

International organizations: An examination of their historical and current influence on
global higher education policy

Presentation for WUN teleconference May 14, 2007

Roberta Malee Bassett, PhD
Lecturer, Higher Education Management and Policy
CHEMPaS, University of Southampton (UK)

Higher education has been an inherently international enterprise from the time of its origins (Altbach, 1998, Clarke, 1964). Students, scholars, and the pursuit of knowledge have traversed national boundaries from the earliest universities in Bologna and Paris, and this tradition has only expanded over the subsequent centuries. Higher education institutions and governance, on the other hand, have historically been domestically-oriented, funded and led by individual governments, serving the interests of local populations, and operating as important conveyors of national interests and culture. The industrial revolution of the late 19th Century and the two World Wars of the early 20th Century brought attention to higher education as a significant contributor to national and international economic growth and development. Far from being a localized interest for individual nations, higher education has, over the past half century, developed into a legitimate operational area of many influential and important international organizations. The aim of this presentation is to provide insights into the origins and history of multinational organizations' interest and influence in higher education and to explore how higher education issues are significant among the international policy agendas of these organizations. This presentation will look specifically at the integration of higher education into the missions of the most visible and influential organizations that formed following the end of World War II and how these organizations continue to influence the direction and policies of higher education as tools for achieving their own global policy agendas.