

Strategic Thinking on Developing
International Outsourcing:
The Role of Universities-
Presentation for Global
Outsourcing Summit-GOS 2012-
Kunming, China-Professor
Edward Sankowski, University of
Oklahoma, USA
esankowski@ou.edu

Universities are increasingly global institutions, developing many alliances with domestic and international companies, organizations of many types, including governments and agencies within governments, as well as with other universities, domestic and global, and for-profit corporations.

This presentation starts mainly from a perspective of US based research universities, but I am open to collaborative, cooperative responses from any nation or organization. Often, a particular university will have unique strengths that make it a possible partner in an outsourcing relationship. Indeed, strategic planning at universities and other institutions often encourages this outcome by fostering thought about institutional niches and core activities.

In the US, core activities of universities are usually divided into research, teaching (or education more generally), and public service (or outreach). These three categories are increasingly overlapping. The categories describe individual faculty activities, but also organizational functions as a whole. All three categories apply to, and can improve outsourcing.

Strategic thinking at universities often is/should be thinking WITH other organizations (governments, employers, etc.) Strategic thinking tries to be longer-term, tries to develop knowledge and agreement about goals and priorities among goals of universities, as well as agreement about means and processes to achieve goals.

Good strategic thinking recognizes that changes in direction (as well as changes in the nature and content of strategic thinking itself) may be necessary.

We need both description and evaluation of strategic thinking.

Strategic thinking tries to go beyond "one project after another", "one reaction to a problem after another".

Strategic thinking DOES welcome projects, problem-solving as important, but tries to achieve bigger, longer-term knowledge (theory and practice, science and know-how, thoughtful values).

Strategic thinking about universities and global outsourcing can include a wide range of university subjects: humanities, social sciences, natural sciences, professional studies (engineering, medicine, management, etc.)

I will be more specific about examples in the remainder of this talk.-

(a) about "technology and public policy" as one component of strategic thinking for universities, including thinking about energy issues.

(b) about energy issues, more specifically about shale gas and horizontal hydraulic fracturing ("fracking").

Interdisciplinary and pragmatic university work (research, teaching, outreach) on technology and public policy can contribute greatly to strategic thinking. Information technology can contribute much to strategic thinking. Information technology CHANGES, but does not REPLACE strategic thinking.

A Technology and Public Policy emphasis at universities can be a flexible degree program, linked with research, student internships, including international experiences, faculty consulting with governments, companies, other organizations.

Technology and Public Policy can have a very wide range: engineering, fine arts (film and media studies, including digital media studies), business (organizational studies, optimization), digital humanities, science and society studies, etc.

Energy issues in particular are basic to the modern global economy, financial system. Universities can contribute to strategic thinking about political economy and energy.

The possibilities need to be examined about public policy on biofuels, nuclear energy, fossil fuels, solar energy, wind power, etc.

One example of an issue here is the topic of "fracking". In the US, there are many technological, economic, business, public policy, environmental questions about this.

There are energy/environmental/public health issues. Issues about economic development. Issues about national energy "independence". Government regulation of business activity. Corporate planning, governance.

Fracking raises questions for research, education, outreach activities of universities. There are many opportunities here for contributions to strategic thinking, as well as outsourcing, for governments, businesses, and universities, domestic and global. Cooperation, outsourcing are essential about these issues.

There are many valuable possibilities for cross-national, cross-institutional connections in which organizations can outsource some project or function to be done by some other organization (e.g., a university), domestic or foreign.

Universities can both do basic and applied research; can both describe and evaluate decision processes about technology and public policy, including (not limited to) the energy/environmental area, including (not limited to) shale natural gas exploration/production/processing/distribution/use.

In general, in this and many other areas, globalizing universities have a productive role to play in economic development and outsourcing.