

**INTERNATIONALIZATION AS THE RESPONSE  
TO INTEGRATION CHALLENGES: MANAGING UNIVERSITIES  
IN KAZAKHSTAN IN THE AGE OF GLOBALIZATION**

**Abstract**

One of the UNESCO Education Strategy 2014–2021 key areas is internationalization emerging from trends in higher education and penetrating into policy agenda predominantly shaped by volatility of integration processes at global and regional levels. All the burden of the interconnected world is concentrated in the universities’ strategies on greater internationalization, more than this, the most enduring actors of managing the implementation of internationalization strategy are the staff working in universities’ International Offices, which is argued as the case for Kazakhstan: despite its landlocked geographic position the country is in the epicenter of global and regional dynamics. This article provides a review based on existing body of literature dedicated to salient internationalization and globalization themes, interwoven and countervailed, with analysis on how national policy affects or is affected by international or multilateral initiatives and how universities in Kazakhstan cope with challenges of internationalization. Kazakhstan is fighting through its own unique path of transforming higher educational establishments employing Bologna framework as a conceptual model of modernization. However, the pressure of changing higher education landscapes and ever-growing competition makes universities of Kazakhstan to apply the practices that go beyond Bologna action lines. Finally, at institutional level universities need more systematic, comprehensive, sustained managerial approaches to produce impact alongside with outcome pursuing internationalization strategies.

Key words: internationalization, integration, neofunctionalism, intergovernmentalism, higher education, university management.

The loci of internationalization are deemed to root from global interconnectedness and regional integration. When it comes to higher education the international dimension might be as a trigger to transformative changes cultivating quality and recognition or a painstaking process with ill-organized activities and social rejection. The growing concerns of anti-globalists who promulgate the protection of national identity are about preserving the language and tradition of a national academia, whereas liberal decision-makers stand on the grounds of the “new public management” school of thought that postulates laissez-faire principle and favors free market approach that breeds academic capitalism management traditions in HEIs.

Enhanced global interdependence and frequently emerging trends remodel the patterns of interactions. Large scale projects with multiple partnership networks, which became the economic and political tool for tapping new markets, shaping collaborations under overarching policies, just few to mention, require huge investments, developed infrastructure, synergy of government, business and academic sector in the long-run. One country nowadays does not perform alone; rather, multilateral projects seem to constitute the adequate response to increased global competition and challenges where participants complement each other. That Chinese leader Xi Jinping announced on One Belt – One Road initiative in Kazakhstani university (Nazarbayev University) in 2013 during his official visit to the Republic is quite symbolic when it comes to analyzing what role is given to tertiary education capacity, research and innovation impact of the countries involved in ambitious international initiatives.

It would be right to say that Kazakhstan historically has been prone to internationalization processes: from Silk Way route crossing the country and contributing to knowledge and technology transfer to USSR legacy which brought pro-Russian system of education with Russian still remaining the language of interethnic communication and the language of science in academic institutions. However, after 1991 disintegration of the Soviet Union the government of Central Asian Republic was seeking to rebuild the whole socio-political concept of public governance as well as to modernize its higher education sector.

Before joining pan-European Bologna initiative as a country-member in 2010 the rectors of some Kazakhstani HEIs signed Magna Charta Universitatum in Taraz, South Kazakhstan. This fact shows that top managers felt inclination towards pro-European reforms in their vision and saw the

modernization agenda of higher education as a policy which would rely on international approaches and trends.

European academic society, by way of comparison, had to think of and formulate internationalization policies with a rather different impetus: participation in the SOCRATES program was the reason why European Commission requested to introduce such a practice at universities; yet, some countries committed a significant part of their efforts to the development of internationalization much earlier. Thus, Swedish Commission on Internationalization of Higher Education was actively seized in activities contributing to incorporating internationalization at all levels of education since 1970s [1].

Kazakhstani system of higher education is challenged by country's geopolitical position and by ambitions set forth by the government (Strategy–2020, Strategy–2030, Strategy–2050) when it comes to internationalization. Becoming a member of the “Bologna Club” meant radical changes implemented in local institutions within less than a decade, which has been cultivated and getting mature for decades in Europe. At the same time Kazakhstan is regionally, economically and simply historically more connected to China, Russia and Central Asian republics, each of them having their own peculiarities in higher education developments. Notably, no single country can shift its borders and ignore its neighborhood irrespective of the policies pursued at this or that period of time.

Thus, due to public policy goals formulated at national level, universities in Kazakhstan comply with the commitments outlined in European Higher Education Area (EHEA) policy documents and at the same time respond to integration processes, appearing initiatives on regional and global levels. Internationalization appears to be the instrument that is to harmonize practices of Kazakhstani universities with those ones widely accepted within global community for gaining recognition and prominence.

Now that internationalization penetrated into all aspects of higher education each country or institution has its own path line to address the challenge of local and regional competition, which is embedded into development strategies as input-output-benefit model and reflects priorities of certain countries and institutions [2].

Being under the influence of international trends and national strategies any university becomes a stakeholder involved in global and regional processes, however, the question arises whether it will be the role of a victim or a key player [3]. In the growing volatility of international geopolitical processes that are molded under liberal slogans of multilateral negotiations and “realpolitik” approaches on operational level it becomes crucial to be empowered with strategic vision so that to be able to forecast what the future holds and have the instruments for smooth navigating between the global and regional integration (interconnectedness) pursuing national and institutional interests.

When applying to regionalization and regional integration Haas's neofunctionalism with its spillover concept and supranational power at the heart is confronted to “high and low politics” formulated in Hoffman's intergovernmentalism theory. According to Hoffman political spillover can be classified as low politics, yet the government will prefer the uncertainty of self-control rather than uncertainty of integration [4, 5].

Both theories have been employed to explain European integration processes with a solid body of criticism from counterparts. Nonetheless, basic assumptions of these approaches can be used for analysis of most integration processes and should, probably, be seen as a balance between public policy of the sovereign state that protects its national interests and voluntary participation in some projects or integrations with supranational functions that target at certain areas such as international trade or education sphere, for example, for the sake of some prospect benefits.

While globalization is seen as more transformative practice connected with integration (supranationalist approach), internationalization appears to be more limited manifesting interconnectedness (intergovernmentalist approach) between states. Thus, executive leadership and policy in higher education, science and research, as it is argued, are more susceptible to transformation under the impact of globalization, whereas internationalization is “fostered within interdependent global systems and encourages their extension and development” [6, p. 10]. In contrast, if some trends are nurtured as the internationalization practices their aggregate mass can have implications for globalization and might pose some challenges to national policy. What is further maintained as an example of premises is the global integration of Europe on a regional scale which signifies the denationalization of EU states due to Europeanization and the merger or integration of regulatory systems.

Since the time higher education entered GATS the notion of academic capitalism emerged meaning that nations who have been able to achieve a certain degree of academic excellence gained significant economic advantage in being able to replenish institutional and national budgets due to the increased demand from international students to study at internationally recognized universities and being able to enhance R&D through attracting outstanding professors and talented students.

In the light of marketization of higher education, the countries can be divided into “soft” and “hard” sellers of educational services [7]. Such countries as the USA, Canada, Great Britain, Australia, New Zealand introduced substantially higher tuition fees for international students than for local students, whereas France, Germany, Finland, Sweden, for example, provide numerous scholarship opportunities or free access to higher education gaining financial benefits from indirect costs that international students have to service while living in another country. The rationale of such policy for soft sellers is in attracting and selecting talents and educated workforce.

In 2006, Simon Marginson and Marijk van der Wende in their study for OECD investigated the effect of WTO General Agreement on Trade in Services (GATS) on the relationship between governmental control and deregulation of tertiary education sector and assert that international trade of educational services is most likely to develop on bilateral or regional basis rather than multilateral globalism. The authors find that there should not be any exaggeration on concerns that GATS have uncontrollable transformative potential, instead, under WTO rules governments can choose the degree to which they wish to open the borders for foreign providers and which conditions will assist their activities in the domestic regulatory system.

Another important conclusion of this research suggests that to address globalization only as the “domain of imperial economic markets” and attribute the rest properties to internationalization is dualistic oversimplification downplaying world-wide convergence because of knowledge immersion, reciprocity of global exchange, emergence of new hubs and trends in Asia etc. and missing the fact that the two concepts “feed” each other.

A Chinese scholar Rui Yang [8] has an obvious inclination on being critical to the approaches in international comparative education literature which link internationalization to modernization through westernization. The researcher assumes that one reason to this trend is modeling universities in Asia, Africa and Latin America based on the prototypes of European or North American universities. The non-Western countries, as the scholar argues, saw the potential for reinforcing national identity through applying existing patterns of internationalizing higher education sector worldwide. The author admits that:

“Much of the content of regional development problems is, of course, shaped by the thoughts and practices of local society, but emerging issues are often then discussed in an explicitly international form of reference. An international perspective is thus necessary in dealing with local development” [8, p. 83].

Yang devised an analytical framework approaching internationalization as more humane and having more attributes of equity compared to globalization which is seen as more pragmatic and favoring the stronger players (Table 1):

Table 1– Some primary values of globalization and internationalization

	Internationalization	Globalization
Origin	Dates back to Sophists in Ancient Greece and Confucius in China	Started in the 19 <sup>th</sup> century with the rise of imperialism, nowadays is fueled by modern technology
Impetus	Advancement of human knowledge based on the realization of the bond of humanity	Profit and belief in world-wide single market
First priority	Human interests	Economic
Primary form	Cooperation, collaboration, caring, sharing and altruism	Competition, combat, confrontation, exploitation and the survival of the fittest
Benefits	Mutual advantages	One-sided economic benefits
Mobility of educational provision	Two/multiway	South-North: students North-South: programs
Quality regulation	Careful quality control	Largely unregulated
Note – Source [8].		

In contrast, Brandenburg and De Wit challenge the existing stance in literature delineating “good internationalization” and “bad globalization” subtly remarking that using education as a tradable commodity in global markets is executed under the flag of internationalization [9].

Kazakhstan is a member of numerous international projects and initiatives (the Bologna Process, Shanghai Cooperation Organization, Eurasian Economic Union etc.). Each of such projects has impacted the sphere of higher education in this or that way. The Bologna Process changed the landscape of the universities by introducing 3 cycle-system, ECTS, academic mobility, life-long learning education, inclusive education, quality assurance etc. Eurasian Economic Union reinforces the position of the Russian language as the lingua franca and strengthens existing comprehensive relations between countries. Being ethnically very close to Turkey, Kazakhstan has fruitful relations with this country. Intergovernmental academic program Mevlana by Turkish government that fosters mobility programs stimulates studies of the Turkish language among Kazakhstani students. More than this, Almaty City hosts Turkish university after former president Suleiman Demirel. Being a member of Shanghai Cooperation Organization Kazakhstan is in seventy-five HEIs network that together build the University of SCO in partner countries.

Yet, it can be argued that Bologna “travelling reform” was used as a template for modernization and internationalization in higher education. Kazakhstan has implemented “Bologna tool kit” within a short period of time: the government was determined to reveal the readiness to follow Bologna principles. Despite not meeting full set of benchmarks compared to best practices in Europe, it is argued that Bologna is not a mere borrowed template, rather, it is a part of a restructuring and reconstruction reform of the national educational system under European standards.

In the research “Becoming Bologna capable” conducted in 2015 [10] in local HEIs the International Offices as well as institutional Bologna Centers employees were surveyed with the following results highlighted: 66% of respondents find they need extra training on Bologna and internationalization processes themes; 54% need more information resources and guidelines or recommendations; 49% of employees would rather welcome the creation of a national association of University International Officers. Other notable findings demonstrate that university staff dealing with internationalization management needs more professional development events and legal consultancy.

Currently, there has been a greater accent on attractiveness and export of educational services and having higher rates of international recruitment by establishing Center of International Programs that coordinates activities of universities in international marketing, cooperating with international agencies and ministries of other countries. In 2018–2019 according to the national Center of Bologna Process 16 686 international students were studying in Kazakhstani universities. In 2017 a total of 2510 local students were enrolled to academic mobility programs spending a semester abroad, whereas only 712 international students came to the country for a semester study.

Like many other countries, Kazakhstan developed a blended approach to enrolments: international students can have governmental scholarships alongside with the opportunity to enter the universities on a tuition-fee basis. Yet, the scale of these activities is considerably smaller to those ones of the Republic’s closest and biggest neighbors. The Russian Federation, for example, allocated 80 mln \$ on promoting the brand of its higher education and plans to achieve 710 000 international student enrollment by 2025. Notably, the number of Kazakhstani students enrolled to Russian universities for full-time studies in quantitative terms is much higher compared to other countries of origin for international students, more than that, Russia expects that their number will triple by 2025 [11].

The flow of Kazakhstani students to China is also steadily growing: since 2010 there was a 40% increase from 8 200 students to 13 200 students in 2017. According to the survey conducted by the national team [12] among those students who left for China to get higher education 49,6% chose the universities in China due to its being foreign students-oriented (visa support, good dormitories, extracurricular support in emergencies, medical care). The second important factor (45% of the students) is low fees for education and accommodation, a higher quality of education (41,8% of the students) and prestige of education (39,1% of the respondents) are also in top 3 determining factors. 29,5% of Kazakhstani students were awarded educational grants by Chinese government.

After the OECD review of higher education in Kazakhstan in 2007 there was published a research report in 2017 benchmarking against recommendations and achievements in ten-year period in the internationalization practices in HEIs. The results reveal that there is a limited progress in language competence, limited focus on skills and competences for knowledge economy, limited inclusion of international examples into curriculum content, constraints in the development of joint degrees due to the normative regulations, limited growth in the number of inbound students and staff, lack of network for international education offices. Kazakhstani universities are not competitive in international rankings, which influences the rate of inbound mobility. The report says that international cooperation activity is still in its infancy with a lack of strategic vision and proper funding.

It was recommended to harmonize the portfolio of higher education sector, trade, migration and labor policies to reduce the constraint factors as well as strengthen the convergence of national and institutional policies. Among other recommendations OECD proposed to create networks of professionals working on internationalization issues, relax the curriculum, introduce the system of evaluating internationalization impact, improve English proficiency in academic community, employ technologies that allow for distant learning and internationalization through curriculum [13, p. 149–187].

According to the international research conducted by Education First in 2016 in 72 countries the rate of English proficiency in Kazakhstan is very low. With A1 level (beginner level in the Common European Framework) identified as the average for the country, Kazakhstan has 54<sup>th</sup> position between Guatemala and Egypt. By way of comparison, Eastern and Central European countries from former Soviet bloc are all in top 30 countries where English proficiency varies between high and moderate: Poland (10), Czech Republic (16), Serbia (17), Hungary (18), Romania (20), Slovakia (21), Bulgaria (24).

By analyzing the situation with internationalization development in Kazakhstani universities it becomes obvious that to tackle current challenges it is important to nurture qualitative changes by healthy managerial practices at the national and institutional level. There has been enough rhetoric on what should be done and criticism on what is not done in transforming HEIs in the Republic. What is really worth considering is how to synthesize best global practices with “home-grown” ones to achieve not only quantitative outcome but positive impact that helps the universities to be competent and efficient stakeholders in achieving national ambitions and meet expectations of the local society.

What seems to be a real issue towards effective and mature internationalization is that top managers at universities rely on national programs and mechanically transfer the benchmarks into institutional strategic programs without having a thorough analysis or drafting realistic plans. At the same time middle managers at their operational level are not empowered with some “ready to use tool kits” with well described processes and actors involved, which could boost professionalism and create an internationalization culture of doing things.

Effective internationalization management requires not only resources (rich world class research universities also experience their own difficulties), but understanding the rational for this or that aspect or process of internationalization. The table below could be the resource or a starting point for such an exercise (Table 2, p. 245).

It is recommended to diagnose a current status and define strategic objectives. Marek Polak [14, p. 4] proposes four strategic internationalization alternatives that can be identified after SWOT analysis:

Strengths and Opportunities: Aggressive strategy (maxi-maxi) – How can university use the strengths to take advantage of opportunities?

Strengths and Threats: Conservative strategy (maxi-mini) – How can university take advantage of the strengths to avoid real and potential threats?

Weaknesses and Opportunities: Competitive strategy (mini-maxi) – How can university use their opportunities to overcome experienced weaknesses?

Weaknesses and Threats: Defensive Strategy (mini-mini) – How can university minimize the weaknesses and avoid threats?

Table 2 – The impact of internationalization

Benefits	Negative implications
Improved quality of academic and research activities	The widespread use of English can lead to cultural homogenization and diminish the role of language diversity
National, regional, and global engagement	The pursue of world-class university based on research excellence concentrates all resources on a limited number of HEIs and diminishes the variety of other models
Effective preparation of global citizens and productive members of workforce	Difficulty to retain talent which affects prosperity, cultural advancement, and social well-being
Access to unavailable or scarce resources in home countries	Unethical and questionable practices in large-scale recruitment of international students
Decreased risk of academic inbreeding	Foreign providers in host countries cannot guarantee that the quality of education is the same as in home country
Exchange of expertise and perspectives through research networks	The prestige of foreign providers of higher education can undermine the efforts of local HEIs that try to meet the needs of the national policy
Benchmarking against best practices	Partnering with prestige university for the sake of prestige and ignoring potential partners that could bring more long term benefits
Enriched institutional policy-making, governance, student services, outreach, and quality assurance practices	Unevenly shared benefits of internationalization due to the asymmetry in relations and resource access
Note – Source: International Association of Universities (2012). Affirming academic values in internationalization of higher education: a call for action.	

The operational management or model of institutional support to internationalization process rests on two main factors: how big the university is and how far the advancement is in the implementation of internationalization process. In this regard, Polak identifies three approaches to the operational management [14, p. 9].

1. A centralized model where most of responsibilities are allocated to adequately developed, centrally structured International Relations Office, collaborating with faculties/departments and reporting to the President / Rector or to the Vice President for International Affairs.

2. A semi-centralized model where responsibilities are logically shared between reasonably developed International Relations Office and faculties and other university units; in this case the supervisory function of Vice President is usually in place.

3. A de-centralized model (dispersed), with most of responsibilities allocated to properly prepared faculties/departments and evidently limited role of central International Relations Office; in this case the supervision is allocated mostly with Faculty Deans.

The institution is supposed to undergo through five phases of internationalization towards maturity: ad hoc approach or functional mess, birth of process approach, enforcement of process approach, implemented process management, process optimization or drive for perfection and maturity.

If an institution is research-intensive it is most likely to follow a university-centered strategy with the reputation and capacity at the heart, meanwhile, student-centered universities focus on the academic experiences of students to contribute to quality graduates' preparation. Whatever the direction is, experts say that internationalization process should be professionally managed.

William Brustein [15] suggests a paradigm of ten pillars that, from his point of view, can breed a model of global university:

- ◆ internationalizing strategic planning;
- ◆ internationalizing the curriculum;
- ◆ eliminating barriers to education abroad;
- ◆ requiring foreign language proficiency;
- ◆ internationalizing faculty searches;
- ◆ incorporating international contributions into the faculty reward system;
- ◆ upgrading senior international officers' reporting relationships and placing senior international officers on key university councils and committees;

- ♦ embracing a holistic approach to the international student experience;
- ♦ drawing upon the expertise and experiences of and engaging fully local immigrant or diaspora communities;
- ♦ making global academic partnerships an institutional priority.

The practices above have been accumulated and formulated as the experience in universities in different countries that are also exposed to the challenges of global, regional, national, institutional issues. This should be incorporated into the duties of the university staff to practice managerial exercises on analyzing, synthesizing, forecasting, implementing, testing, improving internationalization processes addressing challenges, be it at macro or micro level. In other words, universities should prove that their employees are equipped with the same skills as managers in business companies.

Great alliances “come back” in the form of international economic projects naturally stimulate the developments in all national sectors of economy. In this light higher education as the sector of economy thanks to GATS stipulations becomes the tool or mechanism that can empower these processes and assist national strategies of the countries involved.

The first serious challenge for Kazakhstani universities in the modern history of the country came with Bologna Process overarching reform, probably, being less contentious for EU member-countries and their higher educational establishments rather than for non-EU members. Kazakhstan in the near future is unlikely to turn into the hard seller of educational services minding serious issues with institutional structure, governance and management of internationalization. With the new regulation appearing in 2019 granting more autonomy to universities it is hoped that HEIs will have more flexibility that allows institutions to be more responsive to the unique contexts of trans border processes.

Most of research concentrates on ‘what’ and ‘why’ aspects of internationalization, there is insufficient literature on ‘how’ aspect for Kazakhstani HEIs. Great Britain, for example, has agencies like UK Universities and experts like John Fielden who invest into the national universities with advice, expertise and guidance to help them have mature processes of managing internationalization. Before it is requested from local HEIs in Kazakhstan to provide the evidence of reaching benchmarks outlined in policy papers there should be enough of adequate support at national and institutional levels, especially for middle-managers.

The model of replicating good practices seems to be tempting; yet, no framework can be transplanted in its pure way. When scholars and experts suggest conceptual frameworks they do not consider or fully realize the fact that strategic perspective is highly descriptive in nature and the “should better have” approach might be a good starting point for visionary purposes, however, when it comes to operational management and sheer mechanics universities, middle managers and academic staff to be precise, are left to themselves to find the way of achieving the goals of institutional internationalization, the cumulative effect of which influences national higher education system competitiveness.

A further research that concentrates closely on ‘how’ guidelines considering best international practices and local landscape of internationalization development should be undertaken to help HEIs of Kazakhstan, university staff responsible for internationalization, to have some models as a starting point for on-campus adaptation and refining.

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#### Андатпа

ЮНЕСКО-ның 2014–2021 жж. аралығына арналған білім беру стратегиясына сәйкес, интернационалдандыру басым бағыттардың бірі болып табылады. Бұл бағытта интеграциялық үдерістердің жаһандық және өңірлік деңгейлерде ықпал еткен үрдістері мен қиындықтары көрініс табады. Бүгінгі таңда академиялық ынтымақтастыққа қатысушылардың өзара қарым-қатынасы қалыптасатын жағдайда көптеген мәдениеттің, жүйенің саяси-құқықтық ерекшеліктерін есепке ала отырып, ЖОО-лық интернационалдандыру стратегиялары сыртқы ортаның алуантүрлілігі мен күрделілігін көрсетеді. Мақалада қазақстандық ЖОО-да интернационалдандыру үрдістерінің даму жағдайы талданады, ал табысты іске асыру стратегиялық басқаруға жауапты университет қызметкерлеріне байланысты, бірақ көбінесе операциялық менеджментке жауапты адамдарға байланысты. Келтірілген деректерге сәйкес, халықаралық ынтымақтастық бөлімінің қызметкерлері бұл бағыттың кәсіпқой мамандарын біріктіретін ақпараттандырумен байланысты, кәсіби дайындыққа қатысты, ұйымдастырудың жоқтығымен байланысты мәселелерді бастан кешіруде. Қазіргі уақытта интернационалдандыру үдерістерін басқару бойынша нақты ұсыныстарды әзірлеу, осы процестерді жүзеге асыруға тікелей қатысы бар ЖОО қызметкерлері үшін консультациялар мен тренингтер өткізу жөнінде жұмысты бастау қажет. Мақалада ЖОО-ларға қол ұшын беру мақсатында интернационализациялау стратегиясын және оны жүзеге асыру жолдарын жүйелі аналитикалық тәсілмен бастауға көмектесетін бірқатар ұсыныстар ұсынылады.

Тірек сөздер: интернационалдандыру, интеграция, неофункционализм, интерговернментализм, жоғары білім, ЖОО-ны басқару.

#### Аннотация

Согласно Стратегии образования ЮНЕСКО на 2014–2021 гг. одним из приоритетных направлений является интернационализация. Это направление отражает те тренды и вызовы, которые возникают под воздействием интеграционных процессов на глобальном и региональном уровне. Вузовские стратегии интернационализации на сегодняшний день отображают многообразие и сложность внешней среды, политико-правовые особенности систем, в условиях которых формируется взаимодействие участников академического сотрудничества. В статье анализируется состояние развития процессов интернационализации в казахстанских вузах, успешное внедрение которых зависит и от сотрудников вузов, ответственных за стратегическое управление, и от тех, кто отвечает за операционный менеджмент. Согласно приведенным данным сотрудники отделов международного сотрудничества испытывают проблемы, связанные с информированностью, профессиональной подготовкой, отсутствием организации, объединяющей профессионалов этого направления. Становится очевидным, что в настоящий момент необходимо инициировать работу по составлению конкретных рекомендаций по управлению процессами интернационализации, проводить консультации и обучение сотрудников вузов, которые имеют непосредственное отношение к внедрению этих процессов. В статье предлагается ряд рекомендаций, которые призваны помочь вузам начать системный аналитический подход к разработке стратегии интернационализации и подходов к ее реализации.

Ключевые слова: интернационализация, интеграция, неофункционализм, интерговернментализм, высшее образование, управление вузом.