

PARTNERING

By David Moore

A Unique Three-Way Partnership

A community college, four-year university, and foreign institution collaborate to offer a 2+2 business degree in Singapore

ACCORDING TO THE INSTITUTE OF INTERNATIONAL EDUCATION'S *Open Doors 2008* report, the number of international students in the United States rose to an all time high of 623,805 in 2007–08. This figure was 7 percent above the number of college and university students reported one year earlier, which was 3.2 percent above the prior year. This growth trend followed a drop off after the events of September 11, 2001, and the subsequent visa restrictions on students entering the United States after 2003. For more than 50 years, U.S. educational institutions have attracted more foreign students than any other nation on earth. Although other developed nations have excellent higher education systems and are competing directly with U.S. institutions for these same students, earning a U.S. degree still carries some cachet overseas. However, for every student who can afford the expenses of travel, living expenses, and the growing cost of out-of-state tuition, there are many who cannot afford to leave home. These students must remain at home and try to find their education at a local college or university.

One alternative for these students is to find a U.S. college overseas providing programs and degrees for a local audience at a fraction of the cost of moving to the United States. Such programs are available, but they are rare. Not every U.S. institution with an affiliation overseas is actually offering a full program or transferable courses away from the United States. At first, it would seem like a simple concept: offer the same courses overseas that are being offered at home, hire local faculty, and award a final degree. However, if it were simple, many more institutions would be involved in this kind of program. Legal, financial, academic, administrative, and cultural hurdles conspire to make the process highly complex. Few institutions are willing to invest their precious resources to support U.S. style programming abroad. At least one community college in Florida is attempting to meet this need and to create a market niche for an innovative approach to international education.

Since 1986 Broward Community College (BCC) in Fort Lauderdale, Florida, has been offering college programming outside of the United States. On July 1, 2008, BCC officially changed its name to Broward College (BC) because it began offering four-year degrees in the 2008–09 academic

year. As a reversal of the traditional education abroad semester where U.S. students travel to a foreign country and attend courses at a host center or university, BC has established partnerships with institutions overseas that provide instruction to mostly non-U.S. citizens desiring a U.S.-style degree program. This enables the college to offer a quality program in a foreign country without having the cost of creating a campus infrastructure or employing a staff and faculty to run the institution.

The first affiliated partner was with the Center for American Education (CAE) of Singapore in 1986. In 1997, after a comprehensive site visit, the Singapore program was approved by the Southern Association of Colleges and Schools (SACS) to award Broward credits and degrees, and in 2004, the India program in Bangalore, was also approved. The CAE-Singapore program has performed solidly in the 10 years since it became an SACS-accredited site. The India program operated for five years after accreditation, but was discontinued as a degree-granting affiliation in 2008 due to a lack of student enrollment. A third SACS accredited site in Guayaquil, Ecuador, began in 2007 and continues to operate with a growing enrollment base.

Benefits to the Institution

The intrinsic value of such initiatives cannot be overlooked. In the last 30 years, more than 150 faculty, administration, and board members have participated in Broward College international education programs overseas. Their lives, classrooms, and students have been impacted directly and immeasurably by their experiences. The name of Broward has been “exported” to Sri Lanka, Ecuador, Singapore, Spain, Mexico, India, and China. Broward College has become known as an innovator and leader in the field of international education among community colleges. Funds generated by the program over the years have been set aside to support international travel both for education abroad (International Education Scholarship program), an International Education Endowed Teaching Chair to support faculty involved in international education, and to enable select

BC students to spend a full semester abroad enrolled in one of our overseas affiliate programs (William Greene Scholarship).

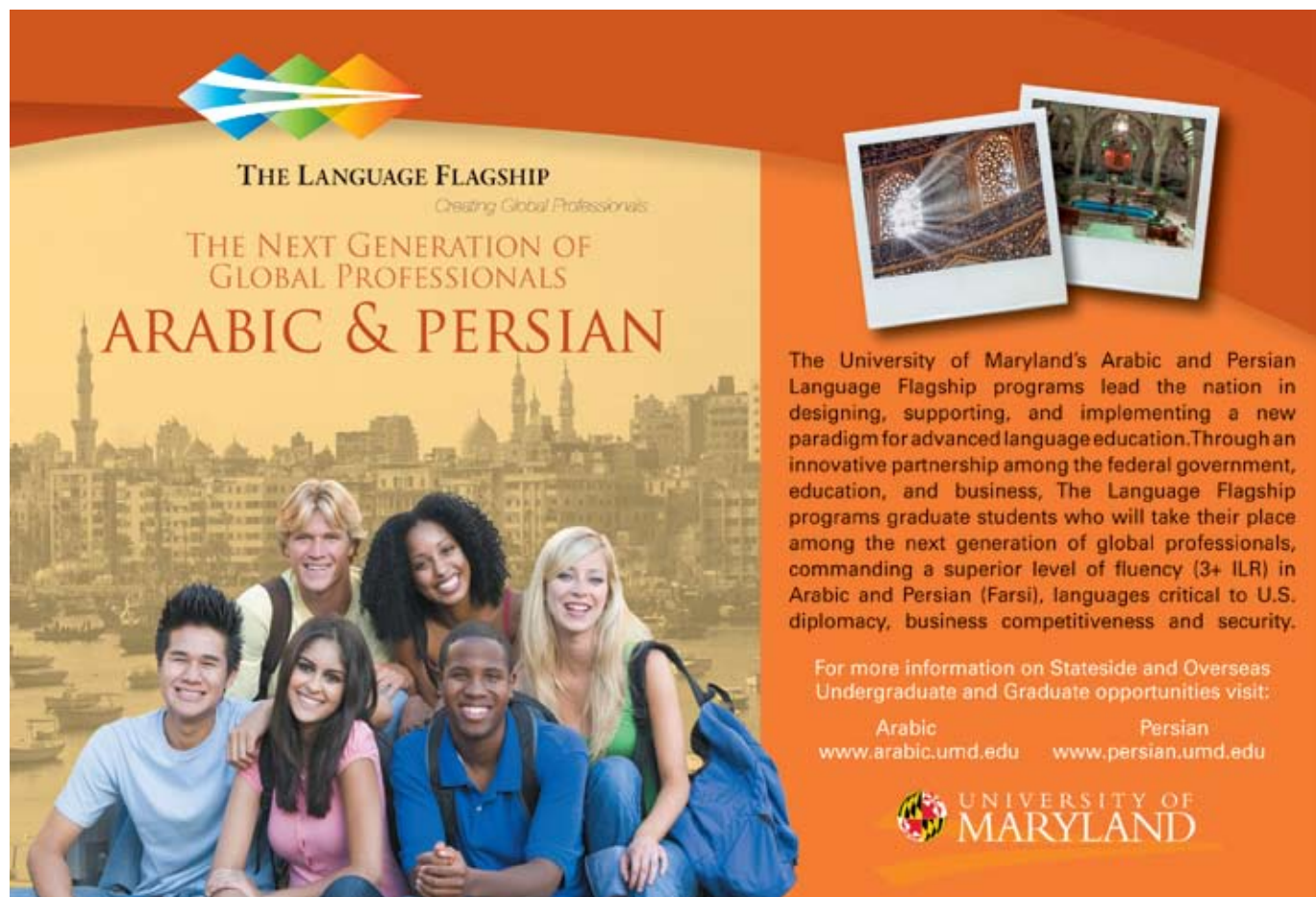
Value of an AA Degree Outside of the United States

Although more than 50 percent of all high school graduates in the United States go on to start their higher education in community colleges, U.S. style AA degrees are still a mystery in most of the world. Outside of this country the term “college” does not always mean postsecondary study, and university training usually begins with studies in the major field, presuming that students have mastered the general education core so integral to the AA degree in the United States. For many people unfamiliar with the community college curriculum, there is little point in continuing to study in college the subjects that were taught in second-

ary school. This perception of the general education core is sometimes an obstacle to developing new program affiliations abroad unless the AA programs are linked to a U.S. university bachelor's degree.

Partnership With a Major University

All of this raises the question: once a student completes an AA from BC in a foreign country, what is the next step in their educational program if they cannot travel to the United States? The answer is being supplied today by a unique and innovative partnership between BCC, the Center for American Education in Singapore, and the University of South Florida (USF) in Tampa, Florida. For several years, BCC has been searching for a university partner to come to Singapore and offer the upper division courses leading to a four-year degree in business



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administration, a special interest among students in Singapore. The search began with universities in the south Florida area, near BCC's Broward County campuses. Although none of these institutions was immediately responsive to the idea, eventually, the dean of international education at the University of South Florida came to see the potential. The dean presented it to her counterpart in the College of Business Administration (COBA) who also saw value in such an international partnership. One of the reasons for this appeal was that graduates from community colleges in Florida can be assured admission to at least one of the 11 state universities in Florida and still graduate with a B.A. (which requires 120 credits) in two years, if attending full time. Furthermore, the uniform state numbering system enables USF to recognize every course on the BC-CAE transcript earned toward the A.A. without rejecting any credits.

Founded in 1956, the University of South Florida, is centered in Tampa, Florida, but is a multi-campus institution with branches in three other west central Florida cities. It is the eighth largest university in the United States with an enrollment of more than 44,000 in fall 2006. The Carnegie Foundation ranked USF as one of only 65 U.S. public institutions in the top tier of research universities, and only one of three in Florida. In addition to SACS, the College of Business

Administration (COBA) is accredited by the Association to Advance Collegiate Schools of Business (AACSB International), which speaks to the quality of their programming in several areas of business studies. COBA offers the B.A., B.S., M.S., M.B.A., and Ph.D. degrees in fields such as accounting, economics, finance, marketing, information systems, management, general, and international business.

Beginning in early 2005, a long courtship began between CAE and USF-COBA, with BC serving as a supporting resource for both institutions. Representatives from BC were the intermediaries between the two institutions because BC has worked with CAE for so long and because BC and USF are in the same state university/community college system and share a common course numbering system. Graduates of BC with an associate of arts degree are automatically accepted into one of the universities of Florida, though not automatically into the one of their choice. In early 2007 an agreement was reached for USF to offer a B.A. in business administration in Singapore. Recruitment efforts began but the results were disappointing. While the University of South Florida is one of the 10 largest universities by enrollment in the United States, it was not well known in Asia. The start of the program had to be postponed until the summer of 2008. The first USF professor taught the

first business course leading to a bachelor's degree from USF in the summer of 2008.

The plans are to offer the final 20 courses (60 credits) in a two year time-table. The first cohort of approximately 20 students will primarily be graduates of BC-CAE and recruits from local polytechnic institutions in Singapore who want to stay home and pursue a college degree in business administration. CAE is also recruiting students from the region (Vietnam, Indonesia, Malaysia, and China) with mixed success.

Obstacles to Success

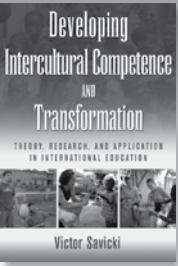
When initial discussions were underway there was general agreement as to what the goals and outcomes would be. However, as discussions continued, specific questions and challenges came to light. These challenges could have led one or another party to withdraw from the initiative. It is a testimony to the commitment of all parties to the outcome that these did not prevent the agreement from being reached. There were several key challenges with which all the partners had to come to terms.

1. Communications with Singapore across 12 time zones. Simple communications are not simple when the natural tendency is to conduct business with Singapore over the phone. However, when it is 3:00 p.m. in Tampa or Ft. Lauderdale it is 3:00 a.m. in Singapore. This reduces the period of time when one can be expected to communicate over the phone to about one hour a day or less, assuming one party or the other is working late to about 8:00 p.m. while the other comes into the office early at 7:00 or 7:30 a.m. Most communication had to take place via e-mail. However, this involved waiting a day or longer for a response in either direction.

2. AACSB requirements. Sixty percent of USF business faculty have to come from the United States to offer courses to students in Singapore. This increases the cost of program delivery since only 40 percent of instructors can be recruited locally.

3. Housing of faculty. While teaching in Singapore USF faculty must be provided with a reasonable housing arrangement. The cost of this must be factored into the overall program costs.


A Transformative Approach to Study Abroad



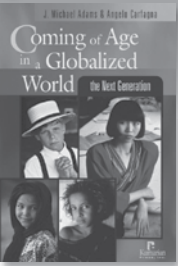
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4. Cost of travel. Sending four faculty per year by air to Singapore is a costly venture and must be factored into the overall budget for the program.

5. Compensation for faculty. University business faculty members are well paid by Singapore education standards. To recruit qualified faculty to teach in this program, there is no way to avoid this issue. Faculty will expect to be paid on a par with what they make in the United States to teach the same courses.

6. Cultural differences. U.S. universities are huge enterprises with intricate and sometimes convoluted management systems. The Center for American Education is a small, private, for-profit business venture, which is quite common in Asia, Europe, and Latin America. The prevailing work atmosphere is casual with a simple organizational structure. Getting these two academic cultures to communicate and understand each other has not been easy. Periodic visits where people can meet face-to-face has been the only way to bridge this gap.

7. Polytechnic transfer students. There are about 70,000 to 80,000 students in Singapore attending five separate polytechnics, which are excellent postsecondary technical training institutions. Many students in these schools are taking business degrees and would be good candidates to transfer to the USF program. However, the transferable courses are limited and not easily identified. BC and USF have agreed to require a foreign credential evaluation service to review each transcript before accepting these students. This process is slow and cumbersome, but necessary, at least in the start-up phase. Admissions personnel also must evaluate student transcripts to determine which credits may be transferred to BC or USF.

Depending on the particular local circumstances, these specific problems may or may not be hindrances to starting up other programs of this kind around the world, but undoubtedly, problems will arise wherever colleges attempt to create partnerships. Institutions who desire to engage the world in this way must be committed to dealing with issues as they arise and finding ways to overcome or minimize any adverse effect on the program.

Success is not guaranteed for the BC-CAE-USF partnership now being forged in Singapore. The obstacles noted above may

yet cause the program to falter. However, the energy and dedication of those who have led this effort toward offering a truly U.S.-style degree in Singapore has been notable and should inspire others to attempt a variation of this model in many other places and in many other academic fields.

Replicating This Model Elsewhere

In addition to its program in Singapore, Broward College has branch campuses in Bangalore, India, and Guayaquil, Ecuador, and other affiliations in Cuenca, Ecuador; Beijing, China; Colombo, Sri Lanka; Mexico City, Mexico; and Ho Chi Minh City, Vietnam. A new program is also being added this year in Jamaica. Some of the affiliates are taking steps to become regular credit- and degree-granting sites in the next year or two. Once they are in a position to award BC degrees (based on approval by SACS), it is quite possible that they could then open their doors to partner with a U.S. university willing to create a similar 2+2 arrangement. Efforts are underway now to develop such partnerships.

Other colleges and universities could do what BC and USF have done by creating overseas partnerships and awarding institutional credits at these locations. The template is in place and can be improved upon as more institutions decide to make such a commitment to international education.

No Shortcuts

The doors to an undergraduate U.S. education offered outside of the United States are opening gradually. There is no shortcut to success, but the rewards are great both for U.S. colleges involved and the international students affected. Every venture that BC has successfully attempted has been achieved only through an intense focus on the goal of providing students throughout the world the kinds of opportunities U.S.-based students are afforded. By offering educational opportunities so students can stay at home, more students can receive a U.S. education and take advantage of one of the finest systems of higher education in the world. **IE**

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