

From Land-Grant to a “World-Grant” University

Musings of a State University President

AS A UNIVERSITY PRESIDENT, I believe that universities should prepare students for a global knowledge economy and expect faculty to be globally engaged. The breadth of local and global interdependencies requires that we accept responsibilities to shape these interdependencies positively for both local and global benefit. Although local prosperity depends increasingly on global prosperity, some see “local” and “global” as a zero sum game when allocating scarce resources. Others recognize our codependencies. For example, in state-wide public opinion surveys commissioned by Michigan State University (MSU), we found that the people of the State of Michigan are broadly cognizant of these interdependencies and the need to prepare students for a global economy.¹

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Today, we, as higher education leaders, are called upon to establish a new twenty-first century framework for knowledge access: talent and idea development without borders. For a land-grant institution such as MSU, “internationalization” means extending our traditional values of inclusiveness, quality, and connectivity to a “world-grant” or global frame.²

Dramatic shifts in economies, communications, systems of trade, and research compel us to move well beyond piecemeal and peripheral international engagement toward comprehensive engagement. As my colleague and NAFSA Senior Scholar for Internationalization John Hudzik writes, “Comprehensive internationalization is a commitment, confirmed through action, to infuse international and comparative perspectives throughout the teaching, research, and service missions of higher education. It shapes institutional ethos and values, and touches the entire higher education enterprise.”³

Sustained Commitment

Comprehensive internationalization is not something accomplished in the short term; it requires a long-term, sustained commitment. MSU didn’t suddenly become “internationalized.” Our present position and my ability to talk about MSU in these terms is not simply because of what we are doing now, but because we have been committed to building it over the long term. We began the journey shortly after WWII and renewed our commitment to the journey in the 1950s under the leadership of then MSU President John Hannah.

Tangible benefits accrued for MSU even in those early days of internationalizing our faculty, expanding research and contract funding, and creating opportunities abroad for our students. Our long-term commitment to Africa, begun in the late 1950s, has produced tens of millions of dollars in research and development contracts, benefits to Africans in health, food supply, education, community development, and empowering women. Recently, the MasterCard Foundation gave MSU \$45 million to support

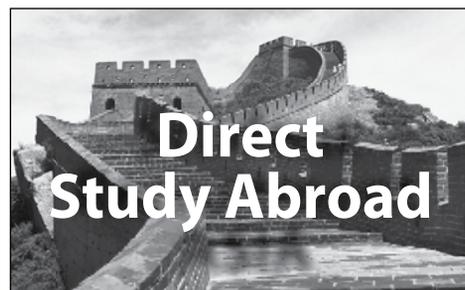
graduate education scholarships for African students to attend MSU. International engagement has paid off in other ways. The National Science Foundation’s \$500 million commitment to MSU’s National Superconducting Cyclotron Laboratory reflects not only that we are among the world’s elite in nuclear and high-energy physics, but that we have been home to teams of international scholars in the field for decades.⁴

From modest beginnings, we now have nearly 7,000 international students on campus from more than 130 countries; 275 study abroad programs in more than 60 countries representing all continents; 210 partnerships with institutions abroad; more than 20 internationally focused centers and institutes; programs to internationalize on-campus curricula; and we teach nearly 75 foreign languages. Approximately 1,500 of our faculty are involved in international research, teaching, and service work across all continents in well over 60 countries.

We do not consider ourselves as having reached the ideal of comprehensive internationalization or a world-grant reality. We are traveling a road without end. Big numbers are also not the only measure of success; rather, our challenge is to continuously assess the outcomes and impact of internationalization on student learning, quality of research, and engagement relevance.

Internationalization Is for All—Getting Started Is What Counts

No one should draw the conclusion that an institution must be big and historically engaged to be successful in the international arena. Success, as with us, comes in stages, beginning with manageable steps and sustained effort. All higher education institutions can benefit from linkages to global pathways of innovation in service to students and society. There will be diversity in how institutions connect internationally, but it is unlikely that purely local orientations can work for anyone. Some may think that only a few elite institutions can effectively engage internationally. However, the more useful conceptualization is diversity in how the



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wide range of higher education institutions can differentially engage the international and the global depending on their starting points, missions, priorities, and capacities.

I am convinced that the costs of internationalization are exceeded by the costs of not doing it. Failure to embrace internationalization isolates us from global idea networks and does not prepare students and our communities for life and work in a global environment. Many institutions seem to want to plan every aspect of how to internationalize before beginning the task, but waiting for everything and everybody to be neatly in place before taking action guarantees inaction. Our orientation has begun with, “Why and how can we do this?” rather than, “How much will it cost?” Wide-ranging dialogue draws people into an understanding of internationalization, its connection to core institutional missions and values, and the rationales for it. From this evolves a framework for buy-in, concrete action, and resource allocations. For example, nearly two decades ago, we first engaged a campus dialogue to build support for a vision to more than triple education abroad participation to nearly 3,000 stu-

dents per year; action began immediately, resource allocations followed incrementally over the long run. The vision and actions to achieve it have reciprocally updated one another throughout the effort.

Getting on a road to internationalization is the important first step. At MSU, we have learned that even in difficult financial times, the journey toward comprehensive internationalization builds on manageable steps taken in parallel as well as serially.

Build a Culture for Action

Over many decades, we have had numerous campus-wide conversations with deans, faculty, staff, and students to build an institutional vision and culture for internationalization. These ongoing conversations are both a reminder of our long-term commitment and a way to continuously update and challenge our visions, as well as inform newcomers. Building a campus-wide culture is important, but so is being bolder by design as well as timely in action.

LEVERAGE BY CREATING SYNERGIES. Controlling cost protects student access and provides the public and partners with

value. We work to find cost-saving synergies across teaching and learning, research and scholarship, and outreach and engagement, rather than pursuing these as isolated missions. We look for synergistic opportunities. How can faculty involvement in education abroad provide them scholarly connections abroad? How might faculty research projects abroad accommodate field research opportunities for undergraduates and graduate students? How might our considerable research expertise in key areas, such as in sustainable and safe water supply, provide two-way learning and problem-solving outcomes simultaneously benefiting communities at home as well as abroad?

We work to synchronize education abroad with degree requirements. We have leveraged considerable institutional internship and service-learning commitments with similar opportunities abroad. We are expanding involvement of the rich resources inherent in our international students to help internationalize the on-campus environment.

LEVERAGE BY INTEGRATING AND DUAL-PURPOSING RESOURCES. Another key strategy has been to integrate internationalization into existing core institutional missions rather than adding internationalization as yet another mission. Having a dual-purpose with resource allocations is a cost-effective strategy. For example, instead of internationalizing our liberal learning goals by adding new courses, the integration of global perspectives into existing liberal learning curricula, as well as into major courses, is paramount. Instead of creating new and expensive research thrusts, we have looked to cross-border engagements that can strengthen those to which we have committed and want to enhance. We prioritize building on existing institutional research strengths and faculty interests.

LEVERAGE THROUGH INTERNAL AND EXTERNAL PARTNERSHIPS. Interdisciplinary teams are increasingly necessary to both define and solve the many problems that

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confront communities locally and across the globe. Our international engagements have caused us to strengthen cross-walks linking the social and behavioral sciences, the humanities, and the natural sciences. The lessons learned by working internationally translate to our work at home as well; internationalization has been an intellectual and institutional change agent. Routinely now, our engagements abroad include faculty teams from the natural sciences, social and behavioral sciences, and the humanities

Partnerships for co-creation of knowledge and solutions important to society can be a leveraging tool also. MSU does not engage others with the thought that it has all the right answers, but rather with a style that recognizes insights from how others approach similar challenges in other parts of the world, melding perspectives and knowledge. This is the pathway to co-creation and co-learning and the architecture for mutual benefit. While cross-disciplinary collaborations are essential, so are partnerships with public, private, and nonprofit entities. Our social forestry projects in Thailand, community and school development in Vietnam, and integrated community development in East Africa are strong examples of co-creation and mutual learning. This preferred mode of engagement arises out of longstanding land-grant practices for community engagement and reinforced by early experiences and challenges in international development activity.

Seizing opportunities to expand our perspective through cross-border partnerships was difficult, at best, before the technology revolution. Now, while not effortless, they are readily available to those who are aware of them. For example, our online certificate and degree programs, available domestically and internationally, help us to create cross-border, cross-cultural learning experiences for students not only on campus, but while studying abroad.

TAKE ADVANTAGE OF “UNFREEZING” EVENTS. There are many strategic opportunities that may not seem directly related to internationalization but can support the fundamental changes required to embed it in the culture. For example, we have broadcast our international aspirations and “unfrozen”

actions through changes in senior leadership, accreditation reviews, institutional strategic planning, annual budget planning, external reviews of departments, and regular curriculum reviews and revisions. Nearly a decade ago, we made internationalization the core of our self-study for our decennial institutional reaccreditation.

The key to advancing change and innovation, according to Eli Broad in *The Art of Being Unreasonable: Lessons in Conventional Thinking*, is “art of the unreasonable.” Broad argues that being creatively “unreasonable” is about having “outsized ambitions.” For a university, comprehensive internationalization is also about having outsized ambitions—goals that cannot be constrained by the traditional boundaries of campus and ivory towers. Meek goals produce meek results; outsized ambitions with vision and sustained action and commitment to achieving them produce the changes needed to keep higher education relevant. **IE**

LOU ANNA K. SIMON, PhD, is president of Michigan State University.

AUTHOR’S NOTE: For more information on this topic, see “From a Land-Grant to a World-Grant Ideal: Extending Public Higher Education Core Values to a Global Frame,” In *Precipice or Crossroads? Where America’s Great Public Universities Stand and Where They Are Going Midway Through Their Second Century*, Eds. Daniel Mark Fogel and Elizabeth Malson-Huddle. Albany: State University of New York, 2012.

ENDNOTES

¹ There were two surveys: one in 1999 and one in 2002 (before and after September 11, 2001, with remarkably stable results.

² Lou Anna K. Simon, “Embracing the World Grant Ideal: Affirming the Morrill Act for a Twenty-first-century Global Society,” East Lansing: Michigan State, 2009.

³ John K. Hudzik, “Comprehensive Internationalization: From Concept to Action.” Washington, D.C.: NAFSA: Association of International Educators, 2011.

⁴ Following initial substantial funding over several decades by the National Science Foundation to build MSU’s Superconducting Cyclotron Laboratory, the U.S. Department of Energy made a \$500 million commitment to fund the companion Facility for Rare Isotope Beams (FRIB). These awards reflected not only that we are among the world’s elite in nuclear and high-energy physics, but that have drawn international scholars in the field for decades, and will continue to do so even more.