share their input on the metrics by which the quality of programs are evaluated. **Eduardo Kokubun** (São Paulo State University) described a similar feedback loop in Brazil, where a committee exists to provide a federal research agency, CAPES, with guidance on evaluation criteria used to rank graduate programs. Dr. Min stated that one particularly productive role that universities can play in shaping rankings is in urging rankers to give more significant attention to metrics that are not exclusively quantitative and oriented to research outputs. As **Lisa Tedesco** (Emory University)

noted, placing undue importance on one metric versus another can put pressure on universities to compromise what is best for their students and institutions.

In spite of the challenges they present, the proliferation of ranking schemes— what some may argue is the result of advances in technology for evaluating the outcomes of higher education—has underscored important lessons for universities and their students. As **Nick Mansfield** (Macquarie University) observed, it is far easier to examine and challenge ranking methodologies than to question entrenched views of university quality that may be based solely on notions of institutional prestige. The inconsistencies in different rankings also uncovers the highly complex and arguable criteria on which rankings are based, Dr. Mansfield added, and this should give prospective graduate students reason for measured consideration when choosing a program. The very instability of rankings is a reason for universities to stay engaged with the various stakeholders who contribute to ranking schemes. In the words of one participant, graduate institutions must “tell their own stories” based on their strategic goals and the best data available.