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Symposium Seeks to Generate Debate about European Higher Education

MADISON, WISCONSIN, 28 March 2005 - The globalization of higher education and research has become a high profile issue both in the U.S. and in Europe. In the context of current debates and issues, the University of Wisconsin-Madison is sponsoring a two-day international symposium on April 8-9, 2005 on a fascinating and complex knowledge space that is emerging - the European Higher Education Area.

"The objective of this symposium is to generate debate about the nature, scope, form and tensions associated with the construction of the European Higher Education Area, and its role in powering the creation of a competitive and 'cohesive' Europe," explains Kris Olds, Professor of Geography, University of Wisconsin-Madison. Olds is co-organizer of the symposium with Susan Robertson, Professor of Sociology of Education and Coordinator of the Centre for Globalisation Education and Societies at the University of Bristol.

Organizers aim to generate debate about issues such as institutional capacity, the implications of the European Higher Education Area development process for American higher education, and factors such as "leadership" in providing the momentum to construct new knowledge spaces.

The European Higher Education Area (EHEA) is the outcome of recent attempts to "create a European space for higher education in order to enhance the employability and mobility of citizens and to increase the international competitiveness of European higher education" as set forth in the 1999 Bologna Declaration. National education ministers have signaled their commitment to reforms aimed at converging national university systems and developing the European Credit Transfer System (ECTS), which will ensure the recognition of coursework and degrees across educational institutions in different nations.

Yet the harmonization of European educational systems has not proceeded without tension. University administrators, faculty, and students have expressed reservations about convergence and the relinquishment of control. Proposed changes in program length and content, credit systems, and even learning styles challenge established national traditions.

Leading experts from the European Higher Education arena will be addressing the Symposium delegates. These include:

- Eric Froment, President of the European University Association;
- Pavel Zgaga, Director of the Centre for Educational Policy Studies at the University of Ljubljana and former Minister of Education and Sport for the Republic of Slovenia;
- David Ward, President of the American Council on Education and Chancellor Emeritus of the University of Wisconsin-Madison, and
- Discussion panels will include university presidents from England, France, Germany, and the Netherlands along with scholars from the USA, Finland, and England.

The Symposium is free and open to the public. For advance registration or further information, visit the Symposium website at: <http://www.geography.wisc.edu/CKS/index.htm>.

ABOUT THE CONSTRUCTING KNOWLEDGE SPACES INITIATIVE: - The Constructing Knowledge Spaces Initiative is an interdisciplinary and global group of researchers with overlapping interests in the emerging transnational governance of 'knowledge spaces' at a range of scales. Supported by the Worldwide Universities Network (<http://www.wun.ac.uk>), and with a focus on education, broadly defined, the CKS Initiative seeks to examine the material and discursive construction of 'knowledge spaces' from a range of theoretical and methodological perspectives.

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