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Our University – Bologna

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Our University – Bologna

The Bologna Process is an ongoing effort of the European Higher Education Area to “tune” universities from 47 countries so that more predictable outcomes and consistency across national and institutional boundaries, leading to transparency in expectations, employment preparedness and certification, are achieved. It is difficult to disagree with any of that.

It makes sense to facilitate student transfer from one university to another. It makes sense equating three- and four-year baccalaureate degrees from a disparate range of institutions. It makes sense to identify learning outcomes aligned with, or tuned to, business and industry needs, so graduates readily become the workforce of the future.

There are thousands of Bologna Process workers toiling to get universities from 47 nations to create programs with the properties of the McCormick reaper: interchangeable parts and production predictability.

Arguing these goals sounds foolish.

Universities must allow and inspire students to aspire. Anything less makes a trade school of the university. Each has great value, greater still when they are not confused or co-mingled. The sometimes perceived jeopardy is that in order for one person to meet her expectations it is likely that another will fail to meet his, if by no other measure than comparison. One without the other provides neither.

The price of excellence in U.S. higher education for students is that some are successful and some are not.

The Bologna Process aspires to ensure success for college students. Sign up to receive a degree and a job.

Everything is harmonious and tuned.

As our nation acknowledges the process of bankruptcy as a safety net to promote entrepreneurship when exercised by individuals and corporations who risk all for a new product or idea - so too must universities provide that same opportunity to students.

Contrary to the film *Apollo 13*, failure must always be an option.

Tuning is catching on in the United States. Engineering programs in Texas; education, history, and chemistry programs in Indiana; and in Utah, physics and history programs, to name a few, are beginning the “tuning” process. Do not

confuse this process with legitimate articulation between community colleges and universities.

A few disingenuous participants in the Bologna Process suggest that American Universities measure success based on reputation and student inputs, rather than the quality of teaching and learning outcomes. A little truth twisted is a lie. According to the Academic Ranking of World Universities, only three of the top 20 world universities exist beyond U.S. borders (2 in the U.K. and 1 in Japan). Results, not input, make reputation.

My experience suggests that good universities in the United States have always been concerned with excellence in teaching and learning, and in performance of graduates.

Bankruptcy laws were established in England under King Henry VIII. When businesses or individuals failed, they were subject to bankruptcy laws and a stint in debtors' prison for being unable and insolvent. A sense of freedom in America allows businesses and individuals to fail, financially and intellectually, without prison but with the noble and laudable burden of having tried and failed.

American sensibilities pollinate risk.

Now, in a global twist of fate, 47 European nations, including England, are coming together to provide tuning and ease a great strength of the American legacy - the United States Constitution, American enterprise, and American higher education - the opportunity to fail.

At our university real risk must live. If the Bologna Process seeks to tune risk out of the equation, or build frameworks that absolve the risk-taker from unpleasant outcomes, we should say no to all of it, no matter how reasonable it sounds.

All universities, like people and states, need autonomy to facilitate the exercise of free-will, and nurture distinctiveness.