

Effects of Transnational Tertiary Education on Students –

Proposing an Assessment Model

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Short Biography for Associate Professor Colleen Liston

Dr Colleen Liston is Director of the Quality Office at Curtin University of Technology. She has been employed in academic and management positions in tertiary education for around twenty years, including experience in international education. She has presented numerous papers at international conferences on Assessment of Quality in Higher Education, Institutional Research, Transnational Education, and Evaluation. Her PhD researched “The Structure Educational Accreditation”. Professor Liston has an Advanced Diploma of Quality Management and was commissioned to write a text for Open University Press UK titled “Managing Quality & Standards in Post-secondary Education” which is due for publication late 1998.

Abstract: Transnational tertiary education is an ancient, growing field but one comparatively little investigated to date, especially as regards its effects on students who study in branches of foreign institutions of higher education or cross national boundaries in pursuit of learning at the tertiary level. Although transnational tertiary education has been part of the scene since Plato's death, the matter took dramatic turns with the massification of higher education since World War II, and with the development of the Internet-based *virtual university* during more recent years. The aim of the paper is to bring together results of international workshops and presentations on this topic where qualitative research was undertaken on elements affecting students undertaking transnational education. The taxonomy used in the study is presented, and is further developed to guide providers and accrediting bodies in setting and monitoring standards in all aspects of transnational tertiary education.

The global business and professional marketplace seeks personnel with wide-ranging educational and training backgrounds. Academic registries, admissions and matriculation departments are looking for ways to equitably evaluate courses and degrees not only from within their own countries but from others around the world. There are two major players in the transnational standards field. One is the ISO 9000 series of auditable quality standards and the other is the evolving Global Alliance for Transnational Education (GATE). The former is a system developed by the International Organisation for Standardisation, which was founded in 1947 and is a federation of around 120 nations. The latter was founded in the United States of America (USA) in 1995 and has affiliates in South Africa, Canada, Chile, Mexico, Ireland, China, New Zealand, Australia, and the United Kingdom (UK). The United Nations Education, Scientific and Cultural Organisation (UNESCO), the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development and the International Network of Quality Assurance Agencies in Higher Education are also founding affiliates.

GATE has identified its role in three areas of need:

- 1) A reliable and current database of transnational educational programs globally.
- 2) To co-operatively develop principles of good practice.
- 3) An international forum to co-ordinate quality assurance and other activities related to principled advocacy of transnational programs.

Affiliates and staff of The Center for Quality Assurance in International Education and GATE, have proposed a set of *Principles for Transnational Education Courses (Degree Programs)*. The Principles provide a basis for reviewing courses offered internationally. A range of criteria for each Principle clarifies requirements subject to external review. They are broad-ranging and address the following eight elements:

- 1) Goals and Objectives

Participants who enrol should understand the goals and objectives which fit appropriately in the provider's purposes and competencies.

- 2) Standards

The provider must ensure that courses are comparable with, and meet the educational quality criteria of, those offered by the provider in its own country.

3) Legal Matters

Transnational courses and programs must comply with all appropriate laws of the host country.

4) Student Enrolment and Admission

Participants must be treated equitably and ethically. Full disclosure of pertinent information and full student status or equivalent with the provider organisation must pertain.

5) Human Resources

There must be a sufficient number of fully qualified persons to provide courses and programs.

Activities must be supervised and regularly evaluated by the provider.

6) Physical and Financial Resources

The provider must assure that an adequate learning environment and sufficient appropriate resources are available until all obligations to enrolled participants are fulfilled.

7) Teaching and Learning

Courses and programs must be pedagogically sound with respect to the methods of provision and the nature and needs of the participants.

8) Evaluation

Courses and programs must be regularly and appropriately evaluated as a normal part of the provider organisation's activities, with the results of the evaluations used for improvement.

Today thousands of colleges and universities offer programs of study to citizens of other countries, and hundreds of thousands of students travel across national boundaries in pursuit of tertiary education. For example, in Hong Kong nearly 500 tertiary courses are being offered by overseas institutions from Australia, the UK, the USA, and other countries (Chuang & Leong, 1998).

Transnational tertiary education is thriving and it can be improved. Tertiary institutions sometimes see transnational education, virtual or not, as one of the keys to thriving - or indeed to survival! As it has for centuries, tertiary education pulls in people who covet the wealth, literacy, knowledge, and technology of the learned (Fletcher, 1998).

Using case-studies, two international workshops in the USA and Malaysia, and three other presentations in Australia, New Zealand and France have explored a number of elements across a range of transnational study scenarios, with special emphasis on the legal, ethical, and practical implications of effects on students. The qualitative research provided insights and information on the basis of which to:

- promote understandings of the many varieties of tertiary education across international boundaries with particular attention on how such experiences affect students,
- promote the adoption of ethical policies that balance institutional and student responsibilities toward the society in which tertiary education is embedded and supported,
- promote the development of values-sensitive procedures to exploit opportunities and solve operational problems in and around tertiary education.

Taxonomy used in the Study: Elucidation and Elaboration.

A taxonomy used in the workshops and other presentations was illustrated by real-life vignettes to explore issues of concern to, and effects on students in transnational education.

Deliberations on the vignettes yielded the following outcomes. They are presented using the taxonomy adopted in the study:

I. Students crossing national boundaries.

A. In accredited programs (courses).

1. Offered through traditional modes of instruction.

a) Students who **study abroad in programs offered by fully accredited institutions** but who are later caught in the backwash of monetary exchange rate changes usually:

- Realise higher than average rates of return on their investments because the UK, the USA, and many other nations substantially subsidise tertiary education, greatly expanding the public sector within higher education and charging low tuition and academic fees, whilst students forego modest earnings and graduates realise high earnings (Witmer, 1997).
- Learn that personal choices sometimes have unintended consequences.

b) Students who win foreign study scholarships often:

- Are assigned tutors or advisors to help them make the transition to the new culture. Many fail to understand that it may be their responsibility to choose a program and a *Personal Tutor* (e.g. in a UK university a faculty member teaching on a program has usually been allocated about 6 to 10 students for whose personal welfare the faculty member has pastoral responsibility). At the very least, the *Personal Tutor* gives advice on what to do next to solve academic and other problems.
- Undertake a cross-cultural communication course offered by their host institution to all foreign students.
- Are well cared for by members of the local power elite in the communities to which they move.
- Are less ethnocentric, face greater professional employment prospects, and realise high rates of return on their investments in tertiary education.
- Have grant funds to offset additional expenses and their lifetime incomes are substantially higher!

c) Adventurous students who cross over national boundaries without sponsorship often:

- Enter institutions that unfortunately merely regard transnational students as part of a revenue stream.
- Are victims of crime.
- Mature rapidly as they cope with harsh realities.

These vignettes gave rise to the hotly debated question of which student-centred ethic should be valued by the institution as best promoting maturity: the student as an adult learning from experience, or the student as a dependent learning through guidance and control.

I. Students crossing national boundaries.

A. In accredited programs (courses).

2. Offered through non-traditional modes of instruction.

a) Employer-sponsored students who study abroad in residential, non-traditional programs

offered by fully accredited institutions often:

- Like students in military academies, compete for the benefits of sponsorship.
- Follow very narrow, prescribed curricula that prepare them for single occupations.

b) Students who *accept cooling out degrees as compromises* typically:

- Need to take home a degree or lose face.
- Have expectations, based on past experience, where favours (and even academic credentials) can be bought.
- Seek out powerful allies or vulnerable conspirators.
- Tend to pass on information about which tertiary education institutions willingly *play the game*.

I. Students crossing national boundaries.

B. In non-accredited programs (courses).

1. Offered through traditional modes of instruction.

Compliant students who **venture over national boundaries to welcoming but unaccredited colleges** typically:

- Do not understand the quality and responsibility issues embedded in accreditation systems.
- Accept institutional brochures and claims concerning standards at face value.
- Spend a lot of very costly time, effort, and money.
- Realise lower than average rates of return on their investments in tertiary education. Their costs are higher; their lifetime incomes are not!

2. Offered through non-traditional modes of instruction.

Naive students who **respond to advertisements in the popular media** frequently:

- Lose their time and money investments. The proprietary institutions are trying to make money - sometimes they are corporations listed on the stock exchange!
- Face very narrow ranges of preparation-for-work courses that do not prepare them well for career advancement.

- Have little chance for redress or restitution in the courts because one person's degree mill is another person's alternative university. For example, in the District Court of Fiorenzuola d'Arda (Italy) in 1958, Amorosa d'Aragona Francesco was brought to trial for using a degree from *Accademia di Studi Superiori Minerva* (also known as *Accademia di Studi Superiori Phoenix* and as Phoenix University), a tertiary institution identified as a degree mill by the Council of Europe. The court apparently ruled that the institution may not be of high quality but it is legal. Note that not the granting institution, but the degree buyer usually suffers - this under the ancient rule *caveat emptor*: let the buyer beware (Bear and Bear, 1996 pp 251-270).

II. Institutions crossing national boundaries.

A. In accredited programs (courses).

1. Offered through traditional modes of instruction.

Students who **study at home in programs offered by foreign institutions** often:

- See them as less rigorous second-chance programs that can be pursued after they have failed the entrance or completion requirements of domestic institutions.
- Earn degrees in programs not available through other local institutions.
- Begin to learn the intricacies of a foreign culture in preparation for emigration.

II. Institutions crossing national boundaries.

A. In accredited programs (courses).

2. Offered through non-traditional modes of instruction.

Students who **study in programs offered by foreign institutions through the Internet, or other distance learning systems**, typically:

- Have uncommon self-motivation, self-direction, and self-discipline to embrace a cue-free electronic method of learning which “extroverted personalities, the kind who do their best thinking in interaction, who network, who think by talking, or who rely heavily on sensory data are perhaps more likely to find...difficult” (Cargill and Jevons, 1998 p4).
- Show that “process matters need only be considered when outcomes are not...achieved” (Liston,

1998a p10).

- Have difficulty making the transition from individual learning - perhaps even *cocooning* - to the experiential learning that socialises and prepares them to be effective team members.
- Demonstrate the behaviour of people who “abandon their own traditional ways of doing particular things in favour of ways they have discovered in the cultures of others” (Sowell, 1996 p384).

Historically, students from various nations have gone to Britain, Germany, and the United States to acquire the human capital needed to advance home countries. However the movement of people and the transmission of knowledge and technology are becoming increasingly separate activities. International computer networks, specialised books and journals, consulting firms, and government agencies facilitate the international transfer of knowledge, skills, and values. And once a base of knowledge has been transferred to another nation, its own people can school others at home while staying abreast of international developments.

III. Both students and institutions crossing national boundaries.

A. In accredited programs (courses).

1. *Offered through traditional modes of instruction.*

a) Students who **study abroad in programs offered by their home institutions**, *i.e.* the colleges or universities from whom they seek degrees, typically:

- Incur the expenses of travel to, and living in, a foreign land. Though only a small - 15 to 20 - percentage of the costs, all students realise [income foregone, tuition, books and supplies required (Witmer, 1979)] that these additional expenses are seldom covered by student financial aid packages.
- Face very narrow ranges of academic courses. Though courses in language and literary culture abound, courses in other subjects required for professional preparation are seldom available.
- Realise lower than average rates of return on their investments in tertiary education. Their costs are higher; their lifetime incomes are not!

b) Students who **study in fully accredited institutions associated with world class universities**

often:

- Develop global perspectives.
- Earn degrees from internationally recognised universities at low cost.
- Transfer to other institutions and programs on the basis of established records rather than scores on exams, and do so with advanced standing.
- Almost automatically attain membership in professional organisations.
- Participate in the transition of their universities to world class status through the use of the Internet to create institution-based virtual universities.

2. Offered through non-traditional modes of instruction.

Students who **study abroad in programs offered by fully accredited foreign institutions**

recommended by academic mentors typically:

- Have much wider study opportunities than their stay-at-home peers, *e.g.* they can pursue degrees in accredited programs not available in their home institutions.
- Continue a time-honoured tradition of going to a foreign land to acquire human capital needed for advancement.
- Require professor-mentors who fully understand the joint programs of the two institutions *and are completely committed to making them work.*
- Are less ethnocentric, *but may become more ethnocentric depending on how different the institutional and society cultures are!* If the gap is small, the students may not change much; if the gap is large, the students may form subcultures within which they experience little that is new and different.
- Have greater professional employment opportunities, and realise better rates of return on their investments in tertiary education. They have additional expenses, as previously indicated, but their lifetime incomes are substantially higher!

b) Other students who study under moonlighting professors frequently:

- Learn that most reputable PhD-granting faculties and many business firms do not recognise

MBA's nor other business degrees from unaccredited courses or for other reasons (e.g. from US institutions that fail to meet the standards of the American Assembly of Collegiate Schools of Business).

- Pay exorbitant academic fees for their courses and consequently realise very low rates of return on their investments.
- Tell friends but do not (cannot afford to) seek redress and retribution.

Critique

Reviewers, respondents, correspondents, workshop participants, and others report that students in transnational tertiary education have diverse experiences giving rise to the following among many issues (Liston and Witmer, 1998a & b; Liston 1998b).

Diversity versus acculturation.

Does the transnational tertiary education experience promote diversity as students learn new languages, participate in different cultures, and learn to tolerate others? (Barrow, 1998) Or does it lead to the formation of a set of small fragmented groups of transnational students, each group representing a particular home culture with little or no common social meeting among them or between them and the predominant local group of students? Or does it promote the overt development of one world culture and the assimilation of students to the dominant, politically correct values of the elite? Does it produce the homogenisation, or even the *McDonaldisation* of world culture?

Whilst pseudo-internationalists wring their hands over clashes among races, religions, and other sub-cultures, ordinary people - professors, counsellors, and students - are creating the inclusive society which perpetuates learning as central to the prosperity that will carry them into the future!

Mentorship versus adulthood.

Are students adults? Or should they be treated differently than others of the same age? Do colleges

and universities coddle students whilst the surrounding, supporting society waives juvenile misbehaviours into adult court and prison? Do mentoring, counselling, advising, and human development services promote or impede the evolution of mature responsibility?

Those who see students as responsible adults see the diversion of monies from the instructional mission of the university as indefensible. Clearly, better shaping of the debate and more definitive research is needed. In the meantime, each institution decides, during each budget cycle, where to put additional time, effort, and other resources.

Knowledge knows no boundaries, flowing electronically throughout the world. Many institutions and students in transnational tertiary education illustrate the realities of the new international market for talented graduates of all races. In the world wide Internet community, disciplined effort and creativity are rewarded, the powerless become powerful, and governments wane (Dyson, 1997). Though governments may confiscate the wealth of the educated, they cannot confiscate the knowledge and skills that create that wealth. People ignore international borders and leave their native lands despite the efforts of politicians to restrict the learning of the globally-connected. Special legislation, legal actions, and border controls do not stanch *brain drain* (Ascher, 1997). While faculties, voters, politicians, and governments fuss, technologists and little children are creating the new world culture in a common language that conveys truths that crosses frontiers and cannot be stopped at national borders.

Government, accreditation and quality assurance.

Governments rightly hold institutions of higher education accountable and virtually all governments have in place some procedures for higher education quality assurance. Surely governments would make worse decisions did accreditors not provide pertinent information and data to them. Indeed, were the governments of the world to lose their trust in the commitment and objectivity of quality assurance agencies, higher education would soon be controlled by even worse bureaucracies beholden to committees beholden to politicians beholden to lobbyists and voters, to the probable ultimate

detriment of all (Liston, in press 1998). Well-grounded efforts to influence governments abound (de Winter Hebron, 1997).

The characteristics of each mission and the actual practices should be the focus of bodies conferring accreditation that denotes the worthiness of an institution's offerings. In Australia the Australian Vice-Chancellors' Committee has developed a "Code of Ethical Practice in the Provision of Education to International Students by Australian Universities" (AV-CC, 1998)

At best, potential students have access to good information and data on graduation rates, rates-of-return on private investments in higher education instruction in various major programs of study, follow-up studies of post-graduate placements, reports on the job market outlook, and faculty who are tenured, *i.e.* faculty who fearlessly pursue and purvey the truth undaunted by politically-correct administrators and governing boards (Ramphela, 1997; Psacharopoulos, 1997; Reutter, 1997). *At worst*, students have nothing beyond the self-serving flyers and publications of the institutions of higher education and their hawkers and fakers. There remains an implicit trust in education systems and the quality of programs offered. When the education market evolves into profit-making businesses, consumers should adopt the same *buyer beware* stance they do for other purposes (Kells, 1997; Landes, 1998).

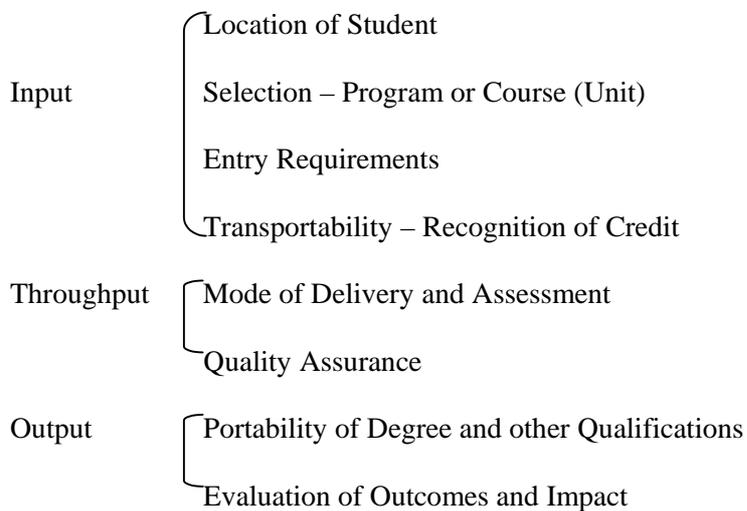
Taxonomies.

Transnational tertiary education has been, and continues in transition. Taxonomies help, but what should be the basis of classification? Transnational status of the student, or of the institution? Status of the institution: accredited or non-accredited? Method of instruction: traditional or methodologically different? The number of problems students face? The value of outcomes? The list is almost as varied as the participants in the workshops and responses given in discussions around the topic. Overall, any taxonomy used by providers and accrediting bodies in setting and monitoring standards should include elements beyond the location of the student and the program. The taxonomy used in the study has been expanded and is presented as a model for assessment of elements to be

considered by those monitoring standards and quality in transnational education.

Model for Assessment of Elements Affecting Students in Transnational Education.

A taxonomy incorporating a number of elements which play a part during what may be termed the input, throughput and output phases of a student's educational experience has been developed as a result of qualitative research and is proposed for adoption by governments, accreditors, auditors and academic communities. Those charged with monitoring offerings via the Internet need to take cognisance of compounding factors such as experiential, service and social interactions other than those that take place on the web. Major headings for each of the three phases are:



Location of Student

Own Country

- Face to face
 - local university with international practicum component
 - university in another province/region/state with different standards and or accreditation requirements
- Combined
 - distance education/face to face block/university
 - open learning/virtual and enrolment in another program for degree
- Virtual

- open learning consortia (distance/virtual)
- internet

Another Country

- Face to face
 - local campus
 - campus of yet another country's university
 - campus of home university
- Distance education

Issues

Cross-cultural

Language

Financial ability

Technological ability

Equity of opportunity

Honesty in marketing

Value in the long term.

Selection

Program

- Full program available in location desired. Mode acceptable - full-time or part-time
- Part programs - full-time or part-time as above - have to use another level to "top up"

Courses

- Across programs
- Across countries
- More than one mode
- Full-time versus part-time

Issues

Cost and other financial issues

Technological ability

Availability

Language

Honesty in marketing

Quality of programs and staff

Value in the long term

Support services

Socialisation (especially for face to face) or *cocooning* (especially for virtual courses)

Legal and ethical.

Entry Requirements

- Translation and standardisation of secondary level qualifications and scores (*e.g.* A or O levels; TER; tertiary entrance examinations)
 - who is the final arbiter?
 - who audits the arbiter?
- Age – post secondary only?
- Recognition of prior learning
- Percentage required to be taken from conferring university

Issues

Equivalence of standards

Prior knowledge and learning opportunities

Language

Bridging courses

Cross-cultural

Flexibility in credit transfer

Age (? post-secondary or course taken while in secondary school).

Transportability (during the course)

- Who will give credit for courses?
- For how many courses?

- What is the time limit?
- How are linkages made?
 - knowledge bases
 - skills and abilities levels
- How does the jigsaw come together?
- What does the final picture represent?

Issues

Honesty in marketing

Equivalence (knowledge, skills, professional recognition *e.g.* registration, certification)

Coherence

Quality of the degree

Ability of the graduate (an engineer with $\frac{3}{4}$ of required knowledge and skills)

Legal and ethical.

Mode of Delivery and Assessment

- Face to face – one or more languages
- Video, computer-assisted, audio – one or more languages
- Distance education materials – one or more languages
- Interactive multimedia – one or more languages
 - Range of media
- (Merely) competency – based in modules or problem-solving [*i.e.* will there be (is there likely to be) transformation learning?]
- Percentage required to be taken and assessed at the conferring university
- Virtual (is the degree virtual too?!!)

Issues

Language

Cross-cultural

Socialisation

Technology

Cost

Ability to pay

Cocooning

Upper middle class issues (versus diversity)

Legal and ethical.

Quality Assurance

By whom

- range of agencies and governments

Of what

- institutions
- programs
- courses
- professional content (accreditation or validation)
- staff qualifications, experience, skills
- entry and exit of students (value added and attrition information)
- “student services”

Equity issues

- legal
 - ethical
 - cultural
- } differences

‘Virtual quality’

Issues

Equivalence versus diversity

Standards a) Entry

b) Throughput

c) Exit

Students

Staff

Programs

Services

Graduates —————> Employability

Lifelong learning

Who determines (what is important). How?

Who monitors (what is important) and reviews criteria. How?

What about improvement (too bad about accountability and profit)

Legal and ethical.

Portability of Qualifications

- Transnational content?
- What does the final jigsaw picture look like (is the 'head' in the right place)?
- Practical application of knowledge, skills and abilities.
- Useful to
 - employers, sponsors, governments
 - individuals – for a while
 - for ever (in terms of lifelong learning; transfer other careers)
 - value for money?
 - more valuable than another?
 - valuable for life?
- Who decides which is valuable and which is not?
- How transparent is this level at the 'Input' stage?

Issues

Honesty in marketing

Quality management

Evaluation of outcomes

Transparency

Graduateness

Attributes and skills

Employer satisfaction

Graduate satisfaction for life.

Evaluation of Outcomes and Impact

International?

National (*e.g.* federal government or agency)

- Funding ∴ accountability – efficiency?
- Quality – improvement – effectiveness?

[Local or state government]

Institutional

- Meeting mission and goals – efficiency and effectiveness.
(? educational purposes)

Program/Research/Professional content

Individual

- Employers – Attributes of Graduates (expectations of knowledge and skills)
- For professional registration or certification
- Self – over-time

Community impact – Research impact – Scholarship impact

Transnational outcomes – impact

Of offerings and take up.

Issues

Who – Government; other agency; accreditors; auditors; SELF – institution and program

Why – accountability versus input (against mission - ? checks and balances on the mission – it may be to satisfy shareholders)

How – self assessment; audit; *quality police*; peers

When – before – on-going – how often?

What – ? criteria used – for institutions; programs; individuals; accreditors; agencies etc.

Legal and ethical

Marketing by nation?
 by institution?
 by program?
 by shareholders' agents?!

Summary

The inevitable globalisation of the post-secondary educational marketplace and a world market for international students, estimated by UNESCO back in 1992 to be more than 1.2 million, has moved the need for international and transnational standards into sharper focus. The number of participants in courses taken in their own country from an international source is unknown. Countries enrolling students from other countries count them, but numbers are unknown for those enrolled for corporate and international courses. Furthermore, transnational culture is being forged in tertiary education institutions and through world-wide electronic media. This paper has brought together considerations by educators and others from almost every nation in the world. A taxonomy has been developed and has been presented as the basis for assessment of standards and quality of elements which affect students in transnational education.

There are a number of issues barely touched on in this paper which require further investigation. What should be done to address the dilemma facing accreditors, auditors, and quality assurers who use criteria with loopholes for voracious (and perhaps immoral!) providers? What, if anything, should be done to forestall homogenisation in response to mass consumption? What should be done to ensure continued growth in creativity? What should be done to stimulate the re-envisioning of creative human intelligence and recognition of the *ancien dictum* "The activity of theoretical study is best" (Aristotle, 332 BC1177a19, in Irwin, 1985p284).

And finally, what should be done to distinguish real universities from virtual universities? Embodied knowledge and skill have been the hallmarks of tertiary education. Should tangible, tactile, experiential elements of *service learning*, unmediated by computer, be added as a third hallmark

(Dye, 1998)? If so, how should this be recorded in permanent student records?

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