

# Foreword: Shared Realities

**M**arket forces, globalization, internationalization, competition, new providers, cost efficiency—these descriptors of the brave new world of higher education appear consistently in any discussion of its future. Even when used in the same national context, such terms describe different phenomena and elicit different interpretations; cross-cultural conversations are even more difficult. A shared understanding of the forces that are reshaping higher education within and among nations provides an essential foundation for the development of sound policy and effective institutional strategies to adapt to these new realities. Such challenges were the focus of the seventh Transatlantic Dialogue, cosponsored by the American Council on Education (ACE), the Association of Universities and Colleges of Canada (AUCC), and the European University Association (EUA) and hosted by the Université Laval in Quebec.

The purpose of this meeting was to explore the forces shaping change in higher education in the United States, Canada, and Europe; analyze how institutions and policy makers are responding; and assess the costs and benefits of these responses. This conversation of some 30 presidents, vice chancellors, and rectors (see page 32) assumed the volatility of the current environment and the need for continuous change. But just how much change is necessary and desirable, and what kind of change should occur, were open to question. The Transatlantic Dialogue explored strategies that institutions use to be

more responsive and relevant, and reflected on the conflicts these strategies can present with respect to historic institutional values and mission. Participants examined the promise and the peril of establishing alliances with partners outside the academy, such as businesses or for-profit educational institutions, and the complexities of international collaborations that go beyond traditional student and faculty mobility. The new environment and the many strategic choices facing institutional leaders on both sides of the Atlantic provided the framework for a rich conversation.

The issues that participants discussed dramatically differed from the ones considered at the first Transatlantic Dialogue in 1989 in Hartford, Connecticut. At that time, the World Wide Web was virtually unknown to administrators, and e-mail use was in its infancy. The sharp differences among national contexts across the Atlantic and within Europe provided few common bases for discussion. The geopolitical situation was entirely different from the one that would exist half a decade later. The Berlin Wall was still intact; the Eastern Bloc countries were still part of the Soviet system. The North American Free Trade Agreement was in its early stages, as was the European Union (EU), which was viewed as a zone of economic growth set up against Communism. In higher education, North American institutions were entrepreneurial and customer-oriented, doing business in a pragmatic world of public relations and money management that was alien to their European counterparts. In continental Europe, the

ministries very much controlled universities' destinies, and the rigidities of centuries-old traditions of teaching and learning were difficult to loosen. In the United Kingdom, the polytechnics were not considered universities, and the national assessment exercises had not yet taken place. The concept of the "European dimension" of higher education was just emerging. The appointed North American presidents saw themselves as leaders, the elected European rectors as first among equals. In brief, a little more than a decade ago, the Atlantic Ocean represented a formidable distance between European and North American higher education, between the old world and the new.

By 2001, and the seventh Transatlantic Dialogue, the picture looked quite different. Technology was a given, and competition—long established in Canada and the United States—was gaining ground in much of Europe. Europe had undergone vast political changes, and the move to harmonize the varying forms of national higher education in the EU by making them more transparent and compatible was intensifying under the auspices of the Bologna Declaration.<sup>1</sup> By 2001, there was no doubt that higher education was indeed a global enterprise, and although significant differences still exist among nations and continents, the fundamental challenges—especially those created by the new environment of technology, globalization, and competition—

are very much the same. The vision of the future seen by those U.S., Canadian, and European leaders at the 2001 Quebec seminar was more similar than dissimilar—a surprise to most, if not all, of the participants.

In order to secure a snapshot of the varying views, the seminar cosponsors asked each participant to vote on a series of statements about the future of higher education from his or her perspective. The participants indicated the extent to which they agreed or disagreed with each statement regarding the actual future they foresaw (versus the ideal future they desired) in their own country. They also noted the extent to which they agreed or disagreed with each assertion.

The high level of consistency among all participants came as a surprise. Of the approximately 20 assertions shown on the next page, the Americans and the Europeans disagreed on only four; and the Americans and Canadians differed on only one. The Canadians and the Europeans agreed on all the assertions. Further, even when disagreement occurred, it was mild. Indeed, the American, Canadian, and European leaders had remarkably similar views of what lay ahead for higher education.