

**LAUDATIO at the Awarding of the Honorary Membership of IREG
Observatory to Jamie Merisotis, President/CEO, Lumina Foundation for
Education, USA, and Detlef Müller-Böling, former Director of CHE, Germany**

*Dear Jamie Merisotis, President and CEO, Lumina Foundation for Education,
Dear Professor Detlef Müller-Böling, founder and former Director of CHE,
Dear Colleagues,*

It is a special privilege to present on behalf of IREG Observatory this *laudatio* which in academic tradition is a particular way of expressing a collective recognition to persons for contributions they made to a specific academic discipline, field or institution. Tonight's ceremony is such an occasion as we wish to recognize the contribution to higher education in general, and more specifically to issues relevant to academic excellence and ranking, made by two persons – Jamie Merisotis and Detlef Müller-Böling.

As you know IREG Observatory, which formally exists since October 2009, is an international non-governmental and not-for-profit organization of a scientific and educational nature. Its members are those academic and non-academic organizations and institutions that are engaged in the area of academic ranking and excellence as well as other aspects of quality of higher education. Its statute does not foresee individual membership. At the same time we know that in any organization the individuals are behind ideas and plans which make the difference. This is particularly valid for such organization as IREG Observatory, which is at an early stage of its functioning. Both Jamie Merisotis and Detlef Müller-Böling played a key role in the inception of our organization. Therefore, in conformity with a statute of our organization, has been bestowed on them a distinction of the Honorary Member of IREG Observatory.

Dear Colleagues,

We can look at the contributions made by Jamie Merisotis and Detlef Müller-Böling in relation to university rankings from a quite different perspective taking into consideration that Detlef was fully involved in this activity while Jamie's encounters with rankings has been that of a policy analyst and informed observer of this new phenomenon in the way we evaluate performance and quality of higher education.

Many of us present here today met Jamie, when he was President of the Institute for Higher Education Policy (IHEP) in Washington, DC, which he founded in 1993. If I am not mistaken, the first time I met Jamie in June 2001 in Hiroshima at the Round Table on "System-Level Indicators for Higher/Tertiary Education" which was jointly organized by the Research Institute for Higher Education of Hiroshima University and UNESCO-CEPES. I have quickly noted that he is not only a nice fellow but that he is an expert on a wide range of issues inside and outside of higher education. Even not living in France he has impressed me with his knowledge about Tour de France.

What brought us to Hiroshima was our understanding that despite taxing limitations there is a need for better quantitative indicators reflecting performance of higher

education at the institutional, system-wide as well as international level. It is at that time that rankings have brought our attention.

In his introductory remarks presented at the meeting convened by the Council for Higher Education Accreditation International Commission in January 2006 in San Francisco, Jamie explains his interest in rankings in the following way:

“I come to the dialogue about rankings with a good deal of skepticism about their ability to serve as effective indicators of institutional quality. But I think it’s fair to say that whether or not colleges and universities agree with the various ranking systems and league tables findings is largely irrelevant. Ranking systems clearly are here to stay. As a result, I’ve come to the conclusion that it is important to learn all that we can about how these ranking system work, and to provide a framework for those who do ranking so that they can improve and enhance their methodologies.”

It was this last observation which most likely motivated Jamie to involve the Institute for Higher Education Policy to organize in 2004 in Washington, DC, a meeting which was a milestone event for the International Ranking Expert Group (IREG). It represented a continuation of the work initiated at the historical meeting organized in 2002 in Warsaw which to my knowledge was the first international meeting entirely devoted to the phenomenon of rankings and league tables.

At that time IREG served as a convening entity for international dialogue. The need for such cross-national dialogue became even more evident after the presentation made at the meeting in Washington by Liu Nian Cai who with his team at the Jiao Tong University produced the Academic Ranking of World Universities, widely referred to as the “Shanghai ranking”. This was first international presentation of the Shanghai ranking.

Dear Colleagues,

After agreeing on the name IREG, like any self-respecting entity, there was a need to design a logo. For such task Detlef was “our man” as he was able during a brief organizational get-together which was convened at the meeting in Washington, to come up with the logo which we are using since that time.

By the way, I was told that thanks to his creativity CHE-ranking has a recognizable and symbolic sign of an “owl”. This is why his colleagues in CHE were, in twist and tongue manner, asking themselves “when the ‘Owl’ is going to retire”... Even if formally “Owl” has retired, he is still very active in higher education and his wisdom is a great asset for CHE, in particular when acting as Associate of CHE-Consult.

Let me still continue briefly with achievements of Detlef Müller-Böling in the field of higher education. After his term as the Rector of the Dortmund University, he founded in 1994 – CHE - Centre for Higher Education Development. Thanks to Detlef, first ranking was published in 1998 and since then is one of the major fields of activity of CHE. Ranking has become his passion. And with such stand on rankings, he had engaged himself in numerous discussions, often turned into ardent disputes,

with the German universities and professors who in the first years of CHE-ranking did not like to be “compared like washing machines in consumer tests.”

Perseverance with which Detlef was pursuing an introduction of modern idea on management and governance of German higher education institutions was well-known. His book “*Die entfesselte Hochschule*” [“The unleashed university”] has influenced debates in Germany on higher education policy. It served as basis to formulate a rationale for setting up the strategy and activities of CHE. The work done in the field of higher education policy and perceived influence earned Detlef a nickname of “*der heimliche Bildungsminister*” [“a secret minister of education”]. But in my opinion, that knowing how academia thinks and acts, he has cleverly positioned CHE as a body between academia and politics and which is providing a bi-partisan analysis and advice. The “Owl” knew what he is doing...

Although Detlef has shown a preference for a multi-dimensional ranking methodology and avoidance of ordinal presentation of ranking’s results, in his other passion which is “sailing”, he is head-on competitor with clear fondness of being at the top. It is this affection that brought him 2010 International German Championship in a sailing class “2.4mR”.

For those who like me whose knowledge about boats goes as far as seeing the difference between rowing and sailing boats let me quote what information can be found about 2.4mR in Wikipedia:

„The 2.4mR class is a one-person keelboat. It is one of few classes designated as an international class and its design is controlled by the International Sailing Federation (ISAF). The boat is primarily used for racing and the class holds highly competitive national events in many countries. 2.4mR is ideal for physically disabled integrated sailing since the sailor does not move in the boat, and everything is adjustable from right in front of the sailor. Both hand-steering and foot-steering are possible. The boat is sailed without a spinnaker, but with a whisker-pole.”

Dear Colleagues,

Jamie Merisotis, is now the President of the Lumina Foundation, which is the largest American foundation devoted to tertiary education with a total assets exceeding \$ 1.5 billion US dollars and disbursing each year some \$ 60-70 million US dollars. Currently, Jamie and his team, is focused on the achievement of one big goal - that by 2025, 60 percent of Americans would hold at least two-year college degree. Right now, less than 40 percent of the U.S. population has attained such level.

For those of us familiar with changes in European higher education, in particular those taking place in the context of the Bologna Process, is quite significant to note that Jamie Merisotis is seeing success of that initiative must also meet a “quality challenge”.

In a recent address at the Australian Embassy in Washington, DC on September 7, 2010, Jamie stated that:

“emphasis on quality means we can’t simply fixate on increasing the number of degrees being granted. Those degrees must mean something. They must demonstrate that students have attained the knowledge and skills that position them for success - in the workplace and in life. In short, quality is a key”.

Later on he points out that:

“Questions of quality are the purview of the teaching staff who determines the content of degree programs and to accreditors who review programs and institutions every so often. Yet accreditation conveys little public information about the value of a degree. And many faculty are hesitant to assign specific public value or meaning with regard to the quality of their offerings. In fact, about the only public information that surfaces is what’s available in rankings such as those provided by U.S. News and other mainstream media. And that information has generally been of little use because the rankings are based primarily on subjective or reputational measures, not on measures of actual student learning.”

It is an important message for providers of rankings to reflect better on the teaching dimension of rankings.

Dear Colleagues,

I am aware that presented *laudatio* only partially give record of achievements of Jamie Merisotis and Detlef Müller-Böling but I am convinced that I was able to demonstrate that they fully merit being the first two Honorary Members of IREG Observatory. A confirmation of this distinction is a diploma and individually casted designed by Polish artist – Piotr Łyczkowski.

Finally, please join me to wish them all the best and look forward to next opportunity of seeing them at our future events.

Thank you.

Dr. Jan Sadlak, President of IREG Observatory

Berlin, 7 October 2010