

Learning the HARD WAY

Universities around the world are plagued by a host of intractable problems - except in America. What are they doing right?

BY BARBARA KANTROWITZ

ROME'S LA SAPIENZA UNIVERSITY has endured seven centuries of war and political upheaval. But as school begins this fall, students at Europe's largest university face a hardship of a different kind: nowhere to sit. Many of La Sapienza's 180,000 students will attend classes under circus tents hastily erected to accommodate massive overcrowding. Others will study in movie theaters, some of which double as porn houses at night—and are only a slight improvement over



BIG TOP: At Rome's La Sapienza, some classes are held in circus tents

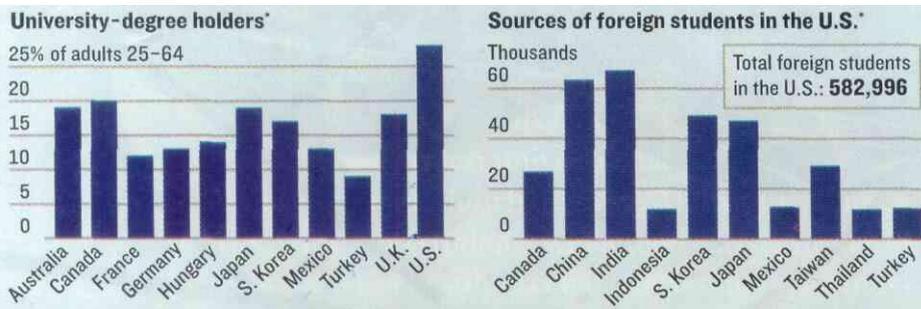
ROBERTO CACCURI—CONTRASTO—REDUX



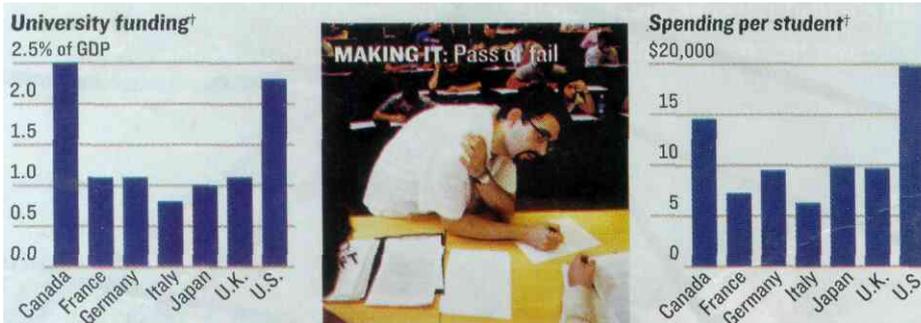
Higher Education: The Global View

With their prestige and vast resources of wealth, top U.S. universities draw leading students and faculty from the rest of the world, leaving other nations scrambling to compete.

Who Goes, and Where: The lure of a U.S. degree draws students away from home.



The Bottom Line: Where higher-education funding comes from, and how much students get.



the unfortunate sociology class that met last year in a parking garage. At least they have a roof over their heads; at La Sapienza's law school, with an enrollment of more than 40,000, students must call ahead to reserve a seat in the lecture halls. Those who don't get in often stand outside and peer through the windows, even in the rain, hoping to overhear at least some of the lecture.

That's just in Rome. Elsewhere in Italy, educators must contend with a soaring dropout rate; at some universities, two out of three entering students never receive a degree. And universities in just about every other country in the world are struggling with their own assortment of intractable

problems. In Japan and South Korea, the issue is too few students. Educators in both countries worry about a dwindling population of young people and a drastic decline in qualified applicants. Money problems loom large in many places. British students are fighting against a proposed tripling of tuition fees—an infusion of cash that university administrators believe is necessary for the survival of their institutions but that many students believe will mean graduating with a load of debt. Pakistani educators bemoan the lack of topflight faculty attracted to a low-paying profession. And in some parts of the developing world, war and political turmoil have completely stymied ed-

Power Schools

Here's where world leaders send their kids:

Chelsea Clinton, daughter of former U.S. president Bill Clinton: **Stanford, Oxford**



• **Euan Blair**, son of British Prime Minister Tony Blair: **Bristol University**

• **Carlos Zedillo**, son of former Mexican president Ernesto Zedillo: **Yale**

EUAN BLAIR • **Walter Kohl**, son of former German chancellor Helmut Kohl: **Harvard**

• **Mirzan Mahathir**, son of Malaysian Prime Minister Mahathir Mohamad: **University of Pennsylvania**



• **Hun Manet**, son of Cambodian Prime Minister Hun Sen: **West Point, Bristol Univ.**

• **Mohamed Al-Qaradawi**, son of Sunni cleric Yusuf Al-Qaradawi: **University of Central Florida**



• **Lee Hsien Loong**, the son of Lee Kwan Yew, former prime minister of Singapore: **Cambridge, Harvard**

• **King Abdullah**, son of late Jordanian King Hussein: **Oxford, Georgetown**

ABDULLAH



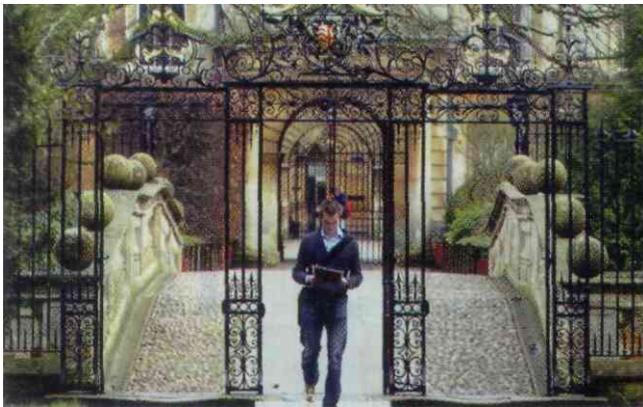
FIRST LADIES: Chelsea went to Stanford

ucational progress. Throughout much of Africa, for example, even basic literacy is still an elusive goal.

No wonder so many of the world's best and brightest are eager to earn their degrees in America, where campuses are thriving. Close to 600,000 international students are expected to arrive in the United States this month, the vast majority of them from India and China. "We could probably have a million international students here without ever missing a beat," says Allan Goodman, president of the Institute for International Education in New York. "Other countries look at America as a role model ... If you want the gold standard in higher education,



DREAM FACTORY:
Students at Japan's
KIT develop a solar-
powered car (above)



HIGH-TECH HAVEN:
Cambridge has
become Europe's
Silicon Valley (left)



MAGIC FORMULA:
Germany aims to
foster autonomy
among universities

globally people will say, 'Go to America.'" And that migration will only increase as the gap between America and the rest of the world keeps growing.

Educators in many countries say their biggest single problem is relying almost exclusively on government funding—a long tradition just about everywhere except the United States. When that funding gets cut because of the budgetary pressures now endemic to most industrialized countries, educators have trouble finding other ways to pay the bills—the university's as well as their own. One of the most troubling cases is Russia, where dwindling government support over the past decade forced many

universities to put off even much-needed building repairs. "It's dangerous even to go inside some universities," says Christina Coshel, a 22-year-old student at the North West Academy of Public Administration in St. Petersburg. "From the horrific state of the buildings, you can imagine the quality of these educational institutions." Budget cuts also mean less pay for professors and administrators; students say many have turned to bribery to "supplement" their salaries. "I paid \$800 to get into the university," says Andrei, a 21-year-old student at the Forestry Engineering Academy in St. Petersburg. "I've heard that now students are paying \$1,500." And it doesn't end

there. Every year, Andrei bribes his teachers about \$50 to pass his term exams. The practice is so widespread that there is almost no risk of getting caught; students prefer guaranteed marks to exposing corrupt teachers.

Even British universities—once widely regarded as the world's finest—have been caught in the money mess. "Confused, bewildered, underfunded and angry" is how Colin Matheson, head of Britain's Coalition of Modern Universities, describes the current state of the system. In the past 15 years, the number of students has doubled while public subsidies have declined more than 36 percent. Britain now spends only 1.1 percent

Society

of its GDP on postsecondary education, less than half of what the United States spends. At the same time, a bill currently before Parliament would raise fees to about \$4,500 a year, a nearly threefold increase. While that may not seem high by the standards of American universities, which can cost more than \$25,000 a year, many in Britain worry about able students being shut out.

Faculty salaries are also considerably below the U.S. average, which has meant a drain of some of Britain's best brains. Christopher Peacocke, a philosophy professor who left Oxford three years ago for New York University, says inadequate funding turns off academic stars in other ways as well. "The British salaries are much too low but I think that's only one factor," he says. "Much more important are research facilities. Most British universities will not give, for example, a regular research grant to the senior research faculty—something I never had even as a chair at Oxford." In the sciences, that gap is crippling; only American universities can afford state-of-the-art research facilities.

Government control can be a burden even when the money keeps flowing. China's higher-education system is the largest in the world, with 16 million students. But analysts say the Chinese system does not allow enough flexibility in everything from paying tuition to choosing classes. Parents must pay for the entire year in September—a particular burden since tuition, nonexistent before China's economic reforms, has risen fivefold in the past decade.

ACADEMIC RIGIDITY TURNS off some of China's best students, who are forced to pick majors while they're still in high school. There's no room for intellectual experimentation. Linda Chen, 24, says her undergraduate experience at Nanjing University, one of the country's most elite, was unimpressive. "I had a lot of classmates who just played computer games all day," she recalls. As a result, she felt unprepared and overwhelmed when she enrolled as a doctoral student in sociology at the University of Washington in Seattle. "In China, teachers teach and you take notes," she says. "Here there is more communication between students and professors. Students sit and brainstorm. You can even tell jokes."

That tantalizing freedom lures many of the brightest Chinese students to American campuses. Since China emerged from international isolation in the mid-1970s, more than 580,000 students have enrolled at U.S. universities. Her daughter Liu Yiting's quest for an Ivy League degree inspired Liu



SPLIT FAMILIES

Korean students - and their moms - are flocking to America high schools

What's Good for THE GOOSE...

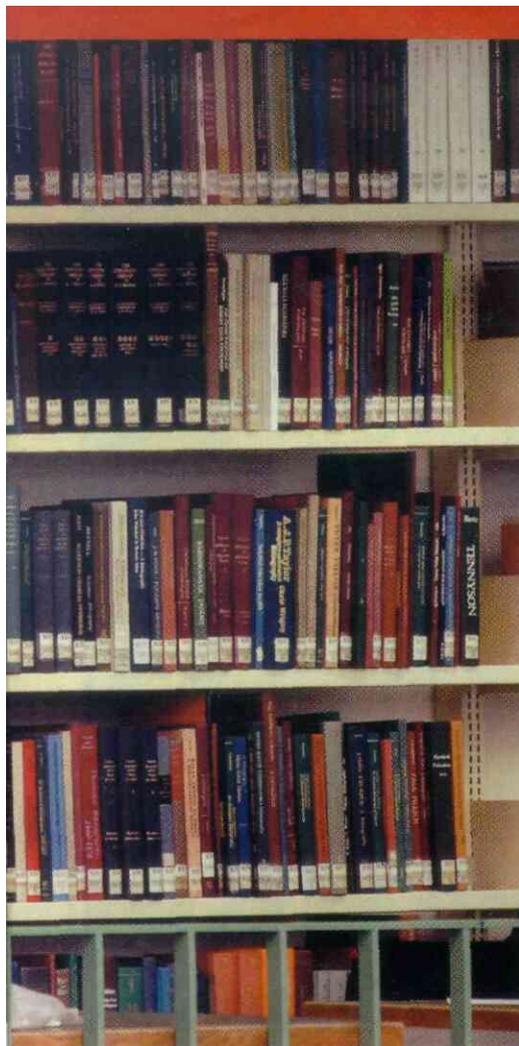
BY B. J. LEE

Chung Gi Sup hates holidays. That's because the 45-year-old political-science professor spends them all alone in Seoul. His wife and two daughters are halfway around the world in New Jersey, where the girls attend high school and their mother does the laundry, checks the homework and drives them to after-school activities. Worried about South Korea's failing education system, they left three years ago in the hopes of learning English and, ultimately, winning the girls ac-

ceptance to an American university. In the meantime, Chung lives in a one-room apartment and sends nearly 80 percent of his \$40,000 annual salary to New Jersey. He is not looking forward to this week's Full Moon Thanksgiving holiday. "I will be all alone in my room," he says. "I am sure I will miss my family even more during that time."

It's a sacrifice more and more Korean families are willing to make. Chung is part of a fast-growing demographic: men who live apart from their families so that their children may be educated in an English-

speaking country. They are known as father geese, after the birds famously devoted to raising their young. The exact numbers are difficult to pinpoint. But according to UNESCO, the number of Korean students studying abroad rose from 110,000 in 1999 to 174,000 last year. Of those, about 10 percent, or 17,000, are believed to be high-school age or younger, and living with their mothers. "Among affluent families in Seoul, sending kids abroad for study has become fashionable," says Kim Ho Gi, a sociologist at Yonsei University. "They want to relieve their kids



OPENING MINDS: In some parts of the world, freedom of thought is an alien concept

Weihua to write "Harvard Girl," a best-selling how-to guide that has made her a superstar to ambitious Chinese parents, both on the mainland and in Hong Kong. "It is the dream of every middle-class Hong Kong parent to have a son or daughter in Harvard or Yale," says Joseph Cheng, a political-science professor at the City University of Hong Kong.

Students aren't the only ones drawn to America's tradition of academic freedom and its stellar research facilities. Pervez Hoodbhoy, a noted professor of nuclear physics at Quaid-I-Azam University in Islamabad, visits a top American university for several months every year—most recently Stanford and MIT—to do research. He's even more outraged than before about the sorry state of his country's universities, which he describes as "intellectual rubble." That may sound harsh, but few Pakistani academics would disagree. The problems are many: a dearth of qualified faculty, students ill-prepared by a dismal public-education system, an often incompetent university bureaucracy and blatant government intervention. "On campuses, serious discussion of scientific, philosophic, social or political issues is virtually nonexistent," he says. "It is difficult to imagine a system in the modern world which had a greater antipathy to intel-

lectual inquiry than the one which presently exists in Pakistan."

It is ironic that at a time when so many are decrying U.S. imperialism, they are openly copying America's educational system in order to keep their talent at home. A century ago, the great German universities occupied much the same place as Harvard, Yale and Stanford do today, attracting students and professors from all over the world. In fact, American schools began their own ascendancy when they copied the German system of integrating teaching with research. But by the early 1990s, German universities were a disaster. Selective admissions and tuition were abolished, turning once elite institutions into overcrowded behemoths. Professors turned into unmotivated civil servants, paid according to seniority rather than merit. The dropout rate was huge: up to 80 percent in many of the humanities and social services.

Now, Germany is in the midst of a huge reform effort, much of which involves copying the United States. The first step is to give universities more autonomy, while avoiding outright privatization, so that each institution can do its own fund-raising and pick its own students, raising quality. More and more professors are being paid by merit. Almost all of Germany's 68 universities have begun replacing the lengthy and internationally incompatible Diplom and Magister degrees with U.S.-style bach-



THE TICKET TO A BRIGHTER FUTURE: Students attend a U.S. college fair in Seoul

from the pressures of Korean schools, while offering them chances of better life."

Korea's troubled economy has driven the explosive growth in overseas study. A decade ago graduates of local universities had little trouble finding jobs. But since the 1997 financial crisis, the economy has opened up, giving graduates with English fluency and knowledge of foreign countries a distinct advantage. In recruiting new employees, Korean companies clearly prefer graduates from midlevel U.S. universi-

ties to those from topnotch local schools like Seoul National University.

Still, the lifestyle is not for everyone. Some kids studying abroad suffer cul-

ture shock or never overcome the language barrier. Worse, some become delinquent in the absence of their fathers, who are traditionally the disciplinarians in Korean

families. But it may be hardest for the fathers left behind. In July, a 36-year-old man killed himself after his wife divorced him because he had an affair with another

woman while she and their children were in Canada. Many father geese seek comfort in one another. Men with families living in New Zealand recently formed an online support group that eventually became an offline drinking and outing club. "Instead of returning to empty homes after work, we meet and talk about our families in New Zealand," says Ju So Jung. They even plan to form a choir and perform for their families in New Zealand this winter.

For most, the payoff is worth the pain. "Our family will have to endure bitter separation for maybe a couple more years," says Chung. "But my children will enjoy a good life for a much longer period." And they won't even have to fly south for the winter.

NO JOKE: Chen's experience as an undergrad in China left her unprepared for America's rigors



PHOTOGRAPH BY DECA IN/STED FOR NEWSWEEK

elor's and master's. Many have also introduced degree programs taught entirely in English. As a result, foreign-student enrollment is up 30 percent since 2000.

At Munich's Technical University, president Wolfgang Herrmann is an outspoken advocate for reorganizing the country's universities. He's been lobbying the government to give universities more independence to compete and is vigorously restructuring his own school, which is Germany's leading center for computer science, engineering and biotechnology. Herrmann, who has also taught in the United States, has introduced professional management and outside auditing, set up a branch of the university in Singapore and begun fundraising among companies and alumni. He has even entered into partnerships with Stanford and Georgia Tech for student and professor exchanges, started headhunting for the best professors and has been actively recruiting students at home and overseas. As a result, foreign enrollment has tripled in the past six years to 18 per-

cent. "American universities like Stanford, MIT and Caltech are benchmarks for us," Herrmann says.

The urgency of reform is palpable across the rest of the Continent. In 1998, education ministers throughout Europe met at the Sorbonne to mark the 800th anniversary of the venerable University of Paris. The need to compete globally was the top of the agenda. The next year, at a follow-up summit in Bologna, ministers from 29 countries set in motion a Europe-wide evaluation of higher

education with the Bologna Declaration. The goal is to create a more flexible system that is uniform across Europe. There is still resistance to the changes, which are supposed to be in place by 2010. The current French minister of Education, Luc Ferry, insists the goal is not to turn French universities into clones of Harvard or Stanford but to make France once again a prime destination for foreign students. The goal of EduFrance, created four years ago, is "to 'sell' French universities, just like we sell champagne, or perfume," according to Francois Blamont, the director of the organization.

In many countries, the pressing need for technological research has spurred reform. The Silicon Valley of Europe now centers around Cambridge, where, in the mid-'90s, university administrators began actively encouraging entrepreneurship and collaboration with industry—long considered a taboo. Last year alone, Cambridge spun out 25 new high-tech ventures, which 'could ultimately be profitable for the university. In



NATALIE BEHRING—GETTY IMAGES

DETERMINED TO LEARN: An Afghan woman in a Kabul classroom

India, Bill Gates has called the seven elite Indian Institutes of Technology "an incredible institution that has changed the world" since their founding just over 50 years ago. Alumni have been major players in Silicon Valley as well as in India's own burgeoning high-tech industry.

In Japan, a once obscure regional technical institute has emerged as a role model. The Kanazawa Institute of Technology doesn't yet have the prestige of Tokyo or Waseda Universities, but it does boast that 99 percent of its students have jobs before graduation—a remarkable statistic in a slow economy. The transformation began more than a decade ago, when KIT officials began sending groups of professors and staffers to major U.S. universities to study how things were done. By the mid-1990s KIT launched a reform plan that emphasized hands-on experiences. At the Factory for Dreams and Ideas, students build projects like a robot that shoots basketballs or a solar-powered car. There are also close ties with Japanese industry, an important source of additional funding. The school has launched its own company to commercialize its research and development.

The influence of privatization is also changing the landscape of Brazil's higher-education system. While many of the country's public universities are languishing, private education is booming; nearly seven out of 10 university students are enrolled in private colleges. A few, such as the Catholic University of Rio, are now considered among the country's best. Brazil is also experimenting with an exit exam, called the *provão*, to test the effectiveness of universities. "Before, evaluating higher education was all guesswork," says Claudio de Moura Castro, an education analyst at the World Bank. "The *provão* is like flying with instruments after years of flying blind."

As higher education becomes more of a global commodity in the next few decades, it's likely that new ideas like the *provão* or KIT's Factory for Dreams and Ideas will inspire professors and students far from their original shores. And that would be the most important lesson that universities around the world could learn from the American example. Unlike most countries, the United States has always encouraged educational diversity, a sort of free-market approach. "We let folks decide for themselves," says Barmak Nassirian of the American Association of Collegiate Registrars and Admissions Officers. In other words, let the best ideas win.

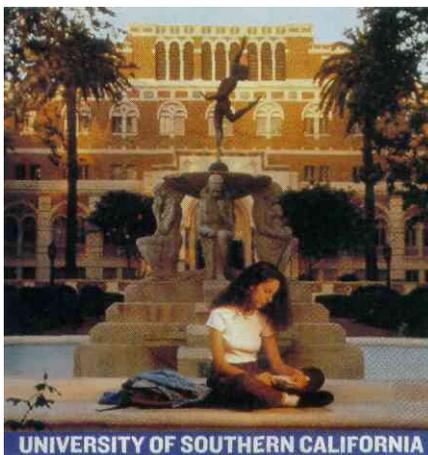
THE TOP EIGHT

Which U.S. universities do international students prefer? Those strong in science—and outreach.

Far From HOME

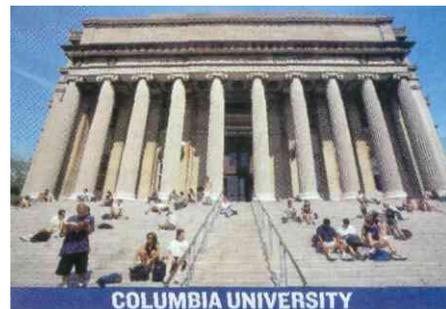
BY MARY CARMICHAEL

Every year, hundreds of thousands of foreign students set off for the States in pursuit of an American diploma. Most come to study the sciences. And their numbers keep growing; the Institute of International Education reports that a record 582,996 foreign students enrolled in U.S. universities last school year. Many of those students attended a select group of universities. The common factor? Each school makes sure international students feel welcome—and each has good word of mouth among folks back home. "If you asked foreign students to name three American schools, they'd name Harvard, Stanford and one of these," says IIE president Allan Goodman. "Students know them because their cousins, uncles



UNIVERSITY OF SOUTHERN CALIFORNIA

and friends go there." They are (in order):
1. UNIVERSITY OF SOUTHERN CALIFORNIA, LOS ANGELES. USC is home to more than 5,000 international students. (Its promotional brochure spotlights an Australian student of Vietnamese origin.) Newcomers might be tempted to befriend only their compatriots, but most find the atmosphere friendly enough that they fit in with any group.
2. NEW YORK UNIVERSITY, NEW YORK CITY. What better place for foreign students to learn than in the shadow of the Statue of Liberty? NYU makes the city manageable, coaching foreign students on everything from travel planning to getting off-campus jobs.
3. COLUMBIA UNIVERSITY, NEW YORK CITY. Between Hispanic neighborhoods,



COLUMBIA UNIVERSITY

Harlem and the Hungarian Pastry Shop (a favorite landmark), Columbia holds an obvious charm for global nomads. Its topnotch American Language Program offers English classes for law, business and tech types.

4. PURDUE UNIVERSITY, WEST LAFAYETTE, INDIANA. Purdue has more students (37,871) than the town has residents (28,778). It boasts a top-ranked engineering program. The international office pairs foreign students with locals and teaches them the finer points of American football.

5. UNIVERSITY OF TEXAS AT AUSTIN. UT-Austin draws Central and South American students. The PALS Program hooks them up with American students, and an entire department helps their families settle in.

6. BOSTON UNIVERSITY. Boston is home to some 50 institutions of higher learning, but BU has the biggest number of international students, 139 of whom hail from South Korea.

7. OHIO STATE UNIVERSITY, COLUMBUS. Solid business and engineering departments—both popular with international students—combine with a vibrant social scene.

8. UNIVERSITY OF ILLINOIS AT URBANA-CHAMPAIGN. Almost every country is represented—there are *two* undergraduates from Mauritius. Students bond in the Cosmopolitan Club (like the United Nations with cocktails).



OHIO STATE UNIVERSITY