



International collaborative-degree programs are becoming an area of focus for higher education institutions interested in deepening their relationships with partners around the world.

BY CHARLOTTE WEST

WHEN SHANNON TRUDEAU, A SENIOR AT APPALACHIAN STATE UNIVERSITY in North Carolina, graduated in May 2015, she completed two bachelor's degrees: one in public relations from Appalachian State and another in communications research and analysis from La Universidad de las Américas Puebla (UDLAP) in Mexico.

Launched in 2011 and built on a direct exchange model, the collaboration between the two universities allows students from either institution to obtain dual bachelor's degrees in communication. The partnership between Appalachian State and UDLAP is just one example of the kind of collaborative-degree programs that are becoming an increasingly popular way for institutions to deepen relationships with international partners.

After completing their first year at their home institution, students complete their sophomore and junior years at the host institution in the other country, then return home for their final year. U.S. students studying at UDLAP need to be able to take courses in Spanish, whereas Mexican students at Appalachian State are expected to take coursework in English.

The idea of earning more than one degree from institutions in multiple countries is an attractive one for students, especially those interested in working internationally.

Trudeau says she chose the program at Appalachian State because she wanted to stand out among her peers: "I thought it would open more doors for me in the future as well as help me improve my Spanish speaking abilities that can carry forward into the work place."

She has already been able to leverage her international experience to gain professional experience. "My dual degree definitely helped me get my internship at National Geographic the summer of 2013 and I do talk about it in interviews since it gives the employer a better background of who I am and what I can do," Trudeau explains.

Similarly, the program's first Mexican student, Francisco Contreras Salazar, says that the experience has led to opportunities to work for TV and radio stations and write online sports editorials in English.

Salazar, who will graduate in December 2015, explains that he benefitted from the dual-degree program because it allowed him to live in the United States for two years, and

DEGREES WITHOUT BORDERS

polish his language skills: “English is a very important language nowadays, so learning it deeper widened my professional formation.”

According to Trudeau and Salazar, double-degree programs are attractive because they allow students the opportunity to develop language skills, give them a chance to live in a foreign country for an extended period of time, and open up international employment opportunities.

For faculty and administrators, on the other hand, collaborative degree programs can contribute to overall campus internationalization strategies, increase student and faculty mobility, and solidify existing relationships. Many of these programs grow out of long histories of previous collaborations.

Nina Lemmens, director of the German Academic Exchange Service (DAAD) office in New York, has been

involved in the establishment of many collaborative-degree programs between German institutions and their international partners.

“Such programs are popular because once they are set up, they give all parties a good sense of security: the two involved universities have gone through an intense procedure of administrative scrutiny and decisionmaking and can be sure that everybody involved in the university is now positive about the commitment. The students know exactly what they are buying into and don’t have to undergo the sometimes very difficult process of credit acknowledgment on their own,” she says.

Lemmens adds that joint programs also offer institutions other benefits: “Once the programs are set up, they are also a very good marketing tool for the universities to attract highly qualified and motivated students.”

Shannon Trudeau on the Iztaccihuatl volcano next to Popocatepetl (the more active volcano in the background) in central Mexico. She graduated in May with bachelor’s degrees from both Appalachian State University and La Universidad de las Américas Puebla (UDLAP) in Mexico.



COURTESY OF SHANNON TRUDEAU

Various Types of International Collaborative Degrees

Three common models of collaborative degrees are joint degrees, double/multiple degrees, and consecutive degrees. The distinguishing feature of joint degrees is that the partner institutions jointly issue a single diploma, whereas each institution involved in a double- or multiple-degree program would award its own national credential. Consecutive degrees, on the other hand, might involve an integrated program where students would obtain a bachelor's degree at an institution in one country and then complete a master's degree at an institution in another country.

Some programs might involve direct exchange of students where they spend equal amounts of time at each campus, while in others the students flow in a single direction. Some institutions have found mutually beneficial solutions to suit their respective priorities, where one institution sends students to complete a degree and the other sends students for shorter-term study abroad. Other programs allow international students to complete two years at their home institution before transferring to the United States to complete their bachelor's degree.

There is relatively little current hard data available on the number or growth of such programs globally. In Europe, a Bologna Process working group estimated that there were 2,500 joint degrees in Europe in 2009 (Nuffic 2015)¹, but the European Union has in the last several years provided significant funding to encourage countries to create joint programs. In Germany in particular, the number of double- or joint-degree programs funded by DAAD grew from less than 10 at the beginning of the millennium to more than 110 in 2014–2015, according to DAAD. A 2011 survey by the Council on American Education reported that in the United States, 18 percent of responding institutions offered international dual-degree programs and 13 percent offered joint-degree programs.²

In terms of the most common types of collaborative programs, a 2011 Institute of International Education (IIE) survey found that double degrees are much more common than joint degrees and the majority are at the master's level. However, there is significant variation by country. For example, the majority of programs reported by Australian institutions are at the doctoral level, while the majority of programs reported by U.S. institutions are at the undergraduate level. IIE also found that the most frequently cited academic disciplines for joint- and double-degree programs are business, management, and engineering. Other popular disciplines include social sciences, mathematics and computer sciences, and physical and life sciences (IIE, 2011).³



A Long History of Collaborative Programs

The University of Colorado Denver (CU Denver) has a long history of successfully running joint programs at both the undergraduate and graduate level. Its longest-running program, the International College Beijing (ICB), started as a pilot project with China Agricultural University in 1994 with a dozen students. It resulted in ICB becoming the first joint program of its kind to be approved by the Chinese Ministry of Education.

The ICB program offers economics, communication, and dual degrees to Chinese students, who are able to study on both the Beijing and Denver campuses. U.S. students may also study abroad in Beijing, though the dual-degree option is only available to Chinese students.

Michael Mendoza is a U.S. student who spent a semester on the Beijing campus in spring 2014. “At the ICB program, I was in the unique position of being the only American student in a majority of my classes. I thoroughly enjoyed the opportunity to be a source of increased cross-cultural interaction. As a student abroad in Beijing, I represented my nationality, university, state of residence, and ethnic groups, which created an opportunity for greater cross-cultural learning,” he says.

“The adaptability and intercultural competency skills that I have learned will transfer into my career aspirations of education, mentoring, and nonprofit work. In these particular fields, having flexibility and intercultural competence with serving the needs of diverse populations is an essential toward having positive and meaningful interactions with individuals, groups, and communities,” adds

Students from Appalachian State University (the two on the left) with faculty members at La Universidad de las Américas Puebla (UDLAP) in Mexico.

Ximena Perez Morales is a student enrolled in the dual degree in communication program between UDLAP (Mexico) and Appalachian State University (North Carolina).

Mendoza, who graduated from CU Denver with a BA in communications in December 2014.

The ICB program currently has more than 1,000 alumni who have graduated with dual degrees. As of fall 2014, the total enrollment for ICB on both campuses was 743, according to John Sunnnygard, executive director of CU Denver's Office of International Affairs.

In addition to the undergraduate program with China Agricultural University, CU Denver has more recently developed a double master's of landscape architecture with Tongji University in Shanghai, China. Started in 2013, the degree is a three-year program and students receive a master's degree from both institutions after completing half their credits on each campus. Four U.S. students and nine Chinese students have participated in the program since its inception.

Combining the Expertise of Two Different Institutions

Like CU Denver, Freie Universität Berlin (FUB) in Germany has a long history of managing collaborative-degree programs. Its first collaborative degree started more than two decades ago in political science in cooperation with the Institut d'Études Politiques de Paris in France. Matthias Kuder, deputy director at the FUB Center for International Cooperation, says that all of its programs have grown out of previous partnerships and are designed to build on the strengths of each partner: "Collaborative-degree programs are not the starting point of cooperation in our experience. To the contrary, they require a solid knowledge of the partner institutions and previous patterns of cooperation."

"All of our collaborative-degree programs follow the same logic—they combine the expertise of two different academic institutions, use synergies, and thus offer particularly attractive settings for students," Kuder continues, adding that such programs also allow their institution to broaden their teaching portfolio.

FUB's newest collaborative-degree program, a double master's in global communication and international journalism with the Saint Petersburg State University in Russia, started in 2014. "It is based on a long cooperation between faculty of both institutions, including joint symposia and workshops, student and faculty mobility in both directions, as well as research cooperation. The idea for the joint program grew almost organically out



of this environment, championed by faculty members from both universities, and its development was then supported by the university leadership with initial funding, administrative advice, and institutional commitment and was then embedded within the strategic partnership that exists between Freie Universität Berlin and Saint Petersburg University," Kuder explains.

He adds that it is easy to maintain collaborations with

long-term partners because there is already faculty buy-in: "Our experience is that when such partnerships are based on faculty interest and when they are embedded in an institutional internationalization strategy, sustainability is less of an issue."

By drawing on the strengths of both institutions, collaborative-degree programs also add to the diversity of the international student population. FUB's collaboration with Saint Petersburg State University, for example, accepts up to 20 students annually and has participants from Canada, Australia, Mexico, South Africa, Iran, Malawi, Germany, and Russia.

"We can also observe that these programs attract high potential students from around the world and thus have further positive effects for the internationalization of our institutions," Kuder says.

International MBA Has Both Joint- and Double-Degree Options

The GlobalMBA program, initially founded in 2001, at the University of North Florida (UNF) offers both a joint and a double degree. Students study and travel as part of an international cohort from four partner universities: Cologne University of Applied Science (CUAS) in Germany; University of Warsaw (UW) in Poland; Dongbei University of Finance and Economics (DUFE) in Dalian, China; and UNF. The program also initially included a French institution, which has subsequently left the consortium.

Students meet each other for the first time at the beginning of the fall semester in Germany, then travel together to spend the spring semester in Poland, the summer semester in China, and then the final fall semester in the United States at UNF. Over the course of the 15-month, 63-credit program, students take business and intercultural communication classes taught in English and complete a group thesis.



Michael Mendoza, a recent graduate of the University of Colorado Denver, studied at the International College Beijing and was “in unique position of being the only American student in a majority of [my] classes.”



At the end of the program, students earn a Master of Business Administration (MBA) from UNE, and a Master of International Management and Intercultural Communication jointly awarded by Cologne and Warsaw.

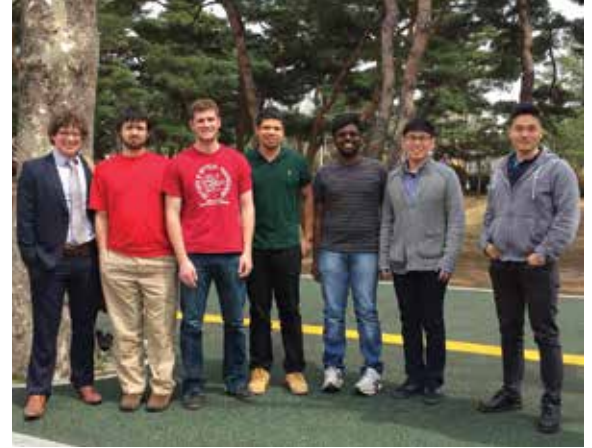
According to Kate Mattingly Leach, associate director of the program, 25–28 students are typically admitted each year. Since its inception, 272 students have completed the GlobalMBA, 84 of them through UNE.

The GlobalMBA program has from its start been faculty driven. “Faculty from CUAS and UNF became acquainted in the 1990s via a common French partner, and began joint research projects. Over an espresso in 1999, faculty from these three institutions sketched out the idea for an international business-focused double degree on the back of a napkin,” Leach says.

She adds that a number of programs have resulted as offshoots of the GlobalMBA collaboration, including undergraduate exchange, summer programs, an annual international business research conference, and joint research between faculty teaching intercultural communication.

Global MBA students in an international cohort where they attend four universities (in the United States, Poland, Germany, and China) defend their theses.

Alumnus David Myers says the program gave him more marketability in his career and he gained soft skills that help him work in an international environment. “I believe dealing with people from cross-cultural backgrounds was the greatest thing it helped in my current career,” he says.



Students from the dual degree program between Rose-Hulman Institute of Technology and the Seoul National University of Science and Technology in South Korea.

ROSE-HULMAN INSTITUTE OF TECHNOLOGY



UNIVERSITY OF NORTH FLORIDA



Korean students taking a summer course at Rose-Hulman Institute of Technology in Indiana.

Faculty Partnership Across Borders Jump-Starts Double Degree

Similar to the creation of the GlobalMBA program, a new double BS program in computer science was the brainchild of collaborating faculty members. After watching a presentation on a dual-degree program at an international engineering conference, Cary Laxer, a computer science professor at Rose-Hulman Institute of Technology in Indiana, suggested to his dean that they propose a similar program to their exchange partner, the University of Applied Sciences in Ulm, Germany.

“Shortly before I attended the conference, my counterpart from Ulm visited Rose-Hulman. We already had other exchange opportunities with Ulm...and he was looking for ways to further expand our collaboration. When I came back from the conference I e-mailed him and broached the subject of a dual-degree program at the undergraduate level. He was...eager to help,” Laxer says.

Laxer says he worked closely with his Ulm colleague, Klaus Baer, in developing the program, which will host its first students in fall 2015: “We did most of the work in putting together the curriculum and working out the administrative details. We kept our respective international offices apprised of our work.”

Students at Rose-Hulman will spend their first two years of study in the United States. For their third year, students travel to Germany, meeting their peers from Ulm

and taking classes together in English as a cohort. For their fourth year, both the Rose-Hulman and the Ulm students will be on the Rose-Hulman campus.

Rose-Hulman also manages a dual MS program with Seoul National University of Science and Technology (Seoul Tech) in Korea, which similarly grew out of a pre-existing relationship.

In the two-year program, students earn a master’s of science degree in optical engineering from Rose-Hulman and a master’s of science degree in mechanical systems design engineering from Seoul Tech.

“Faculty collaboration with international colleagues is the key for establishing a fruitful and meaningful relationship between two schools. In our case, a faculty sabbatical led to summer student exchange, which turned into capstone design participation, then to summer course... and culminated in the dual-degree MS program. The process has taken seven years,” says Azad Siahmakoun, associate dean of faculty and professor of physics and optical engineering.

He says the dual degree was built on the long-term relationship with Seoul Tech and “a mutual need for graduate school improvement on both sides.”

Siahmakoun says the dual program was attractive for Rose-Hulman because it provided access to talented Korean students, positioned their graduates for employment in multinational engineering firms and gave them indus-



A group of University of Calgary students who participate in collaborative degree programs

trial experience through an internship component, and boosted enrollment in the MS program, making it more financially viable.

Collaborative Degrees as an International Student Recruitment Tool

While some institutions use collaborative programs to send their students abroad, others use them as a recruitment tool to attract international students to their campuses. These models allow students to complete a portion of their education in their home country before completing their degree abroad.

University of Calgary's (UC) International Articulation Program (IAP), for instance, which launched two years ago as part of the institution's international recruitment strategy, currently offers a 2+2 program in science and a 3+2 program in engineering.

For the 2+2 program, international students complete the first two years of their undergraduate degree at their home university, and then travel to Calgary in their third year, eventually graduating with a bachelor of science from both universities.

In the 3+2 program, international students complete the first three years of their undergraduate studies at their home institution, and enter UC for the fourth and final year of their bachelor's degree. After completing the bachelor's degree and if they meet the entry requirements for a master's degree, they can enter and complete one more year of a UC course-based master's degree program.

"Our program is in its second year, and the plan is to gradually increase the program offerings and numbers of students. Currently, we have a small cohort of international students participating in this program and studying for engineering and science degrees in the Schulich School

of Engineering and the Faculty of Science," says Savera Hayat-Dade, manager of programs and international development.

The program was first built upon existing partnerships in China and has subsequently expanded to new universities and new countries.

"IAP opens doors for international students to undertake undergraduate and graduate studies through a path that attracts talented students, is cost-effective for international students, and supports University of Calgary in maintaining academic and research partnerships internationally," Hayat-Dade adds.

Partnering With a Provider

Carroll College in Montana has developed a similar model by partnering with a private educational provider, the International Studies Abroad (ISA) Seville Study Center in Spain, to offer a transnational bachelor's degree. The program operates as a 1+3 model. Students from Spain and other countries can spend a year in Seville to complete basic freshman requirements for more than a dozen different majors and then transfer to Carroll to complete their bachelor's degree.

"We've enjoyed a very close working relationship with decisionmakers from Carroll for a few years now, and we saw this as a unique opportunity to embark together on a long-range comprehensive international project of which 1+3 international recruitment is just one component," says David Puente, ISA regional vice president for global mobility.

He says the model is attractive to students for a number of reasons. "Students will get a strong foundation for learning about unique features of U.S. higher education and Carroll in particular...They can boost their academic

English skills through the immersion experience with students from hundreds of U.S. universities who study each year at our ISA Seville Study Center.”

Innovative Partnerships for Dual Degrees

Not all international collaborative-degree programs are managed by higher education institutions or private education providers. One example of a Chinese-American program jointly managed by two nongovernmental organizations is the Sino-American Cooperation on Higher Education and Professional Development (CHEPD) program, which allows Chinese undergraduates and graduates to earn dual degrees by spending one to two years at a U.S. institution.

The American Association of State Colleges and Universities (AASCU) and the China Education Association for International Exchange (CEAIE)/The China Center for International Educational Exchanges (CCIEE) work together to administer the program. The program has more than 100 participating member institutions, more than 70 in China and 25 AASCU member institutions in

the United States, according to Arlene Jackson, AASCU director of international education, and Sufei Li, liaison officer for CCIEE/CEAIE U.S. programs.

The CHEPD undergraduate program is a 1+2+1 program that started in 2001; the graduate program was created two years later. For the undergraduate program, freshmen are selected from Chinese partner universities to spend their second and third year of study at one of the U.S. partner universities. They return to their home universities the fourth and final year of study and will receive bachelor's degrees from both the Chinese and U.S. universities upon successful completion of the program. In the graduate program, first-year graduate students are selected from Chinese partner universities to spend their second and third semesters of study in U.S. partner universities. They return to their Chinese universities for the last year. Students successfully completing the program earn dual master degrees from both the Chinese and U.S. universities.

Between 2001 and 2014, the program has enabled 1,500 students from more than 50 Chinese universities to receive dual bachelor's or master's degrees.





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Lessons Learned From the Field

Experts advise institutions interested in establishing dual-degree programs to make sure senior leadership is on board. “My advice would be to get the backing of the university’s leadership before you start the program, and if possible also some seed money for the first years—both for administration as well as for scholarships,” Lemmens says.

She adds that reconciling curricula can be one of the most challenging parts of the process: “The administrative process in harmonizing curricula between two sometimes very different university legislations, the process of arranging for reciprocal acknowledgment of the credits—the backbone of the whole program—and possibly the accreditation of the programs in one or both countries involved is a long, sometimes nerve-wrecking and often difficult one, and without the support of the university it will be even harder.”

For example, Rose-Hulman Institute of Technology and the University of Applied Sciences in Ulm, Germany, had very different requirements for their dual bachelor’s in computer science. Rose-Hulman had more requirements for math, science, and humanities courses and their

ILLUSTRATION ELEMENTS: SHUTTERSTOCK

JOINT DEGREES IN THE EUROPEAN UNION

In recent years, the European Union (EU) has dedicated significant resources to the development of joint master’s degrees with the aim of internationalizing European higher education institutions, making the European Higher Education Area (EHEA) more attractive to students from around the world, and improving the skills and employability of master’s graduates. Through the Erasmus+ program, the EU has earmarked more than €100 million annually for the period 2014–2020. In addition, the Marie Skłodowska-Curie initiative will spend an additional €20 million per year to fund joint doctorates.

According to Graham Wilkie, education and culture policy officer at the European Commission, the Erasmus+ program will fund approximately 30,000 scholarships for students to pursue joint degrees. Eleven new joint master’s programs were created through the first call for proposals in 2014, with another 15 to 18 likely in the 2015 round.

To receive EU funding, institutions from at least three different program countries—EU member states plus other European countries such as Norway and Turkey—must be part of the consortium, which may also include higher education institutions from other countries around the world.

Wilkie explains that the funding through the Erasmus+ program is not for exploratory grants, but rather for institutions that have already reached some level of integration. “The funding

is mainly for scholarships but the participating institutions get a reasonably generous lump sum for management costs in order to develop the joint curricula and ensure mutual recognition.”

Each consortium will receive money for approximately 40 full scholarships to be used for three cohorts of master’s students.

The master’s programs are designed to attract students from all over the world. The scholarships cover participation costs, travel to Europe, a living allowance, and insurance. Wilkie says that three-fourths of the scholarships are reserved for non-European students. In 2014, for example, the Erasmus+ program funded scholarships for 55 U.S. students and 19 Canadian master’s students.

Wilkie says that the EU Commission interprets “joint degrees” in the broadest sense, adding that many institutions might

start with dual degrees before moving toward issuing a single, joint certification. He adds that the EU has focused on collaborative degree programs because they require a high degree of institutional integration.

“For European institutions to get the stage of being able to offer joint curricula and total mutual recognition, the institutions involved have to be cooperating at the highest possible level, which is obviously something that we want to encourage within both the European Higher Education Area and the European Research Area. It means that the international credit recognition systems are working and that the universities involved recognize the quality of teaching and research of their partners because they are happy to put their names—and reputations—on a certificate for research and study undertaken in another country,” he explains.

German partner had more requirements for computer science. They ended up finding creative ways to capture the knowledge they wanted students to possess. “The hardest part was getting the individual curricula of the two schools to line up and make sure students were getting the right courses and credits for the degrees from both schools... In the end we looked at packages of courses rather than individual courses to cover the requirements,” Laxer says.

Many of the longest-running programs have been successful because they were built on pre-existing institutional relationships. As UNF’s Learch puts it, “Date before getting married! We have not been successful in all of our graduate double-degree endeavors, and some of this can be attributed to not having tested out the waters first. Faculty from Jacksonville and Cologne were well acquainted before the GlobalMBA was conceived, and those strong interpersonal relationships and institutional knowledge were important in creating the program.”

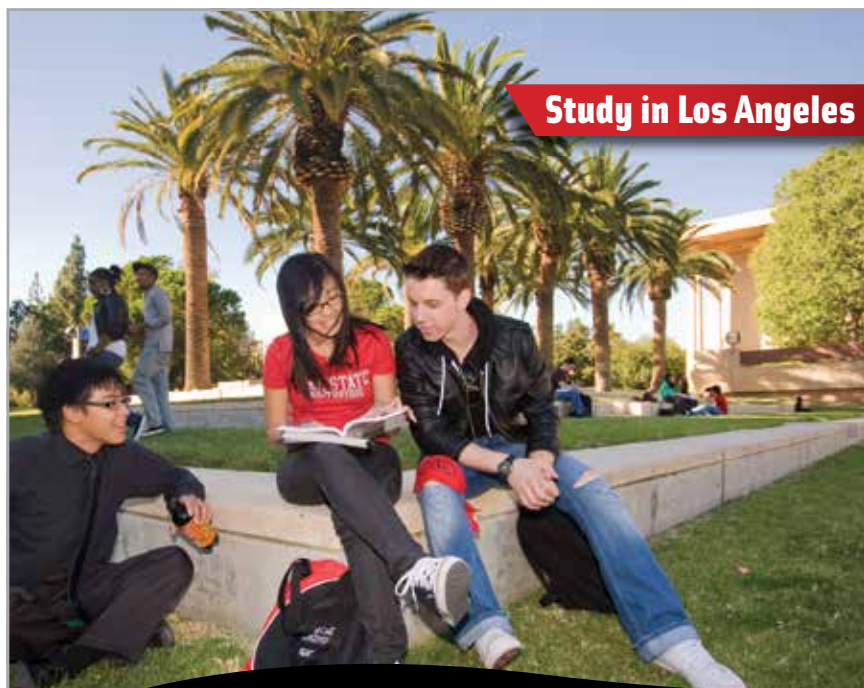
For programs in the United States, two particular challenges are reconciling general education requirements with those of partner institutions, and finding U.S. students to participate in the program. A 2014 report by the

American Council on Education confirms this observation, noting that “because general education is, by and large, an American concept...meeting the requirements for the U.S. degree often entails fitting a lot of general education courses into a tight program timeframe.”⁴

The ACE report also noted that another challenge for double-degree programs in the United States was a “heavy skew toward enrollment of non-U.S. students” and a lack of mobility of American students, reflected by the low overall number of study abroad students.⁵

Both of these issues have come up at Appalachian State. Program coordinator and professor Olga Zatepina-Monacell says that they spent almost as much time negotiating and reviewing syllabi with representatives of general education at their own institution as they did with their Mexican partner.

They have also noted the difficulty recruiting U.S. students, which could pose greater long-term problems. Jesse Lutabingwa, professor and associate vice chancellor for international education and development, says that because they have decided to use a full exchange model where students at the Mexican partner pay their tuition



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and fees as well as room and board at their home institutions and come to study at Appalachian and vice versa, parity is important.

Because it operates on a direct exchange model, the collaboration between Appalachian State and UDLAP has faced some challenges, especially when it comes to recruiting U.S. students. Despite Trudeau's success, Appalachian State has not been able to recruit any more U.S. students to the program. UDLAP has recruited one more Mexican student, with the possibility of two more starting next year.

Zatepilina-Monacell says that part of the challenge is convincing freshmen that have just started their college experience to go abroad for two years. Students who initially express interest back off after consulting with their parents, likely due to security concerns.

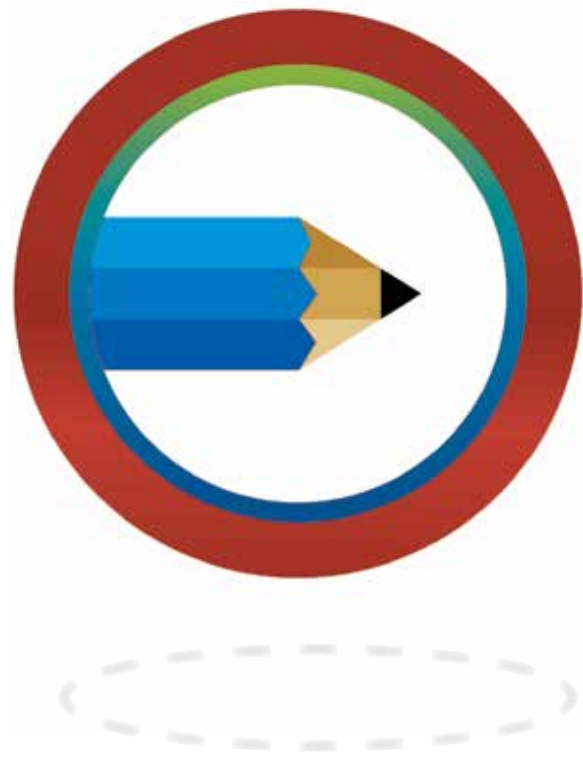
To overcome the challenge of recruiting U.S. students, Appalachian State is working on a number of proposals that include a model that is a hybrid between faculty-led programs and traditional study abroad. Faculty will teach courses to both Appalachian and UDLAP students, and Appalachian students will also take courses from UDLAP faculty, according to Lutabingwa.

Besides the double degree in communications, Appalachian State is working on two other dual-degree programs in engineering physics and intelligent mechatronics systems. Two physics faculty members are currently spending a semester at UDLAP, and three engineering faculty members from UDLAP have spent time at Appalachian. "These faculty exchanges have been important in helping colleagues on both sides to know each other and develop relationships that will be very important once we start implementation of the new programs," Lutabingwa says.

He adds that communication between partners, both at the faculty and administrative levels, has been essential to troubleshooting any problems that might come up: "Dual degrees require a continuous open communication between partner institutions. This is very important because during the course of implementing the dual-degree program, changes occur or unanticipated factors cause leaders at both institutions to communicate very often and at times meet face-to-face to work out some issues."

Other program managers also stress the importance of face-to-face interaction, especially if problems arise. "Technology can enhance collaboration, but it is not a substitute for personal contact," Learch says.

Communication and contact should occur at all levels. Learch says that student services staff in particular



should be kept in the loop. "Institutions occasionally err on the side of involving only faculty in creating double degrees. This may be acceptable for a double-degree program that functions more like simple exchanges, but if the collaboration is more interconnected, a student support person at each school is a must. While the directors handle academic, accreditation and career search issues, the dedicated staff assists with marketing, recruitment, orientation, cultural adjustment, transcript posting, event planning, and of course, interpersonal conflicts among students that may arise," she says. **IE**

CHARLOTTE WEST is a freelance writer in Seattle, Washington. Her last article for *IE* was "Japan Looks to Take Flight" about Japan's internationalization initiatives, which appeared in the supplement on Japan that was published with the March/April 2015 issue.

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