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Globalizing Higher Education: a global challenge

Abstract. *Extending global programs is one of the clear areas of challenge and opportunity for higher education in the 21st century. Universities have realized the importance of expanding student competencies in an age of globalization. A genuine commitment to global education requires three components, at least: attention to curriculum; active international partnerships; and the active attraction and deployment of both international students and faculty. In addition, innovation and flexibility are necessary when attempting to expand beyond a national or regional focus.*

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Few universities, and even fewer that would claim any stature, are not actively exploring ways to extend global programs and global connections. This is indeed one of the clear areas of challenge and opportunity in higher education for the 21st century. Governments in many countries, such as Russia, China and Ukraine, are pressing schools to show evidence of growth in global partnerships. In Europe the Bologna process promotes internationalization of a sort, though with somewhat more ambivalent implications for links to the wider world beyond the continent. American governments, less involved in implementing higher education strategies, do not for the most part have clear goals in the global education arena, but a number of associations play active roles here and individual institutions are developing their own internal mandates.

The bases for further change abound. Particularly interesting is the spread of international education offices at universities literally around the world, helping to coordinate international contacts and often involved in strategic planning. Dual degree programs proliferate, as institutions seek to partner in programs which deliberately bring different perspectives or combine different specializations to the benefit of students at all degree levels. Unlike some international ventures in the past, the dual or

joint degree movement emphasizes the importance of mutual benefit and mutual inputs in international higher education.

The reasons for the surge of international efforts are not obscure. Universities are recognizing the importance of expanding student capacities in an age of globalization. For many students, career opportunities will be enhanced by global training. Citizenship is also a key element: many universities talk of the need to prepare global citizens, aware of cultural and institutional differences and combinations and attuned as well to the interaction between global processes and local conditions. While educational goals are paramount, many universities are finding additional benefits in global commitments. Faculty horizons expand, and research opportunities are enhanced. Global agendas provide a new source of energy and direction for many universities.

A true global program in higher education requires a number of overlapping facets. Some institutions, only superficially engaged, may seek to meet global goals through a few simple steps, like setting up a larger study abroad office (a common American impulse) or signing a growing number of international Memoranda of Understanding (MOUs), without any real follow through. A genuine global commitment requires more.

Indeed, at least three simultaneous components are essential. Explicit policies should guide the attraction and deployment of international students and faculty. Recruitment of qualified international students is a sign of effective outreach, but equally important are measures both to facilitate their success and to encourage constructive interaction with local students. At my university, many international students volunteer to help American students with language training, and we have also established dormitory arrangements and activities that deliberately mingle international and local students and provide opportunities for mutual discussion. International faculties are not a novelty, but universities have not always encouraged them not only to develop their professional specialties but also to contribute directly to international educational planning. We can do more here as well.

Attention to curriculum is vital, including of course efforts to provide students with opportunities to study abroad. In some cases, perhaps particularly in the United States, curricular adjustments are essential to encourage foreign language capacity and to expand the range of languages available. New programs can appeal to students with global interests. Several American universities, including my own, have had great success in introducing interdisciplinary global affairs programs, deliberately going beyond more conventional international relations efforts to discuss, also, global economic and cultural contacts, problems of conflict, and categories such as the environment or public health. Most

challenging of all is active discussion of curricular changes that can touch all students, and not just those with special global interests. It's appropriate to ask all disciplines to consider the global contexts and impacts of their programs. Where general education programs are part of the standard program, as commonly in the United States, they can be retooled to include an explicit global component. The goal is to establish something of a global mindset in all students, including the capacity for tolerant comparisons among institutions and cultures and the vital ability to analyze global and local connections.

Active international partnerships comprise the third global essential in higher education. Partnerships can encourage exchanges of faculty and students. They can develop collaborative research. They can lead to more ambitious efforts, such as dual degree programs.

In all facets of global development in higher education, innovation is essential. Individual disciplines need some reconsideration of frameworks: my own field of history, for example, needs to provide more historical context for the understanding of globalization, through a world history program or some other mechanism, deliberately going beyond a purely national or regional lens. Interdisciplinary combinations become essential; again adequately to introduce students to what's happening in the world around them, the world in which they will shape their lives in future.

Partnerships can enhance curricular innovation. It's now possible to offer jointly-taught courses between two different institutions, on issues such as human rights or environmental change, giving students in each institution an opportunity to gain perspectives from the other partner and even to develop joint projects with each other.

Innovation must extend to university bureaucracies and regulations. Globalization must not involve abandonment of appropriate standards and oversight. But we will all find occasions in which existing procedures are simply too cumbersome to accommodate desirable research and educational activities, and we need to commit to appropriate flexibility, for example in assigning credits to appropriate global endeavors.

There must be opportunities for additional experimentation, recognizing that some experiments will not work out successfully. Undergraduates can benefit from global research projects. There is increasing hunger for student internships and humanitarian activities across borders. Chinese institutions, for example, are including some American students along with their own in summer projects in the region devastated by earthquake a few years ago. American engineering students are

working on water systems and other local issues in sites in Latin America and Africa, and we're seeking ways to open to projects to collaborations from universities in other countries.

Technology is another obvious arena for innovation. We're just beginning to explore the potential of the Internet and the new visualization technologies for global education (global research collaborations are further along here). As noted, opportunities for joint courses abound. Collaborative programs in distance education constitute another possibility, not yet widely explored. Technology can also facilitate the formation of consortia around certain topics in global education – international partnerships need not be confined to separate arrangements between two institutions at a time.

Even universities with well-established global programs need to respond to the imperative to consider additional innovations, based on the growing array of global issues and changes in educational delivery systems. It's important to remember as well that experiments and innovations can come from several sources. Some of the best projects and connections emanate from individual faculty, including even junior faculty, rather than initiatives from the top. Fruitful collaborations may result from a deliberate plan, but also from suggestions from delegations from the outside. It's an exciting time.

It's important as well, however, to acknowledge the amount of effort involved in even promising pilot projects, particularly when collaborations are involved. In my experience, for example, it takes a minimum of two years for a dual degree proposal actually to be hammered out by faculty curriculum groups from the two institutions and then shepherded through the overall approval process, and while technology helps the negotiation some mutual visits remain essential. One of the reasons that MOUs so often receive no ensuing implementation is that actual projects prove so complicated, in terms of staff time and faculty endorsement.

This said, however, the overall global project remains crucial. Students may be transformed by new access to global skills and perspectives. Other educational goals link to the global gains: comparing societies and cultures directly further the inculcation of critical thinking skills, for example.

It is also becoming increasingly apparent that global connections are going to be vital in the areas of research and economic development. One of the most ambitious current global projects, the establishment of an international university center in the free trade zone at Incheon, South Korea, is predicated on the understanding that international educational endeavors directly link to corresponding research activity, which in turn will sustain an extremely ambitious overall development project. We can expand our explanation of why global university programs are essential for the foreseeable future.

We can also seek to attract more direct involvement from international businesses in the global education movement, where mutual benefits become apparent.

A final element of the global agenda emerges from the connections that are being forged among institutions in various parts of the world: it becomes increasingly possible and desirable to share best practices across national boundaries, including best practices in global education directly. Chinese university leaders thus discuss with American colleagues their interest in expanding liberal education in their curricula, as part of broadening the range and creative capacity of their talented students. American universities voluntarily sign onto the *Magna Charta Universitatum*, out of a desire to share in the promotion of appropriate academic standards, including the commitment to freedom of inquiry. The opportunity to share ideas and experiences becomes increasingly open.

The effort to expand global education is at once competitive and collaborative. Many institutions seek to expand global curricula and partnerships from a desire to make sure that they, and their students, remain competitive in the global economic environment. This is one of the basic justifications for the whole global venture. Global innovations play a key role in building the reputations of individual institutions – another opportunity for a competitive approach.

But global education deliberately aims, as well, as reducing the level of international conflict and misunderstanding. It seeks to encourage global cultural competence and tolerance. Global partnerships among universities, as we have seen, are increasingly designed toward mutual benefit. Research collaborations are predicated on the belief that all of the societies involved will benefit, from new knowledge and the commercial implications of discoveries.

The tension between competition and collaboration is very real. Ultimately, however, global education inclines more firmly toward the mutual component. Higher education can and should become one of the key bridges among different regions of the world, generating a common agenda of improved understanding and the advancement of knowledge, spreading the fundamental purposes of universities to a global level. It's a high calling from all members of the university community.