

Editorial

COMPARISONS OF UNIVERSITY SYSTEMS AS A BASIS FOR CREATING AN EXEMPLARY STRUCTURE

As we can see from the stream of reports on financial strains in universities around the world, the question may be posed, (see recent reports in *Engineering Education World*), whether universities could not operate more viably and economically if they are newly structured in a different and more flexible way. A frequently cited model is the American University, which contrasts sharply with the continental European University operational structure. Professor **Hans Weiler** who spent 30 years at Stanford University, and has been President of the European University at Frankfurt/Oder for four years believes that the differences in structures are so large that it would not be feasible to 'Americanise' German or continental universities. In the USA universities are run like enterprises with the president having substantial executive powers. The Board of Governors can vote to remove the president. In contrast, a president or rector on the continent does not have even a fraction of the executive powers. He is dependent on his education ministry for all major financial, curriculum, and personnel decisions. His board, a so-called Senate, has no power to oust a President. A council made up of professors, and other staff, who are prone to represent groupings and political tendencies, elects him. The Senate and the council are elected by the total university body, and are often comprised of people who want the office, but are not necessarily competent to make political or professional decisions. The goings on are *ex-ante*, i.e. predetermined by legislature and often immovable preconceptions. In the USA, the procedures are more dependent on benefit and evaluations of success and so are *ex-post*. As success is the precursor of development in the USA, the criteria for measuring success are more highly developed in the USA. Moreover, success in teaching is also an important basis of operation for a US University president, whereas in Europe, especially on the continent, the independence of a university professor is legendary. Only a very serious breach of competence and duty can in any way affect the professor's, sacred academic freedom. There are hardly any salary bonuses, on the European continent for taking up responsible posts. This contrasts with significant differences in salaries in the USA. The American approach is to a certain extent also applicable for the English speaking universities in other countries, i.e. the UK, Ireland, Australia a.s.o. A department head, which is a tedious job in continental Europe, not much sought after, are nominated by the University President in the USA, and enjoy higher pay. With such basic differences in structure it may be unrealistic to expect an Americanisation of continental European University systems according to Professor Weiler. However, in contrast to this belief, there are movements to change the structure of continental universities, on the one hand to allow more power to the presidents (a controversial feature: see *Engineering Education World*), on the other hand, the introduction of Bachelor and Master's degrees, and a greater financial autonomy. With the snail paced changes of the rigid structures, it remains to be seen whether financial constraints, expediency, student pressures and competitiveness will lead to improved efficiencies of European universities.

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