



# Academic Star Wars

EXCELLENCE INITIATIVES  
IN GLOBAL PERSPECTIVE

EDITED BY  
MARIA YUDKEVICH, PHILIP G. ALTBACH,  
AND JAMIL SALMI

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Excellence Initiatives in Global Perspective

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**A pioneering collection of case studies on the global phenomenon of academic excellence initiatives and how they shape the performance of research universities.**

Academic excellence initiatives (AEIs)—special government-sponsored programs to improve research universities—have provided billions of dollars to top universities and represent perhaps the most significant effort in the past half-century to jump-start academic research. The contributors to *Academic Star Wars*, superbly edited by Maria Yudkevich, Philip G. Altbach, and Jamil Salmi, analyze AEIs in nine European and Asian countries, including China, Japan, Malaysia, South Korea, Taiwan, Denmark, France, Germany, and Russia, and offer penetrating insights into the successes and problems of these initiatives, as well as into the broader system of higher education itself.

*Academic Star Wars* provides a comprehensive analysis of AEIs across the globe as it seeks to understand the impact of these programs on national higher education systems. The contributors explore a host of topics, including how the idea of excellence varies across national systems; the lessons to be drawn from the most successful AEIs; the consequences of AEIs, both intended and unintended, for participating universities; and whether AEIs ensure a significant impact on the global standing of national higher education systems. Finally, the contributors offer policy recommendations for national decision-makers and university leaders, taking into account the variety of initial conditions of national higher education systems and the differences in AEI design, scope, and funding.

**Maria Yudkevich** is Research Fellow in the Center for International Higher Education at Boston College. Previously she was Professor and Head of the Center for Institutional Studies at HSE University, Moscow. She is a coauthor of *Higher Education in Russia*.

**Philip G. Altbach** is Research Professor and Distinguished Fellow of the Center for International Higher Education, Boston College. He is the author of *Global Perspectives on Higher Education* and other books.

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“Essential to understanding why and how nations invest in the global pursuit of academic excellence. This book provides the cultural and theoretical context for such initiatives and reveals their unequivocal consequences for diversity and equality.”

—**Marijk van der Wende,**  
**Utrecht University, the**  
**Netherlands**