Concordia College, Moorhead, Minnesota
--Nomination Essay

Concordia College has been impelled by both its mission and its cultural heritage to focus internationally, as our mission statement attests:

The purpose of Concordia College is to influence the affairs of the world by sending into society thoughtful and informed men and women dedicated to the Christian life.

We believe that to be thoughtful and informed, young adults must recognize that they live in a global society and in order to influence the world our students must engage in and develop an appreciation for the global community. As Concordia was founded and developed, we have, over successive waves, developed an international perspective in our curriculum as well as our identity.

The First Wave: Norwegian Immigrants. Our cultural history has its ironies. The Norse have always had a global interest, be it the Vikings stirring up trouble internationally, or the modern Norwegians contributing far beyond their numbers to the amelioration of international problems, be it world hunger or regional conflict. In an unusual way, Concordia College has set its sights internationally since its inception. Founded in 1891, its original purpose of was to train to teach proper English to Norwegian immigrants. Further, some of the first that we educated became teachers or preachers with many working abroad within the scope of these vocations.

Over the next century-plus, the college has seen itself internationalized in successive waves, often finding itself listed among the leaders in international students and study abroad.

The Second Wave: International Students. The second wave followed the ending of W.W.II, as students from other countries were granted up to a 50% tuition waiver to attend Concordia. Our international student numbers have trended upward over the past decade (from 71 student in 1996 to 171 in 2003). Our international students represented 42 countries in 2003, with Ghana, Sir Lanka, Nepal, Norway, and Canada contributing the greater numbers. While the 9/11 effect has reduced our overall numbers somewhat, Concordia still remains among the top 40 baccalaureate institutions hosting international students. Our newest effort involves working with the Massai of Tanzania by offering full-ride scholarships to students from the Massai Girls School.

The Third Wave: May Seminars Abroad. The third wave--generated by an entrepreneurial French professor--
established month-long travel seminars during May. The May Seminars Abroad typically sends 215 students on 13 study tours led by professors drawn from 23 different disciplines. From its beginnings in 1968, the college has insisted its overseas programs be robust academic experiences first and foremost. Each May Seminar, for example, has a matching Pre-Seminar, taken during the spring semester, to prepare its students on the academic topic.

The Fourth Wave: Semester Study Abroad. Commenced in the early 1990s, the fourth wave developed semester abroad programs for both language and non-language majors. Some of these World Discovery programs are bilateral partnerships with sister colleges (e.g., Malta and the Mediterranean with Luther College, Re-Thinking Development in India with Gustavus Adolphus), bilateral arrangements with universities abroad, or our Credo in Crete program for our honors students. Our own semester abroad programs combine travel experience linked directly to residential classroom learning. For example, the Malta students and their faculty leader make periodic trips to littoral countries of the Mediterranean to visit historical sites or hear experts discuss current environmental problems.

The Fifth Wave: Exploration Seminar. The fifth wave embedded spring break travel abroad into existing courses. These courses are throughout the curriculum, from accounting to philosophy. While these Exploration Seminars put students abroad for only about 10 days, the close link between the overseas experience and campus study brings the international experience back to the classroom, enriching those students who did not travel abroad, as well as whetting their appetites for a study abroad experience of their own.

The Building Sixth Wave. Concordia is perennially ranked among the top 20 baccalaureate institutions in study abroad numbers, ranking 10th in the latest Open Doors survey. Rather than resting on its laurels, the fifth wave is forming under the auspicious of a new strategic plan. Simply put, Concordia will expand its student participation in abroad programs by half-again (50%), moving from the current 400 students abroad each year, to 600 annually by 2009-10. This goal, and the enhanced support capacity that goes with it, is one of three key programmatic goals in the new strategic plan.

Curriculum and Campus. While our study abroad programs grew, we needed a parallel effort to internationalize the campus and our curriculum.

The expectation that courses across the curriculum should emphasize matters international dates from the curricular
reform of the middle-1980s. We needed to attract a broader range of faculty to the internationalization effort, and that required more than exhortation. A series of three major grants allowed us to attract those faculty to the effort (The Consortium for the Advancement of Private Higher Education, the Knight Foundation, the Ford Foundation).

Of these, the greatest impact came from our Knight Foundation grant. Over a three-year period, we sent four teams of 12 faculty on Third World study tours (Latin America, South Africa, or India). All teams extensively prepared with workshops and study; the final team also was given release time for language study.

The impacts of the Knight grant were felt across campus. Students reported the instruction of Knight professors to be more internationalized than those in a control group. Most of the Knight faculty later led students abroad, and to more diverse destinations. In assessment, these new leaders invariably noted, “I never would have done this but for the Knight experience.”

We continue to develop our international focus in the curriculum. This fall, the faculty voted on a new core curriculum that will include new required courses in International and Global Perspectives and U.S. Cultural Diversity.

The physical campus itself has internationalized with the placement of three language houses for on campus majors in German, French, and Spanish. Partially funded by the Max Kade Institute, the three houses are formed around a square-easily seen by the passing traffic--giving a clear message to both our students and the community about the priority Concordia gives to language study.

Impact Assessment. Concordia has supported empirical assessment of its international programs by faculty research teams, much of which has found its way to presentation and publication. For example:


Hovde et al. “An Evaluation of Faculty Study Abroad: A Response to Lambert’s Strategic Questions.”
Concordia Language Villages. Concordia is internationalizing not only its undergraduate curriculum and campus, but is also providing immersion language instruction to pre-collegiate students in a context of international education. The mission of the Concordia Language Villages (CLV) is:

   to prepare young people for responsible citizenship in our global community.

CLV has been an internationally recognized leader in immersion language education since 1961, and is prominent as both an innovator in curriculum development and as a rich site for language education research.

CLV offers language education in 14 languages: Arabic, Chinese, Danish, English, Finnish, French, German, Italian, Japanese, Korean, Norwegian, Russian, Spanish and Swedish. Annually 11,000 young people aged 7-18 representing all 50 of the United States and 28 other countries enroll in year-round programs of the Language Villages. The commitment to immersion is reflected in the CLV campus located in northern Minnesota. There are 135 buildings at this site, each architecturally authentic to reflect the country or countries in which a particular language is spoken. These sites provide ideal programming environments. A Russian Language Village is under construction and will open in the summer of 2006.

Abroad programs in China, France, Germany, Spain, Norway and Sweden and Japan are offered to high school students. The Global Language Village program provides language education in English in 12 sites throughout China.

One-, two-, and four-week summer programs are designed to offer villagers experiences from introductory level to high school and college level course work. Weekend and week-long immersion programs are offered throughout the school year for high school and college students as well as families and adults. Concordia language majors often act as teacher/counselors at CLV, during the both summer and the school year.

For the first time ever, the Deutsche Bundesstiftung Umwelt, Germany's largest environmental foundation, has funded a project outside Germany. Teamed with Kresge Foundation and
the Home Depot Foundation, it will help CLV meet the need for more residential space together with the opportunity to support an environmental program by constructing a unique environmental living center. The "BioHaus" will be a model of Germany's best environmental planning and sustainable environmental building concepts. The "green" building will serve as a leading model for sustainable residential and educational facilities. It will incorporate local building construction technology with state-of-the art German/European sustainability components. As with other CLV sites, the architecture of the BioHaus will reflect its linguo-cultural heritage.

The goal of this building project is to build a resource-efficient building with the least environmental impact and for the most effective educational use. During fall semesters, Concordia students will use BioHaus as a base of operations as they explore environmental issues and solutions in Minnesota and Germany.

While the target students for CLV is pre-higher education, Concordia College has grown the Language Villages out of a sense of commitment to internationalizing young people in the United States as well as in other countries. We do not see a disconnect between what we do for the CLV students from what we do for our college students: we are preparing future generations to be engaged in the world.

Lesson Learned. In our half-century of experience, we learned that both the key and the foundation to successful internationalization is leadership and leadership development. Without foresightful leadership at the top, internationalization's row is too tough to hoe, and stalls. Without program directors who think outside the box, programs will stale and wane. But most important of all, without the development and nurturing of faculty leaders, a college will have either ineffective programs, or no programs at all.

It is important that support is also in evidence at all levels of college governance and leadership. The Concordia College administration and its Board of Regents continue to strongly support these efforts at internationalizing young people. Young adults live in an interconnected world and it is incumbent upon us to prepare them for lives in this global world. For us to fulfill our mission, we must prepare young people to, "... influence the affairs of the world..." by having them engage the world.