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## Spring in Our Step

This issue of *THE NEW ENGLAND JOURNAL OF HIGHER EDUCATION* has two main foci. One is the journal's annual special report on "Trends & Indicators in Higher Education." The other is our Forum on the relationship of New England higher education to a world it once sat atop.

New England's daily papers offer a drumbeat of recession ... pink slips ... a spike in families seeking free and reduced-price school lunches ... a dive in high-priced business lunches ... a rise in professors and others taking pay cuts to save the jobs of co-workers ... an up-tick in out-of-work professionals busking in the Boston subways ... more pink slips.

*NEJHE's* trends report, on the other hand, offers a baseline. Ours is a longer-term, quantitative check on where higher education stands, or stood, before the economic crash gutted university endowments by 30% or more [see Roger Goodman on "Thriving Through Recession," p. 13], but also before recent stimulus legislation promised a needed federal boost to scientific research and financial aid funds.

Our trends data, rich as usual, are complemented this year with a thought-provoking typology of "multiple pathways" to success and College Board measures of college readiness, among other features.

For this issue's Forum, we asked authors to write short but hard-hitting pieces on a specific angle of their choice related to the internationalization of higher education. It's a world New England once dominated, but no more.

We tossed out a range of possible angles for our authors: How healthy is New England's international "balance of trade" in foreign enrollment and study abroad? How might that balance be tipped by the global financial crisis? Will new colleges popping up from Baghdad to Shanghai be casualties of the global meltdown? What does an effective international partnership look like after all the hands have been shaken and photos taken? How deep is the chasm between international curriculum, including the old-fashioned notion of junior year abroad, and the new-fashioned rhetoric about preparing *global citizens*?

Some angles remain for future exploration. Are the international collaborations taking shape on New England campuses linked meaningfully to the ethnic and immigrant communities in New England cities and towns?

A few years ago, Maine officials began equipping students in grades 7 and 8 with laptops to prepare them for the information economy. Is it time now for the New England states to require students to study Mandarin, for example, to prepare them for the global economy?

This issue's two foci come together in many ways. Our Trends & Indicators data show 48,000 foreign students are enrolled on New England campuses with a \$1.5 billion economic impact on the region. Plus, small New England colleges are among U.S. leaders in the percentage of their undergraduates studying abroad at any given time.

But as our Forum authors note, even with its robust tradition of international exchange, New England faces new and old challenges. Too many exchanges still benefit mostly relatively well-off students, whether they are leaving the United States for study abroad or traveling here from foreign countries. And too many students expect an experience abroad to amount to one long party.

Yet, some U.S. students are taking the opportunity of study abroad to learn and help others in new ways. Through the nonprofit organization Engineers Without Borders, for example, engineering students and faculty are building water-distribution systems in undeveloped countries such as Honduras. Contributors and correspondents to the user-generated website Glimpse.org, "have done everything from exploring gay nightlife in Jordan to visiting a prosthetic foot factory in India to voyaging with Maori fishermen in New Zealand."

To be sure, the questions facing New England higher education are endless; so are the challenges. That's a familiar trend. What's new to the equation, however, is Barack Obama. From his ethnic-sounding name that xenophobic talkmeisters and political opponents tried to exploit during the campaign, to his vows of engagement, rather than confrontation, with other nations, Obama indeed offers change. Perfect timing for U.S. higher education and the world? Let's hope.

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