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A “Primer” for Global Engagement

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In late 2011, the American Council on Education’s Blue Ribbon Panel on Global Engagement released its report, *Strength through Global Leadership and Engagement: U.S. Higher Education in the 21st Century*. The report noted, “In the 21st century, higher education is explicitly, and fundamentally, a global enterprise,” and further that, “A prerequisite for success in this new era will be active, ongoing engagement on the part of colleges and universities in the United States with institutions around the world” (ACE 2011). As colleges and universities seek to prepare students to succeed in an increasingly globalized and interconnected world, they are recognizing the critical role of their relationships with institutions and other entities abroad in their internationalization efforts, and in the fulfillment of broader institutional missions and goals.

As interest in global engagement has proliferated, so too have the many forms such involvement may take. To some extent, each new collaboration or venture abroad by a US institution is unique, involving different players and different goals. However, as more institutions have entered the global arena, some common definitions and classifications for such ventures have emerged, which provide structure to the complicated landscape, and an analytical framework to help institutions better understand and evaluate global engagement opportunities.

What Is “Global Engagement”?

Global engagement, at its essence, is about committing to meaningful relationships with partners in other parts of the world. It represents a movement beyond the mechanics of carrying out more traditional campus-based international activities and implies dedication to a deeper and more prolonged commitment to international partnerships for mutual benefit.

Among the many types of global ventures, the most basic and most common are relatively small-scale collaborations, often spearheaded by faculty. Research collaborations between individual faculty members or teams of researchers are generally intended to result in some form of joint scholarly output—a paper, a conference presentation, or general advances in the field. Teaching collaborations involve faculty in different countries working together to instruct their respective students, often with the help of technology. Such arrangements may or may not include the physical movement of faculty or students from one country to another.

More complex, both in terms of definition and execution, are program- and institution-level collaborations. These efforts involve more people, including high-level leadership; require more coordination and a greater resource commitment; and entail signing a memorandum of understanding or other formal contract with partners. Examples of such collaborations and their commonly understood definitions include the following:

Joint degrees are collaborative arrangements, whereby courses leading to a degree are offered jointly by two institutions. Usually students from either institution may enroll and take courses at both participating institutions, and upon graduation receive either a single diploma conferred by both institutions, or a diploma issued only by the institution at which the student is registered.

Double/dual degrees involve students taking courses and receiving a separate degree or diploma from *each* participating institution. A common model for such programs is “2+2,” which requires students to spend two years on one campus and two years on the other campus. Double/dual-degree programs are sometimes referred to as “twinning arrangements,” particularly in the European and Indian contexts.

Branch campuses, as defined by Jane Knight (2005), are a situation where a provider in one country establishes a “satellite campus” in a second country for the purpose of either delivering courses or programs to students from that second country and/or potentially serving home campus students with study-abroad opportunities. Often, institutions collaborate with a university or other existing entity in the host country to secure physical space and manage logistics (such collaboration can be required by law in some countries and possibly referred to as a “joint venture”). Any qualifications awarded by the branch campus are from the home institution.

International “study centers” or “teaching sites” are a somewhat smaller-scale variation of the branch campus and involve a more limited physical presence in another country. For example, an institution plan-

ning to deliver a professional certificate program to students in the host country may lease classroom space in an office building or on a university campus, to be used only when classes are in session. On yet a smaller scale, some institutions establish a physical office in another country, with a limited staff presence, to support study-abroad students, manage international recruitment efforts, and attend to alumni relations.

More difficult to define in concrete terms are emerging collaborations that cross these categories or fall outside of the traditional academic realms of teaching and research. Some US institutions, for example, are engaging with partners abroad to complete cooperative projects with social or economic development aims. These may involve collaborative teaching and research, but the ultimate goals of such projects extend beyond these areas. Institutions are also collaborating with partners outside of academia, such as businesses, government agencies, and nongovernmental organizations—again, with various goals, both academic and nonacademic in nature. Groups of institutions within and across countries are organizing themselves into consortia or networks in order to collaborate in a variety of areas, with varying degrees of success in terms of articulating purpose, engaging members, and achieving substantive aims. “Massive open online courses” (known commonly as MOOCs) and other on-line programs add yet another layer of complexity.

How Globally Engaged Are We?

The American Council on Education’s recently released *Mapping Internationalization on U.S. Campuses: 2012 Edition* report includes data on global engagement initiatives undertaken by US institutions in recent years and provides some insights into the shape and scope of these activities (ACE 2012).

Despite widespread media coverage of new and existing ventures abroad, the overall proportion of colleges and universities that have formalized, institution-level agreements with partners (e.g., joint and dual degrees) or operate branch campuses in other countries is still relatively small, and largely dominated by the doctoral and master’s sectors. However, the *Mapping* data indicate that activity in this area is growing, with many institutions actively pursuing ventures abroad of various types.

For example, for those responding institutions that reported an accelerated focus on internationalization in recent years, global engagement activities have been part of the equation in many cases. Nearly 70 percent of such institutions reported that they are either beginning

partnerships, expanding them in terms of quantity or quality, or moving toward fewer but more wide-reaching collaborations. Institutions are also formalizing the process of establishing partnerships; among those institutions with an accelerated focus on internationalization, 40 percent have implemented campus-wide policies or guidelines for developing and approving partnerships or assessing existing partnerships. As good practices emerge, along with new and increasingly flexible models for partnerships and collaborations, it seems that the trend toward more engagement by more institutions is likely to continue.

References

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