

From the Editor

In a 2 June 2000 article in the *Chronicle of Higher Education*, journalist Beth McMurtrie described the establishment of American university campuses in a prosperous new market frontier that was at the forefront of American cultural, economic, and geopolitical concern a quarter century ago: Japan. Temple University, of Philadelphia,

was the first university to offer an American-style college education when it opened a branch campus [in Tokyo] in 1982. Lured by a potentially lucrative market, more than 30 other institutions soon followed, establishing campuses across the country that promised a rapid improvement in English-language skills and a cheaper alternative to studying abroad. The effort was a fiasco. Only five American branch campuses have survived, and one of them [Minnesota State University–Akita] is soon to close. Precarious financial arrangements have undermined most of the programs, but culture clashes have ultimately been the cause of their demise.

In a recent update by David McNeill (*Chronicle*, 23 June 2010), Temple's campus is named the sole American survivor of the Japanese experiment.

Despite recent news of the closure of most programs at Michigan State University's two-year old campus in Dubai, we can hope that the dozens of other new American and other foreign university campuses and programs opening in the Gulf and elsewhere in the Middle East will take a different course. We can hope that they will thrive, developing robust traditions of academic freedom, challenging classroom teaching, professional development for their faculty, and meaningful shared governance. We can hope that they not only enroll the children of local elites and privileged foreign students from Europe, Asia, and the U.S., but that they work to improve the lives and provide educational opportunities for some of the region's least fortunate residents, the migrant workers whose sweat and blood have helped make the presence of those cosmopolitan university

campuses possible (<http://www.hrw.org/en/reports/2006/11/11/building-towers-cheating-workers>).

In this issue, MESA's past president, Virginia Aksan, takes a broad look at academic practice in North America, noting that libraries, archives, and museums—to which I would add universities themselves—are “serendipitous and organic collections of knowledge, dependent on financing, donors, avid collectors, subject expertise, and politics. In that regard, they can be seen as sites of contestation, vulnerable to destruction, and subject to the winds of public opinion and fashions.” Serendipity, organic interconnection, encounters unexpected, missed, and unwanted; parting words, personal reminiscences, and other unpredictable traces of the past are the substance of much of the rest of the issue. These are things that rational planning generally ignores. But what makes universities, museums, and archives unique is very much like what makes civilizations rich: the slow convergence of resources and circumstances over long periods of time, the development of local traditions, and the effects of accumulated histories. One of the enduring questions we face is how to use those histories as an aid to rational planning, how to articulate a new vision of the utility of “curiosity research,” and how to build the kind of institutional and public memory that might allow—as just one example—the experiences of a scant generation ago in Japan to inform our understanding of the likely course of events today and tomorrow in Dubai and Qatar and Kuwait.

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Editor